Representations of Elizabeth I: Three sites of ambiguity and contradiction

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ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at three themes in representations of the Queen in Elizabethan literature. They are: the problem of representing a female ruler; the relation between the cult of Elizabeth and the cult of the Virgin Mary; and representations of Elizabeth as Cynthia, the moon-goddess. These topics are seen as focal points for problematic issues in panegyric.

The first part of the thesis looks at the problem of reconciling the "masculine" virtues of the ideal ruler with ideal "feminine" virtues, in the figure of Elizabeth. Some panegyric stressed her "masculine" qualities; but, more often, her uniqueness as perfect woman was extolled. However, apparent praise of "feminine" virtues like peacefulness and mercifulness could veil implicit criticism of the effeminisation of the state. In Elizabeth's sex can be found reasons for the proliferation and complexity of fictional personae for her: first, she had to be shown to possess *all* the virtues, masculine and feminine, even when those virtues were incompatible or contradictory. Secondly, a masculine idea of woman as enigma, incomprehensible and ultimately unrepresentable, was magnified in the figure of a female monarch.

The second section examines the theory, popularised by Frances Yates and Roy Strong, that Elizabeth was a Protestant "substitute" for the Virgin Mary, who filled a "psychological gap" for the populace after the Reformation. It considers the extent of contradiction between opposition to idolatry, and belief in the spiritual status of the ruler; and the long-standing exchange of imagery between secular and sacred literature. The relations between the cult of the Virgin and representations of Elizabeth were complex and various. Some apparent examples of Marian imagery in panegyric of Elizabeth were part of the use of religious imagery in the discourse of courtly love; some were attempts to appropriate the "magical" symbolic qualities of virginity in general for the Protestant cause; some were typological readings of Marian myths as narrative structures with which to mythologise contemporary history. Direct identification of Elizabeth with the Virgin only became prevalent in the later years of the reign, particularly in elegies for her death.

Finally, the thesis looks at moon-imagery in panegyric of Elizabeth as a means for apparent praise which contains undertones of criticism and disillusionment. The moon-image was particularly a means of expressing anxiety regarding mutability, as Elizabeth's advancing age added to the problem of her sex, and foregrounded the issue of her mortality.

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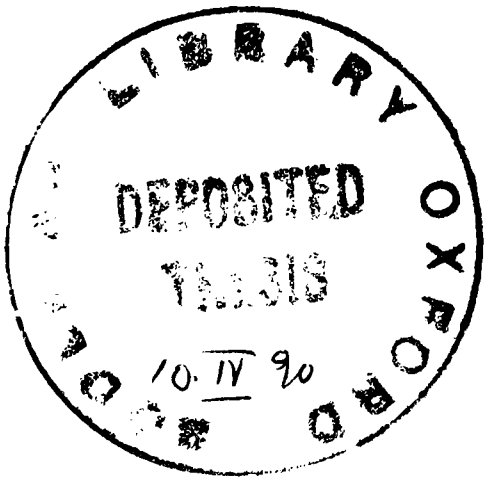
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For my mother

Joan Margaret Cobb

in most loving and grateful memory

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ABBREVIATIONS USED

ELH	*English Literary History*
ELN	*English Language Notes*
ELR	*English Literary Renaissance*
HLQ	*Huntington Library Quarterly*
HMC	Historic Manuscripts Commission
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
JMRS	*Journal of Mediaeval & Renaissance Studies*
LRB	*London Review of Books*
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*
PMLA	*Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*
RHS	Royal Historical Society
TLS	*Times Literary Supplement*
UP, U of X P	University Press, University of X Press

INTRODUCTION

> ... some saide your Pourtraiture might be drawen, other saide impossible: some thought your vertues might be numbred, most saide they were infinite: Infinite and impossible, of that side was I.[1]

Infinite and impossible was the task of representing Elizabeth I, according to this 1592 panegyrist; and no less infinite and impossible would be the task of describing and discussing all attempts at representing her during her reign. In this thesis, therefore, I shall concentrate on three themes in such representations, three focal points for complexity, where representation of Elizabeth itself shades off into the infinite and impossible.

I shall discuss, first, the problem of representing a female ruler; secondly, the relation between the cult of Elizabeth and the cult of the Virgin Mary; and thirdly, representations of Elizabeth as Cynthia, the moon-goddess. I have described these in my title as "sites of ambiguity and contradiction", because I see them as focal points for anxiety, producing representations of Elizabeth which can be paradoxical, ironic, and even subversive. They are grounded in dichotomies of masculinity and femininity, divinity and humanity, immortality and mutability; terms which operate not as fixed opposites, but in a flexible relation, coming to the fore to different degrees in different representations of the Queen.

The term "contradiction" in my title refers to those representations

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1. From the entertainment at Bisham. Jean Wilson, *Entertainments for Elizabeth I*, (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1980), p.44.

of Elizabeth which are simply self-contradictory, if not paradoxical: she is shown as both strong and delicate, both martial and peaceful. In some instances, these paradoxes described a mysterious fusion: both divine and human, both chaste and loving. Their impossibility was part of their force as images of praise.

The term "ambiguity" refers to more complex uses of such images, exploiting the disjunctions and incongruities in representations of the Queen as an outlet for dissent. Here I use "ambiguity" in a sense similar to Annabel Patterson's "functional ambiguity", insofar as she defines this as a "safety valve for the airing of contentious issues", and as the development by authors of "codes of communication ... in order to be able to say what they had to publicly without directly provoking or confronting the authorities".[2] Louis Adrian Montrose and Marie Axton, in their readings of representations of Elizabeth, also describe the subversive use of legitimated forms for the indirect, "safe" expression of resentment of the social and political hierarchy. Montrose, in "The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text", takes issue with Stephen Greenblatt's view of Spenser as entirely loyal to the Elizabethan autocracy, and examines the modes of ambivalence and resistance in Spenser's poetry.[3] Axton, in *The Queen's Two Bodies*, examines Elizabethan Inns of Court drama as "the medium for

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2. Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (U of Wisconsin P, 1984), pp.11, 13-14.

3. In *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986), pp.317-31.

speculation and protest, as testing ground for political ideas and situations"; the lawyers' plays used allegory and obliquely topical allusions to demand of their audience "both a double perspective and an act of silent judgement."[4] These are the sort of elements in representations of Elizabeth which I include under the term "ambiguity".

The section on the problem of the female ruler is placed first, because I locate anxieties regarding Elizabeth's rule fundamentally in her sex. I believe that it is because she was a woman that she presented difficulties of representation. Freud, in his lecture on "Femininity", wrote,

> Throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity ... Nor will *you* have escaped worrying over this problem - those of you who are men; to those of you who are women this will not apply - you are yourselves the problem.

In other words, the "people" who have puzzled over this riddle are in fact *men*. Freud writes later in the lecture:

> ... in the case of some women's lives there is a repeated alternation between periods in which masculinity or femininity gains the upper hand. Some portion of what we men call "the enigma of woman" may perhaps be derived from this expression of bisexuality in women's lives.[5]

In the case of Elizabeth, to the problem of the representation of femininity was added exactly this further problem of the representation of

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4. (London: RHS, 1977), pp.ix, 54.

5. Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures in Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey, ed. James Strachey & Angela Richards, Pelican Freud Library vol.2 (London: Penguin, 1973), pp.146, 165.

a woman whose role and personality had aspects which convention defined as "masculine". She was a woman who ruled alone, without a male consort. In her youth, she could be seen as virgin queen in the sense merely of being in a state preliminary to the conventional one of the married queen. But as the years passed and it became increasingly certain that she would never marry, she emerged as an almost unprecedented figure of a woman who appropriated total, "masculine" authority, disrupting prior cultural structures. She had to combine *all* the virtues, masculine and feminine, in one figure, even when those virtues were directly contradictory. However long or successful her reign, her image trailed vestiges of unnaturalness; as femaleness magnified, she was, for the male writer, mysterious, threatening, unencompassable. Furthermore, Elizabeth exploited the convention of woman as enigma to veil her intentions from her courtiers and to maintain her absolute hold on policy. Anthony Bacon, in a letter of 1599 to the Earl of Essex, wrote of "that deep and inscrutable center of ye Courte (which is her Majesties minde)".[6]

All these factors combined to render Elizabeth ultimately indefinable. Bacon's phrase, "that deep and inscrutable center", aptly describes the vacuum or blank space which seems to lie at the centre of all representations of her; her figure became the eye of a vortex from which spiralled outwards a profusion of fictional personae. The inventiveness of

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6. *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Honourable The Marquess of Bath preserved at Longleat, Wiltshire*, 5 vols., vol.V, *Talbot, Dudley and Devereux Papers 1533-1659*, ed. G.Dyfnallt Owen, HMC 58 (London: HMSO, 1980), p.266.

her panegyrists, spurred on by the apparent impossibility of defining her, produced ever more numerous and elaborate images. *The Faerie Queene* is in itself one example of the use of multiple personae to represent her different facets. Jonathan Goldberg has discussed this multiplicity as an effect of her simultaneous absence and presence in the poem; she is both identical with the text and an Other outside the text, a lacuna where meaning is sited.[7] Elizabeth J. Bellamy argues in similar fashion that *The Faerie Queene* is produced by the failure to name Elizabeth.[8] There are numerous other examples of the multiple, fragmentary and periphrastic naming of Elizabeth, such as Raleigh's song, "Now we have present made," where he names her as "Cynthia, Phoebe Flora / Diana, and Aurora".[9] It is characteristic of panegyric of Elizabeth that it splits her into different persons to represent her different symbolic qualities.

This difficulty in representing Elizabeth is well illustrated by Richard Barnfield's epistle "To the Curteous Gentleman Readers" at the beginning of his *Cynthia*. He tells us that he is anxious to explain his use of the name Eliza:

> In one or two places (in this Booke) I vse the name of *Eliza* pastorally: wherein, lest any one should misconster my meaning (as I hope none will) I haue here briefly discouered my harmeles conceipt as concerning that name: whereof once (in a simple Shepheards deuice) I wrot this Epigramme.

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7. *Endlesse Worke: Spenser and the Structures of Discourse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1981), passim.

8. "The Vocative and the Vocational: The Unreadability of Elizabeth in *The Faerie Queene*", *ELH* 54.1 (Spring 1987), pp.1-30.

9. Walter Oakeshott, *The Queen and the Poet* (London: Faber, 1960), p.205.

One name there is, which name aboue all other
I most esteeme, as time and place shall proue:
The one is Vesta, *th'other* Cupids *Mother,*
The first my Goddesse is, the last my loue:
Subiect to Both I am: to that by berth;
To this for beautie; fairest on the earth.[10]

This is no explanation at all; having told us that he esteems *one* name, Barnfield then praises *two*, Vesta and Venus. This is perhaps to distinguish between his ruler, Elizabeth, and his love, Ganymede, both of whom are addressed in the poems which make up the *Cynthia* volume. However, it is more likely that the two names Vesta and Venus are both aspects of the one name Eliza: Elizabeth is both his ruler and his mistress. In the poem "Cynthia", Barnfield uses the story of the judgement of Paris, as other panegyrists did,[11] to assert that Elizabeth unites in one person the wisdom of Minerva, the wealth (sic) of Juno, and the beauty of Venus. Not only that, but she is also "a second *Judith* in IERUSALEM", and she "shameth *Cynthia* in her siluer Raies". Her Name is trumpeted round the world[12] - but which name? In fact she is never named as Eliza or Elizabeth in the poem "Cynthia" (though she is named as Eliza elsewhere in the *Cynthia* volume). She is at once Vesta, Venus, Minerva, Juno, Judith, Cynthia, and none of these, since she excels them all. They can only represent aspects of her. One name is never enough for her multiple attributes; Barnfield's

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10. *The Poems of Richard Barnfield*, ed. Montague Summers (London: Fortune, 1936), p.46.

11. See Louis Adrian Montrose, "Gifts and Reasons: The Contexts of Peele's *Araygnement of Paris*", *ELH* 47 (1980), pp.433-61, for a discussion of other examples of the Judgement of Paris motif.

12. Barnfield, pp.53-4.

attempt to proclaim one name breaks down into bifurcation, then fragmentation.

Amid the host of titles frantically invented for Elizabeth by panegyrists, Thomas Churchyard strikes an endearing note when he laments the predicament of the second-rate poet. He tells Elizabeth that there are:

> ... a multitude of people ... running & preasing apace ... some with rare inuentions & some with deep deuices to the honouring of your Maiestie. I feare ... that ther is left no deuice, nor matter to study on, such is the bounty of our time, & forwardnes of their wittes which are learned, that all fine inuentions are smoothly reaped from my reach, & cunningly raked away from my vse or commoditie.[13]

Churchyard missed the trick used by more accomplished panegyrists whereby the unrepresentability of the Queen could itself become a complimentary trope. In John Lyly's "Euphues Glass for Europe" - the glass being Elizabeth - the description of her exemplary perfections is prefaced by a concatenation of disability clauses:

> I see you gaze until I show this Glass, which you having once seen will make you giddy. Oh ladies, I know not when to begin nor where to end. For the more I go about to express the brightnes, the more I find mine eyes bleared, the nearer I desire to come to it, the farther I seem from it.

Lyly says that, to convey Elizabeth's beauty, the best he can do is to describe her back, and "leave you gazing until she turn her face." Her

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13. "A Handefvl of Gladsome Verses, giuen to the Queenes Maiesty at Woodstocke this Prograce," 1592, *Fugitive Tracts*, ed. W.C. Hazlitt, 2 vols., 1st Series, 1493-1600 (London, 1875), no.XXXI.

virtues are indefinable and immeasurable: "being in this labyrinth I may sooner lose myself than find the end."[14]

Another example of the unrepresentability trope was the speech at Bisham in 1592 describing the Queen as "infinite and impossible", quoted above. In its simplest form, the trope was the highest form of compliment, implying the Queen's absolute perfection and divinity. Barnfield, for instance, disclaims any intention to describe the Queen's beauty, because:

> No pen can paint thy commendation due:
> Saue only that pen, which no pen can be,
> An Angels quill, to make a pen for thee.[15]

However, by describing his inability to describe the Queen, he does indirectly describe her, as a beauty which exists beyond words; his "no-pen" is itself a pen, an instrument which delineates the Queen by what she is not. The detailing of what she is *not* like itself composes an image of her, like a photographic negative, or like a silhouette formed by the bit-by-bit cutting away of pieces to leave a meaningful shape behind - not a perfect, or whole, or accurate image, but an indication of form for the imagination of the beholder to complete.

Thus the unrepresentability trope was a form of self-reference, in which the Queen was described by the writer's description of his own

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14. John Lyly, *Euphues: the Anatomy of Wit, Euphues and His England*, ed. M.W. Croll and H.Clemens (London: Routledge, 1916.), pp.432, 441, 448.

15. Barnfield, "Cassandra", p.79.

writing as the place where she is absent, the picture she is not like. We can see the disingenuousness of this in the fact that Lyly, having told us that he cannot attempt to describe Elizabeth, goes on to make that attempt over numerous pages. Similarly Spenser tells Elizabeth, flatteringly, that her perfect chastity is such that:

> ... living art may not least part expresse,
> Nor life-resembling pencill it can paint ...
> Ne poets wit, that passeth Painter farre
> In picturing the parts of beautie daint,
> So hard a workmanship aduenture darre,
> For fear through want of words her excellence to marre.[16]

Yet the fear of want of words, the professed reluctance to "darre", in fact produces, not silence, but a profusion of words. Spenser goes on,

> But O dred Soueraine
> Thus farre forth pardon, sith that choicest wit
> Cannot your glorious pourtraict figure plaine
> That I in colourd showes may shadow it (III. proem 3).

The impossibility of true representation generates a profusion of "colourd showes", of fictive invention. In both Lyly and Spenser, an initial statement of the failure of representation is followed by a multiplicity of representations which are foregrounded as partial, inadequate, complementary to one another but never forming a complete picture. The richness of representation is dependent upon the ultimate inevitable failure of representation.

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16. *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton (London: Longman, 1977), III. proem 2. All subsequent references to *The Faerie Queene* will be to this edition.

Such self-referentiality goes beyond ambiguity to produce undecidability, in the deconstructive sense, as defined by Jonathan Culler:

> When poems denounce poetry as lies, self-referentiality is the source of undecidability, which is not ambiguity but a structure of logical irresolvability: if a poem speaks true in describing poetry as lies, then it lies; but if its claim that poems lie is a lie, then it must speak true.

Culler goes on to show how, in deconstructive criticism, what is apparently a "nice paradox or symmetrical formulation" is shown to be not self-contained, but "a chain of discourses and representations", a structure of "repetition and proliferation rather than crystalline closure."[17] This can work well as a description of representations of Elizabeth, which are so often produced by a dynamic relation between opposing terms: concepts such as masculinity and femininity, divinity and humanity, immortality and mutability reflect and reframe each other endlessly in fictional images of the Queen. However, I locate this multiplicity and indeterminacy not, as a deconstructionist might, in a general undecidability of anything, but precisely in the unrepresentability for men of women - Freud's "enigma of woman" - especially when women step out of conventionally feminine roles.

To the extent that I locate ambiguities and contradictions in representations of Elizabeth in her gender, this is a feminist study. Other attempts at feminist studies of Elizabeth have run into difficulties; Adrienne Rich, for instance, complains of:

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17. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge, 1983), pp.202, 240, 203, 205.

> ... how little the reign of Elizabeth Tudor - often glorified as a feminist heroine - actually affected the possibilities for other women of her time; women writers did *not* flourish during her reign, and the economic and political situation of women was actually in decline.[18]

Alison Heisch, in an article entitled "Queen Elizabeth I and the Persistence of Patriarchy", is similarly critical of Elizabeth for not furthering the cause of women in general.[19] And Susan Bassnett's attempt, in *Elizabeth I: A Feminist Perspective*, to reclaim Elizabeth as "a symbol of active female assertiveness for future generations", is unconvincing.[20] My project in this thesis is quite different. I do not seek to apportion praise or blame to Elizabeth as a "good" or "bad" feminist, and I do not seek to claim her as a feminist role-model. Similarly, I am not interested in whether or not she really was a virgin, or in any questions of what she was "really like". My interest in her is not that of a historian or biographer; it is that of a literary critic or *cultural* historian. It is with her representations that I am concerned, as a part of a cultural history of representations of women: I am interested in how representations of Elizabeth drew on pre-existent definitions and images of femininity, and how they altered and adapted them. In this respect, my approach is most similar to that of Philippa Berry in her new book, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan*

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18. *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (London: Virago, 1980), pp.10-11.

19. *Feminist Review* 4 (1980), pp.45-56.

20. (Oxford: Berg, 1988), p.128.

literature and the unmarried queen, although I do not share her view that Elizabeth's ties with other women are central to representations of her.[21]

In this concentration on representations, this thesis can be seen to possess some alignment with "new historicism". I cannot go the whole way with new historicists who assert that there is no reality beyond textual representation; Elizabeth either was or was not a virgin, for instance, and she either did or did not resemble her ever-youthful portraits, in a reality which lies outside textual representations of her, and which is now beyond our reach. However, I accept that the only access we have to the past is through texts; and that literature should not be regarded as merely a reflection of something outside itself which possesses a greater reality.[22] The Elizabeth to whom we have access exists only in representations, whether in public appearances or private letters, literary texts or state documents; and moreover it was those representations which held power in her time. I am persuaded by Montrose's formula of "the textuality of history and the historicity of texts", whereby representations of Elizabeth were at once produced by and productive of their culture and society.[23]

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21. (London: Routledge, 1989), consulted in proof form, p.65.

22. See Jean E. Howard, "The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies", *ELR* 1986 (16), pp.18, 27; Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne and their Contemporaries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1983), pp.xii, xiv.

23. Louis Adrian Montrose, "Renaissance Literary Studies and the Subject of History", *ELR* 16 (1986), p.8; "*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Shaping Fantasies of Elizabethan Culture: Gender, Power, Form", in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan & Nancy J. Vickers (U of Chicago P, 1986), p.87.

Concentration on representations by no means simplifies the problem of the relation between literature and society. The term "representation" itself implies an "image" which represents and a "reality" which is represented. Indeed, representations of Elizabeth were themselves structured by an image/reality dichotomy. This is implicit in the masculine/feminine, divine/human, immortal/mutable dichotomies: they imply an image which is masculine, divine and immortal, a reality which is feminine, human and mutable.

Like those terms, the terms image and reality can be seen to exist in no stable and discrete opposition. The real Queen was represented in images, in roles acted before her; but she herself also became an image, an actress playing herself. Bishop Hurd explained the practice of representing the Queen to herself in fictional form:

> ... what more decent way of complimenting a great Prince than through the veil of fiction; or what so elegant way of entertaining a learned Prince, as by working up that fiction out of the old poetical story.[24]

Thus mythical figures were implied to be in some sense "truly" Elizabeth; and Elizabeth in her own person took on increasingly mythical stature. Her public appearances were all performances, at which she played the role of the loving queen. Sir John Hayward described her dramatic talent:

> Now, if ever any persone had eyther the gift or the stile to winne

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24. *Dialogues Moral and Political*, quoted in John Nichols, ed., *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, 3 vols. (London: 1823), vol.I, p.xxv.

> the hearts of people, it was this Queene, and if ever shee did expresse the same, it was at that present [in the coronation procession], in coupling mildnesse with majesty as shee did, and in stately stouping to the meanest sort. All her facultyes were in motione, and every motione seemed a well guided action; her eye was set upon one, her eare listened to another, her judgement ranne upon a third, to a fourth shee added her speech; her spirit seemed to be every-where, and yet so intyre in her selfe, as it seemed to bee noe where else. Some shee pityed, some shee commended, some shee thanked, at others shee pleasantly and wittily jeasted, contemning noe person, neglecting noe office; and distributing her smiles, lookes, and graces soe artificially, that thereupon the people again redoubled the testymonyes of their joyes; and afterwards, raising every thing to the highest straine, filled the eares of all men with immoderate extolling their Prince.[25]

Hayward was describing Elizabeth's coronation pageants, at which she walked among idealised images of herself and what her subjects hoped she would be, and herself delighted onlookers with her performance of loving demeanour. At a climactic moment, Lady Truth reached down from her tableau to present Elizabeth with the English Bible, which she enthusiastically accepted.[26] Many public representations of Elizabeth had as their climax just such a crossing of the boundary between image and reality, stage and royal audience. In Peele's *Araygnement of Paris*, Diana reached across the invisible line between fiction and fact to give the golden apple to the Queen.[27] In Gascoigne's unperformed masque for Kenilworth, and in Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels*, the climactic moment came when the Queen was "spotted" in the audience and hailed by her mythical counterpart. And in numerous

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25. Quoted in Sir John E. Neale, "The Sayings of Elizabeth I", *Essays in Elizabethan History*, (London: Cape, 1958), p.92.

26. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, pp.38-60; p.48.

27. See Montrose, "Gifts & Reasons", p.455.

examples, the grand finale of a pageant involved the Queen stepping in to the fictional action to make a judgement or dissolve a spell.[28]

Interestingly, dramatic representations of Elizabeth seem to have been acceptable only so long as she was present, so that the image was mirrored in a reality. Jonson stirred widespread controversy by having an actor play her in the public theatre, in *Every Man Out of his Humour*, 1599. Her role in this play was the one habitual to her in courtly entertainments: she appeared at the finale of the play, and by her very presence, reformed the evil character Macilente and put the world to rights. There was no objection to this ending when the play was performed at court before the Queen during the 1599-1600 season, but Jonson had to write a different ending for the public theatre.[29] One of the many sensational attractions of Richard Vennar's hoax playbill, *England's Joy*, 1602 - which described a grand finale in which "the Ladie ... which represents her Majestie" was to be "taken up into Heaven" with great spectacle, music and fireworks - must have been the promise of seeing the Queen represented on the public stage.[30] In general, dramatic

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28. For example, *The Lady of May* (*Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones & Jan van Dorsten (Oxford UP, 1973), p.30); the release of the Lady of the Lake from Sir Bruse Sauns Pitee in the 1575 entertainments at Kenilworth (Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, p.457); the water-pageant at Elvetham (Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, p.116); Thomas Dekker's *Old Fortunatus* (*The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Fredson Bowers, 4 vols. (Cambridge UP, 1953), vol.I, V.ii.306.

29. See Rosalind Miles, *Ben Jonson: His Life and Work* (London: Routledge, 1986), p.44; David G.E. Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1984), p.177.

30. E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923), vol.III, pp.500-3.

representations of the Queen seem to have depended on the reflexive presence of Elizabeth for their authorisation, just as *The Faerie Queene* depended on her as its imagined ideal reader for its authorisation. The meaning of the image depended upon its assertion of a greater reality beyond itself which the panegyrist could never hope to represent fully or accurately.

The "reality" of Elizabeth could thus have the sense of a transcendent, mysterious reality beyond all representation. But this transcendent, mysterious reality was itself a textual construct. We are back in the hall of mirrors again. The reality to which representations of Elizabeth refer is the physical presence of the Queen, but this physical presence was itself of the nature of an image, a symbol, or a theatrical performance. Thus when I describe my subject as "representations of Elizabeth I", I take this to include eye-witness descriptions of her, and to include her self-presentation, as well as more obviously fictional versions of her.

An extension of the new historicist blurring of categories of text and history has been an apparent dissolution of definitions of "literature" and "the canon", applying techniques of literary analysis to historical documents and marginal texts. In this, too, this thesis possesses some alignment with new historicism, using ballads, parliamentary speeches, letters, pageants for progresses, and so on, as well as the works of Spenser, Sidney, and other well-known court poets. My choice of material has been primarily led by the themes and images which I study, rather than being author-led.

However, as Carol Thomas Neely notes, the promise offered by new historicism for the reinstatement and study of marginal texts has been largely unfulfilled in practice.[31] Most new historicist work uses marginal or historical texts simply to produce a new reading of a text from the old canon, by Shakespeare, Spenser or Sidney. In fact, when we attend to their pronouncements, this is all that the best-known new historicists claim to be doing. Louis Adrian Montrose has written that the aim of new historicism is:

> resituating canonical texts among the multiple forms of writing, and in relation to the non-discursive practices and institutions, of the social formation in which those texts have been produced.[32]

"Resituation" of canonical texts is not the same as throwing out the canon. While new historicism often claims to reject a distinction between text and context, such definitions as this, when put into practice, can in fact reinforce a text/context dichotomy. Similarly, Stephen Greenblatt, in his recent book *Shakespearean Negotiations*, describes his progress from an initial attraction to Shakespeare as possessing "the most satisfying intensity" of all voices of the dead, to unease and doubt at the idea of the "total artist": "No individual, not even the most brilliant, seemed complete unto himself - my own study of Renaissance self-fashioning had persuaded me of this".[33] The author and his works are produced by society

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31. "Constructing the Subject: Feminist Practice and the New Renaissance Discourses", *ELR* 18.1 (Winter 1988), pp.5-18.

32. Abstract of "Renaissance Literary Studies and the Subject of History", *ELR* 16 (1986), "Index and Abstracts", p.11.

33. *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988), pp.1-2.

and culture rather than - or as well as? - the individual mind. But a concept of degrees of brilliance persists; Shakespeare is, by implication, the "most brilliant" author, still perching at the top of the canonical tree. The book is, after all, billed as a study of Shakespeare.[34]

This thesis is also open to charges of old-fashioned canonicity. Although I began with a programme of concentrating on marginal works, I have somewhat departed from this as the thesis progressed. I have found myself constantly returning to the work of Spenser, and he is the author who is discussed most frequently here. I would like to be able to claim that this is simply because, in mundane material terms, Spenser's work contains more representations of Elizabeth than that of any other writer. However, as with Greenblatt's attraction to Shakespeare as embodying "the most satisfying intensity", I cannot shake off the feeling that there is an especially fascinating complexity in Spenser's representations of Elizabeth. At the same time, I see little point in constructing league tables, and I would assert that many other contemporary authors, and many of the "marginal" texts used here, also contain much complexity and ambiguity in their representations of Elizabeth. This thesis is not an attempt to use lesser-known texts as supplements or glosses to read Spenser; it is a reading of representations of Elizabeth, in a wide range of sources.

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34. Even if one reviewer found it more illuminating of "the culture of the Renaissance" than of Shakespeare! (Peter Burke, "Open the curtain and see their puppets play", *LRB* 5/1/89, p.18).

I have confined myself to the literature of Elizabeth's reign - adding only the elegies - because of sheer volume. Even within the literature of her reign, I cannot claim to have discussed every representation of her; space does not permit it. My ruling principle has been to illustrate my three chosen themes: the problem of the female ruler, the relation between the cult of Elizabeth and the cult of the Virgin Mary, and representations of Elizabeth in moon-imagery. Throughout the thesis, I have followed the accepted convention whereby "female" denotes biological sex and "femininity" denotes culturally-constructed gender. I have followed the spellings in my sources, so that u/v and i/j are only modernised when I quote from a modernised text.

PART I: MASCULINITY/FEMININITY:

ELIZABETH I AND THE PROBLEM OF THE FEMALE RULER

It is often said of Elizabeth I, as of other female rulers, that in order to enforce her authority as a female ruler she had to lay claim to certain masculine characteristics. Perhaps her best known speech is the one that she is reputed to have given at Tilbury: "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too."[1] These words exemplify a general modern idea of Elizabeth as a "masculine woman"; but how were "masculinity" and "femininity" defined in the sixteenth century, and how was the ideal ruler defined in relation to such gender stereotypes?

1. Theories of masculinity and femininity

Recent feminist theory has discussed notions of "masculinity" and "femininity" which it sees as basic to western culture. A succinct example of this is a piece called *Sorties* by Hélène Cixous, which begins:

> *Where is she?*
>
> Activity/passivity,
> Sun/Moon,
> Culture/Nature,
> Day/Night,
>
> Father/Mother,
> Head/heart,

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1. J.E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Penguin, 1960), p.302.

Intelligible/sensitive,
Logos/Pathos.

Form, convex, step, advance, seed, progress.
Matter, concave, ground - which supports the step, receptacle.

Man

Woman

Always the same metaphor: we follow it, it transports us, in all of its forms, wherever a discourse is organized. The same thread, or double tress leads us, whether we are reading or speaking, through literature, philosophy, criticism, centuries of representation, of reflection.

Thought has always worked by opposition,
Speech/Writing
High/Low

By dual, *hierarchized* oppositions. Superior/Inferior. Myths, legends, books. Philosophical systems. Wherever an ordering intervenes, a law organizes the thinkable by (dual, irreconcilable; or mitigable, dialectical) oppositions ...[2]

Cixous is here arguing, under the influence of Derrida, that thought, in Western culture, has always been structured in terms of dichotomies; she aligns herself with the deconstructive project of inverting, and, ultimately, dissolving these hierarchised oppositions. She adds to deconstruction a specific and conscious feminist impetus by placing the opposition Man/Woman at the apex of her table of polarities. Man has always been seen as the norm, woman as the deviation from the norm, the "Other" against which masculinity defines itself. Cixous is setting out graphically what has become a basic orthodoxy of feminist theory: that man has *always* been identified with superior qualities and entities such as activity, intelligence, light, strength, and so on, while woman has *always*

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2. *New French Feminisms*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtrivon (Brighton: Harvester, 1981), p.90.

been associated with the opposing qualities of passivity, emotion, darkness, weakness, and so on. These observations are presented as timeless and transhistorical.

It is interesting to compare the passage from Cixous with a passage from Ian Maclean's book *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*. Maclean in turn is discussing a book by G.E.R. Lloyd called *Polarity and analogy: two types of argumentation in early Greek thought*, and he writes:

> The earliest stage in the use of polarity, in Lloyd's analysis, is represented by the related opposites attributed by Aristotle to the Pythagoreans in *Metaphysics* A.3 [986a 21ff]:
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | male | female |
> | limit | unlimited |
> | odd | even |
> | one | plurality |
> | right | left |
> | square | oblong |
> | at rest | moving |
> | straight | curved |
> | light | darkness |
> | good | evil |
>
> Here there is no classification of the different sorts of opposites; nor is the alignment of male-limit-odd-one-right etc. justified by reasoning or empirical evidence. In the Renaissance, this set of opposites was known not only through Aristotle's account of it, but also through the Hippocratic corpus, in which it is implicit.[3]

Maclean's argument in his book, put briefly, is that although the Renaissance brought some adjustments in the view of woman through neo-Platonism and through the existence of women rulers and professional women, nevertheless it was these oppositions which prevailed as the basis of ideas of gender.

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3. (Cambridge UP, 1980), pp.2-3.

The apparent congruence between this Maclean passage and the passage from Cixous is not really surprising; both are examining Aristotelianism as the basis of Western thought. But Maclean's passage is particularly interesting because he is specifically discussing the Renaissance; it suggests that Cixous's generalisations can be tied down to a specific historical period, the very period with which we are concerned, and found to hold true. If they are true, then clearly this suggests something about the sixteenth-century view of women *rulers*. Extrapolating from Maclean's and Cixous's lists of oppositions, one could add the further opposition authority/obedience. If man is on the side of activity, intelligence, and good, whereas woman is on the side of passivity, emotion and evil, then clearly man is fitted to be a ruler and woman is not; woman is only fit to be ruled. Conversely, the qualities required of a ruler will be so-called "masculine" virtues.

Some Renaissance views of woman

We must now ask whether Renaissance primary texts back up the definitions of "masculinity" and "femininity" given by Cixous and Maclean. There is not space here to discuss fully the heated debate about the nature of woman which took place in the sixteenth century. However, one can give an impression of the range of opinions expressed. On one side of the debate were such individuals as Cornelius Agrippa, who wrote *On the Nobility and Excellence of Women*, 1529. With an impressive egalitarianism, he proclaims that:

> The only difference between man and woman is physical ... In everything else they are the same ... Women and men were equally endowed with the gifts of spirit, reason, and the use of words; they

were created for the same end, and the sexual difference between them will not confer a different destiny.[4]

At the other extreme was the *Homily on Matrimony*, which explained,

For the woman is a weak creature, not endued with like strength and constancy of mind: therefore they be the more prone to all weak affections and dispositions of mind, more than men be; and lighter they be and more vain in their fantasies and opinions.[5]

This was the officially approved statement on the subject, which was to be delivered in all the nation's churches throughout Elizabeth's reign. It had the authority behind it not only of the state and the Church, but also of the Bible; it alludes to the First Epistle of Saint Peter, in which he calls the wife "the weaker vessel".

In general, the view put forward in the Homily seems to be the prevalent one in the sixteenth century. Even those writers who defended women did so in terms which do not deconstruct the binary oppositions outlined above. As Simon Shepherd notes in his edition of pamphlets by women written between 1580 and 1640, a favourite technique in their defence of women is "lists of chaste women, honourable women, courageous women, fruitful mothers, virtuous daughters, pious widows."[6] They do not question the stereotype of the ideal woman as chaste and submissive, but

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4. Julia O'Faolain & Lauro Martines, eds., *Not In God's Image: Women in History* (London: Virago, 1979), p.196.

5. John Griffiths, ed., *The Two Books of Homilies appointed to be read in Churches* (Oxford UP, 1859), p.503.

6. *The Women's Sharp Revenge: Five Women's Pamphlets from the Renaissance* (London: Fourth Estate, 1985), p.9.

rather reinforce it. Linda Woodbridge comments in her study of *Women and the English Renaissance*:

> To the cynical, formal attacks and formal defenses [sic] might seem two sides of the same coin. Attacks criticise bad women for gadding about, defenses praise good women for staying home; this is only negative versus positive reinforcement.[7]

Margaret P.Hannay, in her editorial introduction to the essay collection *Silent But for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works*, also notes this restrictive definition of ideal femininity.[8] And Lisa Jardine, in *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*, surveys Elizabethan attitudes to women, and concludes:

> ... in spite of the wider range of opportunities which became available to (some) women during the Renaissance and Reformation, attitudes towards women did not perceptibly change - may in fact have become somewhat hardened as individual women challenged their traditional role.[9]

So, although a few writers did entertain ideas of the equality of the sexes, in general most sixteenth-century writers, whether attacking women or defending them, conformed to ideas of feminine virtues which were the opposite of masculine virtues. Within this opposition, the precise ideal of

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7. *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540-1620* (Brighton: Harvester, 1984), p.133.

8. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 1985), pp.1-14.

9. (Brighton: Harvester, 1983), p.58. See also Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1956), on the differences in education for boys and girls, determined by different ideals of their virtues and occupations.

feminine virtues which prevailed in this period was one of silence, chastity and obedience. In Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde*, Sir John of Bordeaux's dying words are advice to his sons regarding the ideal woman:

> ... and yet my sonnes, if she have all these qualities, to be chast, obedient, and silent; yet for that she is a woman, shalt thou find in her sufficient vanities to countervaile her vertues.[10]

Similar attitudes are expressed in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. At the Temple of Venus, the allegorical figures who accompany Womanhood are Shamefastness, Cheerfulness, Modesty, Curtesie, Silence, and Obedience. We are told that

> ... goodly *Shamefastness*
> Ne euer durst her eyes from ground vpreare,
> Ne euer once did looke vp from her desse [i.e. dais]. (IV.x.50.)

If these are virtues appropriate to a woman, they are certainly not appropriate to a ruler. Spenser finds one way of reconciling the conflicting ideals of "woman" and "ruler" in the figure of the "exceptional woman", which will be discussed later. The influence upon him of the Aristotelian framework of binary opposition is manifested in the symbolic geometry of Alma's castle, which combines the circle and the triangle:

> The one imperfect, mortall, foeminine;
> Th'other immortall, perfect, masculine (II.ix.22).

The idea of distinct offices for men and women is expressed in Book V, when Sir Terpin tells Artegall that he is prepared to die rather than submit

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10. G.Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols. (London: Routledge, 1958), vol.II, p.163.

to the "shamefull life" imposed by Radigund, whereby men have to wear "womens weedes" and "To spin, to card, to sew, to wash, to wring" (V.iv.31).

One of the clearest statements of gender-roles in terms of binary oppositions is in the 1614 conduct book of John Dod and Robert Cleaver, giving advice to married couples. This in turn drew heavily upon Bullinger's highly influential *Golden Boke of Christen Matrimonye*, translated into English in 1543. Dod and Cleaver list the complementary duties of man and wife as follows:

Husband	Wife
Get goods	Gather them together and save them
Travel, seek a living	Keep the house
Get money and provisions	Do not vainly spend it
Deal with many men	Talk with few
Be "entermeddling"	Be solitary and withdrawn
Be skilful in talk	Boast of silence
Be a giver	Be a saver
Apparel yourself as ye may	Apparel yourself as it becomes you
Be lord of all	Give account of all
Dispatch all things outdoor	Oversee and give order within[11]

We can see from this list that men are defined entirely in terms of extroversion and expansiveness, while women are defined in terms of enclosure, introversion and conservation. In addition, the male role is one of command, the female role one of obedience.

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11. Quoted from Kathleen M.Davies, "The sacred condition of equality - how original were Puritan doctrines of marriage?", *Social History* issue 5 (May 1977), p.570; see also p.564 n.3, pp.579-80.

2. Theories of female rule

Knox et al.: the Calvinist view of female rule.

Our particular interest here is in how such views of "masculinity" and "femininity" shaped attitudes to female rule. John Knox, in his notorious *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstruous Regiment of Women*, 1558, certainly placed woman on the side of obedience, and man on the side of authority; he wrote: "I say, that woman in her greatest perfection, was made to serue and obey man, not to rule and command him: As saint Paule doth reason."[1] His argument is based precisely upon the opposing qualities which he attributes to men and women, and to *rulers* and women. He defines rulers as follows: they

> ... oght to be constant, stable, prudent and doing euerie thing with discretion and reason, whiche vertues women can not haue in equalitie with men ... vertues in which [women] excell, they haue not comon with men. (f.24r.)

The greatest virtue which Knox attributes to woman is that she is "a tendre creature, flexible, soft and pitifull: whiche nature, God hath geuen vnto her, that she may be apt to norishe children." (f.25v.) But in other passages Knox does not even see this tenderness as a virtue; he writes:

> Nature, I say, doth paynt [women] furthe to be weake, fraile, impacient, feble and foolishe: and experience hath declared them to be vnconstant, variable, cruell and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment. (f.10r.)

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1. The English Experience No.471 (Amsterdam: Theatrvm Orbis Terrarvm, 1972), f.13r.

Therefore, the rule of a woman is "monstriferous":

> To promote a woman to beare rule, superioritie, dominion or empire aboue any realme, nation, or citie, is repugnant to nature, contumelie to God, a thing most contrarious to his reueled will and approued ordinance, and finallie it is the subuersion of good order, of all equitie and iustice. (f.9r.)[2]

Knox was not exceptional in holding such vehement opinions. He could cite the highest authorities in philosophy and theology in his support, such as Aristotle and St.Paul (f.10r, f.12r; f.13r, f.15r.). He was also backed up by other contemporary writers such as Anthony Gilby, author of *An Admonition to England and Scotland*, 1558, and Christopher Goodman, who, in his *How Superior Powers be Obeyed*, 1558, described "That monster in nature, and disordre amongest men, whiche is the Empire and gouernement of a woman."[3]

It might be objected that Knox's and Goodman's diatribes were at heart directed not against female rule, but against the rule of Catholics. It just so happened that at their time of writing, all the leading Catholic rulers in Europe were female - "our mischeuous Maryes" as Knox calls them (f.41v.). Nevertheless, it is striking that the attack is couched explicitly in terms of their sex, suggesting that female rule certainly was seen as controversial, and that an attack on any woman for any cause could always be reduced to an attack on her sex.

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2. See also f.17r, f.34r.

3. (Amsterdam: Theatrvm Orbis Terrarvm, 1972.), p.52.

If this attack on female rule was really an attack on Catholic rule, one might expect it to have been dropped when a Protestant female ruler appeared, in the person of Elizabeth. After all, Goodman praised Princess Elizabeth as "that Godlie Lady, and meke Lambe, voyde of all Spanishe pride, and strange bloude" (p.53). However, this is not what happened on Elizabeth's accession. Although Knox rued the fact that his "blast hath blown from me all my friends in England", his attempt at appeasement was extremely grudging. His letter to Cecil of 10th April 1559 was hedged with qualifications:

> ... albeit that nature and Godes most perfect ordinaunce repugne to soche regiment ... if Quene Elizabeth shall confes, so that the extraordinary dispensation of Godes great mercy maketh that lawfull unto her, which both nature and Godes lawe denye; then shall non in Englande be more willinge to meintein her lawfull auctority then I shal be.

To Elizabeth herself he wrote, on 20th July 1559:

> I cannote denie the writting of a booke against the usurped Authoritie and unjust Regiment of Women; neyther yit am I mynded to retreate or call backe anie principall point, or propositioun of the sam, till truthe and veritie doe farther appear.

He explained, however, that his attack was not against her - as long as she acknowledged that she held power only from God.[4]

Calvin himself wrote a little more mildly to Cecil to atone for the offence given by his followers, but was similarly equivocal:

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4. James Emerson Phillips Jr., writing as James E. Phillips Jr., "The Background of Spenser's Attitude Towards Woman Rulers", *HLQ* 5 (1941-2), pp.19-21; Conyers Read, *Mr. Secretary Cecil and Queen Elizabeth* (London: Cape, 1955), pp.138-9.

> Two years ago, John Knox in a private conversation, asked my opinion respecting female government. I frankly answered that because it was a deviation from the primitive and established order of nature, it ought to be held as a judgment on man for his dereliction of his rights, just like slavery.

In this there is no retraction of the opinion voiced by Knox and Goodman regarding Mary I, that female rule is "an expresse signe of Gods wrathe, and notable plague for the synnes of the people."[5] Calvin's only significant difference from them is that he insists that, however despicable or weak she may be, a female ruler must be obeyed, since she is ordained by God. In this he is applying his general principle regarding the duty of obedience: female rulers should not be resisted, "... because in my judgment it is not permitted to unsettle governments that have been set up by the peculiar providence of God."[6] So, female rule is on a level with famines and plagues of locusts, as a manifestation of God's wrath which man has brought upon himself through sin, and which he must endure as part of the divine plan.

A more positive attempt to reconcile Elizabeth to the Calvinist camp was made by John Aylmer, in his *Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subiectes*, 1559. This book was apparently written:

> ... upon a consultation holden among the [Marian] exiles, the better to obtain the favour of the new queen, and to take off any jealousy she

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5. Goodman, p.96; see also Knox, f.30v-32r.

6. Letter to William Cecil, Geneva, May 1559, in *Letters of John Calvin, selected from the Bonnet Edition* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1980), pp.211-2.

might conceive of them, and of the religion which they professed.[7]

Aylmer structures his arguments as a direct riposte to Knox. He copiously lists examples of successful female rulers,[8] and in some passages seems remarkably radical in his defence of female rule. Writing of Mary I's weakness in bowing to Philip II's will, he says, "That follye was accidente to her person, and not proper to her sexe. But admit it to be throughe the fault of a woman: haue we not had as greate, and greater by men?" (sig.L3r.) Aylmer is refreshingly enlightened in this admission that men are as fallible as women, and in his ability to see that the folly of a woman may be her fault as an individual, not proof of the generic folly of the sex.

However, elsewhere his defence of female rule is not far removed from Knox's attack upon it. He asserts that it is wrong to disobey female magistrates because they are divinely ordained, and reiterates Calvin's doctrine of obedience: "... is it wysdome to comptrolle Gods doynges, or to breake that he hath made, or to pulle downe that he hath set vp?" (sig.C1r.) The implication is as Calvin's: we must put up with female rule, though it is highly undesirable. This is more openly stated later on: if rulers were not appointed by God, but by man, and

> ... if any were to be chosen by lotte, or suffrage: I would not in

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7. Phillips, "Background", p.15.

8. John Aylmer, *An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subiectes*, 1559, The English Experience 423 (Amsterdam: Theatrvm Orbis Terrarvm, 1972), sig.D2v-F4v.

> dede that any woman should stand in the election, but men only: for I say with Aristotle, that ... the male is in all lykelihod meter to rule, then the woman in many respectes. (sig.I1r.)

Like Knox, Aylmer agrees with St.Paul that women should not teach (sig D1r). In fact, he agrees with many of Knox's arguments for women's inferiority, simply placing a different emphasis to reach the conclusion that, after all, this does not absolutely exclude them from government. He tells Knox,

> ... you take this vvord nature to largely, you deceiue your self vvyttingly, thinking that because it is not so continent, so profitable, or mete, therfore it is vnnaturall. (sig.G4v.)

This is hardly an expression of wholehearted confidence in female rule. Indeed, even Aylmer's more vigorous passages in support of women rulers have an air of tension about them, of a mind strenuously exercising itself in an attempt to fit arguments to expedience. One feels that they were written primarily out of a desire to show support for Elizabeth as an individual, rather than out of any profound conviction that female rule in general was to be advocated. Between Aylmer and Knox, it is not convictions which have changed, but merely circumstances: in order to oust the Catholic Marys, Knox argued that *all* female rule is abhorrent, whereas Aylmer, to welcome the advent of a Protestant Queen, argues that some female rule may be acceptable, without dismantling the fundamental doubts about female rule which clearly endured.

Other doubts about female rule

It was not only the Calvinists, with their specific religious

motivation, who voiced opposition to female rule. Ian Maclean, in *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, summarises Renaissance opinion regarding the nature and status of women under three categories. Firstly, there were those, like Agrippa, who maintained that men and women have an identical capacity for virtue. Secondly, there were those who argued that men and women have an identical capacity for virtue, but different "officia", determined by their different physiological and social functions. And thirdly, there were those who believed that the male and female capacities for virtue were different, and that the sexes should practise different and complementary virtues: eloquence/silence, command/obedience, and so on. However, on the specific question of female rule, Maclean finds that:

> Both in commentary on [classical] commonplaces, and in implicit or explicit reference to contemporary examples, there is near unanimity in the distaste shown for the notion of woman's involvement in politics. Nature and convention, divine and human law all predispose man rather than woman to govern, and if woman is to be involved in public life, it should only be in emergency or because the woman in question possesses outstanding qualities of leadership.[9]

Such beliefs were reinforced by the English experience of female rule. In effect, Mary I was England's first Queen Regnant; in the 1140s Matilda had only been acknowledged in a few counties in the West, and the period had been marked down in history as "the Anarchy". Since then, there had been two Queen-consorts: Isabella (wife of Edward II), and Margaret of Anjou (wife of Henry VI), who, for the deleterious consequences of their attempts to play an active role in government, had been vilified as the two "she-wolves of France". Mary herself might not have been accepted as

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9. Maclean, pp.55, 60.

monarch were it not that the other main contender was also a woman, Lady Jane Grey.[10] The doubt which clung to Mary, because of her sex, is indicated by the fact that, on her accession, Parliament felt it necessary to pass an Act declaring:

> That the Regal Power of this Realm is in the Queen's Majesty, to be as fully and nobly as ever it was in any of her most Noble Progenitors, Kings of this Realm.[11]

However, while on the one hand the precedent of female rule set by her sister was a handicap to Elizabeth, on the other hand her differences from Mary were advantageous. As a Protestant, of pure English blood, and as the last surviving descendant of Henry VIII, Elizabeth was greeted, as Camden describes, with "... happy acclamations, and most ioyfull applause of the people, and certainely with a most prosperous and auspicious beginning."[12] Nevertheless, these hopes were not unmixed with fears; Sydney Anglo remarks that:

> The entry pageants for Elizabeth ... are enhanced with as much pent-up passion, desire for reparation, and zeal for Reformation, as could be expressed in civic pageantry ... No previous series, perhaps, had expressed such a commixture of relief, joy, and hope, together with grave anxiety for the future of the commonweal in the hands of a young monarch.[13]

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10. Paul Johnson, *Elizabeth I: A Study in Power and Intellect* (London: Weidenfeld, 1974), p.38.

11. Phillips, "Background", p.8; J.E. Neale, *Elizabeth I and her Parliaments 1559-1581* (London: Cape, 1953), p.22.

12. William Camden, *Annals, or, the Historie of the most renowned and Victorious Princesse Elizabeth, Late Queen of England*, trans. Robert Norton, 3rd. ed. (London: 1635), p.2.

13. Sydney Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy* (Oxford UP, 1969), p. 358.

We might add: of a *female* monarch. It is the same cautious optimism, tremulous and conditional, which one can sense behind Aylmer's text. He sets out Elizabeth's virtues not so much as a description of what she is, but as a manifesto of what her people hope she will be, a vision which they fervently hope she will fulfil.[14] As the coronation pageant expressed it, "This citie sendeth thee firme hope and earnest prayer. / For all men hope in thee, that all vertues shall reygne."[15] Her subject's anxieties arose from a welter of many issues - notably, religion, Elizabeth's youth, recent civic turmoil, and defeat abroad - but at least as significant as all these was anxiety regarding the new monarch's sex.

Louis Adrian Montrose writes that the "Great Chain of Being", which persisted as an idealised model of society, was based upon homologies, and

> embodied a challenge to the homology between hierarchies of rule and of gender. A range of strategies was generated by means of which this ideological dissonance, this contradiction in the cultural logic, could be variously articulated and obfuscated, contained and exploited.[16]

We shall now proceed to examine some of these strategies.

Deborah and Judith: ideal models of female rule.

Caught between fervent desire that Elizabeth should succeed, and a

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14. Aylmer, sigs.N1r-N3v.

15. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, p.57.

16. Montrose, "Elizabethan Subject", p.309.

deep-seated assumption that women never could succeed as rulers, the English began to find for themselves various ways of making the idea of a woman ruler acceptable, and of creating a positive image of the female ruler. These images grew organically out of the very images which had previously been used to attack female rule. In order to reinforce his point that the women rulers of his present age possess only "the spirit of Iesabel, and Athalia", Knox had presented by way of contrast an ideal of the woman ruler to which they cannot hope to aspire, in the person of Deborah:

> God by his singular priuiledge, fauor, and grace, exempted Debora from the common malediction geuen to women in that behalf: and against nature he made her prudent in counsel, strong in courage, happie in regiment, and a blessed mother and deliuerer to his people.[17]

This was presented as a miracle, something which had happened in the distant, Biblical past, which one could not hope to see repeated in the present degenerate age. Nevertheless, Knox virtually sets out point by point the kind of role which came to be attributed to Elizabeth. It is hardly surprising that Aylmer, purportedly Knox's adversary, gleaned from him and used repeatedly the examples of Deborah, Judith, and other Old Testament heroines, to prove the possibility of successful female rule.[18]

Calvin, too, used Deborah, in his letter to Cecil: in his conversation with Knox,

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17. Knox, ff.41v, 42r.

18. Aylmer, sigs.B3v, D2v, O4r.

> I here instanced Huldah and Deborah. I added to the same effect that God promised by the mouth of Isaiah that queens should be the nursing mothers of the church, which clearly distinguished such persons from private women.[19]

Calvin's purpose in this passage is evident: to urge Elizabeth to act as a nursing mother of the Church; in other words, to reform the English Church along Calvinist lines. This is how she will prove herself to be a Deborah and not a Jezebel, a woman granted divine gifts beyond her nature by God, not sent by God to be a scourge and a punishment - though either role still predicates the innate weakness of women.

It was in just such a spirit of Reformation that Elizabeth was represented as Deborah in the coronation pageants: the fifth tableau showed her as "Debora the judge and restorer of the house of Israel".[20] The Old Testament heroines were often used in this way to suggest an ideal role as the patroness of Protestant reform to which Elizabeth should aspire.[21] They were also used to proclaim Elizabeth as a champion over Catholic adversaries, as in "Certaine Englishe Verses", 1586, about the Babington plot, which ran "... victors wee that *Deboras* song may sing / Our *Iudith* stout *Holofernes* Mates hath spoild."[22] The Old Testament heroines

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19. Calvin, p.212.

20. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, p.53.

21. See David G.E. Norbrook, *Panegyric of the Monarchy and its Social Context under Elizabeth I and James I* (Oxford University, D.Phil. thesis, 1978), p.21.

22. Hazlitt, 1st series, no.XXVII.

were a standard part of panegyric in the earlier decades of the reign; at Norwich, for example, during the Queen's visit in 1578, for the second pageant,

> The stage or Pageant was replenished with five personages apparelled like women. The first was the City of Norwich, the second Debora, the third Judeth, the fourth Esther, the fifth Martia, sometime Queene of England.[23]

The invocation of Deborah and Judith was all part of England's growing identification of itself as the new Israel: just as Elizabeth had been chosen by God, specially elevated from weakness to be his earthly agent, so the English, as the protectors of the true reformed religion, could claim to be God's chosen people. Aylmer succinctly declared, in a marginal note, "God is English";[24] while nearly thirty years later, on the eve of the Armada, Job Throckmorton assured Parliament that the many blessings heaped on England showed that "... indeed the Lord hath vowed himself to be English."[25]

Strength in weakness

Thus, paradoxically, Elizabeth's "sexly weakness" could be seen as a source of strength, in its proof of God's special favour. As Knox wrote, God's purpose in favouring Deborah was to show that he could save his own

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23. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.II, p.145.

24. Aylmer, sig.P4v.

25. J.E. Neale, *Elizabeth I and her Parliaments 1584-1601* (London: Cape, 1957), p.170.

people even "by meanes of the moste weake vesselles"; and, as Maclean puts it,

> It is clear from a variety of texts that God delights in confounding the mighty by the agency of the weak; Judith, Deborah and Jael among biblical women are all figures for this[26].

All of these were used as personae for Elizabeth. In 1593, Puckering told the Commons that the Queen owed everything to God,

> And so much the more with humblest thanks to be acknowledged, as that He enableth the weakest sex, and makes them to admire it that ere now were wont to doubt [women's] good success.[27]

Elizabeth herself participated in this presentation of the female ruler as a weak vessel, chosen by God as his instrument as a proof of his strength. In 1576, she told Parliament that she could not claim the achievements of the reign as her own, because "My sex permits it not"; instead she attributed them to God.[28] Even at the end of her long reign, in the Golden Speech of 1601, Elizabeth rhetorically asked the House, "Shall I ascribe anything to myself and my sexly weakness?"[29] As Alison Heisch says, by couching the "disabling" device of conventional parliamentary rhetoric precisely in gendered terms, Elizabeth promoted the concept that "In the *de facto* weakness of her sex lies the evidence of her special strength."[30]

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26. Knox, ff.42r-v; Maclean, p.21.
27. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.II, p.248.
28. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.I, p.364.
29. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.II, p.391.
30. Heisch, "Persistence of Patriarchy", p. 52.

This seems to have been more than calculated rhetoric; in her *Book of Devotions*, the book of prayers which, as far as we know, was written for her private use, Elizabeth constantly reverts to the "sexly weakness" theme. In one of the prayers, she gives thanks for God's kindnesses to her,

> And above all this, making me (though a weak woman) yet thy instrument, to set forth the glorious Gospel of thy dear Son Christ Jesus.[31]

The *Book of Devotions* is a particularly interesting source when one considers such questions as how far Elizabeth herself participated in the creation of her cult, and whether one can distinguish between her public and private voices. W.P. Haugaard has described the *Book of Devotions* as "A neglected clue to the queen's life and character", and claims that it is a significant insight into Elizabeth's private mind.[32] What it mainly shows, though, is that her private mind is very similar to her public persona; it confirms the conviction of Elizabeth's public voice. Elizabeth seems genuinely to have held the opinion that women are innately inferior, but that God had elected her to be a special case.

The "exceptional woman"

In Calvin's letter to Cecil, where he acknowledges that it is possible, and precedented, for women to rule, he explains that:

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31. *A Book of Devotions Composed by her Majesty Elizabeth R*, trans. Rev. A. Fox, foreword by Rev. Canon P. Hodges (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1970), p.19.

32. "Elizabeth Tudor's *Book of Devotions*: A Neglected Clue to the Queen's Life and Character", *Sixteenth Century Journal* 12.2 (Summer 1981), pp.79-106.

> ... certain women had sometimes been so gifted that the singular blessing of God was conspicuous in them, and made it manifest that they had been raised up by the providence of God.[33]

Thus the effect of God's endowing the strength of rule upon female frailty was to elevate the female ruler above the rest of her sex. She became an exceptional woman, a unique phenomenon, whose success, far from proving the potential of her whole sex, instead simply proved her singularity. As Maclean puts it, "If [virtuous princesses] are considered to be exceptional, then the infrastructure of Aristotelian thought remains intact."[34]

This concept of the "exceptional woman" was a further means by which Elizabeth's subjects could conceive of a female ruler as acceptable, and find ways to praise her. Elizabethan panegyric abounds in examples of the "exceptional woman" motif:[35] at the visit to Coventry in 1565, for instance, the city's Recorder complimented the Queen on "your profound learning and policy, seldom to be found in any man comparable, much less in any woman."[36] James Aske, in *Elizabetha Triumphans*, 1588, listed the languages which she could speak, concluding, "Ne are these all, though more

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33. Calvin, pp.211-12.

34. Maclean, p.63.

35. Philippa Berry argues against readings of representations of Elizabeth which emphasise her "*difference* from all other women, as ... a unique woman occupying a man's world", because "*her ties of blood, friendship and affection with other women are thereby elided*" (p.65). I am unconvinced by this, because of the sheer profusion of contemporary examples of the "exceptional woman" motif.

36. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, p.193.

than may be found / In female sex, except her stately self."[37] As with her acceptance of the "strength-in-weakness" argument, Elizabeth herself participated in this promotion of herself at the expense of other women. The French ambassador, Sieur de Maisse, described an audience with Elizabeth in 1597 in which

> She spoke to me of the languages that she had learned ... telling me that when she came to the Crown she knew six languages better than her own; and because I told her that it was great virtue in a princess, she said that it was no marvel to teach a woman to talk; it were far harder to teach her to hold her tongue.[38]

Elizabeth boasts of her own erudition while making stereotypical jokes about women in general.

The "exceptional woman" motif can be seen at work in Richard Barnfield's "Cassandra", one of the poems in his *Cynthia* volume. At two points in the narrative of Cassandra - a woman punished for deceitfulness and unchastity - Barnfield breaks off for blatantly digressive flattery of Elizabeth. Cassandra's inconstancy is the fault of "all woman kinde"; the female sex are "subject to inconstancie, / As other creatures are to destinie." But Elizabeth is:

> The fairest Maide that euer world admired:
> Whose constant minde, with heauenly gifts possesst
> Makes her rare selfe of all the world desired.
> In whose chaste thoughts no vanitie doth enter.

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37. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.II, p.549.

38. André Hurault, Sieur de Maisse, *Journal*, trans. & ed. G.B. Harrison & R.A. Jones (London: Nonesuch, 1931), pp.109-110.

Barnfield is anxious to exempt Elizabeth from the generic aspersion cast by his moral.[39] Even when he is praising women, he feels compelled to assert the exceptionality of the Queen: his second digression comes in a passage praising female beauty, where he inserts Elizabeth as its highest exemplar (p.79). But his narrative of Cassandra then continues: "She seals her lips with silence (womens glory)" (p.80). Silence may be women's glory, but it is of little value in a ruler. A tale with a didactic moral for women jars with panegyric of a female ruler, and this is only uneasily resolved by defining Elizabeth as a wondrous exception.

Another example of the "exceptional woman" model is Richard Mulcaster's *Positions*, 1581. Mulcaster argues in favour of the education of girls, while placing it secondary to the education of boys. He gives four reasons for the need to educate girls: it "is proued, by the custome of our countrey, by our duetie towards them, by their naturall abilities, and by the worthy effectes of such as haue bene well trained".[40] In general, then, Mulcaster's ideas are relatively enlightened. The book might appear to support the view that the presence of a woman on the throne improved the status of women in general.

However, Mulcaster's more progressive statements are consistently qualified and moderated, and this is nowhere more true than in his discussions of "the worthy effectes of such as haue bene well trained",

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39. Barnfield, pp.76-7.

40. (London: Longmans, 1888), p.166.

the argument from precedent. He speaks in these terms of Elizabeth and the ladies of her court:

> We haue besides her highnes as vndershining starres, many singuler ladies and gentlewymen, so skilfull in all cunning, of the most laudable, and loueworthy qualities of learning, as they may well be alleadged for a president [i.e. precedent] to prayse, not for a pattern to proue like by. (pp.173-74.)

Learned women are somehow to be seen as both exemplary *and* exceptional:

> ... these singularities be aboue the conmon [sic], presidentes be for hope, those pictures passe beyond al hope. And yet they serue for profe to proceede by in way of argument, that wymen can learne if they will. (p.176.)

This double perspective is particularly applied to the Queen. Mulcaster cites her as an example to gentlemen that more can be learned at home than by foreign travel, because she has become so erudite though

> ... a *woman*, a *gentlewoman*, a *ladye*, a *Princesse*, in the middest of many other businesses, in that infirmitie of sexe, and sundrie impedimentes to a free minde.

But:

> It may be said that her Maiestie is not to be vsed for a president, which of a princely courage would not be ouerthrowne with any difficulty in learning. (p.212.)

The *Positions* were dedicated to Elizabeth, who held Mulcaster in considerable favour. He appears to be caught between a desire to use Elizabeth and the other educated women of her court as examples of what women can achieve in scholarship, and the conventions of panegyric which demand that the monarch be placed incomparably above her subjects. He also evidently still believes women to be fundamentally inferior: "young *maidens*

must giue me leaue to speake of *boyes* first: bycause naturally the *male* is more worthy" (p.133). The education of girls can only be limited (p.167), since even those who seem very gifted in their early years have an underlying "naturall weaknesse" which soon emerges. A woman like Queen Elizabeth then, who is an example in learning even to gentlemen, can only be understood as singularly gifted, rather than typical. It is her "princely courage" which has enabled her achievements; her divine election to the monarchy has given her exceptional, superhuman - including super-masculine - powers of intellect.

The "exceptional woman" motif is of great importance in *The Faerie Queene*. The theory that only a woman who lawfully succeeds to a throne will be divinely endowed with the ability to rule, enables Spenser to reconcile panegyric of Elizabeth with definitions of ideal femininity as submissive, as discussed earlier (see p.26 above). Female rule is discussed with particular rigidity in Book V, where Spenser makes it clear that it is unnatural for women in general to rule:

> Such is the crueltie of womenkynd,
> When they haue shaken off the shamefast band,
> With which wise Nature did them strongly bynd,
> T'obay the heasts of mans well ruling hand,
> That then all rule and reason they withstand,
> To purchase a licentious libertie.
> But vertuous women wisely vnderstand,
> That they were borne to base humilitie,
> Vnlesse the heauens them lift to lawfull soueraintie (V.v.25).

There is a clear echo here of Calvin's letter to Cecil. This view means that Britomart's heroic act is to restore her own sex to subjection, for which they worship her:

> ... she there as Princess rained,

> And changing all that forme of common weale,
> The liberty of women did repeale,
> Which they had long vsurpt: and them restoring
> To mens subiection, did true Iustice deale:
> That all they as a Goddesse her adoring,
> Her wisdome did admire, and hearkned to her loring (V.vii.42).

Britomart is the mythical ancestor of Elizabeth; suggesting that Elizabeth, too, is a wise female monarch, because she keeps other women in their place.

The Queen's Two Bodies

The female ruler, the exceptional woman, who manifests God's strength in her sexly weakness, is a paradoxical figure, both weak and strong at once. This duality links with the Elizabethan legal theory of the King's Two Bodies. In 1561-2, a case was tried by the Crown lawyers regarding some leases of land made by Edward VI while he was still a minor. The decision reached was that the leases were valid, because:

> ... by the Common Law no Act which the King does as King, shall be defeated by his Nonage. For the King has in him two Bodies, viz., a Body natural, and a Body politic. His Body natural (if it be considered in itself) is a Body mortal, subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident, to the Imbecility of Infancy or old Age, and to the like Defects that happen to the natural Bodies of other People. But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy, Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People, and the Management of the public weal, and this Body is utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities, which the Body natural is subject to, and for this Cause, what the King does in his Body politic, cannot be invalidated or frustrated by any Disability in his natural Body.[41]

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41. Edmund Plowden, *Reports*, quoted in Ernst H.Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton UP, 1957) p.7; see also Axton, p.12.

Marie Axton, in *The Queen's Two Bodies*, has shown how this concept of the monarch's two bodies became well known in Elizabeth's reign through debate over the succession. She summarises thus the axioms of the theory, as developed by Edmund Plowden and others: "that the king's body politic protects the realm, never errs, is never senile, transforms to English a foreign wife, or foreign-born heir."[42] In the case of Edward VI, the juvenility of the King in his private person was deemed to be cancelled out by his possession of the monarchical office. Plowden did not specify that the femaleness of a monarch's body natural could be overcome by her transformation into the body politic, but he did say that in general the "disability of the body naturall is wasshed away by accesse of the body politicke to it." He also argued that a monarch differed from a private man in that, if a private man only had daughters, his inheritance would be shared equally between them; whereas a king who only had daughters would pass all of his inheritance to the eldest, preserving the principle of primogeniture as if she were a son.[43] Thus the theory of the King's Two Bodies was another means whereby Elizabeth could lay claim to the "masculine" virtues and authority of rule.

Ernst H. Kantorowicz has shown how the concept of the body politic derived from the *corpus ecclesiae mysticum* and then the *corpus reipublicae mysticum*.[44] Because *ecclesia* and *respublica* were gendered feminine,

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42. Axton, p.97.

43. Axton, p.31.

44. Kantorowicz, pp.193-232.

Philippa Berry argues that the body politic was also feminine, and that Elizabeth's possession of both body natural and body politic implied, not the union of feminine and masculine in her person, but "*the feminine in a mystical or symbolic relationship with itself.*"[45] However, the "body politic" seems to have held two, not wholly distinct, senses. In the sense used by Plowden, it implies a mystical, perfect, timeless essence of monarchy, which erased the imperfections of the monarch's body natural, whether youth, old age, or, presumably, femaleness. In this sense, Elizabeth could be regarded as masculine, as the temporary incumbent of the office of King. The other sense, which is emphasised by Berry, is that of the body of the nation, to which the monarch was symbolically "married". In this sense, it was in fact gendered masculine by Elizabeth herself to describe her relation to it. When her first parliament, in 1559, urged her to marry, she told them, "yea, to satisfie you, I have already ioyned my selfe in marriage to an husband, namely, the Kingdome of England"; and at the end of her reign, she told Sir John Harington's wife that her people were "all my husbands."[46] Or, in another instance, Anthony Munday gendered Elizabeth, as "King", as the masculine partner in the union: she was "the husband of the common weale, maried to the Realme."[47] Although alternative genderings

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45. Berry, pp.66-7.

46. Camden, p.16; Johnson, p.428. See pp.81, 252 below.

47. Anthony Munday, A VVatch-vvoord to Englande, 1584, sig.A3, quoted in Elkin Calhoun Wilson, *England's Eliza*, Harvard Studies in English 20 (Cambridge, USA: Harvard UP, 1939), p.71; see p.254 below.

were possible, the "marriage" between monarch and nation does not seem to have been conceived of as a female-female relationship.

Elizabeth used the idea of her "two bodies" from the very first to assert her "masculine" authority: in her accession speech, she said:

> ... considering I am Gods Creature, ordeyned to obey his appointment I will thereto Yelde, desiringe from the bottom of my harte that I may have assistance of his Graces to bee the minister of his Heavenly Will in this office now comytted to me, and as I am but one Bodye naturallye Considered though by his permission a Bodye Politique to Governe.[48]

It was also implicit in a written reply to Parliament in 1563, when Elizabeth contradicted those who thought her vowed to celibacy:

> For though I can think it best for a private woman, yet do I strive with myself to think it not meet for a Prince. And if I can bend my liking to your need, I will not resist such a mind.[49]

This division of public and private persons, body politic and body natural, is present in Spenser's exposition of "his whole intention" in *The Faerie Queene*, his "Letter to Raleigh". Here, he says,

> In that Faery Queene I meane glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceiue the most excellent and glorious person of our soueraine the Queene, and her kingdome in Faery land. And yet in some places els, I doe otherwise shadow her. For considering she beareth two persons, the one of a most royall Queene or Empresse, the other of a most vertuous and beautifull Lady, this latter part in some places I doe expresse in Belphoebe, fashioning her name according to your owne excellent conceipt of Cynthia, (Phoebe and

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48. Alison Heisch, "Queen Elizabeth I: Parliamentary Rhetoric and the Exercise of Power", *Signs* I.1 (Autumn 1975), p.33.

49. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.I, p.127.

Cynthia being both names of Diana.)[50]

This division of roles is clear throughout the poem: Gloriana is a static, remote icon of monarchy, whereas Belphoebe, as a private woman, takes part in the action and is human to the extent of making mistakes for which she can even be gently chided; the estranged Timias tells her,

> Ne any but your selfe, O dearest dred,
> Hath done this wrong, to wreake on worthlesse wight
> Your high displesure, through misdeeming bred (IV.viii.17).

Gloriana is the essence of monarchy; but Belphoebe has personality, making her mutable and fallible. Gloriana is asexual; Belphoebe loves and is jealous. Thus the theory of the Queen's Two Bodies enables Spenser to abstract monarchy from femininity and all that it entails.

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50. Hamilton, ed., p.737.

3. The attribution of masculine qualities to Elizabeth

Kantorowicz cites examples of female rulers who, because of their sole possession of the office of monarch, were called not "Queen", but "King"; they were simply the temporary incumbents of an office which was immutable, timeless, and masculine.[1] Likewise, Elizabeth writing to Lady Drury on the death of her husband, reassured her that "... you can enjoye with comforte, a King for his power, and a Queene for her love."[2] In 1583, when she wrote to Burghley dissuading him from resignation, her words of exhortation were "Serve God, fear the King";[3] and in letters to James VI of Scotland she customarily referred to herself as a King.[4]

Through possession of the masculine office of monarch, then, Elizabeth was taken to be endowed with the masculine qualities which the office required, such as intellect, eloquence, and courage. Those individuals who argued in favour of female rule in the sixteenth century, such as Torquato Tasso in *Discorso della virtù feminile e donnesca*, 1582, and John Case in *Sphaera civitatis*, 1588, based their defence upon this very recognition that "A ruler is required to practise virtues which are in some sense contrary to those recommended to woman in general."[5] Tasso

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1. Kantorowicz, p.80.
2. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, p.xxix n.; G.B. Harrison, ed., *Letters of Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Cassell, 1968), p.200.
3. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.II, p.400; Harrison p.159.
4. Harrison, pp.166, 258.
5. Maclean, p.61.

addresses the problem head on:

> What if, as a royal person, one is encouraged to be eloquent, liberal, magnificent, and as a woman economical, silent and modest? ... the first duty of a princess is to her royal status; it is therefore forgivable, though regrettable, if she neglects her moral virtues ... in the pursuit of her royal virtues ... The princess is, as it were, a man by virtue of her birth, and hence the masculine standard of morality applies to her.[6]

The idea of a division between her private, "feminine" virtues and her "masculine" ruling virtues underlay Elizabeth's impressive performances in Parliament. In 1563, replying to a Commons petition on the succession, she began,

> 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 she continued:

> But yet, the princely seat and kingly throne wherein God (though unworthy) hath constituted me, maketh these two causes to seem little in mine eyes, though grievous perhaps to your ears, and boldeneth me to say somewhat in this matter, which I mean only to touch but not presently to answer.[7]

Although in her private, feminine person she would lack the power of oratory, the mantle of kingship brings with it the necessary masculine gifts. We might incidentally note Elizabeth's cunning here in balancing

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6. Maclean, p.62.

7. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.I, pp.107-9; Heisch, "Persistence of Patriarchy", p.52.

masculine and feminine roles: by alluding to her feminine "disability", she can excuse herself from speaking at length on a subject which she would prefer to avoid, while appearing to acknowledge Parliament's concern.

This masculine/feminine motif - a feeble woman blessed with the attributes of a king - persisted throughout the Parliaments of the reign. In the session of 1586-7, Elizabeth told the house,

> I was not simply trained up, nor in my youth spent my time altogether idly; and yet, when I came to the crown, then entered I first into the school of experience, bethinking myself of those things that best fitted a king - justice, temper, magnanimity, judgment. As for the two latter, I will not boast.[8]

The text which was published for propaganda purposes in *The Copie of A Letter*, corrected by Elizabeth herself, here inserts "my sex doth not permit it" - the same phrase she had used ten years earlier in attributing her success to God (see p.40 above). Her assertion of masculine powers is often tempered by such reassurance of her feminine modesty. Nevertheless, Elizabeth consistently applies to herself the title of "King", as in her Golden Speech, where she carefully alternates the terms King and Queen.[9]

The same careful balance can be seen in Elizabeth's performance in another masculine arena, the University of Cambridge, which she visited in 1564. The Orator extolled the Queen's virtues,

> Which her Highness not acknowledging of, [she] shaked her head, bit

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8. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.II, p.128.

9. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.II, p.391.

> her lips and her fingers; and sometimes broke forth [into passion], and these words, 'Non est veritas, et utinam.' ['It is not true, but would that it was' - my translation.][10]

Here we see feminine modesty expressed in masculine Latin. Elizabeth excused herself from giving a Latin oration because of her "womanly shamefacedness", but proceeded to give a long accomplished speech, defending her boldness on the grounds that "The sayings of Princes retain the authority of laws with their subjects."[11] Again, we see the rhetorical "disabling" device expressed in gendered terms, and masculine powers and privileges invoked through the possession of masculine rank.

Eloquence was not the only "masculine" virtue to which Elizabeth laid claim: she also made frequent assertion of her masculine courage. At the end of the session of 1593, referring to the renewed fears of Spanish attack, she declared that: "For mine own part, I protest I never feared, and what fear was, my heart never knew."[12] Again, in the Golden Speech, she asserted that she had "a heart that never yet feared any foreign or home enemy."[13] On both these occasions, of course, she was speaking with the confidence given by the Armada victory that God was on England's side. The balance of feminine and masculine qualities which she presented in her parliamentary persona was summed up by Speaker Yelverton, at the end of

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10. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, p.161.
11. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, pp.177-8; E.C. Wilson, p.71.
12. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.II, p.322.
13. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.II, p.391.

the 1597-8 session: England possessed

> a princess in whom dwelleth such undaunted courage without all dismay of womanish fear, such singular wisdom without insolency, and such sincere justice without rigour.[14]

It is not only in Elizabeth's self-presentation that we can observe this balancing of masculine and feminine; it was also prevalent in her contemporaries' reactions to her. In March 1559, Count Helffenstein, the Imperial envoy, wrote to the Emperor Ferdinand that Elizabeth was "... endowed with so many gifts of body and of mind, that she in no wise falls short of the most famous women of her rank and of her land", and not only matched the noblest women, but also possessed the "truly regal heroic virtues" of "great prudence, great-mindedness and ability in all matters".[15] Pope Sixtus V felt her powers to be beyond those of woman:

> She certainly is a great Queen ... She is only a woman, only mistress of half an island, and yet she makes herself feared by Spain, by France, by the Empire, by all.[16]

Henry IV of France exclaimed, "She only is a king! She only knows how to rule!"[17]

In poetry, too, a favourite mode of panegyric for Elizabeth was to

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14. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.II, p.366.

15. Victor von Klarwill, ed., *Queen Elizabeth and Some Foreigners*, trans. T.H. Nash (London: Bodley Head, 1928), p.47.

16. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I*, p.288.

17. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I*, p.382.

catalogue the "masculine" and "feminine" virtues which met in her person. In George Peele's *The Araygnement of Paris*, 1583/4, Elizabeth wears

> Her robes of purple and of scarlet die,
> Her vayle of white, as best befits a mayde.

The purple and red signify her imperial majesty; the white signifies her virginity and maidenliness. Peele continues:

> Shee giveth armes of happie victorie,
> And flowers to decke her lyons crowned with golde.[18]

She is a martial leader, but bestows upon her heroic soldiers feminine flowers as well as masculine arms. There is a similar poise of imagery in the "Aprill" Eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender*: amongst the maidens, music and flowers which surround Elisa, the Muses present her with "Bay braunches ... / All for *Elisa* in her hand to weare". E.K. explains in his gloss: "Bay branches) be the signe of honor and victory, and therfore of myghty Conquerors worn in theyr triumphes."[19]

In *Descensus Astraeae*, 1591, Peele again presented a dualistic image of the Queen:

> Honor attendes hir throne, in hir bright eies

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18. *The Life and Works of George Peele*, 3 vols., gen. ed. Charles Tyler Prouty, Vol. III, ed. R. Mark Benbow (New Haven: Yale UP, 1970), p.111, ll.1160-64.

19. Edmund Spenser, *Poetical Works*, ed. J.C. Smith & E. de Selincourt, Oxford Standard Authors paperback (Oxford UP, 1970), p.432, ll.104-5; p.434. All subsequent references to *The Shepheardes Calender* will be to this edition.

Sits Majestie: Vertue, and Stedfastnesse
Possesse hir hart, sweete mercy swaies hir sword.[20]

Majesty, a masculine attribute, is located in the feminine attraction of "hir bright eies". She possesses steadfastness, a quality not usually praised in women, who are more usually criticised for their fickleness and waywardness; but it is situated in her heart, the seat of the emotions. She possesses the sword of a judge or conqueror, but wields it with tender, feminine mercy.

Another of Elizabeth's notable panegyrists, Sir John Davies, also made reference in his verses to the alliance in her person of masculine and feminine characteristics:

In her Sexe feares are wont to rise,
Nature permits, *Vertue* denies,
And scornes the face of *daunger*.[21]

However, a different use of sexually ambivalent imagery is exemplified by Robert Cecil's remark after Elizabeth's death. He said, "She was more than a man, and, in troth, sometimes less than a woman."[22] This pronouncement from the end of the reign is strikingly similar to Knox's from the very beginning, directed against "that monstre in nature (so call I a woman cled in the habit of a man, yea a woman against nature reigning aboue men)."[23]

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20. Prouty, gen. ed., Vol. I, *The Life and Minor Works of George Peele*, David H. Horne (New Haven: Yale UP, 1952), pp.214-19, ll.28-30.

21. *Poems of Sir John Davies*, ed. Robert Krueger (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), *Hymnes of Astraea*, p.85, "Of her Magnanimitie".

22. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I*, p.393.

23. Knox, f.53v.

For while the claim to masculine powers by benefit of her office was a means for Elizabeth to assert her strength, it also laid her open to attack as a sexual freak or monster.

Amazons and warrior-women

These statements suggest an anxiety about the female monarch as "mannish woman" which is borne out by the restraint with which martial images were applied to Elizabeth. It might be thought that such praise of the Queen as we have seen, for possessing manly courage, would be naturally extended into depiction of her as a warrior-maiden or Amazon. Britomart springs to mind; she too is described in terms which balance the masculine and feminine: "... she was full of amiable grace, / And manly terror mixed therewithall" (III.i.46). However, it is noteworthy that, unlike Belphoebe or Gloriana, Britomart is *not* a direct representation of Elizabeth; she is her mythical ancestor. Hence they may share some characteristics, without being identical. Moreover, Britomart's destiny is to be called from her arms by her "wombes burden"; her frequent blushes when Artegall is mentioned remind us that she is a woman in love, who has donned armour only in order to pursue the quest for her destined husband. Thus the image of the masculine warrior-maiden is both detached from Elizabeth, and softened by stress on her biological femaleness.[24]

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24. See Simon Shepherd, *Spenser*, Harvester New Readings (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1989), p.78.

This ambivalent attitude to the warlike female is expressed throughout *The Faerie Queene*. At some points, warrior-women are openly praised, most notably at III.ii.2:

> ... by record of antique times I find,
> That women wont in warres to beare most sway,
> And to all great exploits themselues inclined:
> Of which they still the girlond bore away,
> Till enuious Men fearing their rules decay,
> Gan coyne streight lawes to curb their liberty;
> Yet sith they warlike armes haue layd away,
> They haue exceld in artes and pollicy,
> That now we foolish men that prayse gin eke t'enuy.

The suspicion that this might be a compliment specifically designed to catch the Queen's eye is confirmed in the next stanza:

> Of warlike puissaunce in ages spent,
> Be thou faire *Britomart*, whose prayse I write,
> But of all wisedome be thou precedent,
> O soueraigne Queene, whose prayse I would endite.

So Spenser's praise of martial women is not disinterested.[25] Moreover, the skill in arms for which Britomart is praised is largely a symbolic attribute of the allegorical Knight of Chastity; her weapons are emblems of her conquest over unruly emotions. Elizabeth herself is praised not for

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25. Maureen Quilligan argues that *The Faerie Queene* is directed, via Elizabeth, at a female readership (*Milton's Spenser: The Politics of Reading* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983), pp.16, 39, 181, 185, 188). Simon Shepherd takes issue with Quilligan (*Spenser*, p.79), instead asserting that "In terms of pleasure and identification there is little point of entry for the woman reader" (p.58). I would tend to agree with Shepherd. In these passages in Book III in which Spenser praises martial women, we are merely spectators to his political wooing of the Queen.

martial courage, but for its more civilised manifestation in the modern age, wisdom in government.[26]

Similar cautions apply to Britomart's defeat of Artegall at IV.vi.31. Glauce tells him,

> ... you Sir *Artegall*, the saluage knight,
> Henceforth may not disdaine, that womans hand
> Hath conquerd you anew in second fight:
> For whylome they haue conquerd sea and land,
> And heauen it selfe, that nought may them withstand.
> Ne henceforth be rebellious vnto loue,
> That is the crowne of knighthood, and the band
> Of noble minds deriued from aboue,
> Which being knit with vertue, neuer will remoue.

Again, the victory is mainly an occasion for personal compliment to Elizabeth; and Britomart's victory in arms is transmuted into a victory in love.[27]

This reservation in praising the warlike female is confirmed when Britomart meets Radigund in single combat. Radigund, a true Amazon, is "halfe like a man" (V.iv.36). The cause of her violent antipathy to men is that she was jilted in her youth; a motivation which has frequently, through history, been attributed to women who militantly assert the rights of their sex (V.iv.30). Radigund's sense of grievance is reduced to her

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26. See Shepherd, *Spenser*, p.77, for discussion of Britomart's chastity as an image of (masculine) law.

27. For other examples of praise of martial women in *The Faerie Queene*, see III.iii.54, III.iv.1, IV.xi.22. Again, in none of these is praise for martial women straightforward or disinterested. Moreover, female warfare is admired either in the past, or in a far-away land.

personal failure to "get a man"; there is absolutely no conception that the subjection of women might be considered as a social injustice. Both Radigund and Britomart in their fury forget the usual skill and decorum with which they fight, and descend to mere brutal violence; they:

> ... ne spared not
> Their dainty parts, which nature had created
> So faire and tender, without staine or spot,
> For other vses, then they them translated (V.vii.29).

Such uninhibited female aggression is implied to be unnatural.

A less threatening type of the "masculine woman" is Diana, the virgin-huntress. Belphoebe, in the *blazon* of her at II.iii.21-31, is identified with both Penthesilea, Queen of Amazons, and Diana; but Diana, huntress rather than warrior-woman, is the primary allusion in the catalogue of her physical details. She carries weapons, but they are not for combat, like Britomart's; they are for hunting wild beasts. She wears masculine garb for ease in running, but not armour. Less threatening than the warrior-woman's arms, these attributes signify the same quality: active chastity. The boar-spear and bow "wherewith she queld / The saluage beastes in her victorious play" (29) are defences against lust. The word "darts", or arrows, is used with multiple significance: they are at once these darts which she uses against beasts (29); the fierce rays from her eyes, which "darted fyrie beames"; and the arrows of Cupid: "with dredd Maiestie, and awfull ire, / She broke his wanton darts, and quenched base desire" (23).

Belphoebe has both masculine and feminine qualities: in the *blazon*, she is given the "yellow lockes crisped, like golden wyre" of the Petrarchan mistress (30); the pure beauty "withouten blame or blot" of the maiden of the *Song of Songs* (22); and also the legs "Like two faire marble pillours" of the *male* lover of the *Song* (28). In this context, the mixture of masculine and feminine images may signify the meeting in her person of Christ's true love and his Church. Throughout the *blazon*, however, her "masculine" attributes are all emblems of the *feminine* virtue of chastity. After all, the *blazon* itself is a conventional form for the description of idealised *femininity*. Spenser is certainly not embarking upon unqualified praise for the "masculine woman"; her apparent militancy is entirely symbolic.

The idea of the chaste woman as somehow "masculine" derives from the different senses of the word "virtue". Of course, it derives from the Latin "vir", a man, or nobleman; it can therefore have the sense "The possession or display of manly qualities; manly excellence, manliness, courage, valour" (*Oxford English Dictionary* I.7). Another sense given by the OED is "Chastity, sexual purity, esp. on the part of women" (I.2.c.).[28] Courage and valour in a man, and chastity in a woman, are seen as equivalent. It is striking in Book III of *The Faerie Queene* that "chastity and virtue" are constantly paired; they are attributed in turn to Britomart (III.iv.3.4), Florimell (III.iv.8.5) and Belphoebe (III.v.53.6). So the "masculinity" of

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28. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd. ed., prepared by J.A. Simpson & E.S.C. Weiner, 20 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989).

Britomart and Belphoebe is primarily an indicator of their virtue; that is, their chastity.

This is not the same as presentation of Elizabeth as a woman who is armed and masculine because she actually leads her people to war. Winfried Schleiner, in a study of images of Elizabeth as an Amazon, finds that this role was regarded as disturbing and unnatural, and was therefore only applied to Elizabeth when specific circumstances made it particularly apt. She writes: "Significantly, all the direct Amazon references I have seen relate to the Armada conflict, the most serious military challenge to her reign."[29] Thus in a panegyric previous to the Armada, Thomas Blenerhasset's *Revelation of the True Minerva*, 1582, the author is careful to split off the warlike aspect of Minerva: Pallas is her sister and is the goddess of war, but Minerva, whom Elizabeth emulates, is only the goddess of wisdom.[30] The naval victory over the Spaniards, embellished by the Queen's visit to the troops at Tilbury, was the one occasion which inspired unreserved praise for Elizabeth as warrior-woman. There has been debate as to whether or not the Tilbury speech was really given in the famous form of words, "I may have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too."[31] However, the

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29. "'Divina virago': Queen Elizabeth as an Amazon", *Studies in Philology* 75 (1978), p.180.

30. Introd. J.W. Bennett (New York, Scholar's Facsimile, 1941), "The Printer to the Reader."

31. For debate, see Antonia Fraser, *Boadicea's Chariot: The Warrior Queens* (London: Weidenfeld, 1988), p.223, n.53.

very occasion of Elizabeth going down to the camp to ride amongst the soldiers urging them on lends itself to characterisation of her as masculine in her warlike valour.

An example of the many literary works inspired by the Armada victory is *Elizabetha Triumphans*, by James Aske, 1588.[32] It is filled with the familiar type of antithesis: Elizabeth is "A Maiden Queene, and yet of courage stout." (p.548.) This masculine courage is partly accounted for by her inheritance from her father:

> Although she be by nature weake,
> Because her sex no otherwise can be:
> Yet wants she not the courage of her Sire. (p.549.)

Her performance at Tilbury invites comparison with the gods, in which she is identified with both Mars *and* Bellona: the Queen,

> Not like to those who coutch on stately doune,
> But like to Mars, the God of fearefull Warre,
> And heaving oft to skies her warlike hands,
> Did make herself Bellona-like renowned. (p.565.)

She is described as "marching king-like on" (p.566.), her mixed nature exciting mixed reactions from her troops: "Her statelines was so with love-showed [sic] joyned, / As all there then did joyntly joy and feare." (p.571.) The climax of the poem is a versification of the Tilbury speech. The famous line about the body of a woman and the heart of a king is not used, but the same idea is implied; Elizabeth assures her soldiers that,

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32. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.II, pp.545-82.

whenever England is threatened, she herself will be their general. (p.572-73.)

So, masculine warlike imagery was applied to Elizabeth when a martial victory occasioned it; but, even then, there was a hesitancy about it. The year before the Armada, 1587, Maurice Kyffin's Accession Day verses dealt with England's military intervention in Scotland and the Netherlands, which Elizabeth was said to have directed as aid, out of "pure ... compassion"; "Her helping Hand, holds vp the weake distrest."[33] Means were found to attribute military action to feminine tenderness. Even Aske's more bellicose poem contains not an outright assertion of Elizabeth's masculine qualities, but a *balance* of masculine and feminine, Mars and Bellona, stateliness and love. In general, in panegyric of Elizabeth, whenever her masculine gifts are praised they are always accompanied by a counter-balancing praise of her femininity.

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33. Hazlitt, 1st Series, no.XXIX.

4. The use of feminine imagery in panegyric

It would seem from the Aristotelian binary oppositions with which we began that a female ruler would always have to lay claim to masculine qualities in order to assert her authority. However, as we have seen, such figuration of a "masculine woman" was accompanied with anxiety and implications of "unnaturalness". Much panegyric of Elizabeth therefore developed an alternative image: the female ruler as a figure of perfect *femininity*.[1]

Peace and mercy

While through most of *Elizabetha Triumphans* Aske strikes a balance between masculine and feminine virtues, in one passage, it is Elizabeth's feminine virtues which he particularly magnifies. He recounts the military intervention of the English against the French in Scotland, presenting it as a massacre; he describes with grisly relish the carnage and the howling of women and children, then works an abrupt shift of tone:

> Our gracious Queene, who never thurst for blood,
> (When thus the Frenchmen once had felt her force)
> Did use a meane which nearer was to peace

- she sent Cecil north to make the Treaty of Edinburgh.[2] Thus, when

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1. Philippa Berry reads representations of Elizabeth as "exaggerating" her gender, rather than negating it (pp.67, 114, 134).

2. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.II, p.552.

circumstances suit, the feminine delicacy of the Queen is invoked to distance her from the more distasteful (though, nevertheless, by implication, politically necessary) actions of her government. A similar idea was expressed in a letter from Sir Horatio Palavicino to Sir Robert Cecil in 1598: "the Archduke's commissioners ... esteem [the Queen] the mother of peace and not the renewer of war, so that if war be inevitable she may not be held the cause of it."[3]

In a technique frequently employed by Elizabeth's panegyrists, the presentation of the Queen as a serene figure of perfect femininity elevated her above the arena of political controversy. At the same time, it placed her in a *womanly* role, praising her without raising the spectre of female rule as "unnatural". Such virtues as peacefulness and mercifulness could be presented as both feminine *and* the attributes of an ideal ruler. Thus some Accession Day verses of 1587 could praise in one breath Elizabeth's "Princely giftes, her Iustice mylde, her Peacefull lasting dayes."[4] Part of the picture of Gloriana as the perfect monarch, along with her greatness and her lofty throne, is that "in her face faire peace, and mercy doth appeare" (II.ii.40). In the proem to Book V, virtue is identified with justice, which in turn is identified with "Peace vniuersall" (9). Chloris, in the "Aprill" Eclogue, brings a crown of olive branches, because:

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3. *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. The Marquis of Salisbury, K.G., preserved at Hatfield House, Herts.* (hereafter referred to as Hatfield MSS catalogue), 24 vols., vol.VIII (London: HMC, 1899), p.10.

4. Hazlitt, 1st series, no.XXIX.

Oliues bene for peace,
When wars doe surcease:
Such for a Princesse bene principall (11.124-6).

There are a number of other texts and speeches which emphasise Elizabeth's gentleness and mercifulness. Aylmer rejoiced that "She commeth in lyke a lambe, and not lyke a Lyon, lyke a mother, and not lyke a stepdam."[5] In Parliament, in Speaker Bell's oration at the end of the 1576 session,

> He showed what a punishment it was to a nation to have a tyrannical king, and thereby what a blessing to have a virtuous, mild, and merciful princess.[6]

In the 1586-7 Parliament, Job Throckmorton, alluding to Elizabeth's illustrious ancestry, also implied that a female ruler could surpass a king in some qualities: Elizabeth was "in wisdom equal, in mildness and mercy superior" to her forebears.[7] Thus the Aristotelian binary opposition of man as warlike and just, woman as peaceful and merciful, was not deconstructed; but, in certain contexts, the feminine side was valorised.

Similar speeches were made on Elizabeth's progresses. During the visit to Norwich, in 1578, an oration was given by Stephen Limbert, a schoolmaster, in which he declared that, among Elizabeth's many virtues, the most prominent was mercy. He proceeded to assert this as the ideal virtue for *all* rulers, regardless of gender:

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5. Aylmer, sig.N4v.
6. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.I, p.360.
7. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.II, p.171.

> ... than the whiche of manye vertues none can be more acceptable unto God, as Homer writeth, neither any vertue in a mightie Prince more wondered at amongst men.[8]

Another oration, by the Mayor of New Windsor, delivered for the Queen's birthday in 1586, stressed her mercy and mildness. It upbraided traitors that, "Is not even the Sexe that you so violently conspire against, a tender Sexe?"; and listed as Elizabeth's attributes grace, innocence, and other primarily feminine qualities.[9] The fact that Elizabeth was a woman and therefore associated with gentleness and love seems to have been an element in the famous affection between herself and her people which was such a mainstay of her power; an unknown M.P., in a letter to a Privy Councillor on the eve of the 1581 Parliament wrote that the people's disposition

> to love her Majesty, being so good a one, doth so far exceed the fear of her, being a woman and so merciful, that her lovingest means doth make them most obsequious.[10]

Her supposed feminine mercifulness was especially emphasised in relation to the problem of Mary Queen of Scots. In the 1584-85 Parliament she blocked the House's moves to pass the Safety Bill, and the Speaker, in his summing up, sought to assuage the frustration of MPs by attributing the Queen's obstructiveness to "her clement and pitiful nature".[11]

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8. Nichols, *Elizabeth*. vol.II, p.157.

9. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.II, pp. 469, 472, 473.

10. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.I, p.423.

11. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.II, p.96.

Elizabeth herself laid claim to this feminine delicacy, in order to add force to her sound political reasons for hesitating over Mary's execution:

> What will [my enemies] not now say, when it shall be spread that, for the safety of her life, a maiden queen could be content to spill the blood even of her own kinswoman?[12]

It was entirely shrewd and rational for Elizabeth to fear that the execution of one female ruler would set a precedent by which attempts against her own life could be justified; but the issue was presented in terms of its tugging upon her feminine heart-strings. James VI wrote to point out to her how "unfeminine" it would be for her to execute his mother:

> ... he entreated Elizabeth to reflect on the dishonour which she would draw on her name by embruing her hands in the blood of her near kinswoman, a person of the same royal dignity and of the same sex with herself.[13]

And Mary herself, requesting the presence of her servants at her execution, persuaded the officers of the Crown that "... your mistress ... being a maiden queen, for womanhood's sake would not deny me this courtesy."[14]

W. Kempe, the author of "A Dutiful Invective, Against the moste haynous Treasons of Ballard and Babington", 1587, retrospectively stressed

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12. Johnson, p.291; Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.II, p.127.

13. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.II, p.495.

14. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.II, p.504.

Elizabeth's "femininity" in dealing with Mary. Of the death sentence, he says, "Whereto our Queene with wonted grace and mercie beinge moued / Was lothe to yealde consent thereto, for that shee well her loued." She confirmed the sentence "with a fainting breath."[15] A similar version of events was developed more darkly by Spenser in his portrait of Mercilla: stressing the Queen's exceptional mercifulness was a way of showing her isolation on this issue, without straying dangerously outside the limits of loyal praise. The potential ambiguity which we see in Aske's *Elizabetha Triumphans* regarding the Scottish campaign, in which Elizabeth's feminine, divine qualities are actually contrary to what is politically expedient, develops in Spenser into a more threatening contradiction. Before taking us to Mercilla's court, Spenser suggests, in canto vii of Book V, the *Book of Justice*, that a feminine quality of mercy should have precedence over masculine justice. This is depicted by Britomart's vision at the Temple of Isis, where she sees a crocodile under the feet of the statue of the goddess. The vision is interpreted thus:

> ... that same Crocodile *Osyris* is,
> That vnder *Isis* feete doth sleepe for euer:
> To shew that clemence oft in things amis,
> Restraines those sterne behests, and cruell doomes of his. (V.vii.22.)

In this idealised icon, justice is placed under the feet of mercy.

But at Mercilla's court, the balance of justice and mercy is more

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15. Hazlitt, 1st Series, no.XXVIII.

poised. The scene here is an allegorical representation of the trial of Mary Queen of Scots, figured as Duessa. Mercilla, a representation of Elizabeth, also stands for "peace and clemencie, / With which high God had blest her happie land" (V.ix.30). The allegorical figures which plead for Duessa are Pity, Regard of womanhood, Danger, Nobility of birth, and Grief. But the figures which accuse and oppose her are Zeal, the Kingdom's care, Authority, the law of Nations, Religion, Justice, Ate (or "strife"), Murder, Sedition, Incontinence, Adultery and Impiety (V.ix.43-8). It is made clear that the charges against her are more heinous than the claims in her favour; but Mercilla's response is as follows:

> ... she, whose Princely breast was touched nere
> With piteous ruth of her so wretched plight,
> Though plaine she saw by all, that she did heare,
> That she of death was guiltie found by right,
> Yet would not let iust vengeance on her light;
> But rather let in stead thereof to fall
> Few perling drops from her faire lampes of light;
> The which she couering with her purple pall
> Would haue the passion hid, and vp arose withall. (V.ix.50.)

Spenser ends the canto here, leaving the action suspended. The next canto begins with a hymn in praise of mercy; then hastily informs us that Mercilla did, reluctantly, condemn Duessa, though expending on her "more then needfull naturall remorse" (V.x.4). Thus Mercilla's clemency is presented as a supreme quality, above that normally possessed by mortals; but, at the same time, its near-consequences, of pardon for Duessa, are shown as disastrous. As in Aske's poem, the forceful action of Elizabeth's government is shown to be politically essential, while she personally, through her femininity, is exempted from any possible blame. At the same time, more openly than in Aske, her feminine quality of mercifulness is cast in a highly ambiguous light. Spenser ostensibly praises it while

implicitly disagreeing with it. Thomas H. Cain makes a division between the introductory description of her, which is a perfect icon, and the temporal action of the trial, and comments: "the point is ... that the harmony of justice and mercy in the icon cannot be realised in political action."[16]

A similar ambiguity surrounds the quality of pacifism. Elizabeth was often eulogised for having brought long years of peace to England; in fact, the phrase "Prince of Peace" became a standard title for her, with all its Christological associations. It was applied to her at Kenilworth in 1575, at Norwich in 1578,[17] and in the proem to Book IV of *The Faerie Queene*. Yet while peace at home may have been welcomed, the pursuit of peace abroad was a different matter. Over the centuries it has been common practice for a government which is in difficulty at home to pursue an aggressive foreign policy, as a means of distracting the populace and uniting them in a patriotic cause. The foreign campaigns of Henry VIII had bankrupted the Crown and had minimal success, but his exploits were seen retrospectively as glorious. Elizabeth's reluctance to engage in war was far more politically astute in terms of economics and the prospects of gain for England; and she tried to present this as a new sort of patriotism. In her dissolution speech to the 1593 Parliament she said:

> It may be thought simplicity in me that all this time of my reign I have not sought to advance my territories, and enlarge my dominions; for opportunity hath served me to do it ... And I must say, my mind

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16. *Praise in* The Faerie Queene (Lincoln, Nebraska: U of Nebraska P, 1978), p.145.

17. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, p.486-7; vol.II, p.161.

> was never to invade my neighbours, or to usurp over any; I am contented to reign over mine own, and to rule as a just prince.[18]

However, many of her courtiers urgently desired a more aggressive foreign policy, and the chance to serve the state on the battlefield. Just as, in relation to Mary Queen of Scots, Elizabeth's "feminine" mercy gave Spenser a way to stay within the bounds of loyal eulogy while implying political criticism, so subtle means could be found to imply doubt of Elizabeth's foreign policy by attributing her love of peace to her femininity. Fulke Greville, in his *Life of Sidney*, explained that Elizabeth followed a cautious foreign policy "because she resolved to keep within the decorum of her sex"; and he called her an "example of chaste power," because she did not imitate the imposition of extra-parliamentary taxes by foreign rulers.[19] The *Life of Sidney*, written after Elizabeth's death, is nostalgically glowing in its praise of her, but in such figurations of her policy as "feminine" can be detected the vestiges of Greville's criticisms of her foreign policy during her lifetime as weak and insufficiently aggressive.

Philip Sidney, Greville's friend and another vocal critic of Elizabeth's foreign policy, used his portrait of Queen Helen in the *Arcadia* to expound how Elizabeth ruled by feminine arts:

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18. J.B. Black, *The Reign of Elizabeth: 1558-1603* (Oxford UP, 1959), p.286.

19. Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, *A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney*, *The Prose Works of Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke*, ed. John Gouws (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), Ch.VIII, p.47; Ch.XVI, p.115. Hereafter referred to as *Life of Sidney*.

> For being brought by right of birth, a woman, a young woman, a fair woman, to govern a people in nature mutinously proud, and always before so used to hard governors as they knew not how to obey without the sword were drawn; yet could she for some years so carry herself among them that they found cause, in the delicacy of her sex, of admiration, not of contempt.

She kept war at bay, and ruled by:

> ... using so strange and yet so well succeeding a temper that she made her people by peace, warlike; her courtiers by sports, learned; her ladies by love, chaste. For by continual martial exercises without blood, she made them perfect in that bloody art.[20]

Within the tone of courteous compliment to a lady, the use of antitheses makes Elizabeth's stance sound poetical and utopian, rather than politically workable. What is the purpose or virtue of continual martial exercises, if the nation is never going to go to war? Similarly, Lyly, in *Euphues and His England*, praised Elizabeth for having preserved the nation against war and invasion "with her sword in the sheath, with her armour in the Tower, with her soldiers in their gowns."[21] This is couched as panegyric, but the picture which it paints is one of a nation which is idle and effeminate.

A similar ambivalence is present in the "October" Eclogue of Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender*. Piers, speaking to Cuddie of the highest subjects for poetry, urges him:

> ... sing of bloody Mars, of wars, of giusts,

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20. Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed. Maurice Evans (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), Bk. II, Ch.21, pp.351-52.

21. Lyly, *Euphues*, p.439.

Turne thee to those, that weld the awful crowne.
To doubted Knights, whose woundlesse armour rusts,
And helmes vnbruzed wexen dayly browne.

There may thy Muse display her fluttryng wing,
And stretch herselfe at large from East to West:
Whither thou list in fayre *Elisa* rest,
Or if thee please in bigger notes to sing,
Aduaunce the worthy whome shee loueth best,
That first the white beare to the stake did bring.

And when the stubborne stroke of stronger stounds,
Has somewhat slackt the tenor of thy string:
Of loue and lustihead tho mayst thou sing,
And carrol lowde, and leade the Myllers rownde,
All were *Elisa* one of thilke same ring.
So mought our *Cuddies* name to Heauen sownde. (11.39-54.)

E.K. glosses the "woundlesse armour" as "vnwounded in warre, doe rust through long peace". This is as paradoxical as Sidney's praise of Elizabeth for "mak[ing] her people by peace, warlike"; how can the poet compose epics about martial feats in a nation which is never at war?

The suggestion of "bigger notes" is glossed by E.K.:

> ... if the Poet list showe his skill in matter of more dignitie, then is the homely AEglogue, good occasion is him offered of higher veyne and more Heroicall argument, in the person of our most gratious soueraign, whom (as before) he calleth Elisa. Or if mater of knighthoode and cheualrie please him *better*, that there be many Noble and valiaunt men, that are both worthy of his payne in theyr deserued prayses, and also fauourers of hys skil and faculty. [my italics.]

According to E.K., "bigger" means "better". Elizabeth is a great theme for poetry, but, as a female monarch, she cannot be the greatest; male performers of feats of chivalry are greater. The heraldic image used to identify the Earl of Leicester is a "macho" one: he is he "That first the white beare to the stake did bring." By contrast, "Elisa" is simply one of the ring of carollers when the poet relaxes into "loue and lustihead",

after "the stubborne stroke of stronger stounds, / Has somewhat slackt the tenor of thy string" (ll.49-54). So praise for the "long peace" which this female monarch has brought is undermined by manifest admiration of the martial prowess which male courtiers are seen to exemplify. Again, this is a figuring of matters of policy in terms of gender: Leicester, like Sidney, favoured the aggressive foreign policy which Elizabeth opposed, and Spenser was associated with the Leicester party at this time.[22]

Thus, while some panegyrists straightforwardly praised Elizabeth for the possession of feminine attributes like peace and mercy, others with particular political axes to grind found opportunities in the "femininity" of these attributes to introduce irony. The difference between masculine and feminine ideals created a space where irony could occur. It is worth emphasising that Elizabeth's reluctance to execute Mary Queen of Scots or to pursue an aggressive foreign policy did not necessarily have anything to do with a feminine love for mercy or peace. She did not want to execute Mary because in doing so she would set a precedent for the judicial murder of a legitimate monarch, placing her own security at risk; she did not want to become engaged in aggressive warfare in the Netherlands because this, too, would endorse rebellion against a legitimate monarch, and because of the expense and the risks of entering a war with Spain. But stereotypes of femininity enabled such writers as Spenser, Sidney and Lyly to write apparent panegyrics within which criticisms are subtly inscribed.

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22. Shepherd, *Spenser*, pp.26-7, sees these lines as critical of a court which is feminised and a ruler who is mean in patronage.

Motherhood

Another notable *feminine* image which could be applied to Elizabeth in order to enhance her authority was that of mother of the nation. This is an image which seems to have been especially favoured by the Queen herself. She repeatedly used it in her speeches to Parliament; and also in her *Book of Devotions*, saying, in the French prayer,

> ... donc mon Dieu et Pere ie te rend graces immortelles de m'auoir fait l'honneur d'estre Mere et nourice de tes chers enfans.
>
> [I give thee thanks, then, my God and Father, for that thou hast done me the honour of permitting me to be a mother and nurse to thy dear children.][23]

Here Elizabeth is alluding to the verse of *Isaiah*, "And Kings shalbe thy nourcing fathers, and Quenes shalbe thy nources," an authority much cited by Protestant theologians when discussing the duties of the secular ruler to protect the true, reformed church.[24] The motherhood image gave religious sanction to Elizabeth's authority.

I will discuss in a later chapter the ways in which such use of maternal imagery may borrow from the cult of the Virgin Mary. Our main interest in this chapter is whether femininity was a handicap or an advantage to Elizabeth as a ruler; and, in this respect, it is interesting

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23. Elizabeth, *Devotions*, p.22.

24. *The Geneva Bible*, facsimile of 1560 ed., introd. Lloyd E. Berry (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1969), *Isaiah* 49.23. The Geneva gloss reads: "Meaning, that Kings shalbe conuerted to the Gospel and bestow their power, & autoritie for the preseruation of the Church."

to examine how the motherhood image offered different potential usages to the Queen and her subjects. Elizabeth often used it in an attempt to enforce her absolute rule: when the 1584-85 parliament meddled too far in religion for her liking, she sent them a message via the Speaker that:

> ... of her great and tender favour, she could not choose but as a mother over her children eftsoons to warn you to forbear any further proceedings in this course.[25]

For their part, however, Parliament used the motherhood image in terms of demanding indulgence. In a petition of 1566, they told her that they wanted to be "like children, for duty, reverence, and love, without the burden of any unnecessary, unaccustomed, or undeserved yoke of commandment."[26] At other times, they would invoke it in terms of her duty or responsibility towards them; for instance, the parliament of 1586-87 petitioned Elizabeth regarding her reluctance to execute Mary Queen of Scots, saying,

> She is only a cousin to you in a remote degree. But we be sons and children of this land, whereof you be not only the natural mother but also the wedded spouse.[27]

Thus the motherhood image became a nexus for the differing claims to power of monarch and parliament.

Inevitably, maternal imagery became especially bound up with the

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25. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.II, p.74.

26. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.I, p.156.

27. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.II, p.116.

issue of the succession. From the very earliest days of her reign, we can find Elizabeth using metaphors of motherhood and marriage to the nation to resist the suggestion that she should acquire an actual husband and child. According to Camden's account of her first parliament in 1559, she told the MPs who urged her to hasten in marriage negotiations,

> yea to satisfie you, I have already ioyned my selfe in marriage to an husband, namely, the Kingdome of England ... And doe not ... upbraid me with miserable lacke of children: for every one of you, and as many as are Englishmen, are children, and kinsmen to me: Of whom if God deprive me not, (which God forbid) I cannot without iniury be accompted barraine.[28]

However, parliament refused to be satisfied with mere metaphorical motherhood, and turned the image back against Elizabeth. They told her in 1566 that if she refused to settle the succession, she was not a mother to the country, but a step-mother, or even a filicide, because she preferred that England, "which now breathed with her breath, should expire with her than survive her."[29] Likewise an oration at Coventry for the Queen's progress in 1565 sought to transform metaphorical motherhood into physical motherhood; the Queen was wished that

> like as you are a mother to your kingdom, and to the subjects of the same, by justice and motherly care and clemency, so you may, by God's goodness and justice, be a natural mother, and, having blest issue of your princely body, may live to see your children's children, unto the third and fourth generation.[30]

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28. Camden, p.16.

29. J.B. Black, p.77.

30. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, p.197.

This is a striking example of how a feminine image of authority, one favoured and promoted by Elizabeth herself, could be subverted by her subjects. Elizabeth sought to assert metaphorical motherhood as a substitute for physical motherhood; but her subjects asserted that a true metaphorical mother to the nation would produce a true physical heir.

Adaptation of pre-existent feminine ideals

The appeal of the symbolic mother-figure which Elizabeth used to represent her power grew from a tradition of veneration of symbolic mothers and other idealised female figures. Figurations of female power since prehistoric times have taken the form of symbolic goddess-figures identified with nature and the "life-force".[31] Antonia Fraser has discussed how an individual female leader can "tap into" this tradition of goddess-worship; in an interview about her book *Boadicea's Chariot: the Warrior Queens*, she explained that:

> I wanted to explore this strange paradox, because on the one hand, woman - taking the rough with the smooth, give or take - has been inferior, or held to be inferior, throughout history, or subjugated in some way by society. On the other hand, when you do have a warrior queen, by chance, perhaps, heredity or some other accident, then people - men - get tremendously excited about being led by a woman in war. Warrior queens *do* do extremely well in these circumstances, and they become like a sort of goddess, a focus for the national aspirations.[32]

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31. See Mary R. Beard, *Woman as Force in History: A Study in Traditions and Realities* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p.208; Merlin Stone, *The Paradise Papers: The Suppression of Women's Rites* (London: Virago, 1979), passim.

32. *Start the Week*, introd. Melvyn Bragg, BBC Radio 4, 10 Oct. 1988.

This is an extension of the idea of the "exceptional woman": the success of a woman is seen as so extraordinary that she becomes a superhuman cult-figure. In the book, in her discussion of the historical Boudica, Fraser suggests that she was able to identify herself with Celtic goddesses in order to inspire her followers.[33] The cult of Elizabeth similarly tapped into time-honoured figurations of idealised femininity.

Panegyric of previous queens had drawn upon pre-existent images of goddesses and heroines: Mary I had been depicted in her coronation pageants as Judith, defeating Northumberland in the guise of Holofernes.[34] Mary Stuart, on her marriage to the Dauphin, had been identified with a pantheon of classical paragons:

> As portrayed in the epithalamia from both sides of the channel, Mary comes to embody, for one political reason or another, a whole mythology of classical deities and muses. She is Helen in beauty, Lucrece in chastity, Pallas in wisdom, Ceres in riches, and Juno in power. She is the recipient of all the talents that the muses have to bestow.[35]

These identifications with Old Testament heroines and with classical goddesses were all applied also to Elizabeth; they illustrate the fact that, before she began to reign, models existed upon which panegyrists could

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33. Fraser, *Boadicea's Chariot*, pp.13-17, 71, 334.

34. Anglo, pp.320-1.

35. James Emerson Phillips Jr. writing as James Emerson Phillips, *Images of a Queen: Mary Stuart in Sixteenth Century Literature* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1964.), p.17.

work variations. The cult of Elizabeth did not spring up in a vacuum, but was the flowering of nascent myths, complex in its realisation but not unpredictable in its elements.[36]

One corollary of the idealisation of "Woman" was the use of female figures to personify the different virtues. Marina Warner, in *Monuments and Maidens*, takes as her subject "... a recurrent motif in allegory, the female form as an expression of desiderata and virtues".[37] She discusses the way in which the female body, especially the ideal and intact female body, has been used as the "fitting container of high and virtuous meanings", on to which a nation or a cause projects its ideals (pp.266, 12). She notes "... a principal reason for female allegory, the common relation of abstract nouns of virtue to feminine gender in Indo-European languages." (p.xxi.)[38] The same phenomenon had been noted 350 years earlier, by Ester Sowernam, in her pamphlet in defence of women; she argues that women must be virtuous, since

> The feminine sex is exceedingly honoured by poets in their writings. They have gods as well for good things as for bad; but they have no women goddesses but in things which are especially good.[39]

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36. On the dependence of art upon pre-existent myth, see Joanna Russ, "What can a heroine do? Or Why Women Can't Write", *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Susan Coppelman Cornillon (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green U Popular P, 1972), p.11.

37. Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Weidenfeld, 1985), p.xix.

38. For a similar point, see Maureen Quilligan, "The Comedy of Female Authority in *The Faerie Queene*", *ELR* 17 (1987) p.161.

39. "Ester hath hang'd Haman", 1617, in Shepherd, ed., *The Women's Sharp Revenge*, p.99.

This tradition of allegory wherein female figures personified virtues was a framework for panegyric of Elizabeth; its presence in *The Faerie Queene* is self-evident. Philippa Berry argues that the Biblical female figure of Wisdom, or Sophia or Sapientia, mediated through mediaeval allegories and idealisations of the feminine, was one source for representations of Elizabeth.[40] Lisa Jardine also discusses how the allegorical tradition both enabled panegyric of Elizabeth as *feminine*, and elided the sense of her innate female inferiority; and David Norbrook suggests that this tradition may actually have made forms for panegyric more readily available than they were for male monarchs.[41] A clear example of such allegorisation of Elizabeth is the figure of Astraea, as discussed by Frances Yates in her book of the same name.[42] So far I have discussed justice as a "masculine" virtue, the opposite of "feminine" mercy; however, as an abstract ideal it could be represented by the female allegorical figure of the virgin-goddess Astraea. Once justice becomes Astraea, however, it becomes mixed up with various more conventionally feminine attributes, such as peace and fertility; the goddess, as eulogised in Sir John Davies's *Hymnes of Astraea*, brings a golden age which is Spring and Autumn combined, a perpetual age of fruit and flowers.[43]

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40. Berry, pp.4, 9-17.

41. Jardine, p.173; Norbrook, *Panegyric*, p.iii.

42. *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1975).

43. Sir John Davies, pp.69-86.

A further element in sixteenth-century idealisations of the feminine was neo-Platonism. Renaissance interpretations of Plato's *Symposium* saw intellectual admiration of female beauty and virtue as a means of spiritual elevation.[44] In one of the last parliaments of her reign, Speaker Yelverton overtly described Elizabeth as the embodiment of the ideals of Christian Platonism:

> If Plato now had lived, he should not only have seen the mind of a philosopher in the majesty of a queen - which he only wished; but the perfection of a Christian in a princely virgin - which he could not have imagined.[45]

There are many other examples of neo-Platonic terms being used to praise Elizabeth. In "The olde Knightes Tale", a play presented during a progress, she was apostrophised as: "O mortall substance of immortall glorie! / To whom all creatures ells are shaddowes demed."[46] She is the heavenly ideal of which all earthly beauty is a distorted representation. Likewise, the author of "The Miracle of Nature", 1601, explained that to describe her is to be "an eie, that all farre of beholdeth / An excellence it can not comprehend."[47] She is like a bright light: the onlooker can see by it, but is dazzled if he tries to look at it directly. In Thomas Dekker's *Old Fortunatus*, 1600, she was again figured as a Platonic ideal; the figure of Vertue told the Queen:

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44. For example, Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's* Symposium, *University of Missouri Studies* 19 (1944). See Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (London: Faber, 1958), passim.

45. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.II, p.366.

46. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, pp.199-201.

47. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, p.536.

Vertue alone liues still, and liues in you,
I am a counterfeit, you are the true,
I am a Shaddow, at your feete I fall.[48]

Spenser drew on neo-Platonism at the opening of the *Faerie Queene* to invoke Elizabeth as his inspiration, who elevates his mind:

Shed thy faire beames into my feeble eyne,
And raise my thoughts too humble and too vile,
To thinke of that true glorious type of thine,
The argument of mine afflicted stile (I.proem.4).

Sir John Davies, in his verses "To my most gracious dread Soveraigne", predated Donne's *Anniversaries* by addressing his subject in astounding superlatives, as the life-force governing the world.[49]

Neo-Platonism was itself an element in the idiom of courtly love, which regarded the adoration of a chaste, beautiful, unobtainable lady as an inspiration to virtue. The language of love and chivalry became the daily idiom of the Elizabethan court, especially in the 1580s and '90s. In Sir John Neale's words, "the reign was turned into an idyll, a fine but artificial comedy of young men - and old men - in love."[50] Favourites such as Raleigh, Essex and Hatton played the role of adoring lovers: Hatton, for

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48. Dekker, *Old Fortunatus*, V.ii.333-35.

49. Sir John Davies, p.4. Barbara K.Lewalski, in *Donne's* Anniversaries *and the Poetry of Praise* (Princeton UP: 1973) points out how elegies for Elizabeth prefigure the *Anniversaries* in their use of the classical and Petrarchan topic of "nature reversed" or "society dissolved" by the departure of the deceased (p.21).

50. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I*, p.70.

instance, wrote from abroad to Elizabeth that he could not live without her, and pleaded, "Love me; for I love you."[51]

Just as the metaphors of motherhood and marriage had become prevalent to describe Elizabeth's relationship with her subjects in terms of "normal" feminine roles, so the metaphor of courtship was used to express her relationship with her courtiers, softening the perception of her absolute political power. In David Norbrook's view,

> The romantic idiom of [the Garter ceremonies and Accession Day tilts] helped to overcome male courtiers' dislike of subjecting themselves to a woman; they could see themselves as ideal knights gaining honour from the service of a distant and virtuous lady.[52]

The cultivation of their jousting skills gave the courtiers a sense of importance: echoed in *The Faerie Queene*, when Prince Arthur hears of the plight of Florimell. He decides that he will rescue her in order to impress Gloriana and to win her heart; and because "Ill weares he armes, that nill them vse for Ladies sake" (III.v.11). But for which "Ladies sake" is he using them? The protection of the feeble Florimell becomes blurred with the service of Gloriana, who is in no need of chivalrous protection. This is a fantasy of the dependence of all ladies upon knights, when in fact one highly significant lady is not remotely frail or dependent.

The particular idiom of courtly love which was fashionable in the

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51. Arthur F. Marotti, "'Love is not Love': Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order", *ELH* 49 (1982), p.399.

52. Norbrook, *Poetry & Politics*, p.110.

sixteenth-century was that which derived from Petrarch. Again, there were precedents for the use of this to praise a queen; when the young Mary Queen of Scots was in France, Ronsard wrote sonnets addressing her as his Laura.[53] The same role was widely applied to Elizabeth; for instance, Gascoigne, in the Epilogue of the "Hermit's Tale" which he composed for the entertainment at Woodstock in 1575, wrote, "If God wolde deigne to make a Petrark's heire of me, / The coomlyest Quene that ever was my Lawra nedes must be".[54] Raleigh praised Spenser's *Faerie Queene* not as a heroic or romantic epic, but as a tribute of love whereby Elizabeth superseded Laura; he wrote, in "A Vision vpon this conceipt of the Faery Queene",

> All suddenly I saw the Faery Queene:
> At whose approch the soule of *Petrarke* wept,
> And from thenceforth those graces were not seene.
> For they this Queene attended, in whose steed
> Obliuion laid him downe on *Lauras* herse.[55]

In portraits of the Queen, symbolic use was made of the ermine and the sieve, drawn from Petrarch's *Triumph of Chastity*.

A particular feature of Petrarchan love poetry was the *blazon*; and this, too, was applied to Elizabeth. To a modern reader, some examples are startling in their degree of physical detail. For instance, Spenser's *blazon* of Belphoebe lists her face, her eyes, her forehead, her legs, and her "daintie paps ... like young fruit in May" (II.iii.22-29). George Puttenham's

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53. Phillips, *Images*, p.21.

54. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, p.582.

55. Spenser, ed. Hamilton, p.739.

Partheniades - probably written around 1580, when Elizabeth was 46 - tell how

> Her bosome, sleeke as Paris plaster,
> Held vpp twoo bowles of Alabaster;
> Ech byas was a little cherrye,
> Or as I thinke a strawberrye.[56]

It would be unthinkable today to praise a female political leader in such terms. They illustrate how far Elizabethan panegyrists could go in transforming Elizabeth into a literary figure and then making that figure conform to prevailing conventions of femininity.

Conventions of idealised femininity as means of definition

We have looked at various conventions of the idealisation of woman which were incorporated into panegyric of Elizabeth: the goddess or cult-figure; the female allegorical figure; the neo-Platonic ideal; and the courtly or Petrarchan mistress. In the exaltation of Elizabeth through these roles, it might appear that the Aristotelian oppositions with which we began were overturned; that, under the largely-successful rule of a woman, Elizabethans accepted female supremacy and began to see femininity as an ideal with precedence over masculinity. However, as a framework for these idealisations of femininity, we must appreciate the extent of the problem of praising a female monarch. As discussed in my "Introduction", the female ruler presented a polyvalent, threatening, and ultimately

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56. In F.J. Furnivall & W.R. Morfill, eds., *Ballads from Manuscripts*, 2 vols., vol.II (Hertford, 1873), pp.77-8.

unrepresentable figure to the panegyrist. Descriptions of Elizabeth in terms of pre-existent conventions of idealised femininity were motivated by the difficulty of defining this complex, disturbingly potent entity. Recourse to literary convention reduced Elizabeth to a familiar and containable form.

The *blazon*, in particular, was a convention which enabled the breakdown of female power into manageable components. Nancy J.Vickers has discussed the link between the Petrarchan *blazon* and the myth of Actaeon and Diana: like Actaeon, the male poet confronts female sexuality and power, and, to diffuse the threat of his disintegration by this power, he breaks down his mistress's body into its parts, reducing it to his definition and control. He scatters the parts of Diana's body before she can scatter his.[57] The use of Petrarchan modes to praise Elizabeth might be described as just such a defensive male gesture in the face of threatening female power. The alarming figure of an autonomous woman is reduced to a literary convention of femininity; Elizabeth is represented not as a mighty ruler with power over life and death, but as an art-object composed of a familiar pattern of pretty eyes, hair and breasts. As Philippa Berry comments, the Petrarchan or neo-Platonic mistress "was usually little more than an instrument in an elaborate game of *masculine* 'speculation' and self-determination", a mirror for the masculine subject.[58]

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57. "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme", *Critical Inquiry* 8.2 (Winter 1981), pp.265-79.

58. Berry, pp.1-2. Berry draws on Luce Irigaray's theory of the feminine figure as mirror or speculum for the masculine subject (Berry, p.2 n.1, p.8). See also Montrose, "Elizabethan Subject", p.325, for discussion of the masculinism and egocentrism of Petrarchanism.

It is illuminating to compare Elizabeth with the figure of Canacee in *The Faerie Queene*. Canacee, like Elizabeth, was renowned for her erudition; she "... was the learnedst ladie in her dayes, / Well seene in euerie science that mote bee" (IV.ii.35) She was also renowned for her chastity:

> Full many Lords, and many Knights her loued,
> Yet she to none of them her liking lent,
> Ne euer was with fond affection moued,
> But rul'd her thoughts with goodly gouernement (IV.ii.36).

The reward for her accomplishments is that she is set on a tournament stage as a prize:

> Fayre *Canacee* vpon a stately stage
> Was set, to see the fortune of that fray,
> And to be seene, as his most worthie wage,
> That could her purchase with his liue's aduentur'd gage.
> (IV.iii.4).

The consequence of her virtues is that she is treated as a passive object, a commodity to be acquired by feats of masculine prowess, rather than as an active subject in her own right.

Similarly, panegyric of Elizabeth in terms of idealised femininity tends to turn her into a static object. In such panegyric, the qualities for which she is commended bear no relation to the realities of rule. As a Petrarchan mistress, she is an object to be admired for her beauty, not her judgement or authority; as a neo-Platonic feminine ideal, or a goddess, or a female allegorical virtue, she is a figure seated on a silver cloud far removed from the unpleasant cut-and-thrust of real political power. These models represent Elizabeth as a serene, transcendent figurehead,

static and inactive. Elizabeth herself was active in the deployment of these conventional images. They worked to her individual, pragmatic advantage because they were familiar and pre-existent in culture; they reduced the extent to which a female ruler might be seen as unnatural. However, they do not necessarily represent an elevation of the feminine over the masculine; for femininity itself was defined in terms of binary oppositions, of which idealised images of femininity formed only one side.

Binary oppositions within definitions of femininity

Mary Ellman has written that, in the cultural construction of femininity,

> An ideal seems formulated only to be regretted or begrudged, as every feminine virtue implies a feminine vice (chastity and frigidity, intuition and irrationality, motherhood and domination).[59]

We can see these extreme opposites in the use of feminine ideals to represent Elizabeth. We have already seen how the image of mother of the nation carried contradictory implications of tenderness and domination. The additional tradition of woman as Goddess upon which her cult drew carried with it a corollary association of woman with supernatural powers which were seen as mystical and sinister. And while Elizabeth seems often to have tried to resist male attempts to comprehend and define her by cultivating an image of woman as enigma, this too carried the opposite sense of woman as irrational, unpredictable and fickle. These dark sides to

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59. *Thinking about Women* (London: Macmillan, 1968), p.66.

the image of woman will be discussed further when we look at Elizabeth's persona of Cynthia.

Numerous writers, over a long period, have observed that representations of femininity tend to the extremes of virgin or whore. Woman is either an image of perfection who inspires and uplifts man, or else a temptress who depraves and debases man.[60] In the sixteenth century, we can see this virgin/whore dichotomy particularly clearly in the propaganda war between supporters of Elizabeth and supporters of Mary Queen of Scots. Each side depicted their female figurehead as chaste and spotless, the opponents' figurehead as sexually depraved. James Emerson Phillips provides ample evidence of this in his book *Images of a Queen: Images of Mary Stuart in Sixteenth-Century Literature*. He describes how opposing images of Mary were circulated, as Circe or saint, and adds, "neither, I venture to say, has ever since been entirely out of the imaginations - and sometimes the minds - of men." Each party described their opponent as a "Jezebel"; Mary was attacked by Protestant pamphleteers for "lust, adultery, murder, abnormal sexual practices, promiscuity, and the like," while Catholic poets reviled Elizabeth for "her alleged adulterous and incestuous ancestry, her licentious life, and her wolfish cruelty."[61] It was essentially the same model being applied to both

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60. See, for instance, Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley* (London: Dent, 1908), p.278; Jane Ellen Harrison, the anthropologist, in a letter of 1914 (quoted in Rich, pp.35-6.); Susan Gorsky, "The Gentle Doubters: Images of Women in Englishwomen's Novels, 1840-1920", in Cornillon, ed., p.28; Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979), pp.16-36.

61. Phillips, *Images*, pp.43, 164.

women, with slight adjustment to fit biographical facts.

One particular tract, published on the eve of the Armada, said of Elizabeth that

> she hath exalted one special extortioner - Leicester - whom she took up first of a traitor and worse than naught, only to serve her filthy lust ...; with the aforesaid person and divers others she hath abused her body ... by unspeakable and incredible variety of lust, which modesty suffereth not to be remembered, neither were it to chaste ears to be uttered how shamefully she hath defiled and infamed her person and country.[62]

It is striking how a female ruler was deemed to have defiled both her person and her country by her supposed sexual licence, as if the nation and her body had become one. A queen was seen primarily as a female body, so that a bad queen was deemed to be a "vile body", while a good queen had a whole, unspoilt body, symbolising the unity and wellbeing of her realm.

The anthropologist Mary Douglas has written of the use of somatic symbolism and ritual as figurations of social structures. She writes,

> The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious. The body is a complex structure. The functions of its different parts and their relation afford a source of symbols for other complex structures ... we [must be] prepared to see in the body a symbol of society, and to see the powers and dangers credited

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62. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I*, p.304.

to social structure reproduced in small on the human body.[63]

In particular, she describes the preoccupation of isolated or persecuted social groups with bodily purity and wholeness. In the Levitican laws of the early Jews,

> the ... idea that emerges is of the Holy as wholeness and completeness ... the idea of holiness was given an external, physical expression in the wholeness of the body seen as a perfect container. (pp.51-2.)

For the Israelites, "The threatened boundaries of their body politic would be well mirrored in their care for the integrity, unity and purity of the physical body." (p.124.) Similarly, for the early Christians,

> The idea that virginity had a special positive value was bound to fall on good soil in a small minority group. For ... these social conditions lend themselves to beliefs which symbolise the body as an imperfect container which will only be made perfect if it can be made impermeable. (p.158.)

There are clear analogies here to Elizabethan England as the leading Protestant state in Europe, surrounded and beset by Catholic foes, a self-styled new Israel, which affirmed its national identity in the celebration of its Virgin Queen. Leonard Tennenhouse, Peter Stallybrass and Louis Adrian Montrose have all drawn on Douglas's ideas to discuss the emblematisation of the state of the nation in the state of Elizabeth's body. Montrose writes,

> The integrity and strength of the English body politic came to seem

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63. *Purity and Danger: A analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966), p.115.

> mystically dependent upon the integrity and strength - the intactness - of the Queen's body natural.[64]

We can observe such figurations in Elizabethan texts. Lyly, in "Euphues Glass for Europe", after listing the various miracles performed by historical and mythical virgins, tops them all with Elizabeth's miraculous preservation of her realm from foreign invasion or civil war:

> This is the only miracle that virginity ever wrought: for a little island environed round about with wars to stand in peace ... for all other nations either with civil sword to be divided or with foreign foes to be invaded and that country neither to be molested with broils in their own bosoms nor threatened with other borderers.

The "little island" is analogous to Lyly's description of Elizabeth as "a young and tender maiden" surrounded by, and able to quell, "strong and valiant men."[65] By resisting the turmoil of desire and the penetration of her body, Elizabeth has achieved the miracle of preserving her nation from the turmoil of internal dissent and from penetration by enemies from without. The wholeness of her virgin body is paralleled by the integrity of the body politic.

Therefore female rulers tended to be seen not in terms of their political stances or achievements, but in terms of their personal and sexual mores. As James Emerson Phillips notes,

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64. Montrose, "Gifts & Reasons", p.441. See also Leonard Tennenhouse, *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres* (New York: Methuen, 1986), pp.102-3.; Peter Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed", *Rewriting the Renaissance*, ed. M.W. Ferguson, M. Quilligan & N.J. Vickers (U of Chicago P, 1986) pp.129-30.

65. Lyly, *Euphues*, pp.439-40.

> From the beginning, the Protestant attack on Mary was directed not against her religion *per se*, but rather against what was portrayed as the weakness and immorality of her character. Such an attack, viewed from the advantageous point of historical perspective, was clearly designed to justify the ultimate removal of the Queen on personal rather than religious grounds. This line was to be steadfastly maintained not only up to the moment her head fell at Fotheringay, but for decades, even centuries beyond.[66]

In effect, we have come back full circle to Knox, who attacked Catholic rulers not on the grounds of their religion, but because they were women.

Spenser participates in this virgin/whore polarisation in his depiction of Una and Duessa in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*. He demonstrates the evilness of Duessa - who stands variously for duplicity, for Mary Queen of Scots, or for the Catholic Church - by describing the deformity of her female genitalia:

> Her neather partes misshapen, monstruous,
> Were hidd in water, that I could not see,
> But they did seem more foule and hideous,
> Then womans shape man would believe to be. (I.ii.41)[67]

The twentieth-century feminist slogan, "the personal is political", might be inverted for the sixteenth century to say that, for women, the political was always turned into the personal. Thus some verses from 1587, written in the mistaken belief that Mary Stuart's grave had been disturbed by the English government, described Mary as:

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66. Phillips, *Images*, p.34.

67. Cain points out that the later stripping of Duessa at I.viii.47-8 is precisely an *anti-blazon* in its listing of her deformities from head to toe (p.74).

> Forlorn, by England's ruthless Queen betrayed;
> Who meanly envying thy superior grace,
> Thy comelier stature, and thy fairer face;
> More with thy rival charms than rights at strife,
> Gluts her infernal hatred with thy life.[68]

Elizabeth's reasons for executing Mary are reduced to "feminine" vanity and envy.

Theories of marginalisation

Various attempts have been made to explicate this virgin/whore polarisation. It can be seen as part of the construction of woman as the "Other", whereby the goddess or temptress is a projection by patriarchal culture of something against which to measure itself. By positing an alien opposite which is either superior and inspiring, or inferior and degrading, the masculine voice can define its own identity. Sherry B. Ortner, an anthropologist, in an article entitled "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?", expounds this as follows:

> ... woman's intermediate position [between nature and culture] may have the implication of greater symbolic ambiguity ... that which is intermediate betwen nature and culture is located on the continuous periphery of culture's clearing; and though it may thus appear to stand both above and below (and beside) culture, it is simply outside and around it. We can begin to understand then how a single system of cultural thought can often assign to woman completely polarized and apparently contradictory meanings, since extremes, as we say, meet.[69]

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68. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.II, pp.523-4.

69. *Woman, Culture and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo & Louise Lamphere (Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 1974), p.85.

Toril Moi, in her reading of Julia Kristeva, uses a slightly different topography: women are seen as the borderline between man and chaos, and therefore

> ... neither inside nor outside, neither known nor unknown. It is this position that has enabled male culture sometimes to vilify women as representing darkness and chaos, to view them as Lilith or the Whore of Babylon, and sometimes to elevate them as Virgins and Mothers of God. In the first instance the borderline is seen as part of the chaotic wilderness outside, and in the second it is seen as an inherent part of the inside: the part that protects and shields the symbolic order from the imaginary chaos.[70]

The point of both these theories is that they are theories of *marginality*; they show how even images which may appear to exalt women actually only confirm women's status as other, peripheral, objectified.

The "exceptional woman" reconsidered

If women are always seen as *different*, then in that difference can be found marks of inferiority. Thus, despite the development of positive *feminine* images of a female ruler, Elizabeth did not cease to be disparaged for her sex. None of the images we have explored - the woman endowed with exceptional kingly qualities, or the woman perfect in femininity - deconstructed fundamental notions of woman as generically weak and inferior. We can see this in *The Faerie Queene*, where figures of Elizabeth are seen as *uniquely* perfect: Belphoebe "standeth on the highest staire / Of th'honorable stage of womanhead" (III.v.54). As Satyrane watches

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70. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985), p.167.

Una teaching the satyrs, "He wondred at her wisedome heauenly rare, / Whose like in womens wit he neuer knew" (I.vi.31). By contrast, any flaw displayed by a female character is described as "womanish" and seen as a generic weakness of the whole sex. Duessa has a "womanish impatient mind" (I.xii.30); the women of the Wandering Islands practise "womanish fine forgery" (II.xii.28); and the Lady of Delight has "wanton eyes, ill signes of womanhed" (III.i.41). The narrator speculates on Blandina's skill in false flattery that "such grace were giuen her by kynd, / As women wont their guilefull wits to guyde" (VI.vi.43).

Similarly, in the entertainment performed before Elizabeth at Ditchley in 1592, the "Second Knights Complaynt" criticised

> weomen kynde
> who have ther harts as rowlinge as ther eies
> whose thoughts are fancies, wordes & othes but wynde.[71]

In Thomas Dekker's *Old Fortunatus*, the Prologue revering Elizabeth is shortly followed by Fortunatus's announcement that he has just had a dialogue with an Echo, who, he says, "is a woman, which kind of cattell are indeede all Eccho, nothing but tongue."[72] Such texts assume that Elizabeth will except herself from their aspersions against women, that she will understand that she is not included in that "kind of cattell"; but this meant that unrevised notions of woman endured to be turned back against her whenever she provoked criticism for any reason.

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71. J.Wilson, p.126.

72. Dekker, *Old Fortunatus*, I.i.44-45.

In *The Faerie Queene*, Elizabeth is depicted as not just exceptional among women, but exceptional among queens. Even female monarchs are not necessarily exempted from the degeneracy of their sex. Thus Gloriana and Britomart are entitled to rule, whereas Radigund is not; and there are several other queens in the poem who are cast in a dubious light. The standard of ideal queenship is set by Gloriana, who is described thus:

> Great and most glorious virgin Queene aliue,
> That with her soueraigne powre, and scepter shene
> All Faery lond does peaceably sustene.
> In widest Ocean she her throne does reare,
> That ouer all the earth it may be seene;
> As morning Sunne her beames dispredden cleare,
> And in her face faire peace, and mercy doth appeare. (II.ii.40.)

Another queen whom we encounter is Lucifera, who is described as follows:

> High aboue all a cloth of State was spred,
> And a rich throne, as bright as sunny day,
> On which there sate most braue embellished
> With royall robes and gorgeous array,
> A mayden Queene, that shone as *Titans* ray,
> In glistring gold, and peerelesse pretious stone:
> Yet her bright blazing beautie did assay
> To dim the brightnesse of her glorious throne,
> As enuying her selfe, that too exceeding shone. (I.iv.8.)

Lucifera personifies pride; and yet, in many details of her appearance, she closely resembles Gloriana. She sits on a high throne; her beauty shines like the sun; and she is a "mayden Queene", a phrase usually indicative that Elizabeth is being represented. It is not until the significant "Yet" in the seventh line of the stanza that we begin to be fully aware that this is *not* a figure of Elizabeth.

Similarly, Philotime, the daughter of Mammon, is presented thus: a large crowd is gathered in a place

... where was aduaunced hye
A stately siege of soueraigne maiestye;
And thereon sat a woman gorgeous gay,
And richly clad in robes of royaltye,
That neuer earthly Prince in such aray
His glory did enhaunce, and pompous pride display.

Her face right wondrous faire did seeme to bee,
That her broad beauties beam great brightnes threw
Through the dim shade, that all men might it see:
Yet was not that same her owne natiue hew,
But wrought by art and counterfetted shew,
Thereby more louers vnto her to call. (II.vii.44-45.)

Here we are given more hints; the phrase "pompous pride" raises suspicions. Nevertheless, it is not until, again, the significant "Yet" that it is made clear what distinguishes this enthroned woman from the wholly admirable Gloriana. In different contexts, the properties of elevation, radiant beauty and majesty seem equally to signify a feminine ideal or feminine vices. Spenser is justly renowned for making the reader work hard to read his allegory; outward signs are often misleading, and the reader has to be constantly wary and alert. Cain argues that Philotime resembles Gloriana, and Lucifera resembles Mercilla, because they are demonic parodies of Elizabeth, intended to glorify her by contrast.[73] However, the sameness upon which their difference from Elizabeth is grounded gives rise to confusion as to how one should react to images of female power. It is not entirely clear what makes Gloriana's enjoyment of her throne exempt from a charge of pride or excessive self-glorification. The admirability of female regality is thrown into question.

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73. Cain, pp.100, 141.

The enduring handicap of femininity

Opinions of the undesirability of female rule continued to be expressed in the late sixteenth century. Though voiced in works published outside England, many of those works were known in this country; such as *Les Six Liures de la République*, 1576, a defence of the Salic law by Jean Bodin, who was received at the English court. He said that:

> ... the rule and gouernment of women, is directly against the law of nature, which hath giuen vnto men wisedome, strength, courage, and power, to command; and taken the same from women.[74]

George Buchanan's *History of Scotland*, 1582, which was influential upon Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland*, laid down that Nature is "That Primary Law, imprinted in our hearts by God himself", which

> ... from the beginning, hath not only distinguished Men from Women by the strength of Mind and Body, but hath also appropriated distinct Offices and Virtues to each Sex, the same indeed for Kind, but far different in Degree.[75]

Whenever Elizabeth provoked criticism on any grounds, it tended to be turned into an aspersion against her sex. There are many examples of this from the early years of the reign; even Cecil, who was to become her most loyal minister, in 1558, while peace was being concluded with France, rebuked the bearer of an ambassador's letter for discussing with Elizabeth "a matter of such weight, being too much for a woman's knowledge".[76]

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74. Phillips, "Background", p.26.

75. Phillips, "Background", p.25.

76. Johnson, p.86.

Similarly, the imperial envoys sent to negotiate a marriage with the Archduke Charles vented their frustrations over Elizabeth's prevarications in the following terms: "Her Highness is after all a woman, influenced by insidious advice and very susceptible to passions". They lamented, "We ... beseech Your Imperial Majesty to reflect that we have to deal with a woman." They grew "incensed at the wanton waywardness of this Queen", and complained of "the equivocal and unstable mind of the Queen"[77]; although her delays and obfuscations could be seen objectively as shrewd political manipulation.

In 1563, after the defeat at Le Havre, a correspondent of the Spanish ambassador's declared, "God help England and send it a king, for in time of women it has got but a little."[78] Whenever Elizabeth suffered such a setback, it was imputed to her sex; and she was also judged by the mistakes of other queens, as when the Venetian ambassador remarked that the turmoils of Mary Queen of Scots had shown "that statecraft is no business for ladies."[79]

One saying of Aristotle's which continued to be widely quoted in the sixteenth century was that a woman's judgement was "consilium invalidum et instabile" ("weak and unstable judgement" [my translation]);[80] so that all the men involved in Elizabeth's government, from

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77. von Klarwill, pp.133, 163, 172, 242.

78. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I*, p.122.

79. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I*, p.156.

80. Aristotle, *Politics*, I.13, quoted in Maclean, p.50.

nobles and ministers down to ordinary parliamentarians, could feel implicitly justified and loyal in trying to impose their personal views and policies on the Queen. As Neale says,

> They meant well; they were quite loyal, except in their intention to impose [their policy] on Elizabeth; and this, in their masculine eyes, was a proper proceeding towards a misguided woman.[81]

In particular, Neale suggests, and Heisch strongly argues, that Elizabeth's sex was a key factor in the rise in the power of Parliament. Neale, in his discussion of the succession debates in the early parliaments of the reign, writes of, "The impulse to defy and coerce their Sovereign - perhaps a manifestation of parliamentary adolescence, certainly a consequence of the Queen's youth and sex".[82] As the reign proceeded, this defiance and attempted coercion increasingly turned to frustration and anti-feminism: Philippa Berry sees the increasing ambivalence of panegyric in the 1590s, which will be discussed in Part III of this thesis, as produced by:

> the profound anxieties which attended the reluctant recognition of the masculine subject that, as a woman possessed of power, Elizabeth could not ultimately be manipulated in the manner of other female objects of idealized desire.[83]

Elizabeth continued to be patronised or denigrated as a woman right up to her death. Of the younger generation of courtiers, Essex was one of those who was most blind to her intelligence and political control. According to Neale's account, he:

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81 Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I*, p.187.

82. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.I, p.179. See also p.142; Heisch, "Persistence of Patriarchy", pp.48, 52-3; Heisch, "Parliamentary Rhetoric", p.37, n.10.

83. Berry, p.6.

> ... believed that if pressed often enough and long enough, a woman invariably gave way in the end; and he interpreted Elizabeth's moods and acts, as men are apt to do, making a single genus of the species. How differently would he have behaved with a king of her capacity![84]

Robert Cecil took a similar attitude; he justified keeping his correspondence with James at the end of the reign secret, on the grounds that Elizabeth's "age and orbity, joined to the jealousy of her sex" might have made her react violently.[85] Even in a ballad on Elizabeth's death, the writer still harped on her sex: "O shee bore the Sway, & of all affaires, / & yet shee was but a woman." He went on to create a picture of Elizabeth as a "mannish woman" which is simultaneously admiring and decidedly comic:

> A wiser Queene never was to be seen
> For a woman, or yet a stouter;
> For if anie thing vext her, With that w*hi*ch came next her,
> O How shee would lay about her![86]

Examples such as these show how even the relatively successful, forty-four-year-long reign of a woman did not necessarily significantly alter attitudes to women.

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84. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I*, p.347.

85. Johnson, p.413.

86. "Vpon the Death of Queen Elizabeth", Furnivall & Morfill, vol.II, pp.98-9.

5. New fluidity in gender imagery

Nevertheless, it would be an over-statement to say that the Elizabethan period produced no positive or progressive images of women. We have already seen how Mulcaster paradoxically combined the "exceptional woman" motif with claims that Elizabeth demonstrated the high ability of women in general (pp.44-6 above). Some other writers displayed the same mingled attitude: Blenerhasset praises Elizabeth as exceptional - "in no such wayse / did euer woman walke" - but on the next page claims that she proves

> The worthines of woman kinde,
> Thou dost approue that sexe is such
> As doth mankinde exceed, exceedeth man by much.[1]

Of course such praise of women could be disingenuous, only really intended to compliment the Queen; but in Spenser, at least, we find some more positive ways out of the masculine/feminine opposition. Thus far, I have emphasised his subjugation to this polarity; but there are other passages of his poetry in which a progressive or innovative attitude to gender-definitions is displayed. There *are* passages in *The Faerie Queene* which privilege the female as active subject, or which combine masculine and feminine in a way which achieves not the balance of opposed qualities, but fusion. Of course, one of the main characteristics of *The Faerie Queene* is its plurality of points of view; opinions expressed in some passages of the poem are often inconsistent with those expressed elsewhere. Some of

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1. Blenerhasset, sigs. F1v-2r.

these shifts are influenced by the themes of the different books, so that Book III, the *Book of Chastity*, a private, and feminine virtue, personified by a female knight, contains the most passages in praise of women; whereas Book V, the *Book of Justice*, contains the most reservations and ambiguities in its presentation of women. The accent falls differently in different contexts.

Although the idea of the "exceptional woman" dominates the presentation of Elizabeth in relation to her sex, there are other passages of *The Faerie Queene* in which this model is eschewed. When describing the lustful Malecasta, Spenser reassures his female readers:

> Faire Ladies, that to loue captiued arre,
> And chaste desires do nourish in your mind,
> Let not her fault your sweet affections marre,
> Ne blot the bounty of all womankind;
> 'Mongst thousands good one wanton Dame to find:
> Emongst the Roses grow some wicked weeds (III.i.49).

Similarly, he introduces the story of Hellenore with this disclaimer:

> Redoubted knights, and honorable Dames,
> To whom I leuell all my labours end,
> Right sore I feare, least with vnworthy blames
> This odious argument my rimes should shend,
> Or ought your goodly patience offend,
> Whiles of a wanton Lady I do write ...
>
> ... neuer let th'ensample of the bad
> Offend the good: for good by paragone
> Of euill, may more notably be rad,
> As white seemes fairer, macht with blacke attone;
> Ne all are shamed by the fault of one. (III.ix.2.)

This is a reversal of his attitude elsewhere when any fault in a woman is seen as "womanish" and generic. Notably these passages occur in Book III; and like the praises of martial women in that Book, they can be seen as

particularly designed to please the Queen: "Of course I don't mean *you*". Nevertheless, Spenser goes further than necessary in exempting not just the Queen, but the majority of women from his strictures.

Spenser often presents us with good and bad examples of the same kind of figure. Thus Britomart represents an acceptable warrior-woman - one who is "feminine" in her emotions and destiny, as opposed to the unnatural, mannish Radigund; and Gloriana represents the ideal ruler, while Lucifera and Philotime are female power turned bad. Similarly, Spenser presents us with good and bad examples of female domination. The worst example is the giantess Argante, whom we meet carrying off the Squire of Dames:

> Whom so she fittest finds to serue her lust,
> Through her maine strength, in which she most doth trust,
> She with her brings into a secret Ile,
> Where in eternall bondage dye he must,
> Or be the vassall of her pleasures vile,
> And in all shamefull sort him selfe with her defile (III.vii.50).

Here, female dominance is associated with perversion and insatiability. Acrasia's power over her lovers is equally unnatural and evil, a mark of improper lust and decadence; we see her in the Bower of Bliss

> With a new Louer, whom through sorceree
> And witchcraft, she from farre did thither bring ...
> ... in lewd loues, and wastfull luxuree,
> His dayes, his goods, his bodie he did spend (II.xii.72, 80).

Here female dominance stands for the lures of the temptress.

But the positive counterpart to Acrasia is not a chaste virgin, but the sensual Venus of the Garden of Adonis, who:

> ... wont ... often to enioy
> Her deare *Adonis* ioyous company,
> And reape sweet pleasure of the wanton boy ...
> ... she her selfe, when euer that she will,
> Possesseth him, and of his sweetnesse takes her fill. (III.vi.46.)

This coupling is presented as an ideal, an emblem of fruitful generation.

C.S. Lewis notes how striking is the inversion of usual gender-relations:

> It is, of course, unusual in mythology to have the female parent giving form while the male parent gives matter. And this inversion is emphasised by the application of the passive terms of love to Adonis, the active - *enjoy, reap, possess, take* - to Venus. But this is compensated for by the fact that Spenser's Venus is a goddess, whereas his Adonis is not a god.

So Venus's higher rank over-rules the usual definitions of gender-roles.

The parallel with the dominance of a female monarch over her male courtiers is apparent. By incorporating established elements of Renaissance symbolism, Spenser is able to idealise this otherwise uncomfortable state of affairs. As Lewis says later,

> Spenser would be very familiar with the use of the inverted relationship in images of cosmic order. Think, for example, of all the Renaissance pictures of Mars conquered by Venus, disarmed by Venus, bound by Venus. Spenser would know very well that such images of female domination were meant to show Harmony and Reconciliation, or Beauty taming War and Strength and Wrath.[2]

Edgar Wind, too, tells us of the harmony represented by the union of Venus and Mars.[3] Using this tradition, Spenser is able to transform a political anomaly into a symbolic ideal.

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2. *Spenser's Images of Life*, ed. Alastair Fowler (Cambridge UP, 1967), pp.52-3, 104.

3. Wind, pp.81-2.

Venus and Adonis represent not merely the dominance of feminine over masculine, but also a generative union of the two genders. There are many other examples in Spenser of a coupling of the genders as a symbolic ideal, such as the reunion of Scudamour and Amoret:

> No word they spake, nor earthly thing they felt,
> But like two senceles stocks in long embracement dwelt.
>
> Had ye them seen, ye would haue surely thought,
> That they had beene that faire *Hermaphrodite*,
> Which that rich *Romane* of white marble wrought,
> And in his costly Bath causd to bee site:
> So seemd those two, as growne together quite
> (1590 edn., III.xii.45-6).

This alludes to Aristophanes' fable of the hermaphrodite in Plato's *Symposium*, and Ficino's commentary on it whereby the reunion of the two genders represents the reunion of humanity and divinity and the reversal of the Fall.[4] This hermaphroditic, prelapsarian reunion of the genders is also represented in single figures. At the Temple of Venus, the statue wears a veil:

> ... for, they say, she hath both kinds in one,
> Both male and female, both vnder one name:
> She syre and mother is her selfe alone,
> Begets and eke conceiues, ne needeth other none (IV.x.41.)

Dame Nature in the *Mutabilitie Cantos* is a very similar figure:

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4. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. W.Hamilton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951), pp.59-61; Ficino, pp.154-60; and see Wind, p.173; C.S. Lewis, p.38. Kenneth Gross, following Donald Cheney, sees Scudamour and Amoret as an ironic, parodic version of the hermaphrodite (*Spenserian Poetics: Idolatry, Iconoclasm, and Magic* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), p.172).

Yet certes by her face and physnomy,
Whether she man or woman inly were,
That could not any creature well descry:
For, with a veile that wimpled euery where,
Her head and face was hid, that mote to none appeare (VII.vii.5).

And there is also a strong resemblance in the description of Love in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*:

... him the greatest of the Gods we deeme,
Borne without Syre or couples, of one kynd,
For *Venus* selfe doth soly couples seeme,
Both male and female, through commixture ioynd.[5]

These hermaphroditic figures represent perfect balance and pure generation; and they are connected with the representation of Elizabeth, since she, too, was in some sense a hermaphrodite, uniting masculine and feminine attributes. Her virtuous rejection of love, figured as a masculine posture in a woman, paradoxically made her the centre of a cult of love, a figure of ultimate femininity. Thus she, too, was a figure of chaste fertility, whose self-containment and wholeness made her a figure of symbolic and spiritual procreation. She was simultaneously she "In whose chast breast all bountie naturall, / And treasures of true loue enlocked beene", and she "that loueth best" (*Faerie Queene* IV proem 4). She embodied the mystery of Venus Virgo, at once Virgin Queen and Queen of Love and Beauty.[6]

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5. Spenser, ed. Smith & de Selincourt, p.544, ll.799-802. See Alastair Fowler, "Emanations of Glory: Neoplatonic order in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*", in *A Theatre for Spenserians*, ed. J.M.Kennedy & J.A.Reither (Manchester UP, 1973), pp.53-60, for further discussion of hermaphroditic images and unions of sexual opposites.

6. See Wind, pp.73-5; Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1977), pp.47-8.

Linda Woodbridge cites further examples of the hermaphrodite as a Renaissance philosophical ideal; but she notes a significant difference in attitude towards the hermaphrodite as symbol, and the hermaphrodite as physical phenomenon. In the transvestism controversy which flared up, on-and-off, between the late 1570s and 1620, "*hermaphrodite* became a term of contempt for either the effeminate male or the mannish woman."[7] So the "mannish woman" was still feared, even while the hermaphrodite became enshrined in iconography. Philippa Berry also finds that:

> While the myth of the masculine woman was occasionally idealized in the literature of the period, there is no doubt that the idea of this fiction being translated into reality was intensely threatening.[8]

A similar antithesis of literature and reality can be seen in the idealisation of femininity in Elizabeth's person in panegyric, while women in general continued to occupy inferior social roles.

Attempts have also been made to link the rise in the drama of the active, assertive, cross-dressing heroine to the presence of a woman on the throne. Leonard Tennenhouse writes,

> That heroines possessing the power of patriarchy should regularly appear on the stage during the 1590s, and not later, obviously had something to do with the fact that a female monarch was on the throne. By this I do not mean to suggest that these heroines stood in

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7. Woodbridge, pp.137-41. A similar observation is made by Ellen M. Caldwell in "John Lyly's *Gallathea*: A New Rhetoric of Love for the Virgin Queen", *ELR* 17 (1987), p.32.

8. Berry, p.68.

> any allegorical relation to Elizabeth. I am only suggesting that during this period it became possible to imagine patriarchal power embodied in a female, which obviously opened a whole new set of possibilities for representing power on the stage.[9]

There is a looseness about Tennenhouse's account; for one thing, if by "heroines possessing the power of patriarchy" he means heroines who dress as men and/or heroines who dominate the action, then they certainly did not disappear after the 1590s. Moreover, he neglects the argument that heroines on the Elizabethan stage were played by boys, so that their cross-dressing was a practical convenience. It may, as Lisa Jardine argues, have been an opportunity for homo-erotic wit, showing more about how boys were regarded than women; women certainly were not attributed with "patriarchal power" to an extent which permitted them to act on the public stage.[10]

However, there is at least one example of a cross-dressing heroine being openly identified with Elizabeth. Bess Bridges, in Thomas Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West*,[11] has the following dialogue with Mullisheg, the King of Fez:

> Mullisheg: Sweet, your name.
> Bess: Elizabeth.
> Mullisheg: There's virtue in that name.
> The virgin queen so famous through the world,

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9. Tennenhouse, p.61.

10. Jardine, passim.

11. Ed. Robert K. Turner Jr. (London: Arnold, 1968). The two parts of the play are undated, but Part I, to which this discussion refers, was certainly written before Elizabeth's death (see Turner's Introduction, p.xiii).

The mighty empress of the maiden isle,
Whose predecessors have oe'rrun great France,
Whose powerful hand doth still support the Dutch
And keeps the potent King of Spain in awe,
Is she not titled so?

Bess: She is.

Mullisheg: Hath she herself a face as fair as yours,
When she appears for wonder?

Bess: Mighty Fez,
You cast a blush upon my maiden cheek
To pattern me with her. Why, England's queen,
She is the only phoenix of her age,
The pride and glory of the Western Isles.
Had I a thousand tongues, they all would tire
And fail me in her true description (Part I, V.i.86-102).

Bess emulates, at the level of a commoner, the combination of feminine virtue and power, pride and glory which the image of the Queen epitomises; like the image of the Queen, she excels in both feminine beauty and martial conquest of the foes of England. Here the cross-dressing heroine is seen as the natural agent and acolyte of the female ruler.

It seems possible, then, to argue that the presence of a woman on the throne produced some new flexibility in representations of gender roles. This is not necessarily to argue that the reign of a woman improved social possibilities and conditions for women in general; as Marina Warner has found, "There is no logical equivalence in any society between exalted female objects of worship and a high place for women."[12] The relationship between "texts" and "reality" is a very tricky one; but the foregoing discussion suggests that at least in literature, some more positive

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12. *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Picador-Pan, 1985), p.283.

representations of femininity developed. The physical reality of the "mannish woman" continued to be feared, but, in drama, active women in male clothing were heroines. The physical reality of the hermaphrodite, also, was feared, but the hermaphrodite as symbol could represent an ideal fusion of masculine and feminine forces. In this symbolism, neo-Platonism and panegyric of a female monarch were a fortunate convergence, producing some degree of new fluidity in gender-representation.

6. The problem of marriage

The representation of Elizabeth in terms of gender was intrinsically bound up with the fact that she did not marry. She chose "marriage" to the nation as her vocation, just as nuns before the Reformation had been "married" to the Church; like them, she had an autonomy and status which were not available to married women. St. Jerome had seen in this celibate vocation the opportunity for a woman to rise above the disabilities of her sex; he wrote:

> As long as a woman is for birth and children she is different from man as body is from soul. But when she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman, and will be called man.[1]

As Ian Maclean says, "marriage is one of the strongest barriers to conceptual change concerning the status of woman."[2] It was therefore particularly bound up with debate over female rule. In the sixteenth century, marriage was assumed to be a natural state, which was inevitable for women, and dictated a subordinate role. This was even more true than in St.Jerome's day; the religious reformers tended to be suspicious of the Catholic practice of celibacy - seeing it as a hypocritical mask for vice - and instead promoted chaste and loyal matrimony for all but the exceptionally virtuous. Luther, in a letter to three nuns who were considering renouncing their vows, wrote that,

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1. Warner, *Alone of all her Sex*, p.73.
2. Maclean, p.66.

> Women are ashamed to admit this, but Scripture and life reveal that only one woman in thousands has been endowed with the God-given aptitude to live in chastity and virginity. A woman is not fully master of herself. God fashioned her body so that she should be with a man, to have and to rear children.[3]

Calvin, too, in his *Institutes*, stated that, "I confess that virginity is not a virtue to be disdained. But it is not given to everyone and given to some only for a time", whereas marriage is natural and divinely sanctioned.[4]

Marriage was a central plank of Knox's argument against female rule. A woman must be married, and, in marriage, must be subordinate to a man; it therefore follows that it is impossible for a woman to rule over men, "For seing [God] hath subiected her to one ... he will neuer permit her to reigne ouer manie."[5] Aylmer, in his defence of female rule, contests Knox's conclusion:

> I graunte that, so farre as perteineth to the bandes of mariage, and the office of a vvife, she must be a subiecte: but as a Magistrate she may be her husbands head. (sig.C4v.)

However, he does not dispute Knox's basic assumption that a woman is bound to marry. With specific regard to Elizabeth, he considers that a foreign marriage has drawbacks but is not necessarily bad; a domestic marriage would be better (sig.L3v-4v). But he does not discuss at all, and

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3. O'Faolain and Martines, p.208.
4. O'Faolain and Martines, p.211-12.
5. Knox, f.28v.

presumably cannot conceive of, the possibility of the Queen's remaining single. It is the duty of her subjects to pray to God

> ... to guide hir harte in the choise of hir husbande, and to make hir frutefull, and the mother of manye chyldren, that thys realme maye haue the graftes of so goodly a tree, That oure chyldren and posteritie maye see hirs occupying hir throne, with honour, ioye, & quietnes. (sig I2r-v.)

In 1558, following the experience of the last queen's marriage, one might expect to find at least some discussion of the possible advantages of a queen's remaining celibate. The observers of the time were certainly alive to the disadvantages of a royal marriage, especially of a marriage alliance with a foreign nation. One of Knox's arguments against female rule is not merely that a woman should be subject to her husband, but that the marriage of a queen will inevitably subject her nation to a foreign power.[6] Fulke Greville, in his *Life of Sidney*, sets out lucidly why the experience of Mary's marriage had given Elizabeth's subjects cause to fear her choice of a foreign husband:

> ... the marriage of King Philip to Queen Mary her sister was yet so fresh in memory - with the many inconveniences of it - ... the winning of St. Quentin, with the loss of Calais, and the carrying away of our money to foreign ends, odious universally, the Spanish pride incompatible, their advantageous delays suspicious, and their short reign here felt to be a kind of exhausting tax upon the whole nation.[7]

There was also, of course, the problem of religion; in 1558, most of the eligible young rulers of Europe were Catholic.

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6. Knox, f.48r.

7. Greville, *Life of Sidney*, pp.28-9.

Nevertheless, at the commencement of Elizabeth's reign all these weighty considerations were obliterated by her subjects' concern that she should marry and bear an heir to secure the succession; and by the fact that for a woman to remain unmarried was fundamentally unthinkable to them. In 1559, Parliament exhorted the Queen to marry, on the grounds that

> ... your Maiesty should either raigne for ever, (which to hope for, is not lawfull,) or else by marriage bring forth children, heires both of their mothers vertue and Empire.

Elizabeth, they explain, needs a husband to help her; and

> Nothing can be more contrary to the publike respects, then that such a Princesse, in whose marriage is comprehended the safety and peace of the Common-wealth, should live unmarried and as it were a vestall Virgin.[8]

The choice of wording and imagery in this petition is highly ironic in the light of the later literature of the reign, in so much of which Elizabeth *would* be sanguinely described as immortal, and *would* be repeatedly described as a vestal virgin, as the anomaly of her celibacy and childlessness was converted into idealisation of her virginity.

As well as Parliament, all of Elizabeth's key ministers urged the necessity of her marriage: Cecil, writing to Throckmorton in 1561, expressed the wish, "Well, God send our mistress a husband, and by time a son, that we may hope our posterity shall have a masculine succession."[9]

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8. Camden, p.15.

9. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I*, p.109.

At a popular level, too, this wish was fervently shared, according to Count Helffenstein, the Imperial ambassador; in a letter of March 1559, he told the Emperor Ferdinand that

> There is one thing that all [English subjects] much desire, and entreat of Her Royal Highness and that is that she should as soon as possible seek out a husband and consort.

His account gives the impression of an intense atmosphere at court of gossip and speculation upon Elizabeth's matrimonial intentions.[10]

Surrounded by such a universal climate of exhortations to matrimony, Elizabeth's staunch rejection of it from the earliest days of her reign is all the more striking. In fact, even before she was Queen, in April 1558, in reply to her sister, who had communicated a marriage proposal from the Duke of Savoy, Elizabeth asked her

> to give me leave, with his Graces favour, to remayne in that estate I was, which of all others best lyked me or pleased me ... I so well like this estate, as I perswade myselfe ther is not anie kynde of liffe comparable unto it.[11]

Her reply to the aforementioned parliamentary petition of 1559 was that

> ... in the end, this shall be for me sufficient, that a marble stone shall declare that a Queen, having reigned such a time, lived and died a virgin.[12]

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10. von Klarwill, pp.47, 38, 41.

11. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, pp.23-4.

12. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.I, p.49.

The following year, her illustrious suitors, Charles, Archduke of Austria; James, Earl of Arran; and Eric, King of Sweden, were all dismissed with a polite assurance that she was certain that they would make very worthy husbands, but the Queen of England was of no mind to marry.[13] Even more unequivocally, during the negotiations on behalf of the Archduke Charles in 1564, Elizabeth told the imperial envoy,

> If I am to disclose to you what I should prefer if I follow the inclination of my nature, I will tell you. It is this: Beggarwoman and single, far rather than Queen and married.[14]

Whatever the reasons for Elizabeth's aversion to matrimony - whether personal, political, or both - recent history, and, later, the embroilments of Mary Queen of Scots, were enough to indicate that, as Neale puts it, "It must have been a question with Elizabeth whether a woman ruler could ever do otherwise than err in marriage."[15] Even so, those around Elizabeth were puzzled and frustrated by her stance. We can sense a note of desperation in Burghley's lamentation of 1561 that "... her Majestie hitherto cannot be induced, whereof we have cause to sorrow, to allow of any marriadg with any manner of person." Ascham, in 1562, wonderingly described the Queen as "so strange and averse from marriage."[16] Even Sir Nicholas Bacon's attempt to appeal to the "woman" in her, in 1563, was to no avail, despite its charm: "If your Highness could conceive or imagine the comfort, surety and

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13. Camden, pp.31-2.
14. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I*, p.143; von Klarwill, p.193.
15. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I*, p.155.
16. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, pp.27-8, 107.

delight that should happen to yourself by beholding an imp of your own ..."[17] One of the few astute and perceptive reactions to the situation was that of Sir James Melville, the Scottish ambassador, who claimed in his *Memoirs* to have told Elizabeth, in 1564,

> Madam, I know your stately stomach: ye think if ye were married, ye would be but Queen of England, and now ye are King and Queen both; ye may not suffer a commander.[18]

On the whole, though, at least as striking as Elizabeth's bold statements of rejection of matrimony, are the responses of those around her who remained utterly impervious to her declarations, so deep-seated was their assumption that a queen simply must marry. For example, Baron Pollweiler, one of the imperial negotiators sent to arrange a marriage with the Archduke Charles, at a point when the negotiations were going badly, in 1559, wrote to the Emperor Ferdinand:

> ... in the natural course of events the Queen is of an age where she should in reason and as is woman's way, be eager to marry and be provided for. It would also be best for her Kingdom ... The natural and necessary inference from all this is, either that she has married secretly, or that she has already made up her mind to marry someone in England or out of it, and ... is postponing matters under the cloak of Your Imperial Majesty's son, my gracious master. For that she should wish to remain a maid and never marry is inconceivable.[19]

Such a future was equally inconceivable to Elizabeth's subjects, to judge by the literature of the early years of the reign.

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17. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.I, p.112.

18. Johnson, p.111.

19. von Klarwill, p.94.

Virgin Queen as nubile queen

We can observe some changes in panegyric of Elizabeth when she passed child-bearing age. In the 1560s and early 1570s, on the first of her progresses around the country, there was scarcely a town where she was not greeted with an oration or a pageant wishing her a happy choice of husband and many children. These seem to have been delivered in a sincere spirit of goodwill, and a genuine expectation of flattering the Queen; despite being completely at odds with her careful consistency in applauding the praise of virginity. At Cambridge, in 1564, when the Orator extolled virginity, Elizabeth broke in with "God's blessing of thyne heart, there continue."[20] No doubt the Orator imagined himself merely complimenting the Queen on her present, youthful state, rather than her lifelong destiny. Virginity and chastity were simply standard virtues which were automatically produced in panegyrics to a young queen, as is evident from the coronation pageants for Anne Boleyn: she was repeatedly eulogised for both qualities, although known to be, and, in the same pageants, explicitly commended for being, five months pregnant.[21] A ballad by Udall praised the virtues of the white falcon, Anne's heraldic crest:

> In chastitee
> Excedeth shee,
> Moste like a virgin bright.

But it went on to hope that she would "bring / ffruytt according."[22]

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20. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, p.161.

21. Anglo, pp.251, 254, 256.

22. Furnivall & Morfill, vol. 1, pp.390-91.

In fact, the emphasis in panegyric of Elizabeth's mother had been very much on her fertility; her literary image had been that of an heir-producing machine.[23] This was the kind of model of a queen which existed. We can see its prevailing influence in the early poetry and songs of Elizabeth's reign. "A Strife betwene Appelles and Pigmalion", 1565-6, instructs the onlookers of Elizabeth's heavenly beauty that they

> ... ought to pray, both day and night,
> That God may graunt most happie state
> Vnto that Princesse and her mate.[24]

Elizabeth is represented primarily as a nubile young maiden, as in the ballad by William Birch entitled "A Songe betwene the Quene's Majestie and Englande"; here the long-awaited accession of Elizabeth to the throne is described in the erotic metaphor of a lover's reunion with his mistress. England, personified, sings,

> Come over the born Bessy,
> Come over the born Bessy,
> Sweet Bessey come over to me,
> And I shall thé take,
> And my dere Lady make
> Before all other that ever I see.

"Bessy" replies, "Here is my hand, / My dere lover Englande."[25] Another, similar, anonymous ballad, "Queen Elizabeth's Rejoycing", also has Elizabeth

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23. Anglo, pp.253-6.

24. E.C. Wilson, p.9.

25. William Oldys and Thomas Park, eds., *The Harleian Miscellany*, 10 vols., vol.X (London, 1813), pp.260-62. For further discussion of this ballad, see pp.196-8 below.

expressing her joy at taking the throne like a girl who has won her lover; she sings, "Myne hert is set vppone a lusty pynne; / I praye to venus of good continuaunce".[26] This somewhat rustic, giddy, lovelorn figure of "Bessy" is very different from the dignified figure of Gloriana with whom we are more familiar, from more renowned Elizabethan literature. The issue of marriage dictated that, for the first two decades of her reign, Elizabeth was represented in literature as maiden Queen not in the sense with which we are most familiar, as perpetual Virgin; but as being in a state preliminary to marriage.

Some of the most popular images for Elizabeth in early panegyric were the Biblical heroines Deborah, Judith and Esther. Jean Wilson points out that:

> None of them is a virgin, and only Deborah can truly be described as a ruler - she was a prophetess who judged Israel - Judith emerged from her widowed seclusion to kill Holofernes, and returned to it, and Esther was queen only as Ahasuerus's wife. The appropriate image for Elizabeth during the early years of her reign was felt to be a married woman who preserved her people and their religion.[27]

In the later years of the reign, as the cult of the Virgin Queen took hold, these matronly Biblical role-models receded from view.

Representations of Elizabeth continued to emphasise her nubility well into the late 1570s, when she was in her forties. The "Princely Pleasures"

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26. Furnivall & Morfill, vol.II, p.112.

27. J.Wilson, p.7.

hosted by the Earl of Leicester at Kenilworth in 1575 included many allegorical entertainments which sought to persuade Elizabeth to marry, though whether Leicester, at this date, was specifically seeking to advance his own claim as prime candidate is open to debate.[28] The most forceful promotion of matrimony was to have been in a pageant by George Gascoigne concerning the quest of Diana for her missing nymph, Zabeta. The goddess Iris urged Elizabeth to follow not Diana, but Juno; that is, to rule *and* to marry:

> How necessarie were
> That know you wel, whose life alwaies
> The country craves consent,
>
> And Jove in Heaven would smile to see
> ... where you now in princely port
> A world of wealth at wil,
> In weded state ...[29]
>
> for worthy Queenes to wed,
> in learning hath been led.
> your virtues vaunt
> themselfe,
> Diana set on shelfe.
> have past one pleasant day,
> you henceforth shall enjoy;

This masque was never put on, perhaps merely because of bad weather, perhaps because it was feared that such blatant advocacy of matrimony would have incurred the Queen's displeasure.[30]

The Anjou courtship and the transition to perpetual virginity

Not long after Kenilworth, in the late 1570s, the emphasis of

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28. The entertainments are described by Robert Laneham, "Laneham's Letter", Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, pp.426-84; and George Gascoigne, "The Princely Pleasures at the Courte at Kenelworth", Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, pp.485-523.

29. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, pp.514-5.

30. Gascoigne gives inclement weather as the reason (Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, p.515).

entertainments put on for the Queen by Leicester and others began to change significantly, in the light of negotiations for her marriage to the Duke of Anjou. These brought about a reversal of positions: Elizabeth became the advocate of matrimony, while her subjects, now accustomed to the idea of a woman ruling successfully alone, opposed it. Now that a foreign marriage was an imminent possibility, it was its disadvantages which were uppermost in the public mind. As Fulke Greville describes, the memory of Mary I's Spanish marriage still rankled, and highlighted the problem of Anjou's Catholicism: the marriage would have brought Elizabeth

> under a kind of covert baron, and thereby forced her Majesty either to lose the freedom and conscience of a good Christian, the honour of an excellent prince or the private reputation of an obedient wife.[31]

But Elizabeth, speaking to a deputation of the Council,

> ... reproached them for any disposition to doubt that it would be best for her and the realm if she married and had a child of her own body to continue the line of Henry VIII.[32]

The Queen's professed eagerness to marry Anjou is not necessarily evidence that she had been seized by anxiety that time was running out and was gripped by a sudden desire for marriage and motherhood. She could exercise great political control through these marriage negotiations, using Anjou to aid the Protestants in the Netherlands while keeping England's

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31. Greville, *Life of Sidney*, p.30.

32. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I*, p.247. For Burghley's detailed assessment of the pros and cons of the marriage, see *Hatfield MSS Catalogue*, vol. II (1888), pp.239-45.

own involvement and responsibility to a minimum. She held the power of being, in Walsingham's words, "the best marriage in her parish"[33] - the parish being Europe. In fact, despite her anger when others expressed doubts of the expediency of the match, on her own behalf Elizabeth blew as hot and cold in her dealings with the French as she had done in the negotiations with the Archduke Charles twenty years earlier, using the tantalising prize of her throne as a weapon for political manipulation. But the Anjou courtship was the last of such marriage-based power-plays. From the early 1580s, the interplay of sex and power took on new forms. The Queen's absolute power continued to be figured in terms of her unattainability as an erotic object; but the possibility that she might be wooed and married ceased to be a reality. The panegyric written between about 1578 and 1582 conveys a strong sense of being "on the cusp", poised between Elizabeth's potential nubility and perpetual virginity.

The Lady of May, the pageant performed at Leicester's house at Wanstead in 1578 or '9, has been read as a commentary upon the Anjou courtship: Louis Adrian Montrose, for instance, argues that Elizabeth's judgement between the two suitors of the May Lady gave occasion to judge her own wooing-choices.[34] He conjectures that Elizabeth was intended to choose the forceful forester, Therion, rather than the mild shepherd Espilus whom she in fact chose. Therion would then have sung the song of

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33. Walsingham, letter to Leicester, 1578, quoted in Johnson, p.255.

34. "Celebration and Insinuation: Sir Philip Sidney and the Motives of Elizabethan Courtship", *Renaissance Drama* n.s. 8 (1977), pp.3-35.

Silvanus, the woodland god, which, in a surviving text of the pageant, is given to Espilus: "Silvanus long in love, and long in vain, / At length obtained the point of his desire."[35] Silvanus had been a prominent figure in the Kenilworth entertainments, suggesting that he was particularly associated with Leicester;[36] perhaps Therion was meant to represent Leicester's cause, and Elizabeth was meant to "favour" Leicester as her "suitor", or, in other words, to favour his view of foreign policy. By this date, Leicester's marriage to Lettice Devereux was known to the Queen, so he could not have been proposing himself as an alternative potential husband. But the figure of Silvanus, or the wild man, also had associations with the figure of the poet, as did the shepherd, so that the song was not wholly inappropriate to Espilus.[37] The masque seems more open-ended than a simple Leicester/Anjou allegorical opposition; as its editors have commented, it lies in the tradition of courtly debate, and "the function of such debate is to stimulate and exercise the mind, rather than to satisfy it with conclusions."[38] The entertainment does not offer a simple gloss on topical events, though it does seem to allude to them.

In the oblique representation of Elizabeth in the figure of the May Lady, the pageant continues the association of the Queen with springtime, fertility, and, implicitly, nubility; and in calling on Elizabeth to choose

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35. Sidney, *Miscellaneous Prose*, p.30.

36. See Berry, pp.95-100, 101-3.

37. See Berry, p.102.

38. "Introduction" to *Lady of May*, Sidney, *Miscellaneous Prose*, p.15.

between the May Lady's suitors, it continues the foregrounding of the issue of the Queen's possible marriage and choice of husband. However, it stands at a transitional point, where Elizabeth's "favouring" of a "suitor" is beginning to stand for not her actual espousal of a husband, but her showing of favour to a particular court faction. Berry sees this transition as beginning at Kenilworth in 1575; she argues that on that occasion Leicester was using love-discourse to advance his claims not as potential spouse, but as chief favourite. She identifies this as the first occasion on which Elizabeth's virginity and the figure of Diana were shown in a positive light.[39] Such trends may have been already developing in the late 1570s; but the Anjou courtship was certainly a catalyst in establishing Elizabeth's virginity as a positive virtue to be praised in panegyric, and in translating the idea of her choice of suitors to a merely metaphorical level.

The pageant performed for Elizabeth at Norwich, in 1578, showed uncertainty on the most acceptable line to take on the marriage question. At the masque of gods and goddesses, the Queen was told,

> Onely Himineus denyeth his good-will, eyther in presence, or in person: notwithstanding, Diana has so countre-checked him therefore, as he shall ever hereafter be at your commaundement.

Diana hailed Elizabeth as "Virgin Queene", but Cupid presented her with a golden arrow, saying: "Shoote but this shafte at King or Caesar: he, / And he is thine, and if thou wilt allowe."[40]

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39. Berry, pp.75, 87, 95-9, 101.

40. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.II, pp.159-66.

There is similar uncertainty in George Puttenham's *Partheniades.*[41] Early in the poem-sequence, Puttenham declares that the Queen has all earthly gifts but two:

> But had shee, oh! the two ioys she doth misse -
> A Cesar to her husband, a Kinge to her soone [i.e. son] -
> What lackt her highnes then to all erthly blisse? (p.75, ll.56-8.)

Later in the sequence, a sad vision is presented of a plant with three buds; two blossoms fall, then the third begins to fade. The people lament: "Why fades this flower, and leaues noe fruit nor seede?" (p.80, ll.213-27.) The vision is prefaced with the comment that "the interpretation wherof was left to her Ma*iest*ie till by the purpose discovered". Puttenham perhaps feared incurring royal displeasure by expressing a view on the succession; but Elizabeth can hardly have missed the allusion to the Tudor dynasty.

Puttenham provides a *blazon* of the Queen which is sometimes disconcerting in its physical explicitness. It includes the praise of her bosom quoted above (p.90), and praise of her body as perceived through a diaphanous gown:

> Her body shapte as strayghte as shafte,

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41. Furnivall & Morfill, vol.II, pp.72-91. The date of these verses is uncertain, but is probably around the time of the Anjou courtship; F.J. Furnivall and W.R. Morfill suggest that they were a New Year's gift in 1579 (vol.II, p.73), while Gladys D. Willcock and Alice Walker, editors of *The Arte of English Poesie*, place them in 1581-2 ((Cambridge UP, 1936), p.ix). But Nichols prints them as an anonymous New Year's gift to the Queen, 1600 (vol.III, pp. 469-88).

Disclosed eche limbe *w*ith-outen craft,
Saue shadowed all, as I could gesse,
Vnder a vayle of silke Cypresse,
From toppe to toe yee mighte her see
Timberd and tall as Cedar tree ... (pp.77-8, ll.157-62.)

This is the Queen as a lissom, nubile nymph.

But she has a heart of "Syderite [loadstone] that feeles noe fier" (p.78, l.174). The previous wish for a husband for her is now translated into scorn of her suitors:

Kinges and kinges peeres, ... haue soughte farre and nye,
But all in vayne, to bee her paramoures,
Since two Capetts, three Cezairnes assayde,
And bidd repulse of the great Britton Mayde. (p.79, ll.209-12.)

Furnivall and Morfill conjecture that the two "Capetts" are Anjou and his brother Alencon (later Anjou), while the "Cezairnes" are the Cezarins, the royal house of Spain. What is implied elsewhere in the poem to be peculiar behaviour on the part of the Queen - her rejection of marriage - is here translated into national pride. The intactness of her body, her sexual autonomy, becomes an emblem of national independence. This was a fruitful line for panegyric to pursue when Elizabeth's perpetual virginity became a certainty.

Lyly's *Euphues and His England*, 1580, contains another panegyric written "on the cusp." Lyly eulogises Elizabeth for the miracles performed by virginity, and proudly proclaims, "having the beauty that might allure all Princes, she hath the chastity also to refuse all." But he goes on to wish:

> that as she hath lived forty years a virgin in great majesty so she may live fourscore years a mother with great joy ... that either the world may end before she die or she live to see her children's children in the world.[42]

Another work of this transitional period was Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender*, 1579. Some elements of its picture of Elizabeth resemble the nubile, rustic damsels of the popular ballads of the early years of her reign. In the "Februarie Eclogue", "lusty greene" is described as a colour "meete to clothe a mayden Queene" (11.129-32). The "Aprill" Eclogue, devoted to the celebration of "Elisa", depicts her as a "Bellibone" (1.92), a rustic lass, who sits "vpon the grassie greene" (1.65), crowned and surrounded with flowers. The very setting of the Eclogue in April associates Elizabeth with the freshness and promise of Spring.

The theme of fertility is also introduced into other elements of the Eclogue's imagery. Both the sun (Phoebus) and the moon (Cynthia) are "amaze[d]" and "abasht" at Elisa's beauty, which outshines them, a fact which the poet both states and retracts:

> But I will not match her with *Latonaes* seede,
> Such follie great sorow to *Niobe* did breede.
> Now she is a stone,
> And makes dayly mone,
> Warning all other to take heede. (11.76-90.)

This passage expresses both trepidation at the audacity of comparing a mortal with the gods, and anxiety over a woman's childlessness. As E.K. explains, Niobe's scorn for Latona's children caused all her own children to

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42. Lyly, *Euphues*, pp.438, 442.

be slain,

> ... whereat the vnfortunate Niobe ... was ... turned into a stone vpon the sepulchre of her children. For which cause the shepheard sayth, he will not compare her to them, for feare of like mysfortune.

By implication, Elizabeth's childlessness, too, is a misfortune to be feared. The poem contains a possible allusion to the Anjou match, when the litany of flowers ends with the fleur-de-lys, the heraldic flower of France:

> The pretie Pawnce,
> And the Cheuisaunce,
> Shall match with the fayre flowre delice. ("Aprill", ll.142-44.)

The differences between these texts of the period of the Anjou courtship and later panegyrics of Elizabeth are not as wide as one might expect, even though, after this episode, she changed conclusively from a woman who was potentially fertile, virgin in that she was awaiting marriage, into the perpetual Virgin Queen. The main features which distinguish these earlier panegyrics are that they contain allusions to a possible marriage; and that they present a relatively simple, girlish figure of Elizabeth, by contrast with her apotheosis into a remote, dignified figure in even her more pastoral roles later in the reign. But in other respects the "Aprill" Eclogue, in particular, started a trend, rather than ending one. The imagery of flowers and fertility did not fall away when the Queen passed beyond her fertile years; instead it became a favourite theme of panegyric. In a sense, this was a logical development from "Aprill"; at the time when that was written, Elizabeth was already forty-five, and there must have been a gap between her physical appearance and the maidenliness of "Elisa", the "Bellibone". This is partly acknowledged in

the poet's presentation of "Elisa", the image, to "Eliza", the regal spectator (ll.145-50).

This gap would become a creative arena as the reign progressed. One of the earliest imitators of Spenser's "Aprill" was Thomas Blenerhasset, in *A Reuelation of the True Minerva*, 1582. There is still some slight allusion to the possibility that Elizabeth might marry; we are shown the wheel of fortune,

> On toppe whereof *Minerua* [Elizabeth] hath her place,
> A glorious seat by which but one did sit,
> and hee not knowne.[43]

Blenerhasset's editor, J.W. Bennett, interprets this as an allusion to a future consort ("Introduction," p.viii). But by 1582 the Anjou courtship was conclusively over; now, when, in the poem, flowers are selected to make a garland for Elizabeth, "The Flower deluce" is rejected, because "It representes trouble and cruel thrall" (sig.D2v). The prospect of a royal marriage was now extremely remote; yet the motif of flowers surrounding Elizabeth is adopted and developed from Spenser, and the colours repeatedly associated with her are white and green (sigs. D3v, D4v, E3v). According to sixteenth-century works on heraldry and colour-symbolism, these were the colours of virtuous youth; the white of chastity is combined with the green of joy and love.[44] This colour-combination

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43. Blenerhasset, sig.C1v.

44. M. Channing Linthicum, *Costume in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1936), pp.17-22, 31-2. White and green were also the Tudor colours: see Ralph A.Griffiths & Roger S.

therefore embodies the paradox which was to develop around Elizabeth as she grew older: as the Virgin Queen, she was praised for both perpetual chastity *and* perpetual nubility and desirability. The further her bodily state became removed from fertility, the more, symbolically, she was associated with it.

Thus at the very end of Elizabeth's reign, in the madrigal collection *The Triumphs of Oriana*, 1601, pastoral and floral imagery prevail. Elizabeth/Oriana is "the beautiest of beauties". In Thomas Morley's contribution, which is particularly reminiscent of the "Aprill" Eclogue, she is dressed in "gaudy green", and her path is strewn with roses.[45] The development in the last years of the reign of the theme of Elizabeth's perpetual youth will be discussed in more detail in Part III. The point to note here is that while the issue of marriage did affect the themes of panegyric, it was in ways more subtle than might be thought. After the early 1580s, allusions to the Queen's future consort naturally disappear; but the imagery of flowers, fertility and maidenhood does not. The difference was that this fertile maidenhood was represented not as a physical state preparatory to marriage and motherhood, but as a symbolic state associated with the mystical wholeness and perfection of perpetual virginity. Panegyric became increasingly unrealistic and emblematic.

Thomas, *The Making of the Tudor Dynasty* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1985), p.187; Jocelyne G.Russell, *The Field of Cloth of Gold: Men and manners in 1520* (London: Routledge, 1969), pp.94-5; Strong, *Cult*, p.152.

45. E.H. Fellowes, ed., *English Madrigal Verse 1588-1632*, 3rd. ed. ed. F.W. Sternfeld & D.Greer (Oxford UP, 1967), pp.158-66, nos.XI, XIII.

Acceptance and celebration of Elizabeth's virginity

The love-games did not end, but now they were games for favour played by courtiers, rather than foreign negotiations which might have resulted in actual matrimony. By the late 1570s Elizabeth's advancing age beyond child-bearing years coincided with a growing weariness with the "will she, won't she" of her protracted marriage-negotiations. Walsingham complained in 1576 of her vacillations that "No one thing hath procured her so much hatred abroad as these wooing matters."[46] Once the negotiations dwindled to a halt in 1581, followed by Anjou's death in 1584, there was a general sense of relief; and the cult of Elizabeth as Virgin Queen began to develop unfettered. Elizabeth was not just half a monarchy, waiting to be completed; she was the whole monarchy in her own right.[47]

In retrospect, the young Elizabeth's aversion to matrimony was not only accepted, but positively extolled, as part of her superhuman singularity. In Sidney's *Arcadia*, 1590, Queen Helen of Corinth, who was based on Elizabeth, tells the story of her many suitors when she came to the throne, whom she refused unequivocally, "I as then esteeming my self born to rule and thinking foul scorn willingly to submit myself to be ruled."[48] Such proud resolution, regarded as so peculiar and baffling in the young Elizabeth, was translated into a proof of singularity and

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46. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I*, p.241.

47. See Norbrook, *Panegyric*, p.72.

48. Sidney, *Arcadia*, Bk I, Ch 11, p.122.

superiority, to become an integral part of the older Elizabeth's literary persona. Thus Puttenham wrote, in his *Arte of English Poesie*, that poets call Elizabeth "*The maiden Queene*, for that is her hiest peculiar among all the Queenes of the world."[49]

By the early 1600s, after Elizabeth's death, a play about her youth like Heywood's *If You Know Not Me, You Know No Bodie* could present her virginity as predestined, part of a divine plan, proof of her saintliness. The young Princess Elizabeth, fearing for her life while her sister occupies the throne, tells her attendants:

> If I miscarry
> In this enterprise, and you aske why,
> A Virgin and a Martyr both I die.

When assassins approach her in her sleep, angels appear to repel them: her purity endows her with protective magic.[50] In *Henry VIII*, Cranmer prophesies of the infant Elizabeth that she will die a "maiden phoenix", and:

> yet a virgin;
> A most unspotted lily shall she pass
> To th'ground, and all the world shall mourn her.

King Henry, far from being dismayed at this revelation that his male line

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49. Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie*, p.181.

50. Thomas Heywood, *If You Know Not Me, You Know No Bodie; or, The troubles of Queene Elizabeth*, Part I, 1605, *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood*, 6 vols. (London: John Pearson, 1874), vol.I, pp.205, 228.

will die out, greets the Archbishop's "oracle of comfort" with unbridled joy.[51] By the time of these plays, it was unthinkable that Elizabeth could ever have been a "normal" young woman who might have married, or that her marriage might have been desirable. From 1581 onwards, it was Elizabeth's virginity which was the focus of panegyric, invoking traditions which associated virginity with mystical and symbolic potency.

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51. William Shakespeare, *King Henry the Eighth*, V.v.14-76, in *The Complete Works*, ed. Peter Alexander (London: Collins, 1951).

PART II: DIVINITY/HUMANITY:

THE CULT OF ELIZABETH AND THE CULT OF THE VIRGIN MARY

1. The problem: summary of critics' views

It has often been suggested by writers on the cult of Elizabeth that the Virgin Queen became a symbolic substitute for the Virgin Mary, who had been ousted from England by the Reformation. E.C. Wilson, in *England's Eliza*, 1939, was influential in putting forward this idea. He accounts for it in terms of Elizabeth's

> ... shrewd use of surviving mediaeval form and ceremony in statecraft which was eminently practical. Many of her subjects in their unconscious selves were in a deep quandary about religious allegiances.

This quandary was resolved, he suggests, by patriotism:

> Love of their native land found that land personified by a brilliant virgin queen. It was inevitable that she should be exalted in view of what she was. It was equally inevitable that she should be exalted in forms long consecrated to the expression of man's admiration of perfection in sovereignty and womanhood. Her virginity was a fortunate distinction. It fitted her to attract Christian sentiment and pagan fancy alike. It made her 'in earth the first, in heaven the second Maid'; it made her the famous Renaissance Diana.'

Wilson here makes interesting suggestions regarding the reasons for the apparent substitution: he implies that the substitution of herself as Virgin Queen for the Virgin Mary was a deliberate, astute political move by Elizabeth; and he also suggests that the transfer of Marian imagery to

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1. E.C. Wilson, p.226.

Elizabeth was inevitable, as the latest phase in an ongoing veneration of virginity with pre-Christian roots.

However, he gets into difficulties over the full implications of a direct substitution of Elizabeth for the Virgin. In the first place, there is the difficulty that the reformers of the Church did not reject the Virgin Mary out of mere personal dislike; what they rejected was the whole practice of what they perceived as idolatry. Wilson finds himself describing a mere transfer of such idolatry to the Queen. He comments, bemusedly,

> It may appear absurd to the superficial observer, but interesting and ironic to the more thoughtful one, that the English iconoclasts while wrecking the image of the Queen of Heaven turn to adoring that which they model after the queen of England. (p.207.)

At other points, he seems disturbed by a feeling that such adoration of a temporal queen would be blasphemous. Is it possible, he asks, that Elizabethans

> ... unconsciously transferred [to the Queen] some of the adoration which by right of strict inheritance was due a far holier virgin? It is a delicate matter. I trespass on sacred ground that cannot be explored with scientific precision. Yet I think the evidence justifies the belief that so it was. (p.200.)

Despite the assertiveness of this last sentence, Wilson has much recourse to the idea that Elizabeth's subjects were only able to substitute their Queen for the Virgin because they did not realise that they were doing so; the description of the substitution as "half unconscious" is much-repeated (pp.207, 219, 226). Because it seems contradictory and unacceptable to him, he assumes that it must also have appeared contradictory and unacceptable

to Elizabethans, so that they were only able to do it by not thinking about it. This is to imply that such well-educated, intelligent and devoutly Protestant court poets as Spenser and Sidney either wilfully blinded themselves to the fact that they were praising the Virgin Mary in disguise, or were too stupid to realise that they were doing so.

The idea of substitution of Elizabeth for Mary was expressed again by G.Sampson in the *Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*, 1941. He sees it as an expression of timeless human devotion to the feminine ideal, according with his highly romanticised vision of Elizabeth:

> ... devotion to a womanly ideal seems to be a necessity of civilised nature; and with the accession of the bold, fascinating, incalculable daughter of Henry VIIIth, dazzling in accomplishment and infinite in variety, came a thrilling embodiment of the ideal. The cult of the Virgin Queen became a national variation of the cult of the Virgin Mother.[2]

Sampson passes merrily on with no consideration of the issues of idolatry or blasphemy.

More recently, another influential study of the cult of Elizabeth has been *Astraea* by Frances Yates. She argues that:

> To emphasize the worship of 'diva Elizabetta', the imperial virgin, in place of that of the Queen of Heaven, to carry her gorgeously arrayed through street and countryside that she might show her divine Justice and clemency to the people, was a way by which the virgin of the imperial reform might draw ancient allegiances to herself. The bejewelled and painted images of the Virgin Mary had been cast out

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2. G.Sampson, *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature* (Cambridge UP, 1941), p.214.

> of churches and monasteries, but another bejewelled and painted image was set up at court, and went in progress through the land for her worshippers to adore.[3]

Despite implying this direct substitution, Yates, clearly writing under the influence of Wilson, whom she cites frequently in footnotes, also asks:

> ... whether the cult of the virgin queen was, perhaps *half-unconsciously*, intended to take the place of the cult of the Virgin, one of the most abiding characteristics of the ancient faith. (p.78, my emphasis.)

The literary examples of apparent substitution which Yates puts forward, and which I will discuss in detail later, elicit such epithets from her as "[this] startling suggestion", or "This staggering remark" (pp.78, 79). She is confounded by the same problems of idolatry and blasphemy as Wilson, such that her initial assertions of the substitution theory are followed by a rhetorical disclaimer:

> The cult of the Virgin was regarded as one of the chief abuses of the unreformed church, but it would be, perhaps, extravagant to suggest that, in a Christian country, the worship of the state Virgo was deliberately intended to take its place. (p.79.)

Roy Strong, in work which follows on from Yates's, has done much to popularise the substitution theory. In *Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I*, 1963, he suggested that:

> ... the royal portrait filled the vacuum left by the pre-Reformation image cult. The passion for wearing the royal image as a kind of

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3. Yates, *Astraea*, p.79. Yates's ideas on this subject were available earlier in "Queen Elizabeth as Astraea", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* X (1947), pp.27-82.

> talisman makes the Elizabeth-cult draw to itself mysterious traditions.[4]

In *The Cult of Elizabeth*, 1977, he made the same point with reference to national festival-days:

> The cult of Gloriana was skilfully created to buttress public order and, even more, deliberately to replace the pre-Reformation externals of religion, the cult of the Virgin and saints with their attendant images, processions, ceremonies and secular rejoicing. So instead of the many aspects of the cult of Our Lady, we have the 'several loves' of the Virgin Queen; instead of the rituals and festivities of Corpus Christi, Easter or Ascensiontide, we have the new fêtes of Elizabeth's Accession Day and birthday.[5]

He suggests that, although a direct substitution of one image for another appears to contravene their Church's rulings, Elizabethans enacted it without compunction as a simple disjunction between preaching and practice:

> The Anglican position was thus a somewhat peculiar one, for on the one hand the use of religious images was denounced as popish superstition, while on the other, the sacred nature of the royal portrait image was to be maintained.[6]

Subsequent studies of the cult of Elizabeth have picked up from Wilson, Yates and Strong the idea of the substitution of Elizabeth for the Virgin Mary. Dorothy Connell, for instance, in her study of Sir Philip Sidney, writes of "the *fact* that Elizabeth, as the Virgin Queen of

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4. Roy Strong, *Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford UP, 1963), p.39; and Roy Strong, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987), p.40.

5. Strong, *Cult*, p.16.

6. Strong, *Portraits*, p.39; and *Gloriana*, p.40.

Protestantism, came to be identified symbolically with the Virgin Mary" (my emphasis); her footnote refers us to Yates.[7] Paul Johnson, in his 1974 biography of Elizabeth, wrote that:

> She was a sole and virgin ruler in her own right, in a country where religious change had banished the Virgin Mary from the position of overwhelming prominence she had occupied in the visual devotions of multitudes for many centuries. To some extent Elizabeth, as queen, was made - she was not unwilling - to fill the emotional gap left in people's lives, and her image thus acquired quasi-religious importance, and was adjusted accordingly.[8]

Jean Wilson, too, writes that the removal of the Virgin Mary "from the English religious scene, left a gap which, as a virgin-queen, Elizabeth was ideally qualified to fill."[9] And Robin Headlam Wells, in *Spenser's* Faerie Queene *and the Cult of Elizabeth* writes, "That identification of the Queen with the Virgin Mary was a central feature of the cult of Elizabeth is well known". The abolition of the cult of the Virgin "... could hardly be accomplished without leaving an emotional and intellectual gap in the life of Christendom."[10]

The recurring word in many of these accounts is "gap". Although Wilson, Yates and Strong touch on the fact that substitution of Elizabeth

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7. *Sir Philip Sidney: The Maker's Mind* (Oxford UP, 1977), p.54.

8. Johnson, p.12.

9. J.Wilson, p.21.

10. Robin Headlam Wells, *Spenser's* Faerie Queene *and the Cult of Elizabeth* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), pp.16-17. Another example is John Buxton, *Elizabethan Taste* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1963), pp.49-51; he cites Yates's 1947 article.

for the Virgin raises theological difficulties, the general model which has derived from their work is a relatively simple one. It asserts that in 1558 everyone stopped worshipping the Virgin Mary; that this created a gap in the nation's psyche; and that the image of Elizabeth as Virgin Queen was created to fill the breach.

When baldly set out like this, this model can be seen to beg many questions. For instance: how true is it that veneration for the Virgin Mary ceased with the Elizabethan Settlement, or before? This is part of the larger question of how complete the Reformation was in England. If there was a complete conversion to Protestantism at all levels of society, maybe even a Reformation from below, as A.G. Dickens argues in *The English Reformation*, then the Virgin Mary would have been completely banished, but any grief felt at her loss would have been of a rather subtle kind. Dickens sees the Reformation in England as "above all ... a process of Protestantism among the English people, a process not always favoured by the State."[11] This picture is not one of a resentful populace who had the Virgin forcibly wrested from them by an oppressive government; they would have surrendered her willingly. If they regretted her loss, then it was because of a disparity between their theological principles and their emotional or psychological needs.

However, revisionist historians such as Christopher Haigh have argued that the Reformation was far from complete in Elizabethan England; that, in

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11. (London: Batsford, 1964), p.325.

fact, it was a "piecemeal Reformation."[12] Evidence shows that considerable numbers of communities remained Catholic, or at least did not fully absorb the teachings of the reformers. A report on North Wales from about 1580 said that the population were entirely uninstructed in religion, and "maintain the absurdist points of popish heresy".[13] Such people would not have ceased to venerate the Virgin, and would therefore feel no craving for a substitute; although the government might wish to impose a Protestant substitute upon them. This gives us a rather different picture of the impetus behind the cult of Elizabeth.

The scholars of the cult of Elizabeth who are discussed above usually make their assertions about the link with the cult of the Virgin Mary as if they apply to the whole Elizabethan nation, for the whole duration of Elizabeth's reign, and as if they are evidence of some sort of process in the popular psyche. In fact, most of the evidence which they use - the evidence which is most easily available - is drawn from court literature from the last two decades of the reign. These writers were usually well-educated and Protestant. If they use apparently Marian imagery in panegyric of Elizabeth, it could be for a variety of reasons. Perhaps they are displaying a disparity between their theological principles and their psychological attraction to a symbolic feminine figure; this would be the sort of "half-conscious" substitution posited by Wilson. Or, they may be

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12. See Christopher Haigh, ed., *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge UP, 1987), p.7 and passim.

13. Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, vol.I, *Laws Against Images* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), p.354.

more conscious of their practice than this gives them credit for: they may be deliberately trying to appropriate the imagery of idealised femininity to the Protestant cause; and consciously seeking to resolve the conflict between theological condemnation of idolatry, and the usefulness of visual splendour and display in promoting an ideological cause. Or, recent scholars may have been too eager to seize on apparently Marian imagery, when in fact the imagery in question is associated with, but not necessarily confined to, the cult of the Virgin, but represents a broader tradition of idealisation of feminine figures.

So, the issue is far more complex than the simple substitution of Elizabeth for Mary, and a number of questions are raised, such as: did the Church of England completely outlaw all use of images? What were Elizabethan attitudes to idolatry, and particularly to the use of religious imagery for political purposes? And does the literary evidence in fact show a direct substitution of Elizabeth for Mary?[14]

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14. As I do, Berry questions the suggestion by Yates and Strong that Elizabeth was identified with the Virgin Mary. However, she does so only in terms of seeing the Biblical figure of Wisdom, rather than the Virgin, as a source for Renaissance idealisations of the feminine, and thereby a source for representations of Elizabeth (pp.9-10). While her material on Wisdom is very interesting, her argument relies upon the denial of links between the figures of Wisdom and the Virgin - for evidence of which, see Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, pp.195, 198, 247, 248 - and does not tackle many of the other complex issues involved.

    However, Berry makes a number of other highly valid criticisms of Yates's version of the cult of Elizabeth: for being too unified, ignoring different interest groups; for ignoring diachronic changes in the cult; and for laying too much stress upon imperialism (p.63-4).

2. The theological and ideological background: Elizabethan attitudes to images and idolatry

The progress of iconoclasm and anti-Mariolatry

Margaret Aston, in *England's Iconoclasts*, identifies three main periods of iconoclasm in the English Reformation: 1536-8, 1547-8 and 1559-60. In the first of these periods, the Marian shrines at Worcester and Walsingham were destroyed.[1] However, the expulsion of religious images from England was certainly not achieved at one stroke, or even three; rather, the pattern of change was that at each of these stages "the ground shifted a little and the argument moved forward." (p.342.) Moreover, the cause of iconoclasm was furthered by a small but deeply committed minority, who had to contend with extreme reluctance to follow their changes from most of the populace (pp.13, 236). Attachment to the externals of worship was deeply entrenched, both by long usage and by their sensory appeal.

John Jewel was one of the more ardent iconomachs, or opponents of images, of the beginning of Elizabeth's reign. He specifically objected to the according of too much honour to the Virgin Mary; a repeated motif in his polemical works is the complaint that Catholics invoke Mary's maternal claims over Christ:

> Again they say unto her: 'Thou art the Lady of angels: thou art the

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1. Aston, pp.173, 234.

> queen of heaven. Command thy Son: shew thyself to be a mother.' He is thy son; thou art his mother: the mother may command, the child must obey.[2]

"What is blasphemy", he demands, "if this be not blasphemy?" The *Homily against Peril of Idolatry*, one of the longest of the church homilies, which its editor John Griffiths speculates was written by Jewel, specifies images of the Virgin among the many images to be distrusted:

> ... the images of God, our Saviour Christ, the blessed Virgin Mary, the Apostles, Martyrs, and other of notable holiness, are of all other images most dangerous for the peril of idolatry; and therefore greatest heed to be taken that none of them be suffered to stand publicly in churches and temples.[3]

The homilist was careful to stress that his attack on idolatry was not an attack on the spiritual status of the saints:

> These things are not written to any reproach of the Saints themselves, who were the true servants of God, and did give all honour to him, taking none unto themselves, and are blessed souls with God; but against our foolishness and wickedness, making of the true servants of God false gods by attributing to them the power and honour which is God's, and due to him only. (p.227.)

But, as Donald Attwater writes,

> ... the general tendencies of Protestantism and the effects of religious controversy were such that, in practice, the attitude of most Protestants to Mary for long appeared to be one of neglect and

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2. John Jewel, "An Exposition Upon the Two Epistles to the Thessalonians", in *The Works of John Jewel*, ed. John Ayre for the Parker Society, 4 vols. (Cambridge UP, 1848), vol.II, pp.899-900. See also vol.III, pp.65, 121.

3. "The Third Part of the Homily against Peril of Idolatry", *Homilies*, p.247.

indifference, if not worse.[4]

During Elizabeth's reign, no verses were written in praise of the Virgin, except by recusant poets, who made it a badge of their faith to do so. As they perceived it, not only images of the Virgin, but the Virgin herself, was being contemned by "The New Learning":

> the mother of our livinge god
> a thing most strang yet true
> compared is by manie a Jacke
> unto a saffron bagge
> to a thinge of nought, to a paltrie patch,
> and to our vicars hagge![5]

It was the Virgin's humanity which was stressed by Protestant churchmen. As Jewel wrote in his *Apology*, "We believe that Jesus Christ ... did take of that blessed and pure Virgin both flesh and all the nature of man ..."[6] In Hooker's "Learned Discourse of Justification", the text of a sermon delivered in 1586, we find a rejection of the Catholic idea of Mary as the Immaculate Conception.[7] In the Homilies, the two main mentions of the Virgin Mary cite her as a model of civil obedience, for her unquestioning submission to Caesar's order to go to Bethlehem for the census.[8] This is evidence of the overlap between religion and politics, as

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4. *A Dictionary of Mary* (London: Longmans, 1957), p.230.

5. Louise Imogen Guiney, ed., *Recusant Poets* (London: Sheed, 1938), p.269.

6. Jewel, "Apology of the Church of England" (1564), trans. Anne Bacon, *Works*, vol.III, p.58.

7. Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, 2 vols., (London: Dent-Everyman, 1907), vol.I, p.17.

8. *Homilies*, "Sermon of Obedience", p.115; "Sermon against Wilful Rebellion", p.567.

religious *exempla* began increasingly to be used as a means of political control.

But the picture painted by Margaret Aston, and by Christopher Haigh, shows the penetration of such new teaching on images and Mariolatry as a long and complicated process, continuing throughout the sixteenth century and on into the seventeenth. It was slow not only because of popular resistance, but also because of restraints upon iconoclasm imposed by the Crown, particularly by Elizabeth.[9] What we know of Elizabeth's personal religious beliefs suggests that she was a devout Protestant. Her inheritance from her mother was certainly an active commitment to reformed religion; recent research has shown that Anne Boleyn vigorously promoted Protestantism in England.[10] Matthew Parker, Anne Boleyn's chaplain and Elizabeth's Archbishop of Canterbury, felt an obligation to Anne to ensure that her daughter had a Protestant education,[11] and this, with her brother Edward, was what she received. During Edward's reign her public image was that of a devout Protestant princess; she resided in the household of Catherine Parr, the centre of a circle of reformist thinkers. During her sister Mary's reign she abjured Protestantism and attended mass; but the

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9. Aston, pp.341.

10. See the letter from Alexander Ales to Elizabeth about her mother (*Calendar of State Papers Foreign, 1558-59*, ed. J.Stevenson (London, 1863), no.1303); Aylmer, sig.B4v; Maria Dowling, "Anne Boleyn and Reform", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 35.1 (Jan 1984), pp.30-46; E.W. Ives, *Anne Boleyn* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp.302-11.

11. Dowling, p.40.

political necessity of so doing was clear, and, even so, she apparently only did so unhappily and under duress.[12] On her own accession, she performed a series of public acts which left no doubt of her commitment to Protestantism.[13] The private prayers recorded in her *Book of Devotions* provide further important evidence that she was not the utterly unspiritual pragmatist in matters of religion that some historians and biographers have depicted.[14]

However, although Elizabeth's private belief was in a doctrinally correct Protestantism, it is true that in the public arena her primary concern was the maintenance of political stability. This meant avoiding if at all possible the alienation of sectors of the population on grounds of religion, even if this was at the expense of pure Protestantism. This was reflected in the policy on images set out in the Articles of Inquiry and the Royal Injunctions issued for the church visitations of late summer and early autumn 1559.

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12. Larissa J.Taylor-Smither, "Elizabeth I: A Psychological Profile", *Sixteenth-Century Journal* 15.1 (Spring 1984), p.59.

13. Aston, p.297.

14. See Elizabeth I, *Book of Devotions*, pp.35, 29, for prayers which espouse the Protestant doctrines of the supremacy of the Word and of justification by faith alone. Other prayers show that Elizabeth had a profound sense of her vocation as a ruler divinely elected to advance true religion (pp.22-3, 41-2). For further discussion of the *Book of Devotions* as evidence of her religious beliefs, see Haugaard, "Elizabeth Tudor's *Book of Devotions*". An example of a view of Elizabeth as unspiritual pragmatist is Elizabeth Jenkins, *Elizabeth the Great* (London: Book Club Associates, 1971), p.19.

The Articles of Inquiry were based upon those issued by Cranmer during Edward's reign, in 1548, with a few alterations. One of the most significant was that as well as investigating people who kept in their homes "images ... or other monuments of feigned or false miracles, pilgrimages, idolatry and superstition", the Elizabethan article went on to mention "especially [such] as have been set up in churches, chapels, or oratories."[15] The point of this was to try to prevent people from hoarding the objects of idolatry in their homes in case another change of ruler or swing in religious policy would shortly restore Catholicism; there is evidence that this hoarding took place in a number of parishes.[16] On Mary's accession, images of the Virgin had reappeared with alarming speed to be displayed in people's windows as she made her entry to London.[17] Elizabeth was making a clear declaration that Protestantism in England had come to stay.

The Injunctions of 1559 were based on the Injunctions of 1547, and in most respects tempered their Edwardian originals. The Injunctions were of more lasting force than the Articles of Inquiry: they had to be subscribed to by the clergy along with the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity, and they were read in every parish once a quarter. In adapting the Edwardian Articles, slight changes were made so as to limit the destruction of

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15. W.P. Haugaard, *Elizabeth I and the English Reformation: The Struggle for a Stable Settlement of Religion* (Cambridge UP, 1968), p.138.

16. Haigh, ed., *English Reformation Revised*, pp.16, 103, 178-9, 183.

17. Aston, p.278.

images; and, in one major change, the Edwardian Injunction which legalised the wholesale destruction of "all images remayninge in any churche or chappell" was entirely omitted. It seems that Elizabeth's government wanted to avoid the widespread iconoclasm of her brother's reign. The overall implication was that statues and pictures were permissible in churches, provided that they were not worshipped and were not associated with popish practices like miraculous healing and pilgrimages. The Visitors of 1559 who interpreted the phrase "monuments of feigned miracles, pilgrimages, idolatry, and superstition" as a licence to destroy all pictures and statues were imposing a false interpretation based upon their own zeal, rather than carrying out the policy of the Crown.[18]

There is also evidence that Elizabeth moderated the Homily against Idolatry before approving it;[19] and she incited the wrath of the more extreme iconomachs by persisting in having a crucifix in the royal chapel at Windsor.[20] She stood as a restraining force against extreme iconoclasm, recognising the political danger of the repudiation of all forms of imagery. In the earlier stages of the Reformation, Stephen Gardiner had perceived that the contempt of the iconoclasts for religious images was likely to engender contempt for images of secular power:

> If this opinion should proceed, when the King's Majesty hereafter

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18. Haugaard, *Elizabeth I and the English Reformation*, pp.139-41; Aston, pp.298-304.

19. Aston, pp.320-24.

20. Haugaard, *Elizabeth I and the English Reformation* pp.185-98; Aston, pp.306-14.

> should show his person, his lively image, the honour due by God's law among such might continue; but as for the King's standards, his banners, his arms, [they] should hardly continue in their due reverence.[21]

According to this analysis, secular power, as much as religion, works through images, of which the King's body is simply the most impressive. The state as much as the Church made use of symbolism and ritual to inculcate obedience; and some of the more enthusiastic iconoclasts had destroyed statues of kings as well as saints. In 1560, a proclamation had to be issued to forbid the destruction of merely commemorative monuments, and to prohibit anyone "to break any image of kings, princes, or noble estates of this realm."[22] It was clearly in the interests of the state to defend the continued use of certain types of images; and, in fact, Protestant theology did not necessarily dictate the repudiation of imagery in all its forms.

Protestant acceptance of certain kinds of images

Despite the inveighings of homilists and polemicists against the worship of images of saints in churches and at shrines, Protestantism did not wholly abandon images in every modern sense of the word. We must remind ourselves that in the sixteenth century the word "image" was only beginning to bear its modern sense of any visual representation in any

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21. *Letters of Stephen Gardiner*, ed. J.A. Muller (Cambridge UP, 1933), pp.274-5.

22. Aston, p.315.

medium; its primary sense was still a statue or sculpted figure.[23] Nevertheless, post-Reformation iconomachy took on a scope far wider than the mere removal of statues of saints; according to Margaret Aston, it produced a world of profound mistrust of the visual apparatus of worship, with implications for all kinds of art (p.vii). According to Michael O'Connell, also, the Reformation created a critical break between visual imagery of all kinds, now distrusted, and the word, now seen as the only truth.[24]

However, Kenneth Gross points out that idolatry and iconoclasm are not, in fact, polar opposites; both depend equally upon a belief in the power of images.[25] He writes, "iconoclasm itself remains entangled in the very sorts of symbolic action that may issue in idolatry." (p.19). Add to this the fact that the position of many Protestants was not the rejection of all images as evil, but a distinction between false and true images which was shifting and extremely difficult to define,[26] and idolatry and iconoclasm can be seen to be not opposites, but terms in an ongoing and complex dialectic. O'Connell's opposition between the image and the word can also be seen to be too simplistic; as Mark Breitenberg argues, Elizabethan culture depended on "a complex intermingling of iconic and

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23. Aston, p.17.

24. "The Idolatrous eye: Iconoclasm, anti-Theatricalism, and the Image of the Elizabethan Theater", *ELH* 52.2 (Summer 1985), pp.279-310.

25. Gross, passim.

26. Aston, pp. 392-408; Gross, pp.73-5.

verbal representation". The English Bible prominently displayed in churches and in Protestant iconography, and the Scriptural texts painted on whitewashed walls where pictures used to be, were themselves images, graphic forms signifying belief, but they could be regarded as true rather than false images because they were logomorphic rather than anthropomorphic; and because they were new, fresh, vivified, emblems of the new Protestant faith rather than images which by long tradition were identified with Catholicism.[27]

Breitenberg goes on to show how, in various Elizabethan art forms, image and word acted complementarily. In forms like the emblem book, visual images were exempt from the charge of idolatry so long as they were accompanied by a text, "moralised". (pp.199, 211.) Images were "true" if they were edifying or didactic. In fact there was a close commerce between Catholic and Protestant emblem-books, whose illustrations were often just inversions or adaptations of one another. Barbara Lewalski documents this process;[28] although the emphases and organisation of Protestant emblem books differed from Catholic ones, nevertheless, "Most important, the emblem material made available to the seventeenth-century poet a visual symbolic mode" (p.196).

The Homily against Idolatry at one point rejected stories and legends

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27. "Reading Elizabethan Iconicity: *Gorboduc* and the Semiotics of Reform", *ELR* 18 (1988). pp.194-217.

28. *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton UP, 1979), pp.184-96.

of the saints as idolatrous, because they distracted from the worship of God:

> ... for that we have such opinions of the power and ready help of Saints, all our legends, Hymns, Sequences, and Masses did contain stories, lauds, and praises of them, and prayers to them, yea, and sermons also altogether of them and to their praises, God's word being clean laid aside.[29]

However, at another point the homilist acknowledged that the main danger of idolatry lay in the statues of saints, and that the power and attraction of narrative, even narratives shown in pictures, could be used in the service of God:

> ... a process of a story, painted with the gestures and actions of many persons, and commonly the sum of the story written withal, hath another use in it, than one dumb idol or image, standing by itself.[30]

If Elizabethan Protestantism had outlawed imagery in all its forms, this would clearly have been contradictory to the "cult" of Elizabeth, whose elements were ritual surrounding the monarch, iconic portraits, and literary panegyric. Elizabeth herself used the metaphor of the stage to describe her public role: "... we Princes, I tell you, are set on stages, in the sight and view of all the world duly observed."[31] It is a metaphor which implies performance and display, such as characterised Elizabeth's public appearances from the earliest days of her reign. At the coronation pageants, she was an actress as much as the figures in the tableaux,

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29. *Homilies*, p.227-8.

30. Quoted in Aston, p.405.

31. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol. I, p.119.

responding to the action on stage and dazzling her subjects with her display of glory and her "loving demeanour".[32] Her progresses were dramatic spectacles; moreover, in the masques presented along the way, and at court, she was presented with fictional and allegorical images of herself, and often crossed the boundary into fiction in her own person, participating in the action as arbiter or saviour.[33] She was represented in images, and her person was regarded as an image: the physical manifestation of the essence of monarchy. Conversely, visual images of her, such as portraits and miniatures, were seen as manifestations of her physical presence. Images of their monarch continued to hold symbolic potency for Protestants. When, in 1601, a picture of the Queen was found in a little box of poison, Cecil's agent immediately suspected sinister treason: "I cannot conceive he can have a good meaning that will place the picture of her Majesty's sacred person with such poison."[34]

Such reverence for the Queen's image can appear to us to be idolatrous, and therefore, in Protestant Elizabethan England, self-contradictory or even hypocritical. In literary forms of praise, there are many instances of apparent contradiction between a professed attitude to idolatry, and glorification of the Queen. Thomas Blenerhasset, in his *Revelation of the True Minerva*, 1582, presented Elizabeth as an iconoclastic Protestant heroine:

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32. See Norbrook, *Panegyric*, p.27.

33. See Louis Adrian Montrose, "'Eliza, Queen of shepheardes', and the Pastoral of Power", *ELR* 10 (1980), p.170.

34. Hatfield MSS Catalogue, vol.XI (1906), p.404.

> The Queene replide, I knowe no God but one
> And hee of heauen, who guides mee by his grace:
> The Heathen had their Gods which nowe bee gone,
> Whose Idols I by Gods spell did deface.

But a couple of pages earlier he has described the Queen in terms for which he might easily be charged with idolatry:

> The seat wherein this courtly Queene did sit
> was Rubie rare, none seene for size so great,
> a golden globe was vnder both her feete,
> a comely cloude did compasse all the seate.[35]

Elizabeth, he says, is "heauenly".

There is another apparent example of self-contradiction or hypocrisy in Sidney's *Arcadia*, when he describes how Euarchus:

> did wisely consider the people to be naturally taken with exterior shows far more than with inward consideration of the material points.[36]

It is noteworthy that Sidney associated this attachment to "shows" with "the people", thus distancing himself from it. Nevertheless, he is acknowledging the efficacy of visual display to enforce secular power, although his Protestant beliefs would presumably have abhorred such visual display in a religious context.

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35. Blenerhasset, sigs.B3v, A4v.

36. Sidney, *Arcadia*, Bk.V, Ch. 4, p.806.

To dismiss this as mere hypocrisy is to ignore the careful distinctions drawn by Elizabethans between religious and secular art. In fact, even the most fierce iconomachs generally accepted imagery in secular and political contexts. Thomas Becon, in *A new Catechisme* (composed 1559-60, published 1560-64) utterly opposed images in churches, which he said should be destroyed; but, "in politic, civil, profane, and worldly things the use of images is not unlawful." He pointed out that Christ accepted the imperial coinage bearing Caesar's head.[37] Alexander Nowell, in his *Catechism* of 1570, which from 1571 was used in all schools, said that although the Second Commandment seems to condemn all portraiture and images, they are permissible provided they are outside the Church and play no part in the worship of God.[38] William Perkins, in his books *A Reformed Catholike* (1598) and *A Warning against the Idolatrie of the last times* (1601), unequivocally condemned all religious images, but also:

> discerned three kinds of lawful secular imagery: where it was purely symbolical and had a political use, such as monarchs' heads on coinage; where it had historical or commemorative use, as in portraiture, or in depictions of historical events; and lastly, in ornamenting or beautifying civil architecture.[39]

The glorification of Elizabeth in panegyric could also be defended as non-idolatrous on the grounds that it was edifying, particularly in the context of Christian neo-Platonism. According to this philosophy, a golden image created in art or poetry could be a glimpse of a perfection beyond

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37. Aston, p.442.

38. Aston, p.448.

39. Aston, p.450.

this world, and as such could inspire the beholder to reach upward into that spiritual plane. In his *Defence of Poetry*, Sidney writes that the poet does not simply imitate nature, but:

> ... doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like ... [Nature's] world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden. (p.78.)[40]

Nature has not brought forth "so right a prince as Xenophon's Cyrus", but the poet's delivering forth of the *idea* of a Cyrus

> worketh, not only to make a Cyrus, which had been but a particular excellency as nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses, if they will learn aright why and how that maker made him. (p.79.)

Such idealised images can improve the reader, by inspiring emulation, as in heroical poetry:

> For as the image of each Action stirreth and instructeth the mind, so the loftie image of suche woorthies most inflameth the mind with desire to be worthy, and informs with counsel how to be worthy. (p.98.)

Even when such an idealised poetic image bears the name of a real person, this is not necessarily an accurate depiction of that person:

> [Poets'] naming of men is but to make their picture the more lively, and not to build any history: painting men, they cannot leave men nameless ... The poet nameth Cyrus or Aeneas no other way than to show what men of their fames, fortunes, and estates should do.

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40. Sir Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry*, in *Miscellaneous Prose*, pp.59-121.

So, if a poet represented Elizabeth as glorious, perfect and divine, this could be not a representation of the Queen as she was, but an image of an ideal. The poet did not necessarily believe that the real Elizabeth, outside his poetry, was perfect and divine. The spectacle of the ideal Protestant ruler could be intended to inspire the reader or beholder - or, indeed, it could be an image for the real Elizabeth herself to aspire to. This may be what Sir Guyon means when he describes Gloriana as an "Idol":

> men beholding so great excellence,
> And rare perfection in mortalitie,
> Do her adore with sacred reverence,
> As th'Idole of her makers great magnificence. (II.ii.41.)

The perfection of God has its earthly image in Gloriana; and, in turn, Gloriana is an idealised image of Elizabeth. Spenser is drawing a template for Elizabeth of what she is, or could be, in an ideal world. This theory of praise is elucidated by Jonson in his "Epistle to Selden": he admits that he "prais'd some names too much; / But'twas with purpose to have made them such."[41]

Ultimately, glorifying images of Elizabeth could be justified as non-idolatrous simply on the grounds that they were "true", Protestant images, and not "false", Catholic images. They were analagous to the continued use of St.George as patron saint of England and emblem of the Order of the Garter. Garter knights wore a badge showing St.George slaying the dragon - surely an image of a saint, in contradiction of Protestant opposition to

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41. Ben Jonson, "An Epistle to Master John Selden", *The Poems of Ben Jonson*, ed. Bernard H. Newdigate (Oxford: Blackwell, 1936), pp.111-13.

idolatry.[42] But the rejection of Catholic images was grounded in a belief that they falsified and distracted from spiritual truth; whereas the image of St.George, and the image of Elizabeth, as symbols of both the English nation and the Protestant English Church, could be regarded as embodying a spiritual truth. There were similar justifications for the erection of the royal arms in churches, where the holy rood used to be, with its crucifix and statues of Mary and John the Baptist. To Catholics, this was a clear case of idolatry: Nicholas Sander, in his propaganda-history of the *Rise and Growth of the Anglican Schism*, 1585, asserted that the original replacement of the holy rood with the royal arms under Edward VI

> ... was like a declaration on their part that they were worshippers, not of our Lord, whose image they had comtemptuously [sic] thrown aside, but of an earthly king, whose armorial bearings they had substituted for it.[43]

To a Protestant subject of Elizabeth, however, allegiance to Crown and Church were one and the same.

If there was a contradiction in Elizabethan attitudes to the use of images, it lay not in a simple conflict between professed total rejection of images and a hypocritical continued use of them. Only a minority of Elizabethans advocated the total repudiation of images. It was rather that contradiction existed between different theoretical justifications of the continued use of images in the service of the Crown and state. Some

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42. See Strong, *Cult*, pp.168, 181-5.

43. trans. & ed. David Lewis (London, 1877), p.172.

writers defended the use of visual imagery in the service of secular power precisely because it was no longer acceptable in church; the secular sphere was where it belonged. Becon said that the use of images in "politic [and] civil thinngs" was acceptable precisely because they were "profane, and worldly" (see p.164 above). In such arguments, a radical distinction between sacred and secular was asserted. But in many other aspects of Elizabethan theory and practice, it was precisely the likenesses between secular and sacred which were emphasised, justifying the use of images of the Queen and the nation because they were identified with the new Elizabethan Church, and were therefore held to embody a Protestant spiritual truth.

The monarch as a spiritual figure

Not only imagery, but also other aspects of the structures of religion were used to support Elizabeth's rule. The Church Homilies, and the special orders of prayer issued by the government at various points in the reign, were used to inculcate belief in the spiritual mandate of Elizabeth's government and the sinfulness of rebellion.[44] Such close identification of the Crown with the Church was possible partly because of the Elizabeth's role as Supreme Governor of the Church and establisher of the true faith in England; but also because of traditional beliefs in the

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44. See *Liturgies and Occasional Forms of Prayer set forth in the reign of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. Rev. William Keatinge Clay for the Parker Society (Cambridge UP, 1847), passim; "An Exhortation Concerning Good Order and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates" and "Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion", in *Homilies*.

spiritual powers of the ruler, as God's anointed. John Howson, in his Accession Day sermon of 1602, preached that, to maintain proper order and hierarchy,

> God honoreth Princes with his owne name, so that they are called *Gods*, and *Gods annointed*, and the *sonnes of the most high*: he calleth them by his owne name, and furnisheth them with divine and supernatural qualities.

These are powers of prophecy, depth of heart, miraculous healing, absolute power answerable only to God, and the power to bless and curse.[45]

There were particular rituals, perpetuated through Elizabeth's reign, which supported belief in these powers, such as the giving of alms and washing of feet on Maundy Thursday, and the laying on of hands to cure the King's Evil. Both these ceremonies were accompanied by Scripture readings which emphasised the Queen's Christ-like role.[46] Similarly, the entitling of Elizabeth as "Prince of Peace" (see p.74) stressed her role as Christ's agent on earth, and was therefore not blasphemous. Such thinking was particularly bound up with the idea of the King's Two Bodies: Elizabeth was the human embodiment of the spiritual entity of monarchy, just as Christ was the Holy Spirit made flesh.[47] Thus the Recorder of London, in a speech to Elizabeth in 1593, spoke of the pleasure of the subjects in

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45. *A Sermon preached at St. Maries in Oxford, the 17 Day of November, 1602, in defence of the Festivities of the Church of England, and namely that of her Maiesties Coronation* (Oxford: 1602), sigs.D1v-D2r.

46. See Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, pp.325-6; Raymond Crawford, *The King's Evil* (Oxford UP, 1911), pp.64-78.

47. See Kantorowicz, p.16.

beholding their Prince: "... but, which is more, if they might be heard of *him*, and their actions and services by *his* princely favour approved ..." (my emphasis). The pronoun is masculine because what the people behold is the embodiment of the King of England; and, even more than this, "haveing obtayned ... accesse to your sacred person, [we] cannot but behold the same as the visible majesty of God, to our unspeakable joy and consolation."[48] Elizabeth herself described her role in similar terms; she wrote to Thomas Butler, Earl of Ormonde, in 1597, that she would treat the Irish rebels with mercy, "in imitation of God Almighty (Whose minister we are here on earth, and Who forgiveth all sins)."[49]

Accession Day

A new Elizabethan addition to the ritual surrounding monarchy was the celebration of Accession Day. This practice is central to the discussion of the relationship between the cult of Elizabeth and the cult of the Virgin Mary. For one thing, it is an example of an occasion associated with the Queen which seems to have taken a form very like a saint's day, being often described as "Elizaes hollyday".[50] The celebrations of November 17th, the anniversary of Elizabeth's accession, seem in the later years of the reign to have been extended to include November 19th, St. Elizabeth's day; and the date of the similar celebration which arose on

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48. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, p.228.

49. Elizabeth I, *Letters*, p.256.

50. Peele, *Anglorum Feriae*, in Prouty, gen. ed., Vol.I, pp.265-75, l.268.

Elizabeth's birthday, the 7th of September, suggests a direct substitution for a feast associated with the Virgin, since it was the eve of the feast of Mary's nativity. Moreover, the celebrations can be interpreted, from contemporary accounts, as having arisen from a grass-roots level, as a spontaneous expression of popular fervour, supporting the argument that there was a mass psychological need for such occasions. Finally, the Accession Day issue is of interest because it aroused protests from both Catholics and Protestants on grounds of idolatry.

The poems, ballads and speeches composed for Accession Day frequently employ imagery which likens it to a saint's day. Some verses entitled "Rowland's Song in Praise of the Fairest Beta", which are derivative of Spenser's "Aprill" Eclogue, proclaim "*Beta's* holy-day":

> Beta, long may thine altars smoake with yeerely sacrifice,
> And long thy sacred temples may their sabaoths solemnise![51]

Two other poems for November 17th, possibly by Sir Philip Sidney, refer to it as a "Sabaothe", a holy time which cannot be defiled with work:

> Singe neighbours singe, here yow not Say,
> This Sabaothe day:
> A Sabaoth is reputed,
> Of such a roiall Saincte,
> As all Sayntes els confuted,
> Is Love without constrainte.[52]

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51. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, pp.63-5.

52. "AT 19", "AT 21", in *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. William A. Ringler Jr. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), pp.356-58.

These "Sidney" poems also support the view that the celebrations were popular and spontaneous; in the first, it is stated that "... great, and small, rich, poore, and eche degree. / Yeld, fayth, Love, Joy, and prove what in them bee". Such a view is maintained by J.E. Neale and by Roy Strong. Neale puts forward the "psychological gap" theory to account for the celebrations:

> Protestant England cut down the number of saints and thereby deprived the people and their bell-ringers of much traditional festivity.
>
> The diminution in saints' days, we may presume, produced favourable conditions for the more or less spontaneous appearance of a new type of Holy Day.[53]

"More or less", he concedes; Strong is more adamant that:

> The festivities on Accession Day were both courtly and popular ... the Queen's Accession Day was not only a court fête, it was a national festival. All over England Elizabeth's subjects expressed their joy in her government by prayers and sermons, bell-ringing, bonfires and feasting.[54]

Both writers are of the opinion that the celebration arose from a "wave of popular feeling for the Queen which swelled" after the Northern Rebellion of 1569, and the papal bull of excommunication of 1570.[55]

However, the institution of the patriotic feast was clearly of great

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53. "November 17th", in *Essays in Elizabethan History*, p.10.

54. Strong, *Cult*, p.117.

55. Strong, *Cult*, p.119; Neale, "November 17th", p.10. Strong's reference to the Queen's survival of "a dangerous attack of smallpox in 1572", as a contributory factor to the inauguration of Accession Day, may be a confusion with her near-death from smallpox in 1562.

convenience to the government, whether it was taking advantage of a spontaneous movement, or imposing the celebration from above. Both Neale and Strong mention information which implies that the festivities were not wholly spontaneous. For instance:

> By 1576 the Church had added the day to its select rota of Holy Days, and in that year the royal printer issued 'A Form of Prayer with Thanks Giving, to be used every year, the 17th of November, being the day of the Queen's Majesty's entry to her reign.

The first lesson of this official service-book was a choice of passages recalling holy rulers of Israel; the second lesson was Chapter 13 of Romans, with its sonorous opening pronouncement, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher power. For there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God."[56] Strong, while constantly stressing the popular nature of the merry-making, remarks that "Town officials anxious for government favours, saw to it that the 17th of November was observed with public rejoicing."[57] In his more recent work, Strong has acknowledged that "as research progresses it becomes clearer that there was more deliberate orchestration from the centre than was thought twenty-five years ago."[58]

It is difficult to discover the precise extent to which the Day was celebrated at a popular level, rather than by official command, since the

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56. Neale, "November 17th", pp.12-13; Strong, *Cult*, p.121.

57. Strong, *Cult*, p.119.

58. Strong, *Gloriana*, p.42.

evidence which has come down to us is largely of the elaborate tournaments at court,[59] with few details for rural parishes beyond the payment of bell-ringers. It is difficult to tell whether a poet such as Maurice Kyffin, in his Accession Day verses of 1587, is describing common practice, or exhorting uncommon enthusiasm, on an idealised pastoral model:

> Ye Cuntry folke, foorth stalking in your feelds,
> Lowd Carols sing, to celebrat This Tyme;
> Show Signes of ioy (as Cuntry manner yeldes,)
> In Sporting Games, with Daunce, and rurall Ryme.[60]

In 1585, Edmund Bunny, subdeacon of York, issued an order of prayer for November 17th supplementary to those already issued by the central government in 1576 and 1579; its purpose, he said, was to promote the religious observance of Accession Day, "especially in these partes where I am resident"; which suggests that, in the diocese of York at least, the holiday had not readily taken hold.[61]

Much of our information about November 17th is drawn from attacks and defences of the festivity. Among Catholics, such protests were aroused as that of Edward Rishton, in "The Anglican Schism Renewed under Elizabeth", his continuation of Nicholas Sander's *The Rise and Growth of*

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59. See, for instance, Richard Brakenbury's letter to Lord Talbot describing the 1590 jousts (Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol. III, pp.69-70); letter from Mr. Chamberlain, 19th Nov. 1602 (Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, p.600).

60. Hazlitt, ed., 1st. series, no.XXIX.

61. *Liturgies*, pp.467, 548.

the Anglican Schism. He described how:

> ... [Elizabeth's] birthday and ... the day of her coronation ... are kept with more solemnity throughout the kingdom than the festivals of Christ and of the saints ... And to show the greater contempt for our Blessed Lady, they keep the birthday of queen Elizabeth in the most solemn way on the 7th day of September, which is the eve of the feast of the Mother of God, whose nativity they mark in their calendar in small and black letters, while that of Elizabeth is marked in letters both large and red. And, what is hardly credible, in the church of St.Paul, the chief church of London - whether elsewhere or not is more than I can tell - the praises of Elizabeth are said to be sung at the end of the public prayers, as the Antiphon of our Lady was sung in former days.[62]

A further Catholic attack came from William Rainolds in 1597.

One of the most forceful replies to them came from Thomas Holland, whose Accession Day sermon of 1599 had appended to it, when published, "The Apologie or Defence of the Church and Common-wealth of England for their annuall celebration of Q.Elizabeths Coronation Day the 17. of Novemb." Holland asserted that the festivities were popular as well as courtly: the day was marked by "ioyfull exercises" as well as "Courtly triumphes",[63] described in detail as:

> the triumphs vndertaken and performed at Courte that day, bonfires, ringing of bels, discharging of Ordinance at the Tower of London in the honour of the Queene, and other signes of ioy then vsually and willingly exhibited by the people of our Land to expresse their vnfained loue to her Maiestie. (sig.H3r.)

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62. Sander, pp.284-5.

63. *A Sermon Preached at Pavls in London the 17. of November Ann. Dom. 1599 ... Whervnto is adioyned an Apologeticall discourse ...* (London, 1601), title page.

However, there is a hint that Holland might be exaggerating the universality of the rejoicings, when he says that, "the 17. of November in all Parishes of this Realme, *or in most*, there is great practise of ringing." (sig.03r., my emphasis.)

Holland is the source for one version of the history of Accession Day. He relates that it began in about the twelfth year of the reign, and that as far as he can find out:

> the first publike celebrity of it was instituted in *Oxford* (by *D.Cooper* being then there Vicechauncelour after B.of *Lincolne*, and by remoue from thence B.of *Winchester*) from whence this institution flowed by a voluntary current over all this Realme. (sig. N4r.)

He is at pains to stress that it was not imposed, but has ever since "voluntarily continued". However, one might wonder whether Dr.Cooper's aspirations to a bishopric might have been a stronger motivation behind the institution of festivities in Oxford than an outpouring of patriotic fervour by the ordinary townspeople. One might also inquire into Holland's motives for stressing so vehemently the voluntary nature of the celebrations: he almost protests too much. Moreover, he describes one of his purposes in writing as a desire to make a gesture of gratitude to Elizabeth for her patronage of him at Oxford and when chaplain to the Earl of Leicester in the Netherlands (sig. H2r.). His inspiration is a desire to ingratiate and flatter rather than to write an objective account of the feast day. He describes another of his purposes in writing as a wish that

> all faithful subiects of this Realme may behold as in a glasse the good fruites that due obedience vsually bringeth forth ... & what offices of benevolence all true subiectes owe by the law of God and man, to their princes, superiours & governours, who beare the sword by Gods ordinaunce. (sig. H1v.)

The spontaneity of the festivities is also stressed by Holland because it forms a plank of his defence of the observance of Accession Day against the charge of idolatry. He argues that Catholic critics confuse the observance of 7th September with that of 17th November; that the former is not marked as a formal holy-day (sig L2r); and, moreover, that 17th November, whose observances more closely resemble those of a saint's day, cannot be described as a formal holy-day either, precisely because the celebrations are spontaneous expressions of joy and are not imposed by Church or State (sig. R1r-v). He fiercely refutes Catholic charges of idolatry (sig. H4v, Or-v), and argues throughout that the celebrations thank God for the peaceful rule of Elizabeth, rather than praising the Queen herself as a quasi-divine figure. Overall, he seeks to base his defence on the argument that Accession Day is a secular occasion, in no way imitative of a saint's day.

In this he is contradicted not only by such evidence as the "Sidney" poems which hymn Elizabeth as a saint, but also by himself: on his title-page he declared that he will defend "observing the 17. of November yeerely in the forme of an Holy-day." He is on firmer ground when he argues that Accession Day is justified because there is scriptural authority for the praise of a virtuous ruler (sig. I2r-v, R3r-4r). What Accession Day was all about, like so many aspects of the "cult" of Elizabeth, was the astute use of the tools of spiritual authority to support and enforce political authority. It could be most convincingly defended not by denying its religious aspects, but by asserting the spiritual status of the Queen as protector of the true faith and

instrument of God. Holland ties himself in knots by seeking to play down the religious aspects of Accession Day; but in doing so he provides a clear illustration that Elizabethans were far from unconscious of the danger of charges of idolatry for the rituals surrounding their monarch.

In particular relation to Mariolatry, Holland's defence is of great interest in showing the attitude of a Protestant churchman to the Virgin in 1599. He begins by significantly distancing himself from the first generation of reformers:

> ... some will heere obiect that in this discourse I imitate my forefathers of our pretended reformation, and tread in their steppes, whoe longe agoe haue proclaimed open warre against Gods saintes, & especially against the *Blessed Virgine* ... Vnto whome I make this answere. God forbid that I or any one that cal vpon the name of God, their God & ours, should speake dishonorably of the least member of Gods house, much lesse of them that walke with the lambe vpon mount Sion ... (sig K4v.)

He continues to express his respect for the Virgin - adding a proviso:

> Neither let any bee seduced with any such sinister persuasion, that any one that professeth sincere religion hath any misconceipt, or will vse any dispitefull, or contumelious speeches against the mother of God; yet heerein vve must ever obserue this caveat in all speech, wherein vvee mention her honour, that none of these attributes, titles, and dignities, whereby shee is remembred, be noe waies derogatory to Gods glory ... (sig. L1r.)

He concludes by summarising the extremes of mistaken attitudes towards Mary; the danger is equally blasphemy, or idolatry:

> ... some speake despitefully of the *B.Virgine*, and that is impiety: some make her a God by deifying her, and that is a madd fury ... let *Mary* the blessed Virgin be honored, the father, the sonne, & the holy ghost onely be adored. (sig. L1v)

This, of course, was identical to official Catholic doctrine. But Holland

resists those elements of Catholicism which might spill over into excessive glorification of the Virgin: he is at pains to refute the Immaculate Conception, not a dogma at this date, but a widespread belief. Mary was "noe othervvise borne, then as naturally man is borne of the seede of man, conceiued in the wombe of her mother." (sig. L1v-2r.) Thus a middle course is drawn out: although deification of the Virgin as more than human is seen as wrong, equally wrong is a disrespect for her which has come to be associated with the early reformers. This sense of a qualified movement back towards the Virgin is important to bear in mind when we come to look at Marian imagery as an increasing element in panegyric of Elizabeth in the later years of her reign (see pp.184, 259, 263-65 below.)

Another defender of Accession Day, John Howson, preaching in 1602, also espoused moderation. He said that, regarding saints' days, there was

> nothing amisse, til the Calender being overcharged with false and counterfeite popish saints, we reduced it to the compasse of our most auncient and Christian festiuities.
>
> Al which festivities notwithstanding this reformation haue found their enemies, and oppugning arguments, as also this daie which now we celebrate.[64]

Howson admits that the Accession Day celebrations are not only opposed by "Preistes and Iesuites", but also "haue their adversaries at home among vs" (dedication). One such Protestant adversary was Robert Wright, the Puritan chaplain to Lord Rich, who in 1581 attacked the practice as "idolatrous worship". He was thrown into prison for his views;[65] strong evidence that,

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64. Howson, sig.B3v.

65. Strong, *Cult*, p.125.

however popular its origin, the observance of Accession Day was resolutely sustained by the authority of the government.

Accession Day seems to be another example of the government using ritual in order to reinforce its own authority. This is not to deny that the general populace took a pleasure in holy-days which the government was able to exploit; but it is rather different from seeing the festivities as arising spontaneously from the need of the masses to fill a post-Reformation "psychological gap". The controversy surrounding Accession Day suggests that, far from "half-consciously" transferring to their Queen the devotion which previous generations had felt towards saints or the Virgin, many people were aware of the problem of apparent idolatry in the rituals surrounding their monarch. It also illustrates the variety of opinion which existed amongst Elizabeth's subjects, making it unwise to generalise about what Elizabethans thought or believed.

Catholic participation in the cult of Elizabeth

It must not be forgotten that Elizabeth had a number of Catholic subjects. It is perhaps more surprising than the fact that her Protestant subjects found arguments to defend their praise of her as non-idolatrous, to find some Catholics also participating in panegyric. Individuals like Henry Constable, a convert to Catholicism, distinguished between their religion and their patriotism. He wrote to the Earl of Essex,

> Though I am passionately affectionated to my Religion yet am I not in the nomber of those w[hi]ch wish th[e] restitution thereof w[i]t[h]

th[e] seruitude of my country to a forrain Tyranny.[66]

Constable wrote three complimentary sonnets to the Queen, two some time before his conversion, but one in 1589, a year when he seems to have been in some religious turmoil immediately prior to his conversion. This sonnet is particularly interesting; it runs:

> Most sacred prince why should I thee thus prayse
> Which both of sin and sorrow cause hast beene
> Proude hast thow made thy land of such a Queene
> Thy neighboures enviouse of thy happie dayes.
>
> Whoe neuer sawe the sunshine of thy rayes
> An everlasting night his life doth ween
> And he whose eyes thy eyes but once haue seene
> A thowsand signes of burning thoughts bewrayes
>
> Thus sin thow causd envye I meane and pride
> Thus fire and darknesse doe proceed from thee
> The very paynes which men in hell abide
>
> Oh no not hell but purgatorie this
> Whose sowles some say by Angells punish'd be
> For thow art shee from whome this torment is. (p.138.)

The attitude of this poem is unfixed: its form is that of panegyric, especially in the second quatrain, but the tone of the rest of the sonnet is dark and accusatory. Even if the reason is her beauty and success, nevertheless Elizabeth is the cause of "sin and sorrow"; and her courtiers exist in a state of unfulfilled and unattainable desire which is a "torment" described in terms of Purgatory, a Catholic doctrine.

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66. *The Poems of Henry Constable*, ed. Joan Grundy (Liverpool UP, 1960), p.37.

Even though Constable's attempt at panegyric is very dark and contorted, the poems which he wrote to the Virgin Mary after his conversion illustrate the attractions of earthly pomp for him, and the proximity of religious and state ritual. He wrote:

> Soveraigne of Queenes: If vayne Ambition move
> my hart to seeke an earthly prynces grace:
> shewe me thy sonne in his imperiall place,
> whose servants reigne, our kynges & queenes above ...
> And love, my hart to chaste desyres shall brynge,
> when fayrest Queene lookes on me from her throne
> and jealous byddes me love but her alone.
> ("To our blessed Lady", p.189.)

With its diction of power and love, this is precisely the idiom of court panegyric. Another poem to the Virgin runs,

> Why should I any love O queene but thee? ...
> If love doe followe worth and dignitye?
> thou all in [thy] perfections doest exccede:
> if love be ledd by hope of future meede?
> what pleasure more then thee in heaven to see?
> ("To our blessed Lady", p.190.)

Evidently what Constable had renounced in his conversion was not his attraction to splendour, power, and reward; what he describes the Virgin Mary as offering him are precisely the gains on offer to the participant in the cult of Elizabeth, only more so.

Ben Jonson wrote *Cynthia's Revels* during his Catholic period, a play ostensibly in praise of the Queen and written in an attempt to gain royal favour. Like Constable's sonnet, it exhibits signs of ambivalence towards the image of the Queen, but nevertheless it constitutes participation in royal panegyric by a Catholic.

There are other interesting examples among musicians. John Dowland, who wrote some of the most well-known songs in praise of the Queen, seems to have been a Catholic, though perhaps of rather flexible devotional allegiance. Nevertheless, he wrote to Robert Cecil in November 1595, regarding his hopes of a place at court, "I heard that her Majesty being spoke to for me, said I was a man to serve any prince in the world, but I was an obstinate papist."[67] If this is true, then it was contrary to the experience of William Byrd, who was a gentleman of the Queen's Chapel, and was shown great favour by the Crown, including the grant of a virtual monopoly in printed music. This was despite being a devout Catholic all his life, and being regularly reported as a recusant in the 1590s. Perhaps royal favour was bestowed on Byrd simply because he was the best musician of his day, and it was therefore an asset to have him in the royal service; or perhaps it was because, apart from his recusancy, he gave every sign of loyalty. Despite his Catholicism, he composed much of the finest music of the reformed English Church.[68]

Among other loyal Catholics were Lord and Lady Montague, who entertained Elizabeth at Cowdray, a centre of Catholicism, on her progress of 1591. The entertainment stressed the loyalty of the county of Sussex and of the Montague family, and included panegyric of Elizabeth as divine: she has a "heauenly face not framd of earthly molde," and she is "Goddesse and Monarch of (t)his happie Ile."[69]

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67. Diana Poulton, *John Dowland* (London: Faber, 1972), p.38.

68. See Edmund H. Fellowes, *William Byrd* (London: Oxford UP, 1936), passim.

69. J.Wilson, pp.86, 89-90.

John Howson, in his Accession Day sermon of 1602, defended the celebration of November 17th as follows:

> If the particular Church of England had auctority in Queene Maries daies to appoint two solemne & Anniversarie Masses to be yerely celebrated in St.Maries, the one on the 18. of Februarie beeing the Nativity of Queene Marie, & the other on the first of October, on which she was crowned ... and moreover appointed two solemne processions vpon the same daies ... I doubt not to affirme that the particular Church of England hath also auctority sufficient to institute, if so it please, the celebration of the Nativity, and inauguration of her excellent Maiestie, with publike sermons, common praiers, & thankesgiving.[70]

This is an astonishing way to defend Accession Day: it's all right, because the Catholics did the same - as if the Elizabethan Settlement had nothing to do with the Protestant Reformation, beyond the establishment of an autonomous national Church. It is an indication of the *rapprochement* with ritual and pre-Reformation practices which was taking place in the mainstream of the Church towards the end of Elizabeth's reign. Hooker, for instance, accepted many of the "popish" trappings of the Church which Jewel had formerly denounced, finding it permissible for churches to be named after saints, for saints' days to be celebrated, and for certain songs, including the *Magnificat*, the Virgin's song, to be used as forms of worship.[71] The French ambassador in 1597 said of the English Church,

> As for their ceremonies, they retain many, as vestments, bells and organs. Those who first changed religion in England were the Churchmen, and it was enough for them to change the doctrine but to

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70. Howson, sig.C3r.

71. Hooker, vol.II, pp.44-5, 349-73, 113.

> retain the more notable ceremonies ... it seems, saving for the images, that there is little difference between their ceremonies and those of the Church of Rome.[72]

And the Church of Rome, as Howson's sermon indicates, had long accepted the use of religious ritual to solemnise and celebrate secular rule. Gardiner, who opposed iconoclasm in 1547 because of its threat to the regalia of monarchy (see pp.157-8 above), was leader of the conservative religious party and essentially a Catholic. For Catholic subjects of Elizabeth, any problems in participating in her cult would lie less in unease over idolatry, than in the apparent *political* disloyalty of praising the figure whom their Church had named as its enemy. Some Catholics, like Byrd and the Montagues, evidently found that she was no enemy to them personally provided that they were no enemies to her, enabling them to separate their faith from their political allegiance.

The fact that Protestants and some Catholics could join in praise of Elizabeth, without objections of idolatry on the one hand or blasphemy on the other, might seem to bear out Strong's point that there was a considerable contradiction between what Elizabethans preached, and what they did in practice. However, for the majority of Elizabeth's Protestant subjects, there was no contradiction. While some, identifiably Catholic images were seen as spiritually dangerous and misleading, other forms of imagery were accepted as edifying and "true"; and the close identification of Church and state enabled symbolism and ritual surrounding the monarchy

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72. Hurault, pp.19, 22.

to be seen as just such "true" imagery. The use of visual splendour and lofty praise to inculcate loyalty to the Crown was not an unconscious mistake, but the considered policy approved by eminent and educated Protestants, like Hooker, Sidney, Spenser, and Elizabeth herself. It was not surprising that such praise and spectacle should draw on religious imagery. What is perhaps surprising is that some literary panegyric appears to draw on precisely *pre*-Reformation, Catholic imagery. To understand this, we must consider the long tradition, going back through the Middle Ages, of commerce in imagery between secular and sacred literature.

3. The Cultural Heritage

Exchanges of imagery between secular and sacred literature

To understand just how strong was the tradition of an exchange of imagery between sacred and secular verse, we need to go back to mediaeval lyric verse. Many mediaeval religious lyrics present the Virgin Mary in the guise of a courtly mistress; indeed, in the case of some verses, such as "Maiden in the mor lay" (early 14th century), there is continuing debate as to whether it is an erotic love song, or an allegory of the Virgin.[1] Other examples, such as "Quia amore langueo" (c.1400)[2], and the following verses, apply all the conventional terms of courtly love to the Virgin:

> Nis non maide of thine hewe
> So fair, so shene, so rudy, so bright.
> Swete levedy, of me thu rewe,
> And have mercy of thine knight.[3]

No other maid "so derne loviye cunne", an erotic phrase meaning that no other maid knows how to love so profoundly or secretly.

Conversely, the following verses, praising the mercifulness, perfection, solace and grace of a lady, could easily be read as addressed to the Virgin:

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1. R.T. Davies, ed., *Mediaeval English Lyrics: A Critical Anthology* (London: Faber, 1963), p.102.
2. R.T. Davies, ed., p.148.
3. R.T. Davies, ed., p.65.

Most soveren lady, comfort of care,
A next in my hert, most in my minde,
Right welth and cause of my welefare,
Gentle trulove, special and kinde,
Eey pinacle, pight with stidfastness,
Right tristy, and truth of my salace,
Ever well-springinge stillatorye of sweteness,
Tresore full dere, gronded with grace.[4]

In fact, however, they are an acrostic, the first letters of each line spelling out the name "MARGARET". Clearly, then, before the Reformation, there was no blasphemy perceived in describing the Virgin Mary in terms of a fleshly mistress, or in describing a fleshly mistress in terms of the Virgin. Both were conflated to form a single schematised model of female perfection.

Moreover, a number of Elizabethan poems show that pre-Reformation religious practices, while excluded from public worship, continued to have currency as poetic figures. Amongst the nonsense-refrains of madrigals can be found allusions to saints and pilgrimages, presumably a survival of pre-Reformation folk-songs:

Heave and ho,
Rumbelo.
Hey trolo, troly lo!

My lady's gone to Canterbury,
Saint Thomas, be her boot!
She met with Kate of Malmesbury,
Why weep'st thou, maple root?[5]

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4. R.T. Davies, ed., p.254.

5. From Thomas Ravenscroft, *Pammelia* (1609), in Fellowes, ed., *English Madrigal Verse*, p.206.

Raleigh's "Walsingham" is another example of such a ballad-survival:

> As you came from the holy land
> Of Walsinghame
> Mett you not with my true loue
> By the way as you came?[6]

When this poem was composed, presumably on the base of a popular song, the shrine at Walsingham would have been in ruins for well over fifty years. However strictly dictates from above attempted to impose the Reformation, it would clearly take some time to filter through and permeate those areas in which the practices and trappings of Catholicism had become an intrinsic part of popular culture.

Douglas Gray, in his study of mediaeval religious lyrics, has pointed out their striking similarity, in themes and images, to the renowned religious lyrics of the seventeenth-century. He notes that the gulf between pre- and post-Reformation English poets was not as wide as we might assume:

> Apart from the few great disputed points of dogma, the spiritual inheritance of Catholic and Protestant was often surprisingly similar.[7]

He also points out that religious lyrics were not subject to instant destruction in the same way as visual images were; some seem to have

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6. *The Poems of Sir Walter Ralegh*, ed. Agnes M.C. Latham (London: Routledge, 1951), p.22.

7. *Themes and Images in the Mediaeval English Religious Lyric* (London: Routledge, 1972), p.224.

faded and declined over a period of time, in the light of the new beliefs, while others survived for centuries as carols and popular songs (pp.221-2). George Herbert's well-known campaign, in his poetry, to turn secular love poetry to sacred uses, was nothing new; the same policy had been pursued by various mediaeval churchmen,[8] and by Robert Southwell in the 1580s. So running right through the Elizabethan period was a continuity of shared imagery between secular and sacred verse.

This commerce in imagery was given a further impetus by the influence of Petrarch and neo-Platonism. A commonplace of the sonnet-sequence was the use of religious imagery, in which the mistress was her lover's "saint". This is the idiom in which the famous first meeting between Romeo and Juliet is couched; the lines in which Romeo as a "pilgrim" at Juliet's "shrine" craves a kiss, are written in the form of a sonnet.[9]

Indeed, many of the Protestant Elizabethan poems quoted in anthologies of religious verse are extracts from longer works on the theme of love, such as Fulke Greville's *Caelica* or Spenser's *Amoretti*.[10] One often included is *Amoretti* LXVIII, in which, writing on Easter Day, Spenser takes Christ's love for mankind as a model for the love to which he and his

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8. R.T. Davies, ed., pp.24, 31.

9. *Romeo and Juliet* I.v.91-104, in Shakespeare, ed. Alexander.

10. See, for example, *The Oxford Book of Religious Verse*, ed. David Cecil (Oxford UP, 1940), pp.55-81; *The Faber Book of Religious Verse*, ed. Helen Gardner (London: Faber, 1972), pp.74-93.

mistress should aspire: "So let vs loue, deare loue, lyke as we ought, / loue is the lesson which the Lord vs taught."[11] While recusant poets continued to write hymns to the Virgin and saints, Protestant poets transferred their spiritual energies into their secular verse, elevating the theme of love to a metaphysical level. It is hard to find a self-proclaimedly sacred poem by an Elizabethan Protestant poet; but religious feeling continued to find expression within their purportedly secular verse.

If, as we see, it was commonplace for mortal lovers to be compared to saints, or even to Christ as the lover of mankind, it is conceivable that there would have been no implication of blasphemy in comparing a mortal queen with the Virgin Mary. Moreover, it was evidently possible to treat the Virgin not so much as a theological entity, but as a poetic image. She was just one face of the ideal woman, who was described in much the same terms whether she was Christ's mother or the poet's mistress: she was chaste, her lips were red, her skin was white, she was a rose, a lily, and her eyes were like stars. There has been much discussion of how the court poetry generated around Elizabeth used the idiom of courtly love, with the courtier-poets acting out the roles of knights in the service of a mistress; we should not, therefore, be surprised if the same imagery which was exchanged between the Virgin Mary, and the erotic mistress, was in turn transferred to the Queen.

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11. Spenser, ed. Smith & de Selincourt, p.573.

Precedents of Marian imagery applied to queens

As well as a long tradition of secular mistresses being described in the same terms as the Virgin Mary, there was also a long tradition of temporal queens being praised in the same terms. Since the Virgin Mary was the highest ideal of femininity, comparison with her had naturally been the highest compliment that could be paid.

In thirteenth-century France, Blanche of Castile had been represented in ways which resembled the Virgin Mary.[12] In Elizabeth's own lifetime, panegyric of her sister Mary associated her with her namesake; so Catholics clearly saw no blasphemy in invoking the Mother of God as a likeness to a mortal ruler. A ballad called "Christ brought Home" used the Flight into Egypt as an allegory of Mary Tudor's exile and subsequent return, bearing with her the true religion:

> Herode by his great crueltie,
> Compelde Mary with Christ her sonne
> Into Egypt full fast to flye,
> Tyll God his wyll for her had done,
> Which wyll so wrought, her wyll she wonne
> This tyrant soone himselfe had slaine,
> Then Mary brought home Christ againe.[13]

Herod, the ungodly tyrant, represents Northumberland. Another broadsheet ballad, called "An Ave Maria", saw Mary as Judith defeating Northumberland

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12. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p.114.

13. Guiney, ed., p.127.

in the role of Holofernes, and as an earthly incarnation of the Blessed Virgin.[14]

William Forrest, Mary's chaplain, composed "A New Ballade of the Marigolde", in which he proclaims the Marigold to be superior to all other flowers:

> To MARIE our queene, that floure so sweete,
> This Marigolde I doo apply:
> For that the name doth serve so meete,
> And propertie in eache parte ...
> Shee may be calde Marigolde well,
> Of *Marie* (chiefe) Christes mother deere;
> That as in heaven shee doth excell,
> And *golde* in earth to have no peere,
> So certainly, she shineth cleere,
> In grace and honour double folde,
> The like was never earst seene heere -
> Suche is this flowre, the Marigolde.[15]

As would later be the case for Elizabeth, some of the most direct identification between Mary I and the Virgin Mary took place at her death. An "Epitaph upon the Death of the most excellent and our late vertuous Quene MARIE, deceased", proclaimed,

> ... to praye was her delight
> ... a Mary named right ...
> O mirrour of all womanhed! O Quene of vertues pure!
> O constant MARIE! filde with grace; no age can thee obscure.[16]

Another Catholic Queen Mary, Mary Queen of Scots, was also elegised in

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14. Hyder E.Rollins, ed., *Old English Ballads* (Cambridge UP, 1920), p.14.

15. Oldys & Park, eds., vol.X, pp.253-4.

16. Oldys & Park, eds., vol.X, pp.259-60.

Marian imagery. An Italian poem on her death took the following form:

> each triad of the terza rima verse is accompanied in the margin by a phrase from the Ave Maria, so that one reads panegyrics to Mary of Scotland and Mary the Virgin at one and the same time.[17]

It is perhaps not so surprising to find Catholic queens called Mary being identified with the Virgin; although it is interesting that even those who still openly venerated the Blessed Virgin did not feel that any blasphemy was involved in identifying temporal queens with her. Even more interestingly, there is also evidence of Marian imagery in panegyric of a Protestant queen prior to Elizabeth, namely, her mother, Anne Boleyn, a heroine of the reformed religion (see p.154 above). One of the tableaux for her coronation pageant contained the following figures:

> St. Anne and her progeny, the three Marys - the Virgin, mother of Christ; Mary Salome, wife of Zebedee; and Mary Cleophe with her husband Alphee (sic) - together with the children of Mary Cleophe and of Mary Salome. The import of this pageant is succinctly explained by Hall, who writes that, when Anne drew near, a child 'made a goodly Oracion to the quene, of the fruitfulnes of saint Anne, and of her generacion, trustyng that like fruite should come of her.'[18]

The tableau is an allegory of fertility, in which the new Queen is clearly identified with St. Anne, by the correspondence of name, and also, implicitly, with her daughters, the three Maries, including the Virgin, all of them significant as mothers.[19] The verses by Udall which were spoken by

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17. Phillips, *Images*, p.165.

18. Anglo, p.253; and see *The noble tryumphant coronacyon of quene Anne ...* , printed by W.de Worde, 1533, sig.A4r-4v.

19. See Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, pp.23, 345, for the legend of the three Maries.

the child mentioned above linked this fertility to the preservation of the true faith: St. Anne's descendants through her daughters were Christ, the apostle James, and John the evangelist, and

> Wee the Citizens, by you in short space
> hope suche issue and descente to purchace.
> Whereby the same faith shalbee defended.[20]

Thus the correspondence of name and fertility between the Queen and St.Anne was used to turn a Marian tableau into a Protestant rallying-call. This suggests that the correspondence of virginity between Elizabeth and the Virgin Mary could have been used on the same principles to turn Marian imagery to Protestant use. What we must note here, and in the other examples of application of Marian imagery to queens, is that it is not being suggested that these queens should be worshipped in exactly the same way as the Virgin Mary; but, rather, Marian emblems and myths are being read in typological ways to create authoritative and prophetic representations of the rule of temporal queens.

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20. Furnivall & Morfill, vol.I, pp.388-9.

4. Literary examples of attitudes to religious images and idolatry

"Come over the born Bessy"

The ease with which, in the sixteenth-century, a poetic image could be transferred between the Virgin Mary, Queen Elizabeth, and a mistress, is well-illustrated by one particular song, "Come over the born Bessy". From about 1500 there exists the following ballad, sung by Christ to the soul:

> Com home againe!
> Com home againe!
> Mine owene swet hart, com home againe!
> Ye are gone astray
> Out of youer way,
> Therefore, com home againe!

The metaphor is the common one of Christ as a lover, the soul as his mistress; in fact, R.T. Davies comments that "The burden of this carol is quite probably secular", and it is likely

> ... that this religious poem was sung to a well-known secular tune, Christ complaining to the erring soul with the same music as a lover to his wandering sweetheart.[1]

Later, on Elizabeth's accession there appears William Birch's "A songe betwene the Quene's Majestie and Englande". This uses the same motif of the lover's call:

> England: Come over the born Bessy,
> Come over the born Bessy,
> Sweet Bessey come over to me,

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1. R.T. Davies, ed., pp.256-7.

And I shall thé take,
And my dere Lady make
Before all other that ever I see.[2]

Just as the soul, or the Church, or the Virgin, were habitually presented as the bride of Christ, so Elizabeth is presented as the bride of the kingdom.

However, this version of the ballad, too, apparently existed as a popular secular love song; so popular, in fact, that it endured until at least as late as the 1600s, when it turns up in *King Lear*. Edgar, in his guise of Poor Tom, sings, "Come o'er the bourn, Bessy, to me".[3] In about 1568, it featured as one of the snatches of idle love songs sung by the decadent Moros in W. Wager's *The Longer thou Livest the more Fool thou art*:

Com ouer the Boorne Besse,
My little pretie Besse,
Com ouer the Boorne besse to me.

Moros describes how he learnt these songs:

A fond woman to my Mother,
As I war wont in her lappe to sit,
She taught me these and many other.[4]

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2. Oldys & Park, eds., vol.X, pp.260-2.

3. William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, in *Complete Works*, ed. Alexander, III.vi.25.

4. W. Wager, *The Longer thou Livest the more Fool thou art*, c.1568 (The Tudor Facsimile Texts: 1910), sig.A3r-v.

Here we have an instructive example of a song whose origin was in popular culture, both secular and sacred; it was plucked from that context, being found appropriate, for the purpose of panegyric to Elizabeth; then it returned to popular culture, as a non-specific folk-song. This transference of the lover/mistress motif between sacred, secular, and panegyric contexts was performed easily, without any anxiety about blasphemy or profanity, simply because the song was well-liked and came naturally to hand.

Fulke Greville

But while the different appropriations of this popular ballad elided the sacred and the secular, a more problematic relationship between the two is evident in the writings of Fulke Greville. Like his friend Sidney, Greville was a devout Protestant, whose views on government policy were often opposed to those of the Crown. In his play *Alaham*, he wrote:

> People are superstitious, caught with showes:
> To power why doe they else their freedome giue,
> But that in others pompe these *shadowes* liue?[5]

This is an acknowledgement of the political force of visual show; while at the same time the mention of superstition implies that it partakes of popish idolatry. Greville, in many of his writings, virulently attacks those temporal rulers who exploit such superstition; in *An Inqvisition upon Fame and Honovr*, for instance, he says that:

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5. *Poems and Dramas of Fulke Greville, 1st Lord Brooke*, ed. G.Bullough, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1939), vol.II, pp.138-213; III.iii.89-91.

... spirituall pride (no doubt) possesseth still
All fleshly hearts, where thirst of *Honour* raues,
For sit vpon the seat of God they will,
As did those Princes, who in stead of graues
Made Idols, Altars, Temples to be rais'd,
Wherein, like gods, they were ador'd and prais'd.

As for those who collude in such adoration:

Who worship *Fame*, commit Idolatry,
Make Men their God, *Fortune* and *Time* their worth,
Forme, but reforme not; meer hypocrisie,
By shadowes, onely shadowes bringing forth,
Which must, as blossomes, fade ere true fruit springs,
Like voice, and *eccho* ioyn'd, yet diuers things.[6]

Idolatry is the specific name which Greville gives to the adulation of a temporal prince, and reverence for his or her public image. Unlike Becon, Nowell, and Perkins, he does not distinguish between worship of a saint's image and eulogy of a secular ruler; both, equally, are idolatrous. Yet this is the same Fulke Greville who wrote "Vnder a Throne I saw a Virgin sit", a poem often quoted as an example of the transfer of Marian imagery to Elizabeth, and, at any rate, a poem in the form of royal panegyric.[7] Elsewhere he writes of the necessity for a strong monarchy, and for proper obedience to it, in the following terms:

formes establisht, which must be obay'd
As levells for the world to guide her owne,
Foundations against Anarchie well layd,
Whose beinge is but beings overthrowne;
Where Thrones (as mortall shrynes) with mortall feare

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6. *An Inquisition upon Fame and Honour*, in Greville, ed. Bullough, vol.I, pp192-213; p.200, st.35; p.213, st.86.

7. *Caelica*, in Greville, ed. Bullough, vol.I, pp.73-153; p.131, Sonnet 81. See pp.221-2, 360-1 below for further discussion of this poem.

> Must be ador'd, and worshipt everie where.[8]

This seems to be precisely what he was condemning as idolatry; and yet he is now praising it, as a bulwark against anarchy.

Greville composed panegyric to Elizabeth of a somewhat ambivalent tone in *Caelica*, and of a more rapturous tone after her death, in his *Life of Sidney*. It is not surprising that Norbrook comments that

> Greville could resolve the conflict between his stylistic iconoclasm and his firm monarchism only by strategic ambiguities. This was not only a matter of evading censorship: he had genuine difficulty in reconciling the polarities of his thought.[9]

His different allegiances, to Protestant ideals and to an ideal of monarchy, produced paradox and inconsistency in his professed attitudes to the use of visual display and ritual for political purposes. His participation in royal panegyric was undermined by a profound consciousness of the danger of idolatry in such panegyric, leading him into tortuous argument with himself.

Puttenham's *Partheniades*

A text which exhibits far less anxiety concerning the use of images

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8. "The Excellencie of Monarchie Compared with Aristocratie and Democratie Joyntlie", *A Treatise of Monarchy*, in *The Remains: Being Poems of Monarchy and Religion*, ed. G.A. Wilkes (Oxford UP, 1965), p.201, st.663.

9. Norbrook, *Panegyric*, p.157.

is George Puttenham's *Partheniades*. These contain a section headed: "That amonge men many thinges be allowed of necessitye, many for ornament, which cannot be misliked, nor well spared without blemishe to the cyvile life."[10] Although many of the ensuing verses are confusing in their syntax, Puttenham's enthusiasm for ceremony is made clear:

> Take pomp from prelates, and maiestie from Kinges,
> Solemne circumstance from all these worldly thinges,
> We walke awrye and wander without lighte,
> Confoundinge all to make a Chaos quite. (11.388-91.)

The next section is subtitled:

> Conteinynge an invective agaynste the puritanes, with singular commendacion of her Maiesties consyderate iudgment *and* manner of proceedinge in the cause of religion.

Puttenham advocates pomp and circumstance in both politics and religion:

> [Take] obsequies from funeralls;
> From holy dayes, and fro weddinges,
> Minstrells and feasts and robes and ringes;
> Take fro Kinges Courtes intertaynmentes,
> From Ladyes riche habiliments, ...
> From worldlye thinges take vanitee,
> Sleit, semblant, course, order, and degree:
> Princesse, yt ys as if one take awaye
> Greene wooddes from forrests, and sunne-shine fro the daye.
> (11.400-4, 412-15.)

The Princess here addressed is Elizabeth, to whom the *Partheniades* are dedicated. The poem-sequence as a whole ends with a hymn to her, under the guise of Pallas:

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10. Furnivall & Morfill, eds., vol.II, pp.86-87.

Whye build we not thye temples hye,
Steples and towers to touch the skye,
Bestrewe thine altars *w*ith flowers thicke,
Sence them *w*ith odours arrabicque,
Performing all the revestryes
*W*ith muske, Cyvett and Ambergries,
In thy feast dayes to singe and dawnce
*W*ith lively leps and countenance,
And twise stoope downe at everye leape
To kisse the shadow of thy foot-stepe,
Thy lyvinge Ymage to adore,
Yealding the all earthly honour:
Not earthlye, no, but all divyne,
Taking for me thys hymne of myne!
THE END (11.542-55.)

This is a remarkable crescendo, proposing altars, incense, feast days and image-worship all dedicated to the adoration of Elizabeth - highly reminiscent of the cults of saints and Mariolatry. But Puttenham seems to seek to excuse it by framing it as a hymn to Pallas, even though he declares that Pallas' earthly name is "ELIZABET" (1.533). He says in the subtitle which introduces the set of verses, "All prayse by resemblance ys voyde of offence"; in other words, by praising Elizabeth in the guise of another figure, who is moreover a classical goddess and therefore a secular, literary object of praise, he seems to claim licence to use excessive and idolatrous terms without "offence". Having previously *likened* religion and secular power, in their mutual need for ritual, he now *separates* them: his feats of extravagant praise are asserted to be legitimate because they are "only" secular and literary.

Barnabe Barnes

A poem which sheds interesting light upon Elizabethan attitudes specifically to the Virgin Mary is Ode 3 of Barnabe Barnes's *Parthenophil*

and Parthenophe (1593). These names mean "Virgin" and "Lover-of-a-virgin."

Ode 3 reads as follows:

> Vpon an holy Saintes eue
> (As I tooke my pilgrimadge)
> Wandring through the forest warye
> (Blest be that holy sainte)
> I mette the louely Virgine *Marye*
> And kneeled with long trauell fainte
> Performing my dew homage,
> My teeres fore told mine hart did greeue
> Yet *Mary* would not me releeue.
>
> Her I did promise euery yeare,
> The firstling foemale of my flocke
> That in my loue she would me furder.
> I curst the dayes of my first loue,
> My comfortes spoiles, my pleasures murther:
> She, she alas did me reproue,
> My suites (as to a stonie rocke)
> Were made, for she would not giue eare.
> Ah loue, deare loue, loue bought to deare!
> *Mary*, my sainte chast, and milde
> Pittie, ah pittie my suite;
> Thou art a virgine, pittie me:
> Shine eyes, though pittie wanting
> That she by them my greefe may see
> And looke on mine hart panting:
> But her deefe eares, and tonge mute
> Shewes her hard hart vnreconcil'de,
> Hard hart, from all remorse exil'de.[11]

The speaker's unyielding mistress called Mary is metaphorised as a stone statue of the Virgin such as one might come across at a forest shrine.[12] The poem revolves around an outrageous idea: that Barnes is trying to seduce the Virgin Mary, at least on a metaphorical level. Pleading with a

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11. Ed. Victor A. Doyno (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1971), p.97.

12. For evidence that Barnes may really have had a mistress called Mary, see Barnes, *Parthenophil*, pp.xxi-iv.

mistress for sexual satisfaction is implied to be equivalent to praying to the Virgin for spiritual succour.

To some extent, Barnes is just making a logical extension of the mediaeval lyric convention of describing one's mistress as if she were the Virgin. One mediaeval lyric form which was interchangeable for songs of courtly love, and hymns to the Virgin, was the "chanson d'aventure", in which the poet describes how he rode or walked out one day, and met a lady, often in a wood or by a well. The lady may be his mistress, or a fairy-enchantress, or the Virgin, as in this example:

> At a sprynge-wel under a thorn,
> Ther was bote of bale
> A lytel here aforn.
> Ther bysyde stant a mayde
> Fulle of love ybounde.
> Hoso wel seche trwe love
> Yn hyr hyt schal be found.[13]

Barnes's Ode is an idiosyncratic adaptation of this form.

Interpretation of the Ode is complicated by the fact that the sonnet-sequence is dedicated to William Percy, brother of the Earl of Northumberland and member of one of the leading Catholic families, whose sister, Mary, may perhaps be the mistress addressed.[14] Does the poem, then, demonstrate that the interchangeability of Blessed Virgin and mistress was perfectly acceptable and unemotive even to Catholic readers; that the

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13. Gray, p.92.

14. Barnes, *Parthenophil*, pp.xiii, xiv, xxi-ii.

Virgin, even for them, had, by the late sixteenth century, been reduced to the role of merely a courtly-love conceit? Was Barnes simply making unexceptionable use of a long-standing poetic convention?

This hardly seems likely, given Barnes's consistent use of the risqué and outrageous throughout *Parthenophil and Parthenophe*. In the Ode, the poet does not merely tacitly praise his mistress in terms usually associated with the Virgin; he explicitly seeks to seduce her in the guise of the Virgin Mary, or under the patronage of the Virgin Mary, offering in homage his successful deflowerings, the "firstling foemale[s] of my flocke". Moreover, Barnes is describing no chaste neo-Platonic devotion, but the pursuit of a virgin which ends in consummation and ravishment; and this prayer to Mary is followed by a prayer to Bacchus for tumescence, at the very least a cheeky juxtaposition.

Barnes was the son of a Bishop of the Church of England, and while this does not necessarily prove anything about his own religious beliefs, it does raise the possibility that he is deliberately satirising a traditional form of devotion to the Virgin, in order to discredit her and deface her image. Such a reading is supported by looking at Barnes's *Divine Centurie of Spirituall Sonnets*, 1595, in which the theological line taken is a resolutely Protestant one. Although Mary Magdalen, the Saints Michael and George, and the Virgin are mentioned incidentally,[15] there are no sonnets

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15. In *Heliconia: Comprising A Selection of English Poetry of the Elizabethan Age*, ed. T. Park, 3 vols. (London: 1815), Vol.II: p.6, Sonnet XI; p.24, Sonnet XLVII; p.29, Sonnet LVII; p.52-3, "Hymne".

directly addressed to, or in praise of, such personages. Instead, all the sonnets invoke or extol Christ or God the Father, and stress their absolute power of salvation. Interestingly, one of them specifically attacks idolatry:

> Father of Pietie! by this wee know
> The glories greater of thy gracious love,
> Than of desires which carnal fancies move:
> For, if we praise a mortall shape below,
> By flattery their divinities wee show;
> Comparing them their perfectnesse above
> Their cheekes to roses, their neckes white to dove,
> Their eyes to starres from whence all fortunes flow,
> Their eyes effects to the meridian-sunne,
> Their modest thoughts to the colde virgine-moone.
> Oh fooles, fooles ignorant! - when this is done,
> Wee know wee flatter them:- then, Muses, soone
> Why turne you not your numbers musicall
> To GOD above, man's praise which ruleth all?[16]

This fits in with the general impetus of Barnes's sonnet sequence, like that of Herbert's verses of the next century, to convert poetry from themes of profane love to sacred themes. However, it is tempting to imagine that the "mortall shape[s]" whose flattery Barnes deplores, encompassed not merely profane mistresses, but also, perhaps, the Queen herself. All the terms of flattery which Barnes lists were lavishly applied to Elizabeth; and the mention of the "colde virgine-moone" turns our thoughts immediately to her.

Be that as it may, the sonnet suggests that Barnes stood well to the left of Elizabethan religious opinion, and was rigidly opposed to idolatry.

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16. Barnes, *Spirituall Sonnets*, p.12, Sonnet XXIII.

So it is easily conceivable that in Ode 3 of *Parthenophil and Parthenophe*, he was indeed deliberately satirising the prayer to the Virgin and purposely courting what those who preserved a reverence for the Virgin might perceive as blasphemy.

Nevertheless, we are left with uncertainty regarding the reading of Barnes's Ode. Perhaps it illustrates the fact that the Virgin Mary, by the 1590s, existed merely as a standard poetic conceit for desirable femininity, exciting no particular feelings of spiritual devotion. Or perhaps it illustrates the fact that one writer, at least, was deliberately using the image of the Virgin in a blasphemous manner in order to discredit it. This could be because she had already declined into a figure of fun or disrespect; or, it could illustrate the opposite case, that she was still regarded with veneration, and in this the shock-value of the poem resided.

It is important to stress the range of tones and attitudes encountered in the texts discussed here. There are vast differences between the simple transference of "Come over the born Bessy" between secular and sacred contexts; the internal contradictions and complexities of Greville's views on idolatry; the straightforward enthusiasm for images of Puttenham; and the almost impenetrable ambiguity of Barnes. These examples illustrate how rash it is to generalise about Elizabethan attitudes to Mariolatry and idolatry. The use of religious and specifically Marian imagery in panegyric is bound to vary according to different contexts and the different beliefs of particular writers. It is far too vague merely to assert that all such imagery is evidence of Elizabethans

seeking to fill a post-Reformation psychological gap; as we shall see, this is inadequate to the variety and complexity of uses of such imagery.

5. Literary examples of apparently Marian imagery applied to Elizabeth

We have seen that, according to the pronouncements of strict Protestant theologians, images of the Virgin Mary were indeed expelled from England in Elizabeth's reign; but their dictates were slow to penetrate all parts of the country, and all areas of cultural life. At the same time, certain forms of imagery which were seen as edifying and which were not tainted by long association with Catholicism were tolerated by Protestants. In particular, the use of visual symbolism in the service of secular power was defended and even encouraged. The close identification of the Elizabethan state with the new Church combined with traditional beliefs in the spiritual nature of monarchy to legitimate the extensive use of religious imagery to inculcate loyalty to the Queen. Such employment of religious imagery to political ends was widely theorised and defended, rather than occurring half-consciously.

There was also a deeply-embedded cultural heritage of use of the Virgin Mary as the literary model of a feminine ideal. What Elizabethan Protestants objected to in praise of the Virgin Mary was apparent aggrandisement of her until she rivalled the Holy Trinity; less theologically sensitive were her incursions into secular art-forms, where she had become virtually indistinguishable from the courtly mistress. This being so, it is not greatly surprising if we find that praise for a queen who was a virgin, who was God's anointed, and who was the figurehead of the national Church, overlapped with pre-Reformation Virgin-Mary-imagery.

Against this complex background, poets might express their individual attitudes to images, the Virgin Mary, and the Queen, in idiosyncratic ways. Moreover, we must be careful to establish just what we are defining as Marian imagery. Some images which have been seized on as "Marian" may draw on a broader current of praise of virginity, or femininity, or may have reasons for their association with Elizabeth which are far stronger than any Marian connection. It is also important to place material in context before citing it as evidence of a cultural trend. Frances Yates, and those who draw on her, cite four main pieces of evidence that the cult of Elizabeth "took over" the cult of the Virgin Mary: these are a song by Dowland with the line "*Vivat Eliza* for an *Ave Mary*", and three pieces from elegies for Elizabeth.[1] These examples have particular contexts which must inform our interpretation of them.

"*Vivat Eliza* for an *Ave Mary*"

The lines from the Dowland song, so frequently quoted by those who argue that Elizabeth was directly substituted for the Virgin Mary, run as follows:

> When others sings *Venite exultemus*,
> Stand by and turn to *Noli emulari*;
> For *Quare Fremuerunt* use *Oremus*,
> *Vivat Eliza* for an *Ave Mary*.[2]

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1. Yates, *Astraea*, pp.78-79.

2. John Dowland, *2nd Book of Songs*, nos.VI-VIII, in Fellowes, ed., *English Madrigal Verse*, p.469.

Wilson remarks that these are "... verses that suggest an actual substitution of the English virgin for the Catholic in the hearts of ardent Protestant knights."[3] Yates quotes the lines as evidence that Elizabethans did not flinch from a direct comparison of Elizabeth with Mary: "'Long live Eliza!' instead of 'Hail Mary!' ... [- a] startling suggestion."[4] Alison Heisch considers that the lines "cheerfully acknowledged" that "... the Virgin Elizabeth either rivalled or replaced the Virgin Mary ... Long live Eliza instead of Hail Mary."[5] And Robin Headlam Wells quotes the song as evidence of

> ... the tendency for Protestant Elizabethans to see the adulation of their Virgin Queen as a precise and proper substitute for the cult of the Virgin Mary.[6]

All these writers are interpreting the lines as if they were a popular slogan or rabble-rousing chant. This is simply not so; they are drawn from a courtly song, composed for a particular occasion. The song, "Time's eldest son, Old Age, the heir of Ease", forms a pair with "His golden locks Time hath to silver turned", a song composed for the retirement tilts of Sir Henry Lee, the Queen's champion, on November 17th 1590.[7] It is worth quoting both songs in full to show how, when replaced in context, the "*Vivat Eliza*" lines seem far less combative.

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3. E.C. Wilson, p.206.
4. Yates, *Astraea*, p.78.
5. Heisch, "Persistence of Patriarchy", p.46.
6. Wells, p.18.
7. Dowland, *1st Book of Songs*, no.XVIII, in Fellowes, ed., *English Madrigal Verse*, pp.464-5.

"His golden locks" runs as follows:

His golden locks Time hath to silver turned.
     O Time too swift! O swiftness never ceasing!
His youth 'gainst Time and Age hath ever spurned,
     But spurned in vain; youth waning by increasing.
Beauty, strength, youth are flowers but fading seen;
Duty, faith, love are roots and ever green.

His helmet now shall make a hive for bees,
     And lover's sonnets turn to holy psalms.
A man-at-arms must now serve on his knees,
     And feed on prayers which are Age's alms.
But though from Court to cottage he depart,
His Saint is sure of his unspotted heart.

And when he saddest sits in homely cell,
     He'll teach his swains this carol for a song:
Blest be the hearts that wish my Sovereign well,
     Curst be the soul that think her any wrong.
Goddess, allow this aged man his right
To be your bedesman now that was your knight.

The first stanza establishes the theme of age; the second stanza describes the retired soldier's transition from martial exploits to the contemplative life; and the song ends with the conventional courtly love trope of the mistress/monarch as her servant's goddess or saint.

"Time's eldest son" develops the same themes, stanza by stanza:

Time's eldest son, Old Age, the heir of Ease,
     Strength's foe, Love's woe, and foster to Devotion,
Bids gallant youths in martial prowess please,
     As for himself he hath no earthly motion,
But thinks sighs, tears, vows, prayers, and sacrifices
As good as shows, masks, jousts, or tilt devices.

Then sit thee down and say thy *Nunc dimittis*,
     With *De profundis*, *Credo*, and *Te Deum*,
Chant *Miserere*; for what now so fit is
     As that, or this: *Paratum est cor meum*?
O that thy saint would take in worth thy heart,
Thou canst not please her with a better part.

When others sings [sic] *Venite exultemus*,
Stand by and turn to *Noli aemulare*;
For *Quare fremuerunt* use *Oremus*,
Vivat Eliza for an *Ave Mary*;
And teach those swains that lives [sic] about thy cell
To say *Amen* when thou dost pray so well.

In both songs, religious imagery is a trope for retirement, and for the service of a courtly lover. The hermit or beadsman was a common figure for one who had retired from public office. Elizabeth wrote an affectionately bantering letter to Burghley in 1591 to dissuade him from retiring, in which she called him "Sir Eremite", and teased him for having "possessed yourself of Theobalds with her sweet rosary."[8] When Elizabeth visited Theobalds in the early 1590s, a hermit-figure played a prominent role in the entertainments.[9]

As for religious imagery as a trope for courtly love, this is well-known to have been a widespread usage with a long tradition (see pp.187-91 above). What is striking about Elizabethan examples is the way in which specifically the imagery of *Catholic* religious practice - pilgrimages, the worship of saints at shrines, image-worship, and so on - came to stand for erotic devotion. Sir Arthur Gorges, in a sonnet, said that a place without his mistress was "as a shryne wher no Saynte is att all."[10] B.Griffin, in his sonnet-sequence *Fidessa*, 1596, also addressed his mistress as a saint,

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8. Elizabeth I, *Letters*, p.207.

9. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, pp.241-6; Berry, pp.103, 107.

10. *The Poems of Sir Arthur Gorges*, ed. Helen Estabrook Sandison (Oxford UP, 1953), p.67, l.4.

and described his mounting desire as like rising clouds of incense.[11] In George Gascoigne's *The Adventures of Master F.J.*, 1573, F.J. dances with Lady Frances while watched by his mistress, Lady Elinor: "The dance begun, this knight marched on with the image of St Frances in his hand, and St Elinor in his heart."[12] Even the very term "idolatry" could be used unpejoratively to describe utter devotion of body and soul, as in *Romeo and Juliet*, where Juliet says, "swear by thy gracious self, / Which is the god of my idolatry."[13]

There are numerous examples of such religious imagery being applied to Elizabeth in a courtly-love context, such as Sir Christopher Hatton's letter to Sir Thomas Heneage on leaving his prodigy-house, Holdenby, built for Elizabeth to stay in on progress, for one of his smaller properties; he wrote that he was leaving that "other shrine, I mean Holdenby, still unseen until that holy saint may sit in it, to whom it is dedicated."[14] In particular, the loyal beads-man was a common figure for the courtly lover.[15] This seems to be its sense in an obscure passage from the end of *The Lady of May*, where Rombus, the pedantic schoolmaster, presents

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11. *Fidessa, more chaste than kinde* (London, 1596), printed by Widow Orwin for Matthew Lownes, sig.D2v, sonnet XXXVI.

12. Paul Salzman, ed., *An Anthology of Elizabethan Prose Fiction* (Oxford UP - World's Classics, 1987), p.19.

13. Shakespeare, ed. Alexander, II.ii.113-14.

14. Quoted in Berry, p.179 n.18.

15. See J.Wilson, pp.36-7, for the history of the hermit-motif; and Berry, pp.92-3, 100, 107.

Elizabeth with "a chain of round agates something like beads", and explains that the Earl of Leicester "is foully commaculated with the papistical enormity," and "is a huge *catholicam*." He goes on,

> I have found *unum par*, a pair, *papisticorum bedorus*, of Papistian beads, *cum quis*, with the which, *omnium dierum*, every day, next after his *pater noster* he *semper* suits 'and Elizabeth', as many lines as there be beads on this string.[16]

The passage is best understood as an expression, through the loyal beadsman motif, of Leicester's inordinate devotion to Elizabeth.

Note the use of Latin in Rombus's speech, as in "Time's eldest Son". Such specific allusion to the Latin liturgy is part of this conventional use of Catholic forms as tropes for courtly love. It is in this context that "*Vivat Eliza* for an *Ave Mary*" must be interpreted. It is a mode of courtly compliment to the Queen, rather than a rallying of forces in her name as an ideological battle cry. Both the Virgin and Elizabeth are being presented as objects of romantic dedication and fidelity rather than of religious worship. The song thus, when placed in context, can be understood as respectably Protestant, in that "*Ave Mary*", like saints, shrines, and pilgrimages, has been emptied of religious significance and made simply a metaphor for gallantry and courtly love. And of course, at Elizabeth's court in 1590, courtly love was itself a trope for political loyalty. The song merely asserts, in conventional tropes, that Lee will continue in his retirement to be steadfast and unswerving in his obedient service to the Queen.

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16. Sidney, *Miscellaneous Prose*, p.31.

Roses, flowers, and the colours red and white

Dowland's song is evidence that the name of the Virgin Mary could be used in panegyric of Elizabeth simply as a form of compliment to her on her femininity, her virginity, and the devotion which she inspires. If this is true of the name of the Virgin, it is also true of the images formerly associated with her. Those who argue that Elizabeth became a substitute for the Virgin Mary often cite the agglomeration of numerous Marian symbols around her: E.C. Wilson writes,

> More than her people realised, she encroached upon the Blessed Virgin in their hearts. Hallowed epithets came to her. Her people called her their "pearl", their "star", their "rose".[17]

Yates echoes him:

> Many of the symbols of this virgin - for example the Rose (the Tudor Rose, badge of union, of peace, of mystic empire), the Star, the Moon, the Phoenix, the Ermine, the Pearl - were also symbols of the Virgin Mary.[18]

However, all of these were images which were associated not with the Virgin Mary exclusively, but with virginity and idealised femininity in general. Moreover, several of them had a precise and particular aptness to Elizabeth, such that it was natural that they should be applied to her, and should be appropriated as her own personal emblems.

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17. E.C. Wilson, pp.218-9.

18. Yates, *Astraea*, p.78.

This is particularly true of the rose. As Yates's parenthesis implies, it was a specifically Tudor emblem; and, in general, floral imagery and the colours red and white had long been conventional in the praise of maidenliness and ideal beauty, applied alike to courtly mistresses, to queens, and to the Virgin. Warner describes Biblical and other sources for Marian rose-imagery, but adds, "The flower that had been a symbol in mediaeval poetry of the lover's quest was, like so much profane imagery, translated and applied to the Lady of Paradise."[19] It seems rash to deny that the cult of Elizabeth might also have been drawing on these secular sources.

A renowned example of floral imagery in panegyric of Elizabeth is the "Aprill" Eclogue of Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender*:

> See, where she sits vpon the grassie greene,
> (O seemely sight)
> Yclad in Scarlot like a mayden Queene,
> And Ermines white.
> Vpon her head a Cremosin coronet,
> With Damaske roses and Daffadillies set:
> Bayleaues betweene,
> And Primroses greene
> Embellish the sweete Violet. (ll.55-63.)

The tableau of a virgin enthroned among flowers does echo the imagery of Mariolatry. Notice, though, that Elisa does not wear the traditional *blue*-and-white robes of the Virgin Mary. In fact, I know of no representations, literary or visual, of Elizabeth wearing blue, the Virgin's colour, although one might expect to find them if she really were being promoted as a

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19. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p.307.

direct substitute for her.[20] Here she wears red and white, colours connotative of majesty and chastity, mingling her masculine and feminine aspects, a duality particular to Elizabeth as autonomous female ruler. They are also the colours of St.George, whose day falls in April, and are therefore emblematic of English nationalism.[21] The colour-symbolism is added further complexity by the addition of the green of Elisa's pastoral setting. Earlier, in the "Februarie" Eclogue, although Elizabeth is not directly represented, the briar boasts,

> Seest, how fresh my flowers bene spredde,
> Dyed in Lilly white, and Cremsin redde,
> With Leaues engrained in lusty greene,
> Colours meete to clothe a mayden Queene. (11.129-32.)

Berry sees the combination of white, green and red as invoking the colours of the three evangelical virtues, faith, hope and love, as worn by Beatrice when she appears to Dante at the end of the *Purgatorio*.[22] They may also represent a heraldic combination of the colours of St.George with the Tudor colours of green and white (see above, p.137, n.44). In its use of colour-symbolism, this example of floral imagery in panegyric invokes far more than just Marian imagery, alluding to dynastic symbolism and other pre-existent idealisations of the feminine.

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20. For blue as the Virgin Mary's colour, see Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p.266.

21. Cain, p.17.

22. Berry, pp.27, 80. I see no grounds for Berry's reading of "Yclad in Scarlot ... and white" as meaning that Elisa is naked (p.80).

In particular, there was a tradition of the application of such floral imagery to queens. In about 1500, a poem appeared entitled "The lily-white rose":

> In a glorious garden grene
> Sawe I sitting a comly quene
> Among the floures that fresh bene.
> She gadered a floure and set betwene.
> The lily-whighte rose me thought I sawe ...
> In that garden be floures of hewe,
> The gelofir gent that she well knewe;
> The floure-de-luce she did on rewe,
> And said, 'The white rose is most trewe
> This garden to rule by rightwis lawe.

It has been plausibly suggested that this white rose represents Elizabeth of York, the Queen of Henry VIIth, Elizabeth's grandmother.[23] The white rose as symbol of femininity and chastity, alluding to courtly love lyrics and Marian hymns, also carries a heraldic role as emblem of the House of York; it merges romantic, religious, and political associations. The same motif was employed by Thomas Phillipps, in "I love a flower" (c.1500), in which, after running evocatively through the columbine, the primrose, the gillyflower, and so on, he concluded, "The rose it is a ryall flour ... / I love the rose, both red and white."[24] Here the reference to the red-*and*-white rose alludes to the union of the houses of Lancaster and York, with an apparent reference to the birth of Prince Arthur in line 40.

So, while it may contain echoes of the cult of the Virgin and of

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23. R.T. Davies, ed., pp.262-3, and note.

24. R.T. Davies, ed., pp.263-4.

courtly love poetry, the use of the rose as symbol in a Tudor context could be primarily dynastic and political, representing union and peace. This seems to have been its main significance in the coronation pageants for Anne Boleyn, where red-and-white roses were extensively used, combining the Tudor badge with associations of femininity, with no apparent allusion to the Virgin Mary.[25] In *Aue Caesar*, 1603, verses written to mourn Elizabeth and acclaim James I, Elizabeth is mourned as "The *virgin Queene*, the White and Red-crown'd Rose," and dynastic history is traced back to Henry VII's marriage to Elizabeth of York:

> So did the Houses both in one vnite,
> Mixing the kingly *Red*, with princely *White*.
>
> A glorious Arbour from this roote hath sprong,
> Of sweetest Roses, crown'd with Diademes:
> From Prince to Prince, the branch hath run along,
> And now the noble Flower is cald *King James*.[26]

This rose is decidedly Tudor, not Marian.

The "Aprill" Eclogue goes on to liken Elizabeth specifically to a rose:

> Tell me, haue ye seene her angelick face,
> Like *Phoebe* fayre?
> Her heauenly haueour, her princely grace
> can you well compare?
> The Redde rose medled with the White yfere,
> In either cheeke depeincten liuely chere. (11.64-69.)

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25. Anglo, pp.248-55.

26. Hazlitt, ed., 2nd series, no.IV.

The combination of heavenly grace, comparison with the moon, and the red and white rose does echo Marian imagery; but the primary significance, as E.K. is at pains to point out in his gloss, is that

> By the mingling of the Redde rose and the White, is meant the vniting of the two principall houses of Lancaster and of Yorke: by whose longe discord and deadly debate, this realm many yeares was sore traueiled, and almost cleane decayed.

The poetic idealisation of the Tudor dynasty is Spenser's first concern, rather than simply the substitution of a Protestant Virgin for the Catholic one.

It seems unlikely that Spenser, a devout Protestant, would have wished to associate Elizabeth directly with the Virgin Mary. Instead, it predictably happened that the motifs which he and other poets found most appropriate to the praise of a maiden queen, and had as their cultural heritage, often overlapped with imagery associated with the Virgin. Eventually, in the course of the reign, red and white roses became associated with Elizabeth as her personal symbol, over-riding all previous connotations. Thus Sonnet 81 of Fulke Greville's *Caelica* can be read as a paean to Elizabeth, invoking her dynastic emblem, without necessarily setting her up as a Protestant Virgin in opposition to the Catholic one: "Vnder a Throne I saw a Virgin sit, / The red, and white Rose quarter'd in her face".[27] The verb "quarter'd" could mean that the rose is "given quarter", or lodged, in her face; or, in its heraldic sense, it could mean

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27. Greville, ed. Bullough, vol.I, p.131.

that red and white roses are displayed in the quarters of her face as on a coat-of-arms, pointing us to their dynastic, not religious, significance.

When Spenser blazons Belphoebe as a type of "red-and-white" beauty he is following the convention for praise of a beautiful and virtuous woman, whether the Virgin or a Laura-like mistress:

> ... in her cheekes the vermeill red did shew
> Like roses in a bed of lilies shed,
> The which ambrosiall odours from them threw,
> And gazers sense with double pleasure fed,
> Hable to heale the sicke, and to reuiue the ded. (II.ii.22.)

Belphoebe, and her chastity, are specifically identified with the healing rose which she tends; ladies are advised,

> With this faire flowre your goodly girlonds dight,
> Of chastity and vertue virginall,
> That shall embellish more your beautie bright,
> And crowne your heades with heauenly coronall,
> Such as the Angels weare before Gods tribunall. (III.v.51-55.)

By this rose of chastity, Spenser perhaps means the eglantine, or white rose, which became Elizabeth's personal emblem, combining associations of purity, beauty and femininity. The well-known miniature of a "Young Man among Roses" by Nicholas Hilliard, c.1587, shows a devoted courtier, possibly Essex, standing in a bower of eglantine, and engravings of the Queen frequently showed her wreathed with the flower. Sir Arthur Gorges, in *A Pastorall unfynyshed* (*Eglantine of Meriflure*), calls it "The Albion flowre so fayer so pure".[28] In *The Wonderfulle Yeare*, 1603, Dekker

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28. Gorges, p.124, l.21.

described Elizabeth's last sickness as a tempest blasting "the tender Eglantine".[29]

The eglantine and the Tudor rose met in George Peele's *Anglorum Feriae*, composed for Accession Day 1595; he exhorted,

> ... weare Eglantine
> And wreathes of Roses red and white put on
> in honor of that day yow Lovelie Nymphes.[30]

These two emblematic roses were immediately identifiable with Elizabeth, without any likeness to the Virgin Mary necessarily being implied. The rose had become a symbol of Elizabeth in her own right.

The phoenix

Another of the symbols cited by Yates as a Marian transfer to Elizabeth is the phoenix. This had been used as a symbol of Mary because it was unique and because it reproduced by a form of virgin birth; but, like the rose, it had also been used generally as a symbol of the exceptional woman. Some verses for the accession of Mary I read:

> Shee maye bee well comparde,
> unto the Phenix kinde ...
> Shee doth as farre exceade,
> these women now a dayes,
> As doth the floure, the weede.[31]

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29. (London: Bodley Head, 1924), p.17.

30. Peele, gen. ed. Prouty, Vol.I, pp.265-75, ll.39-41.

31. Guiney, ed., pp.121-23.

It was a figure of singularity; and as such, in a double sense, took on a particular aptness to Elizabeth. She was singular in that there had never been an autonomous female monarch like her before; and in that she was unmarried, and would provide a successor by some means other than bearing a child. Moreover, the phoenix was also a symbol for Christ, and was therefore an element in the representation of the monarch in christological terms (see below, pp.234-5).[32]

As early as 1571, Sir Nicholas Bacon, in his opening oration to Parliament, praised Elizabeth as the Phoenix, that "blessed bird".[33] Christopher Haigh suggests that, in the early years of the reign, the phoenix symbolised Elizabeth's triumph over the adversities of her youth:

> as queen her own symbol of the phoenix may have signified her recovery from the disaster of Anne [Boleyn]'s execution ... Elizabeth had risen from bastard child of an adulterous traitress to Queen of England: she was indeed a political phoenix.[34]

However, the image became more widely used, and more apt, as Elizabeth grew older and her single state became irrevocable. Thomas Churchyard produced the following verses for the Queen's visit to Oxford in 1592:

> Sith silent Poets all, that praise your Ladies so:

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32. See Lewalski, *Donne's* Anniversaries, p.28.

33. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.I, p.187.

34. Christopher Haigh, *Elizabeth I* (London: Longman, 1988), pp.3, 4-5.

> My Phenix makes their plumes to fall, that would like peacockes goe.
> Some doe their Princes praise, and Synthia some doe like;
> And some their Mistresse honour raise, as high as soldier's pike.
> Come downe yee doe presmount, the warning bell it sounds,
> That calls your Poets to account, for breaking of your bounds.
> In giuing fame to those faire flowers that soone doth fade;
> And cleane forget the white red rose, that God a Phenix made.[35]

Thomas Holland, in his defence of Accession Day, described November 17th as

> A day wherein our Nation received a new light after a fearfull and bloudy Eclipse ... a day wherein God gaue a rare Phaenixe to rule this land.[36]

It seems that later in the reign, when Elizabeth was beyond child-bearing age, the phoenix-symbol took on a particular aptness as a creature which lived for several centuries until reproducing itself asexually from its own ashes. This was a reassuring fiction that, despite Elizabeth's refusal to name an heir, the succession would somehow, mystically, be provided for; and, as it became increasingly inevitable that James VI of Scotland would succeed, the phoenix was an apt metaphor for the transition of the Crown to an heir who was not a child of the monarch's body. Once Elizabeth died, the phoenix was one of the most prevalent images in the elegies, as an elegant means of balancing grief for Elizabeth's death with joy at James's succession, as in Thomas Cecil's elegy:

> Elizae's dead, - that rends my heart in twaine:

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35. Thomas Churchyard, "A Few Plaine Verses of Truth Against the Flaterie of Time, Made when the Queens Majestie was last at Oxenford", 1592. E.C. Wilson, p.224; Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, p.175.

36. Holland, sig.K2r.

> And James proclaim'd, - this makes me well againe.
> ... as Phoenix dies; Phoenix is dead,
> And so a Phoenix followes in her stead;
> Phaenix [sic] for Phoenix.[37]

Similarly, John Lane wrote:

> See how our *Phoenix* mounts aboue the skies,
> And from the neast another *Phoenix* flyes,
> How happily before the change did bring
> A Mayden-*Queene*, and now a manly *King*.[38]

So, the symbol of the Phoenix had a precise aptness to Elizabeth, which overrode any vestigial associations with the Virgin Mary. This is equally true of the moon-imagery which was applied to Elizabeth; although the moon had been used as a symbol of the Virgin Mary,[39] it took on particular aptness to Elizabeth through its mixed connotations of constancy and mutability, as I shall discuss in a later chapter. Moreover, it had time-honoured associations with female power and virginity in general, and with the classical virgin-goddess Diana, not solely with the Virgin Mary. Similarly, the pearl had traditional associations with virginity in general; and other symbols in Yates's list of supposed Marian transfers to Elizabeth, such as the ermine and the star, had primary associations with the Petrarchan mistress rather than the Virgin. What

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37. J.B. Nichols, ed., *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities, of King James the First*, 4 vols. (London, 1828), vol.I, p.16.

38. Hazlitt, 2nd series, no.II.

39. See Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, pp.256-62.

these all exemplify is the appropriation of all available symbols of virginity to the cause of Protestant England.

Emblems of virginity as emblems of the Church

What we are observing, then, is not a one-for-one substitution of Elizabeth for Mary, but a continuing idealisation of the quality of virginity, now personified in Elizabeth. It has often been argued that Protestantism rejected virginity as an ideal and replaced it with an ideal of chaste matrimony.[40] What the cult of Elizabeth reveals is that this was not absolutely so; virginity could still be venerated by Protestants as a superhuman state. Protestant promoters of chaste matrimony did not usually extol marriage, or the married woman, as images of perfection; they still saw marriage mainly as a prevention of fornication, and the married woman as a vessel for the containment of base human lusts.[41] We can see Protestant idealisation of *female* virginity continuing into the next century in the work of Milton: the Lady in *Comus* is said to be "clad in complete steel" because "No goblin, or swart faëry of the mine / Hath hurtful power o'er true virginity."[42] Keith Thomas, in *Religion and the*

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40. See, for example, W. & M. Haller, "The Puritan Art of Love", *HLQ* V (1941-2), pp.235-72; C. & K. George, *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation* (Princeton UP, 1961).

41. See Linda T.Fitz, "'What says the Married Woman?': Marriage theory and feminism in the English Renaissance", *Mosaic* XIII.2 (Winter 1980), pp.7-8; Kathleen M.Davies, pp.565, 573-4.

42. *A Masque presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, in *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey (London: Longman, 1971), pp.168-229, ll.420, 435-6.

Decline of Magic, writes that, as regards such marks of female sexuality as menstruation and childbirth, "The idea of purification survived the Reformation"; "Virginity, or at least abstinence from sexual intercourse, was still a generally accepted condition of holiness." Virgins were used in magic rituals because they were seen as charmed.[43]

The Protestant "rejection" of virginity was largely a rejection of celibacy for men; the professed celibacy of Catholic clerics was seen as a hypocritical mask for the fornication which the fallen human condition rendered irresistible and inevitable. As for women, we have already seen how Luther asserted that "only one women in thousands has been endowed with the God-given aptitude to live in chastity and virginity".[44] Clearly this scepticism renders that "one woman in thousands" all the more special. The ideal of virginity is not dismissed out of hand; in fact, if anything, it is placed on an even higher pedestal. Protestants continued to see it as a victory over the curse of the Fall; but a victory only achievable by exceptional, superhuman figures.[45]

We have already seen how virginity, as wholeness, was associated with holiness; and how virginity-symbolism has often been used by nations and

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43. (London: Weidenfeld, 1971), pp.39, 38, 215, 268.

44. O'Faolain & Martines, p.208; see pp.118-9 above.

45. I therefore disagree with Maureen Quilligan that Elizabeth's virginity was entirely problematic to Spenser as a Protestant (Quilligan, pp.177, 184); even a Protestant could still see it as adding to her status as "exceptional woman".

religions as a figuration of their strength and unity (pp.95-7 above). Marina Warner draws on Mary Douglas's theories to discuss the symbolic relationship of the Virgin Mary to the Catholic Church, and that Church's glorification of virgin martyrs:

> There was one particular attitude toward virginity that the Christian religion did inherit from the classical world: that virginity was powerful magic and conferred strength and ritual purity ...
>
> ... the image of the virgin body was the supreme image of wholeness, and wholeness was equated with holiness.[46]

In a similar way, Elizabeth's virginity, the wholeness of her body, became the emblem of the integrity and health of the state and the Church.[47] What we see in the application of traditional virginity-emblems to Elizabeth is the Protestant cause laying claim to the same virginal "magic", the same symbolic strength and purity. This was a process of analogy rather than substitution: the same symbolic structures were applied to Elizabeth as to the Virgin Mary, but this was not simply a one-to-one identification of her with the Virgin, but rather a perpetuation of an ancient and enduring stream of beliefs and superstitions regarding female sexuality. This is the root cause of similarities between praise of Elizabeth and praise of the Virgin Mary. Praise of the Virgin was rejected by Protestants because it was seen as idolatrous, detracting from the worship of God; but they did not reject an ideal of female virginity. They continued to see the virgin woman as a special, magical creature, one whose victory over her sexuality

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46. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, pp.48, 72.

47. See Tennenhouse, p.102-3; Stallybrass, pp.129-30.

represented a transcendence of the human condition. The enclosed, intact virgin body continued to be seen as charmed. Therefore, when presented with an unmarried queen, it is predictable that her subjects should have laid great stress on her virginity in their panegyric, and drawn on existing conventions of the symbolism of virginity to do so.

The star

Thus the star was often used as an emblem of Elizabeth, drawing on its associations with the Virgin Mary; *and* with Laura, Petrarch's chaste mistress who guided him on his spiritual progress; *and* with the conventional beauty of the countless chaste mistresses of Petrarch's imitators. In its application to Elizabeth it acquired imperial and militantly Protestant connotations. The star-like light shed by Gloriana is a symbol of the imperial, worldwide extent of her power, "Whose glory shineth as the morning starre, / And with her light the earth enlumines cleare".(II.ix.4.) In the person of Una, this light is precisely identified with the saving revelation of Protestantism; we see her

> ... forth proceeding with sad sober cheare,
> As bright as doth the morning starre appeare
> Out of the East, with flaming lockes bedight,
> To tell that dawning day is drawing neare. (I.xii.21)

The star is used in a similar way by Fulke Greville, in *Caelica* 82, where Elizabeth is "Starre of the North, and for true guards to it, / Princes, Church, States, all pointing out her Grace".[48] She is a guiding

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48. Greville, ed. Bullough, vol.I, p.131, *Caelica* 81.

light shining forth for the whole of Europe to see, placed in the North, not in the southern domains of Spain and Italy which are the strongholds of Catholicism. Sir John Davies, in his *Hymnes of Astraea*, writes:

> If we this Starre once cease to see,
> No doubt our State will Ship-wrackt be,
> And torne and sunke for ever.[49]

The role of Mary as Stella Maris, and of Laura as the star guiding Petrarch on his turbulent voyage of love, are here combined to elevate Elizabeth as the beacon of the reformed Church.

Astraea

An elaboration of this star-imagery was the association of Elizabeth with the constellation Virgo: because of her virginity; because her birthday fell on the 7th of September, in the month of Virgo;[50] and because of the mythical connection between that sign and the classical goddess, Astraea. Ovid, in his *Metamorphoses*, had described Astraea as the virgin-goddess of justice who presided over the Golden Age, and fled to heaven when it ended; Virgil, in his Fourth Eclogue, had prophesied the return of the goddess to earth to restore that age of Gold.[51] This was an obviously appropriate image for panegyric of Elizabeth. A notable example

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49. Sir John Davies, *Hymnes of Astraea*, no.XXII, "Of Her Wisedome".

50. See Christopher Ockland, *Ειρηναρχια sive Elizabetha* (London, 1582), sig.B3r.

51. Yates, *Astraea*, pp.29-30, 33-38.

was Davies's *Hymnes of Astraea*, in which he describes her as having brought in a new Golden Age of peace and prosperity:

> Blessed *Astraea*, I in part
> Enjoy the blessings you impart,
> The *Peace*, the milke and hony,
> Humanity, and civill *Art*,
> A richer *Dower* then money.
> Right glad am I that now I live,
> Even in these daies whereto you give
> Great happinesse and glorie.[52]

Peele, too, in *Anglorum Feriae*, named "Elizaes Coort, Astraeas earthlie heaven", and rejoiced in "... this golden age / Wherein we live in."[53]

One manifestation of Astraea's Golden Age was supposed to be the advent of an eternal spring, in which flowers and fruits existed simultaneously.[54] This was one way of associating Elizabeth with symbolic fertility rather than physical barrenness; and was developed by Davies:

> Reserve (sweete Spring) this Nymph of ours
> Eternal garlands of thy flowers,
> Greene garlands never wasting;
> In her shall last our *states* faire spring,
> Now and for ever flourishing,
> As long as heaven is lasting.[55]

Many of the entertainments presented on Elizabeth's progresses proclaimed that she had brought perpetual spring and harvest to the place of her

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52. Sir John Davies, *Hymnes of Astraea*, no.II, "To Astraea".

53. Peele, gen. ed. Prouty, Vol.I, pp.265-75, ll.8, 50-51.

54. See Wells, pp.14, 78.

55. Sir John Davies, *Hymnes of Astraea*, no.III.

visit, as at Elvetham in 1591.[56] These flowers of the Golden Age are a further element in the floral imagery of Spenser's "Aprill" Eclogue.

The link between Elizabeth, Astraea, and the Virgin Mary, is the fact that Virgil's Fourth Eclogue had often been interpreted, from the time of Constantine onwards, as a prophecy of the birth of Christ.[57] Astraea had therefore been regarded as a type of the Virgin Mary. In the application of Astraean symbolism to Elizabeth there are echoes of Mariolatry, particularly in the idea of a woman whose chastity bestows fertility, though this also alludes to the neo-Platonic concept of Venus Virgo. But the main force of Astraean imagery in Elizabethan panegyric is to suggest that Elizabeth was sent from heaven as part of a divine plan - hence her symbolically appropriate birth in September - and to give to Elizabeth herself a messianic aura. Spenser's choice of his Fourth Eclogue in which to perform an act of homage to Elizabeth which centres on her "miraculous" birth alludes to Virgil's prophecy of a new messiah.[58] Peele's Astraea is a shepherdess, performing a Christ-like pastoral role.[59] Philippa Berry confirms from her researches that "in fact, [Elizabeth's] courtly cult more

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56. J.Wilson, p.110.

57. Yates, *Astraea*, pp.3-4, 33-8. Berry points out that, in Virgil, although Astraea's return inaugurates the new golden age, it is Diana, as Lucina, who actually presides over the birth of the new king. She therefore justly criticises Yates for emphasising Astraea as a persona of Elizabeth, giving insufficient attention to her other symbolic personae, especially that of Diana or Cynthia (pp.39-40).

58. See Montrose, "Eliza, Queen of Shepherds", p.166.

59. Peele, *Descensus Astraeae*, in Prouty, gen. ed., vol.I, pp.214-9.

often compared the queen to Christ than to the Virgin."[60] The panegyric use of Astraean imagery was designed to present the Queen as a semi-divine figure who is a fulfilment of prophecy, and whose authority, over both Church and state, was therefore unquestionable.

Messianic imagery

This mode of panegyric could be manifested in forms which seem to a modern reader to be downright blasphemous. A good example is the entertainment given at Sudeley in 1591.[61] In this play, a band of shepherds follow a star, and, consulting an almanac, find that Elizabeth's birthday has just passed: "The seventh of September, happines was borne into the world." The Queen is revealed in the audience, and the shepherds kneel in worship, saying, "This is the day, this the houre, this the starre." They present her with a gift of a woollen dress. Montrose comments:

> The arrival of the Queen in this notable sheep-farming area at a time just after her birthday provides the circumstances for a metamorphosis of the scene that was acted in the pastoral Nativity pageants of the Corpus Christi plays.

Thus he sees the entertainment as a deliberate appropriation to political ends of pre-Reformation religious ritual. In support of his argument, he notes that a Nativity hymn to Christ and a hymn on Elizabeth's birthday in *England's Helicon* use the same pastoral imagery.[62]

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60. Berry, p.82 n.66.

61. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, pp.136-43. See Montrose, "'Eliza, Queene of Shepheardes'", pp.153-82.

62. Montrose, "'Eliza, Queene of shepheardes'", pp.175, 161.

This blatant identification of Elizabeth with Christ incarnate illustrates the licence with which Elizabethan panegyrists felt able to employ religious imagery for political purposes. As we have already discussed, it indicates a sense of freedom in the secular sphere to deploy the kind of external display now forbidden in the church - the separation of secular and sacred - combined with a paradoxical drawing together of secular and sacred in the person of the monarch, who was seen as semi-divine. This two-way argument created an opening for practices which seem to us to be startlingly idolatrous or blasphemous; but the main impetus seems to be to exalt a political ideal by whatever imagery comes readily to hand. Christian myth, including the story of the Nativity, can be read typologically, as material from which to fashion a mode of panegyric which conveys a sense of destiny.[63]

The Immaculate Conception

The application of Astraean and messianic imagery to Elizabeth asserted her political and religious supremacy in terms of the fulfilment

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63. Another example of the uninhibited allegorical representation of current events in terms of Scriptural narrative was the pageant performed for the arrival of the Earl of Leicester in the Netherlands in 1585. This showed the disciples Peter, James and John catching nothing in their nets the first time they cast them out - representing the lack of assistance to the Netherlands from France. Then, instructed by the figure of Christ walking on the water, they cast them out a second time and drew them in full - representing the providential arrival of aid from England. See David M.Bergeron, *English Civic Pageantry 1558-1642* (London: Arnold, 1971), p.52.

of a divine plan. Central to such panegyric themes was the issue of her birth and her ancestry - prevalent themes in Spenser's work. They produce the imagery in his writings which most closely approximates to Marian imagery: namely, his descriptions of the conception of Elisa in *The Shepheardes Calender*, and of Belphoebe in *The Faerie Queene*, as asexual and therefore free from sin, alluding to the Marian concept of the Immaculate Conception.

In the *Song of Songs*, the eulogy of the bride ran, "Thou art all faire, my loue, and there is no spot in thee."[64] This figure of the maiden *sine macula* had been interpreted by pre-Reformation exegetists as a prophecy of the Virgin Mary as the Immaculate Conception, free of Original Sin. It is notable in the Geneva Bible, however, that this verse has no gloss; although the "Argument" prefaced to the *Song* as a whole explains that it:

> ... by moste swete and comfortable allegories and parables describeth the perfite loue of Iesus Christ, the true Salomón and King of peace, and the faithful soule or his Church, which he hathe sanctified and appointed to be his spouse, holy, chast and without reprehension. (p.280.)

Throughout the Geneva commentary on the *Song*, the bride is frequently and consistently referred to as the Church.

In *The Faerie Queene*, various figures of Elizabeth are described as "without spot": Belphoebe's face is "Cleare as the skie, withouten blame or

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64. Geneva Bible, *The song of Salomón*, IV.7.

blot" (II.iii.22); Una wears a garment "All lilly white, withoutten spot, or pride" (I.xii.22); Britomart's "dainty parts" are "without staine or spot" (V.vii.29). However, as we can see from the Geneva Bible, this motif does not necessarily invoke the Virgin Mary; to a Protestant, its main force is to assert that Elizabeth is the personification of the true Church. Moreover, Spenser's figure of Truth is also "Most sacred virgin, without spot of sin" (III.iv.59); and, perplexingly, Radigund's "dainty parts" as well as Britomart's are included in the description "without stain or spot." The phrase "without spot" is being given a wide application, to signify simply feminine delicacy and purity. Spenser undoubtedly derives the phrase from the *Song of Songs*; but he borrows it directly from that Scriptural source, to signify maidenliness, without necessarily invoking the Marian tradition. He is appropriating a scriptural figure of virginity to a new Protestant iconography.

At other points in Spenser's writing, though, female spotlessness is more closely associated with the Immaculate Conception, through engagement with the issues of ancestry, conception and birth. In the "Aprill" Eclogue, he says of Elisa:

> ... shee is *Syrinx* daughter without spotte,
> Which *Pan* the shepheards God of her begot:
> So sprong her grace
> Of heauenly race,
> No mortall blemishe may her blotte. (ll.50-54.)

E.K. elaborates, in his commentary:

> ... here by Pan and Syrinx is not to bee thoughte, that the shephearde simplye meante those Poetical Gods: but rather supposing (as seemeth) her graces progenie to be diuine and immortall ... could deuise no parents in his iudgement so worthy for her, as Pan the shepeheards God, and his best beloued Syrinx. So that by Pan is here meant the

> most famous and victorious King, her highnesse Father, late of worthy memorye K.Henry the eyght. And by that name, oftymes (as hereafter appeareth) be noted kings and mighty Potentates: And in some place Christ himselfe, who is the verye Pan and god of Shepheardes.

Thus Elizabeth's conception is sublimated into a musical breath blown through reeds; and her father, as well as being exalted in his own person, is obliquely identified with Christ himself.[65]

It is notable that, although this form of asexual birth alludes to the Immaculate Conception, it is given form by an Ovidian metamorphosis. The same is true of the asexual conception of Belphoebe and Amoret by Chrysogonee in *The Faerie Queene*. After bathing, Chrysogonee fell asleep on a grassy bank, where

> The sunne-beames bright vpon her body playd,
> Being through former bathing mollifide,
> And pierst into her wombe, where they embayd
> With so sweet sence and secret power vnspide,
> That in her pregnant flesh they shortly fructifide. (III.vi.7.)

Because she conceived without lust, Chrysogonee gave birth without pain, just as the apocrypha asserted of Mary: "She bore withouten paine, that she conceiued / Withouten pleasure." (III.vi.27.) A further consequence of her sinless conception is that her daughters are born free from sin, "Pure and vnspotted from all loathly crime, / That is ingenerate in fleshly slime". (III.vi.3.)

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65. See Louis Adrian Montrose, "'The perfecte paterne of a Poete': The Poetics of Courtship in *The Shepheardes Calender*", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 21.1 (Spring 1979), p.40.

There is a conflation here of the idea that Christ, because conceived without the human sexual act, was delivered without pain; and the complementary idea, developed by various mediaeval exegetists, that his mother was herself conceived without lust by her own parents, and was therefore born free of Original Sin. It has been noted that one of the lines describing Belphoebe in this account of her conception, "Her berth was of the wombe of Morning dew" (III.vi.3), is almost a literal translation of the Prayer Book version of Psalm 110:3: "The dew of thy birth is of the womb of the morning".[66] It was generally accepted that this verse referred to the begetting or Incarnation of Christ and, by extension, to the formation of the Church.[67] So, as with the Astraea-imagery, Elizabeth is being associated not just with the Virgin Mary, but also, implicitly, with Christ himself. The idea of Elizabeth's divine ancestry is maintained by incidental remarks throughout *The Faerie Queene*. Belphoebe, at her first appearance, before her birth has been related, is described as "borne of heauenly birth" (II.iii.21); Gloriana "is heauenly borne, and heauen may iustly vaunt" (I.x.59).

This identification of Elizabeth with both Mary and Christ derives from Elizabethan theories of monarchy. Belphoebe's grandmother is named Amphisa, meaning "of double nature", highlighting the Christ-like double

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66. *The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition*, ed. E.Greenlaw, C.G. Osgood & F.M.Padelford (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1934), vol.III, p.249.

67. Thomas P.Roche, *The Kindly Flame: A Study of the Third and Fourth Books of Spenser's* Faerie Queene (Princeton UP, 1964), p.105.

nature of Elizabeth/Belphoebe. Elizabeth was God's anointed, she was Supreme Governor of the Church, and her body natural gave form to the body politic; in all these senses, she was the physical embodiment of a spiritual entity, analogous to Christ as the incarnation of the Holy Spirit. In describing her as miraculously incarnated, Spenser was emphasising and justifying her political and spiritual supremacy.

This is not simply the creation of a Protestant Virgin to fill an emotional gap left by the loss of the Catholic Virgin. As Robin Headlam Wells rightly comments,

> ... the adaptation of Marian imagery to the praise of Elizabeth ... was more than sentimental or merely metaphoric. Rather it is to be seen as a later extension of the very earliest attempts to identify Elizabeth as a predestined champion of the Protestant cause; as such it had a precise historic and apocalyptic function.[68]

What we are observing is not a substitution of Elizabeth for the Virgin Mary arising out of a psychological void, but, rather, the use of Marian myth in a typological way, echoing its familiar structures in order to bestow an aura of sacred authority upon Elizabeth's rule.

Moreover, Spenser was not just performing a general promotion of Elizabeth as the figurehead of the Protestant nation; he was also making specific points in the propaganda war with the Catholic states. One of the

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68. Wells, p.17. It is disappointing that although Wells comments perceptively on the typological nature of the transfer of Marian imagery to Elizabeth, he persists in subscribing to the idea that Elizabeth was a "substitute" Virgin Mary who filled a "psychological gap" (pp.16-21).

most frequent grounds of Catholic attacks on Elizabeth was the assertion that she was a bastard; and, as a direct result of her bastardy, that she herself had a nature which was sexually rapacious and deviant. One of the most virulent of these attacks was Nicolas Sander's *The Rise and Growth of the Anglican Schism*, in which he asserted that Anne Boleyn was Henry VIII's own daughter, that she was physically deformed, and that Elizabeth was therefore not only a bastard, but the incestuous child of a monster.[69] This story was taken up and embroidered by Adam Blackwood, in *Martyre de la Royne d'Escosse*, 1587, and other Catholic poets, following the death of Mary Queen of Scots.[70] French pamphlets vilified Elizabeth as "Jezebel", "this singular bastard and shameless harlot"[71]; bastardy and harlotry were assumed to go together as cause and effect. A tract published on the eve of the Armada, cataloguing Elizabeth's supposed debaucheries, described her as "an incestuous bastard, begotten and born in sin of an infamous courtesan, Anne Boleyn".[72]

Elizabeth's ancestry was a particularly sensitive issue for her panegyrists. Her whole claim to the throne rested on her legitimacy as the daughter of Henry VIII; and doubt of that legitimacy was exaggerated and embroidered by these Catholic adversaries.[73] Allusion to the Immaculate

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69. Sander, pp.23-4, 231.

70. Phillips, *Images*, pp.174, 164.

71. Black, p.336.

72. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I*, p.304. For further discussion of sexual propaganda against Elizabeth, see pp.94-5 above.

73. See Bruce Thomas Boehrer, "'Carelesse Modestee': Chastity as Politics

Conception was a means of constructing a poetic myth to gild over the problem. The church reformers rejected the idea of Mary as the Immaculate Conception because it denied her humanity, her role as a model for all believers to aspire to.[74] Spenser alluded to it precisely to emphasise the divine, perfect side of Elizabeth's dual nature. His purpose was not to create a substitute Virgin Mary, but to confront directly the Catholic charges against the Queen. Against their formula, that she was an incestuous bastard and therefore a harlot, Spenser opposed his own formula: that she was conceived asexually, by some sort of divine insemination, and was therefore free of all taint of human sin. To give this narrative form, he conflated the Christian myths of the Immaculate Conception and the Incarnation with the mythology of Ovidian metamorphosis.

We can usefully distinguish between the ways in which Spenser uses the two Christian myths of the Immaculate Conception and the Incarnation. As a devout Protestant, it is extremely unlikely that he believed in the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, any more than he believed that Elizabeth had been asexually conceived; this Christian myth was simply treated by him, like the Ovidian myth of metamorphosis, as literary

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in Book 3 of *The Faerie Queene*", *ELH* 55.3 (Fall 1988), pp.566-8, on the problem of Elizabeth's legitimacy: "Twice bastardized by act of Parliament, she could attest to the awful ambivalence of genealogy as a political weapon" (p.566).

74. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p.252.

material from which to fashion a new myth to his political purpose. However, he undoubtedly did believe in the Incarnation of Christ, and in Elizabeth as the incarnation of the abstract spiritual entity of monarchy and as God's agent for the advancement of the true faith. In this sense he could openly identify Elizabeth with Christ, without the sense of blasphemy which might be felt by a modern reader for whom the monarchy is essentially human. The discomfort felt by E.C. Wilson and Frances Yates, who have to suggest that Elizabeth was identified with sacred figures "half-consciously", did not exist in the same form for Spenser; monarchy had a real spiritual dimension.

In so far as Spenser is using Marian myth by making a typological reading of the Immaculate Conception, Kenneth Gross's remarks about allegory and iconoclasm are highly relevant:

> ... the ambiguous magic of allegory is often a product of the effort to reduce, transform, repossess, or overgo earlier mythologies or allegories. There is more at stake in such retrospective revisions than the simple shuffling around of old and new images; for the allegorical struggle grows out of a continuing tension between an attachment to the power and authority of an older set of images and the need to find a continuity (even an illusory one) between those images and present life, or the riskier desire for a new and more complete revelation ... in this case the allegorist takes the place of the iconoclast by undoing any idolatrous overestimation of anterior revelation.[75]

This works well as an exposition of Spenser's use of Marian imagery. He does not seek merely to slot Elizabeth into the vacant place of the Virgin

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75. Gross, p.59.

Mary; but simultaneously to appropriate the enduring potency of virgin-imagery, and to supersede and blot out the image of the Virgin Mary.

The Whore of Babylon versus the Woman Clothed with the Sun

While Protestant Englishmen no longer accepted the apocryphal doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, they regarded the Bible itself, as the Word of God, as absolute truth. In particular, the Book of *Revelation* was read as a precise prophecy of contemporary events. The Whore of Babylon was read as an allegorical type of the Church of Rome, or the papacy, or, more personally, Mary Queen of Scots; while the other principal female figure in the Book, the Woman Clothed with the Sun, was read as representing the Reformed Church, or Elizabeth as its guardian. This created a framework in which much of the propaganda battle with the Catholic Church was fought symbolically in terms of female sexuality. Stress upon Elizabeth's absolute sexual purity was often only coincidentally drawing a parallel with the Virgin Mary; principally, it was emphasised in order to contrast her with Catholic symbolic figures who were presented as sexually insatiable.

We have already examined the virgin/whore dichotomy in Part I, with the idea that a good queen possessed a whole, untainted body, symbolising a unified, prospering nation, while the bad queen possessed a defiled body, symbolising the unhealthy state of her realm (pp.93-9 above). This symbolism also applied to the two opposed churches. Warner, paraphrasing Mary Douglas, writes, "the image of the body reflects the image of society, and ... a virginal body symbolised the whole impermeable body of the Church

in a hostile world."[76] Here she is discussing the relation of the Virgin Mary to the Catholic Church. The fact that the cult of Elizabeth employed a similar symbolic structure does not necessarily prove that it was a wholesale takeover of the cult of the Virgin; what it may reveal is deeply entrenched and enduring attitudes to female sexuality and its allegorical symbolism.

The Roman Church and idolatry had often been associated by its enemies with female depravity.[77] In the Geneva Bible, there was the following description of "great Babylon, the mother of whoredomes":

> I sawe a woman sit vpon a skarlat coloured beast, full of names of blasphemie, which had seuen heads, & ten hornes.
> And the woman was araied in purple & skarlat, & guilded with golde, & precious stones, and pearles, and had a cup of golde in her hand, ful of abominations, and filthines of her fornication.

The Geneva gloss explains that:

> This woman is the Antichrist, that is, the Pope with the whole bodie of his filthie creatures ... whose beautie onely standeth in outwarde pompe & impudencie and craft like a strumpet.[78]

Following such an interpretation, William Alabaster, in his epic Latin poem *Elisaeis*, 1588-91, depicted the Pope as the Whore of Babylon and the daughter of Satan.[79] Such apocalyptic rhetoric was also a common feature

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76. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p.71, n.13.

77. See Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics*, p.120; Johnson, p.187.

78. Geneva Bible, *Reuelacion*, XVII.3-4.

79. "The *Elisaeis* of William Alabaster", ed. & trans. Michael O'Connell, *Studies in Philology* 76 (1979), pp.vii, 1-77: p.35.

of parliamentary debate: to such Puritan members as Job Throckmorton, who spoke on foreign policy in the 1586-87 Parliament, it was self-evident that the prophecies of *Revelation* were being fulfilled in contemporary events:

> But sure, we that have lived in the eyes of all men, so choked, as it were, with blessings of God beyond desert, we that have lived to see her Majesty's life, so dear unto us, pulled out, as it were, even out of the lion's jaws in despite of Hell and Satan, may truly - not in any pride, but in humbleness of soul to our comforts - confess that indeed the Lord hath vowed himself to be English ... It is an argument unanswerable, to prove the Pope to be that man described in the Apocalypse - I mean that man of sin, that beast with the mark in his forehead - to prove him, I say, to be Antichrist.[80]

England was the new Israel, the chosen nation; and Mary Queen of Scots was the Whore of Babylon. In the 1572 Parliament, Francis Alford declared: "I think her to be as vile and as naughty a creature as ever the earth bare, and am ... thoroughly persuaded of her lewd demeanours"; in 1576 Peter Wentworth reviled her as "Jezebel", "the most notorious whore in all the world".[81] From as early as 1565 onwards, Protestant propaganda had developed "The portrait of the Queen of Scots as a sinister creature driven by voluptuous desires."[82]

This is the background to Spenser's characterisation of Archimago, Duessa, and Una in *The Faerie Queene*. We first meet Archimago in the guise of a good old man: "He told of Saintes and Popes, and euermore / He strowd

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80. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.II, p.170.

81. Neale, *Parliaments*, vol.I, pp.289, 328.

82. Phillips, *Images*, pp.36, 43.

an *Aue-Mary* after and before." (I.i.35.) These saints, popes, and Ave-Maries are signs not of holiness, but that he is not what he seems. Shortly afterwards we meet Duessa for the first time, who appears as

> A goodly lady clad in scarlot red,
> Purfled with gold and pearle of rich assay,
> And like a *Persian* mitre on her hed
> She wore, with crownes and owches garnished,
> The which her lauish louers to her gaue. (I.ii.13.)

The description merges the identifiable trappings of the Pope, in the garnished mitre and rich robes, and of the Whore of *Revelation.* A few cantos later, this first impression is reinforced by a description of Duessa wearing a triple crown and sitting on a seven-headed beast, an even bolder fusion of allusion to the Apocalypse and to the papacy (I.vii.16-18). At this point in the poem, unlike in Book V at her trial where she becomes simply Mary Queen of Scots, Duessa is simultaneously Mary Stuart, and the Pope, and the whole Roman Church, and the Babylonian whore.

Vital to this composite picture, as the symbolic opposite to Una/Elizabeth's spotless purity, is her sexual depravity and deformity. At I.viii.46-8, Spenser describes how Duessa is stripped, just as the great whore is stripped in *Revelation.*[83] Once her outward pomp is stripped away,

> ... her misshaped parts did them appall,
> A loathly, wrinckled hag, ill fauoured, old,
> Whose secret filth good manners biddeth not be told ...

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83. Geneva Bible, *Reuelacion*, XVII.16, XVIII.16. See note on *Faerie Queene* I.viii. 46-8 in Spenser, ed. Hamilton.

Her neather parts, the shame of all her kind,
My chaster Muse for shame doth blush to write ...

If Mary Stuart, or the Roman Church, were the Whore of Babylon, then Elizabeth, as their adversary, was the opposite female figure of *Revelation,* the Woman Clothed with the Sun. This woman had been seen as a prophetic type of the Virgin Mary by exegetists;[84] but again, here, as with the issue of the Immaculate Conception, the primary impetus in assigning the role to Elizabeth is not so much to identify her directly with the Virgin, as to oppose her to the challenge of Catholicism, as part of the ongoing reclamation of virginal "magic" to the Protestant cause. Just as Protestants, ever since the Reformation, had identified the papacy with the Whore of Babylon, so there was an existing tradition of identifying Protestant heroines with the Woman Clothed with the Sun; indeed, the role had been assigned to Elizabeth in her youth, when she was being brought up in the reformist circle of Catherine Parr. John N.King writes that:

> Biblical paradigms such as the Woman Clothed with the Sun (Revelation 12), which were applied in praise of such reformist heroines as Anne Askew and Princess Elizabeth, contributed to the emergence of the Reformation iconographical tradition of the 'true Christian woman'.[85]

Thus ballads on Elizabeth described her as "thou shining lampe of th'earth," and as she who "like the Orient Sun doth shine thorowout the world most bright."[86] Protestant connotations were made explicit in "The

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84. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p.93.

85. John N.King, "Patronage and Piety: The Influence of Catherine Parr", in Hannay, ed., pp.43-60: p.52.

86. Hazlitt, 1st series, nos.XXVI, XXVIII.

Blessednes of Brytaine" by Maurice Kyffin, 1587:

> As Shyning Sunne recleeres the darkned Skye,
> And foorth recalles eche thing, from shiv'ring Shrowds,
> So hath our Second Sunne, both farre and nye,
> by brightning Beames, outcleerd erronious Clouds;
> A pow'rfull Prop of Christes Euangell pure,
> One [i.e. on] whose Support, it rests Reposed sure.[87]

In Spenser's "Aprill" Eclogue, Elisa is "another Sunne" who causes Phoebus to retreat in amazement when he sees "how broade her beames did spredde" (ll.73-81). In *The Faerie Queene*, Una, at her betrothal, reveals "The blazing brightnesse of her beauties beame, / And glorious light of her sunshyny face" (I.xii.23). Gloriana, too, is like the rising sun:

> In widest Ocean she her throne does reare,
> That ouer all the earth it may be seene;
> As morning Sunne her beames dispredden cleare (II.ii.40.).

Here the conventional association of sun-imagery with monarchy is conflated with the imagery of *Revelation*. The city of Cleopolis, or London, over which the Faerie Queene reigns, is the earthly equivalent of the New Jerusalem in heaven (I.x.57-59). Belphoebe, also, in her *blazon*, is attributed with sun-like beauty which combines Biblical overtones with the Petrarchan convention of praise for a mistress's bright eyes:

> In her faire eyes two liuing lampes did flame,
> Kindled aboue at th'heauenly makers light,
> And darted fyrie beames out of the same. (II.ii.23.)

So identification of Elizabeth with the sun, while bearing associations

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87. Hazlitt, 1st series, no.XXIX.

with Marian imagery, also encompasses other associations of sun-imagery with monarchy and with the Petrarchan feminine ideal; and represents a re-appropriation from its Biblical source of the image of the Woman Clothed with the Sun, in order to confront Catholic propaganda.

Bride and mother

Some of the closest correspondences between the cult of Elizabeth and the cult of Mary are not in symbols of virginity, but in the symbolism assigned to each as brides and mothers. In mediaeval exegeses and lyrics about Mary, much play was made on the fact that she was at once Christ's mother, and his bride in heaven, and his daughter as a member of the human race. The nuptial imagery was transferred to nuns and virgin saints; they too were represented as "brides of Christ." Mary was also often seen as both bride and mother to the church.[88] In a similar way, Elizabeth was seen as bride and mother of the English Church and English nation.

This maternal role was derived not solely from the cult of the Virgin, but also from the text in Isaiah about queens being nursing mothers.[89] This Biblical source gave the image the Protestant authority of the Word, rather than its merely being an appropriation of Catholic imagery. Moreover, the bride/mother image endowed Elizabeth with the fertility in the symbolic sphere which she lacked in reality; it associated

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88. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, pp.123-8, 287.

89. Geneva Bible, *Isaiah*, XXXXIX.23; see p.79 above.

her with life-giving powers, rather than just a negative, sterile chastity.[90]. A view of her symbolic motherhood as compensation for her lack of physical children was openly expressed by Maurice Kyffin in his Accession Day verses of 1587: a marginal note reads, "A perpetual memory of her manifold goodnes, insteade of Sonnes and daughters", and the verses beside it run, "Frutefull in Faith, though fruteles, wanting feere [i.e. spouse]: / Such brings shee Frute, in stead of Children heere."[91] It is evident that bridal and maternal symbolism held great appeal, without this necessarily proving that post-Reformation Englishmen were anxiously searching for a new symbolic-mother-figure.

The image of bride of the nation was one which had more mystical connotations, suggesting the idea of the bride of the Lamb, the virgin who has renounced the "natural" functions of women in this world in order to fulfil her spiritual vocation. William Camden reports a speech to the 1559 Parliament by Elizabeth in which she describes her duty as ruler precisely as a nun-like calling:

> Concerning marriage which ye so earnestly move me to, I have beene long since perswaded, that I was sent into this world by God, to thinke, and doe those things chiefly, which may tend to his glory. Hereupon haue I chosen that kinde of life, which is most free from the troublesome cares of this world, that I might attend the service of God alone.

She went on to describe herself as bride and mother to her kingdom:

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90. Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics*, p.115.

91. Hazlitt, ed., 1st series, no.XXIX.

> And behold (said she, which I marvaile ye have forgotten,) the pledge of this my wedlocke and marriage with my Kingdome, (and therewith, she stretched forth her finger and shewed the ring of gold wherwith at her Coronation she had in a set forme of words, solemnly given her selfe in marriage to her Kingdome.)[92]

The symbolic ring is analogous to the wedding-ring worn by nuns to signify their marriage to Christ.

The bridal image is used in the *Faerie Queene*, where Una is betrothed to the Red Cross Knight, simultaneously symbolising the betrothal between Church and nation, and the betrothal between Elizabeth and Protestant England (I.xii). Notably, this is a betrothal, and not a marriage; for Spenser, the union of England with the *true* Protestant Church had yet to take place. Among other examples of the image, Thomas Bentley, in the dedication to Elizabeth of *The Monvment of Matrones*, wrote of "Iesus Christ your sweet spouse."[93] Elizabeth herself, in her old age, told Sir John Harington's wife that her people were "all my husbands"; and was reportedly highly distressed when, in February 1603, her coronation ring had to be cut off because of the swelling of her hands.[94]

The image of mother of the nation was slightly less spiritual; it promoted the idea of the state as a family, as a structure whose

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92. Camden, p.16; Heisch, "Persistence of Patriarchy", p.50; E.C. Wilson, p.6n.

93. Thomas Bentley, comp., *The Monvment of Matrones: conteining seuen seuerall Lamps of Virginitie* (London: 1582), dedication.

94. Johnson, pp.428, 434.

hierarchical power-relations were "natural". It was an effective image to instil social and political stability. Thus, in the official order of prayer issued in 1601 after the Essex rebellion, it was said that the rebels,

> like unnatural Children have rebelled against the Mother of their own lives, that took them up from their cradles, and cherished them in her own bosom.[95]

Sir John Harington, in some verses "Against Pius Quintus, that excommunicated Queene Elizabeth", juxtaposed the figure of the mother's breast with images of violence to express the extreme unnaturalness of those who sought to separate the English Queen, alias the English Church, from her people:

> You suck out blood, and bite your Nurses teats.
> Learne, learne, to ask your milk, for if you snatch it,
> The nurse must send your babes pap with a hatchet.[96]

On the other side, Elizabeth used the image to assert her care for and commitment to her subjects, thus precluding dissent; in 1563 she told Parliament,

> And so I assure you all that though after my death you may have many stepdames, yet shall you never have any, a more naturall mother, than I meane to be unto you all.[97]

Many panegyrists who used the maternal image did so in precise echo

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95. *Liturgies*, p.690.

96. *The Letters and Epigrams of Sir John Harington*, ed. N.E. McClure (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1930), p.274.

97. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I*, p.125; Heisch, "Persistence of Patriarchy", p.50.

of the text from Isaiah. Thomas Bentley, again, in the dedication to *The Monvment of Matrones*, commended the succeeding religious writings by women as "... so diuine exercises of the church, vnto your Maiestie the most naturall mother and noble nursse thereof."[98] Anthony Munday, in 1584, conflated the mother and bride image to write:

> her Highnesse is the most louing Mother and Nurse of all her good Subiectes, and is lykewise the husband of the common weale, maried to the Realme, and the same by ceremony of Ring as solemnly signified, as any other mariage.[99]

And in the penultimate year of the reign, Josias Nichols asked rhetorically, "... whose hart is not greatly moued to glorifie God, who hath giuen vs, so faithful & constant a nurse & louing mother [?]"[100]

John Jewel, too, addressed the Queen in a dedication as "now the only nurse and mother of the church of God within these your majesty's most noble dominions." However, under the guise of compliment he is in fact reminding her of her duty as guardian of the Protestant Church in England, exhorting her to put through a thorough programme of reform. After referring to her father, as the initiator of religious reform in England, Jewel goes on to express the hope that Elizabeth may live to be "an old mother in Israel".[101] Writing in 1564, he is exhorting her not only to be

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98. Bentley, dedication.

99. Anthony Munday, *A VVatch-vvoord to Englande*, 1584, sig.A3, quoted in E.C. Wilson, p.218. For discussion of Munday's masculine gendering of Elizabeth as the "husband" in the marriage, see p.49, n.47 above.

100. Josias Nichols, *Abrahams faith*, 1602, sig.B1r-v; Wilson, p.218.

101. "An Epistle to Queen Elizabeth", in *A Defence of the Apologie of the Church of England*, in J.Ayre, ed., vol.III, p.118.

symbolic mother to the nation, but to be the biological mother to an heir who will continue the Tudor dynasty's promotion of the true faith (see pp.80-82 above).

Another interesting example of the use of this image is John Aylmer's *Harborowe*, 1559. Aylmer frequently named Elizabeth as the mother of the country,[102] and, reflecting on the miseries of Mary I's reign, expressed his confidence in the new regime thus:

> ... as for this losse we haue nowe, I doubte not, but as the olde fathers are wont to saye, that as by a woman came death: so by a woman was brought fourthe life. In like manner as bi a womans (whether negligence, or misfortune, I wote not we haue taken this wound ([sic] so bi a mothers diligence and felicitie, we shal haue it againe healed.[103]

According to this formula, Mary Tudor was the Eve who brought upon England its Fall; while Elizabeth is the second Eve, or Virgin Mary, by whom it will be redeemed from that Fall.[104] Mary Tudor was a bad mother; Elizabeth will be a good mother. Here is a striking example, from early in the reign, by a Protestant churchman, of Elizabeth being directly likened to the Virgin Mary. The manner of the analogy, though, is not such as to suggest that Elizabeth will be worshipped in the same way that the Virgin Mary had been worshipped. Rather, it treats the tradition of the Virgin as

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102. Aylmer, sigs. B3v, D2v, O4r.

103. Aylmer, sigs.L3r - L3v.

104. For the history of this tradition, see Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, pp.59-60.

the second Eve as an allegory which can be read as a typological representation of contemporary events, just as the Book of *Revelation* and other parts of the Bible were habitually read.

In combination, the images of mother and bride constituted an overwhelming assertion of Elizabeth's absolute authority as both natural and divinely-ordained. As such, it is hard to see how Elizabeth and her ministers and panegyrists could have resisted using them, regardless of their echoes of Mariolatry. Besides, they may represent not so much an appropriation of the cult of the Virgin Mary, as a continuation of certain ways of thinking about women, and female power. The familiar way of representing female power as natural was through these images of motherhood and marriage; they were an established means of reconciling the mutually exclusive categories of femaleness and power. Their appeal also lay in their reconciliation of contradictory ideas about female sexuality. Paul Heishman, in a study of the worship by Sikhs of a virgin-mother goddess, has reached the conclusion that it resolves the problem of the contradictory values placed on motherhood and female sexual purity.[105] One might apply much the same argument to both Mariolatry and the cult of Elizabeth: similar beliefs regarding female sexuality produce similar symbols in different places and times.

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105. "Virgin and Mother", *Symbols and Sentiments: Cross-Cultural Studies in Symbolism*, ed. Ioan Lewis (London: Academic Press, 1977), pp.269-293; and see "Introduction", pp.21-2.

Popular examples

Some Elizabethan popular songs and ballads have survived which seem to transfer Marian imagery directly to Elizabeth. "Come over the born Bessy", for instance, contained the lines:

> Oh, swete virgin pure!
> Longe may ye endure
> To reigne over us in this lande:
> For your workes do accord,
> Ye are the handmaid of the Lord
> For he hath blessed you with his hand.[106]

The phrase "handmaid of the Lord", recalling Mary's response to the Annunciation, also occurred in another song, from 1584, which was issued in reaction to the Throckmorton plot. It called England the place

> ... where the Lord of Lords hath set,
> his handmaid pure and cleene,
> Annoynting her my rightfull Prince,
> to raigne a royall Queene.[107]

The phrase describing Mary's meek submission to the divine purpose comes to describe Elizabeth's dutiful obedience to her calling to lead the English Church and nation. The phrase "handmaid of the Lord" was also applied to Elizabeth officially, occurring with great frequency in the Orders of Prayer issued throughout the reign;[108] it seems to have been

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106. Oldys & Park, eds., vol.X, pp.260-62.

107. "Englands Lamentation For the late Treasons conspired against the Queenes Maiestie by Frances Throgmorton", E.C. Wilson, p.31.

108. *Liturgies*, passim.

transferred from the Virgin to Elizabeth, as a description of her role as God's agent in advancing the true faith.

Another ballad, from 1562-3, contains the sort of agglomeration of symbols of virginity which Wilson and Yates take as evidence of the substitution of Elizabeth for the Virgin Mary (see p.216 above):

> Loe here the pearle,
> Whom God and man doth loue:
> Loe here on earth
> The onely starre of light ...
> Loe here the heart
> That so hath honord God,
> That, for her loue,
> We feele not of his rod.[109]

Thus conventional emblems of virginity are combined with the Catholic idea of the Virgin and saints as intercessors, creating a very strong echo of Mariolatry.

Evidently the authors of these ballads differ from Spenser, a Protestant intellectual, in their more simplistic and direct transfer of Marian imagery to Elizabeth. Again, though, this is not necessarily evidence of a psychological need to create a Virgin-Mary-substitute; but merely shows an absence of anxiety in describing a virgin queen in the phrases and images to which they were most accustomed.

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109. E.C. Wilson, pp.9-10.

The 1590s and early 1600s

Even in court poetry, in the last decade or so of the reign there seems to have been a decrease in anxiety about praising the Queen in idolatrous or Marian terms. Writers like Spenser, Sidney and Greville, who began their writing careers in the 1570s and 80s, and who were devout Protestants, saw ideological justifications for eulogising the Queen, but often did so in terms which clearly represented an idealised version of her: what they hoped she might be. Moreover, while they might use emblems of virginity to embellish the Protestant cause, they generally avoided any blatant or specific identification of Elizabeth with the Virgin Mary. However, if these qualms were not shared by popular balladeers, they were also not shared by some court poets in the 1590s. As panegyric to Elizabeth became ever more fantastical, Marian imagery was woven into the elaborate web of conceits.

Part of what went on in the 1590s was the use of religious and Marian imagery as tropes of courtly love, as in "*Vivat Eliza* for an *Ave Mary*". But this took on more force when allied with belief in the mystical powers of the ruler, in Elizabeth's semi-divine status as anointed monarch, as protector of the true Church, and as a vessel for the Holy Spirit. The entertainment at Ditchley, the home of Sir Henry Lee, in 1592, continued and extended the "hermit-knight" imagery of his retirement tilts of 1590, to use religious imagery as more than just a metaphor for absolute romantic devotion. Lee, or "Loricus", asks a chaplain to show him the way; the chaplain points to heaven, saying, "... it is the verie Kinge's hie-waye.

[You say true] in deede (quoth he) the verie Queene's hie waye." Jean Wilson comments: "[the Queen's highway is] both the route to Elizabeth, worshipped as a goddess, and the route to God which the saintly Elizabeth follows." Loricus and the chaplain join "in prayers for one Prince, & the prayers of one God." Loricus calls the lodging he builds "the Crowne Oratory". He is sick, but Elizabeth's very presence heals him; when he blesses her for curing him,

> Hereat Stellatus, his Chappelaine, besought him to blesse God onelie, for it was Gods spirite who recovered his spirites. Truthe (quoth he again) yet whosoever blesseth her, blesseth God in her: and ever blessed be God for her.[110]

This goes further than "*Vivat Eliza* for an *Ave Mary*": the pageant addresses the question of whether it is correct or permissible to pay homage to Elizabeth as a divine figure, and answers with a resounding "Yes," because she is seen as the earthly agent of the Christian God.

Elizabeth had always, theoretically, been seen in these semi-divine terms; what is striking about the panegyric of the 1590s is its assumption that the proper way to praise such a figure is in imagery which blatantly borrows from pre-Reformation sacred verse. Sir John Davies, for example, in his *Hymnes of Astraea*, uses imagery which unconcernedly lays itself wide open to charges of idolatry:

> Brave Princes of this civill age,
> Enter into this pilgrimage:
> This Saints tongue is an oracle,

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110. J. Wilson, pp.136-41.

Her eye hath made a Prince a Page,
And workes each day a Miracle.[111]

There is evidently no sense that it is outrageous or unacceptable to call Elizabeth a miracle-working saint; it is self-consciously extravagant to do so, but not taboo. Similarly Thomas Churchyard, in "A discourse of the ioy good subiects haue when they see our Phenix abroad", 1593, described the Queen as "like shrined Saint in beaten gold."[112] In the 1591 entertainment at Elvetham, "The Poet's speech to his Boy offering him a cushion" urged, "Now let us use no cushions, but faire hearts: / For now we kneel to more than usuall Saints", an allusion to the use of hassocks in church.[113]

Thomas Dekker goes even further in *Old Fortunatus*, 1599, in his presentation of Elizabeth as a divinity. Fortunatus describes the courts he has seen:

there to liue is rare, O tis diuine;
There shall you see faces Angelicall,
There shall you see troopes of chast Goddesses,
Whose star-like eyes haue power, (might they still shine)
To make night day, and day more christalline.
Neere these you shall behold great *Heroes*,
White headed Councellors and Iouiall spirites,
Standing like fierie Cherubins to gard
The Monarch, who in God-like glorie sits,
In midst of these, as if this deitie
Had with a looke created a new world;

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111. Sir John Davies, *Hymnes of Astraea*, no.VIII, "To all the Princes in Europe."

112. From *Churchyard's Challenge*, quoted in Robert Chester, *Loves Martyr*, ed. A.B. Grosart (London, 1878), p.xxx.

113. J.Wilson, p.104.

The standers by, being the faire workemanship.'[114]

By this trope, the monarch's power as maker of men transforms her into a Supreme Creator, at the centre of a court which is an earthly facsimile of heaven. On one level, this religious imagery is merely a metaphor for the political supremacy of the monarch; but, at the same time, it is a precise representation of her spiritual powers as an earthly analogue to the powers of God.

It is difficult to interpret these hymns to Elizabeth as a "saint" or "goddess". How far did Elizabethans believe in their monarch's divinity? Were these expressions of profound spiritual worship, or merely conventional hyperboles of flattery? A foreign visitor, Thomas Platter, after witnessing shows of adulation of the Queen on his travels in England in 1599, was moved to assert, "For this is certain; the English esteem her, not only as their queen, but as their God."[115] However, such was the blurring of politics and religion at this time that it is very hard to establish how far even belief in the spiritual powers of the monarch extended beyond a formula for representing her political supremacy, or how far professions of worship extended beyond expressions of patriotism and loyalty. It seems unlikely that Elizabethans actually regarded her as divine. Amidst the currents of discontent of the 1590s and early 1600s, it seems most plausible that panegyrists employed these lofty terms for

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114. Dekker, *Old Fortunatus*, II.ii.178-89.

115. *Thomas Platter's Travels in England*, 1599, trans. Clare Williams (London: Cape, 1937), p.228.

primarily political reasons; put baldly, he who praised most strikingly and exaltingly could hope for the most political advancement.

One of the most striking examples of panegyric from this period is one which employs specifically Marian imagery: some "Verses of the Queene", sometimes attributed to Sir John Davies, which were composed for Christmas 1602:

> A virgin once a glorious starre did beare,
> Like to the Sunne inclosd in globe of glasse;
> A virgins hart is nowe the golden Sphere
> Whence to this earth that influence doth passe.
> He shynes on her, and she on him againe,
> Reflecting Love all earthly starres doth staine.
>
> He whylome tooke a stable for his Cell,
> Thrise happie Cell in which a god hath ben,
> But he will nowe in princes pallace dwell,
> And wedds himselfe to rare *Eliza* queene.
> Come wise men, come, present your giftes devine,
> Here standes the starr that makes your starr to shine.
>
> This Sacred Nimphe, because noe mortall wight
> Deserved to lincke with her in chaines of Love,
> Vnto the god of soules her faith hath plight,
> And vowde her selfe to him without remove.
> Thus doth this brid tenn thowsand children breed,
> And virgins milke the Church of god doth feed.
>
> To see this birth did Angells sweetly singe,
> Nowe singes that nest of nightingalls againe,
> Joye, peace, goodwill [on earth] to men they bringe,
> Of fortie five yeares thus tuninge they remaine.
> Long maye they tune that sweete and pleasant songe,
> And longe maye shee our angell singe amonge.
>
> For Syons sake preserve from death:
> Our noble queene *Elizabeth*: Amen.[116]

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116. Sir John Davies, p.307.

Here there are indisputable echoes of Mariolatry: like Mary, Elizabeth bears Christ within her, and becomes his bride, and direct comparisons are made between virgin and virgin. In particular, the image of virgin's milk feeding the Church draws on mediaeval symbolism of Mary giving nutritive suck to true believers,[117] as well as drawing out the literal implications of Isaiah's words about queens being nursing mothers of the Church. There is considerable grotesquerie here if we pause to think that Elizabeth was sixty-nine when these verses were written, only a few months away from her death, and if we stop to imagine her physical state; but, of course, we are wholly in the realm of symbolism here, and of compliment, in which extravagance is all.

In this inflated mode of panegyric which predominated in the later years of the reign, this kind of openly "idolatrous" imagery was not only acceptable, but was being imaginatively developed at all levels of literature. Hyperbole, from whatever source, was the order of the day. Moreover, there seems to have been a relaxation of the anxiety of the earlier years of the Elizabethan settlement, as to whether it was acceptable to make any mention of the Virgin and saints. In Robert Chester's *Loves Martyr*, 1601, King Arthur was said to bear on his shield "The image of our *Ladie* with her *Sonne* / Held in her armes",[118] restoring a mediaeval tradition, resisted by Spenser, that Arthur was the Virgin

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117. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, ch.13.

118. Chester, p.61/69.

Mary's champion.[119] Sir John Harington, in a religious poem entitled "Fifteen several distichs on the fifteen divisions", included scenes centring on the Virgin such as the Annunciation, the Nativity, and the Assumption and Glorification:

> And after all theis things it is presumed,
> the blessed virgin was to heaven assumed,
> God graunt me, when my life hath run the race,
> to say to her with saynts. *Haile full of grace.*"[120]

In such a climate, it is not altogether surprising that Marian imagery should have been a central feature of the elegies on Elizabeth's death.

Marian imagery in the elegies.

Apart from the Dowland song, "*Vivat Eliza* for an *Ave Mary*", some of the literary evidence most often used to support the argument that Elizabeth supplanted the Virgin Mary in the public affection is drawn from the elegies written for her death. In particular, several writers quote the couplet appended to an engraving of the Queen with the Phoenix device, "She was, she is (what can there more be said?) / In earth the first, in heaven the second Maid."[121] Yates comments,

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119. For more on this tradition, see J.Wilson, p.36, n.79. Spenser gives Prince Arthur a pure diamond shield which dazzles his opponents (*FQ* I.vii.33-35).

120. "Unpublished Poems by Sir John Harington", ed. R.H. Miller, *ELR* 14 (1984), pp.157-58.

121. For these verses, see Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol. III, p.652; Furnivall & Morfill, eds., vol.II, pp.286-88. For comment on them, see E.C. Wilson, p.206 n.72; Yates, *Astraea*, p.78; Strong, *Cult*, p.15.

> This staggering remark seems to imply that the defunct Queen Elizabeth is now a second Blessed Virgin in heaven. What more can there be said indeed? Except to add that implications of this kind are not uncommon in Elizabethan literature.[122]

In fact several more things can be said. The outpouring of overt Marian imagery in the elegies is not, as Yates implies, typical of panegyrics produced throughout Elizabeth's reign; it is far more blatant, growing out of the increasingly overt use of such imagery through the 'nineties and early 1600s, and encouraged by the even greater aptness of sacred imagery to Elizabeth now that she had been sanctified by death. For it was far from unusual for the death of a queen, even a Protestant queen, to be treated as an assumption into heaven and elevation to saintly status: Alexander Ales reported that, on the day of Anne Boleyn's execution,

> ... the Archbishop then raised his eyes to heaven and said, 'She who has been the Queen of England upon earth will to-day become a Queen in heaven.[123]

In 1631, even the Puritan Milton wrote in his "Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester" that "thou bright saint sit'st high in glory / ... No marchioness, but now a queen."[124] Once a noblewoman or queen had been translated from the physical to the spiritual sphere, there was apparently no incongruity for a Protestant in apotheosising her. There was an implied

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122. Yates, *Astraea*, p.78.

123. *Calendar of State Papers Foreign 1558-59*, no.1303, §22.

124. Milton, ed. Carey, pp.126-9.

acknowledgment of this in Henry Petowe's *Eliza's Funerall*; he wrote, "Divine she is for whom my muse doth mourne, / Though lately mortall, now she sits on hie."[125] Her death grants a free licence to praise her as a goddess. Elizabeth, once dead, shared with Mary not only her virginity and her status as female figurehead of the Church, but also the immortality and other-worldliness of a soul beyond death, making it even more predictable that she should be eulogised in similar terms. Thus it was that Elizabeth's death inspired the use of strongly religious imagery, such as: "She was, she is, and evermore shall be, / The blessed Queene of sweet eternitie."[126]

The interest of the the Phoenix couplet quoted by Yates lies mainly in its description of Elizabeth as the "*second* Maid" in heaven, suggesting not that the "first Maid" had been supplanted, but that veneration for her had persisted, or been revived, such that this was the highest compliment that could be paid. In this respect, the more openly Marian imagery of the elegies seems to grow out of the increasing extravagance of 1590s and early 1600s panegyric, and out of a relaxation of attitudes towards the images formerly castigated by the reformers as popish, as manifested in texts like Hooker's *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* and Holland's 1599 Accession Day sermon (see pp.179, 184 above).

Another reason for alluding to the Virgin Mary in the elegies was

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125. Oldys & Park, eds., vol.X, pp.333-41.

126. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol. III, p.616.

because of correspondences between Marian feasts and the dates of Elizabeth's birth and death: the Queen had been born the day before Mary's nativity, and she died the day before the Annunciation. This close correspondence could be stressed to suggest that Elizabeth's life was providentially ordained, just as Astraean and messianic imagery surrounding her birthday had been used in earlier panegyric to suggest her fulfilment of a divine destiny. The same engraving which carried the "second Maid" couplet was also subscribed:

> This Maiden-Queen Elizabeth came into this world, the Eve of the Nativity of the blessed virgin Mary; and died on the Eve of the Annunciation of the virgin Mary, 1602.[127]

Thomas Dekker, in *The Wonderfulle Yeare*, infused his prose with a sense of wonder to draw out the fatefulness of these dates:

> Shee came in with the fall of the leafe, and went away in the Spring: her life (which was dedicated to Virginitie,) both beginning & closing vp a miraculous Mayden circle: for she was borne vpon a Lady Eue, and died vpon a Lady Eue.[128]

Both Oxford and Cambridge Universities brought out volumes of collected elegies, in both of which much emphasis was laid upon these miraculous dates; the Cambridge volume, *Sorrowes Ioy*, contained the following lines:

> The blessed morne 'fore blessed Marie's day,
> On Angel's wings our Queene to Heaven flieth;
> ... In heaven's chorus so at once are seene,

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127. *Brittain's Lachrimae*, in Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, p.652; Yates, p.78.

128. Dekker, *Wonderfulle Yeare*, p.25.

A Virgin Mother and a Maiden Queene.[129]

Besides this linking of dates, the elegies continued and developed those strands of imagery which had already associated Elizabeth and Mary; most notably, the description of Elizabeth as symbolic bride and mother. Now that her soul had ascended to heaven, it was even more apt to describe her as the bride of Christ, being received into mystic marriage:

> Whilst here shee liu'd, shee spent her virgin yeares
> In Royall pompe amongst her wiser Peeres:
> Nor mought shee daygne with earthly Prince to ioyne,
> To bring forth issue from her virgin loyne:
> She had espoused her selfe to th'Lord of life,
> So still shee liues, a maiden, and a wife.[130]

The author of "A Stay-Griefe for Englishmen" wrote:

> Elizabeth our English Queene,
> The like to whome was never seene,
> Is gone from Earth to Christ aboue
> To dwell with him her onely loue.[131]

Another writer, who composed the verses prefacing the account of the Queen's funeral, saw in her death divine retribution for the nation's decadence:

> Her losse is ours, Heaven thereby gaines a Wife.

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129. "Singultientes Lusus", in *Sorrowes Ioy: or, A Lamentation for our late deceased Soveraigne Elizabeth with a Triumph for the prosperous Succession of our gratious King Iames, &c.*, in Nichols, *James*, vol.I, p.15.

130. "An Epitaph vpon the Death of our late gratious and dread Soveraigne *Elizabeth*, Queene of *England*, &c.", Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, p.652.

131. In *Sorrowes Ioy*, Nichols, *James*, vol.I, p.12.

> Yet had not Sin bin hugg'd in th'armes of Pride,
> England had smil'd, and Heaven had lost a Bride.[132]

Besides the symbolic role of bride of Christ, Elizabeth continued to be assigned the title of the nation's mother. The Cambridge volume of elegies lamented that the English were orphans who had lost "thy virgin scepter-swaying Mother;"[133] and the Latin inscription on her tomb described her as "the mother of this her country".[134] The "Verses of the Queene" of 1602, quoted above (p.263), expressed the idea of Elizabeth's symbolic motherhood in bearing Christ within her, just as Mary bore him in her womb. This trope was reiterated by Dr. King, in his sermon at Whitehall three days after the Queen's death:

> Soe there are two excellent women, one that bare Christ and an other that blessed Christ; to these may wee joyne a thrid that bare and blessed him both. Shee bare him in hir hart as a wombe, she conceived him in fayth, shee brought him forth in aboundance of good workes ...[135]

There was also continuation and extension of the application of messianic imagery to Elizabeth herself. Anthony Nixon explicitly identified her with Christ the Redeemer: "*Eliza* was our Iesus to withstand / Our enemies that sought to worke our woe."[136]

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132. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, p.620.

133. Nichols, *James*, vol.I, pp.3, 2.

134. Johnson p.441; Strong, *Portraits*, pp.153-4.

135. Strong, *Portraits*, p.42.

136. Anthony Nixon, *Elizaes memoriall. King Iames his arrivall. And Romes downefall*, 1603, quoted in E.C. Wilson, pp.385-7.

At the same time, the mantle of messianic symbolism passed on to James, applied to him in even more detail because he was of the same sex as the incarnate Christ. Such an identification, while appearing highly blasphemous to the modern reader, was by no means unprecedented: the birth of Henry VII's first son, Prince Arthur, had been greeted with poems alluding to Virgil's Fourth Eclogue, implying that the new prince was a new manifestation of Christ; which, indeed, as the heir to a divinely-anointed monarchy, in some sense he was.[137] Similarly, James was described as a new shepherd for the nation, and one Cambridge elegist said, "Though we a King of Peace haue in her stead, / Yet let vs mourne, - the Queene of Peace is dead."[138] Most strikingly, John Savile, in *A Salutatorie Poem to the Majestie of King James*, used the fact that James had been proclaimed King on the day preceding the Annunciation to develop an extended similitude between his accession and the coming of Christ. He relates how the English people longed for James to arrive, just as Mary longed for the birth of Jesus; how they greeted him with song, just as she greeted her child; and how they were possessed with the same joy which possessed Mary's soul. Mary is described as "Entombing in her wombe our Saviour deare", perhaps an allusion to James's "birth", as monarch, from Elizabeth's tomb. The new King is greeted with the acclamation, "Hail; full of grace!"[139]

As with material from throughout the reign, however, it would be

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137. Anglo, p. 46.

138. *Sorrowes Ioy*, Nichols, *James*, vol. I, pp. 8, 10.

139. Nichols, *James*, vol. I, p. 141.

wrong to suggest that the individual writers using Marian or religious imagery all did so in identical ways. Instead, they reveal different sensibilities and attitudes. For instance, there is unusually overt use of Catholic imagery in an elegy entitled "To the blessed Saint of famose memory Elizabeth", and assigned to "Thy perpetuall and faithfull Beadesmen the distressed co*mm*ons of Englande." Elizabeth is addressed as a saint, with powers of intercession:

> If o*ur* petitions, then (Blest S*ainc*t), want wings
> To mounte them to the Iudge of Iudges throne,
> O helpe them (mighty Soueraine!) w*i*th thine owne;
> Carry o*ur* iust complaintes, since Iust they ar,
> And make a tender of them at *tha*t Barr ...
> O pardon these our grosse omissions,
> And deigne to furthar these our poor petitions,
> And wee will make the name of great Eliza
> Equall *th*e honors of *tha*t great Maria.[140]

They will erect a shrine for pilgrimages, with an altar. In this instance, Elizabeth is seen as performing precisely the same role as the Virgin Mary.

Dekker, also, wrote in such a way as to imply a substitution of Elizabeth for the Virgin Mary: England is "a nation that was begotten and borne under her; that neuer shouted any other *Aue* than for her name."[141] This could imply that England has expelled popish images, but not the rituals whereby they were worshipped, merely transferring them to the secular leader. Or, it could imply that in that very act of transference,

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140. Furnivall & Morfill, vol. II, pp.130-31.

141. Dekker, *Wonderfulle Yeare*, p.19.

the significance of the "*Ave*" is modified and secularised; it becomes a "hail" to an imperial ruler, rather than an act of religious homage. Certainly Dekker's words suggest a burst of nationalist pride.

Other elegists display more self-consciousness of the ambiguity of their position. A poem "On the Day of our Queene's Death, and our King's Proclamation", says of the day of Elizabeth's death, which is the "fast vnto our Ladie-day",

> Be Holy eve unto our Holy day,
> Wherein was told the comming of our Lord ...
> Begin the yeares with good hap both togither,
> Weele keepe the one beginning as the other;
> And as it falls, thou the Politicall,
> Serue sub-yeare to th'Ecclesiasticall.[142]

This writer is plainly sensitive to any confusion of the political with the religious, and is careful to state that religious festivals retain supremacy. Also interesting is the elegy for Elizabeth by Thomas Cecil, the eldest son of Burghley:

> O deare, deare Saint, I could haue worshipt thee;
> And still I would, but for idolatrie.
> And yet I will i'the best place of my brest,
> Build vp a chappel for thy sole behest.[143]

Here is an elegist who is aware that he may be committing idolatry; although, having acknowledged the fact, he resigns himself to it. This has the effect of making his panegyric all the more glorifying: for Elizabeth's

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142. Nichols, *James*, vol.I, p.10.

143. Nichols, *James*, vol.I, p.16.

sake, he will *even go so far* as to commit idolatry, so great is the devotion she inspires.

An even more self-conscious position is taken by the author of "Englands welcome to Iames", 1603. Verses rejoicing at James's accession are interrupted by an "Anticke Voice", which cries out, "... England thou art not wise." The nation is rejoicing because it has a virtuous king,

> Yet dost forget the giver of thy King ...
> Thy King, heauens Queene, in homelie cloutes did holde,
> Not wrapt in roabes be-wrought with wouen golde.

The gospels are briefly recounted; then England sings,

> All glory be to God,
> which in my widdow-hood:
> Sent me a husband and a King,
> to cheere my sorrowing moode.[144]

The verses teeter between the conventions of panegyric and a Puritan iconoclasm; yet even within this Puritanism, Mary is described as "heauens Queene." The complexity of the attitudes struck in poems such as this indicates how rash it is to generalise about the use of Catholic or Marian imagery in panegyric.

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144. Hazlitt, 2nd series, no. III.

6. Conclusion

Right up to the end of Elizabeth's reign, then, we can find diversity in the encomia to her which use Marian imagery. Those panegyrists who wrote during her lifetime vary from the author of the 1602 "Verses of the Queene", in which Virgin is directly likened to virgin, to Spenser, who employed images which carried associations with the Virgin Mary without ever alluding to her directly. This range of tones and stances is not adequately covered by the simple idea that Elizabeth was turned into a substitute Virgin Mary to fill a psychological void which had been left by the Reformation. Nor were the apparent implications of idolatry and blasphemy quite the same as they might appear to us today.

The official line on images of the Virgin Mary, and on other forms of visual splendour associated with Catholicism, was that they were unacceptable in a religious context. At the same time, there were some forms of visual symbolism which were tolerated because they were specifically identified with the new Protestant faith. In particular, the power of visual display and ritual was permitted, or even positively promoted, in the service of secular authority. Some writers justified this on the grounds that such worldliness, which must be banished from the Church where it would distract from true spiritual devotion, was precisely appropriate in the service of worldly power. In this respect, secular power was distinguished from the sacred. On the other hand, the tendency was to emphasise the likeness between secular and sacred: traditional belief in the spiritual powers of the monarch was amplified by Elizabeth's role as Supreme Governor of the Church and as establisher of the Protestant faith

in England, justifying the use of religious imagery in praise of her. The dominant motivation running through all this was the enforcement of royal authority; and the use of visual display and ritual in support of this, while it may have made use of the popular appeal of such display, tended to be initiated by central government, rather than rising spontaneously from "the masses".

At the same time, there was a long cultural tradition of exchange of imagery between secular and sacred poetry. In court poetry, Catholic imagery was a conventional trope for romantic devotion. The use of such imagery in panegyric of Elizabeth may therefore, in many cases, imply merely such courtly devotion - itself a trope for political loyalty - rather than religious worship.

Moreover, it is necessary to be wary of stamping the label "Marian" too readily on images in Elizabethan panegyric such as floral motifs, or the sun or moon, or the phoenix. Such images had been used in praise of Mary, but they also bore other connotations which were at least as prominent in making them apt for the praise of Elizabeth. Some of these images had original sources in the *Song of Songs*, the Book of *Revelation*, and conventional symbolism of virginity in general, so that a Protestant writer like Spenser may have been using them in an attempt to go back to the Scriptural source and reclaim the symbolic power of virginity for the Protestant cause. The use of other Marian myths by Spenser such as the Immaculate Conception, or the stress laid by other panegyrists upon the correspondence between the dates of major events in Elizabeth's life and Marian feast days, are evidence not that Elizabeth was being elevated to

fill a gap left by the Virgin Mary, but that Marian myth was being read in typological ways, just as Scripture in general was being read, as a means of representing the history and destiny of the Elizabethan nation. Lyly, in his encomium of Elizabeth in *Euphues and his England*, 1580, wrote of God's protection of Elizabeth from treacherous plots:

> He hath kept her safe in the whale's belly when her subjects went about to throw her into the sea, preserved her in the hot oven when her enemies increased the fire, not suffering a hair to fall from her, much less any harm to fasten upon her.[1]

Just as he invokes the stories of Jonah and of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, so Marian narratives could be sources for the allegorical representation of Elizabeth.

E.R. Dodds, in *The Greeks and the Irrational*, wrote that

> A new belief-pattern very seldom effaces completely the pattern that was there before: either the old lives on as an element in the new - sometimes an unconfessed and half-conscious element - or else the two persist side by side, logically incompatible, but contemporaneously accepted by different individuals or even by the same individual.[2]

I would suggest that we can apply this model of the survival of belief-patterns to the use of apparently Marian imagery in panegyric of Elizabeth - but *not*, I hasten to add, because the cult of the Virgin Mary simply survived and was transmuted into the cult of Elizabeth. To build up a more

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1. Lyly, *Euphues*, p.437.

2. p.179, quoted in Peter Gay, *Freud for Historians* (Oxford UP, 1985), p.196.

complex and accurate picture, we can, firstly, use it as a model of the survival of ceremony and splendour in politics, existing alongside Protestant rejection of idolatry. However, I would dispute that this was "unconfessed and half-conscious"; the evidence suggests that Elizabethan panegyrists were highly conscious of their proximity to idolatry, and found ways of justifying it through the sort of simultaneous likening and separation of the secular and sacred described above.

Secondly, we can apply Dodds's model to the prevailing reverence for female virginity existing alongside Protestant promotion of chaste matrimony. Many of the resemblances between the cult of the Virgin Mary and the cult of Elizabeth simply reveal the prevalence of certain syndromes in the representation of prominent women: the belief that virginity is a hallowed state for women, and also the representation of female power in terms of symbolic motherhood or mystical marriage. Marina Warner writes of Mariolatry,

> ... every facet of the Virgin had been systematically developed to diminish, not increase, her likeness to the female condition. Her freedom from sex, painful delivery, age, death, and all sin exalted her *ipso facto* above ordinary women and showed them up as inferior.[3]

This is the "exceptional woman" syndrome which we discussed in Part I under only a marginally different guise. Individual images which were applied to both figures simply place them in a long line of feminine symbolism, rather than originating with the Virgin and then being taken

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3. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p.153.

over by Elizabeth. For instance,

> The moon has been the most constant attribute of female divinities in the western world, and was taken over by the Virgin Mary because of ancient beliefs about its functions and role, which Christianity inherited.[4]

If a virgin was deemed to have transcended the human condition by her victory over her sexuality, then this implied all sorts of things about the state of her body and her mortality. The Virgin Mary had been deemed to have conquered death, the consequence of the Fall, and to have been assumed into heaven. As we have seen, several of the elegies for Elizabeth implied that she too had been awarded just such an assumption. This question of whether her resistance of sex implied a victory over time became particularly pertinent in the last decade of her reign; and was a major component of her representation as Cynthia, the moon-goddess.

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4. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p.256.

PART III: IMMORTALITY/MUTABILITY:

ELIZABETH AS CYNTHIA, THE MOON-GODDESS

Cynthia, the moon-goddess, was the most frequently used persona for Elizabeth in the 1590s and early 1600s. A well-known example from Shakespeare gives us some idea why:

> That very time I saw, but thou couldst not,
> Flying between the cold moon and the earth
> Cupid, all arm'd; a certain aim he took
> At a fair vestal, throned by the west,
> And loos'd his love-shaft smartly from his bow,
> As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts;
> But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
> Quench'd in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon;
> And the imperial votaress passed on,
> In maiden meditation, fancy-free.[1]

It is at once the Queen's, and the moon's "chaste beams" which quench Cupid's fiery arrow, causing it to fall instead on the flower which becomes the love-charm. This association of Elizabeth with the moon enables Shakespeare to present her as an ethereal, mystical figure; she glides across the stage like a spirit. It simultaneously implies female power, virginity, beauty, radiance and an other-worldliness.[2]

It was these powerful multiple associations of the moon-image which made it so popular with panegyrists. Yet more associations could be

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1. Shakespeare, ed. Alexander, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, II.i.155-64.

2. For discussions of more indirect reflections on the cult of Elizabeth in the moon-imagery of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and in the figure of Titania, see Montrose, "Shaping Fantasies"; Berry, pp.143-6.

invoked: like Diana/Cynthia, the Queen enjoyed hunting as her favourite pastime; and the association of the moon with water and the oceans could be used to assert English claims to imperial power. This was the case at Elvetham on the Queen's visit in 1591, when an elaborate pool was constructed upon which water-pageants took place, to entertain "Faire Cinthia the wide Ocean's Empresse."[3] There are countless examples of the use of the image, right through to elegies for Elizabeth: one declared, "For siluer *Cynthia* has eclipst her light, / And with her absence makes eternall night."[4]

Sir Walter Raleigh seems to have been instrumental in the establishment of the Cynthia-role for Elizabeth. Spenser told him that he named "Belphoebe, fashioning her name according to your owne excellent conceipt of Cynthia, (Phoebe and Cynthia being both names of Diana.)"[5] Evidently by 1589 Raleigh was already associated with "Cynthia"-poems to the Queen, either *The Ocean's Love to Cynthia*, if we accord it such an early date, or other poems now lost to us.[6] In fact, though, Spenser himself had compared Elizabeth's beauty with that of the moon-goddess as

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3. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, p.111.

4. John Lane, "An Elegie vpon the death of the high and renowned Princesse, our late Soueraigne ELIZABETH", 1603, Hazlitt, ed., 2nd series, no.II. See also no.IV, "Aue Caesar. God saue the King", 1603.

5. "Letter to Raleigh", in Spenser, ed. Hamilton, pp.407-8.

6. For discussion of the date of *The Ocean's Love to Cynthia*, see Oakeshott, pp.133-8; E.C. Wilson, pp.307-8; Katherine Duncan-Jones, "The Date of Raleigh's '21th: And Last Booke of the Ocean to Scinthia'", *Review of English Studies* 21 (1970), pp.143-58.

far back as the 1579 "Aprill" Eclogue (l.82); and the goddess Diana had played prominent roles in masques performed before Elizabeth since the earliest years of the reign, albeit not directly identified with her.[7] The moon was in many ways an obvious comparison, since it represented a virgin-goddess. But the popularity of the image really took off in the 1590s, not only because of its associations with beauty, radiance and virginity, as invoked by Shakespeare, but also because of its negative associations. This was a period when the rule of a female monarch was being regarded with increasing discontent and frustration, so that associations of the moon with fickleness, magic, and sinister female powers added to its expressive potential. Its very combination of positive and negative associations made it extremely useful as a subtle means of introducing ambiguity into panegyric. Moreover, as the reign was felt to be drawing to a close, the moon, with its connotations of time and change, was a means of exploring the theme of mutability.

1. Background to representations of Elizabeth as Cynthia

Immutability and immortality

The moon could represent both change *and* immutability, since through its cycle it is endlessly self-renewing. As such, it was associated with a major theme in panegyric of Elizabeth: namely, the assertion that she was

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7. See Axton, pp.57, 60, 64. Berry, p.126, mentions Giordano Bruno's development in the 1580s of a neo-Platonic idea of Elizabeth in terms of Diana and the sea.

immune to the ravages of time. Her motto was "semper eadem", which came to signify an immutability which went beyond mere constancy and integrity. The fiction of her eternal youth was developed, as shown in her portraits: in Hilliard miniatures of the 1590s and the Rainbow Portrait at Hatfield House, she is shown as a young maiden with her hair hanging down and her bosom uncovered.[8] The implication is that, because she is still a virgin, untouched by sexual activity, she has raised herself above bodily infirmities.

This was suggested as early as 1578 in a song from the entertainments at Norwich:

> Chast life lives long, and lookes on world and wicked ways;
> Chast life for losse of pleasure's short, doth winne immortall prayse ...
> Chast life as pretious pearle, doth shine as bright as sunne;
> The fayre houre glasse of dayes and yeares, that never out will runne.[9]

Chastity brings longevity, and perhaps even immortality. The inexhaustible hour glass can be seen as a figure of the intact, unimpaired, virgin body: not having been penetrated, it has a never-diminished inner vitality. It is analogous to Tuccia's unleaking sieve as an emblem of virginity, which was associated with Elizabeth in several portraits, and in *Euphues and His England.*[10] According to legend, the Vestal Virgin, Tuccia, proved her

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8. Strong, *Portraits*, p.17; *Cult*, p.48; *The English Icon: Elizabethan and Jacobean Portraiture* (London: Routledge, 1969), p.29.

9. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.II, p.197.

10. Lyly, *Euphues*, p.431.

innocence of unchastity by carrying a sieve full of water from the River Tiber to the Temple without spilling a drop. The sieve is an emblem of the unpenetrated, and therefore "leakproof", unwasting, virgin body.

A similar idea was often expressed through the image of Elizabeth as an inextinguishable lamp, able to provide unfailing sustenance for her people by her preservation of her bodily purity.[11] In Raleigh's *The Ocean's Love to Cynthia*, she is "A vestall fier that burnes, but never wasteth, / That looseth nought by giving light to all."[12] Jonson, in *Cynthia's Revels*, 1600, melded the virgin-lamp image with that of the moon and its cyclical self-renewal; Cynthia says:

> Monthly we spend our still-repaired shrine,
> And not forbid our virgin-waxen torch
> To burn, and blaze, while nutriment doth last:
> That once consumed out of Jove's treasury
> A new we take, and stick it in our sphere
> To give the mutinous kind of wanting men
> Their looked-for light.[13]

Elizabeth herself used a similar figure in her last address to parliament, the end of session speech of 1601:

> ... I haue diminished my owne revenewe that I might adde to yor securitie and bene content to be a taper of trewe virgin waxe that I

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11. The image of the lamp is linked to moon-imagery in the figure of Diana Lucifera or Lucina, who was often shown on ancient Roman coins holding a torch (Berry, p.40).

12. Raleigh, ed. Latham, ll.189-90.

13. *Complete Plays of Ben Jonson*, ed. G.A. Wilkes, based on edn. of C.H. Herford & P. & E. Simpson, 4 vols. (Oxford UP, 1981), vol.II, pp.vii-117; V.vi.23-9.

might giue light and comfort to those that liue vnder me.[14]

The image of the vestal fire or virgin taper suggested a holy dedication; Elizabeth had renounced the usual feminine roles of wife and mother to devote herself to the care of the nation. The image of the pure and inextinguishable flame also suggested a victory over the flesh whose corollary was a victory over time.

Some verses "Of the Queene" by Sir Arthur Gorges are an interesting example of the theme of the triumph of chastity over time. He compares her to Alexander the Great, a masculine, martial simile, figuring the virtue of chastity in terms of *virtus*. Alexander's victories in battle are matched by her victories through merit and beauty. He continues,

> But gryefe alas to tell amydste this Pompe and pryme;
> Quaylde weare his Conquestes throughe mortall Destenye
> As hir bewtyfull lymmes triumphant over tyme
> Are banyshte sweete delights throughe Devyne chastytie.[15]

This is surprising in its suggestion that Elizabeth's chastity is as lamentable as Alexander's premature death; but both are forms of detachment from the flesh, and the strong implication is that her chastity has enabled her to triumph over time. The sensuality of the phrase "bewtyfull lymmes" suggests both the eternal youthfulness of her body, and the power which she exercises as a perpetually unobtainable object of desire.

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14. Heisch, "Parliamentary Rhetoric", p.55.

15. Gorges, pp.64-5, no.61.

This linking of sex and death is another example of a way of thinking about women which was also an element in the cult of the Virgin Mary. Marina Warner writes that:

> the Christian equivalence between spiritual impurity and bodily decay provides the basic argument behind the doctrine of the Assumption, which declares that the all-pure Virgin was spared the dissolution of the grave.
>
> The association of sex, sin and death is ancient and still endures in Christian symbolism.

Mary does not have all the divine qualities, "but agelessness and immortality are hers."[16]

It was standard for panegyric to include wishes for the Queen's long life. Texts as varied as Mulcaster's *Positions*, 1581, Aske's *Eliza Triumphans*, 1588, and Barnes's *Parthenophil and Parthenophe*, 1593, contained such wishes.[17] A further example is an Epilogue from 1599, possibly by Shakespeare, which uses figures of steady and stately circularity, associated with time, to suggest that Elizabeth has miraculous powers of self-renewal:

> As the diall hand tells ore /
> y^e^ same howers yt had before
> still beginning in y^e^ ending /
> circular account still lending
> So most mightie Q. we pray /
> like y^e^ diall day by day
> you may lead y^e^ seasons on /

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16. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, pp.xxiii, 51, 95.

17. Mulcaster, p.173; Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.II, p.582; Barnes, *Parthenophil*, Canzon 2, l.45.

making new when old are gon.
that the babe w^{ch} now is yong /
& hathe yet no vse of tongue
many a shrouetyde here may bow /
to y^{t} empresse I doe now
that the children of these lordes /
sitting at your counsell bourdes
maye be graue & aeged seene /
of her y^{t} was ther father Quene
once I wishe this wishe again /
heauen subscribe yt wth amen.[18]

The longevity wished to the Queen in these verses is so miraculous and indefinite as to constitute immortality. Prayers for her triumph not only over time, but over death, became a convention of panegyric. They occurred in the entertainments at Norwich in 1578, at Elvetham in 1591, and in Peele's *Anglorum Feriae*, 1595, where he prayed, "... may shee shine in beautie freshe and sheene / Hundreds of yeares our thrice renowned queen."[19]

Moreover, panegyric increasingly embraced not just wishes and prayers for Elizabeth's immortality, but outright *statements* of it. An early form of this was the conceit, in pageants for progresses, that time stood still while Elizabeth was visiting. At Kenilworth in 1575, the three Fates appeared, and it was explained that Lachesis and Clotho had spun none of Elizabeth's thread of life, of "pure purpl sylk", for the eighteen days of her visit, while Atropos had lost her shears altogether.[20] The same motif

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18. *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G.Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), pp.1851-52.

19. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.II, p.142; vol.III, p.107; Peele, gen. ed. Prouty, vol.I, ll.332-33.

20. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, p.471.

was taken outside the context of the charmed visit and made more general in Peele's *Arraygnement of Paris*, 1583/4; in this, the Fates danced before Elizabeth, then laid their distaff, spindle and shears at her feet. Atropos announced,

> Dame Atropos according as her pheeres
> To thee fayre Queene resignes her fatall knife:
> Live longe the noble Phoenix of our age,
> Our fayre Eliza our Zabeta faire.[21]

Peele was one of the principal writers who developed the theme of the Queen's immortality; it features in *Descensus Astraeae*, 1591, where "Time and Kinde / Produce hir yeares to make them numberlesse," and in *The Battle of Alcazar* (1588-9).[22]

Numerous other writers also proclaimed Elizabeth's immortality. Thomas Kyd, in *Soliman and Perseda*, c.1588, gave the following speech to Death:

> I, now will *Death*, in his most haughtie pride,
> Fetch his imperiall Carre from deepest hell,
> And ride in triumph through the wicked world;
> Sparing none but sacred *Cynthias* friend,
> Whom *Death* did feare before her life began:
> For holy fates haue grauen it in their tables
> That *Death* shall die, if he attempt her end,
> Whose life is heauens delight, and *Cynthias* friend.[23]

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21. Peele, gen. ed. Prouty, vol.III, ll.1227-36.

22. Peele, gen. ed. Prouty, vol.I, pp.214-9, ll.33-37; vol.II, *Battle of Alcazar*, ll.675-85.

23. *The Works of Thomas Kyd*, ed. F.S. Boas (Oxford UP, 1955), pp.161-230, V.v.34-41.

This manner of describing Elizabeth as triumphant over death, by means predestined by God, implies the Christ-like quality of monarchy.

At the very end of the reign, when Elizabeth visited Harefield Place in Middlesex in 1602, the conventional compliment that she caused time to stand still at the stopping-off points of her progresses was intertwined with the theme of her eternal youth. In a dialogue between Time and Place, Time explained:

> My wings are clipt indeed, and it is her hands hath clipt them: and, 'tis true, my glasse runnes not: indeed it hath bine stopt a longe time, it can never runne as long as I waite upon this Mistris. I [am] her *Time*; and *Time* weare very vngratefull, if it should not euer stand still, to serue and preserue, cherish and delight her, that is the glory of her time, and makes the *Time* happy wherein she liueth.[24]

The glory of her time, and mistress over time: this example illustrates how central the theme of time became to panegyric of a long-reigning, ageing queen.

Elizabeth's actual "strength and beautie"

Dowland gave succinct expression to the theme of Elizabeth's ageless beauty: "Time stands still with gazing on her face."[25] According to this formula, her beauty is both cause and effect of her victory over time.

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24. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, pp.589-90.

25. Fellowes, ed., *English Madrigal Verse*, p.479.

Another example of the myth of her ever-youthful beauty is the "Hermit's Oration", presented during the entertainments at Theobalds in 1593-4:

> with theis same eyes doe I behold you the self-same Queene, in the same esteate of person, strength and beautie, in which soe many yeares past I beheld yow, finding noe alteration but in admiration, in soe much as I am perswaded, when I looke aboute me on your trayne, that Time, which catcheth everye body, leaves only you untouched.[26]

This clamour of poetic voices from the 1590s and early 1600s, asserting that Elizabeth is immortal and her beauty unfading, leads one into natural curiosity as to just how she did look in her last years. Is it possible that she was amazingly well-preserved? Or are these just the hyperboles of panegyric, in which any falsehood is acceptable as long as it flatters? We can never know what Elizabeth was "really like", since we have access to her only through textual representations. Even texts which might be classified as "historical background" rather than "literature", such as the eye-witness accounts of courtiers and foreign visitors, equally construct an image of Elizabeth; they use her as a colourful figure in a story, and they mediate an image which she chose to present. We may go to these texts with the expectation that they will contradict the claims of panegyric, and reveal the ageing woman behind the mask; but this is not necessarily what we find.

A number of accounts suggest that Elizabeth remained physically fit well into her last years. There is an account of her dancing publicly with the Earl of Essex in 1599;[27] and a series of letters from 1600, from

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26. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, p.243. Date as given by Nichols.

27. Walter Bourchier Devereux, *Lives and Letters of the Devereux, Earls of*

Rowland Whyte to Robert Sidney, gives a vivid picture of the Queen as very robust in her late sixties. On August 12th, Whyte wrote: "Her Majesty ... resolves to go on her Progress to Elvetham ... The lords are sorry for it; but her Majesty lets the old stay behind, and the young and able to goe with her." The letters from September show Elizabeth still hunting; Whyte wrote on September 12th that, "Her Majesty is very well, and excellently disposed to hunting, for every second day she is on horseback, and continues the sport long." On 26th December, after watching a dance, the Queen herself "dawnced ... a corante."[28] As late as 1602, Elizabeth still went on a progress, although she did not go very far afield: only to Chiswick, Harlington, Harefield, Greenwich and Wandsworth. However, she was evidently still travelling on horseback: for the delivery of a speech of greeting at Harefield Place, "Her Majesty, being on horsebacke, stayed under a tree (because it rayned) to hear it." It seems that she would have liked to travel further; Sir Thomas Edmonds wrote to the Earl of Shrewsbury, on August 23rd, 1602, that

> Her Majesty hath had compassion, notwithstanding her earnest affection to go her Progress, yet to forbear the same in favour to her people, in regard of the unseasonableness of the weather."[29]

There also exist accounts of Elizabeth's appearance which support assertions that she kept her youthful looks, as well as her physical strength, well into old age. A German traveller named Ratgeb wrote in 1592

Essex, 2 vols. (London: 1853), vol.II, p.8.

28. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, pp.513, 519.

29. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, pp.578-9; 586; 595.

that, "the Queen despite her age, can in grace and beauty vie with a maiden of sixteen years."[30] Another traveller, Thomas Platter, was similarly impressed:

> She was most lavishly attired in a gown of pure white satin, gold-embroidered, with a whole bird of Paradise for panache, set forward on her head studded with costly jewels; she wore a string of huge pearls about her neck and elegant gloves over which were drawn costly rings. In short she was most gorgeously apparelled, and although she was already seventy-four [in fact sixty-five], she was very youthful still in appearance, seeming no more than twenty years of age.[31]

It is hard to believe that Elizabeth, in her sixties, literally looked only sixteen or twenty. We can easily understand that poets and panegyrists turned the Queen into an idealised fiction; but it is more surprising to find such apparently unrealistic assertions in the supposedly documentary form of an eye-witness account. These observers, as much as poets, accepted and participated in the representation of Elizabeth as ever-youthful; and, of course, what they observed was itself a representation. The Queen probably wore skilful and heavy make-up, and the detail of Platter's account suggests that the sheer splendour of her costumes dazzled onlookers. It clearly bowled over Lupold von Wedel, another German visitor to England, in 1584-5, who saw her in her coach, in a white dress, and wrote that "The Queen sitting all alone in her splendid coach appeared like a goddess such as painters are wont to depict."[32]

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30. von Klarwill, p.349.

31. Platter, p.192.

32. von Klarwill, p.329.

Von Wedel's allusion to painters is telling. Elizabeth presented a painted face in two senses: in her self-decoration for public appearances, and in the dissemination of her image in increasingly decorative and idealised portraits. If there was a gulf between her public image and her physical reality, developments in her portrait-representation may provide evidence of it: Roy Strong writes of "the portrait crisis of the 1590s, namely the reconciliation of idea and reality in portraying a fast-ageing ruler." He maintains that Elizabeth never sat for a portrait again after her sittings for Marcus Gheeraerts and Isaac Oliver in about 1592, which produced the Ditchley portrait and a face-pattern both of which show signs of age. Instead, from about 1594 on, Hilliard and his workshop promulgated the officially approved "Mask of Youth". It may be from these years in the early 1590s that we can date a significant divergence between Elizabeth's public image and her actual physical state.[33]

The contradictions between and within different first-hand accounts of the Queen do suggest that there was a perceived difference between her image and her reality. Some other eye-witnesses, in their versions of her, chose to foreground her physical reality as an ageing mortal: Paul Hentzner wrote, in 1598:

> ... next came the Queen, in the sixty-fifth year of her age, as we were told, very majestic; her face oblong, fair, but wrinkled; her eyes small, yet black and pleasant; her nose a little hooked, her lips narrow, and her teeth black (a defect the English seem subject to, from their too great use of sugar); she had in her ears two pearls, with very rich drops; she wore false hair, and that red ... her bosom

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33. Strong, *Gloriana*, pp.134-51.

> was uncovered, as all the English ladies have it till they marry ... her air was stately, her manner of speaking mild and obliging.[34]

We know from other sources that Elizabeth indeed wore wigs; her accounts show that in 1602 one Dorothy Shepherde was paid for "six heads of hair, twelve yards of hair curl and one hundred devices made of hair."[35] The French ambassador in 1597 saw Elizabeth face-to-face, rather than from a distance like Ratgeb and Platter, and wrote:

> ... she wore ... a great reddish-coloured wig ... As for her face, it is and appears to be very aged. It is long and thin, and her teeth are very yellow and unequal, compared with what they were formerly, so they say, and on the left side less than on the right. Many of them are missing so that one cannot understand her easily when she speaks quickly. Her figure is fair and tall and graceful in whatever she does; so far as may be she keeps her dignity, yet humbly and graciously withal.[36]

Despite the evidence of physical decay, there is always this mention of the Queen's stateliness and regal bearing; she was clearly ruled by the will to keep up appearances, and this perhaps gave her an anxiety to be seen to dance and to go on progresses even when she was really too frail to do so. A courtier's letter of 1599 said,

> The progress was first appointed to Wimbleton, to ... Parford, to ... Horsley, to Otelands, and so to Windsor, but by reason of an intercepted letter, wherein the giving over of long voyages was noted to be a sign of age, it hath been resolved to extend the progress to

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34. Paul Hentzner, *Travels in England During the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. H.Walpole, trans. R.Bentley, with *Fragmenta Regalia* by Sir Robert Naunton (London: Cassell, 1889), pp.47-8.

35. John Langdon-Davis, comp., *Elizabeth R*, Jackdaw no.53 (London: Jackdaw, n.d.), p.VI.

36. Hurault, pp.25-6.

Basing and so to Wilton.[37]

What comes through from all these various accounts is the importance of public opinion and of keeping up appearances. A façade of make-up, glittering dresses, wigs and stately bearing worked in concert with the poetic fiction of Elizabeth's eternal youth.

Immortal through art

Eye-witness descriptions of Elizabeth thus either participate in the admiration of her amazing youthfulness, or suggest a gulf between her image and reality. The latter seem more credible to a modern reader, in whom the benefit of hindsight combines with natural scepticism. However, it would be rash to assume that Elizabeth's subjects could not possibly have believed in her immutability and immortality, and that assertions of these qualities in panegyric are invariably merely cynically hyperbolic flattery. Elizabethan nationalism was coloured by belief that England was specially favoured by God, and by faith in his providential plan; add to this the fact that Elizabeth had already lived unusually long, and had apparently been delivered by God from numerous threats to her life, and it is not inconceivable that some of her subjects might have believed that she would literally go on forever. So many circumstances in her life already seemed miraculous, that this would be merely one more miracle. One 1590s masque contained the wish:

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37. *Hatfield MSS Catalogue*, vol. IX, p.246.

> that as you haue ouer liued the vaine hope of your forraine enemies so you may outlast the kinde wishes of your loyall subjectes, which is to last to the last euerlasting. Amen.[38]

Perhaps, though, as the wording of this quotation suggests, Elizabeth's immortality was a hope or a wish rather than a belief. The increasing prevalence of topoi of Elizabeth's supposed triumph over time, age and death suggests an growing anxiety regarding time and the future, as the reign was felt to be drawing to a close. Despite the undiminished impressiveness of her public façade, Elizabeth did reveal unmistakable signs of age: in 1601, at the opening of Parliament, the very weight of her splendid velvet and ermine robes caused her to stagger and fall into the arms of the peer standing nearest her.[39] Prayers for her immortality were in effect wishes for the infinity of the Elizabethan era. We have already seen how Elizabeth's virginity became an emblem of the prosperity and independence of the English nation and Church (pp.96-7 above); likewise, wishes and assertions of her resistance to age were implicitly wishes for the nation to continue in a peaceful and prosperous state. By the 1590s, few could remember a time when Elizabeth was not Queen. In the Epilogue to *Every Man out of his Humour*, 1599, Jonson exhorted, "Fly from her age; sleep time before her throne, / Our strongest wall falls down when she is gone."[40] The more her immortality was asserted, the more the actual

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38. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, p.210.

39. Jenkins, p.321.

40. *Complete Plays of Ben Jonson*, ed. G.A. Wilkes, based on edn. of C.H. Herford & Percy & Evelyn Simpson, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981-2), vol.I, p.411.

imminence of her death was implicitly the focus of concern and anticipation. We can sense a mingling of excitement and trepidation at the idea of the end of the old epoch and the beginning of the new.[41]

It remains at least questionable whether Elizabethans believed in the immortality of their Queen which they asserted so frequently. Some texts are notably ambiguous as to to whether this immortality would be achieved by her physical person. In Blenerhasset's *Revelation of the True Minerva*, which dates from 1582, Elizabeth was at first implied to be mortal: the future extent of her reign is a "doubtfull date."[42] She was then praised for "Her heauenly hewe, her more than mortall grace / (For vertue may mortall immortall make,)" (sig.B4v). The gods assert that, if she is found to be the best servant of God,

> Then her we may and will immortall make ...
> All men that liue her grace they shall adore
> Both at this present time, and euermore. (sig.D1r.)

But this immortality, gained through virtue and piety, is not necessarily to be achieved in this world. Elizabeth herself is given the lines, "euery living thing / Must perish quite, for death will it deface," but "death on earth is life everlasting" (sig.F1r).

Even panegyrics of the 1590s and early 1600s, when assertions of

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41. Norbrook, *Poetry & Politics*, pp.152-3, sees 1590s representations of Elizabeth as Cynthia as expressions of anxiety regarding her imminent demise.

42. Blenerhasset, sig.B2v.

Elizabeth's immortality were coming thick and fast, often speak implicitly only of an *otherworldly* eternal life. Some "Verses sung to Queene *Elizabeth* by a Mairmead as shee past upon the Thames to Sir Arthur Gorges house at Chelsey," probably from 1599, ran:

> Seas, yeares, and beawties ever ebb and flow
> But shee still fixt doth shine
> When all things dyed; her Raigne begins to growe
> To prove shee is devyne.
> Soe those in whose chast harts virtue survives
> Finish their fading yeares, but not their lives.[43]

Here we see implicit use of the moon-image, and reiteration of the theme of triumph over time through chastity. But, again, it appears that this triumph is to be achieved not in Elizabeth's life in this world, but in a never-ending life which lies beyond. In their recognition that Elizabeth will "Finish [her] fading years" these verses are both prophetic and elegiac, seeming to foretell her translation to a state of spiritual glory.

John Howson, in his Accession Day sermon of 1602, prayed:

> O Lord send her salvation, O Lord send her prosperity: *Non moriatur sed vivat*, let her not die but liue, that shee may declare thy wonderous workes to many generations.[44]

This can imply eternal life in the senses of a spiritual existence in heaven, and of an undying reputation for virtue and holiness. Various other texts imply that Elizabeth's immortality might be achieved only through her

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43. Gorges, pp.131-2, no.109, ll.11-20.

44. Howson, sigs.D3r-v.

fame: Maurice Kyffin, in "The Blessednes of Brytaine," went no further than asserting that "Her Fame, no Rav'ning Time, shall euer Raze."[45] "The Miracle of Nature", 1601, is ambiguous as to whether future ages will admire Elizabeth in person, or merely her reputation:

> They that have liv'd, could say while they did live,
> Subiects are blest in such a Soveraigne:
> They that now live, may well like witnesse give,
> A gratious Queene doth make a glorious reigne.
> They that hereafter live hir Grace to see,
> May say on earth not such a Queene as shee.[45]

Puttenham, in his *Arte of Englishe Poesie*, presented:

> ... an hympne written by vs to the Queenes Maiestie entitled (*Minerva*) wherein speaking of the mutabilitie of fortune in the case of all Princes generally, wee seemed to exempt her Maiestie of all such casualtie ...

The hymn runs:

> And that thy loze [i.e. fame], ne name may neuer dye,
> Nor thy state turne, stayd by destinie:
> Dread were least once thy noble hart may feele,
> Some rufull turne, of her unsteady wheele.[47]

Here is uncertainty and "dread" regarding what might ensue upon the Queen's death, and an assertion that she is immune to mutability, but hopes of her triumph over time centre on her fame.

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45. Hazlitt, ed., 1st. series, no.XXIX.

46. In *The Right Way to Heaven*, Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, p.535.

47. Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie*, p.237.

If it is only through her fame that the Queen will attain immortality, then the panegyrist is afforded considerable power as the conveyor of her name and image to posterity. This is analogous to the sonneteer's assertion that his verses will eternize his beloved; the beloved, or the person praised, is thereby placed in the poet's debt. As Sir John Davies put it,

> The pompe of Coronation
> Hath not such power her fame to spread,
> As this my admiration.[48]

The power of the word is more enduring than the power of ceremony. Sir Arthur Gorges described Elizabeth's immortality as the work of poets through the generations, on whom she is implicitly dependent: "The voices off our dayes the trompetts of her fame / And all posterityes as Eccoes to the same."[49]

Spenser, particularly, always shows a realistic recognition that Elizabeth's miraculous triumph over death will take place solely through the creation in poetry of her magnificent image. In *The Teares of the Muses*, although at first he appears to be issuing the conventional wish for the Queen's immortality, he then makes it clear that this will be achieved in the arts, not in life:

> Liue she for euer, and her royall P'laces
> Be fild with praises of diuinest wits,

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48. Sir John Davies, *Hymnes of Astraea*, no.XXVI, "To Envie".

49. Gorges, p.56, ll.13-14.

That her eternize with their heauenlie writs.[50]

In the *Prothalamion*, he wishes that

> ... great *Elisaes* glorious name may ring
> Through al the world, fil'd with thy wide Alarmes,
> Which some braue muse may sing
> To ages following.[51]

The "braue muse" may be him, or may be some other poet; either way, it is their poetry, not the person of the Queen, which will survive. He is well aware that his monumental image of Gloriana will outlive the ageing Queen, and himself.[52]

Image and reality

Throughout his work, Spenser seems particularly conscious of the reality which underlies the idiom of panegyric: namely, the benefit to the Queen of his creation of her public image. This is in fact a mutual dependence, almost a contractual arrangement, since he hopes to be rewarded for his successful creation of this image by his own material benefit and social advancement. In *Colin Clout*, he uses the balance of the pentameter line to express this reciprocity:

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50. Spenser, ed. Smith & de Selincourt, p.486, ll.580-2.

51. Spenser, ed. Smith & de Selincourt, p.602, ll.157-60.

52. See Norbrook, *Poetry & Politics*, p.156. Cain notes that the subject of the "braue muse[']s]" song may be Essex's "wide Alarmes", his military triumphs, rather than "*Elisaes* glorious name" (p.164).

> With that *Alexis* broke his tale asunder,
> Saying, By wondring at thy *Cynthiaes* praise,
> *Colin*, thy selfe thou mak'st vs more to wonder,
> And her vpraising, doest thy selfe vpraise.[53]

In the "Aprill" eclogue, "Colin" offers in homage a "milk-white lamb" (ll.95-100), poeticising the relation of queen and poet as that of goddess and worshipper. The poet's creation of "Elisa" is presented to the audience of "Eliza", with the exhortation "Let dame *Eliza* thanke you for her song" (ll.145-50).[54]

The issue of Elizabeth's "immortality" was intrinsically part of the ongoing dialectic, throughout her reign, between artifice and reality (see pp.13-16 above). An implied question was increasingly posed as to what the relation was between "Eliza" and "Elisa", between the living Queen and her perfect, immutable image. The Cynthia-persona was very much involved in such questioning, since it was frequently used in entertainments where an idealised image of Elizabeth was presented to her, and where attention was specifically drawn to the mirroring or doubling of the Queen. In the "Prologue at Court" to Dekker's *Old Fortunatus*, the two old men speak as follows:

> 2. See howe gloriously the Moone shines vpon vs.
> 1. Peace foole: tremble, and kneele: The Moone saist thou?

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53. Spenser, ed. Smith & de Selincourt, p.540, ll.352-5.

54. The reciprocal relationship of Queen and panegyrist is a major theme in Montrose's work. See "Perfecte paterne", pp.40-42, 53; "Elizabethan Subject", p.303, 322; "Gifts and Reasons", passim. See also Cain, Preface, and p.17.

Our eyes are dazled by *Elizaes* beames. [*Both kneele.*[55]

In Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels*, Cynthia surveyed the audience and exclaimed:

> What shape? What substance? Or what unknown power
> In virgin's habit, crowned with laurel leaves,
> And olive branches woven in between,
> Or sea-girt rocks, like to a goddess shines?
> O front! O face! O all celestial sure,
> And more than mortal! Arete, behold
> Another Cynthia, and another queen.[56]

It is the ultimate flattering hyperbole to assert that the object of praise is even *more* perfect than her perfect image.

This question of the relation between Elizabeth and her image was turned into an elegant compliment by George Peele, in *The Honour of the Garter*, 1593. The poem is a dream-vision; the speaker is awoken by the beams of Cynthia, to behold a procession of great kings and emperors. This is its climax:

> Under the glorious spreading wings of Fame,
> I sawe a Virgin Queene, attyrde in white,
> Leading with her a sort of goodly Knights,
> With Garters and with Collers of S.George.
> Elizabeth on a compartiment
> Of gold, in Bysse was writ, and hunge a skue
> Upon her head, under an imperiall crowne:
> She was the Soveraigne of the Knights she led.
> Her face me thought I knewe: as if the same,
> The same great Empresse that we here enjoy,
> Had clymed the clowdes, and been in person there;
> To whom the earth, the sea, and elements

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55. Dekker, *Old Fortunatus*, p.113, ll.25-7.

56. Jonson, *Cynthia's Revels*, V.viii.4-14.

Auspicious are.[57]

This is another example, like the one from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, of moon-imagery being used to present Elizabeth as a vision, an other-worldly figure gliding by. In the charming disingenuousness of "Her face me thought I knew", Peele deftly suggests that this figure is no mere figment of his imagination, but is Elizabeth in person: since she is immortal and divine, naturally she can join a supernatural procession of dead and glorious monarchs. The moon-image is precisely used to represent this divinity; like the moon, Elizabeth can climb the clouds, and controls the earth, sea and elements. The dream-figure and the Queen are "the same": the congruity of person and image, of artifice and reality, are used to express Elizabeth's dual nature, as human and divine, mortal and immortal. Peele goes one step beyond the mere creation of an idealised image of Elizabeth to assert that she literally *is* that idealised image. As with assertions of her immortality, the very extremity of this hyperbole implies its opposite: the profound knowledge that she is *not* the same as her image.

Criticism and disillusionment

Although Peele asserted the identity of Elizabeth and her public image, although a profusion of artifices were employed to glorify her, and although her public image grew ever more magnificent, there is

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57. Peele, gen. ed. Prouty, vol.I, pp.245-59, ll.319-31.

considerable evidence that, in the 1590s, the Queen's hold upon the imagination of her subjects was seriously slipping. Not only was the rift widening between the youth and beauty of her image, and her actual decrepitude; another rift was growing between the professions of adoration for her, and a reality of increasing disillusionment and impatience with her reign. There seems to be a growth in general cynicism in the literature of the 1590s, in which satire became increasingly popular, and in which the boom in sonneteering included a strong vein of sophisticated *anti*-Petrarchism.[58] In the sphere of religion, the period was marked by large numbers of conversions, to both Catholicism and extreme Protestantism; and it has been suggested that these were motivated by a declining faith in the royal icon, and a search for a more authentic spiritual experience.[59]

Even in those writers who still celebrated their age as a Golden Age, we can detect a note of impatience. At the retirement tilts for Sir Henry Lee in 1590, "The Supplication of the owld Knight" described Accession Day as "this sacred memorie of that blessed reigne, which shall leaue to this land an eternall monument of Godes fauoure, and greate glorie."[60] There is a sense of retrospection, as if the period is drawing to a close and is already the object of nostalgia; yet the reign had thirteen more years to run, thirteen years suspended in this sense of culmination. A year earlier,

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58. Norbrook, *Panegyric*, p.114; Berry, pp.136-7.

59. Norbrook, *Panegyric*, p.128.

60. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, p.197.

in 1589, an intrigue involving the Earl of Essex, Penelope Rich, Henry Constable, and others, aimed to secure favour with James VI of Scotland, "in the event of James's succession in, as it was then believed to be, the near future."[61] Five years before the Queen's death, Paul Hentzner's description of England gave the impression that her demise was expected any day; he said that the splendid unfinished tomb for Wolsey in St.George's Chapel, Windsor, was "reserved, according to report, for the funeral of Queen Elizabeth; the expenses already made for that purpose are estimated at upwards of £60,000."[62] Those volumes of the Hatfield manuscript collection which cover the last decade of the reign are full of false reports of the Queen's death, suggesting a combination of anticipation and nervousness in the population.

Specific dissent grew up in the 1590s over political and economic issues. Raleigh and Essex both favoured a more aggressive anti-Spanish foreign policy than Elizabeth would countenance, and many felt that she was not defending and advancing the Protestant cause abroad with sufficient military commitment. Spenser, who sometimes appeared the Queen's most loyal poet, admonished her in his *View of the Present State of Ireland* for not using sufficient force in that country. One of the speakers in this dialogue, Irenius, declared that Ireland could only be reformed "by the sworde", and "by the sworde I meante the Royall power of the Prince which oughte to stretche it selfe forthe in her Chiefe strengthe."[63] We

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61. Constable, p.29.

62. Hentzner, pp.68-9.

63. Edmund Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, *The Works*

might be reminded of the ambivalent praise of Mercilla in *The Faerie Queene*: "at her feet her sword was likewise layde, / Whose long rest rusted the bright steely brand." (V.ix.30.) This conflict between Spenser's desire to extol Elizabeth as a Protestant icon, and his doubtfulness about her policies, produced considerable tension in the later books of *The Faerie Queene* (see below, pp.364-6).

At home, there was discontent as factions of the nobility were felt to be dominating the government to their own advantage. This is reflected in some bitter verses by Sir John Harington entitled "Against an extream flatterer that preached at Bath on the Queens day the forteth [sic] yeer of her raign", in which he complains that the preacher has "... lade[d] our ears with stale and lothsom praise / Of forty yeares sweet peace and restfull dayes." Instead he should

> ... seeke som words of commination
> For tymes abounding with abhomination ...
> For law with lust, and rule with rape is yoked,
> And zeall with schisme and Symony is choked.[64]

As the Queen's godson, Harington was not blaming her directly, but his verses do express extreme disillusionment with the general idea of an Elizabethan Golden Age. Beyond the court, there was much economic distress

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of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition, vol.IX, *Spenser's Prose Works*, ed. Rudolf Gottfried (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1949), p.148, ll.1956, 2976-8.

64. Harington, *Letters & Epigrams*, p.297.

caused by war taxation, inflation and the exploitation of trade monopolies by the nobles. An Essex labourer, in 1591, said that people should pray for a King, because:

> ... the Queen is but a woman and ruled by noblemen, and the noblemen and gentlemen are all one, and the gentlemen and farmers will hold together so that the poor get nothing.[65]

In the later years of the reign, criticism of the government was often voiced in terms of such anti-feminism; Elizabeth's remarkable positive achievements had done nothing to erase the opinion that, when things went wrong, it was no more than one should expect from a feeble woman. The French ambassador in 1597 said that, "if by chance she should die, it is certain that the English would never again submit to the rule of a woman."[66] Bishop Goodman, looking back on the Elizabethan era, said that towards its end "the Court was very much neglected, and in effect the people were very generally weary of an old woman's government."[67]

Being a woman could sometimes be an asset to Elizabeth when things went well, turning her into a charismatic wonder-worker; but it also went against her when things went badly, since it gave immediate easy grounds upon which to disparage her. We can sense her trying to use her femininity

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65. Christopher Haigh, ed., *The Reign of Elizabeth I* (Houndmills, Hants.: Macmillan, 1984), p.5.

66. Hurault, pp.11-12.

67. Quoted in Penry Williams, "Court and Polity under Elizabeth I", *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 65.2 (Spring 1983), p.270.

to her advantage in Sir John Harington's observation that "Hir wisest men and beste counsellors were often sore troublede to knowe her wyll in matters of state: so covertly did she pass hir judgemente."[68] She was trying to use the conventionally enigmatic, mysterious associations of womanhood to maintain her hold on absolute power; but the obverse of this was that her ministers and courtiers, not knowing or understanding her policy, tended to regard her critically as a creature of "typically" feminine irrational whim, upon whom it was their duty to try to impose masculine decisiveness and judgement.

Elizabeth's cultivation of secrecy and mystery in protection of her autonomy was often figured symbolically in terms of her virginity. Philippa Berry argues that the figure of the Virgin Queen among her ladies-in-waiting, like Diana among her nymphs, at the centre of the court, came to connote a private feminine space at the centre of power into which the male courtier and masculine values could not obtrude. Like her femininity, her virginity was therefore not only celebrated, but also implicitly distrusted as representing a self-containment which was frustrating to the male courtier. Berry writes that even in the Petrarchan and neo-Platonic conventions upon which panegyric of Elizabeth drew, chastity was problematic:

> It often seemed to connote, not the negation of woman's bodily difference, of her own sexual desires, but rather the survival of a quality of feminine autonomy and self-sufficiency which could not be appropriated in the self-serving interests of the masculine subject.

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68. Harington, *Letters and Epigrams*, p.123.

In representations of Elizabeth from the later part of her reign, such as those by Lyly, a "superficial message ... of exaggerated courtly compliment" was combined with "a distinct unease about the implications of this gynocentric definition of courtly service."[69]

To femininity and virginity was added the further problematic quality of age. Occasions when Elizabeth made displays of self-will only made her conform, in the eyes of her subjects, to a stereotype of a cantankerous and petulant old woman. After the pageants for Accession Day 1595, organised by Essex with speeches by Francis Bacon, "the Queen said, that if she had thought there had bene so moch said of her, she would not have bene their that night; and soe went to bed."[70] A Frenchman reported in 1596 that "She is passionate and violent among her attendants, and demands more than is due to her sex."[71] In 1598, Sir John Harington recorded that Sir Christopher Hatton, emerging from the Queen's chamber, had warned him not to enter and brave her mood, saying that "the sunne doth not shine" today.[72] Harington developed this elemental imagery in a letter of 1606 to Robert Markham, in which, reminiscing about his godmother, he described her "alteracions":

> When she smiled, it was a pure sun-shine, that every one did chuse to

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69. Berry, pp.18, 62, 65, 78-82, 111-2, 134.

70. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, p.372.

71. Devereux, vol.II, pp.218-9, n.1.

72. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, p.430.

> baske in, if they could; but anon came a storm from a sudden gathering of clouds, and the thunder fell in wondrous manner on all alike.[73]

It began to appear that the whole business of government had been reduced to correctly reading the Queen's fitful moods; as Donne expressed it in his fourth Satire, the practised courtier

> When the Queen frowned, or smiled, and he knows what
> knows
> A subtle statesman may gather of that.[74]

A view of Elizabeth, at the centre of her cult of courtly love, as merely a vain, foolish old woman, was expressed by Osborne, in his *Memoirs of Queen Elizabeth*. He described her reaction to a duel between the Earl of Essex and a rival; it

> did rather inflame than abate the former account she made of him: the opinion of a Champion being more splendid (in the weak and romantic sense of women, that admit of nothing fit to be made the object of a good quarrel but themselves), and far above that of a Captain or General ... though she chid them both, nothing pleased her better than a conceit she had, that her beauty was the subject of the quarrel, when, God knows, it grew from the stock of honour, of which then they were very tender.[75]

Increasingly, the Earl of Essex became a focal point for the various currents of dissent. He was evidently cynically aware of the hypocrisy of the game of courtly love: Francis Bacon, in a letter, advised him to

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73. Harington, *Letters and Epigrams*, pp.122, 125.

74. John Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A.J. Smith (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p.166, ll.98-100.

75. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, p.xxx.

emulate Leicester and Hatton in his love-play with the Queen, something which he had so far scorned to do. Bacon urged him to flatter her more "familiarly", since at present "a man may read formality in your countenance."[76] In his letters to Elizabeth, Essex employed conventional excesses: "While your Maj. gives me leave to say I love you, my fortune is as my affection, unmatchable."[77] But in his poetry, he expressed the frustrations of the Elizabethan courtier, play-acting a "love" which was inevitably unrequited and uncertain, as in the paradoxes of the following verses:

> To plead my faith where faith hath noe reward,
> To move remorse where favor is not borne,
> To heape complaints which shee doth not regard
> Were frutelesse, bootles, vaine, and yelds but scorne.
> I loved her whom all the world admird,
> I was refused of her that can love none;
> And my vaine hopes which far to hie aspird,
> Are dead and buried, and for ever gone.[78]

Elsewhere, his true sentiments broke out even more fiercely. In 1597 he told the French ambassador that "they laboured under two things at this Court, delay and inconstancy, which proceeded chiefly from the sex of the Queen."[79] In 1595 he had complained of the Queen's "irresolution" regarding the Cadiz expedition, saying "I know I shall never do her service but

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76. Devereux, vol.I, p.397.

77. Devereux, vol.I, pp.249-50.

78. Edward DeVere & Robert Devereux, "The Poems of Edward DeVere, 17th Earl of Oxford, and of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex," ed. Steven W.May, *Studies in Philology* 77.5 (Early Winter, 1980), p.46.

79. Hurault, p.115.

against her will," a figuration of political service in terms of rape.[80] After the incident in 1598, in which he turned his back on the Queen and she boxed his ears, he replied thus to the urgings of the Lord Keeper for him to seek forgiveness:

> What, cannot princes err? Cannot subjects receive wrong? Is an earthly power or authority infinite? Pardon me, pardon me, my good Lord, I can never subscribe to these principles ... let them acknowledge an infinite absoluteness on earth, that do not believe in an absolute infiniteness in heaven.[81]

To separate divinity from the monarch so blatantly was to blaspheme against a central tenet of the Elizabethan regime.

Essex's secretary, Henry Cuffe - described by Sir Robert Naunton as "a vile man and of a perverse nature"[82] - is the probable author of "A Poem made on the Earle of Essex" which is an evocative expression of the distemper which coloured the 1590s. He uses an extended metaphor of a bee and a flower, and twines around it the images usually associated with panegyric of the Queen, instead turning them all to images of sickness and decay:

> I worke on weedes when moone is in the waine,
> Whilst all the swarme in suneshine tast the Rose;
> On blacke roote fearne I sitt, and sucke my baine,
> Whilst on the Eglentine the rest repose;
> Havinge too much they still repine for more,

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80. Devereux, vol.I, pp.339-40.

81. Devereux, vol.I, pp.501-2.

82. Hentzner & Naunton, p.175.

And cloide with sweetness surfit on the store.[83]

The speaker feeds on "Henbaine, Hemlock, Nettls, Rue", while the bees who feed on the rose become glutted and are "Swolne fatt ... In sweetned Clustres fallinge from the Tree." This is a cynical and repellent vision of the excesses of the cult of Elizabeth in her later years. There also exist some lines entitled "Verses made by the Earle of Essex in his Trouble" which bemoan the unmanageable character of Elizabeth. They open with ocean imagery, setting the tone of insecurity and uncertainty: "The waies on earth have paths and turnings knowne, / The waies on Sea are gone by needles light."[84]

Elizabeth herself expressed consciousness of impatience for her death in a letter to James VI in 1600, after he had nearly been killed by the Gowrie conspiracy. She wrote,

> And though a King I be, yet hath my funeral been prepared (as I hear) long or I suppose their labour shall be needful, and do hear so much of that daily as I may have a good memorial that I am mortal, and with all so be they too that make such preparation before hand, wherat I smile, supposing that such facts may make them readier for it than I ... Of this my pen hath run further than at first I meant.[85]

Sir John Harington vividly recorded how sorely Elizabeth was beset with fears for her life in October 1601, following the rebellion and execution of the Earl of Essex in February of that year:

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83. DeVere & Devereux, pp.62-4.

84. DeVere & Devereux, p.47.

85. Elizabeth I, *Letters*, pp.278-9; Hatfield MSS Catalogue, vol.X, p.288.

> [The Queen] is quite disfavourd, and unattird, and these troubles waste her much ... She walks much in her privy chamber, and stamps with her feet at ill news, and thrusts her rusty sword at times into the arras in great rage ... so disorderd is all order, that her Highness hath worne but one change of raiment for many days, and swears much at those that cause her griefs in such wise.[86]

In 1602, making a return to London, she changed her means of travel and went by water to Whitehall, a member of the household reporting that, "The sudden alteration grew upon an inkling or suspicion of some dangerous attempt."[87] In the same year, the young men of the Middle Temple were reluctant to stage their usual entertainment for her.[88] The "Elizabethan Golden Age," in its last years, had become distinctly tarnished.

The darker side of the moon

Moon-imagery was admirably suited to expressing this growing disillusionment within the acceptable outward form of panegyric, because of its darker overtones. In any case, the moon was implicitly only an image of secondary power, inferior to the symbol of masculine regal power, the sun. During Elizabeth's reign, the moon began to be employed alongside the sun as an emblem of royal authority; "Certaine Englishe Verses", written in 1586 about the Babington plot, railed against traitors who:

> ... in armes seeke Ioue from skies by force to take,

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86. Harington, *Letters & Epigrams*, pp.90-91.

87. Letter from Mr. Chamberlain, Nov 19 1602, Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, p.600.

88. Norbrook, *Panegyric*, p.130; Chambers, vol.I, p.170.

They seeke the Sun, the Moone, the starres in great contempt
To obscure their light a deadlie Eclips to make.[89]

Thomas Churchyard, writing in 1592 about the absence of the Queen in time of plague, combined the influence of the moon over the tides with the metaphor of head and body, a common image of the relationship between monarch and people:

For, as the Moone moues up the mighty seas,
So head doth guide the body when it will,
And rules the man by Wit and Reason's skill.[90]

After Elizabeth's death the implicit inferiority of the moon-image became explicit, with many of the elegies greeting James as the magnificent sun superseding the faded moon. In "England's Farewell", he was hailed as Phoebus after Phoebe; and England was told, "though thy moone decaies, thy sun doth rise."[91]

In any discussion of the binary oppositions which have governed western culture, the moon is always on the side of inferior feminine qualities, as in the catalogue assembled by Hélène Cixous:

Activity / passivity,
Sun / Moon,

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89. Hazlitt, ed., 1st Series, no.XXVII.

90. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.III, pp.176-9.

91. Nichols, *James*, vol.I, pp.12, 20. Berry sees the shift in the course of Elizabeth's reign from sun-imagery to moon-imagery in panegyric as part of the increasing emphasis on femininity in her "cult" (pp.134-5).

Culture / Nature,
Day / Night.[92]

That such categories applied in the sixteenth century can be shown from contemporary sources, where the moon is used as an image of female inferiority. Luther, for instance, said:

> ... woman is a different animal to man, not only having different members, but also being far weaker in intellect ... For as the sun is more splendid than the moon (although the moon is also a most splendid body), so also woman, although the most beautiful handiwork of God, does not equal the dignity and glory of the male.[93]

The moon is an emblem of beauty, but not of dignity and glory, which are reserved for men. Hence we find Astrophil and Stella described in an elegy for Sidney by the succinct antithesis: "He was a Sun, and she a Moone."[94] Mulcaster, in his *Positions*, explained that girls' bodies were weaker, "as of a moonish influence."[95]

As well as being a feminine and secondary image, the moon was particularly associated with sinister qualities. The Elizabethans viewed brain-sicknesses as brought on by the influence of the moon - hence "lunacy". Elizabeth herself wrote to Leicester on July 19 1586,

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92. Cixous, p.90.

93. Maclean, p.10.

94. "An Elegie, or friends passion, for his *Astrophill*", Spenser, ed. Smith & de Selincourt, p.557, l.132.

95. Mulcaster, p.176. Berry gives further evidence of the association of the moon with the weakness and changeability of women's bodies (p.135).

> Rob, I am afraid you will suppose by my wandering writings that a midsummer moon hath taken large possession of my brains this month, but you must needs take things as they come in my head, though order be left behind me.[96]

The moon was associated with wandering wits through its association with change and unfixity, as in Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, where he said,

> Again, when the great sage Ecclesiasticus said that "the fool changes as the moon, but the wise man is steadfast like the sun", what he was suggesting was surely that the entire mortal race is foolish and the epithet of wise applies to God alone. By moon is understood human nature, by the sun the source of all light, that is, God.[97]

Again here we see the moon being used as a figure of *secondary* power. Erasmus and Ecclesiasticus are echoed in "Tishe's Verses on the Order of the Garter":

> Lyke to the Moone, that Moonthly chaungeth newe,
> I maie compare a fleeting fickle mynde;
> For when her full shee geues the world to vewe,
> her wayne is nearest then by course of kynde:
> So wavering witt's the farder that they raunge,
> theire suddeyn wane presadgeth speedy chaunge.
> But constant Myndes are lyke vnto the Sonne,
> whose certayne course doth neuer runne astraye.[98]

The moon was associated with strange behaviour in nature, with darkness, and with night. Barnabe Barnes, in his *Spirituall Sonnets*, defined the moon thus:

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96. Elizabeth I, *Letters*, p.178.

97. Erasmus of Rotterdam, *Praise of Folly* and *Letter to Martin Dorp, 1515*, trans. Betty Radice, introd. A.H.T. Levi (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p.188.

98. Furnivall & Morfill, 2nd series, pp.115-29, ll.277-284.

That silver planet, torch of silent night,
Which, when the sunne reposeth his beames bright
In westerne seas, her planet-darts forth throwes,
Whose influence doth strange events compose.[99]

Everyone, from scientists to uneducated people, believed in the magical powers of the moon.[100] The goddess Diana was associated with witches; Reginald Scot, in his *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 1584, wrote that:

> certain wicked women following Sathan's provocations, being seduced by the illusion of divels, beleeve and professe, that in the night time they ride abroad with Diana, the goddesse.[101]

Figures of Cynthia in Elizabethan poetry are not necessarily always direct representations of the Queen. It is perhaps tempting to see her in the "Cinthia" of Spenser's *Epithalamion*, who enviously spies on him and his bride in bed; but direct identification becomes difficult when he tells her:

sith of wemens labours thou hast charge,
And generation goodly dost enlarge,
Encline thy will t'effect our wishfull vow,
And the chast wombe informe with timely seed.[102]

These are the traditional classical properties of Lucina, and they hardly square with Elizabeth's harsh disapproval of matrimony and motherhood for her ladies-in-waiting. In the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, there is an allusion to Diana which likewise seems to refer to general classical myth, with no

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99. Barnes, *Spirituall Sonnets*, p.48, Sonnet LXXXXV, ll.4-7.

100. See Thomas, pp.297, 333, 354, 384.

101. Quoted in Berry, p.130.

102. Spenser, ed. Smith & de Selincourt, p.584, ll.383-6.

direct application to Elizabeth: October, in the pageant of the months, rides upon the Scorpion, "the same which by *Dianaes* doom vniust / Slew great *Orion*" (VII.vii.39). Earlier in *The Faerie Queene*, Cynthia is outshone by Prince Arthur's shield: "siluer *Cynthia* wexed pale and faint, / As when her face is stayned with magicke arts constraint" (I.vii.34). There are no grounds to find an allusion to Elizabeth here. Similarly, it is difficult, and indeed somewhat alarming, to see Elizabeth in the lines from *Old Fortunatus* in which Fortunatus describes how he has spent three days and nights in the woods, and has seen

> three times franticke *Cynthia* naked ride,
> About the rustie high-waies of the skies
> Stucke full of burning Starres, which lent her light
> To court her Negro paramour grim night.[103]

Yet these associations of the moon with the mysteries of female reproduction, with arbitrary and unfair judgement, with sickly light, with magic, and with a wild eroticism, are shadows which stand behind applications of the image to Elizabeth. The lines from *Old Fortunatus* follow directly upon the Prologue in which two old men hail Elizabeth as the moon and kneel to her. Later in the play, the figure of Vice appears:

> ... with a gilded face, and hornes on her head: her garments long, painted before with siluer halfe moones, increasing by litle and litle, till they come to the full.[104]

Such applications of the moon-image inevitably colour the way it is used

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103. Dekker, *Old Fortunatus*, I.i.155-8.

104. Dekker, *Old Fortunatus*, I.iii.s.d.

with regard to Elizabeth. The role of Cynthia, however much it is sanitised and made respectable, trails with it ideas of untamable, licentious and threatening female powers.

Mutability

Alongside the general mood of criticism and disillusionment, which could be expressed through the more negative aspects of moon-imagery, the last years of the sixteenth century were also marked by a preoccupation with mutability. It was one of the most prevalent themes of poetry of this period. This preoccupation may well have arisen from awareness that the century and the reign were both drawing to a close, presaging unpredictable changes.

There may also have been an element of millenarianism; some verses headed "A hartie thankes giuinge to god for our queenes most excellent maiestie" ran:

> I prepare with speed,
> crist commyng is at hand;
> as by straing signes and token both
> the learned sort haue stand.
> gods workes plainly declares
> each day vnto us all,
> *that* soddenly an end shalbe
> of things on earth mortall.[105]

One of the poems which wished for Elizabeth's longevity expressed it thus:

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105. Furnivall & Morfill, eds., vol.II, pp.109-12.

"And let her liue, *and* let her neuer dye, / But rule till Christ shall come *and* conquer death."[106] In the entertainment at Cowdray in 1591, a Pilgrim prayed, "God graunt the worlde maie ende with your life."[107] The expectation may have been that neither event was all that far off. Katherine R.Firth informs us that the older generation of reformers believed

> ... that 1600 would be a very important date. Luther and Melanchthon thought the world would not last much beyond then; Foxe, Napier, and Pont, that it must mark at least the beginning of a quick series of events completing the prophecies of the Apocalypse and preparing the world for the kingdom or the Last Judgement.[108]

Sir John Harington, in his *Tract on the Succession*, dedicated to the future James I, remarked that it was apt that in 1598 both universities held disputations on the topic that the world was growing old.[109] Elizabeth herself, as a devout Protestant, had a profound conviction of the impermanence of earthly things. In her *Book of Devotions*, she wrote that:

> I see all things in this life subject to mutability nothing to continue at one stay, but fear and trembling, hunger and thirst, cold and heat, weakness and faintness, sorow and sicknes, doth evermore oppress mankind. I hear how oft times untimely death doth carry away the mightiest and greatest personages ... all things in this world, both heaven and earth shall pass and perish and thy word alone endureth for ever.[110]

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106. "Verses vpon the report of the death of the right Honourable the Lord of ESSEX", Furnivall & Morfill, eds., vol. II, pp.217-39.

107. J.Wilson, p.90.

108. *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530-1645* (Oxford UP, 1979), p.195.

109. Norbrook, *Panegyric*, p.132.

110. Elizabeth I, *Book of Devotions*, 2nd English Prayer, pp.41-2.

Mutability was the central theme of Nashe's play, *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (1592?), most plangently expressed in the sung lines "Queenes haue died yong and faire, / Dust hath closde *Helens* eye" - not a direct allusion to Elizabeth, but evidence of the general preoccupation with mutability.[111] There were further evocative expressions of the theme in Sir Walter Raleigh's *The Ocean's Love to Cynthia*:

> All droopes, all dyes, all troden vnder dust
> The person, place, and passages forgotten
> The hardest steele eaten with softest ruste,
> The firme and sollide tree both rent and rotten.[112]

There are resemblances to Raleigh's poem in Sonnet 83 of Fulke Greville's *Caelica*, likewise a lament for a fall from grace: "Time past layes vp my ioy; and time to come my griefe, / She euer must be my *desire*, and neuer my *reliefe*." We cannot be certain whether this "She" is a mistress, or the Queen; as in much court poetry, the idioms of love and politics are interfused. But again, we find eloquent images of transience:

> The Ship of *Greece*, the Streames and she be not the same
> They were, although Ship, Streames and she still beare their antique
> name.
> The Wood which was, is worne, those waues are runne away,
> Yet still a Ship, and still a Streame, still running to a Sea.[113]

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111. *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow, 5 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), vol.IV, pp.282-4.

112. Raleigh, p.34, ll.253-6.

113. Greville, ed. Bullough, vol.I, pp.131-4, ll.47-8, 69-72. Greville also used this image in his *Life of Sidney*, when he commended Elizabeth for not imposing extra-parliamentary taxes. If she had made this

This idea that those things which appear to be eternal are in fact composed of a never-ceasing flux vividly prefigures Donne in "The Second Anniversary."

The moon as a symbol of change

It is significant that *The Ocean's Love to Cynthia* and *Caelica* are both texts concerned with the representation of the Queen; and that they enact this representation through the moon-image. Central to the negative associations of the moon was its identification with change. Thus Juliet tells Romeo,

> O, swear not by the moon, th'inconstant moon,
> That monthly changes in her circled orb,
> Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.'[114]

This identification was virtually proverbial, as shown in a colloquial aside in a courtier's letter of 1571: "News we have here none of any certainty, things are so variable, and more changing than the moon."[115]

In Elizabeth's old age, the moon, with its associations with fickleness and mutability, became an increasingly apt means of representing

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change to the nation, her people would have found themselves in a ship of Athens, "of which - the name being old and all riders, sleepers and other timbers new - they were to be shipped down a stream of the like nature, ever and yet never the same" (Ch.XVI, p.115).

114. Shakespeare, ed. Alexander, *Romeo & Juliet*, II.ii.109-11.

115. Hatfield MSS Catalogue, vol.I, p.516, no.1583.

both the perceived fickleness of her favour, and also her physical decay and mortality. At the same time, the moon could be a symbol of *im*mutability and perpetuity, since, in its monthly cycle, it was eternally self-renewing. This dual nature of the moon was admirably suited to the increasingly ambivalent panegyric of the last years of the reign.

Dowland stressed the fact that Cynthia's monthly cycle is part of a larger perpetuity:

> See the moon
> That ever in one change doth grow
> Yet still the same; and she is so;
> So, so, so, and only so.[116]

Admittedly it is the refrain of a song, but his repetition of "So" seems to have something over-insistent about it, as if desperately trying to convince both himself and his audience of a blatant untruth, namely, Elizabeth's immutability. Jonson expressed this untruth by distorting the properties of the moon; he asserts that Elizabeth is like a moon which never wanes:

> [Her] glory, like a lasting plenilune,
> Seems ignorant of what it is to wane!
> Not under heaven an object could be found
> More fit to please.[117]

Other writers invoked the moon-image only to discard it, or to affirm that Elizabeth surpassed it. Dekker, for example, in *Old Fortunatus*, wrote:

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116. Dowland, *Third Book of Songs*, no.VII, in Fellowes, ed., *English Madrigal Verse*, p.481.

117. Jonson, *Cynthia's Revels*, V.viii.10-14.

I weepe for ioy to see the Sunne looke old,
To see the Moone mad at her often change,
To see the Starres onely by night to shine,
Whilst you are still bright, still one, still diuine.[118]

Elizabeth is greater than sun and moon and stars, all of whom have only limited qualities. Richard Barnfield's "Cynthia", 1595, is, like Peele's *Honour of the Garter*, a dream-vision in which the poet is woken by Cynthia's radiance, but whereas Peele's device of praise is to assert that Elizabeth is identical with Cynthia, Barnfield asserts that she exceeds her; she "shameth *Cynthia* in her siluer rayes." His "Cynthia" concludes:

Thus, sacred Virgin, Muse of chastitie,
This difference is betwixt the Moone and thee:
Shee shines by Night; but thou by Day do'st shine:
Shee Monthly changeth; thou dost nere decline:
And as the Sunne, to her, doth lend his light,
So hee, by thee, is onely made so bright:
Yet neither Sun, nor Moone, thou canst be named
Because thy light hath both their beauties shamed:
Then, since an heauenly Name doth thee befall,
Thou VIRGO art: (if any Signe at all).[119]

Barnfield recognises that the moon represents change and secondary power, and is therefore not an entirely complimentary image for the Queen. His "Cynthia" is a straightforward, unambiguous panegyric; but for those panegyrists with doubts or criticisms to express, the conjunction of positive and negative aspects in the moon were precisely what made it so attractive as a symbol for the Queen.[120]

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118. Dekker, "The Prologue at Court", *Old Fortunatus*, p.113.

119. Barnfield, pp.54-55.

120. Berry discusses some early sixteenth-century French poems which had already made use of the negative aspects of moon-imagery for implied political comment (pp.54-60).

2. Versions of the Cynthia-image in panegyric of Elizabeth

Chapman's Cynthia

George Chapman's *The Shadow of Night*, 1594, is perhaps the most cryptic and least typical example of representation of Elizabeth as Cynthia. However, it is worth examining, because it supports much of what has already been said about the dark and sinister associations of moon-imagery. Its atypicality lies in the fact that, for Chapman, those associations are positive rather than negative.

The Shadow of Night consists of a pair of poems, the "Hymnus in Noctem" and "Hymnus in Cynthiam", which are clearly allegorical, but have never been satisfactorily unravelled. Their editor, Phyllis Brooks Bartlett, comments on their "obscurity" and "extraordinary difficulty", felt by Chapman's contemporaries as much as the modern reader.[1] Chapman purposely courted obscurity in his writing, scorning readers who quailed before it:

> Obscuritie in affection of words, & indigested concets, is pedanticall and childish; but where it shroudeth it selfe in the hart of his subiect, utterd with fitness of figure, and expressiue Epethites; with that darknes wil J still labour to be shaddowed.[2]

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1. *The Poems of George Chapman*, ed. Phyllis Brooks Bartlett (New York: MLA, 1941), pp.4-5, 11.

2. Letter to Matthew Roydon, preface to *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*, Chapman, p.49.

It is as part of this valorisation of "darkness" that the night becomes the setting of Chapman's allegory: "No pen can any thing eternall wright, / That is not steept in humor of the Night." ("Hymnus in Noctem", 11.376-7.) Douglas Bush describes this sentiment as "so different from the rhetorical denunciation of night ... in Shakespeare and Spenser ... The dominant idea, quite un-Elizabethan, is the primitive mystery, the vast fecundity, of night."[3] Elizabeth, as Cynthia, is his Queen of the Night, rising resplendently at the end of the "Hymnus in Noctem", after the evening star:

> Behind her, with a brase of siluer Hynds,
> In Iuorie chariot, swifter then the winds,
> Is great Hyperions horned daughter drawne
> Enchantresse-like, deckt in disparent lawne,
> Circkled with charmes and incantations,
> That ride huge spirits, and outragious passions:
> Musicke, and moode, she loues, but loue she hates,
> (As curious Ladies do, their publique cates)
> This traine, with meteors, comets, lightenings,
> The dreadfull presence of our Empresse sings:
> Which grant for euer (ô eternal Night)
> Till vertue flourish in the light of light. (11.392-403.)

Like Shakespeare with his "imperial votaress", and Peele in *The Honour of the Garter*, Chapman uses the moon-image to create a vision of Elizabeth which is other-worldly, translucent, mystical and ethereal.

Chapman's Cynthia represents not merely Elizabeth in her "soueraigne kinde", but also

> ... the forces of the mind:

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3. *Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry* (New York: Pageant, 1957), pp.201-2.

An argument to rauish and refine
An earthly soule, and make it meere diuine.
("Hymnus in Cynthiam", 11.151-5.)

In her chastity, she represents the victory of the virtuous mind over base human instincts. The "Hymnus in Noctem" is a lament for the decay of justice and virtue in the world; Cynthia/Elizabeth therefore rises at its climax as a purgative force. The "Hymnus in Cynthiam" then concerns itself with extolling her exemplary virtue, which brings about her triumph over time. She is a moon who has risen above change and achieved a "fixt prime":

Ascend thy chariot, and make earth admire
Thy old swift changes, made a yong fixt prime,
O let thy beautie scorch the wings of time. (11.16-18.)

This image of time as a singed moth recalls the "lamp" and "flame" figurations of Elizabeth's virginity and agelessness discussed above (p.284-5).

Chapman is a fervent admirer of chastity, eulogising Cynthia's purity in the following extended simile:

as heauens Geniall parts were cut away
By Saturnes hands, with adamantine Harpey [i.e. sword],
Onely to shew, that since it was composd
Of vniuersall matter: it enclosd
No powre to procreate another heauen:
So since that adamantine powre is giuen
To thy chast hands, to cut of all desire
Of fleshly sports and quench to Cupids fire:
Let it approue: no change shall take thee hence,
Nor thy throne beare another inference. (11.21-30.)

The chastity which renders Cynthia immutable is dramatically figured here

as a castrating power. Yet despite these descriptions of chastity's triumph over time, Chapman frequently alludes to the Queen's death as an imminent crisis; he is not like those panegyrists who assert her immortality and leave the real soonness of her death unspoken. He writes of the earth's jealous desire to reclaim Cynthia (11.31-9), and of the fear that she "Should yeeld to change, Eclips, or heauinesse" (1.109).

Chapman makes particularised use of the moon-image to oppose it to the masculine "sun" of the papacy:

> Then set thy Christall, and Imperiall throne,
> (Girt in thy chast, and neuer-loosing zone)
> Gainst Europs Sunne directly opposit,
> And giue him darknesse, that doth threat thy light. (11.116-19).[4]

As they engage in this conflict, Cynthia's followers are endowed, by her chastity and their emulation of it, with superhuman strengths and powers to overcome physical infirmities:

> The vertue-temperd mind, euer preserues,
> Oyles, and expulsatorie Balme that serues
> And steeles our feet to march on needles points:
> And mongst her armes, hath armour to repell
> The canon, and the firie darts of hell (11.132-6.)

Chapman connects the integrity of Elizabeth's virgin body with the impregnability and prosperity of the nation:

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4. Norbrook and Waddington note the origin of the sun-image for the papacy in Dante (Norbrook, *Poetry & Politics*, p.116; Raymond B.Waddington, *The Mind's Empire: Myth and Form in George Chapman's Narrative Poems* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974), p.80). It may also be relevant that Philip II's *impresa* was Apollo driving his sun-chariot over land and sea (Cain, pp.52-3). I am unconvinced by Waddington's argument that the sun represents Anjou and the threat of Elizabeth's marriage; in 1594, this seems highly implausible.

Deare president for us to imitate,
Whose dores thou guardst against Imperious fate,
Keeping our peacefull households safe from sack,
And free'st our ships, when others suffer wracke. (11.505-8.)

The next line is about her "virgin chamber ... that sacred is", which Chapman glosses as her temple (1.509.)

The climactic vision of the poem is of Cynthia's other person, Hecate. In this guise, she is a sinister and destructive force:

Then in thy cleare, and Isie Pentacle,
Now execute a Magicke miracle:
Slip euerie sort of poisond herbes, and plants,
And bring thy rabid mastiffs to these hants.
Looke with thy fierce aspect, be terror-strong
Assume thy wondrous shape of halfe a furlong:
Put on thy feete of Serpents, viperous hayres,
And act the fearefulst part of thy affaires:
Conuert the violent courses of thy floods,
Remoue whole fields of corne, and hugest woods,
Cast hills into the sea, and make the starrs,
Drop out of heauen, and lose thy Mariners.
So shall the wonders of thy power be seene,
And thou for euer liue the Planets Queene.
("Hymnus in Cynthiam", 11.515-28.)[5]

It appears that Chapman is here urging Elizabeth to employ her virtue as a searing purifying force to transform the decayed state of the nation.

What is striking about his use of the moon-image is the way in which he employs its sinister and magical attributes without compunction; for

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5. This echoes Medea's invocation of Hecate in Book VIII of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (trans. A.D. Melville, introd. E.J. Kenney [Oxford UP-World's Classics, 1987], p.150).

him, with his cult of night, they are assets. Here, dramatically stated, are all the conventional associations of the moon with strange effects in nature, and with powers which are wayward, incomprehensible, and uncontainable. For Chapman, this constitutes a celebration of Elizabeth, but only within his highly idiosyncratic symbolic scheme.[6]

Jonson's Cynthia

More typical was use of the darker aspects of the moon-image to invoke straightforwardly negative associations. In this form, they were implied, rather than openly stated in Chapman's manner, in order to voice ambivalence towards the Queen under the guise of praise. For instance, we have already seen how Jonson asserted that Elizabeth was like a "lasting plenilune" (p.325 above). This hyperbolic distortion and denial of the true properties of the moon draws attention to the fact that the moon is conventionally a figure of change: there is no such thing as an unwaning full moon, nor was the Queen eternally unchanging.

In *Cynthia's Revels*, the moon-image is used in just such an ambivalent way to suggest the imperfections of the Queen. Cynthia is ostensibly praised: she is a figure of absolute and rigorous virtue, who will purge the court of decadence. Arete, her loyal nymph, proclaims:

> This knot of spiders will be soon dissolved,

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6. See Waddington, pp.99-101, 107, for the influence of Cornelius Agrippa upon Chapman's positive conception of the moon's magic.

> And all their webs swept out of Cynthia's court,
> When once her glorious deity appears,
> And but presents itself in her full light.[7]

Cynthia is said to have enormous power, which is described in terms of her influence over the tides:

> What could never in itself agree
> Forgetteth the eccentric property,
> And at her sight turns forthwith regular
> Whose sceptre guides the flowing ocean. (V.v.19-22.)

When she appears in person, it is as Queen of the Night, greeted with a melodious hymn:

> Queen and huntress, chaste and fair,
> Now the sun is laid to sleep,
> Seated in thy silver chair,
> State in wonted manner keep. (V.vi.1-4.)

However, these outward gestures of panegyric are accompanied by some disharmonious notes. Cynthia appears as something of a spoilsport and a prude, out of touch with the attitudes and enthusiasms of her subjects. Her speeches are defensive and unconvincing, as in the following dialogue:

> Arete: ... ignorant is all the race of men,
> Which still complains, not knowing why or when.
> Cynthia: Else, noble Arete, they would not blame,
> And tax for or unjust, or for as proud
> Thy Cynthia, in the things which are indeed
> The greatest glories in our starry crown;
> Such is our chastity. (V.vi.45-51.)

She repudiates criticism of her punishment of love-games, but the only

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7. Jonson, *Cynthia's Revels*, III.iv.88-91.

justification she will give is this: "To men, this argument should stand for firm, / 'A goddess did it, therefore it was good.'" (V.xi.25-6.) This is not unlike Sidney's highly ambivalent description of the portrait of the Queen of Laconia: "she was a queen and therefore beautiful."[8]

Jonson's Cynthia is open to alternative readings: either she is elevated above human judgements; or she is autocratic and arbitrary, with an inflated sense of her own authority. The opening of the first masque is in marked contrast to the usual catalogue of divine pseudonyms and periphrases by which she is hailed: instead, Cupid begins, "Clear pearl of heaven, and, not to be farther ambitious in titles, Cynthia." (V.vii.1-2.) This could be merely an attempt at novelty; or it could be a sign of an exhaustion of invention, and a growing disrespect for and boredom with the royal cult. Cynthia's powers are not infinite; her influence is limited to the realm of darkness:

> Ladies and gallants of our court, to end
> And give a timely period to our sports,
> Let us conclude them with declining night;
> Our empire is but of the darker half. (V.xi.1.)

Cynthia's Revels was presented before the Queen, apparently as an attempt to flatter her and win her favour, although it failed to do so.[9] Away from the royal presence, it would appear that Jonson's view of her was highly cynical; he is reported to have remarked, regarding her

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8. Sidney, *Arcadia*, Bk.I, Ch.16, p.159.

9. See Miles, p.56.

virginity, that "she had a membrana on her, which made her incapable of man, though for her delight she tried many."[10] It is therefore unsurprising that his attempt at panegyric of the Queen should be deeply ambiguous; and that it should draw on the ambiguities inherent in the Cynthia-convention.

Lyly's Cynthia

Jonson employed general associations of the moon with dark or secondary powers. John Lyly, however, developed the specific association of the moon with mutability, and explored the gap between this and conventional assertions of the Queen's *im*mutability. Used thus, the moon could be a subtle but eloquent emblem of both the Queen's advancing age, and the perceived fickleness of her favour.

In *Endimion, The Man in the Moone* (published 1591), the moon's devoted lover delivers a speech in the first scene which intertwines associations of constancy and change, and which is riddled with self-contradictions. He begins by claiming that Cynthia is not changeable at all:

> O fayre *Cynthia*, why doe others terme thee vnconstant, whom I haue euer founde vnmoueable? Iniurious tyme, corrupt manners, vnkind men, who finding a constancy not to be matched in my sweete Mistris, haue christned her with the name of wauering, waxing, and waning. Is shee inconstant that keepeth a setled course, which since her first creation altereth not one minute in her mouing?

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10. Jardine, p.173; "Conversations with William Drummond", in G.Parfitt, ed., *Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p.470.

But then he immediately asserts that, in any case, inconstancy is a virtue, and Cynthia *is* inconstant:

> There is nothing thought more admirable or commendable in the sea, then the ebbing and flowing; and shall the Moone, from whom the Sea taketh this vertue, be accounted fickle for encreasing, & decreasing?

Finally he defines this cyclical change as the basis of Cynthia's eternal youth:

> What thing (my Mistris excepted) being in the pride of her beauty, & latter minute of her age, that waxeth young againe? ... getting youth by yeeres, and neuer decaying beauty by time, whose fayre face, neyther the Summers blase can scorch, nor Winters blast chappe, nor the numbring of yeeres breede altering of colours.[11]

So Cynthia is unchanging; but inconstancy is a virtue, and she is inconstant; but through her inconstancy she achieves constant youth. Endimion's argument is as circular as the moon's own self-renewing cycle.

Lyly uses rhetorical paradoxes to emphasise the paradoxicality of Elizabeth/Cynthia, the paradoxicality of a Queen who claims to be immutable but is visibly ageing. She is:

> *shee whose figure of all is the perfectest, and neuer to bee measured - alwaies one, yet neuer the same - still inconstant, yet neuer wauering.* (III.iv.155-7.)

Cynthia combines the positive and negative properties of the moon; she is a perplexing and elusive figure who arouses in Endimion as much

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11. John Lyly, *Endimion, or The Man in the Moon, The Complete Works of John Lyly*, ed. R.Warwick Bond, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902), vol.III, pp.5-103; I.i.30-56.

frustration as devotion. He declares,

> In the midst of these distempred thoughts of myne thou art not onelie iealous of my truth, but careles, suspicious, and secure: which strange humor maketh my minde as desperate as thy conceits are doubtfull. (II.i.27-30.)

He has sometimes been interpreted as a representation of Leicester - the play was perhaps written as early as 1585, before Leicester's death - whom he certainly resembles in his long but fruitless courtship. He laments, "Haue I not spent my golden yeeres in hopes, waxing old with wishing, yet wishing nothing but thy loue." (II.i.21-2.) He is a typical courtly lover, the hopelessness of whose devotion is multiplied when his mistress is a heavenly object like the moon, or a woman infinitely above him in power, like the Queen. As Eumenides describes it, it is an extravagant passion for an unobtainable object:

> There was neuer any so peeuish to imagin the Moone eyther capable of affection, or shape of a Mistris: for as impossible it is to make loue fit to her humor which no man knoweth, as a coate to her forme, which continueth not in one bignesse whilst she is measuring. (I.i.19-23.)

Another form in which the sinister associations of the moon are represented in the play is in the figure of Tellus, meaning Earth, who has been interpreted as the moon in her sinister guise when she walks on the earth as Hecate. She tries to lure Endimion away from his elevating spiritual adoration of Cynthia into base physical passion for herself, and, when he resists, she conspires with the witch Dipsas to send him into a perpetual sleep. After many years have passed, Cynthia releases him from this spell, and miraculously restores his youth, suggesting that release

from erotic desire entails release from age and mutability.[12]

Tellus has been variously interpreted as representing Mary Queen of Scots, or the dark, worldly side of Cynthia/Elizabeth; or simply the human side of Elizabeth, her body natural.[13] In her debate with Endimion, the counterpoint is set out between Elizabeth as goddess and Elizabeth as woman:

> Endimion: ... of *Cynthia* we are allowed not to talke but to wonder, because her vertues are not within the reach of our capacities.
> Tellus: Why, she is but a woman.
> Endimion: No more was *Venus*.
> Tellus: Shee is but a virgin.
> Endimion: No more was *Vesta*.
> Tellus: Shee shall haue an ende.
> Endimion: So shall the world.
> Tellus: Is not her beautie subiect to time?
> Endimion: No more then time is to standing still.
> Tellus: Wilt thou make her immortall?
> Endimion: No, but incomparable. (III.i.77-88.)

Once again, Lyly deals inconclusively with the question of whether the Queen can truly conquer time. It is no wonder that Joel Altman, in *The Tudor Play of Mind*, cites Lyly's *Endimion* as an example of the tendency in Renaissance drama to argue *in utramque partem*, balancing at least two points of view at once.[14] Here, though, this ambivalence is not merely a

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12. See Berry, p.126.

13. Axton implies that the opposition of Cynthia and Tellus may reflect Elizabeth's dualism as body politic and body natural (p.72).

14. Joel B. Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1978), pp.201-28.

function of Renaissance rhetorical habit, or of the particular undecidability of Lyly's writing; it is also a function of the problems of representing the ambivalent or polyvalent figure of the Queen.

Lyly's Pandora

Another possible representation of Elizabeth in Lyly's works is Pandora, in *The Woman in the Moone* (publ. 1597), another figure who is associated with the moon. Lyly draws on Hesiod's myth of Pandora as a woman created by the gods to have *all* their gifts; she therefore appears perfect, but is actually fatally flawed. She is irresistible, rendering men vulnerable so that she can work their ruin.[15] In Lyly's version, Pandora is created by Nature to satisfy a band of four shepherds who have lamented their lack of a mate. As the warring planets compete for dominance over her, she is successively sullen, proud, warlike, amiable, wanton, false and mad. Finally, the moon takes her over.

Although this representation of a female figure is obviously a highly unfavourable one, there are various points in the play which seem to reflect on circumstances at Elizabeth's court. When Pandora is proud, she rejects her suitors out of a conviction that the throne granted her by Jupiter places her infinitely above them:

> Although my brest yet neuer harbored loue,

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15. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 11.60-91, *Theogony*, p.42, in *Theogony, Works and Days, Theognis, and Elegies*, trans. D.Wender (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

> Yet should my bountie free your seruitude:
> If loue might well consort our Maiestie,
> And not debase our matchlesse dignitie.[16]

This sounds very like the many imperiously dismissive statements on marriage made by the younger Elizabeth. Moreover, the futility and insecurity of the pose of the Queen's "lover" in the court of the 1590s, as expressed in such poems as Essex's, is echoed in the paradoxical figures by which the shepherds voice their complaints:

> Stesias: Sweet hony words, but sawst with bitter gawle.
> Iphicles: They drawe me on, and yet they put me back.
> Learchus: They hold me vp, and yet they let me fall.
> Melos: They giue me life, and yet they let me dye.
> (II.i.133-6.)

When, under Mars' influence, Pandora turns warlike, and "layes about her" with a spear, the reaction of Gunophilus, her servant, is, "What? is my mistresse mankinde on the sudden?" (II.i.197.), bringing out the anxieties regarding the martial or mannish woman which were latent in much panegyric of Elizabeth, as we saw in Part I of this thesis.

Finally, Luna takes control, declaring, "as I am, so shall *Pandora* bee, / New fangled, fyckle, slothfull, foolish, mad." (V.i.4-5.) Accordingly, Pandora turns lunatic, and in this is depicted as fulfilling her destiny as a woman. Gunophilus declares, "I was nere in loue with her till now. O absolute *Pandora*! / because folish, for folly is womens perfection."

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16. John Lyly, *The Woman in the Moone*, *The Complete Works of John Lyly*, ed. R.Warwick Bond, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902), vol.III, pp.229-88. II.i.129-32.

(V.i.115-16.) Pandora herself gladly decides to remain in Luna's sphere. Once she does so, Luna will alternate between the roles of "*Diana* in the woods" and "*Hecate* in *Plutos* regiment" (V.i.297-8) in the "infernall shades" (V.i.284), her light and dark sides. Pandora wants to dwell in the moon because:

> change is my felicity,
> And ficklenesse *Pandoraes* proper forme ...
> ... *Cynthia* made me idle, mutable,
> Forgetfull, foolish, fickle, franticke, madde;
> These be the humors that content me best,
> And therefore will I stay with *Cynthia*. (V.i.301-2, 307-10.)

Lyly's Pandora closely resembles Sir John Harington's description of Elizabeth in his letter to Robert Markham:

> I marvell to thynk what strange humors do conspire to patch up the natures of some myndes. The elements do seem to strive which shall conquer and rise above the other. In good soothe, our late Queene did enfolde them all together.[17]

Yet it may seem improbable that such a negative depiction as Lyly's of female, and lunar, power, could have been intended as a reflection on the Queen. However, he was writing within the genre of courtly entertainment discussed by Marie Axton in *The Queen's Two Bodies*, in which discussion of otherwise vetoed political issues might be tolerated within the relatively safe form of dramatic performance before a select audience. Lyly worked extensively within this form: his second play, *Sappho and Phao*, dealt allegorically with the Queen's proposed French marriage; others such as *Gallathea* and *Love's Metamorphosis*, in which love gained the upper hand

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17. Harington, *Letters & Epigrams*, p.122.

over chastity, implied criticism of the Queen's failure to marry and provide an heir. *Endimion*, to which *The Woman in the Moone* was the sequel, was evidently an allegory upon court affairs. There is evidence that Elizabeth may have perceived satire against herself in *The Woman in the Moone*: it was not published until two years after its entry on the Stationers' Register in 1595; and a petition from Lyly to the Queen in 1595 reveals that he had somehow incurred her displeasure.[18]

One way of reading the play as allegory is to see it as working on the fine line between the "exceptional woman", and women in general. As audience to the many panegyrics which praised her, while slighting women in general, Elizabeth must have grown accustomed to excepting herself from any critical comment; *The Faerie Queene* is a case in point. So are the entertainment at Ditchley in 1592, Barnfield's *Cassandra*, and Dekker's *Old Fortunatus*, in all of which encomium of Elizabeth alternates with aspersions against the female sex (see pp.43-4, 100-101 above). Presumably there was a tacit understanding that the Queen was not to consider herself one of this "kind of cattell," as Fortunatus termed women.[19] In the case of Lyly's Pandora, when Lyly writes that women are under the moon's influence - and are

> mutable in all their loues,
> Fantasticall, childish, and folish, in their desires,
> Demaunding toyes:
> And starke madde when they cannot haue their will (V.i.323-6)

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18. Lyly, *Works*, ed. Bond, vol.I, pp.63, 65; vol.II, pp.256-7.

19. Dekker, *Old Fortunatus*, I.i.44-5.

- the tacit understanding may have been that the Queen, from long practice in the art of reading as the "exceptional woman", would have excepted herself from these aspersions, while the long-suffering courtiers who made up the rest of the audience recognised her in the figure all too well. As Axton writes, Lyly's purpose was

> critical as well as complimentary, and it is hard to escape the suspicion that he wrote as much for Elizabeth's exasperated courtiers as for the Queen herself.

The "exceptional woman" theme could be a vehicle for the relatively safe expression of criticism and resentment, using what Axton calls "informed collaboration" with an audience.[20] Another way of defining this might be through Annabel Patterson's idea of "functional ambiguity," whereby,

> writers ... gradually developed codes of communication ... partly in order to be able to say what they had to publicly without directly provoking or confronting the authorities ... there were conventions that both sides accepted as to how far a writer could go in explicit address to the contentious issues of his day, how he could encode his opinions so that nobody would be *required* to make an example of him.[21]

The Pandora-figure - representative of women in general, or representative of the Queen in particular? - could be an example of just such an ambiguous encoding. Berry, too, notes the dualism of Lyly's drama, combining the celebratory and the satiric, and, in particular, combining idealisation of the feminine with misogyny, as in the figures of Tellus and Dipsas in

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20. Axton, pp.71, 3.

21. Patterson, p.11.

Endimion. She suggests that "perhaps these misogynistic representations also contaminate by their proximity the icon of Elizabeth."[22]

Pandora was a conventional figure in Elizabethan sonnet-sequences: Thomas Lodge, for instance, uses the name in *Phillis* XXXIII to praise his mistress as all-gifted;[23] and Spenser uses it in *Amoretti* XXIV, where his mistress, more like Hesiod's Pandora, becomes through her many gifts a scourge to men.[24] The name was often applied to Elizabeth in panegyric: Lodowick Lloyd wrote in a song of 1579, "With godds Pandora is her name."[25] Dekker included the name in his much-quoted dialogue between two old men in the Prologue to *Old Fortunatus*:

> 1. Are you then trauelling to the temple of *Eliza*?
> 2. Euen to her temple are my feeble limmes trauelling. Some cal her *Pandora*: some *Gloriana*, some *Cynthia*: some *Belphoebe*, some *Astraea*: all by seuerall names to expresse seuerall loues: Yet all those names make but one celestiall body, as all those loues meete to create but one soule.
> 1. I am one of her owne countrie, and we adore her by the name of *Eliza*.[26]

In both these examples, the name seems to carry only the uncontroversial sense of "all-gifted". But what Lyly may have been seeking to draw out is the contradiction latent in this idea: how *can* a creature

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22. Berry, pp.116, 130-1.

23. *An English Garner: Elizabethan Sonnets*, introd. Sidney Lee, ed. E.Arber, 2 vols. (Westminster: Constable 1904), vol.II, p.18.

24. Spenser, ed. Smith & de Selincourt, p.566.

25. E.C. Wilson, p.27.

26. Dekker, *Old Fortunatus*, p.113.

exist who has *all* the gifts? Surely many of those gifts will contradict each other and be incompatible? How can a woman be chaste *and* loving, amiable *and* warlike, and so on? This comes down to the problem of the female ruler, as discussed in my Introduction (pp.3-4 above); she has to combine *all* the virtues, masculine *and* feminine, in one figure, and her representations therefore become multifaceted, or paradoxical, or both.

Raleigh's Cynthia

Unlike Chapman, Jonson or Lyly, Sir Walter Raleigh was a professional courtier. Not only that, but for some years he was one of the inner circle of favourites, giving him far greater proximity to the Queen, even to the extent of intimacy. This inevitably coloured the way in which he used the moon-image. The role of Cynthia encapsulated the paradoxes of female power, and of a mutable but supposedly unchanging monarch. To these Raleigh's Cynthia-poems added the further paradoxes of courtly love: the blurring of artifice and reality, and of love and power.

The daily idiom of court life in the 1590s was the performance of love. A vivid illustration of this blurring of love and politics is Robert Carey's account of his interview with the Queen after his marriage in 1593. It was "stormy and terrible", but he appeased her by telling her:

> ... that she herself was the fault of my marriage, and that if she had but graced me with the least of her favours, I had never left her nor her court.

Were these desired "favours" political, or amorous? - the word is suspended between the two senses. Jean Wilson comments, "he virtually

claims that he had married on the rebound from Elizabeth."[27] The letters of the Earl of Essex are also full of double-edged diction, such as: "And so making myself as humble to do you service, as in my love I am ambitious, I wish your Majesty all your happy desires ... my desires do triumph when I seem to myself in a strong imagination to conquer your resisting will."[28] Words such as "service", "love", "ambitious", "desire" and "triumph" are finely poised, speaking simultaneously of love and power. Raleigh himself wrote, in a poem to the Queen, "Thus must I needes advaunce my self by skyll, / And lyve to serve, in hope of your goodwyll."[29] The idea of advancement through skill suggests ruthless and Machiavellian politicking, but at the same time, the key-word "serve" is loaded with meanings: he will serve Elizabeth as her subject and courtier, but a "servant" was also a lover.[30]

Use of the courtly-love idiom in panegyric was confusing and fraught with complexities, since its application to Elizabeth realised aspects of it which were usually only rhetorical. Although it was conventional for the Petrarchan sonneteer to protest his abject slavery to his mistress, in fact he was very much in control of her as her author, her literary creator with the power to immortalise her. However, the courtier writing sonnets

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27. J.Wilson, p.14.

28. Devereux, vol.I, p.292.

29. "Sweete ar the thoughtes", Raleigh, p.4.

30. On the use of love-metaphors to express social and political aspirations, see Marotti, passim., and Montrose, "Gifts and Reasons", p.438.

to the Queen, like Raleigh or Essex, was *her* creation, her "creature"; she bestowed upon him his rank and social identity.

Puttenham, in his *Arte of English Poesie*, complimented the Queen upon her talent as a poet: "your selfe being alreadie, of any that I know in our time, the most excellent Poet." By this he meant not only that her literary efforts deserved high praise; but that she was a poet in the conduct of her life.

> Forsooth by your Princely purse fauours and countenance, making in maner what ye list, the poore man rich, the lewd well learned, the coward couragious, and vile both noble and valiant. Then for imitation no lesse, your person as a most cunning counterfaitor liuely representing *Venus* in countenance, in life *Diana*, *Pallas* for gouernement, and *Iuno* in all honour and regall magnificence.[31]

The Queen is herself a "maker", in her power to "make" men socially, and to make different guises for herself under which to fulfil the various roles of a female ruler. The idea of her as a "maker of men" was echoed in *Old Fortunatus*: just after Vertue had told the Queen that she was the Idea of which Vertue was the shadow, she continued,

> All these that thus doe kneele before your eyes,
> Are shaddowes like my selfe, dred Nymph it lies
> In you to make vs substances.[32]

The link between aesthetic and social "making" was blatantly made by Sir John Harington, in some verses to Elizabeth which praise her reading aloud

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31. Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie*, pp.4-5.

32. Dekker, *Old Fortunatus*, V.ii.337-39.

of his verses:

> Sith then your Highnes doth by gift exceeding,
> Make what you read, the better in your reading,
> Let my poore Muse your paines thus far importune,
> To leaue to read my verse, and read my fortune.[33]

The courtier-poet found himself in the paradoxical position of "maker" of an image of his own "maker." Barnfield acknowledged that the Queen could be the "subject" of a poem in no conventional sense; his antithesis, "Queene of my thoughts, but subject of my verse", far from being an assertion of the poet's power to make the Queen his subject and his literary creation, in fact preceded a timorous apology for subjecting "Divine *Eliza*" to his rude verses.[34]

While the lover-poet might tell his mistress, hyperbolically, that she had the power to make him live or die by the bestowal of her favour, Elizabeth truly did possess such power. In another respect, also, the political use of the courtly-love idiom realised its metaphors. The conventional 1590s sonneteer both complained of and glorified the hopelessness of his devotion; he eulogised his mistress for being so chaste that she would never yield, yet it was evidently the achievement of that yielding at which the persistence of his eulogy was aimed. The conventions of the court decreed that the aspiring courtier must profess his desire to be loved by the Queen; but the best success he could hope

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33. Harington, *Letters & Epigrams*, p.258.

34. Barnfield, "Cassandra", p.77.

for was not her physical love, but the metaphorical love of political favour. This in itself was never certain; so that, more literally than that of the lover-poet, the courtier's devotion truly was hopeless, and doomed to frustration. He was suspended in a state of perpetual insecurity.

The combined tensions for the 1590s Elizabethan courtier of enforced submission to female power, pretended belief in the Queen's divinity and immortality, the performance of love for her, and the insecurity of dependence on her favour, all met in Raleigh's poetry, especially *The Ocean's Love to Cynthia*. As Stephen Greenblatt has neatly put it, Raleigh "contrived ... to transform his troubled personal relations with Elizabeth into a powerful nexus of love, time and mortality."[35] As already mentioned, Raleigh was instrumental in the popularisation of the title of "Cynthia" for Elizabeth (see p.281 above). Besides its general suitability, it had a particular aptness to his relationship with the Queen, since her nick-name for him was "Water".[36] Thus Raleigh's image of himself as Ocean to Elizabeth's Cynthia fitted in with the general figurative language of the court, as well as neatly expressing his subservience to her, drawn in and out of favour just as the moon draws the tides back and forth. In a portrait of Raleigh from 1588, dressed in the Queen's colours of black and white, a tiny crescent moon looks down from the top left hand corner.[37]

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35. *Sir Walter Ralegh: The Renaissance Man and his Roles* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1973), p.60.

36. Oakeshott, p.26; Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I*, p.217.

37. Richard Ormond, ed., *National Portrait Gallery In Colour*, introd. John Hayes (London: Cassell-Studio Vista, 1979), p.29.

The literalities underlying the metaphors of courtly love had a particular personal force for Raleigh. When he described falling from his mistress's favour, he was talking about not just exile from her affection, but real physical exile or imprisonment, since his perceived offences against Elizabeth caused him to be sent to Ireland in 1589 and incarcerated in the Tower in 1592. When he entitled her "Empresse of my Heart", the conventional metaphor accurately described her actual complete power over his fate:[38] more than his chief rival Essex, he was utterly reliant upon the Queen's personal favour, being of the gentry and a religious sceptic, whereas Essex was an aristocrat with the backing of his family and the Puritan party.[39] His dependence upon her whim was demonstrated in the poetic exchange between them. Raleigh's language was high-flown and extravagant: the Queen is "my soules heaven above ... my worldes joy". Elizabeth, however, trivialises the issue: "Ah silly pugge wert thou so sore afraid, / mourne not (my Wat) nor be thou so dismaid."[40] She addresses Raleigh as if he were her lap-dog or pet-poet. She can afford to treat their relationship as a light-hearted game; but he cannot afford to be any less than earnest.

In *The Ocean's Love to Cynthia*, use of the courtly love idiom is even more profoundly darkened by real political insecurity. The poem may have

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38. "Sir Walter Ralegh to the Queen", Raleigh, p.18.

39. See Norbrook, *Panegyric*, p.139.

40. L.G. Black, "A Lost Poem by Elizabeth I", *TLS* 23 May 1968, p.535; Greenblatt, *Ralegh*, p.58.

been written in 1592, when Raleigh was imprisoned in the Tower in punishment for his liaison with Elizabeth Throckmorton. Alternatively, it may have been written during Raleigh's later imprisonment in the Tower, after Elizabeth's death, possibly incorporating parts of an earlier poem or poems. If the later dating is correct, then clearly Raleigh wrote the poem for himself, as a retrospective meditation on his relationship with Elizabeth. If the earlier dating is correct, then he may have intended it to be read by the Queen, as a bid to restore him to her favour; the criticisms of her in the poem might therefore be intended as corrective admonishments.[41] However, even those critics who ascribe an earlier date to the poem generally agree that its tone is too dark and critical for it to have been shown to the Queen; it may have been begun as a bid for favour, but, if so, it got out of hand. So whichever date is correct, in so far as Raleigh is addressing the Queen, he is doing so "in his head." As Greenblatt notes, the poem is "Addressed, despite its title, not to Cynthia but to the poet himself."[42] It is an outpouring of his resentments and frustrations.

Near the opening of the poem, Raleigh's lines could belong to any Petrarchan sonneteer eulogising his mistress:

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41. For summaries of different views of the date and context of *The Ocean's Love to Cynthia*, see E.C. Wilson, pp.307-8, and Oakeshott, pp.133-8. Many critics, such as E.C. Wilson (pp.306-8), Oakeshott (pp.54, 56, 136-8), Greenblatt (*Ralegh* pp.78-9) and Norbrook (*Panegyric*, pp.140-2; *Poetry and Politics* p.117), take the poem to have been written in or soon after 1592, so that the Queen is only "dead" metaphorically, in the sense of having withdrawn her favour. Katherine Duncan-Jones ("The Date of 'The Ocean to Scinthia'") argues that the poem was written after Elizabeth's death.

42. Greenblatt, *Ralegh*, p.78.

> Her regall lookes, my vigarus sythes suppressed,
> Small drops of ioies, sweetned great worlds of woes,
> One gladsome day a thousand cares redressed.
> Whom Love defends, what fortune overthrowes? (11.49-52)[43]

But the conventional rhetoric of the "contraries of love" describes a very real political insecurity:

> Such heat in Ize, such fier in frost remaynde,
> Such trust in doubt, such cumfort in dispaire (11.69-70).

Elizabeth's absolute power fulfils the usually hollow hyperboles:

> Such force her angellike aparance had
> To master distance, tyme, or crueltye,
> Such art to greve, and after to make gladd,
> Such feare in love, such love in maiestye. (11.112-15.)

Elizabeth in her majesty graciously bestows her love upon her favourites; but in such love is fear, the fear that it will shift elsewhere.

The one conventional hyperbole which Elizabeth cannot realise is the power over time. Raleigh begins by asserting that she *can* do so, using the lamp-image discussed earlier: she is "A vestall fier that burnes, but never wasteth, / That looseth nought by giving light to all" (11.189-90) (see p.284 above). In the earlier part of the poem, he maintains the fiction of the Queen's immutability; but, rather than celebrating it, he makes her eternal beauty cause of eternal woe: "That as her bewties would our woes should dure / Thes be th'effects of pourfull emperye" (11.199-200).

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43. All references to *The Ocean to Cynthia* are to the text in Raleigh, *Poems*, ed. Latham.

Then follows a dramatic *volte-face*: "Yet have thes wounders want which want cumpassion, / Yet hath her minde some markes of humayne race" (11.201-2). This goddess is human after all; yet her humanity, though it entails compassion, is not necessarily a positive quality. "Yet will shee bee a wooman for a fashion / So douth shee pleas her vertues to deface." (11.203-4.) This is an abrupt transition from woman as divine mistress, to the opposite extreme of woman as wayward, irrational, and incomprehensible. Raleigh elaborates:

> So hath perfection, which begatt her minde,
> Added therto a change of fantasye
> And left her the affections of her kynde. (11.209-11)

"Fantasy", at this date, meant both caprice or changeful mood, and inclination or liking.[44] "Affection" could have its modern sense of fondness and loving attachment; or it could mean a malady or disease; or a temporary state; or an affectation.[45] Thus the force of this passage is a complaint that Cynthia is infected with the fickleness and shallowness in love which characterise women in general. Now Cynthia is identified with changefulness and unreliability. Raleigh laments the mutability which characterises Cynthia/Elizabeth's world: "In love thos things that weare no more may bee." (1.219.)

The poem veers between representation of Elizabeth as an immutable goddess, and as a changeable woman, and in the process, conventional

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44. *OED*, definitions 6 & 7.

45. *OED*, definitions 6a, 10, 11, 13.

images take on new significances. The sun was a conventional emblem of regal power, and of supremacy and constancy; it is used in this sense in the fragment "The end of the bookes, of the Oceans love to Scinthia, and the beginninge of the 22 Boock, entreatinge of Sorrow". Here Elizabeth, as the sun, holds firm against the mutability of the rest of the world:

> So could shee not, if shee weare not the soonn,
> Which sees the birth, and buriall, of all else,
> And holds that poure, with which shee first begunn.[46]

However, in the 21th Book, as the longer poem is called, the sun itself becomes an image of decay and change; she will "decline her beames as discontented / Convertinge sweetest dayes to saddest night." (11.251-2).

Cynthia's love is now cynically painted as "Unlastinge passion, soune outworne consayte / Whereon I built, and onn so dureless trust!" (11.295-6.) Roles are reversed: the spurned lover becomes the figure of constancy, and the timeless qualities normally attributed to Cynthia are transferred to him:

> My love is not of tyme, or bound to date ...
> My bound respect was not confinde to dayes
> My vowed fayth not sett to ended houres. (11.301, 304-5.)

She is no longer the supposed courtly mistress, but stands revealed as a mighty ruler:

> A Queen shee was to mee, no more Belphoebe,
> A Lion then, no more a milke white Dove;

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46. Raleigh, p.44.

A prissoner in her brest I could not bee,
Shee did untye the gentell chaynes of love. (11.327-30.)

The irony of the last couplet is that, even as he wrote, Raleigh was a prisoner in the Tower, tied by chains which were far from gentle.[47] His Cynthia presides over not a golden age, but a post-lapsarian world infected with mutability.[48]

Raleigh's "Walsingham" ballad enacts a similar transition. At first Elizabeth is a perfect, goddess-like figure; she "lyke a queene, lyke a nymph, did appere." There follows a lament over mutability, which subtly comes to be located in the person of Elizabeth:

I haue loude her all my youth,
Butt now ould, as you see,
Loue lykes not the fallyng frute
From the wythered tree.

In her inconstancy, Elizabeth is like *all* women: "Of women kynde suche indeed is the loue." The song ends with the lover as the figure of constancy:

But true Loue is a durable fyre
In the mynde euer burnynge;
Neuer sycke, neuer ould, neuer dead,
From itt selfe neuer turnynge.[49]

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47. This applies whether we take the early or late dating of the poem to be correct.

48. See Berry, p.149.

49. Raleigh, pp.22-3.

In "The Ocean's Love to Cynthia", love and ambition, image and reality, become blurred, and find expression in a style which is cryptic and convoluted. Raleigh writes:

> But I vnblessed, and ill borne creature,
> That did inebrace the dust, her boddy bearinge,
> That loved her both, by fancy, and by nature
> That drew yeven with the milke in my first suckinge
>
> Affection from the parents brest that bare mee,
> Haue found her as a stranger so severe
> Improvinge my mishapp in each degree.
> But love was gonn. So would I, my life weare! (11.319-26.)

The idea of himself as an "vnblessed, and ill borne creature" suggests Raleigh's lack of a name prior to his promotion by Elizabeth, in the sense both of rank, and of identity. As an "ill borne creature", he was without form, like a bear cub which had to be licked into shape; he is her creation, her offspring. The image of embracing the dust which bore her body is both obscure and highly suggestive. It could be an expression of the lover's conventional claim that he worships the earth his mistress walks on. Or, if the poem is written after Elizabeth's death, it could mean that Raleigh adored the very dust to which her body is turned. Or it could mean that, in trying to embrace her, he embraced only dust. In any case, the image is a powerful juxtaposition of physical desire and mortality.

This eroticism continues into the idea of a dual love "by fancy, and by nature." The word "fancy" had many meanings at this date, including: "imagination", in a pre-Romantic sense of conjuring up in the mind images of things not present to the senses, or events not drawn from experience; an unsupported supposition; and amorous inclination, similar to the modern

colloquial sense of to "fancy" someone.[50] The idea of loving the Queen "by fancy" therefore has the possible meanings that Raleigh loved her delusively, "in the mind", and cupidinously. The "fancy"/"nature" dichotomy suggests that he loved her with the mind, and with the body, in her image, and in her person.

This is followed up by the image of the suckling breast. A similar image was used by Sir Robert Naunton in *Fragmenta Regalia* (c.1628-32) to describe the relationship between the Queen and Raleigh's rival, the Earl of Essex. He wrote that this relationship had two flaws:

> the first was a violent indulgence of the Queen (which is incident to old age, where it encounters with a pleasing and suitable object) towards this great Lord, which argued a non-perpetuity; the second was a fault in the object of her grace, my lord himself, who drew in too fast, like a child sucking on an over uberous nurse.[51]

In both Naunton and Raleigh, the breast image is at once connotative of motherhood, and violently sexual. It signifies an almost perverted dependence. In Raleigh's case, it suggests that he sucked his very identity from Elizabeth's metaphoric breast, as part of the whole poem's attempt for him to define himself against her, and to re-define himself against his loss of her. His trauma is analogous to that of a child abruptly weaned.[52]

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50. *OED*, definitions 4a, 6, 7b. The inventory of Lord Lumley's paintings made in 1590 included "an old man fancying a young woman" and "a young man fancying the rich old woman" (Buxton, p.97).

51. Hentzner & Naunton, pp.168-9.

52. In *The Four Foster Children of Desire*, the tilt and pageant staged in 1581, there was similar imagery of identity as sucked from the breast. The Four Foster Children had "bin a great while nourished up with that infective milke, and to to much care of their fiery fosterer, (though full oft that dry nurse dispaier indevered to waine

In such passages, Raleigh's use of the courtly love idiom goes far beyond a merely prettifying metaphor for political ambition. Instead it conveys a sense of futility and frustration which is so intense as to verge on insanity. The obscurity and disjointedness of the poem finally breaks down into outright self-contradiction and incoherence:

She is gonn, Shee is lost! Shee is found, shee is ever faire! (l.493.)

Elizabeth is lost to Raleigh; yet her image, her allure, endures. She is at once a changeable woman, and a changeless idealised figure, as in a dream. At the core of this cryptic and phantasmagoric poem, at the core of Raleigh's use of the courtly love idiom to merge reality and unreality, we once again find the paradoxical figure of the Queen as both mutable and immutable.

Fulke Greville's Caelica and Cynthia

Fulke Greville was another poet who used the ambiguities of the Cynthia image to express ambiguities of attitude towards the Queen. Although, like Raleigh, he was a courtier, he was never a favourite; his role in relation to Elizabeth was rather that of political commentator. His literary representations of her are coloured by his complex and changing political ideas.

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them from it)" (J.Wilson, p.67). Such imagery perhaps derives from the mediaeval iconography of seekers for knowledge sucking it from Wisdom's breasts (see Berry, pp.8, 13, 15).

We have already seen how, in some of his writings, Greville castigated undue praise of monarchs as idolatrous (see pp.198-200 above). His earlier work often seems to imply republican sympathies:

> No People, No. Question these Thrones of Tyrants;
> Reuiue your old equalities of Nature;
> Authority is more than that she maketh.[53]

However, while he may oppose tyranny, neither is he an advocate of democracy, condemning it, in his *Treatise of Monarchy*, as tending to anarchy. His attitude to monarchy is a recognition of its disadvantages and limitations, in that its success depends entirely upon the individual holding the office:

> ... who well observes a monarchie,
> Shall finde disorder there a fatall thinge,
> The head beinge both of unprosperitie,
> Good fortune, fame, or infamie the springe.[54]

But he distinguishes between monarchy and tyranny: provided the throne is not abused by a tyrant, it can be the ideal form of government. Later in life, in his retrospective view of Elizabeth in his *Life of Sidney*, he eulogised her as just such an ideal monarch:

> ... how sovereign soever she were by throne, birth, education, and nature, yet was she content to cast her own affections into the same moulds her subjects did, and govern all her rights by their laws.[55]

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53. *Mustapha*, V.iii.92-4, in Greville, ed. Bullough, vol.II, pp.63-137.

54. Greville, *Treatise of Monarchy*, "Of Croune Revenue", p.145, st.439.

55. Greville, *Life of Sidney*, Ch.VI, p.41.

His fears and doubts about the institution of monarchy were now directed against King James.

Greville's sonnet-sequence *Caelica* contains many expressions of negative sentiments regarding monarchy. In Sonnet 90, he compares the dictatorship of the Turkish sultan with the so-called "*Christian* freedome" of English law, which in fact "... proues ... crooked as power lists to draw, / The rage or grace that lurkes in Princes brests" (11.7-8).[56] In 92, he wryly comments, "... place a Coronet on whom you will, / You straight see all great in him, but his *Ill*" (11.23-4). Much of the sequence was written during Elizabeth's reign, and therefore, unlike the rosy picture of her in the *Life of Sidney*, we find instances of this cynicism being directed at her.

The *Caelica* poems are addressed variously to Caelica, Cynthia or Mira, and it is often unclear whether these names stand for the Queen, or for one or more real or imaginary mistresses. Many of the poems, like those of Raleigh, of other Elizabethan courtiers, and, in an earlier reign, of Wyatt, use a mode which renders them equally applicable to an erotic or political context. The general tone is of insecurity, whether that of a lover or of a courtier. However, most critics agree that Sonnet 81 at least is definitely about Elizabeth.[57] Here she is presented as the beacon of the true Protestant faith:

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56. All references to *Caelica* are to the text in Greville, ed. Bullough, vol.I, pp.73-153.

57. See Greville, ed. Bullough, vol.I, p.42.

> Vnder a Throne I saw a Virgin sit,
> The red, and white Rose quarter'd in her face;
> Starre of the North, and for true guards to it,
> Princes, Church, States, all pointing out her Grace (p.131, ll.1-4).

This image is emblematic and monumental; yet it is also fraught with puzzling undertones. Why does the virgin sit *under*, rather than *on*, a throne? Perhaps this can be explained by her sitting within a throne with a high, ornate back and a huge canopy, like the "cloth of state" under which Spenser's Mercilla and Lucifera each sit (*Faerie Queene* V.ix.28-9, I.iv.8). More problematic is the statement a few lines later: "The homage done her was not borne of Wit." This could be wrenched into a positive reading by inferring that the homage done her is based in a wisdom and understanding that is deeper than wit. However, the sense which more readily presents itself is that the homage is unthinking, merely a mindless awe at the pomp of majesty. Both readings are available, creating an unfixity and disquiet which subverts the conventional rhetoric of praise.

Other verses in *Caelica* could perhaps allude to Elizabeth, and are similarly dark and ambiguous. In Sonnet 17, Greville, like Lyly, employs the analogy of Endimion to describe the hopelessness of love for Cynthia:

> Why cast you clouds on your sweet looking eyes?
> Are you afraid they shew me too much pleasure? ...
> Are you afraid, because my heart adores you,
> The world will thinke I hold *Endymion's* place?
> *Hippolytus*, sweet *Cynthia*, kneel'd before you,
> Yet did you not come downe to kisse his face. (p.82, ll.5-6, 9-12.)[58]

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58. Bullough is of the opinion that this sonnet is about Elizabeth (Greville, ed. Bullough, vol.I, pp.42, 238, 256).

Cynthia is unattainable; yet her manifold beauties and virtues - or, realistically, her absolute political sway - compel adoration: "So beyond hope your worth beares vp desires." (1.4.) Her devotees are left with a hoard of unfulfilled hopes: "*Starre-gazers only multiply desires.*" (1.14.)

The moon-image is used again in Sonnet 55, often thought to be about Elizabeth.[59] Here Greville develops in an extended metaphor the precise qualities of the moon:

> *Cynthia*, because your Hornes looke diuerse wayes,
> Now darkned to the East, now to the West;
> Then at Full-glorie once in thirty dayes;
> Sense doth beleeue that Change is Natures rest.
>
> Poore earth, that dare presume to iudge the skye;
> *Cynthia* is euer round, and neuer varies,
> *Shadowes and distance doe abuse the eye,*
> *And in abused sense truth oft miscarries:*
>
> Yet who this language to the People speaks,
> Opinions empire senses idoll breaks. (p.106.)

He appears to be defending Cynthia against the charge of inconstancy: if she could be seen from a higher viewpoint, not from the fallen, faulty earth, it would be seen that she is always full. He perhaps means, as Norbrook suggests, that although the multitude think Cynthia changes, the courtly élite know better. Yet this does not account for the strange aspects of the poem, such as its implication that the earth prefers its image of Cynthia as ever-changing. There is also something sinister about

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59. See Norbrook, *Panegyric*, p.163; Greville, ed. Bullough, vol.I, p.256.

the description of Cynthia as a horned goddess, with horns which look in different ways, suggesting two-facedness. This alternation is described as her horns *darkening*, not brightening, by turns.

Sonnet 64 (p.113) makes similarly precise use of the moon-image: "And since my fall though I now onely see / Your backe, while all the world beholds your face." (11.9-10.) Greville emphasises the fact that the moon has a dark side as well as a bright one, as a metaphor for falling out of favour. The image also suggests a flawed reality behind the perfect public image. The same sonnet is ambiguous in its description of Caelica's superhuman multiplicity of gifts:

> ... I conceau'd you of some heauenly mould,
> Since Loue, and Vertue, noble Fame and Pleasure,
> Containe in one no earthly metall could,
> Such enemies are flesh, and blood to measure (11.5-8).

Like Lyly's depiction of Pandora, Greville implies the impossibility of an all-gifted creature. This is couched as a compliment: Caelica must be divine, since so many gifts could not co-exist in an earthly creature. At the same time, there is an edge of irony, implying the absurdity of such hyperbole. The impression of irony is reinforced by lines 12 to 14:

> And still I thinke your heart a heauenly place:
> For what before was fill'd by me alone,
> I now discerne hath roome for euery one.

The *Caelica* poems are coloured by a profound cynicism and melancholy; and this mood derives from a sense of mutability which is threefold. There is the unreliability of Caelica/Cynthia; the transience of "love", whether that be taken as standing for personal affection or political favour; and a

mutability at the heart of the state which pervades the whole world. Sonnet 48 (pp.101-2) begins with a general observation that men's lives "from houre to houre decay", but Cynthia's tendency to sudden change leads to a more acute sense of insecurity: "If on the next day *Cynthia* change and leaue, / Would you trust your eyes, since her eyes deceaue?" (11.9-10). Her abrupt reversals are compared to the "sudden change" of a man whose "blacke head instantly waxt gray", as if under her sway natural processes of change are unnaturally accelerated. This man forswears himself; when all is so rapidly transient, the individual loses his sense of identity.

Spenser's Cynthia and Mutabilitie

Spenser's use of the Cynthia-image specifically foregrounds the issue of mutability. It is also bound up with an increasing disillusionment with the Queen. The first note of criticism of Elizabeth in *The Faerie Queene* is in the episode of Timias and Belphoebe, representing Raleigh's fall from favour. At their reconciliation, Timias tells Belphoebe that she has "done ... wrong" (IV.viii.17). It is notable that for this first incursion of criticism Spenser "fashion[s] her name according to [Raleigh's] excellent conceipt of Cynthia" ("Letter to Raleigh"). If Raleigh's earlier Cynthia-poems were anything like *The Ocean's Love to Cynthia*, he evidently used the role precisely to voice his discontent towards Elizabeth, and to show her in her most mutable form. Spenser, too, in this Timias and Belphoebe episode, uses the moon-role to depict the Queen as fickle of favour, in a departure from all his representations of her thus far.

In Books V and VI of the *Faerie Queene*, the depiction of Elizabeth becomes more and more critical.[60] Mercilla's trial of Duessa in Book V, as we have seen, is an occasion for subtle dissent.[61] Much of Book V, like Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland*, contains more or less critical comment on Elizabeth's policies; she has failed to live up to his ideal as leader of the Protestant nation. In Book VI, the *Book of Courtesy*, Spenser warns the Queen in his proem that, despite his theme, he will stray far from her court and her: "... from your selfe I doe this vertue bring, / And to your selfe doe it returne againe" (VI.proem 7). This warning itself is impeccably courteous; but, nevertheless, there is a sense of a developing rift between the poet and the regal image which he has been instrumental in creating. She is no longer his first concern; it is his mistress, not his Queen, whom he places at the centre of the dance of the Graces (VI.x). As he strays further from his original panegyric theme, there develops a recurring pattern of guilt and apology: "Pardon the boldnesse of thy basest thrall", in the proem to Book V; "pardon me, most dreaded Soueraine", in the proem to VI; and, in the vision on Mount Acidale,

> Pardon thy shepheard, mongst so many layes,
> As he hath sung of thee in all his dayes,
> To make one minime of thy poore handmayd (VI.x.28).

We can detect a weariness of his "so many layes" of the Queen. Each of

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60. The idea that the 1596 books of *The Faerie Queene* are less encomiastic dates from Herbert Cory in 1917 (Cain, p.131). Cain agrees that in the later books "encomium falters" (pp.2, 132).

61. See pp.72-4 above; and see Stephen Orgel, "Making Greatness Familiar", *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim, 1982), p.43.

these suits for pardon accompanies a significant swerving away from royal panegyric.

Hand-in-hand with this increasing disillusionment with Elizabeth goes an increasing anxiety about change and time. In the Garden of Adonis, in Book III, a procreative view of the cycles of time was expounded. The babes who are sent out into "the chaungefull world" by Genius eventually "thither ... returne, where first they grew: / So like a wheele around they runne from old to new." (III.vi.33.) The Garden itself is no *static* paradise; destructive Time, with his scythe, is present there, "For all that liues, is subiect to that law: / All things decay in time, and to their end do draw." (III.vi.40.) But in ends are beginnings. Adonis, the presiding spirit of the Garden, is a pattern of continuity through change:

> All be he subiect to mortalitie,
> Yet is eterne in mutabilitie,
> And by succession made perpetuall,
> Transformed oft, and chaunged diuerslie (III.vi.47).

When we come to Book V, however, we find a directly contrary view, as expressed by Artegall: "All change is perillous, and all chaunce vnsound" (V.ii.36). In the proem of this Book, Spenser has expounded the topos of a world in decay since the original Golden Age. This sense of universal decay seems directly linked to his political concerns: Artegall's words echo Eudoxius in the *View of the Present State of Ireland*, when he explains that:

> ... all inovacion is perillous in so muche as thoughe it be meante for the better yeat soe many accidentes and fearefull eventes maye Come betwene as that it may hazzarde the losse of the wholle.

Irenius, Eudoxius's more radical interlocutor, agrees that "all chaunge is to be shonned wheare the affaires stande in suche state as that they maie continue in quietnes or be assured at all to abide as they are." Change is only justified in Ireland because it is already in such a disordered and unstable state.[62]

In Book VI, Spenser retreats back again from the political scene, and thereby seems able to recapture a sense of the positive power of change and time. The Dance of the Graces exemplifies movement within an ordered continuous form, recalling the wheel-like cycles of the babes of the Garden of Adonis. But the overmastering feeling, as the *Faerie Queene* progresses towards the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, is that change is a source of disquiet. The peaceful vision on Mount Acidale is only achieved within a pastoral retreat.

The intertwining of anxiety regarding change with dissatisfaction with the Queen as symbol is evident in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*. This poem was probably written on Spenser's return to Ireland from the court in 1591, just as the *Mutabilitie Cantos* were probably written on his return from the court in 1597 or '8, and we can trace in it many germs of ideas which emerged in the later poem. In some passages of *Colin Clout*, eulogy of Elizabeth continues to prevail; she is a divine paragon (11.344-45).[63] Yet at other points her court is bitterly castigated; Colin left it because

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62. Spenser, *View*, p.147.

63. Spenser, ed. Smith & de Selincourt, pp.535-45.

he "Durst not aduenture such vnknowen wayes, / Nor trust the guile of fortunes blandishment" (ll.669-70). It is a place of uncertainty, of men thrusting themselves upwards while thrusting others down (ll.690-92). As such, it seems also to be metaphorically represented in Spenser's description of the ocean, which is "A world of waters heaped vp on hie" (l.197), where

> Bold men presuming life for gaine to sell,
> Dare tempt that gulf, and in those wandring stremes
> Seek waies vnknowne, waies leading down to hell. (ll.209-11.)

The echo of the "waies vnknowne" in the "unknowen wayes" of the court points out the similitude. It is also an echo of Raleigh's "Farewell to the Court": "My lost delights now cleane from sight of land, / Haue left me all alone in vknowne waies."[64] For Spenser, the court and the ocean are places which partake equally of the conditions of insecurity and exile.

Once again, it is not coincidental that Spenser uses a moon-name for Elizabeth. Not only was Raleigh his companion in this journey; but Cynthia, as the moon, is also clearly the monarch of the seas, of this symbolic realm of danger and insecurity. Her followers are guilty of fickleness and duplicity; and the irrational instability of her favour is implied in the description of her treatment of Raleigh:

> His song was all a lamentable lay,
> Of great vnkindnesse, and of vsage hard,
> Of *Cynthia* the Ladie of the sea,
> Which from her presence faultlesse him debard. (ll.164-7.)

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64. Raleigh, p.12.

Her mutability is also implied in the sense of her mortality. Unlike the hosts of other poets who, in the 1590s, repeatedly acclaimed Elizabeth as immortal, Spenser continues to display the realistic recognition, already discussed (pp.300-301 above), that she will be immortal only in terms of her fame. The poets who populate her court "do their *Cynthia* immortall make" (l.453), but she is immortal only in her image which they create. As for Colin himself, he tells us,

> ... when as death these vitall bands shall breake,
> Her name recorded I will leaue for euer ...
> And long while after I am dead and rotten:
> Amongst the shepheards daughters dancing rownd,
> My layes made of her shall not be forgotten. (ll.630-31, 640-42.)

He is looking towards his own death; and he is also, by implication, foreseeing a time when Elizabeth will be dead and rotten. This is brought out in the next lines:

> And ye, who so ye be, that shall surviue:
> When as ye heare her memory renewed,
> Be witnesse of her bountie here aliue,
> Which she to *Colin* her poore shepheard shewed. (ll.644-47.)

Poet and Queen are alike facing oblivion; their fates are inextricably entangled. Perhaps in their joint creation of the regal icon they can defeat the destruction of time, but not in their physical selves.

The *Mutabilitie Cantos* represent a further attempt to come to terms with the imminent demise of the poet and of the Queen who was his principal poetic subject. They contain Spenser's most negative representation of Elizabeth, once again in the form of Cynthia and Diana.

Part of this negativity is political dissent from Elizabeth's Irish policy: Ireland has been made "most vnpleasant and most ill" "through Diana's spights" (VII.vi.37); she has abandoned it to wolves and thieves (VII.vi.55). But, as with all uses of the moon-goddess persona, the central issues are time, change and mortality.

Although there is no certain proof of their date, it seems likely that the *Mutabilitie Cantos* were Spenser's last composition;[65] indeed, whatever their date, he may have envisaged them as his last words. They have certainly usually been read as such, especially the last two stanzas with their air of finality and leave-taking. At the end of Canto vii, Spenser's figure of Nature has explained that change is not to be feared, because it is a force not of destruction, but of cyclical continuity. All things

> ... by their change their being doe dilate,
> And turning to themselues at length againe,
> Doe worke their owne perfection so by fate. (VII.vii.58.5-7)

Yet, in Canto viii, the narrator turns over in his mind the speeches of

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65. See Spenser, *Variorum*, vol.VI, pp.439-41, for Evelyn May Albright's view that the *Cantos* were written at the earliest stage of composition of *The Faerie Queene*. For the view that the *Cantos* are rejected material from earlier Books of *The Faerie Queene*, see William Fenn De Moss, Spenser, *Variorum*, vol.VI, pp.436-37; and Alice Fox Blitch, "The Mutabilitie Cantos: 'In Meet Order Ranged'", *ELN* 7 (1969-70), pp.179-86. However, the view of most critics is that they were a late composition, probably Spenser's last: see F.J. Furnivall, Spenser, *Variorum*, vol.VI, p.315; F.M. Padelford, "The *Cantos of Mutabilitie*: Further considerations bearing on the date", *PMLA* 45 (1930), pp.704-11; Spenser, *The Mutabilitie Cantos*, ed. S.P. Zitner (London: Nelson, 1968), p.3.; Russell J. Meyer, "'Fixt in heauens hight': Spenser, Astronomy, and the date of the *Cantos of Mutabilitie*", *Spenser Studies* IV (1983), pp.115-29.

Mutabilitie and Nature, and concludes that in earthly things Mutabilitie

> ... beares the greatest sway.
> Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle,
> And loue of things so vaine to cast away;
> Whose flowring pride, so fading and so fickle,
> Short *Time* shall soon cut down with his consuming sickle.
>
> (VII.viii.1.)

He goes on to long for "that same time when no more change shall be" (VII.viii.2.2), with God in eternity.

These deeply ambiguous lines are open to several variant readings. Most critics have read them on the assumption that the sense of VII.viii.1.6-7 is "An awareness of mutability [as destructive] makes me loathe this state of life so tickle and cast away love of things so vain." They then vary in opinion as to whether this represents a despairing rejection of Nature's consolation, or a calm resignation to mortality.[66] But

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66. For readings of the stanzas as rejecting consolation, see Bush, pp.121-2; Ricardo J. Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1972), p.288; Lewis J.Owen, "Mutable in eternity: Spenser's despair and the multiple forms of Mutabilitie", *JMRS* 2 (1972), p.67; Thomas Hyde, "Vision, Poetry and Authority in Spenser", *ELR* 13 (1983), pp.136, 144-5; Stephen J.Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (U of Chicago P, 1980), p.179; Cain, pp.183-4; Gross, pp.251-2; Thomas M.Greene, *The Descent from Heaven: A Study in Epic Continuity* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1963), p.323.

A.C. Judson (*Life of Spenser*, Spenser, *Variorum*, vol.XI, p.206), Raymond Jenkins (quoted in Quinones, p.278 n.22), and C.L. Falkiner (Spenser, *Variorum*, vol.VI, p.436) read the stanzas as expressive of an anxiety regarding change arising from the vicissitudes of life in Ireland.

For readings of the stanzas as consolatory or resigned, see Spenser, ed. Zitner, p.11; Michael Holahan, "*Iamque opus exegi*: Ovid's Changes and Spenser's Brief Epic of Mutability", *ELR* 6 (1976), p.267; Norbrook, *Poetry & Politics*, pp.154-55; William Blissett, "Spenser's Mutabilitie", *Essays in English Literature from the Renaissance to the Victorian Age*, ed. M.Maclure & F.W. Watt (U of Toronto P, 1964), p.42.

a further possible reading, which follows the syntax more closely, is to give VII.viii.1.6-7 the sense: "An awareness of mutability [as procreative] makes me loth [i.e. reluctant] to cast away this state of life so tickle and love of things so vain."[67] It is not implausible that there is a deliberate double meaning here. As Empson says in *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, when faced with an instance of ambiguity, it may not be necessary to weigh up the relative probability of the alternative readings and decide that only one is correct; it may be that two or more different meanings, even contradictory ones, are simultaneously present.[68] Here, this would reflect the profound ambivalence towards Mutabilitie which runs through the course of the poem. At first the poet bewails the "pittious worke of MVTABILITIE" (VII.vi.6), but in canto vii she is shown to be responsible for the vibrant and entrancing pageant of the months and seasons.

Whether the gesture of leave-taking from this world is one of reluctance or rejection, or of both mingled, all readings at least agree that the conclusion of the stanzas constitutes a relinquishing of this changeable world and a hopeful gaze to heaven. This world of mutability

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67. I am indebted to Isabella Wheater for alerting me to this second possible reading. It has also been noted by Harry Berger Jr. (see note on these lines in *Faerie Queene*, ed. Hamilton) and by Judith H. Anderson ("'A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine': The Chaucerian Connection", *ELR* 15 (1985), p.173, n.20.), who both also note the possibility that "vaine" is an adverb.

68. Rev. 3rd. ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), pp.81-2.

which the poet relinquishes is intrinsically tied to his representation of Elizabeth. Her representation in the *Cantos* in the figures of Cynthia and Diana immediately alerts us that she is being shown in her most changeable aspect. At Nature's court, Spenser makes his most bold statement of Cynthia's mutability:

> ... her face and countenance euery day
> We changed see, and sundry forms partake,
> Now hornd, now round, now bright, now brown and gray;
> So that 'as changefull as the moone' men vse to say. (VII.vii.50)

This may allude to Elizabeth's unpredictable moods and fickleness of favour. It sounds very like Fulke Greville's Caelica, whose "... Hornes looke diuerse wayes, / Now darkned to the East, now to the West."[69] The allusion to proverbial wisdom, to what men "vse to say", brings into play the folk-beliefs associating Cynthia with madness and "feminine" instability.

Other details in the *Cantos* imply Elizabeth's mortality. Cynthia's gates are guarded by Tyme, "an hory / Old aged Sire, with hower-glasse in hand", suggesting that her time is waning (VII.vi.8) Her page is Vesper, suggesting that she is in the evening of her life (VII.vi.9). The eclipse brought about by Mutabilitie's attempt to thrust her from her throne seems to presage the confusion consequent upon Elizabeth's death. The lower world is "darkned quite", and everyone

> ... wondred at that sight,
> Fearing lest Chaos broken had his chaine
> And brought againe on them eternall night. (VII.vi.14.)

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69. Greville, ed. Bullough, vol.I, *Caelica*, p.106, Sonnet 55. See p.362 above.

Lewis J.Owen has shown how Mutabilitie's challenge is essentially a challenge to the distinction between the heavens and the earth, the superlunary and sublunary regions.[70] She says, at Nature's court, "heauen and earth I both alike do deeme" (VII.vii.15). The heavens, in this instance, are not the eternal home of the Christian God, but the region between the empyreum and the earth, occupied by the heavenly bodies. Mutabilitie demonstrates that the earth is ruled by processes of time and change; she then seeks to show that the heavens are no different. She challenges Jove, "what if I can proue, that euen yee / Your selues are likewise chang'd, and subiect vnto mee?" (VII.vii.49). For Nature's reply to constitute a triumph over Mutabilitie, she ought to uphold the distinction, showing that the heavenly bodies are immune to change; but this she does not do. She merely argues that change is ruled by the creatures of Nature, and not vice versa. But this presumably is true in the heavens as much as on earth: change therefore exists in the heavens - a radical and disturbing concept.

This reading can be taken further by making the link with the cult of Elizabeth. After all, the starting point of the whole problem is Mutabilitie's challenge to Cynthia; and when, at Nature's court, Mutabilitie sets out to prove the mutability of the heavenly bodies, Cynthia is her first, and prime example. The crux of the question of the power of change is the question of whether Cynthia, or Elizabeth, is subject to change.

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70. Owen, passim.

The question of whether Elizabeth is immutable or mortal is in turn part of the larger question of her divinity and/or humanity. As we have seen, the monarch was said to bear a dual nature, being both the eternal, spiritual, body politic, and a human, fallible, body natural. Spenser had represented this in his earlier division of Elizabeth into "Queene" and "Lady", in which he had chosen the name of Belphoebe, a moon-name, to signify her human, feminine aspect. Moon imagery is directly related to the idea of a dual nature: the moon was both changeful in its cycle and perpetually unchanged by means of its cycle, both mutable and eternal. Moreover, the moon was supposed to stand on the border of the earthly region and the heavens. This is stated in the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, where Cynthia is said to have her seat on "heauen's coast" (VII.vi.12). The moon partakes of both regions, without being wholly part of either; she is both earthly and heavenly, both human and divine, just as Elizabeth was supposed to be. But as Elizabeth aged, her symbolic, divine, immortal role become ever more obviously far-removed from her actual ageing, fallible state. The supposed two sides of her nature, instead of being complementary, underwent a graphic division.

The strategy of some panegyric was to stress the mutability of the realm *under* the moon, implicitly placing the moon on the side of immutability. Raleigh, in "Praisd be Dianas fair and harmles light", asserted "Mortalitie belowe hir orbe is plaste."[71] Jonson used the same conceit in *Cynthia's Revels*: "Years are beneath the spheres: and time makes

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71. Raleigh, p.11.

weak / Things under heaven, not powers which govern heaven."[72] There was a more ambivalent exploration of the relation between the sublunary and superlunary spheres in a song presented by the Earl of Cumberland on May Day 1600:

> Th'Ancient Readers of Heauens Booke,
> Which with envious eye did looke
> Into Natures story;
> All things vnder *Cynthia* tooke
> To bee transitory.
>
> This the learned only knew,
> But now all men finde it true,
> *Cynthia* is descended;
> With bright beames, and heauenly hew,
> And lesser starres attended.
>
> Landes and seas shee rules below,
> Where things change, and ebbe, and flowe,
> Spring, waxe olde, and perish;
> Only Time which all doth mowe,
> Her alone doth cherish.
>
> Times yong howres attend her still,
> And her Eyes and Cheekes do fill,
> With fresh youth and beautie:
> All her louers olde do grow,
> But their hartes, they do not so
> In their loue and duty.[73]

Although Cynthia is said to be immune to time, she has "descended" and become earthly; and stress is laid upon the transience of the realm of this earthly Cynthia, and the ageing of her followers. It reminds us that by the last decade of the reign most of Elizabeth's principal ministers

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72. Jonson, *Cynthia's Revels*, V.xi.34.

73. E.C. Wilson, pp.317-18.

and courtiers of her own generation, such as Leicester, Hatton and Walsingham, were dead. She was a hang-over from a past age.

Spenser's examination of Cynthia's borderline position concludes by placing her firmly on the side of change. In *The Mutabilitie Cantos*, it is the dark, unreliable, mortal side of the moon which comes to the fore. Mutabilitie declares:

> Euen you, faire Cynthia, whom so much ye make
> Ioue's dearest darling, she was bred and nurst
> On Cynthus Hill, whence she her name did take.
> Then is she mortall borne, how-so ye crake. (VII.vii.50.)

Nobody does "crake"; no-one, at the assembly before Nature, refutes Mutabilitie's charge. When Nature pronounces judgement, nothing is said about reinstating Cynthia on the throne from which Mutabilitie had dislodged her. Instead, we are told,

> ... all things stedfastnes doe hate,
> And changed be. Yet, being rightly wayd,
> They are not changed from their first estate,
> But by their change their being doe dilate,
> And turning to themselues at length againe,
> Doe worke their owne perfection so by fate. (VII.vii.58.)

Continuity is preserved by the old being replaced with the new: the solution to the dethronement of Cynthia is, presumably, to place a new power on her throne. This is not a victory for Mutabilitie, in that the body politic remains unchanged; but neither is it a victory for Cynthia, in her body natural. She must accept her replacement by a new monarch, as part of a regenerative natural process. Plowden, in his definition of the King's Two Bodies, asserted that the body politic "is not subject to Passions as the other is, nor to Death, for as to this Body the King never

dies."[74] But this continuity of the body politic was effected by its migration from one body natural to the next. As to *that* body, the body natural, the Queen *must* die.

Lewis Owen draws attention to the treatment of the heavenly bodies in the *Cantos*: Spenser personifies them as classical gods, thereby representing them in their most human, fallible form. This contributes to Mutabilitie's case: we see Jove and the other gods as vulnerable and indecisive, preparing us for the conclusion that the stellar region is as much in thrall to Mutabilitie as the sublunar world. This presentation of the gods is a form of burlesque, contributing to the comic tone of the poem. Elizabeth as Cynthia/Diana is also subject to this burlesque, deflationary treatment. First she is embroiled in the undignified struggle with Mutabilitie over her throne; then, in the person of Diana, she is subjected to the humiliation of Faunus's laughter at his glimpse of her "some-what" (VII.vi.46). In her angry reaction, Spenser describes her as

> Like ... an huswife, that with busie care
> Thinks of her dairie to make wondrous gaine,
> Finding where-as some wicked beast vnware
> That breakes into her dayr'house there doth draine
> Her creaming pannes, and frustrate all her paine (VII.vi.48).

This is a far cry from the stately pomp of Gloriana. It is also, in its ridicule of Diana's fuss over the concealment of her "some-what", a satiric swipe at the whole idea of a cult of a Virgin Queen.

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74. Quoted by Kantorowicz, p.13.

If the gods can be shown as human, fallible, and faintly absurd, then, by implication, even the supposedly divine half of the Queen's dual nature is not immune to such infirmities. Just as Mutabilitie proves that the heavens and the earth are in fact identical, in that both are equally subject to change, so Spenser implies that both halves of the supposed dual nature of the Queen are in fact identical. She is mortal in her whole being. The perfect universality embodied in paradox is now transferred away from Elizabeth to the figure of Nature; she appears hermaphroditic (VII.vii.5), and is:

> ... euer young yet full of eld,
> Still moouing, yet vnmoued from her sted;
> Vnseene of any, yet of all beheld. (VII.vii.13).[75]

Elizabeth no longer embodies the ideal of masculinity in femininity, divinity in humanity, immortality in mutability. It is now merely femininity, humanity and mutability which cohere in her person; and after the departure of Diana from Ireland, she disappears from the poem.

Some critics have seen a reappearance of Elizabeth in the "God of Sabbaoth" of the closing lines, detecting a pun on "Eli-zabeth", where "sabbath" means both "seventh" and "day of rest".[76] Evidence that Elizabethans might have been conscious of this pun lies in Laneham's

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75. See Dennis Kay, "'She was a Queen, and therefore beautiful': Sidney, his mother, and Queen Elizabeth", unpublished paper, pp.7, 9.

76. See A.C. Hamilton, "Our new poet: Spenser, 'well of English undefyld'", *A Theatre for Spenserians*, ed. J.M. Kennedy and J.A. Reither (Manchester UP, 1973), p.110.

Letter: "her Highnes' name Elizabeth, which I heer say oout of the Hebru signifieth (ammoong oother) the seaventh of my God."[77] David Quint sees in the pun a resolution and reconciliation: Elizabeth, Nature and God are united.[78] However, in view of what has gone before, I am more persuaded by Elizabeth J.Bellamy's argument that if this is a naming of Elizabeth, its subsuming of her in the "Sabbaoth God" constitutes an effacement of her. Spenser has given up his endeavour to name Elizabeth, which is the dynamic of the whole *Faerie Queene*. She cannot be named as herself, but only in terms of a greater power which supplants her as Spenser's imaginative goal.[79]

The *Cantos* thus reflect Spenser's increasing disillusionment with the Queen whose symbolic image had been the centre of his greatest work, and enact a turning away from that image. The confidence of the earlier books of *The Faerie Queene* is gone. In Book I, the Red Cross Knight's vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem may have been a deferred one, representing a goal not yet gained, but still to seek. Nevertheless, Cleopolis, the capital of the Faerie Queene, was at least the closest image of that city which earth could achieve. There is no such vision linking heaven and earth as climax to the *Mutabilitie Cantos*; the "Sabaoths sight" exists only in the next world.[80] In this world, change is part of nature; this constitutes a

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77. Nichols, *Elizabeth*, vol.I, p.467.

78. *Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature: Versions of the Source* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983), p.165.

79. Bellamy, pp.23-24.

80. Cain comments that the *Mutabilitie Cantos* effect the "separation of the real queen from her heavenly image" and "the collapse of the claim that England partakes in Jerusalem" (p.184.)

consolation on a universal level, but not on a personal one. It is natural that Elizabeth should die and be replaced by a successor; it is also natural that Spenser, the leading Elizabethan poet, will be overtaken by a new generation, as he implies in the *Prothalamion*, another late poem, when it is "some braue muse", not himself, whose praise of Elizabeth will endure in "ages following."[81] Regeneration on a global scale inherently depends upon the obliteration of the individual. Thus we find in Canto viii a potent mingling of regret and and yearning: regret for the loss of the "flowring pride, so fading and so fickle" of this realm of Mutabilitie, which Spenser has just described so vividly in the pageant of the months and seasons; and yearning to leave the insecure realm of the changeable, feminine Cynthia, and to pass on to the timeless, masculine, "great Sabbaoth God".

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81. Spenser, ed. Smith & de Selincourt, p.602.

CONCLUSION

It is fitting that this thesis should end with a discussion of the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, because they are one of the texts in which the three thematic dichotomies in representations of Elizabeth - masculinity and femininity, divinity and humanity, immortality and mutability - most closely cohere. At the same time, they illustrate how these pairs of terms exist in no fixed or stable polarity, but rather a fluid interfusion, open even to inversion. The *Cantos* are one of the most ambiguous of texts which represent Elizabeth - both in the sense that it is hard to reduce them to a single fixed meaning, and in that they show figures of the Queen as doubtful and questionable. In these capacities, they are paradigmatic of this whole study.

I have tried to show how, as a female ruler, Elizabeth needed to personify both masculine and feminine virtues. This could sometimes produce images of her which were self-contradictory; but it also produced attempts to assimilate idealised feminine virtues to an ideal of rule. Thus Elizabeth's chastity could be represented in terms of martial virtues; or her peacefulness and mercy could be stressed as feminine *and* magisterial virtues. Such synthetic images could also be a medium for the indirect expression of criticism, depicting the nation as feminised and weak. As well as this dialectic between femininity and masculinity, representations of Elizabeth inhered in a dualistic conception of woman as either virtue or vice, virgin or whore. Throughout Elizabeth's reign, a fundamental anxiety concerning the phenomenon of a female ruler - and one who is autonomous through her virginity - failed to be dissipated.

A different sort of contradiction and ambiguity was involved in my examination of the relation between the cult of Elizabeth and the cult of the Virgin Mary - not only that produced by the interfusion of divinity and humanity in representations of Elizabeth, but also the contradictions and ambiguities in the work of twentieth-century writers on this subject. They have seen it simply as an amazing paradox that, while the Elizabethan Protestant Church condemned idolatry, its members apparently merely transferred their idolatry to their Queen. They assert that Elizabeth's subjects worshipped her in identical terms to the Virgin Mary, because they felt emotionally bereft of a symbolic virgin-mother-figure. I have tried to show that the forces at work were far more complex than this. Elizabethan iconoclasm was not absolute; distinctions were drawn between "true" and "false" images, and between the extent of imagery permissible in secular rather than sacred art. Moreover, monarchy was held to have a spiritual dimension, which could justify its representation in quasi-religious terms. I also showed how the application of Marian imagery to Elizabeth was part of a long tradition of exchange of imagery between secular and sacred literature; and how some examples of "Marian" imagery which have been cited by critics in fact have a far wider frame of reference. Where Marian imagery does occur in representations of Elizabeth, in some cases it forms part of the use of religious imagery as a trope for courtly love; in other cases it is a typological reading of Marian myths, just as other Scripture was being read to interpret current history; and in later examples it is part of the growing extravagance in panegyric of Elizabeth, and of a return by the Establishment to the externals of religion. The dominant motivation was not the emotional loss of the Virgin

Mary, but a desire to appropriate the symbolic "magic" of virginity to the Protestant cause.

Representations of Elizabeth as Cynthia, the moon-goddess, which became prevalent in the 1590s and early 1600s, were a focus for anxieties about time, change and mortality, as the Queen's life, the reign, and the century were felt to be drawing to a close. The rift widened between the image of the Queen and her physical state; as mortality encroached, she was obsessively praised as immortal and ever-young. This contradiction was neatly represented in the moon-image, at once endlessly self-perpetuating, and a symbol of change. Furthermore, the moon combined positive symbolic attributes of radiance, beauty and chastity with more sinister associations with night, magic, and sinister female powers. As such, it was a useful vehicle for representations of Elizabeth which indirectly implied disillusionment with her rule within the forms of panegyric.

I divided my themes like this for clarity and convenience, but it will now be evident that they are all intrinsically linked with one another. The fact that Elizabeth was a female ruler, and an unmarried one at that, enabled her to be represented in terms already associated with virginal female power, resembling those of the Marian cult. The virginal magic which was her major symbolic attribute in turn implied that, by resisting the pleasures of the flesh, she was immune to the ravages of the flesh, an ever-youthful maiden. And in turn, representations of her as Cynthia, with their dark side, were a means of expressing enduring discomfort with female rule.

Also running through all three sections of the thesis was a dichotomy of image and reality, in which reality was itself a textual construct. Elizabeth's "reality" could be an implied transcendence and mystery outside the text; or the site of glorification could be turned into the site of degradation, and Elizabeth's "reality" could be implied to fall far short of her image. She was represented as a Queen whose peacefulness and mercy appeared ideal, but in practice were political handicaps; a Queen who was the symbol of the true Church, but in whose realm the true Church remained a vision yet to be achieved; a Queen whose mask depicted eternal youth, but who was subject to the ultimate reality, death. The greatest praise for the Queen was to assert that she was identical to her idealised image, as in Peele's *The Honour of the Garter* (see pp.303-4 above); but images of her which took hyperbole to extremes, presenting her as "infinite and impossible", could contain ironies in their excess, implying the gulf between image and reality.

Thus concepts of image and reality, masculinity and femininity, divinity and humanity, immortality and mutability, formed a shifting framework for representations of Elizabeth. Sometimes these opposites united in a glorious, mysterious paradox; sometimes their separateness and contradictoriness as attributes of the Queen were emphasised; sometimes one term in the pair came to the fore. Together, they illustrate the ambiguity and contradiction which characterised the representation of a female ruler: infinitely represented as ultimately unrepresentable.

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