Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen*

by John N. King

It is commonly acknowledged that although Elizabeth I vowed herself to a life of perpetual virginity, she entered into a symbolic marriage with England as her husband.1 In this way she could receive the adulation of her subjects as the universal object of a Petrarchan religion of love, one that pervaded ballads, pageants, and dramatic entertainments. Scholars claim that she was able to convert her unprecedented weakness as a celibate queen into a powerful propagandistic claim that she sacrificed personal interests in the name of public service. Her maidenly chastity was therefore interpreted not as a sign of political or social deficiency, but rather as a paradoxical symbol of the power of a woman who survived to govern despite illegitimization, subordination of female to male in the order of primogeniture, patriarchy, and masculine supremacy, and who remained unwed at a time when official sermons favored marriage and attacked the monastic vow of celibacy and veneration of the Virgin Mary. It seems, then, that from the accession of Elizabeth in 1558, at the age of twenty-five, celebration of her virginity was a synchronic phenomenon noticeable in works of literature and art that flattered her as a new Judith or Deborah, Eliza Triumphans, Astraea, Cynthia, or even Venus–Virgo.

A lively scholarly discourse has grown up in support of the proposition that the cult of Elizabeth as a virgin queen was produced by political, social, and cultural forces. It is undeniable that Elizabeth’s retention of virginity constituted “a political act”2 and that the celebration of her remoteness from erotic love played an important role

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1See Elkin Wilson, England’s Eliza (Cambridge, MA, 1939), 217.

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE VIRGIN QUEEN during her reign. Elkin Wilson articulates the modern consensus that “from 1558 to 1603 the virgin queen of England was the object of a love not dissimilar in quality from that which for centuries had warmed English hearts that looked to the virgin Queen of Heaven for all grace.” Frances Yates concurs that the “virginity of the queen was used as a powerful political weapon all through her reign.”

Yates’s influential views and those of her student, Roy Strong, attribute the secularization of Mariological imagery in Elizabethan iconography to the revolutionary political and social impact of the Protestant Reformation. Stephen Greenblatt modifies this picture by emphasizing the role of cultural forces not under the control of the individual in the fashioning of an Elizabethan image imposed from above as an imperialistic device by an authoritarian state.

Louis Adrian Montrose qualifies Greenblatt’s ideas concerning the hegemonic formulation of an authorized queenly image, under royal authority, by examining the alternative possibility that Elizabethan subjects could fashion, indeed subvert, the official royal image. According to Montrose, “such fashioning and such manipulation were reciprocal” processes engaging the efforts of the queen and her government from above and Elizabethan subjects from below.

The tendency of Yates and Strong to emphasize the classicization of the queen’s image as Astraea or Cynthia has undergone qualification in recent work that charts the fundamental importance in Elizabethan iconography of scriptural and medieval formulas that had been employed in literary and artistic praise of both the Protestant Tudors, Henry VIII and Edward VI, and their Catholic successor, Mary I.

Little scrutiny has been given to the widespread assumption that Elizabeth I set in motion her cultic celebration by means of esoteric literary and artistic symbolism when she made a youthful vow to


7See John N. King, Tudor Royal Iconography: Literature and Art in an Age of Religious Crisis (Princeton, NJ, 1989), 182–266.
remain a virgin. The corollary view that her own action generated a public image that remained intact throughout the rest of her reign has gained many adherents. Louis Montrose thus concludes that from the beginning of the queen’s reign “she was already formulating the discourse by which she would continue to turn the political liability of her gender to advantage for nearly half a century.” Affirming that the queen “defended her maidenly freedom and royal prerogative against . . . patriarchal expectations,” he claims that she legitimated “her desire for autonomy among men by invoking a higher patriarchal authority . . . of her heavenly father, the ultimate ground of her sovereignty.” Montrose gathers together such chronologically disparate works as the “April” eclogue in Edmund Spenser’s Shepheardes Calender (1579), the Armada Portrait (ca. 1588), Spenser’s 1590 Faerie Queene, and William Camden’s Historie of . . . Elizabeth, Late Queene of England (1630) as timeless reflections of Elizabeth’s perpetuation of “her maidenhood in a cult of virginity.”

A diachronic review of contemporary manuscripts, printed books, and artistic works indicates that instead of a continuous and timeless phenomenon, Elizabethan iconography was closely tied to the life history of the monarch and to political events of her reign. Few scholars have pinpointed the shift from Elizabeth’s early praise as a nubile virgin to her late adulation as a perpetual virgin, who remains ever youthful and attractive, during the course of the 1579–83 marriage negotiations between the queen and the final suitor for her hand in marriage, François, duc Alençon (later duc d’Anjou). The identification of separate phases of Elizabethan culture makes it possible to reassess the internalization of the queen’s image in some major works of Elizabethan literature and art. Spenser’s “April” eclogue exemplifies this shift because its publication during the heat of the Alençon controversy marks it as a borderline text that enhances the queen’s standing as a princess eligible for marriage at the same time that it praises her in a manner that may be read as an appeal to remain unmarried. When the poet came to portray Elizabeth in The Faerie Queene (1590–96), however, Belphoebe personified her virginity as a permanent state.


The Origins of a Myth

Modern scholarship has transmitted a frequently cited report by William Camden that supports the widespread view that the queen chose a life of perpetual virginity. He indicates that at the outset of her reign Elizabeth rejected advice that she settle the succession by marrying and bearing an heir to the throne. She spoke in response to a 1559 petition from the House of Commons urging her to choose a husband on the ground that “nothing can be more repugnant to the common good, than to see a Princesse, who by marriage may preserve the Common-wealth in peace, to leade a single life, like a Vestal Nunne.” According to the tradition established by Elizabeth’s first historian, this speech provided the earliest sign that the queen would flout patriarchal convention through a deliberate decision to remain unwed:

And therefore it is, that I have made choyce of this kinde of life, which is most free, and agreeable for such humane affaires as may tend to his [God’s] service . . . and this is that I thought, then that I was a private person. But when the publique charge of governing the Kingdome came upon mee, it seemed unto mee an inconsiderate folly, to draw upon my selfe the cares which might proceede of marriage. To conclude, I am already bound unto an Husband, which is the Kingdome of England . . . (And therwithall, stretching out her hand, shee shewed them the Ring with which she was given in marriage, and inaugurated to her Kingdome, in expresse and solemne terms,) And reproch mee so no more, (quoth shee) that I have no children: for every one of you, and as many are English, are my Children . . . Lastly, this may be sufficient, both for my memorie, and honour of my Name, if when I have expired my last breath, this may be inscribed upon my Tombe:

Here lyes interr’d ELIZABETH,
A virgin pure untill her Death.  

The youthful queen’s “prophecy” was borne out at the approach of her death, according to Camden, when she ordered that the “Ring, wherewith shee had beene joyned as it were in marriage to her kingdome at her inauguration, and she had never after taken off, to be filed off from her finger, for that it was so growne into the flesh, that it could not be drawne off.” This action “was taken as a sad presage”

Camden, Annales: The True and Royall History of the Famous Empresse Elizabeth, Queene of England, France, and Ireland, etc. True Faith’s Defendresse of Divine Renowne and Happy Memory (1625), bk. 1, 26, trans. from Annales rerum Anglicarum et Hiberniarum, regnante Elizabeth (1615).

Ibid., 27–29.
of the coming dissolution of her “marriage with her kingdome.”

Camden’s account provides every indication that Elizabeth skillfully manipulated political language and imagery by adapting a patriarchal vocabulary whereby kings governed as “fathers” of their people and as “husbands” of the country. She was known to style herself as the virgin mother of her people. Accounts based on Camden’s interpretation argue that Elizabeth’s invocation of divine authority as an external and universal source of power supported her effort to validate royal sovereignty and to deny its limitation by male subjects. Louis Montrose therefore concludes that she refused “to enact the female paradigm desired by . . . [her] advisors: to become the medium through which power, authority, and legitimacy are passed between generations of men.”

As appealing as Camden’s view may be, it begs quite a few questions. The absence of the queen’s reported epitaph upon her tomb need not be too troublesome, because James I established her naturalistic funerary monument at Westminster Abbey in 1606 as a counterpart to the flattering memorial that vindicates his own mother, Mary, Queen of Scots. But what about the analogy that Camden draws between the queen’s marriage to England as her husband and the tradition that nuns are betrothed to Christ the Bridegroom? Is it a simple coincidence? How authoritative is Camden’s historical testimony, which appeared in print more than half a century after the events described and midway through her successor’s

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12Idem, The Historie of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princesse Elizabeth, Late Queene of England, trans. R. N[orton]. (London, 1630), 222. This edition contains the account of the last half of the reign in bk. 4 of Camden’s Annales, which had been published posthumously in 1627 as Tomus alter annalium rerum Anglicarum, et Hiberniarum. The concluding section of the present essay explains why Annales rerum Anglicarum et Hiberniarum and the English translation of 1625 end after Camden’s account of the trial and execution of Mary, Queen of Scots.

13See Axton, 133–34.

14See Wilson, 6 (note) and 61; Lacey Baldwin Smith, Elizabeth Tudor: Portrait of a Queen (Boston, 1975), 120, 122; Axton, 38–39. Compare the aligned use of Camden’s testimony in Leonard Tennenhouse, Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare’s Genres (London, 1986), 22. Although Yates claims that “from the very beginning of her reign the Virgo-Astraea symbol was used of Elizabeth,” I have discovered no examples between 1558 and 1569. Yates, 59, cites the unverified testimony of Camden’s Remains (1674) that the figure was in use “‘in the beginning of her late Majesties Reign.’”

15Montrose, 310.

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Did the queen actually speak the words that her first historian attributes to her?

Scholars have tended to accept at face value Camden’s declaration that he has inaugurated a historiographical method that makes unprejudiced use of manuscript “monuments.” In actual fact, it is difficult to track down his sources because he omits citations. His use of Tacitus as the model for compiling a work in the annals format might suggest the need for caution in assessing his “objectivity,” because of the Roman author’s commitment to moralizing history, his habit of silently harmonizing conflicting sources, and his invention of speeches in a rhetoric appropriate to the character and style of historical personages. Camden himself acknowledges that he views Tacitus as a model for moralized exemplary history because the Roman author declares that the “principal office” of compiling annals “is to take care, that Vertue be not obscured, and by the relation of evill words or deeds, to propose the feare of infamie, with posteritie.” Camden informs the reader that his testimony is drawn from the archives of his patron, William Cecil, Lord Burghley, who, shortly before his death, “willed me to compile a Historie of Q. Elizabehs Raigne from the beginning.” Camden acknowledges the manifest point that Cecil’s goal of providing “for the propagation of the Queenes honour”17 was not disinterested, because a flattering view of the queen would necessarily reflect glory on the man who served as her chief minister throughout four decades.

The preservation of a transcript of the queen’s speech among the Cecil papers makes it possible to assess Camden’s accuracy.18 Examination of the Cecil manuscript reveals an entirely new set of problems, however, because Camden (or an unnamed intermediary) falsified the contemporary record of the queen’s speech.19 This

17Camden, 1625, sigs. [b7–8].
19George P. Rice, Jr., transcribes both versions of the queen’s speech in The Public Speaking of Queen Elizabeth: Selections from Her Official Addresses (New York, 1951), with the undocumented claim that the Camden variation represents a “second, much shorter, and obviously superior version” (114–18). With rare skepticism, John E. Neale acknowledges Camden’s version of the queen’s address in Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments, vol. 1 (London, 1953), 47 n. 3, where he remarks: “I know of no text from which he could have made it, and it does not correspond with the Queen’s description. I have therefore ignored it.” On the contrary, Louis Montrose, 309, makes the unsubstantiated claim that the Camden transcript is drawn from “official records.”
falsification offers one indication that Camden transmits a hagiographical account that may be less accurate as a portrayal of the Tudor queen than it is of Jacobean patronage and politics. After all, the historian admits that he turned away from this project in dismay at its arduous nature until James I returned him to the task. The concluding section of the present essay explains how the Annales came to enshrine a posthumous myth of Elizabeth as a perpetual virgin, one that has passed into modern scholarship through many retellings. Camden’s version of events provides a Jacobean representation of Elizabeth as a virgin queen, one that followed in sequence upon her earlier celebration, first as a marriageable maiden, and second as a mythically youthful object of courtly desire. An awareness of the anachronistic processes at work in the first history of Elizabeth’s reign throws light on these earlier phases of Elizabethan iconography and demonstrates how the entire Gloriana cult was defined by the practicalities of Elizabethan and Jacobean politics. Differentiation among the different “cults” of the Virgin Queen demonstrates how the royal image was fashioned dynamically by Elizabeth and her government from above, and by her apologists and suppliants from below.

The “Cult” of the Marriageable Virgin

Within months of her accession to the throne, Elizabeth acknowledged to a parliamentary delegation the desirability of marriage. The transcript of “The Ansuere of th[e] Quenes highnes to th[e] peticon proponed [i.e., set forth] unto hir by th[e] Lower howse Concerning[e] hir mariage” in MS Lansdowne 94 contains a version of her 10 February 1559 address that differs in many respects from the Camden variation. In all likelihood this very clean copy was transcribed at the behest of Cecil or someone close to the man who served as chief secretary of state throughout most of the queen’s reign. Cecil’s collected papers provide what may be the most complete and reliable contemporary account of Elizabethan state events. Because neither MS Lansdowne 94 nor the profuse contemporary documentary record refers to a queenly vow to remain a chaste virgin married to her realm, one may presume that this promise is a later addition. The absence of contemporary reference to the regal display of the coronation ring suggests that this histrionic gesture is an apocryphal embellishment, one possibly modeled on the custom that nuns wear rings commemorating their vow of celibacy and
wedding to Christ. The version of the speech that Camden attributes to the parliamentary delegation establishes an iconographical link between the alleged unacceptability of Elizabeth’s behavior and that of a “Vestal Nunne,” but this reference is absent from contemporary Elizabethan documents for this Parliament.

The manuscript version of the queen’s speech records no vow of perpetual virginity; indeed, any such vow would have violated the official disapproval of all vows, including that of celibacy, by the Church of England, of which Elizabeth served as Supreme Governor. The locus classicus for this position is in the third section of the homily “Of Good Works” in the first Book of Homilies, which was preached in English churches at royal command. Elizabeth’s speech testifies that at the outset of her reign she fashioned a public identity not upon a vow of celibacy but upon her well-known preference for an unmarried life. She does promise, however, that if God wills that she marry, her choice of a husband would benefit the public interest. An underlying reason for this idealized commitment to a vocation of religious and political service may reflect the practical reality that her supremacy as head of state would not necessarily extend to the headship of her own family were she to marry. Although the law of inheritance made her an exception to the rule of masculine supremacy in her public capacity as queen, husbands were the legal heads of families. Her acknowledgment that she “can not so certenlie determyne” the actions of any potential husband may be grounded on the precedent of the marriage of her sister, Mary, to Philip of Spain, which demonstrated that even though a treaty and parliamentary act might preserve a married queen’s political authority, they had no necessary effect on her husband’s actions. Furthermore, she voices

20See Herbert Thurston, in The Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 13 (New York, 1912), 60, s. v. “Rings.” The wedding ring was also attributed to St. Catherine, whose cult had a strong following in medieval England, as the bride of Christ.

21Camden, 1625, bk. 1, 26. What appears to be the earliest printed account of the parliamentary petition and the queen’s answer is in Grafton’s Abridgement of the Chronicles of Englande, 3d ed. (London, 1570), sigs. Z3r–4r. Richard Grafton, who sat as a member of several parliaments, claims to provide an eyewitness account, “as nere as I could beare the same away,” of the queen’s address to the parliamentary delegation at Whitehall Palace. Holinshed’s Chronicles and the second edition of John Stow’s Annales (1592) agree almost completely with MS Lansdowne 94, fol. 29, and Grafton. John Nichols provides the same speech in Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth, vol. 1 (London, 1823), 63–65. Neale quotes extensive extracts; 1953, 47–50.

the realistic fear that as a mother she would be unable to guarantee that her offspring might not “growe out of kynd [i.e., behave in an unfilial fashion?]”, and become perhappe ungracious.” The conditional nature of her promise that she would be content, should she remain unmarried, to have on her tomb the inscription “that a Queen having raigned such a tyme, lyved and dyed a virgin” is lost sight of in Camden’s hindsight view of this epitaph as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Words that she spoke in 1559 might have undergone embellishment in an oral tradition that resulted in the legendary account in Camden’s Annales. According to the Cecil transcript, these are the words that were read on the queen’s behalf by a member of the House of Commons:

I may saye unto yow, that from my yeares of understanding syth I first had consideracion of my self to be borne a servitor of almightie god I happelie chose this kynde of life in w[hi]ch I yet lyve. w[hi]ch I assure yow for myne owne p[ar]te hath hitherto contented my self and I trust hath bene moost acceptable to god . . . . Nevertheless, if any of yow be in suspect, that whensoever it may please god to enclyne my harte to an other kynd of Life. Ye may well assure yo[u]r selves my meaninge not to doe or determyne anie thinge, wh[e]arw[i]th the Realme may or shall have iuste cause to be dyscontented . . . . I will never in that matter conclud[e] any thing that shalbe preiudiciall to the realme. ffor the weale, good & safetie whereof I will never shune to spend my life. And whomsoevo[e]r my chaunce shalbe to light apon I trust he shalbe as carefull for the realme and yow I will not saie as my self because I can not so certenlie determyne of any other. but at the least wayes, by my good will and desire, he shalbe suche as shalbe as carefull for the preservacion of the realme and yow as my self. And albeit, it might please almightie god to contynew me still in this mynde, to lyve out of the state of mariage, yet it is not to be feared, he will so worke in my harte. And in yo[u]r wisdomes as good provision by his healpe may be made in convenient tyme whereby the realme shal not remayne destitute of an heir th[at] may be fitt [to] governe and peraventure more beneficiall to the realme then such ofspring as may come of me. ffor although I be never so carefull of yo[u]r well doinge and mynd ever so to be, yet may my issue growe out of kynde, and become perhappe ungracious. And in the end this shalbe for me sufficient that a marble stone shall de[cl]ar[e]. [t]h[at a] Q[ueen h]a[v]ing ra[ign]e[d such] a tyme[, l]y[ved and] dyed a virgin.23

governing Mary I’s marriage provides a binding precedent for a marriage that she herself might undertake, see The Letters of Queen Elizabeth, ed. and trans. G. B. Harrison (London, 1935), 98.

23 MS Lansdowne 94, fol. 29. Italics have been added to emphasize the only significant variants in the printed transcript. The line that is fragmentary due to the folding of the sheet of paper has been restored by reference to Grafton, sig. Z3v–4v, which records these words: “that a marble stone shall declare that a Queene, having reygned suche a tyme, lived and dyed a virgin.” It reads “as a good mother of my country, I will never
During the 1560s and 1570s virtually everyone assumed that Elizabeth would marry, including the queen herself, if her statements are to be accepted at face value. Regardless whether she genuinely desired to wed, her marriageability was an essential element of her youthful image. The diplomatic utility of her eligibility and the many proposals she received argue against the premise that she had taken a public vow of celibacy; indeed, her portraits were sent abroad in 1567, 1571–74, and 1578–81 in connection with marriage negotiations.²⁴ Although she had no want of suitors, each one had personal or political liabilities. Thus a renewal of the English marital alliance with Spain through marriage to her sister’s widower, Philip II, was never seriously entertained. Her well-known refusal to wed a man she had never met may have reflected the disastrous influence of the flattering portraits that were made for use during the negotiations leading up to the marriage of Henry VIII and Anne of Cleves. Elizabeth’s declaration in a letter of 25 February 1560 to Eric, King of Sweden, that she was determined “not to marry an absent husband”²⁵ surely reflects her memory of the ill effect of the prolonged absenteeism of Philip of Spain during her sister’s reign; this objection implies the corollary fear that a married queen must depart with her husband “out of her own native country and sweet soil of England.”²⁶ Archduke Charles of Austria offered the best possibility for a diplomatically successful marriage, but his Catholicism and Hapsburg lineage represented stumbling blocks for the English who regarded the queen as the nation’s only hope for preserving political independence and the Protestant settlement in religion. Elizabeth’s interest in Robert Dudley, Master of the Queen’s Horse (later Earl of Leicester), incurred no opposition on religious or nationalistic grounds, but the queen refused to marry her own subject. Furthermore, he was a married man who made domestic political enemies.

²⁶John Stubbs, John Stubbs’s “Gaping Gulf” with Letters and Other Relevant Documents, ed. Lloyd E. Berry (Charlottesville, 1968), 49.
The death of his wife in 1560 under mysterious circumstances dashed any real hope that the queen might achieve a true love match.27

During an age of early menopause and a high rate of death in childbirth, Elizabeth’s advancement into her fourth decade fueled anxiety that the House of Tudor would die with the queen.28 Her own statements indicate that during her thirties and forties she fashioned a public identity as an unmarried ruler who is eligible, indeed eager, for marriage to a politically appropriate husband. Elizabeth’s reply to a 1563 petition from her second parliament therefore argued that she was no less capable of childbirth than Saint Elizabeth, to whom God sent offspring despite her advanced years (Lk. 1:5–25).29 Even though she may have been the saint’s namesake, this scriptural comparison was not distinctively Elizabethan because apologists for Mary Tudor used the same precedent to declare that providential intervention would produce a royal heir when she was close to forty, a very old age for bearing children during the sixteenth century.30

Continuing agitation in favor of a royal marriage caused Elizabeth to go on record for a third time on 5 November 1566 in response to a petition from her second parliament that she marry and settle the succession. This reply follows along the lines of the first, except that the queen explicitly vows to marry despite her personal inclination toward a celibate life. Her elaboration that the sole reason for marriage is her wish to bear children acknowledges the political expediency of producing heirs to perpetuate her dynasty; it accords further with the orthodox view that the chief purpose of wedlock is “the procreation of children.”31 Once again the queen acknowledges the political difficulties attendant upon this issue, this time mentioning the probability that the most earnest proponents of mar-

27Neale provides a useful account of the “marriage problem” even though he minimizes the queen’s commitment to wedlock (1934, 76–90). See also Smith, 118–25. From the age of fifteen, Elizabeth’s letters record her awareness of the political complications of courtship and marriage (Elizabeth I, 1935, 9–11). Axton, 11–25, considers the succession debate in light of the Elizabethan adaptation of the theory of the king’s two bodies.

28Forty was the average age at menopause according to Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800 (New York, 1977), 63 and n. 48.

29Neale, 1953, 110. Minutes in the queen’s own hand concerning her reply to Parliament are preserved in MS Lansdowne 94, fol. 30.

30King, 216.

riage are those most likely to object to her choice of a husband. At the same time, she takes strenuous exception to the expression of doubt concerning the sincerity of her intention to take a husband. In actual fact, neither the privy council nor parliament ever agreed on the appropriateness of any of the queen’s many suitors. In her promise to marry and in her awareness of the problematic nature of her choice, the speech accords with the queen’s actions during the 1560s and 1570s. According to a contemporary manuscript, these are the words that she delivered in 1566 to a delegation made up of thirty members from each of the two houses:

I dyd send theym aunswere by my counseyle I wolde marrye (althowghe of myne own dysposycion I was not enclyned thereunto), but that was not accepted nor credyted, althowghe spoken by theyre Prynce. And yet I usede so many wordes that I coulde saye no more. And were yt not nowe I had spoken those wordes, I wold never speke theyme ageyne. I wyll never breke the worde of a prynce spoken in publyke place, for my honour sake. And therefore I saye ageyn, I wyll marrye assone as I can convenyently, yf God take not hym awaye with whom I mynde to marrye, or my self, or els sum othere great lette happen. I can saye no more except the partie were presente. And I hope to have chylderne, otherwyse I wolde never marrie . . . . But theye (I thinke) that movythe the same wylbe as redy to myslyke hym with whom I shall marrie as theye are noe to move yt, and then yt wyll apere they nothynge mente yt. I thought theye wold have byn rathere redye to have given me thanks then to have made anye newe requeste for the same. There hathe byn some that have or [i.e., ere] thys sayde unto me they never requyred more then that theye myght ones here me saye I wold marrie. Well, there was never so great a treason but myght be coverythe undere as fayre a pretence.32

Political concerns of the kind stated by the queen shaped the representation of her virginity in the iconography of the first half of her reign. Maidenly chastity was a necessary attribute of her claim to be a legitimate and marriageable queen. The straightforward virginity symbolism of Elizabeth’s early images differs from the esoteric iconography of the virgin goddess—Cynthia or Venus-Virgo—that emerged in the 1580s and flowered during her final decade. The Coronation Portrait in which the queen wears the regalia of investiture typifies the early phase (fig. 1), as do related miniatures by Nicholas Hilliard (ca. 1600). Although the portrait was painted on a panel

32From a copy of the speech in Cambridge University Library MS Gg.iii.34, fols. 208–12; transcribed in Hartley, 145–49. A fragment of the draft in the queen’s own hand, with an endorsement by Cecil, is preserved in Public Record Office, State Papers Domestic, Elizabeth 41/5. Modernized texts are in Elizabeth I, 1951, 77–81; and Neale, 1953, 146–50.
Fig. 1—Coronation Portrait of Elizabeth I, ca. 1600-10. London, National Portrait Gallery. (Photo: National Portrait Gallery)
close to the time of her death (ca. 1600–10), its depiction of the queen’s youthful features is modeled on a lost original painted ca. 1559. Her facial appearance is in line with the anachronistic “mask of youth” characteristic of her last years. Possibly this portrait was used as a funerary image. It is noteworthy that Elizabeth’s long hair flows down onto her shoulders in the style of an intact virgin.33

Because of the close ties between the English establishment and the Inns of the Court, where many members of the royal court, privy council, and parliament received their legal education, it was a natural move to dramatize questions concerning royal marriage and succession in revels and entertainments staged by lawyers. Although a royal proclamation of 16 May 1559 forbade discussion of religion and politics in the popular drama, dramatic performances at the royal court and the Inns of the Courts were excluded from the prohibition. Gorboduc is a case in point, because Thomas Norton, a prominent member of the House of Commons, and Thomas Sackville, later Earl of Dorset, designed the play to reflect upon the dangers attendant upon a realm where the royal succession remains unsettled. Although the work was written for only a single production at the Inner Temple on Epiphany, 6 January 1562, the work was revived before Elizabeth at Whitehall Palace twelve days later. Along with other revels and entertainments during this season, it takes a position critical of the queen on the controversial political issues of royal marriage and succession.34

Modern scholarship associates the moon goddess Diana (or Cynthia) with the praise of Elizabeth’s chastity.35 Although many iconographical variations of the classical protectress of virginity and hunting were identified with the queen’s maiden state during her last decades, they were conspicuously absent from her early literary and artistic praise. It was not until the 1580s and 1590s that the “moon cult” of Elizabeth as a perpetually virgin goddess emerged and took root after the failure of her last effort at marriage.36 Entertainments designed during the 1560s lauded her instead as Pallas Athena because Cynthia’s “sylvan chastity seemed inimical to the perpetua-

34Axton, 38–41; David Bevington, Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning (Cambridge, MA, 1968), 141–47.
35See Wilson, chaps. 5 and 7; and Yates, 29, 76.
36Strong pinpoints the origins of the Diana and Cynthia compliments in panegyrics that Giordano Bruno addressed to Elizabeth in 1584–85 (1987, 125–26).
tion of the English body politic.” Wisdom and political virtue were the divine virtues attributed to the marriageable queen, but the virginity of the patron goddess of ancient Athens received little if any emphasis. It is Athena rather than Cynthia who appears in what Roy Strong identifies as “the earliest of the allegorical paintings of Elizabeth,” Queen Elizabeth and the Three Goddesses, the 1569 variation of the Judgment of Paris in which she not only takes the place of the Greek hero, but also outranks Venus, Juno, and Athena. In place of the golden apple that Paris awarded to Venus, however, Elizabeth retains her own coronation orb. The verse inscription specifies that Elizabeth exceeds Juno in political power, Athena in wisdom, and Venus in beauty.

During the 1560s the widespread concern for the chaste perpetuation of the Tudor dynasty made it appropriate to avoid—or suppress—praise of Elizabeth as Diana or Cynthia in Inns of the Court masques. The goddess of virginity received unflattering treatment in several performances that were staged prior to the third parliamentary petition concerning marriage and succession. Although Cynthia appeared in a 12 February 1566 wedding masque at Lincoln’s Inn, she was not a figure for the queen; rather than honoring virginity, the masquing lawyers paid homage at the altar of Hymen, the ancient god of wedlock. At a second wedding celebration at Lincoln’s Inn on 1 July 1566, Elizabeth herself attended a masque in which Diana was implicated in criticism of the queen for her failure to marry. Thomas Pound, the author and presenter, delivered to Elizabeth the censure that he received from Juno, goddess of marriage, for his own failure to wed. He quotes Juno thus:

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for wedlocke I lyke best
it is the honoroblest state
  it passethe all the rest
my Jove saithe she doth knowe this ioye
  this bodye is his owne
And what swete use I haue of his
  to men may not be knowen.
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If the serio-comic treatment of Diana is directed at the queen, it cannot be taken as complimentary praise. Marie Axton comments that the slighting comments on the overly robust and florid figure of Diana betray no hint of the “lineaments of the elegant huntress of later

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37 Axton, 48.
38 Strong, 1987, 65 and figs. 52–53.
Elizabethan verse.” The ultimate irony involves Diana’s resignation at the “loss of her nymph”—Frances Radcliffe, the betrothed of Thomas Mildmay—and acceptance of the necessity that maidens will become wives.39

The claims of Diana were subordinated to those of Juno, protectress of married women and, in the guise of Lucina, goddess of wedlock and childbirth, as late as 1575 in a series of outdoor masques and entertainments designed by George Gascoigne and others for the queen’s visit to Kenilworth Castle, the Warwickshire seat of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Although he was her chief favorite and the English subject most likely to win her in marriage, in all likelihood he had already abandoned genuine hope for the success of his suit.40

The scripts were published under Gascoigne’s name in the following year as The Princely Pleasures at Kenelworth Castle. These celebrations are notable for the infusion of classical gods and goddesses into the nativist frame of Arthurian romance, because a series of mythological deities including Neptune and Proteus pay homage to the queen after an opening tableau in which the Lady of the Lake greets Elizabeth as the greatest of British sovereigns since the death of King Arthur.

Although the rescue of the Lady of the Lake from attempted rape by Sir Bruce associates “Cynthia, the Ladie of the Sea,” with Elizabeth as a maiden queen,41 her dedication to virginity is not presented as a permanently desirable state. The messenger Triton announces the appeal of his lord, Neptune, that Elizabeth fulfill Merlin’s prophecy that the Lady of the Lake must remain hidden beneath the waters of her pool “Except a worthier maide than she, / her cause do take in hand.” Neptune had “envyoned hir with waves” in defense of her virginity. The return of the queen from hunting manifests the transcendent power of chastity in a manner sufficient “to make sir Bruse withdrawe his forces.” Gender conflict is a real issue in this water masque; after all, the queen forges a “naval” alliance with a maiden in distress in order to exercise sovereignty over the militaristic personification of masculine desire. The

39Axton, 47–53. Quotation follows her transcription from masque texts in Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson poet. 108, fols. 24–37. She also cites Emilia’s transient devotion to Diana in another 1566 masque witnessed by Elizabeth, Richard Edwards’ Palamon and Arcite.


41Wilson, 274, 277–78.
permanent victory of maidenly chastity is not foreseen, however, as the ideal outcome of Elizabeth’s romantic career. Triton’s speech instead poses the unresolved question of whether the queen should marry: “Howe then can Diane, Junos force, / and sharpe assaults abyde?” The possibility that this maidenly victory would be transitory had already been suggested by a display of fireworks that advertised Leicester’s devotion to the queen by appearing to pass beneath the waves only to “rise and mount out of the water againe, and burne very furiously untill they were utterlie consumed.” This spectacle was analogous to the gifts Elizabeth had received as tokens of Leicester’s “true love.” Verses delivered by “one clad like a Savage man,” a hirsute personification of masculine desire, advertised a potential victory over the “watery” power of feminine virginity:

What meant the fierie flames,
    which through the waves so flue?
Can no colde answers quench desire?
    is that experience true?

The feminine voice of Echo supplied the answer: “True.”

The planned involvement of Diana and her nymphs in one of the entertainments was appropriate to this royal hunting holiday in a woodland setting. Although Gascoigne claims in the printed text that his masque of Diana and Zabeta was cancelled because of “lack of opportunitie and seasonable weather,” it seems more likely that the performance was cancelled because of the queen’s distaste for its advocacy that she choose a husband and marry. The printed text records Diana’s efforts to relocate “one of her best beloved Nimphes,” who was reputed to have gone over into the company of Juno “neere seventeene yeares past.” This explicit reference to the 1558 accession of the queen identifies her not with Diana but with the lost nymph, whose name, Zabeta, is an obvious truncation of Elizabeth. Diana recalls that prior to her coronation chaste Zabeta, whom she terms a “peereles Queene” famous for “prudence” and “pollicie,” had followed her for “twentie yeeres or more.” As the emissary of all-knowing Jove, Mercury acknowledges the problem that although Juno has tried for sixteen years to win Zabeta over to marriage through the proposals of the greatest kings that “this our age foorth brings,” she has continuously refused to yield. Diana’s

joy that the nymph has taken a “constant vowe, / of chaste unspotted life” is premature, however. As the messenger of Juno, Iris, the rainbow goddess, would have crossed over the fictional line between mythological romance and dynastic politics by directly addressing Queen Elizabeth with Juno’s appeal to marry:

A world of wealth at wil,
you henceforth shall enjoy
In wedded state, and therewithall,
holde up from great annoy
The staffe of your estate:
O Queene, O worthy Queene,
Yet never wight felt perfect blis,
but such as wedded beene.

Although Elizabeth never saw this performance, the text does record an encouragement to marry that Gascoigne prepared under the patronage of the most powerful man in England. Diana had not yet won the place that she would occupy during the last phase of the Elizabethan age as an unambiguous figure for a queen resigned to die a virgin.43

Widespread public concern about royal marriage may be noted in civic pageantry devised for the queen’s entry into Norwich, the second city in the realm, during her summer progress of 1578. Thomas Churchyard’s “Shew of Chastitie” modifies the iconography of Petrarch’s Trionfi by identifying Elizabeth with Dame Chastity in an encounter in which the latter dethrones Cupid, the patron of erotic love, and takes his place in a triumphal pageant cart. In the company of her attendant maidens, Modesty, Temperance, Good Exercise, and Shamefastness, Dame Chastity confers Cupid’s bow and arrows upon the queen because she has “chosen the best life,” presumably one of celibacy. She further explains her action, stating that “since none coulde wounde hir highesse hart, it was meete . . . that she should do with CUPIDs bow and arrowes what she pleased.”44 This appeal is delicately ambiguous, however, because the queen might play either her own Cupid, by choosing a suitable husband,45

or the archer Diana, by continuing her unmarried life. It should be noted that this performance was designed on behalf of the Lord Mayor and aldermen of the corporation of Norwich, which was a notorious hotbed of radical Protestant sentiment. The initiation of a new round of marriage negotiations during the following year suggests that this performance lodged oblique advice that the queen consider only suitors of suitable religious faith.

The last great flurry of excitement over Elizabeth’s professed desire to marry began in 1579, when Alençon arrived in England to court her during the final interval when she was still remotely capable of bearing an heir. The queen’s taking of the initiative late in the wooing suggests that she had every intention of wedding the duke, despite her personal distaste for marriage and despite the opposition of powerful Protestant lords on the privy council who believed that the choice of a husband who was both an heir to a foreign throne and a Catholic would threaten England’s religious settlement and its political autonomy. Her own letters specify that the chief stumbling block to marriage was the Catholicism of the younger brother of the king of France. At the height of the controversy over the proposed match, she wrote that she wished to wed should he modify his “public exercise of the Roman Religion.”

Spenser’s Shepheardes Calender evokes the political milieu of the Alençon courtship. The assumption that the queen remained eligible and interested in marriage well into her forties underlies the inclusion of a transparent allusion to the earl of Leicester in the “October” eclogue. Piers’s appeal that Cuddie devote himself to epic poetry includes an aside on the queen’s love for the great noble that seems to nominate him as a candidate for her hand in marriage:

Whither thou list in fayre Elisa rest,
Or if thee please in bigger notes to sing,
Advaunce the worthy whome shee loveth best,
That first the white beare to the stake did bring. (ll. 45–47)48

The prominence of this allusion to the Dudley device of the staked bear places Spenser in the camp of the Protestant progressives who opposed the Alençon match, even though Leicester’s secret marriage during the previous year excluded him as a potential mate for the queen.49 Further indication of the poet’s interest in this topic is provided by the presumable composition of part of *Mother Hubberds Tale* at about this time, given the likely satire directed against Alençon and his agent, Jean de Simier, in the form of the Ape. The connection of that poem to the *Calender* may be noted in Spenser’s 1591 description of the *Tale* as a work “composed in the raw concept of my youth” and in its affinity with the satirical mode of his ecclesiastical eclogues.50

The appearance of the *Calender* during the immediate aftermath of the political explosion triggered by the publication of the most notorious appeal that Elizabeth spurn a foreign marriage, John Stubbs’s *Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf whereinto England is like to be Swallowed by an other French mariage* (August 1579), may account for Spenser’s last-minute alteration of the *Calender*’s dedication from Leicester to his nephew, Sir Philip Sidney.51 Whereas the queen’s anger over the appearance of this tract gave the earl every reason to distance himself from the anti-Alencon faction, Sidney went on record against the French marital alliance in a letter that he sent directly to the queen.

Even though the writings of Stubbs and Sidney document the existence of broadly-based opposition to the Alençon match, they never argue against the desirability of marriage as such; indeed, they assume that Elizabeth will marry and bear children. The fact that no one adopts the rhetorical strategy of reminding the queen of a 1559

51William A. Ringler, Jr., “Spenser, Shakespeare, Honor, and Worship,” *Renaissance News* 14 (1961):159–61. The dedication was changed from Dudley to Sidney after E. K. dated his epistle to Gabriel Harvey on 10 April 1579, by which time Spenser’s composition must have been virtually complete.
vow to live out her life like a celibate nun wedded to England provides yet another proof that Camden (or an unknown intermediary) invented that apocryphal story. Sidney presumably wrote his letter “Touching Her Marriage with Monsieur” after the appearance of Stubbs’s Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf because he often follows the tract in argument and phraseology; manuscript copies of his letter were in circulation at about the time that Spenser’s Calender went to press in late 1579. Although Sidney enumerates Alençon’s liabilities both as a foreigner and as a Roman Catholic, he nevertheless assumes that the queen will choose a more appropriate husband and bear children who will be “the perfect mirror to your posterity.”

According to tradition, Sidney withdrew to his sister’s estate to escape the queen’s wrath. Sidney’s unpublished advice incurred no punishment, but Stubbs suffered the penalty of the loss of his right hand for publically challenging the queen’s prerogative concerning her potential marriage.

Unlike Sidney, who remains discreetly silent about the queen’s age and vulnerability to fatal complications in a pregnancy, Stubbs explicitly raises the danger of death in childbirth. His acknowledgment of the queen’s real age and mortality lacks Sidney’s courtly delicacy: “If it may please her Majesty to call her faithfulest wise physicians and to adjure them by their conscience towards God, their loyalty to her, and faith to the whole land to say their knowledge simply… how exceedingly dangerous they find it by their learning for Her Majesty at these years to have her first child, yea, how fearful the expectation of death is to mother and child; I fear to say what will be their answer.” Stubbs’s witty reference to “her natural body” as “her very self or self self, as I may say” suggests mockery of the legal fiction of the queen’s “two bodies.” Furthermore, his use of bestial imagery to compare the proposed marital union to “contrary couplings together… [like] the uneven yoking together of the clean ox to the unclean ass” could only draw the queen’s wrath. By lodging strictures based upon biblical injunctions against “unnatural” acts

52Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan Van Dorsten (Oxford, 1973), 57, ll. 7–8. Cecil preserved an anonymous letter written close in time to Sidney’s composition that reviews the problem and urges the queen to marry (MS Lansdowne 94, fols. 70–71).


54Stubbs, 9, 51, 68.
(Dt. 22:10), Stubbs evokes the widespread association between Roman Catholicism and sexual uncleanness; Protestants widely assumed that devotion to Roman “idolatry” constituted “spiritual fornication” (Rev. 2:14, 17:2). Prejudice of this kind flared up against French Catholics after the St. Bartholomew Massacre (1572).

If it was not until after the failure of this last effort at marriage, one third of the way through Elizabeth’s reign, that the patriotic cult of an unmarried virgin queen who would remain ever wedded to her nation took hold in officially-sponsored propaganda, in poetry of praise generated outside of the royal court, and in the popular imagination, how are we to interpret the celebration of Eliza as the “flowre of Virgins” and “a mayden Queene” in Spenser’s “April” eclogue (ll. 48, 57)? It is important to note that Hobbinol sings the lay to Eliza in the place of Colin Clout, who no longer sings this song of praise. The absence of Colin, Spenser’s pastoral surrogate, distances the poet from this blason. Eliza’s portrait obviously fuses classical mythology and Christian iconography associated with yet another virgin queen, Mary:

For shee is Syrinx daughter without spotte,
Which Pan the shepheards God of her begot:
  So sprong her grace
  Of heavenly race,
No mortall blemishe may her blotte. (ll. 50–54)

The “argument” explains that the eclogue “is purposely intended to the honor and prayse of our most gracious sovereigne, Queene Elizabeth, ” just as Eliza’s company of virgins (nymphs, muses, graces, and shepherds’ daughters) idealizes the sociology of the privy chamber, where the queen surrounded herself with attendant maidens whom she watched over like a jealous mother. The naturalistic representation of Eliza in the eclogue’s woodcut illustration is devoid of the esoteric symbolism often found in Elizabeth’s later portraits, although muses playing upon their musical instruments do attend her (fig. 2).

Even though this eclogue was “a seminal work in creating the image of the Virgin Queen,” a French marriage was still regarded as a distinct possibility, indeed a threat, in the eyes of Protestant progressives, until after the entry of the Calender in the Stationers’ Reg-
This Eglogue is purposely intended to the honor and prays of our most gracious souereigne Queene Elizabeth. The speaker berein be Hobbinoll and Thenot, two shepheardes: the which Hobbinoll being before mentioned, greatly to have loosed Colins, is here set forth more largely, complaung him of that boyes great misadventure in Lune, whereby his mynd was alienate and with drawn not only from him, who moste loosed him, but also from all former deligtes and studies, aswell in pleasant piping, as conning ryming and singing, and other his laudable exercisys. Whereby he taksb occasion, for prove of his more excellencie and skill in poesie, to recorde a songe, which the saide Colin sometime made in honor of her Maistrie, whom abruptly he termebed Elysia.

Tell me good Hobbinoll, what partes thee greete?
What: hath some Wolde thy tender Lambes people?
D? is thy Bagpye broke, that foundes to sweete?
D? art thou of thy loued ladle eolopes?
By bene thine eyes attempted to the pearce,
Quenching the gasping surrowes thirst with rayne?

Like
ister on 5 December 1579. The “April” eclogue’s floral imagery indicates that Eliza is the “goddess of love and procreation as well as goddess of chastity and virginity.” Spenser alludes to the Ovidian account that Syrinx preserved her virginity when her flight from Pan, the Arcadian fertility god, resulted in her transformation into a reed-bed (Meta. ll. 688–712). In a paradoxical rewriting of the classical myth, Syrinx fails to evade Pan; indeed, she conceives of Eliza by means of an insemination vaguely aligned with the virgin birth of Christ. Nevertheless, the Mariological tag “without spotte” refers to Eliza’s virginity, not that of her mother, and she clearly derives her “heavenly race” from her father. We should not look for tight one-to-one correspondences because Spenser situates this eclogue within a complicated symbolic matrix. After all, it is ultimately the poet who makes Eliza spotless because the progeny of Syrinx are songs.

E. K.’s gloss on line 50 recognizes Spenser’s synthesis of Christian and classical imagery by noting that Christ “is the verye Pan and god of Shepheardes.” The comment that Pan also refers to “the most famous and victorious King, her highnesse Father, late of worthy memorye K. Henry the eyght” reflects the iconographical inconsistency of Colin Clout’s song.

What E. K. leaves unstated is more significant historically than his explanation of the Pan reference, because Syrinx must refer to Anne Boleyn, the mother of the queen who was executed on grounds of adultery during Elizabeth’s infancy. Soon after Anne’s death and Henry’s remarriage to Jane Seymour in 1536, Princess Elizabeth was declared illegitimate in order to clear the way for the accession of the male heir expected of her father’s third wife. When Elizabeth acceded to the throne long after her father’s death, she did so as the bastardized daughter for whose sake her father had rejected papal authority. The recovery of personal and political legitimacy was therefore always a matter of concern to the queen, whose legalism disconcerted her counselors and parliament when it extended even to

56Patrick Cullen, Spenser, Marvell, and Renaissance Pastoral (Cambridge, MA, 1970), 116. Anne Lake Prescott has commented to me that Eliza’s scarlet attire is appropriate to a “mayden Queene” (l. 57) who remains marriageable.

57Thomas H. Cain, Praise in “The Faerie Queen” (Lincoln, NE, 1978), 16–17; David Lee Miller, The Poem’s Two Bodies: The Poetics of the 1590 “Faerie Queene” (Princeton, NJ, 1988), 95, 238. See also n. 78 below.

defense of the claim of Mary, Queen of Scots, “as heir presumptive
to the Tudor throne.”\textsuperscript{59} The emphasis of the “April” eclogue on Eli-
za’s purity runs counter to long-standing Catholic allegations con-
cerning Elizabeth’s bastardy.\textsuperscript{60}

The witty mythologization of Elizabeth’s birth constitutes a flat-
tering rewriting of the historical record, one that glosses over the
chronic succession crisis that England had experienced because of
her inability and that of her entire dynasty to perpetuate a sturdy line
of male—or female—heirs to the throne. Colin Clout’s blason de-
clares:

\begin{quote}
Pan may be proud, that ever he begot
such a Bellibone,
And Syrinx rejoyse, that ever was her lot
to beare such an one. (ll. 91–94)
\end{quote}

According to this view, both Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn could
take satisfaction for having produced such a splendid heir to the
throne. Poetic diction suggests further that Elizabeth may yet con-
tinue the Tudor line if the choice of words is aligned with Perigot’s
love-smitten praise of “the bouncing Bellibone” in the “August”
celogue, whose green skirt and floral crown are clearly appropriate
to a nubile maiden (ll. 61–112). Although the “April” eclogue’s
mythic view of dynastic history crumbles under a literal interpre-
tation, it succeeds on a figurative level due to the syncretic combi-
nation of pagan myth with a trope of scriptural pastoral (the Good
Shepherd), whereby both father and daughter receive homage as
Christlike monarchs. It is debatable, however, whether celebration
of a king deeply implicated in dynastic chaos is appropriate to a
poem dedicated to praising Queen Elizabeth.

The delicate ambiguity of Spenser’s praise of queenly virginity
may be noted in the “April” eclogue’s very early comparison of Eliz-
abeth to Cynthia, goddess of the moon, in her guise as Phoebe, the
twin sister of Phoebus Apollo: “Tell me, have ye seene her angelick
face, / Like Phoebe fayre?” (ll. 64–65). This astronomical figure
highlights the political power of the queen’s femininity when Eliza
outshines the sun-god, Phoebus, who “blusht” in amazement “to
see another Sunne belowe” (l. 77). This imagery is androgynous be-

\textsuperscript{59}Smith, 64–65. See also Norman L. Jones, “Elizabeth’s First Year: The Conception
and Birth of the Elizabethan Political World,” in Christopher Haigh, ed., \textit{The Reign of
\textsuperscript{60}Norbrook, 1984, 85.
cause Elizabeth's lunar qualities as both a woman and a queen are overlaid with the solar symbolism that iconographical tradition accorded to kings as males. The singer identifies Eliza's moonlike qualities with the queen's dominant aspect:

Shew thy selfe Cynthia with thy silver rayes,
and be not abasht:
When shee the beames of her beauty displayes,
O how art thou dasht? (ll. 82–85)

Having introduced this complicated astronomical conceit, Spenser ostentatiously denies its appropriateness to queenly iconography by employing *occupatio*, a rhetorical device that emphasizes something by seeming to omit it: "But I will not match her with Latonaes seede, / Such follie great sorow to Niobe did breede" (ll. 86–87). Having introduced the possibility of lauding Eliza as a new Cynthia, the singer immediately retreats from that simile in a manner that is inconsistent with an interpretation of Elizabeth's virginity as a permanent condition.

Spenser's homage to Eliza as a virgin queen is poised at a liminal moment in the development of Elizabethan iconography. He shares Sidney's realization that ambiguity is the appropriate posture for one to assume in praising or advising a queen whose own image and desires are ambiguous. The "April" eclogue enhances the queen's standing as an eligible woman at virtually the last moment when she is still remotely capable of marriage and child-bearing, on the one hand, but it praises her in a manner that may be understood as an appeal that she retain her unwedded state, on the other hand. Colin's blason praises a marriageable queen who is on the verge of a decision to remain unmarried. Virgilian emblems spoken by Thenot and Hobbinol highlight the transitional standing of Colin's lay to Eliza. E. K. interprets them as words spoken "in the person of Aeneas to his mother Venus, appearing to him in the likeness of one of Dianaes damosells: being there most divinely set forth." Although these words, "O quam te memorem virgo?" and "O dea certe" ("By what name should I call thee, O maiden?" and "O goddess surely!")), were to become famous as a "prophetic" compliment to the perpetual innocence of Elizabeth as Venus-Virgo, the Calender's publication during the marriage controversy creates a delicate ambiguity about whether the phrase emphasizes Elizabeth's virginity, her potential maternity, or both qualities. The Graces who appear in the eclogue may accompany Venus (or Athena, or the muses), but not
Diana. The potential fusion of chastity and erotic love afforded by this early application of the Venus-Virgo figure would soon be forgotten.\footnote{Aeneid, 1.327–28, in Virgil, Eclogues, Georgics, and Aeneid, vol. 1, ed. and trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA, 1940); Variorum, 7, pt. 1, 41, 45, 287–88. According to Virgil, Venus appears as a nymph, possibly a votaress of Diana. On a contemporary application of the Venus-Virgo figure to Elizabeth, see King, 259, 261.}

The eclogue's involvement with questions of dynastic politics and succession is made manifest by E. K.'s interpretation of Colin's description of Eliza's cheeks, where the "Redde rose medled with the White yfere" (l. 68), as a figure for "the uniting of the two principal houses of Lancaster and of Yorke: by whose longe discord and deadly debate, this realm many yeares was sore traveiled, and almost cleane decayed. Til the famous Henry the seventh, of the line of Lancaster, taking to wife the most vertuous Princesse Elisabeth, daughter to the fourth Edward of the house of Yorke, begat the most royal Henry the eyght aforesayde, in whom was the firste union of the Whyte Rose and the Redde." This gloss corresponds to a well-known dynastic image, the Tudor rose arbor designed for the title page of a work published soon after the Calender, the first edition of John Stow's Chronicles of England, from Brute unto this present yeare of Christ 1580 (fig. 3). This figure is modeled ultimately upon the Tree of Jesse, the genealogy of Jesus as the scion of the royal House of David, which was reapplied during the Middle Ages in praise of Christian kings. The Tree of Jesse had already undergone adaptation for purposes of dynastic praise in the title page border for Edward Halle's Unyon of the twoo noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre and Yorke (1550), in which Henry VIII occupies the place of honor as a Christlike king. The Stow border constitutes a reconfiguration of a conventional dynastic image in which the marriage of Henry VII and "Elizabeth daughter to Kinge Edward the fourth" unites the houses of York and Lancaster in the form of their second son and heir.\footnote{See Michael O'Connell, Mirror and Veil: The Historical Dimension of Spenser's "Fae- rie Queene" (Chapel Hill, 1977), 6–7.} Interpretation of the Stow title page is ambiguous, however, like that of the "April" eclogue. Would Elizabeth be the last bud upon the rose arbor? Or, flanked by sterile offshoots, Edward VI and Mary I, is she still capable of perpetuating her line? The liminality of both of these "texts" disappears in a poem attributed to the queen, "On Monsieur's Departure," that employs Petrarchan vocabulary...
Fig. 3 — Elizabeth I as the Tudor Rose. In John Stow, Chronicles of England, 1580, title page. (Photo: Huntington Library, San Marino, California)
to lament the dashing of her hope to marry when Alençon made his final departure from England in 1582:

I grieve and dare not show my discontent,
I love and yet am forced to seem to hate,
I do, yet dare not say I ever meant,
I seem stark mute but inwardly do prate.
   I am and not, I freeze and yet am burned,
   Since from myself another self is turned.63

The Cult of the Virgin Goddess

Emerging during the tortuous negotiations that marked the last phase of the Alençon courtship (1579–83), the best-known face of the Elizabethan image made it possible to argue for the first time that by reigning as England’s perpetually virgin queen, Elizabeth could escape the political compromises necessitated by the marriages of her kindred monarchs, Mary I and Mary, Queen of Scots. After the danger of foreign Catholic entanglement had subsided, progressive Protestants could acclaim “this virgin queen with all the greater enthusiasm, and her virginity became a symbol of national independence.” That this change coincided with increased emphasis on classical mythology in royalist panegyrics may be noted in Thomas Blenerhasset’s A Revelation of the True Minerva (1582) and George Peele’s The Araygnement of Paris (1584), a “pastorall” performed before Queen Elizabeth by the children of the Chapel Royal.64

This iconographical shift is clearly evident in royal portraiture, which begins to incorporate esoteric virginity symbols into arcane allegories that may be impenetrable to casual observers. Thus the mundane utensil held by the queen in the “Sieve” portraits (1579–83) celebrates her standing as a latter-day Vestal Virgin, whose maiden state is essential to the imperialistic program proposed by John Dee. Roy Strong concludes that these paintings “must be seen as statements against the [Alençon] marriage by means of a deliberate intensification of the mystique of chastity as an attribute essential to the success of her rule.”65 In the Ermine Portrait (1585), the queen captivates the ermine of chastity, which stands transfixed

63The Poems of Queen Elizabeth I, ed. Leicester Bradner (Providence, RI, 1964), 5. He expresses doubt concerning the accuracy of this attribution (xiii), but see Caldwell, 22 n. 1.
64Norbrook, 1978, 58.
without a tether but with a royal crown about its neck. After Isaac Oliver’s disastrous experiment with naturalistic portraiture of the queen as an aging woman (ca. 1592), authorized images shifted to the anachronistic “Mask of Youth” that appears in paintings of the queen until her death. It may be noted in the convoluted *Rainbow Portrait* (ca. 1600–03, fig. 4), which depicts the preternaturally youthful queen with the shoulder-length hair of a marriageable virgin.66

Praise of Elizabeth as Cynthia (or Diana, or Belpheobe, or any one of a number of other variants) became indelibly imprinted during the last half of the reign. Marie Axton notes that as the queen “grew older and hope for offspring faded, Diana or Cynthia as a public image found reluctant acceptance.”67 Unlike the *Princely Pleasures at Kenelworth Castle* and the “April” eclogue, in which unambiguous praise of Zabeta or Eliza as Cynthia had not yet won a place, the emergence of the queenly moon-cult typifies the increasing Petrarchism and Platonism of royal circles, where courtiers paid homage to Elizabeth as an ever-youthful yet unapproachable object of desire.68 The cult originated in Giordano Bruno’s praise of Elizabeth during his mid-1580s residence in England, according to Roy Strong, who concludes that it “must have become public” by the end of the decade. Her status as “Cynthia, Queen of Seas and Lands” further alludes to John Dee’s claim for England’s status as an imperialistic military and naval power, which was voiced with increased stridency following the destruction of the Spanish Armada. Thus jeweled crescent moons symbolic of Diana appear in the queen’s hair in miniatures by Nicholas Hilliard (ca. 1586–1603) and at the apex

66Ibid., 112–14, 130–33, 142–47; Yates, 215. Louis Montrose, 315, proposes that the presence of a virgin-knot in the *Armada Portrait* (ca. 1588) “suggests a causal relationship between her sanctified chastity and the providential destruction of the Spanish Catholic invaders” without exploring the alternative possibility that this jeweled bow is no more than a straightforward symbol of the kind that appears throughout Elizabeth’s pre- and post-Armada portraiture. His daring view is based upon analogy to his interpretation of Henry VIII’s codpiece in the Holbein cartoon of *Henry VIII with Henry VII*, which argues for the presence of political symbolism in “the king’s phallic self-assertion” (312–14). Here again, Montrose neglects the alternative possibility that this appendage is no more than an item of conventional attire. Codpieces appear with some frequency in portraits of Renaissance royalty, nobility, and commoners.

67Axton, 60.

68Leonard Forster notes that it is after the failure of the Alençon negotiations that “the icon of Elizabeth as Laura begins to take shape” in *The Icy Fire: Five Studies in European Petrarchism* (Cambridge, 1969), 135.
FIG. 4—Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger (attributed). *Rainbow Portrait (Elizabeth I as Astraea)*, ca. 1600–03. By courtesy of the Marquess of Salisbury.
of the headpiece in the *Rainbow Portrait* (fig. 4). The queen actually appears as crescent-crowned Diana in a portrait in which she bears bow and arrows and holds the tether of a hunting dog.

The apotheosis of the queen as Cynthia was complete by the time that boy actors from St. Paul’s School performed John Lyly’s *Endimion: The Man in the Moone* at the royal court on Candlemas 1588. Her cult image is clearly apparent in a fiction showing (paradoxically) her love for a mortal. Although it cannot be proved that this elaborate play contains a detailed program of topical allegory, queenly symbolism differentiates between the celestial state of the moon goddess and the mortality of her subjects, who are associated with Tellus (the earth). The goddess herself is significantly absent during the first two acts, which dramatize the condition of the lovesick shepherd, Endimion. Eumenides explains that his companion’s desire is incapable of satisfaction because “there was never any so peevish to imagin the Moone eyther capable of affection, or shape of a Mistris: for as impossible it is to make love fit to her humor which no man knoweth, as a coate to her forme, which continueth not in one bignesse whilst she is measuring.” (Her inconstancy and variable form refer to the waxing and waning of the moon.) Although this viewpoint might seem critical of the unending virginity of the queen, the play “apotheosizes a queen for whom marriage is unthinkable,” and whose courtiers may now direct toward her “harmonious, platonic affection without rivalry for special favor.” One critic concludes that Endimion’s adoration dramatizes the “proper worship of the ideal courtier for his monarch.” Cynthia’s manifestation of truth, justice, mercy, and peace in the concluding act, after her kiss releases Endimion from the enchantment of sleep, accords with the attribution of all virtue to the queen in her later iconography. The goddess herself proclaims that this

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70Lawrence G. Holland, *Catalogue of the Pictures at Hatfield House* (privately printed, 1891), no. 51, attributed to Cornelius (or Henrik) Vroom and cited, 36, in an inventory of 1611 as “a portrait of her late majesty.” Ill. Mandell Creighton, *Queen Elizabeth* (Edinburgh, 1896), facing 76.


mythic act of noblesse oblige manifests virginal innocence, in accordance with her own comment that "my mouth hath beene heere fore as untouched as my thoughts" (5.1.20–21). The direct appeal for royal favor in the epilogue makes explicit the identification between the queen as a member of the audience and the boy playing her role as the moon goddess: "but if your Highnes vouchsafe with your favorable beames to glaunce upon us, we shall not only stoope, but with all humilitie, lay both our handes and heartes at your Majesties feete."

The place of Sir Walter Ralegh as a major disseminator of the moon-cult may be noted in his nocturnal portrait (1588), which depicts the ability of feminine Luna to govern the male. The device of the crescent moon in the upper left corner compliments the queen as the goddess controlling Ralegh's tides in a nautical conceit that presumably refers to the importance of his own maritime skills in advancing Elizabethan imperialism. This symbolic image defines the courtier's relationship to the queen as Cynthia, who in turn gave him the punning nickname of "Water." His wearing Elizabeth's colors of black and white affiliates him with the Virgin Queen as a nighttime figure who is ever alluring and changeable, but the motto Amor et Virtute reaffirms the innocent chastity of his love. Several years later, Ralegh lamented the loss of the intimate and protected relationship that he once enjoyed as the queen's favorite in "The 11th: and last booke of the Ocean to Scinthisha" (ca. 1592): "What stormes so great but Cinthishes beames apeased? / What rage so feirce that love could not allay?" George Chapman's celebration of the cult of the Moon Queen in The Shadow of Night (1594), which includes his "Hymnus in Noctem" and "Hymnus in Cynthia", is aligned with Ralegh's views and those of their originators, John Dee and Giordano Bruno. The ascendancy of the powerful Elizabethan moon over the European sun through the grand conceit of a solar eclipse may allude in particular to the outcome of the Alençon courtship a decade earlier. Surely it lodges a general claim to English imperialistic triumph late in the queen's reign:

Then set thy Cristall, and Imperiall throne,  
(Girt in thy chast, and never-loosing zone)

74Strong, 1987, 127, fig. 135.  
Against Europs Sunne directly opposit,
And give him darknesse, that doth threat thy light.\(^76\)

The Faerie Queene’s dedicatory “Letter to Ralegh” (23 January 1589/90) declares that Spenser models the name Belphoebe on “your owne excellent conceipt of Cynthia, (Phoebe and Cynthia being both names of Diana).” When the narrator praises Elizabeth as the enshrinement of chastity at the outset of the “Legend of Chastity,” he indicates that the most perfect representation of the queen’s image, “in living colours, and right hew,” is to be found in the “sweet verse” of Ralegh, “In which a gracious servant pictured / His Cynthia, his heavens fairest light” (3.proem.4). Spenser presumably refers to a lost section of the fragmentary manuscript of Ocean to Cynthia that predated Ralegh’s disgrace.

The androgynous conceit that fuses solar and lunar qualities in the “April” eclogue is akin to some queenly images in the Faerie Queene, where the concealment of Una’s brilliant whiteness beneath a “black stole” (1.1.4) suggests a lunar image that is a witty variation of the figure of the Woman Clothed with the Sun, who has “the moon... under her feet” (Rev. 12:1). Una wears Elizabeth’s personal colors of black and white in the manner of Ralegh’s nocturnal portrait. The subordination of the masculine sun to the feminine moon in Britomart’s dream at Isis Church raises the intriguing possibility that Elizabeth’s crescent moon imagery may derive from Isis as well as Cynthia. In Britomart’s vision the Crocodile, that is Osiris or the sun, submits as a consort to Isis, who “doth the Moone portend.” The “rich Mitres shaped like the Moone” worn by the priests of Isis correspond to the moon devices that appear in the queen’s portrait during her last decade (5.7.4). The Egyptian fertility goddess shares the queen’s androgynous nature, and the history of her search for the dead Osiris, whom Typhon had dismembered, makes her look like a type for Elizabeth in her restless quest for a spouse. Although Isis recovers the rest of her husband’s body, she never finds his phallus, a lost member that forever eludes her.\(^77\)

Belphoebe personifies Elizabeth’s private capacity as a woman according to the “Letter to Ralegh.” Her portrayal is problematic,


however, because it tends to identify chastity with perpetual virginity, even though Spenser characteristically associates that virtue with the consummation of love in marriage. Belphoebe’s status as the elder sister of Amoret, the twin who is destined for marriage to Scudamour, might appear to elevate the celibate life above wedded love in the mythic account of their birth, but Amoret participates equally in their virgin birth by Chrysogone:78 “Pure and unspotted from all loathly crime, / That is ingenerate in fleshly slime” (3.6.3). It looks as if Spenser has cleaved the virginal and fertile sides of Eliza into two characters, one remote and divine and the other approachable and worldly. The anomalous aspect of Belphoebe’s virginity invites the reader, almost automatically, to equate her unmarried state with that of Elizabeth, whose private capacity as woman rather than queen is “fashioned” in the chaste huntress (3.proem.5). Nevertheless, the queenly nubility of Britomart and Gloriana makes it difficult to accept Belphoebe as any more representative of Elizabeth than those other queenly figures or to assimilate the huntress into an unequivocal sanction of Elizabeth’s status as a virgin queen. Indeed, the “paradoxical doubleness” of the huntress combines attributes of Venus and Diana in a complicated symbolic depiction of the queen.79

Although Belphoebe is a strong woman who conquers enemies and hunts, Spenser passes her over to make the female knight, Britomart, his chief personification of chastity. Her commitment to heterosexual love contrasts sharply with Belphoebe’s celibacy. While the “martiall Mayd” (3.2.9) matches Belphoebe’s militance in defending her virginity against an inappropriate suit like that of Malecasta, that she is destined to marry Artegall is never in question. This “Magnificke Virgin” is clearly labeled as a type for Elizabeth

78See Thomas P. Roche, The Kindly Flame: A Study of the Third and Fourth Books of Spenser’s “Faerie Queene” (Princeton, NJ, 1964), 103. In an otherwise astute analysis, David Lee Miller identifies the births of Belphoebe and Amoret, and before them Eliza, as types of the Immaculate Conception (95, 235–36, 238–40). Surely the allusion is to the virgin birth of Christ rather than to the Immaculate Conception whereby St. Anne bore the Virgin Mary. Furthermore, it is debatable whether the explicit comments that Pan “begot” (i.e., procreated) Eliza define a virginal conception (“April,” ll. 51, 91). See n. 57 above, and related text.

79O’Connell, 100–103. On some of the cautiously negative touches in Spenser’s portrayal of Belphoebe or Elizabeth, see Judith H. Anderson, “ ‘In living colours and right hew’: The Queen of Spenser’s Central Books,” in Poetic Traditions of the English Renaissance, ed. Maynard Mack and George deForest Lord (New Haven, 1982), 47–66; and Miller, 6, 100, 233, and passim.
by her name ("martial Britoness"), by her dream at Isis Church, and by the maidenliness and chastity that she shares with the queen. As a member of the blood royal and Tudor ancestress, she shares many of the queen’s attributes. Like Elizabeth, she is the heir to a "Crowne" and a giver of "royal gifts of gold and silver wrought" (5.7.21–24). When Britomart removes her helmet, the reader learns that she wears her hair long in the manner of a marriageable virgin, a style similar to the one that Elizabeth maintained as an aged queen according to the Rainbow Portrait (fig. 4). The presence of this symbolic detail indicates that the knight’s appearance is analogous to the "Mask of Youth" found in so many other portraits made during Elizabeth’s last decade of life:

Her golden locks, that were in tramels gay
Upbounden, did them selves adowne display,
And raught unto her heeles; like sunny beames,
That in a cloud their light did long time stay,
That vapour vaded, shew their golden gleames,
And through the persant aire shoote forth their azure streames. (3.9.20)

The Jacobean Apotheosis

The advent of James I cast Elizabethan fashion into eclipse at court. The new regal style reverted to traditional masculine models for praising kings and downplayed the commitment to militant Protestantism which ideologues had attached without warrant to a queen whose own inclinations lay in the direction of pacifism and noncontroversial religion. At the same time, patriarchal theory of royal absolutism underwent enhancement. Spenser’s death during the last years of the late queen’s reign created a “vacancy” in the unofficial position of laureate poet, which the Catholic convert Ben Jonson filled when he rose to ascendancy as a prominent celebrator of the Jacobean royal image; he had never achieved the place he desired under the old regime. Jonson felt an aversion to the political and millennial fervor that marked the last years of Elizabeth. Even before the end of her reign, his “demotion” of the queen to the status of an arbitrator of comic action in Every Man Out of his Humour (acted in 1599) could have been taken as an insult to her honor, and he openly mocked the cult of the Faerie Queene in The Alchemist (acted in 1610).

Nevertheless, sentimental idealization of the late queen began soon after her death. James’s early years on the throne were welcomed in the public theater by plays that praised Elizabeth as a Protestant heroine and contrasted the disastrous events of the reign of Mary I with the mythic “golden age” that followed. It may be that emphasis upon the errors of the Marian government constituted oblique advice to the new king to observe precedents established under Elizabeth rather than to follow the example of Mary I or his own mother, Mary, Queen of Scots. Typical of this concern is The Famous History of Sir Thomas Wyat (1607), a collaborative composition by Thomas Dekker and John Webster that was performed in the early years of the new reign. In contrast to an idealized line of Protestant succession extending from Henry VIII through Edward VI and even Lady Jane Grey, the regime of Mary I as a “catholicke Queene” and her husband Philip, the “forraine Prince” (sigs. A4v, E3), is dramatized as a historical anomaly immediately preceding the advent of Elizabeth. Explicit historical analogies may be drawn between historical antecedents found in the play and Jacobean events, for example the parallel between Mary’s marriage to the Spanish heir and the proposed wedding between Prince Henry Frederick and Anne, Princess of Spain.81

The two parts of Thomas Heywood’s If You Know Not Me, You Know No Bodie: Or, The Troubles of Queene Elizabeth (1605) have a far broader historical scope because they dramatize events from the “tragic” fall from favor of Princess Elizabeth after her brother’s death until the Spanish Armada. Acted in 1604, the first part resembles a Protestant saint’s legend by sentimentalizing Elizabeth’s suffering during her sister’s reign, when suspicion of complicity with anti-government plotters threatened the young princess with execution. Her own testimony during imprisonment takes on the quasi-prophetic cast that would become famous through Camden’s Annales: “If I miscarry in this enterprise, and aske you why, / A Virgine and a Martyr both I dy” (If You Know, ll. 341–42). The play follows a tragicomic trajectory by dramatizing Elizabeth’s survival of a series of perils that culminate in imprisonment at the Tower of London, where one scene dramatizes a by now legendary instance of perseverance through the keeping of her own counsel. The pious

princess inscribes into her Bible an epigram that had long since won a place of honor in Foxe’s “Book of Martyrs”: “Much suspected by me, nothing prov’d can be, / Finis quoth Elizabeth the prisoner” (ll. 1036–37). The first part of the play closes at the same point where Foxe concludes his hagiographical celebration of the accession of Elizabeth as an example of providential intervention on behalf of the English nation. It dramatizes Elizabeth’s self-presentation as an evangelical queen (ll. 1578–98) by recapitulating an actual event during her entry into London on the eve of her coronation, when she kissed a Bible as an endorsement of the popular reading of the scriptures in the vernacular. Heywood’s sequel traces events of Elizabeth’s reign leading up to the climax of patriotic fervor that greeted England’s “providential” deliverance from the Spanish Armada. This nationalistic “triumph” could be applied adversely to James I and his policies because the self-styled heroism of Sir Francis Drake and the Elizabethan seadogs served as a blunt argument in favor of the militantly imperialistic and anti-Spanish foreign policy that the new king was reluctant to espouse. The outset of his reign was instead marked by the establishment of the 1604 peace treaty that ended two decades of hostility toward Spain.

Jacobean politics provided a motive for the anachronistic revival of the cult of Elizabeth as a model ruler whose perpetual virginity symbolized political integrity, Protestant ideology, and a militantly interventionist policy against Spain. Because these values were increasingly found wanting at the court of England’s Scottish king, Protestant militants praised the late queen in order to attack Jacobean pacifism. In the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot, Thomas Dekker’s Whore of Babylon (acted ca. 1606–07) fused Spenserian allegory with the well-known scene from Elizabeth’s coronation pageantry when newly awakened Truth, the daughter of Time, presents the...
Faery Queen with a Bible symbolic of Protestant evangelical truth. The kissing of the scriptures by this unambiguous type for Queen Elizabeth precedes the idealized triumph of the Reformation when Roman clergy are expelled from the realm. Dekker led the way in developing the Spenserian revival that was to flower after the 1610 assassination of the French king, Henri IV. Although Spenser was not himself a Puritan, his poetry appealed to the moral sensibility of Puritans and other progressive Protestants who increasingly opposed James I. When the king frustrated expectations that he would ally England with the German Protestant princedoms against the Hapsburg empire, Prince Henry Frederick served as a magnet for the apocalyptic fervor and militant hopes of radical Protestants. It seemed clear that a return to a political style approaching Elizabethan "majesty" must await the accession of James’s militantly Protestant heir.

Although these hopes were dashed by the untimely death of the Prince of Wales in 1612, it may be no accident that an aura of fervent expectation surrounds the birth of Elizabeth Tudor in Shakespeare’s roughly contemporaneous Henry VIII (ca. 1612–13). The play may be associated with the 14 February 1613 wedding of the late prince’s sister, Elizabeth Stuart, to Frederick, Elector Palatine, who occupied a prominent place in the leadership of Protestant Germany. Protestant zeal imbues Archbishop Cranmer’s prediction of the infant’s future greatness as England’s Virgin Queen in a retrospective prophecy of the kind found in Camden’s Annales:

She shall be, to the happiness of England,  
An aged princess; many days shall see her,  
And yet no day without a deed to crown it.  
Would I had known more! but she must die,  
She must, the saints must have her; yet a virgin,  
A most unspotted lily shall she pass  
To th’ ground, and all the world shall mourn her. (5.4.56–62)

This play differs, nevertheless, in an important respect from the works of disaffected authors who felt alienated from the royal court.

King, 228–31.
Cranmer’s “prophecy” is more accurate than the radical efforts to rewrite history by transforming Elizabeth’s pacifism and noncontroversial religion into precedents for a militantly Protestant foreign policy. It flatters James I as a peaceable monarch who is not only the legal heir of “the maiden phoenix” (5.4.40), but also her spiritual progeny:

Who from the sacred ashes of her honor
Shall star-like rise as great in fame as she was,
And so stand fix’d. Peace, plenty, love, truth, terror,
That were the servants to this chosen infant,
Shall then be his, and like a vine grow to him. (5.4.45–50)

This hindsight prophecy accords with the policies of a king who attempted to balance a pro-Spanish foreign policy and a marital alliance with Protestant Germany.

William Camden completed the original Latin text of the Annales of the Famous Empresse Elizabeth against the backdrop of Jacobean patronage and politics. After abandoning work on Cecil’s papers in 1598, he restarted the project in 1608 at the behest of James I. The historian went along with the vetting that his manuscript received at the hands of the king or his confidant, Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, to the extent of providing the sympathetic account of Mary, Queen of Scots, that her son desired. Camden also rewrote the historical record by vindicating James against charges that he accepted his mother’s execution with little protest or grief. Because the king’s interest in the chronicling of Elizabethan events dried up after Mary’s death and his own exculpation, royal command blocked publication of the last installment, which treated events following her trial and execution. Although Camden completed this section in 1617, the posthumous publication of Tomus alter annalium rerum Anglicarum, et Hibernarum, sive pars quarta was held off until 1627, after the king’s death.

Although James’s wishes channeled Camden’s handling of Scottish affairs and Mary’s imprisonment, the author’s distaste for Jacobean extravagance, political corruption, and the king’s conciliatory foreign policy colors his extravagantly partisan account of the previous reign. Christopher Haigh observes that the “virtues and successes of Elizabeth were therefore defined by the flaws and omissions of James, and Camden wrote a commentary on the rule of
James in the guise of a history of the rule of Elizabeth.”

An English translation of books 1–3 of the *Annales* (1625) was entered into the Stationers’ Register in March 1624, soon after the furor aroused by the unsuccessful proposal that Charles, Prince of Wales, marry the Infanta of Spain.

Because the generations that had grown into adulthood under Elizabeth had dwindled and accurate memories of her reign had dimmed, Camden provided a very influential record of Elizabethan public events, one that still dominates most twentieth-century accounts of Elizabethan history and culture. The elaborately symbolic title page of the 1625 *Annales* highlights the hagiographical nature of Camden’s text. Its woodcut border portrays events that shaped the heroic myth of an Elizabethan “golden age” of imperialistic triumph: Sir Francis Drake’s circumnavigation of the globe in 1577–79, his 1587 attack on Cadiz, the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, the earl of Cumberland’s 1591 raid on San Juan de Puerto Rico, and the 1596 Cadiz expedition of the earl of Essex. Inset portrayals of naval scenes illustrate these events along with stentorian captions like “ALBIONS COMFORT, IBERIAS TERROR. The famous overthrow of the Spanish Navie the 30th yeare of the Q[ueen] R[egnant].” The Tudor rose and the queen’s motto of “Semper Eadem,” along with its symbolic equivalent of the reborn Phoenix rising from its own ashes, crown the title page. The accompanying frontispiece incorporates the famous Elizabethan devices of the jeweled crescent moon and the fan into its portrayal of the queen’s apotheosis (fig. 5). The attendant cherub confers a celestial crown with the sun, moon, and stars of the Woman Clothed with the Sun above an inscription proclaiming that Elizabeth, “that famous Queene,” still lives. The verses printed boldly on the flyleaf rise to a crescendo that makes it clear that Elizabeth was, in every respect, the antithesis of James I. Stridently patriotic hyperbole of

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87 Haigh, 9.

88 On the theatrical controversy generated by the proposed marital alliance with Spain, see Jerzy Limon, *Dangerous Matter: English Drama and Politics, 1623/24* (Cambridge, 1986), 98–129; and Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison, WI, 1984), 75–79.

Fig. 5 — The Apotheosis of Elizabeth I. In William Camden, Annales, 1625, frontispiece. (Photo: Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC)
this kind shaped the posthumous representation of Elizabeth as the triumphant Virgin Queen of modern reputation:

By this Good Princes never dye,
Death but refines their MAJESTY:
For in this Maiden-Queene Story,
Admire and view Englands Glory,
 Beauties Mapp, DIANAS Mirror:
Who built up Truth, banisht Error.
In whose blest raign true Gospels light
Shines in spight of all Romish might:
Foes with undaunted mind Reject,
France friended, Netherland protect,
POPE exiled, SPAINES Armado
Confounded with their Bravado.
here read the days when britan ground
With blessings all was compast round.

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