

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Sixteenth century Elizabeth I of England has long been a figure of interest to Renaissance scholars, and their work largely focuses on how her gender impacted the power, politics, and culture of her day. Many have perceived her to be a heroine whose ingenuity and determination circumvented the limitations imposed on a female ruler in patriarchal Renaissance England. In my thesis, I examine the life and work of Elizabeth I, and the self-representations she constructed within the boundaries imposed on highborn women. In the first half of my thesis, I suggest that she embraced and utilized the female roles available to her to secure agency and a degree of safety for both herself and England. In the second half, I suggest that masculine subjects such as Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser, in turn, sought to manipulate her later self-representations to negotiate their own agency and identity which was perceived to be beset with anxieties and biases stemming from the ageing Queen's seizure and redefinition of the female gender role allotted to her. A chronological examination of the self representations evident in her personal writing, commissioned portraiture, parliamentary speeches, and sonnets, as well as the poetry of two of her

foremost masculine subjects, suggests a shift in gender politics and a tension roused by an ageing Queen regnant in a rigidly patriarchal society.

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Courting Elizabeth: The Virgin Queen and Elizabethan Literature

by
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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of the Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Jaime Zinck, Author

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Courting Elizabeth: The Virgin Queen and Elizabethan Literature

Introduction

I read my first royal biography at the age of eleven, and have since accumulated a massive collection of texts on the royalty of the world. Elizabeth I caught my attention some fifteen years ago, and she has long been a fascination. Initially I was amused to learn that my grandmother believed that the language of the trope of the King's Two Bodies meant that she was in fact a hermaphrodite. Obviously, this isn't true, but at the age of fourteen I researched what Elizabeth was talking about, and why. Since then, my focus has largely been the Tudor and Stewart dynasties, and during the last five years as I attended college I became aware of and interested in the shifting definitions of what it meant to be a man-and how it affected what it meant to be a woman.

After reading various biographies of the Virgin Queen, I have a good sense of the timeline of her reign and the courtships she engaged in. Movies such as *Elizabeth* and *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*, as well as Helen Mirren's portrayal of the Queen in *Elizabeth R*, led me to question the politics of her rhetoric. More recently in graduate school, I took to the databases and library to research how she was talked about in the academic world. Early on, I focused on how masculinity came into play when talking of Elizabeth after taking Dr. Tara Williams' Chaucer class and reading Holly Crocker's text *Chaucer's Visions of Manhood*.

The modern understanding of Elizabeth Tudor is that she was an early feminist, crusading for the rights of women. Indeed, nothing could be further from the truth. To a large extent, she stayed within the patriarchal framework of patriarchal Elizabethan England, and further she identified strongly as a woman as defined by the social and gender hierarchies of her day. It is not surprising that the modern world believes thusly; movies portraying the powerful and defiant Queen, and books celebrating her resistance to masculine domination, have flooded the media in the last two decades. I began this project in 2009 with the intention of examining how masculinity was formed during Elizabeth's reign as represented in literature of the day; however, I soon realized that to understand this, I needed to examine how she identified herself, which resulted in a shift to a study of the Queen and her self-representation. Secondly, I took the readings of Elizabeth's own works and commissioned portraits and applied them to the works of two authors, Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser. In this I hoped to understand how and why her identity shifted in the early 1580s, and why her courtiers began to plot against her and flout her authority. I have a greater understanding of the motives and constraints of Elizabeth Tudor and how she came to her guise of static and unchangeable maiden as she grew older and became a somewhat odd figure of virginity into her sixties.

Though Elizabeth failed to marry and secure the succession by producing an heir, she used the a social privileges granted to women by patriarchal England to engage in courtships with her aristocratic courtiers and international European rulers, As an unmarried, young Queen in need of a husband, Elizabeth was a matrimonial

prize, sought after largely because whomever she chose to wed would become de facto King of England.

As a chaste young Queen actively seeking a husband, Elizabeth stayed largely within the confines of the patriarchal framework. Her accession to the throne did not overtly challenge or thwart the social and gender hierarchies that dictated who and what a man or woman could (and should) be. Young and unmarried women held a degree of power in society, able to reject the suits of distasteful alliances and use flirtation to draw men in. Once a woman married and succumbed, she lost the allure of maidenhood and became a figure whose place was now below her husband. As king of his household, a husband had, in theory, complete control over his wife, her belongings, her children, and her body. The same was true of Queens: when Mary I, Elizabeth's sister, married the Spanish king Phillip, he became King of England, raiding her treasury to fund his own wars and using (and losing) her cities in warfare.

Her ability to use courtship as a political tool faded as she aged, and by 1581 she had ended her last official attempt to find a husband when she rejected the suit of the French prince the Duke D'Anjou, whom she appears to have been quite fond of, even to the extent of seriously contemplating a marriage. As she reached middle age and refused to give up her chastity, the basis of power for young, aristocratic English women, it became necessary for her to find a new way to justify her status as single Queen.

Her chastity became a static and unchanging representation of her identity, a self-representation that stayed within the boundaries of her gender role but also made

her subjects nervous, because it was unapproachable. At the same time that she redefined herself and her basis of power, her subjects began to exhibit anxiety and tension. To a large degree, such anxiety can be attributed to the lack of a secure succession and the aging Queen's encroaching barrenness. The literary works of the day, particularly the Petrarchan sonnet sequences by Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser, began to hint at an increasing need for physical consummation rather than the traditional, distant worship of an unattainable woman. I suggest that this represents what Breitenberg refers to as an "anxious masculinity" which arises whenever a society is organized and power distributed along patriarchal parameters.

This anxiety is manifested in Sidney's sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella*, wherein the speaker begs not only for the love of his desired lady but also the physical gratification of her body. Stella, a married and thus unavailable woman, is cold and aloof. Essentially, Elizabeth's courtiers gave up after Elizabeth embraced the static chastity of the eternal (yet unattainable) maiden not unlike the Stella figure of Sidney's sequence, and sought ways in which to diminish the power she attempted to hold via this static chastity in order to alleviate the anxious masculinity resulting from the rule of a woman who was never going to fall back into her socially prescribed place. Though to a large degree Elizabeth's play for power was successful, she was still beset with tensions and unruly courtiers for the last two decades of her reign. In *Amoretti* and *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser responds to Elizabeth's claim of authority based upon female chastity and her manipulation of the social practice of courtship by

depicting several chaste female characters that problematize the culturally accepted ideal of womanhood.

In the first article, I explore the ways in which Elizabeth used private and public words and images to illustrate that she attempted to remain within the social confines and expectations of patriarchal England by using the conventions of courtship to authorize her agency, and that accounts of negotiations of her gender to maintain her authority as Queen have been somewhat overstated. My reading would seem to support the assertion that far from rejecting her female self because of its weakness and liability, she acknowledged its limitations and rendered them neutral by asserting her princely self when necessary to perform her duty as Queen Regnant. By using portraits, letters, sonnets, and speeches, we can get a sense of what Elizabeth thought of herself as a woman as well as a Queen. The image that emerges is that of a woman conflicted by her personal desires and her obligations, a figure that allows us to consider Elizabeth the woman as a valid voice that speaks of the forces acting upon early modern culture.

In the second article, I explore the impact of Elizabeth's failure to wed and of her new self-representation as the chaste, removed, and eternal mistress. Even though, as I suggest in the first article, Elizabeth may not have actively sought to undermine patriarchal authority and willingly conformed to her gender role, the poetry of the last two decades of her reign and the ways in which empowered marriageable women are represented, addressed, and how they exercise their agency indicate an increased emphasis of the importance of marriage and procreation. Sidney and Spenser's works

provide examples of both negative and positive figures of female empowerment, as well as strategies for resolving the tension such figures arouse. Through marriage and the successful conclusion of courtships, Spenser's women are empowered until married, a stage during which they can use their agency to seek out husbands, and then discard it once they have found them.

This project looks at the figure of Elizabeth as more than a Queen. As a woman, she crafted self-representations that validated and affirmed patriarchal gender norms in both public and private documents. She used the customs of courtship to provide security for England, but she also, I would suggest, sought the approval of her councilors in order to bolster her self-worth. After she became too old to be considered a viable marriage candidate, she attempted to hold on to said approval by remaining within the patriarchal framework, but could not entirely prevent the tension and anxieties, some fueled by her lack of an heir and her impending death, that beset the country in the last two decades of her reign. As her subjects grappled with these anxieties, authors such as Sidney and Spenser provided examples of how to interact with empowered women, and justification for male subjugation to a Virgin Queen.

The Inviolable Elizabeth

Elizabeth Tudor's accession to the English throne in 1558 as queen regnant was by no means unprecedented. Isabella, the Queen of Spain, was ruler in her own right of Castile, a region independent of the kingdom of Spain (1474-1504). In England Matilda, daughter of Henry I, was Queen for a few short months in 1141. More recently, Elizabeth's own sister, Mary I, inherited the crown as a single woman in 1553. Susan Doran, among others, contends that Elizabeth's assumption of the crown was thus met with relatively little resistance rooted in concern about the limitations of her gender, despite the patriarchal hierarchy of early modern English culture. Just as a father ruled his household, so too was a king said to rule his kingdom; a single Queen upon the throne, while contradictory, appears to have raised little concern initially, perhaps because Elizabeth was expected to marry.

Suitors had begun pressing their suits for her hand even before her sister Mary's death, including Mary's own husband Philip, King of Spain. Far more pressing were the objections, Catholic and otherwise, to a Protestant Queen whom the Pope had declared illegitimate and a heretic, the usurper of a crown which he contended belonged by rights to Mary Queen of Scots. Elizabeth's adherence to the gender role prescribed to her, that of the maiden actively seeking a husband, reassured her councilors that the gendered hierarchy of Elizabethan society would be restored upon her marriage and the production of an heir for the succession.

Elizabeth would engage in many courtships, official and unofficial, during the first three decades of her reign, with every appearance of enjoyment. Numerous

accounts from the foreign ambassadors stationed at her court, as well as from her own courtiers and ladies in waiting, illustrate that Elizabeth used courtship as a means of entertainment, but she also brilliantly used the lure of her royal hand in marriage to form international royal alliances, facilitate trade, and manipulate political crises to England's advantage. Many would argue that as she kept England relatively neutral from the wars of the continent and enabled English trade to prosper, her reign was largely successful. However, others would argue that her failure to marry and provide the country with strong male leadership, as well as to secure the survival of the Tudor dynasty, amounts to her failure as both a woman and a Queen.

Literary scholarship of the figure of Elizabeth has shifted to gender as an analytical tool in the last thirty years, as scholarly discourse began to examine in depth the difficulties Elizabeth faced as a single Queen in patriarchal sixteenth century England. Stephen Greenblatt's work in the 1980s, suggesting that identity is constructed according to a set of culturally accepted standards, set the stage, so to speak, for new interpretations of the figure(s) of Elizabeth and her cult of virginity as a product of the social, political, and cultural forces at play. Current scholarly opinion would generally seem to agree that Elizabeth's adherence to her gender and the role of courting maiden was a political strategy and contrived to buy time and secure English prosperity.

Susan Frye asserts that Elizabeth used her chastity as the means by which she "challenge[d] patriarchal definitions of the feminine" (Frye 7), to strategize her later self-representations in order to justify her authority. Yet while she certainly used the

power invested in the figure of the maiden to stabilize and extend her own authority as single Queen in a patriarchal culture, I hesitate to infer from her self-representations that she consciously sought to challenge and/or overturn patriarchal gender expectations. I argue that Elizabeth Tudor largely worked within those patriarchal confines to shape both her public and private feminine personas. An examination of Elizabeth's own body of textual work both private and public, as well as several portraits commissioned in her name spanning from her early teens to the end of her reign, demonstrates that she utilized the social expectations of her gender and social standing as rhetorical tools. By embracing the socially prescribed role of chaste daughter, she secured her questionable legitimacy, and by later emphasizing her chastity, she was able to embark upon courtships that proved politically expedient. Her later representation of "frozen" or "static" chastity was an attempt to remain to some degree a woman to keep that feminine self alive and viable, while increasingly playing the part of the prince and embracing her masculine, royal self.

But neither, I would suggest, does Elizabeth reject her female self and its part in shaping her identity. Her early representations as an ideal and virtuous royal daughter and maiden would suggest that from an early age Elizabeth strove to construct a public *and* private identity that was in keeping with the gender expectations of patriarchal England. The social customs of courtship granted Elizabeth agency that validated her self-identity as a woman, but as a married Queen were impossible to wield. Current scholarship on the whole seems to overlook considering the figure of Elizabeth the woman, whose social and perhaps self-worth hinged on her

adherence to the role prescribed for her (Frye 98, 100). By playing the part of the dutiful and virtuous daughter, and later honorable and chaste woman worthy to be pursued and courted for marriage, Elizabeth would seem to have been driven to construct a self that was a legitimate and worthy heir and daughter to her father, King Henry VIII. While we cannot know Elizabeth's true intent when it came to marriage, her behavior would suggest that she seriously considered it at times. How, then, can we reconcile the woman who proclaimed a desire to live and die a virgin with the coquettish maiden Queen with countless suitors? Was courtship just a means of securing power and agency, or was it something more? Was Elizabeth able to establish a rule with "one mistress...and no master" (Starkey, *Monarchy*, 79), or was she content, ultimately, to be led in part by the authoritative men in her life, her councilors?

As an extraordinarily intelligent and well-educated woman, Elizabeth's self-representation as decidedly female, virtuous, and wellborn from childhood on would suggest that her identity formation was constructed in part to overcome the controversies surrounding her legitimacy, her mother, and her position as a woman in (and out) the royal succession. I would argue that she sought to become a worthy and marriageable figure of womanhood with the intention of fitting in, rather than standing out, of patriarchal expectations in an effort to ensure both her own safety by establishing her legitimacy as a daughter of the King as well as her own happiness by pleasing that father and securing his favor.

A Tainted Birth

The Tudor dynasty reigned England from 1485 to 1603, during a period of political upheaval, religious reformation, and generations of succession anxiety. In order to survive, Elizabeth was compelled to “play” many parts as she navigated the dangers of the royal courts of first her father Henry VIII, then her brother Edward VI, and finally her sister Mary I. From birth, her position within the line of royal succession and at court was tenuous.¹ In order to assure her safety, it would have been politically expedient for her to conform to the gender expectations imposed upon high born women, even Queens, of early modern England, particularly in regards to her chastity.

Elizabeth’s birth was tainted by her father’s marital quagmires. Her legitimacy and even paternity were jeopardized by events set into motion long before her arrival. Her father, Henry VIII of England, had divorced his first wife Katherine of Aragon because of her failure to produce a male heir. His reasoning was that as he had taken or married his brother’s widow, he had violated God’s law. “Taking” your brother’s wife sexually and thus as a wife, according to Leviticus, will result in a barren union, as 18:16 states that: “thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of your brother’s wife; it is thy brother’s nakedness” (Leviticus). To “uncover the nakedness of your brother’s wife” is to have sex with her, a relationship that infringes on the rights and property of said brother. Leviticus 18:21 continues this line of reasoning, further providing Henry

¹ For more details about the contested legitimacy of Elizabeth Tudor, see David Starkey’s *Elizabeth: The Struggle for the Throne*, particularly chapters 3, 4, 5, and 16. Starkey deftly examines the familial, religious, political, and gender contexts which played a role in shaping the woman, and monarch, that Elizabeth became.

with just cause for his divorce by stating: “and if a man shall take his brother's wife, it *is* an unclean thing: he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless” (Leviticus). Henry claimed that his marriage was thus doomed to remain barren (of male offspring) as punishment for marrying his brother Arthur’s widow, Katherine of Aragon. In order to assure the succession and satisfy his passion for Anne Boleyn, a woman of his Court, Henry eventually asked the Pope for a divorce from a woman he should not have married in the first place despite the Papal dispensation excusing it. He finally declared himself head of the Church of England in 1532, after years of delays, deferments, and refusals from Rome (Weir 12). This move to invest himself with authority equivalent to that of the Pope, at least in England, allowed Henry to undo his marriage to Katherine so that he could marry Anne.

Anne gave birth to Elizabeth on September 7, 1533. Her parents had expected this first child of their union to be a son and heir to the throne. That she was a girl made her succession unlikely. Several subsequent failed pregnancies, the last of which was of a boy, demonstrated that Anne could no more provide Henry with an heir than could Katherine. Katherine died in exile, while Anne was executed for treasonous adultery with men of Henry’s inner circle, including her own brother George Boleyn, Lord Rochford (Starkey). Many argue that Anne was innocent of the charges she was convicted of, and assert that her death was the result of her failure to produce a male heir. Her mother’s conviction and execution would taint Elizabeth’s own reputation for the rest of her life. This was, I would suggest, a driving force behind Elizabeth’s

identity making, as she strove to prove that she was untouched by her mother's crimes and was not the woman her mother had been.

Rather than rejecting the patriarchal model of womanhood in shaping her feminine identity by utilizing it to subordinate her male subjects, I suggest that Elizabeth identified herself as the woman her father, brother, and people expected her to be: an intelligent Tudor princess with the benefit of a strong Humanist education and an ability to separate her two selves, the woman and the Queen, in order to craft state policies for the benefit of her country rather than just herself. Her aversion to marriage, rather than a determined move to ensure that she would not have to subjugate herself to a man, could possibly have stemmed from a desire to protect the exemplary self-identity she had constructed, to avoid the ultimate fate of her mother, a disempowered Queen and wife no longer wanted, celebrated, and pursued.

While Elizabeth's chastity was a means by which she initially adopted the social representations of her gender, her adherence to her gender role in so far as she fashioned her identity as a virtuous and chaste daughter, and later as a woman qualified to engage in honorable courtship, was a conscious move to seize one of the rare opportunities granted her sex in early modern English culture, to distance herself from the shadow of her tainted mother. As Philippa Berry notes, her manner of rule was not "intended to undermine the male hegemony of her culture" but rather to authorize her reign and her person by identifying her empowerment as a legitimate seizure of the power granted women in courtship, a move to reconcile her royal authority and masculine power with her female self (Berry 61). This female self, she

acknowledged throughout her reign, was both “weak” and “feeble,” but her male self had the “heart and stomach of a king.”

Many scholars, including Louis Adrian Montrose, Frye, and Berry contend that Elizabeth was continuously thwarted as Queen by the patriarchal culture over which she ruled, in her attempts to control the representation of her person(s) as her masculine subjects sought to use her royal image to further their own political and/or gender agendas. As Montrose points out, Elizabeth’s power to “shape her own strategies was itself shaped—at once enabled and constrained—by the existing repertoire of values, institutions, and practices specific to Elizabethan society and to Elizabeth’s position within it” (Montrose 2). Essentially, much as she sought to assert her own will and agency, her very strategies of doing so were shaped by her culture’s perceptions of the role she should play within it. Frye argues that she nonetheless succeeded to some degree in her efforts to “engage and restructure the discourses current in her culture that naturalized gender identity, particularly in regards to representations based upon her chastity” suggesting that to some degree, she was able to “restructure the discourses...based on her chastity” (Montrose 7). I would suggest that Elizabeth Tudor largely stayed within the social confines and expectations of patriarchal England, and that accounts of negotiations of her gender to maintain her authority as Queen have been somewhat overstated. My reading would seem to support the assertion that far from rejecting her female self because of its weakness and liability, she acknowledged its limitations and rendered them neutral by asserting her princely self when necessary to perform her duty as Queen Regnant.

Carole Levin and Leah Marcus, among others, examine how Elizabeth and her longstanding adherence to the role of courted maiden authorized her as a single female ruler. It effectively preserved a degree of autonomy that allowed her to simultaneously adhere to her prescribed gender role while also wielding control over the men surrounding her, a dichotomous queenship that Levin, Marcus, and others argue impacted the gender discourses of early modern England. By examining the works of William Shakespeare, in particular, they deftly demonstrate how the Queen's expansion of female gender roles influenced the construction of female characters in the literature of the age. Marcus notes that "there are remarkable correlations between the sexual multivalence of Shakespeare's heroines and an important strain in the political rhetoric of Queen Elizabeth I," that of the rhetoric of the Queen's two bodies with which Elizabeth employs masculine language to assert her princely authority as both a monarch and as an courted maiden (Marcus 137). As society grappled with a powerful Queen who both conformed to cultural expectations and at the same time extended them, representations of similarly empowered figures began to appear on the theatrical stages of London and in the literary works of members of Elizabeth's own court.

The cross dressing and 'masculine language' of such heroines as Viola from *Twelfth Night*, according to Levin, "reflect the fact that a powerful, unmarried woman ruling opened up both the possibility of expanding gender definitions and recognition of the limits of those definitions" (Levin 125-126). They demonstrate the power that is granted to women engaged in courtship, and how that power, under the cross-dressing

verisimilitude of manhood employed by Rosalind and Viola, can be seized by those who would play the role required to wield it. This can be read as a means of validating the agency and power wielded by Elizabeth as legitimate and positive examples of womanhood, because eventually they do marry and relinquish their power to their husbands. Though Rosalind plays at being the male Ganymede in *As You Like It* because of the safety and freedom such a disguise allows, she eventually dictates whom she will marry before shedding her Ganymede guise.

These characters, such as Shakespeare's Viola in *Twelfth Night*, reflect Jacques' assertion that a man [or woman] can have "many parts" during his time as a player on the stage of the world. Viola, without the protection of a male guardian, knows that as a young unmarried female she cannot enter the service of the Duke of Orsino without sullyng her chaste reputation. She decides to dress herself as a man in order to join the Duke's court as the page who acts as messenger between the Duke and the woman he is courting. Despite dressing as a man, however, Viola maintains her feminine nature, finding little enjoyment in her male disguise, such as in Act III Scene 4. The machinations of Sir Toby lead to a proposed duel between Viola's male persona Cesario and Sir Andrew, against her will. As she approaches the site where the duel is to take place, Viola cries out "pray God defend me! A little thing would/make me tell them how much I lack of as a man" (Shakespeare 465). Her cowardice and reluctance to perform as a man "for honor's sake" demonstrate that despite her manly guise, Viola is still a woman and still capable of fitting into the framework of English patriarchal culture. Her eventual discard of the persona of

Cesario and forthcoming marriage to the Duke suggests that empowered female figures are non-threatening to the social regime and capable of returning to their preferred position. Elizabeth, like Viola, can be both the chaste maiden and the empowered man without losing her femininity, and she can return to the position granted her natural female self after marriage. Figures such as Viola can be read as both a validation of temporary female empowerment and an attempt to return to the natural order as the death of Elizabeth Tudor approached and the traditional dynastic figure of King James I loomed on the horizon.

I would also suggest that just as the figure of Viola represents the new possibilities created by expanded gender definitions, Viola also reminds readers and audience members that the assumption of female authority and power, particularly that granted by the rite of courtship, is eventually lost once the choice of suitor is made. As the Duke reminds her at the end of the last scene, she is very much his to command: “Cesario, Come/For so you shall be, while you are a man/But when in other habits you are seen/Orsino's mistress and his fancy's queen.” When not disguised as Cesario “but when in other habits you are seen,” he reminds her, “Orsino’s mistress and his fancy’s queen” she is to be. Even though she is still disguised as the man Cesario, Duke Orsino takes on the role of the man in the relationship now that Viola has made her choice. He tells her her/him to “come,” because despite her manly appearance, he now holds the upper hand.

Just as Jacques asserts in *As You Like It* Act II Scene 7:

All the world's a stage
And all the men and women merely players;

They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts (Shakespeare 419).

The “parts” available for women to play expand when they take on masculine identities and/or dress. These female characters play many “parts” under the guise of men in order to ensure their autonomy and safety, but can and do also effectively “exit” that part and return to their natural selves. Furthermore, such examples seem to establish that not only does this return to the patriarchal hierarchy occur, but that is natural and the free choice of the women in question, particularly as Viola, still in drag, follows her Duke offstage as he bade her without comment.

If early modern women can play “many parts,” each with their own “exits and entrances” upon the world’s stage, then Elizabeth’s assumed authority early in her reign by playing the role of maiden to solidify her authority and agency. As I will demonstrate, the first decades of her reign saw her engage in multiple courtships, usually conducted with great political savvy to the advantage of Protestant England. These courtships could be read as her attempt to play the role expected of her, that of the orphaned daughter seeking a husband capable of assuming the reins of state. They could also reinforce the commonly held assumption that once married, she would restore the patriarchal hierarchy of the court and the first household of England. As she aged, however, and marriage became a dim prospect, the maiden gradually became a figure with “the heart and stomach of a king.”

Elizabeth, as a woman in a position of power who had to display said power publically, was hindered by the public expectations of women’s roles. Anthony Fletcher asserts that the institution of patriarchy was based upon the twin pillars of

“the subordination required of women as punishment for Eve’s sin...and an understanding of bodies....in terms of relative strength and weakness” (Fletcher xvii). In other words, Eve’s fall marked women as disobedient and weak in mind as well as in body. In a society in which men were traditionally placed at the top of the hierarchy, a woman in charge was an obvious contradiction. However, I suggest that Elizabeth Tudor was able to utilize the traditional gender expectations foisted upon her by declaring herself to have two bodies, a physical female body and a kingly body. In doing so, she was able to be a woman and fill the role expected of her, and which she, I would argue, expected of herself, without jeopardizing her own claim to the throne. Her international courtships and political strategizing, as well as the flirtations and courtships in her own English court, demonstrate that she found a way to perform her duty as a prince while still embracing and utilizing the socially endorsed self representation of womanhood she constructed herself to fit, so long as she stopped short of marriage.

Emily Bartels argues that Elizabeth I was the only female of early modern England with the ability to *construct*, rather than just *fill*, her role in society, as “in this period, self-making is an activity of the public sphere” and as such, a man’s domain (Bartels 418). Bartels goes on to assert that Elizabeth’s decision to bemoan her female gender in the numerous reiterations of the rhetoric of the dual bodies of the Queen, was in some ways disempowering to other women, and other women writers, of the period (Bartels 418). She also argues that Elizabeth constructed her authority based upon identification with patriarchal beliefs in a move to usurp the power granted to

women and to justify her extension of it despite its intrusion on male privilege. I would agree that she knew her English male audience and made a conscious decision to use the masculine and divinely sanctioned power bestowed upon her by her crown, as well as the chastity assigned and expected of her gender and so valued by patriarchy, in order to hold onto her tenuous position as Queen. But I would also suggest that she also did so because she identified herself as a woman well suited to fill that role.

Foreshadowing Elizabeth's Womanhood

Elizabeth's mother provided her with a model of womanhood that failed to follow the conventions expected of women, and it served to remind Elizabeth of the consequences of straying too far from representations of chastity expected of her by her father and later her subjects. Ann Boleyn's career also, however, showed that courtship was one social custom in which a woman was granted some degree of agency to decide her own fate and pursue her own desire, all the while representing herself as compliant to a patriarchal discourse.

Before the age of three, Elizabeth had lost her mother to the executioner's sword; this example of the fate of a woman whom many described as "stained in her reputation" (Weir 9-10) likely haunted Elizabeth for the rest of her life. Some speculate that Henry grew tired of Anne and sought a means of ridding himself of her, as Anne failed to produce a male heir much like her predecessor Katherine of Aragon. David Starkey makes a direct connection between Anne's last miscarriage of what "seemed to be a male child which she had not borne three and a half months" (Starkey

553) in January of 1536 and her downfall. Her arrest came a few months later in May 1536, and she was shortly thereafter executed “in the French manner” (Starkey 558) by sword. The maiden who so efficiently used the ritual of courtship to reach the pinnacle of the English Court, many have argued, was unable to maintain the transition from mistress to wife.

Ann had dragged her courtship out for seven long years, refusing to succumb without marriage as Henry wrestled with the courts to win a divorce from his first wife. During her courtship, Anne played the part of the powerful yet sexually aloof mistress until the king was free to marry her. But after marrying the King, she failed to act, at times, as was expected of a wife rather than a mistress. Alison Weir contends that despite her intelligence, Anne had “found it difficult, if not impossible, to make the transition from a mistress with the upper hand to a compliant and deferential wife...which the King...expected of her” (Weir 11-12). Weir quotes the Spanish Ambassador Chapuys’ observation that “when the Lady wants something, there is no one who dares contradict her, not even the King himself, because when he does not want to do what she wishes, she behaves like someone in a frenzy” (Weir 11-12). Anne’s behavior fell far short of the behavioral expectations dictated in contemporary conduct books.

Sixteen century conduct books, as well as the urgings of the clergy, endorsed patriarchal gender norms of female subordination and thus provided women with the rules by which to fashion their identities as English daughters and wives. Tim Stretton looks to court records to discern that sixteenth century commentators “repeatedly

directed women to be passive [and that] good wives were intended to remain silent and modest and obey their husbands, as they had obeyed their fathers” (Stretton 10). *The Education of a Christian Woman*, written by Mary I’s tutor Juan Luis Vives, outlines the roles women of varying stations were expected to fulfill, and the habits and behaviors expected of them; through education, girls can be taught to be “sober and chaste...[which are] the rules of life.” Essentially, women were expected to be raised to be good wives who used their intelligence to ensure the comfort of those in their households and to live frugally to protect the assets of their husbands. Although a woman who by many accounts was vastly intelligent and cultured, Anne may have thwarted the role expected of her as Henry’s wife. Sent to France at a young age to serve at the French court which was a “byword for promiscuity” (Weir, *The Lady*, 82), Anne, some such as Weir have argued, did not have the upbringing that Vives asserted was essential to produce daughters who would make obedient wives who embraced the model of marital chastity, to be silent and honorable.

Ilona Bell describes a married woman’s chastity as a “social code that insists ‘the ornament of a woman is silence’” (Bell 34). She should remember her subjugated role and refrain from arguing with her husband, as it is, according to Vives, “a beautiful and outstanding virtue in a woman to control the tongue...to not allow herself to be carried away by violent emotions” (Vives 219). Despite her efforts to portray herself as virtuous, Anne had by various accounts exhibited “strident tantrums” and in doing so had “not been a meek and submissive wife” (Weir 82). A wife was expected to be subservient and docile, to maintain her silence and, as Henry

famously is said to have told her to ignore his flirtations and relationships with other women, as it was her duty to “be silent, as her betters had before her” (Starkey, *Elizabeth*, 21). Desperate to regain his attention, she “sealed her fate,” as Starkey asserts, by “flaunting her sexuality [which] at the beginning of their relationship...had driven him into her arms with jealous lust [but then] provided the evidence that was used to bring her down on charges of multiple adultery and incest” (Starkey 22). Anne was executed for treason in 1536, as cheating on the King was considered treason, as a wandering wife could foist a bastard son upon the country and disrupt the royal succession.

Catholic writers such as the author of the *Spanish Chronicle* claimed that Anne was an unchaste woman and had had a relationship with her childhood friend Thomas Wyatt prior to her marriage to the King. As Alison Weir notes, however, “the obvious flaws and discrepancies in these stories, and the fact that they only appear in partisan Catholic sources and are...highly suspect” (Weir, *The Lady*, 168-170). Catholics throughout the country perceived Elizabeth as a bastard, an illegitimate offspring resulting from the King’s adulterous affair with a harlot, and the affidavits of numerous servants and courtiers recounted repeated adultery. Further, Anne was also accused and convicted of seducing her brother George Boleyn, their incestuous liaisons uncovered by George’s wife Jane (Weir, *The Lady*, 88). These instances of adultery were tied by her accusers to her multiple failed pregnancies after the birth of Elizabeth; the fetuses were said to have not been fathered by King Henry (Weir, *The Lady*, 193). Many historians and biographers in recent years have maintained that it is

highly unlikely that Anne was guilty of adultery, let alone incest. The Queen was rarely left alone, and female servants attended her even while she slept. Weir and Starkey assert, as do others, that Anne was probably innocent, discarded once it had been demonstrated that she could not give the King the male heir he craved². Whether or not Anne was adulterous, it's likely that the public flaunting of her sexuality was what sealed her fate, as well as her sharp tongue that overstepped the role of a wife. If a wife was supposed to be a reflection of her husband, Anne fell short of the image of patriarchal manhood that Henry VIII wanted to project.

Thus Anne served as an example of a woman who enjoyed autonomy and power while she engaged in socially endorsed courtship, but who failed to successfully make the transition to meek and subservient wife. So long as she had played the coquette before marriage, she was lavished with attention, gifts, praise, and power from her father and uncle as well as the King. But once she married Henry, she was expected to acquiesce and become a wife who devoted her intelligence and energies to the comfort of her husband and the management of his household. This example of a wife and Queen who failed to secure the succession could have served as a factor in Elizabeth's own avoidance of marriage.

² See Weir, *The Lady in the Tower: The Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 2010. See Particularly chapters 1-5, in which she recounts the courtship and the factors that played a role in the downfall of Queen Anne. Chapter 9 provides a detailed account of Anne's alleged affairs and trial.

Elizabeth's Self-Representation as a Virtuous and Learned Daughter

Heeding the example set by her mother, Elizabeth spent her formative years crafting an identity that followed the rules of Tudor England in order to both find favor with her royal father and survive the politics of his court. By emulating the successful courtship of her mother, she nonetheless stopped shy of repeating the mistakes and loss of power she saw demonstrated by both her mother and later her sister Mary I. Elizabeth's early self-representations revolved around crafting an identity that met with society's approval and that overcame the taint of her mother to establish Elizabeth's royal legitimacy (Montrose 14). By the age of twelve, she had learned the importance of representing herself as a dutiful daughter to a father known for his monstrous rages and deadly revenge. She also, however, attempted to make the case for a place for the intellectual freedom of women, and her gift to her father in 1545 demonstrates that women can be intelligent and yet still follow the social conventions for women in their varying roles, which her mother had failed to do.

For a private New Year's gift to father in 1545, Elizabeth translated her stepmother Queen Katherine Parr's *Prayers* (1545), into French, Italian, and Latin. In her prefatory epistle, she tells her father that she is:

bound unto [him] as lord by the law of royal authority, as lord and father by the law of nature, and as greatest lord and matchless and most benevolent father by the divine law, and by all laws and duties I am bound unto your majesty in various and manifold ways (Tudor 9).

In this gesture of filial homage to her father, Elizabeth makes clear that she is aware of the social expectations for her gender that she remain obedient to her father.

Regardless of class or social station, her identity was irrevocably tied to her relationship to her father and her socially prescribed role of subjugation.

Though she adopts this role of subservience to her father because she presumably believes it to be divinely ordained and natural, later in the epistle she also makes a case for the intellectual capabilities of women, reasoning that as tribute:

I might offer to your greatness the most excellent tribute that my capacity and diligence could discover. In the which I only fear lest slight and unfinished studies and childish ripeness of mind diminish the praise of this undertaking and the commendation which accomplished talents draw from a most divine subject (Tudor 9).

Queen Katherine's talents she notes are most "accomplished" and "draw from a most divine subject." Katherine herself is judged qualified to produce such work that is both spiritual and worthy of the king. Elizabeth, however, makes note that her own skills in translating the Queen's work may not be of the same quality as that of her stepmother. Her skills, however, are lacking not because she is female but because of the shortcomings of her "capacity" as she is yet a child. The "childish ripeness of her mind" and "slight and unfinished studies" of her tutelage are both unfinished.

Common public opinion held that women were weak and inferior, but humanists such as Sir Thomas More and Juan Luis Vives asserted that women were as intellectually capable of men, and that learning was a means of harness their intellectual capabilities in order to shape them to better adhere to the gender roles they were expected to fulfill. Vives notes in his conduct manual that minds should be cultivated in order to render them "sober and chaste [in order to] make them better" regardless of gender (Vives 58). Katherine Parr, Henry's sixth wife, was a model of

female virtue and pious learning, a woman who was able to keep her husband pleased by playing the role of subservient wife and thus keeping her head.

Katherine was the daughter of minor English gentry, and her father Thomas Parr served as a courtier of both Henry VII and Henry VIII. Catherine was born in 1512, and named after her godmother Queen Katherine of Aragon.³ Starkey notes that although both were highly intelligent, Katherine was likely more educated than Anne in the humanist sense endorsed by More and Vives; Vives' conduct manual had, after all, been dedicated to her godmother, and he served as tutor to Katherine's daughter the Princess Mary. While Katherine had grown up cultivating her mind in order to be "sober and chaste" and an asset to her husband with a smattering of lessons in courtly behavior, Anne had been sent to the court of France where education for women focused on cultivating the social graces and the art of seduction. Whether it was this difference in their educational curriculums or merely their own particularly personalities, Katherine was able to conduct herself, as Vives advocates, as a "sober and chaste" wife who acted "with wisdom and discretion" as Queen (Starkey, *Six Wives*, 710). It seems probable that Elizabeth, heeding the ill fated example set by her mother's behavior, looked to Katherine as an example of successful, learned womanhood.

Elizabeth's praise of her step mother's work in the dedicatory epistle to the *Prayers* (1545) as "so pious, and by the pious exertion and great diligence of a most

³ Starkey, David. *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII*. 2003. See particularly the section entitled "Catherine Parr," in which Starkey presents a biography of Parr as well as the discourses in play from her childhood to her years as Henry VIII's sixth Queen.

illustrious queen,” presents the *Prayers* as an example of how a woman can be modest and yet pious and learned at the same time. Further, the *Prayers*, as she tells her father in the dedicatory epistle, will serve to incite her to “grow in knowledge and fear of God and thus devote myself to him more religiously and respect your majesty more dutifully” (Tudor 10). Elizabeth’s claim that the fruit of her stepmother’s learning will serve as an example of how to live piously as well as “respect [his] majesty more dutifully” illustrates her willingness to use her intellect and learning in order to behave as a subservient daughter and subject should. The *Prayers*, then, demonstrate that Katherine the Queen is a worthy woman and example of feminine learning for Elizabeth to emulate. Elizabeth’s deliberate praise of the Queen, and her assertion that she will follow the good example before her in order to further conform to the role expected of her, suggests that she was aware of the political expediency in identifying with a successful example of Queenly virtues.

Elizabeth goes on to tell her father that her own worthy translating work of the Queen’s *Prayers* into other languages “deserves indulgence on account of ignorance, youth, short time of study, and goodwill” (Tudor 10). If there are errors, that is not because she is a woman but because she is young, and that in time she will, like Queen Katherine, be a credit to her father by utilizing the skills and virtues she had inherited from him. She declares herself to be “indebted to [him] not as an imitator of [his] virtues but indeed as an inheritor of them” (Tudor 10). As an inheritor of her father’s intelligence, she lays claim to her royal inheritance and position in the line of succession. Elizabeth appears to adhere to Vives’ admonition that daughters should

seek to hone their inherited intelligence and make themselves a credit to their fathers and later their husbands. Even though she is female, Elizabeth seems to suggest at this moment that the proper sort of education and training as the Queen can provide, as outlined by Vives to instill sober and chaste behavior, can make her a worthy and legitimate daughter of her father.

The epistle makes explicit mention of her gender only once in the dedication: “To the most illustrious and most mighty King Henry the Eighth [from]...Elizabeth, his majesty’s most humble daughter” (Tudor 9). I would argue that this overt gender identification, rather than demonstrating that she holds herself aloof from the patriarchal role cast for her, illustrates that she believed it was permissible for women to be educated so long as they held to those socially prescribed roles. As we have seen, Vives advocated for the education of women, as did Sir Thomas More, arguing that they possessed minds as capable as men and that they should be trained to use them. As Henry’s daughter, she is worthy of and capable of benefiting from a humanist education typically granted largely to high born men, and has demonstrated that she can be educated and a subservient daughter at the same time.

Her dedication is modest, as was expected of women, and makes no claims of superiority. She states that her learning and skill in translating the Queen’s text were made possible by the virtues that she inherited from him, and she remains, throughout, subservient to his will and his “most humble daughter” (Tudor 10). As her dedicatory epistle to the *Prayers* suggests, Elizabeth adhered to the role of subservient daughter and thus endorsed patriarchal values that formed the foundation of English society.

A pair of companion portraits of Prince Edward and the fourteen year old Elizabeth further demonstrates her maidenly virtues as well as her intellectual prowess. The 1546-47 portraits attributed to William Scrots make the case for what Montrose calls the melding of both “the active and the contemplative lives with...princely magnificence” (Montrose 28). Essentially, these paintings demonstrate that both royal progeny can emulate their father’s greatness, even if one of them happens to be female.

Although it has been speculated that the portraits were commissioned by Henry VIII, Scrots’ royal patron (Scott 61), a lack of definitive evidence leaves room for speculation as to the ordering of the scenes and their subjects. Though for other paintings such as the anonymously painted mural *The Family of Henry VIII* (c. 1543-1547), it seems, according to Montrose, that Henry paid particular attention to order the scene for dynastic propagandistic purposes. Henry is carefully positioned in the center, with Prince Edward on his right and the mother of his only son, the deceased Jane Seymour, on his left. Montrose asserts that in this portrait, “masculine authority, legitimacy, and succession are gloriously affirmed under the canopy of state; and the flanking figures of Mary and Elizabeth are oriented toward [it]....and that the King was driven by an urgent need to realize such ideas” (Montrose 26). Henry, while making a clear distinction between his male and female children and their priority in the succession, includes his daughters as part of the future of the Tudor dynasty. They are simultaneously both declared legitimate and part of his family, and thus under his masculine authority as not only their king but their father as well. Though Elizabeth

and her sister Mary are included in the portrait, they are placed on either side of the King and Queen at some distance from the future of the dynasty that Edward represents. Thus, it seems evident that when Henry did commission portraits of his family, he did so with a specific purpose in mind, to “celebrate masculine succession as the triumphant legitimization and fruition of Henry’s kingship” (Montrose 26). One could argue, however, that the Scots portrait of Elizabeth lacked such dynastic intent. Indeed, far from the marginalized position she inhabited in *The Family of Henry VIII*, Elizabeth is presented not only as the daughter of the King but as a virtuous and learned lady in her own right outside of the direct male line of descent. This suggests that she possibly played a role in determining how she would be represented in the portrait, furthering her own agenda while at the same time adhering to that of her father. One could argue that their agendas are one and the same, as it would have been in Henry’s best interest to affirm Elizabeth’s claims of parentage. With his Act of Succession 1543, Henry had restored both Mary and Elizabeth to the line of the succession, though both of his daughters were still considered illegitimate. This public and legal acknowledgement that he was indeed her father meant that Elizabeth, as his daughter, was a reflection of Henry himself, and a portrait portraying Elizabeth as a learned and virtuous lady would reflect well on them both and validate Elizabeth’s inclusion in the succession.

Another consideration to take into account when considering intent in the composition of Elizabeth’s portrait is that Scots was but one of the artists in Henry’s service. Master John had been under royal patronage in 1544-1545, and had been

commissioned by Henry to paint both his sixth wife, Katherine Parr, and his daughter Mary. Both of these portraits depict women similarly posed with their hands clasped together in the front. Although more richly dressed than Elizabeth in her portrait, neither Katherine nor Mary hold a book, and there is no staging in the background to suggest the learning alluded to in Elizabeth's Scots portrait.

In her Scots portrait, Elizabeth is dressed in rich fabrics, but her gown is relatively simple in design. She wears the typical jewelry and accoutrements of a wealthy, even royal, lady, but her hair is simply arranged without braids or crimping and concealed under a hood. Her restraint in appearance suggests an attempt to portray her as intelligent, sober, and chaste, her image carefully crafted to demonstrate her piety and worthiness. In the background, a Bible rests open on a lectern, and in her hand she holds a small book. Holding her place in the book with her finger, she supplements the typical use of books as props by demonstrating that she actually *reads* and is worthy of the virtue such a demonstration of learning bestows. The Bible demonstrates her piety and the open book her learning. Holding or gesturing towards a sacred book such as the Bible was a means by which educated men, according to Montrose, demonstrated both their piety and their learning; in her portrait, Elizabeth appropriates "a measure of the gendered piety, learning, and authority" employed by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (Montrose 29). Elizabeth's portrait employs a motif of the sixteenth century more commonly utilized by learned men, but as she demonstrates in her epistle, such learning can also be the mark of a virtuous, pious daughter.

Montrose asserts that the paired portraits are “strongly gender-coded” and that not only does the Scots portrait of Elizabeth “emphasize maidenly modesty, piety, and restraint,” it also demonstrates the “intellectual accomplishment and moral authority that a Christian humanist education made possible for the daughter of a king” (Montrose 32). So in this portrait, Elizabeth is presented as both a woman who adheres to her gender role and uses her intellect to do so in a way which reflects well on her father, from whom she inherited her intellectual prowess. A woman, then, can be modest and follow social gender norms while at the same time take advantage of the educational opportunities granted to her, opportunities which she seized as a means of boldly asserting “that her own piety and learning manifest her royal legitimacy” (Montrose 33). Elizabeth’s careful crafting of her self-representations in both the epistle to the *Prayers* and her image in the Scots portrait demonstrates that she sought to present herself as a virtuous daughter and sister to ensure her survival by appearing both a good daughter and worthy subject.

The King’s Protestant Sister

After her father’s death, she continued to construct her identity based upon her role as royal daughter subservient to the will of the men around her. During Edward VI’s reign, she maintained a chaste and virtuous demeanor, emphasizing her Protestant learning and emulating the Queen her stepmother with whom she lived for a period of time. A woman’s chastity was the basis for her honor (Bell 33), and Elizabeth guarded hers zealously, representing herself as a chaste and thus honorable young woman vested in preserving the conventions and customs of her culture. As she approached

adulthood, however, she became a viable candidate for courtship and marriage and was vulnerable to men interested in marrying the second in line to the throne. In maintaining the guise of her chastity and proclaiming her virtue in the wake of scandal, Elizabeth tried to ensure that she would continue to be perceived as a valuable commodity to her brother Edward VI and his Privy Council and later as a viable contender for marriage and the English throne.

As a young woman, Elizabeth was expected to be passive, silent, and subservient; however, in the marriage market, social custom granted her a degree of agency in her courtships, provided the Privy Council granted permission as outlined by her father Henry VIII's will (Starkey 65). The will stipulated that Mary and Elizabeth as his issue had legal rights to the throne after Edward:

the said imperial crown and all other the premises shall wholly remain and come to our said daughter Mary and the heirs of her body lawfully begotten... We will that, after our decease, and for default of issue of ... our daughter Mary, the said imperial crown and other the premises shall wholly remain and come to our said daughter Elizabeth and to the heirs of her body lawfully begotten (Tudor Will).

With the claim to the throne, however, came conditions that limited the young women's freedom to follow social custom and to conduct their courtships and consent to marriage as empowered, wellborn women. Henry added that his daughters' potential imperial inheritance was dependent upon the following condition: that they obtained the approval of their choice of suitor from the Privy Council of their brother Edward:

upon condition that our said daughter Mary [and Elizabeth], after our decease, shall not marry nor take any person to her husband without the assent and consent of the privy councilors (Tudor Will).

Orphaned children were typically free to choose their own partners upon a father's death, and English law dictated that "marriage is contingent on the woman's and the man's freely given assent" (Bell 34). Thus while she couldn't marry without the approval of the Privy Council, neither could she be compelled to marry without her acquiescence. She could still as any maiden engage in courtly flirtations so long as she adhered to the socially accepted role of a young, unmarried woman and stayed clear of any scandal that would besmirch her chastity and public image.

Bell describes early modern courtship as a means by which both men and women of all social classes could forge alliances and make economically viable decisions to preserve the social order (Bell 40). Marriageable women were "encouraged to entertain a number of suitors" (Bell 52) because courtship granted them the opportunity to test compatibility and enter into a marriage of their choice. As the king's sister, she was a highly desirable woman and typically viewed at her brother Edward VI's court as a chaste and proper woman because she represented herself as such (Starkey, *Elizabeth*, 83).

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century encouraged a break from the pomp and circumstance of the Catholic faith, a break which extended to appearance and lifestyle. She kept her dress modest and plain, preferring as her tutor Ascham declared, "simple elegance to show and splendor, so despising the outward adorning of plaiting the hair and wearing gold" (Starkey, *Elizabeth*, 83). She adopted a

more “virtuous example,” according to her tutor’s friend John Aylmer, of “maidenly apparel” (Starkey, *Elizabeth*, 83), much like the uncomplicated dress of rich fabric and relatively restrained jewels of the Scots portrait. Ascham praises her preferences for plain dress, as he describes in one of his many letters, by stating that “with respect to personal decoration she greatly prefers simple elegance to show and splendor, so despising the outward adorning of plaiting the hair and wearing of gold” (Starkey, *Elizabeth*, 83). Edward called her his “sweet sister temperance...praising her taste and lifestyle” as the hallmarks of a modest and virtuous Protestant maiden in comparison to their sister Mary’s Catholic and old fashioned love of display and opulence, outward symbols of her stubborn refusal to abandon her faith (Starkey, *Elizabeth*, 85). Elizabeth’s move to the household of the Queen Dowager, Katherine Parr, also signaled her acquiescence to the role her King and brother had cast for her, the Protestant maiden pursuing a humanist education in the chaperoned household of her virtuous stepmother.

Elizabeth’s chastity, and thus her social worth, were tested while living in her stepmother Katherine Parr’s household. At Edward’s court it was rumored that prior to his marriage to the widowed Queen, Seymour had attempted to court and marry Elizabeth without the consent of the King and his Protector, Seymour’s elder brother and the de facto ruler of the kingdom during Edward’s minority.⁴ Rumors of bedroom frolics while both lived under the same roof, interrupted by Seymour’s pregnant wife

⁴ Loades, David. *Elizabeth I: A life*. See chapter 4, “The King’s Sister,” for a thorough examination of Seymour’s investigation of Elizabeth’s inheritance via questioning of her servants, their flirtations, and the subsequent investigation of said courtship upon Seymour’s arrest for treason.

Katharine Parr, and illicit sexual relations and secret pregnancies stained Elizabeth's reputation and jeopardized not only her marriage prospects but her life, for a royal heir to marry without consent was treason. These rumors at court, and indeed across the country, were met with her stalwart protestation of innocence and a show of affronted maidenly modesty.⁵ Elizabeth, as a woman deeply invested in portraying herself as a virtuous and chaste woman, perhaps recognized the danger of rumors that tarnished her reputation and called into question her claim to the throne and moved to defend herself.

Elizabeth protested these stains upon her virtue by writing to the Lord Protector and declaring herself innocent and her chastity unbesmirched. In a letter dated January 28, 1549, she justifies her earlier flirtations with Seymour as part of a valid, honorable courtship, as they occurred before his marriage to her stepmother. Furthermore, the Lord Admiral (Seymour) was, as Elizabeth's servant had told her, "inquiring whether [her] patent were sealed or no...and what was spent in [her] house" (Tudor 23). The sexual overtones of Seymour seeking to determine if Elizabeth remained in possession of the "sealed patent" of virginity and if she had engaged in any illicit sexual behavior or "spending" in her household suggests that his was a legitimate suit. This suggests that by seeking to determine if she was a chaste woman, Seymour was investigating whether or not she was a viable candidate for wife. As courtship was a common practice and such considerations were commonplace,

⁵ See Starkey's *Elizabeth: The Struggle for the Throne*, particularly chapter 13 Hatfield: Further Education.

Elizabeth didn't feel she had acted dishonorably, and her display of indignant irritation at rumors to the contrary further asserted her standing as a chaste maiden.

Despite whatever plots Seymour was attempting to instigate by marrying the King's sister in secret, Elizabeth had remained a loyal subject of the King and by extension of the Lord Protector as well. In her letter, she makes it clear that she would not have acquiesced to the proposed marriage without "the consent of the king's majesty, your Grace's, and the Council's" (Tudor 23). She ends her letter with a plea that he act to restore her tarnished reputation and chastity by squashing rumors that she is "in the Tower and with child by [her] Lord Admiral" having been impregnated by the Admiral after his marriage (Tudor 24). This letter, then, illustrates that she wishes to represent herself as a virtuous Protestant maiden who conforms to social gender norms, and that she has no wish to be ostracized for being perceived as unchaste. It also suggests that she recognized her place in patriarchal England. In the wake of the scandal, her emphasis that she would never consider marriage with anyone without the consent of both the king and the Privy Council demonstrates her awareness of the importance of casting the right image by abiding by her father's will and maintaining the chastity on which her honor and value rested.

Elizabeth's ill-fated relationship with Thomas Seymour taught her that clandestine courtships, however well intentioned and socially acceptable, were dangerous for her so long as plotters endeavored to commit treasonous acts in her name; to surrender her chastity would be to lose her honor and become complicit in the conspiracy against the king. By refusing to marry without her brother or his

Council's consent, Elizabeth was using the agency granted by courtship to keep herself clear of conspiracy and danger. Later, after Edward's death, many English noblemen were unhappy with Mary's marriage to the King of Spain, Phillip II. Plots to overthrow Catholic Mary and put the Protestant Elizabeth on the throne in her place further jeopardized Elizabeth's survival. One such plot, the 1555 Dudley conspiracy which sought to depose Mary and wed Elizabeth to a descendent of Edward IV, Edward Courtenay, would have placed Elizabeth upon the throne as a Protestant ruler. Courtenay's planned use of her name and position as heir to the throne was enough to implicate her, despite her protests that she had not consented to the marriage. Anna Whitelock describes Elizabeth's subsequent house arrest. Her servants were questioned, but she was eventually cleared of treason at the urging of Mary's husband King Phillip II of Spain (Whitelock 191). Thus, to rid herself of the threat of a viable Protestant heir to the throne and the plots concocted around her sister, Mary devised a scheme to get Elizabeth out of the country- a foreign marriage.

She was, after all, a young woman who had already engaged in courtships and was on the market as a prospective bride, and Phillip and Mary proposed Emmanuel Philibert, Prince of Piedmont and Duke of Savoy. This Catholic cousin of Phillip would have succeeded in neutralizing the Protestant threat and such a marriage would take her from England. However, the social code that granted women the right to refuse the courtship of an undesirable suitor allowed her to refuse him, as she did not want to commit to the Catholic cause and leave her native country. If Mary failed to

produce an heir, Elizabeth would ascend the throne as Queen and thus needed to stay in England to protect her interests (Whitlock 191).

Throughout Mary's reign, Elizabeth steadfastly refused to wed, even when doing so would have ensured her safety. She clung to her right to refuse the courtships of foreign princes chosen by her sister, resolved to choose her own husband and retain the power of choice granted to highborn women by virtue of their chastity. Her continued self representation and emphasis of this chaste and viable for marriage status was a means by which Elizabeth ensured her continued survival, despite the many plots seeking to draw her into danger.

Elizabeth's Queenly/Kingly Self-Representations

Elizabeth I came to the throne in 1558 after the death of her sister. Mary I, during whose five year reign the people of England experienced firsthand the pitfalls of a female ruler who, acting as her culture dictated, married and subjugated her authority to a male figure. Mary's Catholic husband had encouraged her to re-establish England as a Catholic nation and eliminate heretics from England via religious persecution. Philip II had also used his wife's treasury to fund his own wars and draw English troops into his Spanish War with France (Starkey, *Elizabeth*, 321). The plots to overthrow the monarch during Mary's reign demonstrated the instability brought to England by her foreign marriage, and the uneasiness of the patriarchal leaders of society who chose to instigate them. In an attempt to mitigate the negative precedent of her sister and fellow Queen's rule, Elizabeth set about establishing clear distinctions between her feminine and vulnerable self and her princely self.

She chose to employ the rhetoric of the “body politic of kingship,” to supplement her own female “body natural.” Rachel Weir argues that Elizabeth adapted the pre-existing theoretical concept of the King’s two bodies discussed at length by Ernest Kantorowicz⁶ to account for her mortal self, keyed for a gender socially perceived as weak and corruptible, while still laying claim to the masculine and incorruptible authority of the “body politic” bestowed upon the sovereign (Weir 9). This rhetorical strategy allowed her to make it clear to her patriarchal, masculine subjects that she was aware of the limitations of the female gender that had contributed to her sister’s decisions (such as allowing her foreign husband to direct English policy) while at the same time she claimed a masculine authority by which to utilize the power of her office. She was thus able to be a “weak and feeble woman” while at the same time have the “heart and stomach of a King, and a King of England.” While Mary I also utilized the trope to legitimize her claim as first Queen Regnant of England, she insisted that the Marriage Act between herself and Phillip follow English common law and grant the property and titles of the bride to the husband as well. Phillip, therefore, became King upon the marriage, lord and husband of not only Mary but England as well. Mary’s use of the trope, however, was short lived, as she married and moved to publicly surrender the authority of her “kingly body” to her husband as she had likewise surrendered to him her female body in marriage.

⁶ Kantorowicz, Ernst. *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*. An overview of the concept and its history.

In Elizabeth's first speech as Queen on November 20, 1558, she draws on her humanist education in theology to demonstrate her legitimate inheritance of the crown and her suitability to rule as Henry VIII's daughter. Speaking at Hatfield soon after learning of her elevation, she tells the assembled lords that she is "God's creature," who has been "ordained to obey His appointment" to assume a "body politic...[with which] to govern" (Tudor 52). This first and very early reference by Elizabeth to the doctrine of the King's two bodies suggests that this political theology is a possible basis for her seeming dismissal of the limitations of the female gender that she acknowledges numerous times during her reign. The most widely recognized example of this is of course the reference to the "weak and feeble body of a woman" she possessed at her Speech Before the Troops at Tilbury 1588. How, then, if she perceives women to be, although capable of great learning and virtue, nonetheless weak, does she justify her rule? She is the monarch and imbued with the masculine authority of the "body political," and it does not signify that she is also a woman. Though she is burdened with a weak female body, the "heart and stomach of a king" she claimed to possess in the aforementioned speech neutralizes any female inadequacies. Her physical gender is irrelevant, because God has indicated her worthiness to rule and to act as a masculine authority by calling her to do so when she survived to ascend to the throne of England. This use of the Two Bodies rhetoric allowed Elizabeth to be both a woman and a powerful ruler without overtly contradicting the patriarchal hierarchy of Elizabethan England. This enabled her, I

would suggest, to garner support of her rule after the hope of her councilors for a marriage and a strong male ruler for the country died.

It was of paramount importance that she affirm both her legitimate descent from Henry and by extension her divinely sanctioned assumption of his throne. For, as Montrose asserts, her legitimacy “was simultaneously a condition of daughterhood and of queenship” (Montrose 39). As Henry’s legitimate daughter, she could rule by the divine right of kings, her assumption of the throne endorsed by God himself. Levin reminds us that “the theory of the two bodies proved useful to some of Elizabeth’s councilors both in justifying her to foreign courts and in their own dealings with their often recalcitrant queen” (Levin 122). She needed the two bodies rhetoric to stymie objections to her gender raised in part by those who had seen firsthand the dangers that could beset a country with a woman on the throne. It enabled her masculine subjects to reconcile their positions as well; to be subjugated to a ruler who happened to be a woman, jarred the patriarchal premise of masculine superiority. This rhetorical strategy, however, failed to assure all of her subjects.

Scottish Reformer John Knox published his *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* in 1558, a pamphlet which warned against female rulers such as Mary I of England and the Dowager Queen of Scotland and mother of Mary of Scots Marie de Guise-Lorraine because it was “abominable before God is the Empire or Rule of a wicked woman” (Jansen 12). Further, Knox blames said abomination on the men who allow such women to gain their thrones in the first place. Knox asserts that it was the failure of the ‘esteemed watchmen,’ as Jansen points out,

that their countries become the prey of foreign nations. Though at the time Knox published this Mary was still on the throne, the pamphlet likely played a role in the uneasiness of England's male subjects at the time of Elizabeth's accession in late 1558. But if she had two bodies, one the kingly body politic and the other her actual female self, then the two could be conjoined in her person. But if indeed "God hath subjected Womankind to man, by the ordre of his creation" (Montrose 16), then the two bodies construct could overcome the objection of a single woman ruling over men, because by the divine right of kings that female self was also a majestic and princely male ordained to rule over men.

Cristy Beemer argues that Mary also employed the image of the dual bodied monarch in order to justify her reign as a single woman. Like Elizabeth after her, Beemer contends that Mary used the three traditional figures of spouse, mother, and maiden in order to "embody conventional roles for women in Tudor society as they fulfilled them in unconventional ways."⁷ In her speech at Whitehall on February 1, 1553, shortly after having announced her forthcoming marriage to Phillip of Spain, she refers to the rhetorical marriage and her combined masculine and feminine role in it that she entered into with England at her Coronation by promising them, "on the word of a prince" (Beemer 264) that she loves them like a mother.

Elizabeth states in her first speech to Parliament on February 10, 1559 that she is already "bound unto a husband, which is the kingdom of England" (Beemer 266). Mary had ceased to lay claim to the authority of a prince upon her marriage, while

Elizabeth forewent the generally perceived view that a woman had a natural need for a husband and family for the safety of her country perhaps because of the consequences of Mary's relinquishment. Mary thus embraced the role expected of her gender by surrendering to the guidance of her husband, but Elizabeth too also cast herself in the role of maiden and mother as well, protective of the future of her people, by allowing her female self to be overshadowed and subjugated to the princely and masculine authority of her male body.

Though Beemer asserts that Mary, like Elizabeth, used rhetoric to authorize her reign and "establish[ed] an image of female authority to reduce the fears of [her] people" (262), Mary's authority was used to quell the objections to the maiden Queen's proposed marriage with the Catholic Phillip of Spain. Fearful of the Spanish Inquisition gaining a foothold on England, as well as the prospect of Spanish wars being funded by the English treasury, her people (particularly the Protestant population) were anxious about the future. Elizabeth refers to the heirs that her potential marriage will produce to ensure the succession, and then she also states "that if it shall not probably appear to all the nobility and commons in the high court of parliament, this marriage shall be for the high benefit and commodity of the whole realm, then will I abstain from marriage while I live" (Beemer 265-266). This statement suggests that the marriage is for "the high benefit and commodity of the whole realm," rather than for her own desire. However, she immediately continues with the threats that if all do not agree, "then I will abstain from marriage while I live." During a time of political upheaval on the eve of the Wyatt rebellion, Beemer

argues that this statement “had to frighten her male audience” (Beemer 266).

Withholding the fruit of her female self with the maiden authority to choose her own husband, while also asserting the authority and power of her male self, Mary may have authorized herself as Queen but failed, I would argue, to present herself as both a caring mother figure and a strong princely authority, as she gave that authority up upon marriage in a public declaration of wifely subjugation in the Marriage Act. Nevertheless, this display of a new kind of power of female authority in a female body failed to secure the future of England and ease the minds of her people. The five short years of Mary I’s reign were beset with religious persecution, wars, rebellions, a depleted treasury, and a royal womb that remained barren. One could argue that Mary’s reign failed to satisfy her male subjects. This could have prejudiced the country against another single inheritress to the throne, casting doubt as to the ability of female rulers to reign alone. Elizabeth, then, had to prove that not only could she rule with princely authority, but she also had to rule as a caring mother who would assure the safety of her people.

Despite Elizabeth’s adapted rhetoric of the Queen’s two bodies, John Aylmer’s defense of the Queen’s solitary rule in the face of John Knox’s misogynistic rhetoric against female rulers makes it clear that her reign was a “divinely sanctioned anomaly, which was in practice to be limited and shared by a masculine political nation” (Montrose 19). Elizabeth as Queen certainly gained a degree of self-authorized power with her rhetoric; by acknowledging her feminine weakness and “body natural” while at the same time claiming a masculine “body politic,” she was able to craft a self that

at times seemed contradictory; weak yet strong, female yet male. By acknowledging the shortcomings of her female self, she was reaffirming patriarchal values and demonstrating to her councilors that she wasn't going to make the mistakes of her sister, because she could, with her masculine heart and stomach, think like a king despite being distracted by her weak female body. Mary had married despite overwhelming protest at her choice of groom, a move which could have been interpreted as the ill conceived decision of a woman ruled by her emotions. Elizabeth, who made it clear that conjoined selves would be ruled by the body politic, set herself apart from Mary and her less than successful reign.

The Maiden Queen

I would argue that Elizabeth's accession made the men of the new Queen's council nervous even though there were precedents for a Queen Regnant, and despite urging her to marry, they remained concerned about any potential unions that would couple their Queen with a foreign husband and foreign concerns. The Queen's subjects felt authorized to both plead with her to marry and to veto perspective bridegrooms should they fall short of the expectations of her male courtiers, particularly the members of her Privy Council whose authority to do so was outlined in Henry VIII's will. As I will demonstrate, Elizabeth played upon their desire for a secure succession in order to augment and emphasize her self-representation as a chaste and thus powerful virgin Queen.

The question of her marriage arose early in Elizabeth's reign, as she was the last remaining Tudor and one of the greatest matrimonial prizes in Christendom, but

from her earliest speeches as Queen, Elizabeth had made it clear that though she had mixed feelings about marriage she was prepared to do her duty as a woman and Queen. In a speech to her first Parliament in 1559 in response to a request that she marry, she states that though she preferred to “live out of the state of marriage” and die a virgin, she was yet mindful of her responsibilities as a woman to marry and reproduce (Tudor 58). She adds that she will marry, if God ever inclines her to “another kind of life,” and if she marries, that “whomever [her] chance shall be to light upon, [she] trusts that he shall be as careful...for the preservation of the realm and you as myself” (Tudor 58), essentially promising to place the welfare of the realm and her people ahead of her own desires. She makes provision for the possibility that there may not be an heir as well, assuring her Parliament that the country shall not “remain destitute of an heir that may be fit as governor” (Tudor 58), even if she failed to marry and produce an heir. But it was not until the Parliament of 1563 that the succession question received serious royal consideration and response to the entities of her councilors.

In October of 1562 Elizabeth contracted smallpox, and her council met to discuss the succession should she die, but reached no agreement. After her brush with death, the outcries for her marriage, and a settled line of succession, were brought to the forefront in the Parliament of 1563, what Mortimer Levine calls a “succession Parliament,” as the Queen was forced to discuss the prospect of designating an heir in return for much needed treasury funds (Levin 45-47).

In answer to the parliamentary petition that Elizabeth name a successor in case she was to die without issue, on January 28, 1563 she makes it clear that their request doesn't anger her, even though "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," because despite the limitations of her gender:

the princely seat and kingly throne wherein God (though unworthy) hath constituted me, maketh these two causes to seem little in mine eyes, though greivous perhaps to your ears, and boldeneth me to say somewhat in this matter, which I mean only to touch but not to presently answer (Tudor 70).

In other words, she informed Parliament that her princely authority enables her, though a woman who would ordinarily be unable to logically discuss marriage with them, to discuss the subject rationally with due consideration. She continues by making it clear that she means to "have the safety and surety of you all" as their natural "mother" (Tudor 72). But if her people are her children, what need has she of more issue? In identifying herself as the natural mother of her people, she is representing herself as a woman with both maternal and patriarchal responsibilities which have to some extent already been fulfilled. Her assurance that their petition requesting that she name a successor did not anger her, and that she "neither mislike[s] any of your requests herein, nor the great care that you seem to have of the surety and safety of yourselves in the matter," makes it clear that she is aware of their justifiable anxiety and her role in creating it (Tudor 72). She was, after all, bound by her role as daughter and subject to heed her father's will and his command that she be led by the Privy Council in marriage matters. One could argue that she is suggesting the

possibility of an eventual marriage and that in marrying and producing an heir she would ensure the succession.

However, she rather ambiguously states that she will think of the matter, and will “upon further advice further to answer” (Tudor 72) without an indication of what or when that further answer will be. This avoidance of a direct statement of intent suggests a negotiation of agency as she seeks to fulfill her duty as a queen, but also as a prince with a country whose safety she is in charge of ensuring. My reading of the response to Parliament suggests that Elizabeth is making it clear that unlike Mary, and despite her emotional weakness as a woman, the reasoning of her masculine self could overcome any female liabilities and allow her to think beyond just herself for the prosperity and security of England.

To the second main petition of the Parliament of 1563, the request that she marry, her April 10, 1563 response provides further evidence that she negotiated the agency of her natural female self to construct a representation of Queenly authority that remained socially authorized. John Hales, an M.P. in Parliament, had written and circulated a tract entitled *A Declaration of the Succession of the Crown Imperiall of England* in which he argues that her inadequate rule as a female monarch had failed to ensure the safety of the country by securing an heir. Parliament shortly thereafter submitted a petition, requesting that she marry” (De La Torre 560) to which she voiced her irritation that they had expressed doubt about her ability and/or intent to secure the succession with an heir of her body:

For [she] had thought it had been so desire as none other tree’s blossoms should have been minded or ever hoped if [her] fruit had been

denied [them]. And yet, by the way of one due doubt-that I am, as it were, by vow or determination bent never to trade that kind of life-pull out that heresy, for your belief is awry (Tudor 79).

By requesting her to name a successor only five years after her accession to the throne, Parliament attempted to ensure that even if she failed to marry and have children the succession would be secure. Elizabeth's response, and her irritation that they doubted her ability to think and act as a prince, demonstrate her awareness of her gender's perceived liabilities and sought to overcome them with the body politic. "Though I can think it [a woman's choice to wed or not based upon her liking] best for a private woman," she told them, she cannot reconcile this natural female role with her role as monarch, as she does not "think it [indulgence in liking versus need] meet for a prince [or the princely self of a Queen]" (Tudor 79). Marriage, she makes clear, might not suit her as a "private woman," but she is also a "prince," and as such must temper her liking to the Parliament and the country's need.

As Queen, she was responsible for their welfare, and was aware that the men of her Parliament would be most assured of safety if she alluded to a potential future marriage that would achieve their desired safety. She ended her response to the petition with the hope that she would not "end [her] life without...the foundation of your surety after my gravestone" (Tudor 80), a vague promise which could be construed as a vow to eventually wed and produce an heir. Through her self-representation as a woman and Queen aware of her responsibility to see to her people's "surety," Elizabeth won the funding she sought from Parliament and was able to refrain from naming a successor definitively as well as promising absolutely to

marry. However, as the years passed without her naming a successor or marrying and providing an heir, her subjects began to get restless and more insistent on their Queen fulfilling the promises that her self-representation as a chaste and dutiful woman had led them to expect.

Despite Elizabeth's numerous self-representations as a good daughter and a chaste maiden, throughout her reign she demonstrated what the Spanish ambassador at her court described in 1567 as a "most strange" hatred for marriage (Levin 39). Her many public self-representations to her Council and Parliaments made it apparent that she both preferred to "live and die a virgin" but was yet aware that as a woman, she had a responsibility to secure the Protestant future of people by marrying and producing an heir.

The Courting Queen

Elizabeth's official courtships provide a means of reading her private and public representations as a chaste maiden and virgin Queen. Like Levin, I hesitate to assume that she didn't feel some degree of affinity with the gender role prescribed to her. Her refusal to marry, I would argue, is in keeping with the social custom of courtship which encouraged a woman to court multiple men and marry later in life. Rather than Elizabeth freeing her private self from "the subordination to a husband" as Berry asserts, I would argue that her refusal to marry is the private sacrifice of a woman on behalf of her country rather than, as Berry argues, a determined move to secure her autonomy and power for private reasons. Despite her declared wish to "live and die a virgin," my reading of the primary texts demonstrate that she did, on several

occasions such as her courtship with Seymour and her later courtship with Anjou, seriously consider marriage. If she was *just* using the semblance of adhering to her gender role in order to gain support for her reign, she would not have voiced so vehemently a position contradictory to the role expected of her as a woman. I infer that the disinclination to wed was more of a rhetoric device to eliminate comparison with Mary. Elizabeth had experienced firsthand the consequences of a Queen's marriage to a foreign power. Though Mary I's marriage had negative private consequences for Mary herself, the toll on England was much more dramatic and destructive. Elizabeth I as chaste virgin and desirable marriage prospect despite her personal inclination as a woman held a certain degree of power based upon the value granted such chastity by the patriarchal society. So long as Elizabeth represented herself as a chaste virginal figure "viable through the images of youthful virginity," she retained that power and also made it clear that the liabilities of her female self were outweighed by the responsibility to wed acknowledged by her princely self. She was therefore able to demonstrate her understanding of and adherence to the forces of the patriarchal culture she ruled (Frye 114).

Her last official courtship with Francis, the French Duke of Anjou illustrates the battle between private and public wills. This relationship between the public figures of the French Duke and English Queen was carried out initially by diplomacy, with exchanges between the French ambassador at the English court and the Queen. Eventually however, Anjou received permission to visit the English court, and arrived in England on August 17th, 1579, becoming the only one of Elizabeth's royal suitors

permitted to court her in person. The flirtations and constant shared company of the two, as well as the tearful farewells of both parties upon the Duke's departure from England, and the nickname of "Frog" Elizabeth bestowed upon him (Frieda 342) demonstrate that the courtship was more than the exchange of promises to ambassadors and advisors. However, I would disagree with historian Leonie Frieda's assertion that Elizabeth's behavior illustrates Elizabeth's theatrical skills and determination to manipulate the power granted her position as a courting woman to elicit political gain. Her behavior is suggestive of a burgeoning romantic relationship that followed the course of a genuine courtship rather than just a ploy to use courtship to ensure a political allegiance. Despised by the country because he was French and Catholic, the display of affection would have garnered her little approval in England. Furthermore, royal marriage negotiations were largely conducted by ambassadors, and such a display would have little impact on political treaties and negotiations.

Levin contends that when Anjou returned to the English court in 1581, Elizabeth "did everything in her power to show that she was serious about the marriage" (Levin 60) to Anjou despite Phillip Sidney's public letter against the match and humble Londoner John Stubbs' 1579 pamphlet *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf whereinto England is like to be Swallowed*. Sidney declared the match unworthy of her, as the French prince was the "son of the Jezebel of our age," the French Queen Catherine de Medici who had orchestrated the 1572 Huguenot murders of the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre. While Stubbs alluded to Elizabeth's advanced age and suggested she might wed only to die in childbirth. Sidney was banished from court,

but the aptly named Stubbs suffered far worse; his hand was cut off and the stub plunged into hot tar to seal the wound (Levin 62). On November 22, 1581, she made a public declaration that she would marry Anjou, only to back out of it the next day claiming that she was destined to remain a spinster and unable to “overcome her natural hatred to marriage” (Levin 63). Though some suggest that her short-lived acquiescence to the French marriage was fueled by spite at the marriage of her long time suitor Robert Dudley, this was one of her last chances to marry and have children as a woman in her forties, and perhaps she regretted her long virginity.

Having rejected with finality the Duke D’Anjou’s hand, she recounts this move in her sonnet “On Monsieur’s Departure” (1582). The sonnet suggests a sense of loss and self-sacrifice which supports my assertion that Elizabeth’s refusal to marry was a sacrifice of her feminine self on behalf of her people. She laments the private sacrifice she was forced to make:

I grieve and dare not show my discontent;
 I love, and yet and 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 I turned (Tudor 302-303).

In the first section of the sonnet, Elizabeth reconciles herself to her role in the patriarchal framework of England as that of a woman who, in order to remain powerful, must refrain from marriage. She states that “[she] grieve[s] and dare[s] not show [her] discontent” signifying her desire to be a woman who is able to culminate a courtship relationship with marriage, because to show her discontent would be to reveal the weakness of female sentiment. She is “forced to seem to hate” despite the

fact that she loves, because her love for Anjou is against public and court sentiment, as outlined by the Stubb's pamphlet and Sidney letter. Unlike Mary, who married a Catholic foreign prince despite the overwhelming public sentiment against the marriage, Elizabeth "dare not say [she] ever meant" to marry Anjou despite her public announcement of the match because to do so would jeopardize her princely authority and the welfare of her people. She further acknowledges that she is a woman who must maintain her chastity in order to retain power as she admits that "I freeze and yet am burned," a Petrarchan trope of contradictory states which highlights her inner turmoil. She burns with passion, one could argue as a woman, but also is frozen by her inability to act upon said emotion as a prince, as she declares that "since from myself another self I turned."

The sonnet then goes on to lament the "care" that follows her, regret for her lost matrimonial opportunity:

My care is like my shadow in the sun-
Follows me flying, flies when I pursue it,
Stands, and lies by me, doth what I have done;
His too familiar care doth make me rue it.
No means I find to rid him from my breast,
Till by the end of things it be suppressed (Tudor 303).

The common reading, as described by Peter Herman and Ilona Bell, of the care spoken of is that it refers to Elizabeth's care for Anjou, that it is her love for him that follows her and is like her shadow. One could also read her "care," as Bell argues, as the replacement of her love or "care" for her duty to her country, a duty that is "like [her] shadow in the sun" that follows her and also "flies when [she] pursue[s] it" (Bell 112). Anjou's "care" that is "too familiar" could reference his disappointment in his failure

to secure the marriage. This suggests that not only does her duty follow her closely, but it also flees before her as she constantly seeks to keep up with what is demanded of her as Queen. One can read this as an acknowledgement that she can neither completely fulfill her duty because she will not marry and produce an heir, hence the flying when pursued, nor forget her duty because it is the self she chooses to forefront. Her duty shadows her and when tempted by the Duke's "too familiar care" of her, and it "doth make [her] rue it," it being the duty that prevents her from choosing to not turn from her other female self.

The only solution to "rid him from [her] breast" is to end the relationship and send Anjou on his way, as "by the end of things it be suppressed." Elizabeth is able to suppress her womanly emotions to focus on her princely obligations and duties. The sonnet ends with a sense of resignation that she is "soft, and made of melting snow" as a woman, who is bound by her duty her princely self to "freeze" though she "burns" and maintain an outwardly impenetrable chastity that cannot be overcome. Her female self, then, is controlled and neutralized by her awareness of her duties as monarch.

This personal sacrifice is evidence of Elizabeth's successful understanding of the rhetoric of the dual bodies and the sacrifices it demands. The sonnet and the Petrarchan trope used of burning and freezing suggests that Elizabeth is moving towards a female self that can never be obtained, but only admired from afar, an aloof and cold mistress who allows suitors to attempt to court her, but ultimately is unmoved and unattainable. This can be read as a move to resign from the marriage

market, and therefore her abandonment of active viable chastity for the more stable, but politically tenuous static chastity.

This is a significant moment in Elizabeth's reign, the point at which the self-authorization based on the power of the courted female is jeopardized. If she had, as Peter Herman argues and I maintain, confirmed rather than challenged the gender stereotypes at play of women as "yielding and frail," soft, as she calls herself, as "melting snow" (Herman 32), she needed a new means of reassuring her masculine subjects now that a husband and masculine guidance was out of the question. If Elizabeth was to retain control of the representations of herself and her authority as a chaste woman ruling a patriarchal society, at this moment it was necessary to find a new way in which to authorize her rule while still seeming to adhere to the cultural expectations of her gender.

The New Cult of Elizabeth: Frozen Chastity

Berry notes that the 1590s were a time of political and economic unrest in England; the Queen was aging, droughts caused crop failures, and her refusal to marry all contributed to what Mark Breitenberg calls "anxious masculinity" as the patriarchal foundations of Elizabethan society grappled with masculine subjugation to a powerful female figure. Frye recounts the various works of literature that simultaneously "address and assault...a Chastity figure [via] sophisticated re-workings of the Queen's image" in an effort on the part of her masculine subjects to quell their anxieties (Frye 97). Frye, Berry, and Montrose, among others, contend that during this last decade of her life her control on how her image was represented began to slip; it seems evident

that as she lost the accessibility inherent with active flirtation, she lost a degree of control over the young and ambitious men at her court. Her withdrawal from formal political courtship (evidenced by the fact that she never again engaged in formal negotiations to wed), and the role cast for her as the marriageable maiden, made it necessary for her to find a new way to use her chastity to garner political power.

In order to shift away from a self-representation centered on an active chastity viable for courtship, she used the discourses of Petrarchanism and Neo-Platonism to posit herself as powerful and unapproachable, an unassailable virgin. Her courtiers had long used Petrarchanism as a means of expression for attempting to “penetrate her isolation, to address and persuade her...a queen whose distance was quite real” (Frye 109), and now she used it to her advantage to construct her inviolability. In the second version of the 1590s sonnet “When I Was Far and Young” which she likely read before an audience at court, she creates this sense of distance from her suitors and impenetrability by emphasizing how many men she had rejected:

When I was fair and young, and favor graced me,
Of many was I sought unto, their mistress for to be.
But I did scorn them all, and said to them therefore,
“Go, go, go seek some otherwhere!
importune me no more” (Tudor 304).

These rejected suitors and others who would seek to emulate them by pursuing the Queen in earnest are told in no uncertain terms to leave her alone.

The second stanza creates even more distance and also emphasizes the speaker’s superiority:

How many weeping eyes I made to pine with woe,
 How many sighing hearts, I have no skill to show;
 Yet I the prouder grew, and answered them therefore,
 “Go, go, go seek some elsewhere,
 Importune me no more” (Tudor 304).

As the speaker, she occupies the male position and thus the position of power in a discourse in which a male speaker “generally strives both to attain a high position in the cosmic hierarchy through the aestheticized contemplation of the female subject and to attract the notice of his peers and the patronage of his betters” (Frye 108). Further, the separation of the speaker from his lady is the occasion for sonnets written in the Petrarchan discourse, so adopting its conventions further established the distance between Queen and subjects, male suitors and maiden. But Elizabeth, of course, was a woman, and as Bell reminds us, early modern women engaged in courtship weren’t necessarily the silent objects of adoration typical in Petrarchan sonnets. She had the power to reject her suitors, just as Spenser’s Elizabeth of *The Amoretti* has, and as the sonnet demonstrates, she “answered them therefore/Go, go go,” proud at first of her power over them to make them “weep,” “pine,” and “sigh” for love of her. But like Elizabeth herself, the beauty and youth of the speaker “when [she] was fair and young” disappear.

Cupid, the “proud victorious boy” and the son of the goddess of love, is irritated that the speaker should think to thwart love:

Then spake Venus’ son, that proud victorious boy,
 And said: “Fine dame, since that you be so coy,
 I will so pluck your plumes that you shall say no more
 Go, go, go seek some elsewhere,
 Importune me no more (Tudor 304-305).

Cupid tells her that she will no longer be courted by those who sought to make her their wife or mistress. The poem ends with the speaker feeling perhaps some degree of remorse for never having allowed herself to be wooed and won by one of her suitors:

When he spake these words,
such change grew in my breast
That neither night now day since that, I could take any rest.
Then lo, I did repent that I had said before,
Go, go, go seek some otherwhere
Importune me no more (Tudor 305).

The change that “grew in [her] breast” at Cupid’s words was perhaps a realization that it is too late at her advanced age to marry and produce heirs to the throne. She “repents” that she “scorn[ed]” and turned away those who sought her hand while she was a viable marriage candidate, those that perhaps she could have “burned” for or desired. In order to continue the light flirtations and courtships in which she engaged with her male courtiers to empower herself, Elizabeth essentially began to reinforce the image of herself as a youthful virgin, perhaps in a move to recapture the youth she regretted she had lost. This figure was able to engage in courtship and yet was distanced at the same time, the frozen mistress whom no one could defeat, whose heart was “changed.” In other words, the game could continue, but it had already been won in terms of establishing her princely power as Virgin Queen. Though the prospect of a potentially successful courtship was no longer possible, Elizabeth could at least remember and relish the encounters in which men did seek to win her hand. Furthermore, her courtiers could read her regret as an acknowledgement that she had failed to conform to gender norms. During the last two decades of her reign, tension arose amongst her councilors and subjects as the Queen aged, the succession remained

unclear, and the country's financial wellbeing suffered because of droughts and international politics. The woman Elizabeth Tudor, as the regret and repentance this poem seems to communicate, was perhaps not so lucky.

Though in the sonnet "When I Was Fair and Young" she refers to her youth in the past tense, she strove to maintain a self-representation of herself as young woman whose youth was eternal. By doing so, Elizabeth was able to in a sense to deny the normal aging process that typically rendered older women less powerful. Frye asserts that Elizabeth claimed herself ageless and that her virtue, "so often particularized as her virginity or chastity, protected [her] from the normal aging process [and an] attempt to transcend her society's tendency to disparage and ignore any woman past childbearing age" (Frye 100). At the same time, maintaining this enduring, youthful self-representation allowed her to also provide a visual representation of her political vitality.

To utilize her chastity and virginal status to safeguard her basis for perpetual female power, to freeze her youth as it were, she once again turned to the rhetoric of the two bodies. Her kingly body was immortal, after all; the medieval construct designated it divine and enduring and "grew out of the difficulty of separating the body politic from the person of the monarch. While individual kings died, the crown survived. With a woman on the throne, the importance of separating the individual sovereign from the ideal of king became more difficult and more crucial" (Levin 122). If the princely self was immortal and represented the ever enduring crown, the image

of the youthful, powerful, and regal Queen was one which could encapsulate this authority.

The Coronation Portrait, c. 1600, is arguably the most iconographic image of Elizabeth as the powerful and youthful Virgin Queen. The painter appropriated the youthful face mask of portraits done of the Queen during the 1540s-1560s rather than using the true face of the sixty-seven year old monarch. Her hair flows loose down her back in the style of an English maiden, and she holds the royal regalia in imitation of a royal ancestor. This serves, as Frye points out, to “connect the aging queen’s right to the throne with the medieval past in the icon tradition of the portrait of Richard II” (Frye 102). It also, however, serves to emphasize that as Queen, even though without an heir, she still would, as she told her Parliament of 1563, ensure the safety of her people. The portrait deflects the succession anxiety that plagued her courtiers during the 1590s by suggesting a monarchy that would endure, regal and majestic, much like their Queen. This could potentially have alleviated some the tension and anxiety of the 1580s and 1590s resulting from her failure to marry. If the *Coronation Portrait* promised the continuation of the monarchy embodied in the youthful figure of Elizabeth, the *Rainbow Portrait* of c. 1600-1600 did so as well.

The *Rainbow Portrait*, however, couples the loose flowing hair seen in the previous portrait with further claims of maidenly chastity and the power inherent in such a position. In this portrait, she wears a low cut bodice in order to better display her bosom; this signifies her maidenhood and youth. Its smooth appearance, though highly unlikely to be the reality of the sixty-seven year old woman, in this image

contributes to her youthful image. She wears pearls, associated with both wisdom and chastity, according to Frye, and also bears the crescent moon, symbol of the virgin goddess Diana, upon her headdress (Frye 101). This final portrait encapsulates the Queen Elizabeth's lifelong struggle to first conform and adhere to the gender expectations of the patriarchal culture of early modern England, her efforts to maintain her crown using the power and authority granted to young, chaste, and reproductively viable women engaged in courtship, and finally to her usurpation of that power in her own right and refusal to surrender it once she had retired from the fields of political and amorous courtships.

The overly exaggerated details of this portrait suggest that in the last years of her reign Elizabeth had a greater need to emphasize youth and her part in the continuation of the monarchy. James I of Scotland was her unofficial heir, but her councilors still awaited her official recognition of his status as the next king of England. The youthful image of this portrait, coupled with the promise of an eternally vital and powerful England, may have served to remind her people that even though she hadn't physically given birth to an heir, she was still responsible for providing one for the country and as such would fulfill her promise to see to their care. Her return to a self-representation of youth could also have served to represent her regret at never marrying, and/or a return to a stage in her life in which she was valued and praised as a worthy and desirable model of royal womanhood.

Conclusion

Both Mary and Elizabeth began their reigns as single women, and both were beset, from the beginning of their reigns, with requests that they marry to secure the succession. While both utilized the rhetoric of the monarch's two bodies in order to lay claim to the throne despite their single status in a patriarchal culture, it was Elizabeth who, despite never marrying, proved the best mother to her people by establishing their security and prosperity. Both women played the part of maiden and used that role to fulfill different gender expectations demanded of young English women, but only Elizabeth failed to reinforce the stereotype of that part, the foolish woman who hands over all her power for love with dire consequences. Unlike Mary, who chose to marry a Catholic king despite her councilors and the public's protest, and to deplete her coffers to fund his Spanish wars, Elizabeth utilized the custom of courtship and the authority it granted her to negotiate, time and again, political advantage for England. Never a wife, she acted as mother to her people, her female self giving up suitors that her princely self rejected for the good of the country. Though she failed to produce an heir, or even name a successor during her lifetime, she upheld the dictates of her father's will to heed the advice of her Privy Council, proving herself to be an obedient daughter.

Late in her reign she again demonstrated how empowered women could use the gender roles of the patriarchal order to authorize themselves and adapt to a changing definition of what it means to be a woman while still remaining within the bounds of social custom. My reading of Elizabeth Tudor's writings reflects a

reluctance to jeopardize herself by stepping outside her assigned gender role as a woman and a royal daughter. While many feminist and historical readings of the body of Elizabeth's work interpret her adaptation of the rhetoric of the monarch's two bodies as a move to reject her femininity and prescribed role in society as a woman, I would suggest that rather than the crusader of women's rights that some would proclaim her to be, Elizabeth was a woman who, while identifying with her gender and constructing her identity based upon social expectations because of the safety and perhaps self-worth it granted, she nevertheless chose to put the needs of England ahead of her own desires. This interpretation demonstrates that Elizabeth was a complex, intelligent woman who cannot be easily understood. While we cannot know if she did intend to marry, the similarities of stance and attitude towards her gender role and the prospect of marriage would seem to support my assertion that she may have regretted the personal sacrifices she made. The nostalgic return to the self-representation of youth in her last years signifies a yearning to return to a role that she relished but no longer could play. English literature of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries reflects the impact of the reign of the Virgin Queen, and the collective English realization that there are indeed many parts one can play upon the stage as authors such as Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser sought to alleviate the tension aroused in part by her failure to marry.

“My Lady So Cruelly To Pen”: Representations of Elizabeth and Chastity in the Works of Edmund Spenser

Elizabeth Tudor reigned as England’s Virgin Queen from 1558 to 1603. After the unsuccessful conclusion of her last official courtship in 1581, she re-fashioned herself as a powerful, chaste, and single female figure whose authority was based on a chastity that was unassailable and remote. This in turn caused anxiety among her literary subjects such as poets Sir Phillip Sidney and Edmund Spenser. In this article, I will demonstrate how these poets used their craft to demonstrate, via literary representations of powerful female figures, how marriage and the loss of their chastity could restore such figures to their socially prescribed positions and thus restore the patriarchal order of early modern English society.

Carole Levin,⁸ Alexandra Shepard, Philippa Berry, and Susan Frye, among others, contribute to the ongoing conversation examining the impact of the long reign of the Virgin Queen by examining the ways in which literary representations of courtship and gender intersect to reflect social tensions resulting in part from the reign of Elizabeth Tudor. Most scholars agree that Elizabeth’s failure to marry and continued empowerment was perceived as threatening by her subjects to some extent, but they disagree when considering the question of her manipulation of expectations.

⁸Levin, Carole. *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power*, 1994. Levin explores how the gender constructions of early modern England influenced Elizabeth’s self representations as a woman, a ruler, and a Protestant.

Shepard, Alexandra. *Meanings of Manhood*, 2003. Shepard examines the ways in which the patriarchal foundations of early modern English society were undermined, contradicted by both men and women.

Berry, Philippa. *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen*, 1994. Berry asserts that the figure of the powerful and unmarried Queen challenged the discourse of love and was perceived as threatening.

Frye, Susan. *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation*, 1993. Frye examines Elizabeth’s challenges and obstacles as she constructed her power and authority in a patriarchal society.

Frye and Berry contend that authors such as Sidney and Spenser used their pens to combat the perceived threat of the Queen's self-empowerment, and that Elizabeth was aggressive in enforcing her new self-representation. Shepard argues that patriarchal supremacy was undermined by both men and women, and that though Elizabeth was still considered a threat, men were accustomed to negotiating contradictory patriarchal ideologies. Lastly, Levin looks to the ways in which Elizabeth was able to use her female gender to her advantage, as well as the ways in which it complicated her claim of agency, particularly as she aged, rather than an outright stance against patriarchy. I would suggest that Elizabeth sought to adapt her gender role in order to accommodate a new type of chastity that would allow her to conform to social expectations as well as provide a means of justifying her continued agency that would extend and legitimize her continued reign as a single woman. I would also add that this move to enable her to continue to conform to her gender role was an attempt to garner approval and support from her subjects, subjects whose masculinity was threatened by their continued subjugation to an empowered woman. As Edmund Spenser's poetry reflects, a shift in how empowered women were portrayed, as well as an increased emphasis on marriage and subjugation to a husband in the literature of the 1580s and 1590s, suggests that Elizabeth's attempts to remain within the patriarchal framework were successful to some extent.

As the Queen aged and became barren, her subjects began to exhibit a restlessness and tension likely caused, at least in part, by the uncertainty of the succession; Elizabeth not only ultimately refused to marry and produce issue, but she

also refused to name a successor, throwing into jeopardy the wellbeing of the subjects she swore to ensure. Levin notes that although “many of the English reacted with ambivalence to the idea of woman ruler....everyone expected she would marry and solve the problem of being a woman by turning the governance over to her husband....In her last years the grumblings about woman’s rule were louder” (Levin 3-9). These grumblings, along with other problems which plagued the country in the 1590s, created a tension that Mark Breitenberg⁹ calls “anxious masculinity.” According to Breitenberg, Elizabeth’s masculine subjects countered her refusal to marry and conform to her socially prescribed identity in an attempt to defend and bolster their own privileged positions as lords and masters.

After 1581, when her last courtship ended and she definitively resigned from further marriage negotiations, Elizabeth sought to redefine her position as a woman who would never marry. This new gender representation adapted her previous rhetoric of the king’s two bodies, discussed in the companion chapter to this piece, to merge the Queen’s feminine “body natural” with her masculine and kingly “body politic.” By doing so, Elizabeth was able to claim the youth and vitality of the crown, immortal and enduring, that manifested in her “body politic” in order to claim her “body natural” ageless and perpetually youthful. This allowed her to construct a self representation that maintained her youth and thus the power garnered by her continual chastity while at the time making it clear that such chastity was inviolable majestic

⁹ Breitenberg, Mark. *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*. 1996. Breitenberg argues that in cultures that distribute power based upon patriarchal prerogatives, masculine anxiety and tension is unavoidably anxious and defensive.

and superior to the men who courted her. According to Frye, this denial of mortality “effectively served as an assertion of her political viability as well as an attempt to transcend her society’s tendency to disparage and ignore any woman past childbearing age” (Frye 100). Even though, as Frye contends, she “made no claim for women as a whole, but rather sought to distance herself from normative constructions of the feminine” (Frye 101), her refusal to marry and herself be subjugated to a husband was coupled with an embrace of her chastity and all it represented. She later crafted a new kind of static or unchanging chastity that many perceived as a threat to the patriarchal social order. By redefining her chastity and the power derived from it, Elizabeth was able to authorize her refusal to marry within the terms allotted to her gender by manipulating the normative codes of patriarchal society. Though some have argued that Elizabeth was an early feminist, I suggest that she was trying to make herself fit into her gender role so as to soothe the fears and anxieties of her people. This representational strategy, my reading would suggest, allowed Elizabeth to stay within social expectations and therefore remain a figurehead that her subjects could approve of. I would hesitate to infer that this move was the result of a conscious desire to reject the gender role assigned her, and would suggest that rather than standing in opposition to patriarchy, she was seeking to mold herself to its expectations.

As a young, marriageable woman and as a Queen, she was able to authorize her reign with the rhetoric of the two bodies used by royalty during the late Middle Ages. This later self-representation based on static chastity contradicted the normative gender roles prescribed by Protestant, patriarchal England. During the latter half of the

reign of Elizabeth Tudor, there is a shift in the literary representations of powerful female figures which I would suggest is a reflection of this contrary representation. As Frye explains, Elizabeth transgressed her society's "unstable gender distinctions" by redefining feminine gender norms and "disrupting them in ways that made her the focus of widespread anxieties" (Frye viii), and in response to these anxieties, some of her masculine subjects attempted to reinstate normative gender roles to preserve the hierarchy of power. An effective means of reaching large segments of the common population was theater, and for members of the royal court, poetry. These literary representations demonstrated how powerful women can be stripped of their chastity, and thus their power, via marriage. They represented a social push to emphasize marriage and therefore mitigate the anxieties roused when confronted with the unassailable and removed chastity of their aging Queen.

The unsuccessful conclusion of the Queen's last official courtship in 1581 and the subsequent refashioning of Elizabeth's identity helps to explain what we might think of as a defense of patriarchy and its associated gender identities in courtly poetry evident in the poet Edmund Spenser's *Epithalamion*, *Amoretti* and *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser's work suggests that Elizabeth's re-definition and usurpation of the socially empowered role of chaste maiden, and the subsequent anxieties it provoked, influenced literary representations of gender roles, courtship, and power. Although many scholars commonly perceive Spenser's work as propagandistic, this chapter explores the ways in which her subjects such as Spenser sought to re-define the normative codes of behavior in patriarchal England in an attempt to put to rest the

anxieties provoked by Elizabeth's static chastity and barren reign. By representing multiple figures of empowered women, Spenser was able to present the type of woman necessary for the self-fashioning of patriarchal masculine identities. He was able to quell the anxiety created by the position of the Queen and her static chastity. Despite his own position as a courtier, Spenser was able to both criticize and thus disempower his Queen while at the same time curry royal favor by celebrating Elizabeth's earlier representations as a chaste maiden and powerful prince along the lines of the traditional royal trope of the King's Two Bodies.

Patriarchy, Courtship, and The Virgin Queen

Edmund Spenser's identity was shaped or fashioned by the cultural forces at work in Elizabethan England, when a powerful female ruler threatened the basis of patriarchal supremacy that was the foundation of an upper class man's identity. Before I turn to specific examples of female disempowerment through marriage and a loss of chastity in the work of Edmund Spenser, it is important to understand the foundations upon which early modern English identities were crafted.

Patriarchy, a social order in which men hold the reins of power, provided the foundational aspects of the social norms that influenced the ways in which men and women of early modern England shaped their self-identities; it therefore played an important role in the shaping of Edmund Spenser's identity, and influenced literary measures he undertook to bolster and preserve that identity and its privileges. Shepard asserts that when considering the historical context of sixteenth century England, it is important to move away from a strict definition of patriarchy in terms of a male-

female dichotomy. She notes that while patriarchy played a role in the self-fashioning of upper class men, it is disadvantageous to equate manhood or masculinity entirely with patriarchy; manhood or masculinity did not necessarily connote patriarchal values (Shepard 3-4). Though Spenser set his masculine representations against the empowered figure of the Queen in his literary texts, he did not work in a strict male versus female dichotomy, and men were not always in a position to dominate women, a move that perhaps reflects Shepard's assertion that there were other kinds of manhood.

Shepard asserts that normative codes of manhood, such as those that influenced Spenser's self-fashioned identity, are socially embedded, and "gender constructions were central to the ways in which early modern moral, political, and social commentary made sense of things" (Shepard 7). Those normative gender identities are constructed in response to pressures perceived to threaten the social order, such as an unmarried female ruler who restructured gender identity. Men who did not achieve the ideals of patriarchal manhood were not necessarily considered less "manly," but for the purposes of this project, I will focus on the ways in which normative codes of patriarchal manhood were constructed as a response to threats to patriarchal authority. These concepts of manhood were rooted in the belief that to sustain the patriarchal order, women must be controlled and subjugated according to the normative gender identities prescribed for them.

The process of constructing these normative gender identities is dependent upon internalizing threats to the patriarchal system and projecting defenses against

them, which enables the system's perpetuation. Breitenberg, discussing English masculinity in the early modern period, contends that anxiety is inherent in a system which distributes power unequally based upon patriarchal prerogatives and agendas. The anxieties Breitenberg discusses involve cuckoldry, status, desire, and power are created by a discourse of gender hierarchy that places men above women (Breitenberg 3-4). As men seek to marry and thus relegate their prospective wives back into the patriarchal fold, so too are they defined as patriarchs by their determination to do so and eliminate the threat to the overarching social system which shapes their very selves. Shepard notes that "normative manhood was primarily defined through comparison with a broad range of deviant 'others,' such as Elizabeth in the last two decades of her reign (Shepard 8). In a patriarchal culture, a powerful and unmarried female figure of static chastity undermined the foundations of the paradigm. Single women, a threat to this order in which men rule, were courted and wed in order to preserve that which is the basis of masculine identities. Elizabeth Tudor, a powerful female ruler who failed to marry and thus subjugate herself to a husband, presented a threat to patriarchy and masculine identity once she withdrew from courtship, an example of a role for women which granted an alternative to marital subjugation.

According to Anthony Fletcher,¹⁰ patriarchy was "a scheme of gender relations that men found...in need of constant repair" (Fletcher 162), so a figure such as Elizabeth could have been perceived as an obstacle needing to be overcome by

¹⁰ Fletcher, Anthony. *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England, 1500-1800*, 1999. Fletcher argues that the patriarchal underpinnings of English society began to come under pressure as women became verbally and sexually more confident and assertive, and the process by which gender identity and patriarchy became separated from its religious associations to transform into something more adaptable.

patriarchal superiority. Anything that could be perceived as a threat was dealt with in a variety of methods, from preachers in the pulpit presenting sermons on marriage and women to manuals designed to educate men on how to run their households. Conduct books began to appear in the latter half of the sixteenth century which further dictated social relationships between men and women.

Fletcher notes that the authors of said books saw their task as that of “model[ing] the patriarchal family afresh for this new world” (Fletcher 162). From the reign of Mary I, 1553-1558, the first Tudor Queen to ascend the throne as a single woman, there seems to have been a resurgence of interest in regulating the relationship between man and wife, and more generally between men and women, as the many conduct manuals from the period suggest. Mary wed, but the union failed to produce an heir. At her death, another single woman became Queen, but instead of taking a husband, Elizabeth played at courtship for several decades as a means of gaining political advantage and power, her chastity granting her a degree of empowerment and authority. So long as she engaged in official and non-official courtships, she remained largely within the gender norms prescribed by patriarchy; however, once her aging body necessitated a withdrawal from the courtship game, it became necessary for her to re-define her chastity and gendered authority.

As an unmarried noblewoman, Elizabeth was empowered by her chastity; patriarchy granted women few opportunities to assume social autonomy, but before marriage, chastity granted them a degree of power in courtship. Though English law granted women the right to marry without parental consent at age twelve,

Ilona Bell asserts that their “social and financial liberty was severely limited by an ethical code that defines female honor as chastity...and a legal system that subjects women and first to their fathers and then to their husbands” (Bell 33). Women behaved honorably and preserved their chastity, which is defined by the *OED* as “purity from unlawful sexual intercourse, or incontinence” (*OED*). They were theoretically free to marry whom they chose within their social class. Marriages among the upper classes were often arranged, but even though patriarchs had the power to dispose of their daughters as they saw fit, “the man was expected to court the woman and to obtain her consent” (Bell 39). Courtship, then, was a venue in which women were theoretically at liberty to make their own choices so long as those choices preserved the social order.¹¹

Unmarried women, even queens, were expected to guard themselves and remain virginal until they married; this chastity or purity made women desirable marriage prospects and valuable commodities with which to bargain, but it also granted them a degree of socially sanctioned power in a culture which was based upon a male dominated gender hierarchy. Thus, aristocratic and upper-class women were in a unique position while men courted them; they were empowered by their ability to choose to succumb to a marriage prospect so long as they eventually surrendered and married. Once they surrendered this power, they became wives and mothers, and were relegated once more to a role of subjugation to their male guardians. Even though she was a queen, Elizabeth found it advantageous to use the power granted to single

¹¹ See the companion article to this piece, “The Inviolable Elizabeth,” for more details about courtship customs and privileges.

women in order to authorize her position. By participating in courtships, she remained within the patriarchal framework. Courtship was a means by which the patriarchal order was sustained; women married and performed their gender identities as instructed by society.

Courtship also provided men with expected roles to play in response; its patriarchal guidelines instructed them to court, marry, and subjugate chaste (and therefore virtuous) and reproductively viable women, all while adhering to the normative gender codes determined for and by them. Breitenberg asserts that early modern masculinity was inherently anxious as it sought to perpetuate the patriarchal paradigm that favored it, and that masculinity was fashioned in itself as a result of these anxieties (Breitenberg 1). As men reacted to threats perceived to jeopardize masculine supremacy such as powerful female figures acting outside of masculine authority and control, efforts to neutralize such threats, such as literary representations of powerful women who are ultimately wed and relegated back to their subjugated roles as wives and mothers, reinforce the dichotomy between male and female gender roles and the patriarchal hierarchy which regulates them in the early modern period.

When she withdrew from courtship in the 1580s, Elizabeth re-defined her chastity to authorize herself and her refusal to subjugate herself to the authority of a husband, a move which removed that chastity from the chase and overturned the balance between courtier and Queen. She effectively signaled that she would not marry and take on the role prescribed for her as wife and mother. She retained her chastity and the power it garnered but re-defined it, authorizing herself and her agency

by placing herself beyond the reach of men. Her new chastity was remote and divine, self-sufficient and perpetual; the more she distanced herself, the more powerful she was perceived to be, and the more concentrated the attempts to penetrate that inviolability became. Frye asserts that Elizabeth's later strategies of self-representation were an attempt to place herself beyond the control of others, and she and others have argued for a closer examination of the socio psychological response to Elizabeth's representations of queenship.

Once her age rendered her no longer reproductively viable, Elizabeth was forced to rewrite the gender role assigned her in order to authorize her continued position of power without the guidance of a husband. Frye argues that late in her reign, the Queen "increasingly represented herself and was represented in discourses that positioned her as powerful because she was remote, self-sufficient, and desirable- 'chaste,' according to her own re-definition of the word" (Frye 107). By the mid to late 1580s, it was clear that her fertility was over, rendering marriage for the production of an heir pointless. Increasingly, Elizabeth began to distance herself physically from the court, withdrawing to her inner rooms more often, and going on shorter and less frequent progresses throughout the country (Frye 107-113). As she withdrew from courtship, she withdrew physically from her people in order to construct a self representation that was unapproachable and set above all others.

Even though, as Frye contends, Elizabeth "made no claim for women as a whole, but, rather, sought to distance herself from normative constructions of the feminine" (Frye 101), her usurpation of her own chastity and refusal to marry and

herself to be subjugated to a husband was a move which many perceived as a threat to the gendered social order. By redefining her chastity as static and impenetrable (and thus unconquerable), Elizabeth was able to authorize her refusal to marry and succumb within the terms allotted her gender by the normative codes of patriarchal society.

Again, this refashioning of her chastity resulted in tension amongst her male courtiers, and as a result a defensive reaction by her male subjects, who in turn fashioned their own identities based upon their subjectivity in relation to a perpetually empowered object of desire who had self-authorized her own removal from the game of courtship. This anxiety, as I will demonstrate, is evident in Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti*, *Epithalamion*, and *The Faerie Queene*.

Courting a Lady, Courting the Man: Soothing Masculine Anxiety in Sidney and Spenser's Sonnet Sequences

Spenser's work, as I will demonstrate, illustrates how Elizabeth's re-definition of chastity influenced the literary representations of gender roles, courtship and power. Spenser portrays the shift in gender relations caused in part by Elizabeth's usurpation of chastity in his sonnet sequence *Amoretti* and his tribute to marriage *Epithalamion*. Thus, Spenser's body of work provides examples of the ways in which Elizabeth I may have influenced literature and when her masculine subjects sought to re-define the normative codes of behavior in patriarchal England in an attempt to put to rest the "anxious masculinity" which beset them.

Spenser hoped that with his poetry he could establish himself as a "professional" author rather than a typical court dilettante who just dabbled in poetry because it was expected of a gentleman; he wanted his poetry to "fashion a noble

gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline,” (Spenser 1) rather than just entertain them. Sidney’s stance that poetry should instruct as well as amuse and entertain played an important role in shaping Spenser’s identity as an Elizabethan poet and courtier. Spenser is an interesting figure for this study because he wrote courtly poetry and therefore participated in a conventional mode of expression that was shifting in response to Elizabeth’s late reign representation of an unconquerable powerful virgin figure. He sought to influence and shape the ways in which men responded to their subordination to a powerful single woman.

The English sonnet, modeled after the Petrarchan relationship between courtly suitor and his unattainable lady, had historically provided a framework for such spiritual retooling, but with the reign of the Virgin Queen, spiritual growth took a back seat to asserting and stabilizing masculine identity and patriarchal authority. Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* sonnet sequence, for example, while following the basic conventions of an English sonnet, introduced an element of anxiety in its expression of a need to guarantee female subjugation with marriage and a physical relationship. Spenser takes up this element of anxiety and presents a sonnet sequence in which an empowered woman is courted and moved by the speaker to submit and make her choice, which culminates in marriage. One could argue that Spenser, sensing the anxiety and tension roused in part by Elizabeth’s late reign self-representation and manifested in Sidney’s poems, sought to modify courtship and the roles of those engaged in it in his sonnet sequence *The Amoretti*. By creating a role for women that grants them power because of their chastity, he follows the conventions of sixteenth

century upper class courtship, but he also makes clear that marriage is the expected and socially endorsed outcome. This effectively addresses and relieves the need to figure the “defeat” of a strong female figure in order to reassert one’s masculinity via courtship according to the social norms of the day.

Before Elizabeth’s late reign re-definition of her chastity, courtship poetry was largely a means by which a man proved his intellectual prowess. The women wooed in this traditional model were not perceived as a threat to patriarchal norms because they were typically already married, stripped of the power granted to women in courtship by virtue of their chastity. The traditional model of courtship portrayed in the sonnets, one could argue, demonstrates the poet’s art and his ability to navigate the “courtly behavior, diplomacy, and ceremonies of state” needed to prosper at the Queen’s court, and perhaps was never meant to signify the earnest pursuit of a physical woman (Bell 2). Just as Queen Anne played at courtship after her marriage to Henry VIII with the men who flocked to her for patronage and power,¹² Phillip Sidney’s sonnet sequence demonstrates that the speaker’s primary purposes in wooing “Stella” are to demonstrate his intelligence and courtly graces while worshiping a passive female figure without expectation of reward or the physical gratification of consummation.

Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* sonnet sequence, composed in the 1580s, marks a turning point in the representations of courtship. I would argue that Sidney, and many other upper class men at the Queen’s court, had come to the conclusion that

¹² See Weir’s *The Lady in the Tower*, particularly chapter 7 in which she details the events of May 2, 1536 when Anne was summoned to the Privy Council and presented with the warrant for her arrest. The chapter also outlines Anne’s trip to the Tower and her subsequent imprisonment.

Elizabeth Tudor, despite her continued adherence to the role of chaste maiden, was not likely to marry and produce an heir to perpetuate the Tudor dynasty. Sidney uses the traditional model of courtship poetry in which consummation and eventual culmination in marriage was impossible, yet also begins to demonstrate the beginnings of the masculine tension later portrayed more explicitly in the literary work of Edmund Spenser.

The traditional model of courtship poetry Sidney employed in his *Astrophil and Stella* sonnet sequence involves the illicit wooing and pursuit of a married or otherwise unavailable woman. Said woman, in this case “Stella,” stands as the star that Astrophil the “star lover” worships; the real “Stella,” Penelope Rich, whom Sidney wooed with his poetry, was married, and lacked the power to speak and choose granted to single women. Already wed, “Stella” has already given up the power granted to high born single women when courted by enamored men. While men can still woo her and court her in poetry, there is no socially approved choice for her to make; she cannot give her suitor her chastity and hand in marriage, as it has already been given. Though the speaker begs her to sleep with him, he does so acknowledging the spiritual struggle such a request raises. This model, then, serves as a means of grounding a married and consummated woman within the bounds of early modern norms of gender and sexuality. A silent figure, she is not really meant to be won; she acts as the means by which the speaker proves his intelligence, social graces, and his ability to refine his soul by resisting the lure of illicit and unsanctioned pleasures.

Sonnet 71, and indeed Sidney's entire sequence, illustrates the spiritual and intellectual struggle of men to resist temptation that is celebrated by the Petrarchan sonnet tradition. By doing so, the male suitor is able to become more virtuous and thus worthy of God's grace, feeling the temptation for physical consummation but also struggling to overcome it:

Who will in fairest book of nature know
 How virtue may best lodged in beauty be,
 Let him but learn of love to read in thee,
 Stella, those fair lines which true goodness show.
 There shall he find all vices' overthrow,
 Not by rude force, but sweetest sovereignty
 Of reason, from whose light those night-birds fly,
 That inward sun in thine eyes shineth so.
 And not content to be perfection's heir
 Thy self, dost strive all minds that way to move,
 Who mark in thee what is in thee most fair;
 So while thy beauty draws the heart to love (Spenser .

The suitor reads in Stella "true goodness" (71.4) and is inspired by her ability to "all vices' overthrow" (71.5). The suitor also "learns of love" by "read[ing]" Stella, as "those fair lines which true goodness show" illustrate how best to read the beauty, and therefore the virtue of the world (71.2-4). Her beauty is such that she is able to "all vices' overthrow/not by rude force, but sweetest sovereignty of reason" (71.5-7). Once she attains virtue, she feels that she must "strive all minds that way to move" and help her male suitor to become more virtuous through the chaste adoration of a beautiful object of desire. The relationship at this point remains chaste and largely of a spiritual nature.

Yet even in Sidney's traditional Petrarchan sequence the reader can glimpse a shift in the nature of the relationship between suitor and beloved that I ascribe to

Elizabeth's long standing chastity. Specifically, in Sonnet 71, the suitor needs the physical consummation of their relationship in order to be gratified and fulfilled. At the conclusion of the sonnet quoted above, the poetic speaker expresses desire to have both physical and spiritual gratification: "As fast thy virtue bends that love to good./But ah, desire still cries, 'Give me some food'" (71.14). Despite acknowledging that worshipping Stella in the Petrarchan tradition will render him virtuous and closer to God in the first twelve lines of the sonnet, Sidney ends with a clear plea for the physical act of love. The chaste and largely self-absorbed courtship of a beautiful and desirable woman as a means refining oneself has become no longer is enough, as the speaker's cries for "food" illustrate. The speaker's focus on physical consummation is particularly interesting at a time which the aging Queen became unable to bear an heir, and thus uninterested, it seems, in marrying. Derek Alwes argues that Sidney's sonnet sequence is directed at Elizabeth, as "to criticize Petrarchanism at the court of Elizabeth was to criticize Elizabeth herself."¹³ He further notes that the sequence ends in "darkness, stasis, and despair," equating the failed attempt to woo and consummate the speaker's relationship with the maiden to the 1580s and 1590s political upheaval of an anxious populace unsure of the succession (Alwes 79-80). I suggest that this need for "food," physical consummation, speaks to not just a political upheaval, but to another need that arises in the 1580s, a need to redefine male/female relationships after the queen manipulates the patriarchal concept of chastity to further legitimize her power as a single woman. The masculine anxiety that begins to arise would seem to be

¹³ Alwes, Derek. *Sons and Authors in Elizabethan England*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004. 79. Print.

related to the desire for physical consumption and the subsequent loss of a wooed maiden's chastity.

Another way to look at it is that in order to fashion himself, the speaker looks to his lady, following the traditional Petrarchan conventions; however, the lady has a new and more active role in the shaping of his identity. He no longer feels that her passive and removed role is enough, and he now needs the "food" to a physical surrender in order to affirm and shape his masculine identity. This shift could be an expression of an anxiety that had largely been absent from courtly love poetry prior to the 1580s. It is no longer enough to simply have women conform to gender roles that endow them with socially sanctioned power by playing the role of the chaste maiden. Once a woman makes a choice and marries, the basis for her power is nullified and patriarchal dominance and supremacy is re-established. Elizabeth and her strategies of self-representation demonstrate that even when a woman conforms to the norms expected of her, thus adhering to her prescribed gender role, she eventually needs to succumb and surrender that power, because feminine power and an empowered "Other" figure creates and perpetuates the "anxious masculinity" inherent in a culture driven by patriarchal prerogatives.

Spenser's *Amoretti* and its companion piece *Epithalamion* can similarly be read as an attempt to soothe masculine anxieties roused by Elizabeth I's insistent and static virgin state. Like Sidney's *Astrophil*, Spenser's masculine figures seek a successful conclusion to their amorous pursuits. Like Elizabeth, the lady figured in Spenser's sonnets remains aloof and demonstrates her power by invoking a reaction in

the speaker. Further efforts on the speaker's part eventually do, however, convince her to concede defeat and agree to wed him. Through his poetry, he is able to both conquer her and move her to virtue. She eventually succumbs in the *Epithalamion* and assumes her socially allotted gender role of wife, essentially surrendering her power and restoring the patriarchal gender hierarchy. Powerful women can be courted and valued, Spenser's poetry suggests, but the shift in courtship roles suggests that the most valuable ladies are those who eventually marry and conform to the role of wife, perpetuating the patriarchal culture of early modern England. Spenser's sonnet sequence, then, echoes the need for consummation in Sidney's sonnet sequence, and takes it a step further by demonstrating that said consumption can disempower the maiden and restore the social hierarchy.

In sonnet 18, the lady still demonstrates her power as a chaste maiden by ignoring her suitor's plight. She also mocks his theatrical display of passion, which urges him to further wooing attempts:

The rolling wheele that runneth often round,
 The hardest steele in tract of time doth teare:
 And drizzling drops that often doe redound,
 The firmest flint doth in continuance weare.
 Yet cannot I, with many a dropping teare,
 And long intreaty, soften her hard hart:
 That she will once vouchsafe my plaint to heare,
 Or looke with pittie on my payneful smart.
 But when I pleade, she bids me play my part,
 And when I weep, she sayes teares are but water:
 And when I sigh, she sayes I know the art,
 And when I waile, she turns her selfe to laughter.
 So doe I weepe, and wayle, and pleade in vaine,
 Whiles she as steele and flint doth still remayne (Spenser 594).

The speaker notes that despite continued efforts, the lady he pursues cannot be persuaded to look “with pittie on [his] payneful smart” despite “many a dropping teare,/and long intreaty, soften her hard hart” (18.5-8). His tears and wailing she says are “art” and cause her to laugh, while “she as steele and flint doth still remayne” (18.14). Typical of Petrarchan sonnet sequences in Elizabethan England, then, the unmoved lady is seemingly pursued in vain, and the suitor is taught patience and endurance, as well as self control, as he continues the chase for the chaste. This sonnet follows some of the tropes of the Petrarchan sonnet courtship style, for the chase allows the speaker the opportunity to grapple with the conflicting desires for spiritual and physical love.

The speaker’s lady, however, is empowered with the ability to speak in response to the suit for her hand, demonstrating that Spenser attributes a greater degree of power to the lady in his sequence than typically found in Petrarchan sonnets. This lady, Spenser’s Elizabeth, actually responds, ignoring his efforts and tears but “says teares are but water” (18. 10). The Speaker continues to press his suit, but when he “sigh[s], she says I know the art” (18.11). The lady not only denies his suit, but also laughs, calling his actions “art” and even criticizing him when he “waile[s]” (18.12). This lady, therefore, not only stands unmoved by his suit, but goes so far as to judge his efforts with his laughter and criticism. Even though the male speaker is the one to vocalize her response by paraphrasing her words, we could read her perceived response to his suit as a manifestation of his own feelings of inadequacy and anxiety in an unfamiliar position of subordination to a powerful single woman.

In *The Amoretti*, both the speaker and his lady are aware of the game in play; this is a move on Spenser's part to invest her with a degree of autonomy, albeit minimal, largely denied the feminine objects of desire in the literature of the day to perhaps portray the threat to masculinity figured by the Queen whom the lady could be said to represent. As traditionally women in courtship poetry are largely silent and passive figures, Spenser's empowered lady can be seen as a more accurate representation of his Queen, whose power in part depended on her chastity and desirability. This deviation from the traditional model and representation of the empowered lady provides Spenser with an example of how to overcome such a figure despite being threatened and challenged by her. At court, Elizabeth's suitors are at her beck and call, subject to endure her ill tempers and manipulative games. This suggests that Spenser is attempting to respond to his own position to the Queen and to redefine that position in terms of the conventions of upper class courtship. This would in turn reconcile Elizabeth's inviolable chastity with the position traditionally assigned women. In other words, one could argue that this move on Spenser's part serves to provide an assurance to his fellow anxious male courtiers that despite their subservient, subjugated roles at the court of the Queen, strong women can be conquered via courtship and put back in their place.

Spenser's sonnet sequence also diverges from the Petrarchan model to provide an example of courtship that participates in the patriarchal social norms then at play late in Elizabeth's reign. The lady the speaker pursues is an eligible maiden unlike Sidney's Stella, interestingly named Elizabeth in Sonnet 74, who in resisting her suitor

actively guards her chastity and keeps her socially endorsed power. Her honor and value as a prospective bride rests upon her virginity, and the speaker makes little effort to illicitly seize that which he has not yet rightfully won.

In Sonnet 74, Spenser goes on to praise his mother, Queen, and intended bride, the Elizabeths who have enriched his life:

Most happy letters framed by skilfull trade,
 With which that happy name was first desynd:
 The which three times thrise happy hath me made,
 With guifts of body, fortune, and of mind.
 The first my being to me gave by kind,
 From mothers womb derived by dew descent,
 The second is my sovereign Queene the most kind,
 That honour and large richesse to me lent.
 The third my love, my lives last ornament,
 By whom my spirit out of dust was rayseed:
 To speake her prayse and glory excellent,
 Of all alive most worthy to be prayseed.
 Ye three Elizabeths for ever live,
 That three such graces did unto me give (Spenser 617).

The three Elizabeths of the poem have granted Spenser with three “guifts of body, fortune, and of mind” (74.4); his mother gave him life or “body,” his Queen granted him “fortune,” and his love gave him her “mind” by agreeing to eventually marry him. Though he makes clear that all three ladies whose name of nine “most happy letters [Elizabeth]” (74.1) have all made him happy, it is the third Elizabeth, the lady he is wooing, who is of paramount importance. She is the subject of the entire third quatrain and is described as the speaker’s love, and granted more space, line wise, than the other Elizabeths combined. She is, as he tells us in line twelve, “of all alive most worthy to be prayseed” even above his Queen. Spenser seems to suggest in this sonnet that his relationship with his betrothed is the most important, though all three ladies

are described as graces, as it is her who has raised his “spirit out of dust” (74.10) by ensuring his immortality. Traditional courtship conventions involve the exchange of “large riches” (74.8) that he gets from his Queen, and marriages also often include the exchange of dowries and the production of children and thus the gift of body he received from “mothers womb” (74.6). Here, a companionable courtship and marriage bring more to a man than heirs and fortunes.

All three of the speaker’s Elizabeths, then, are represented as valuable and beneficial to the speaker’s patriarchal role, but the courted and wed Elizabeth is the superior female figure and the most valued by the male speaker. It is his beloved who is “of all alive most worthy to be prayed” (74.12) because it is she “by whom [his] spirit out of dust was raised” (74.10). Her value to the speaker, aside from her love and physical body, is the children she produces as the fruit of the marriage. She is thus the one who ensures his immortality through the production of heirs and a continued dynasty: she is the Elizabeth most valuable to the male speaker and the one who most clearly supports patriarchal values.

That said, Spenser still recognizes his Queen’s value to her male courtiers. After all, she still grants her suitors, if not her hand and body, at least material wealth, as the speaker notes “that honour and large riches to me [are] lent” (74.8) by the “sovereign Queene the most kind” (74.7). Even though she did not marry and produce the heirs that would ensure the survival and immortality of both her country and her dynasty, she could thus still be seen to be of importance to the male speaker.

The *Amoretti* also departs from traditional sonnet sequences in its insistence upon marriage before consummation, a move that positions Spenser as a patriarchal authority as well. The male suitor wishes to win his lady's hand in marriage, illustrating that both Spenser and the suitor of the sequence are capable of adhering to and promoting Protestant values of early modern England. Rather than portraying a cold mistress who is married to another and yet available as other, more traditional sonnet sequences such as Sidney's do, Spenser presents a type of woman who is empowered by her social status as a chaste woman viable for matrimony, just as his Queen portrayed herself during the first half of her reign. Writing in the 1580s, Spenser continues to validate the kind of woman his Queen represents herself as, but the sonnets' emphasis on marriage and procreation further demonstrates the need, after she is no longer marriageable, to reiterate the importance of a successful conclusion to courtships because of the security and dynastic survival often granted by them.

Spenser's sequence further departs from tradition in its ending, as his speaker eventually gains the hand and love of his chosen lady. As the reader learns in sonnet 82, she finally relents and accepts his suit:

Joy of my life, full oft for loving you
 I blesse my lot, that was so lucky placed:
 But then the more your owne mishap I rew,
 That are so much by so meane love embased.
 For had the equall hevens so much you graced
 In this as in the rest, ye mote invent
 Som hevenly wit, whose verse could have enchased
 Your glorious name in golden monument.
 But since ye deigned so goodly to relent
 To me your thrall, in whom is little worth,
 That little as I am, shall be spent,
 In setting your immortall praises forth.

Whose lofty argument uplifting me,
 Shall lift you up unto an high degree (Spenser 620).

Praising the beloved, since she “deigned so goodly to relent” and allow herself to be engaged intellectually, giving to [him] [her] thrall” (82.9-10), the speaker rejoices that he has finally attained his lot “that was so lucky placed” (82.2). He continues, asserting that his “little worth” will be spent “in setting your immortall prayes forth” (82.13) which will eventually uplift him as a writer as well. His affianced Elizabeth is therefore most important to him, because it is through her that he is able to immortalize himself as a writer as well as a man.

The *Epithalamon* follows *Amoretti*, and celebrates the marriage of Spenser to his wooed and won lady, Elizabeth Boyle, which took place in 1589. Spenser thus presented not only the successful wooing of a strong minded, chaste female figure that resulted in marriage, but also effectively illustrated that a masculine courtier could defeat even a strong and adamantly virginal lady. These sonnets and the sequence in which they are found suggest that Spenser’s skillful adherence to and use of the sonnet sequence form by portraying the courtship of an empowered woman attempted to quell the masculine anxiety of the 1580s. His innovative departures from it by demonstrating how to successfully woo and subdue such a lady via marriage, were an attempt to recognize and remedy the anxiety of a courtier and man that arose from the long standing single state of the Queen.

The Faerie Queene: Courting the Virgin

Spenser composed several works in addition to *The Amoretti* that also endorse the Queen's self-representations while, at the same time, demonstrate how said representations could jeopardize patriarchal authority and threaten masculine identity. Yet just as he did by ending his sonnet sequence with marriage, in these works, and *The Faerie Queene* in particular, Spenser alleviates the anxiety roused by such revelations. Spenser's aim in writing the monumental epic poem *The Faerie Queene* was, as he outlines in his prefatory letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, to "fashion a gentleman or noble person," to educate and move his readers through his poetry, rather than just entertain them. By attributing to poetry the potential to incite the reader to re-fashion his or herself according to the ideal represented, Spenser would effectively illustrate the importance and value of a professional poet.

Spenser sought to allay the masculine anxiety of Elizabeth's male courtiers by appropriating the secondary basis for her continued power as a single woman, her static chastity, back into the accepted patriarchal framework by demonstrating that persistently chaste and empowered women could eventually be wed and therefore relegated back to their socially prescribed place. As the previous discussion of the *Amoretti* demonstrates, his sonnet sequence can be read as an attempt to demonstrate that empowered women can still be functioning contributors to patriarchal English society, so long as they eventually wed. In his sonnet 74, it is the strong woman who does succumb to her suitor who is valued the highest, though the Elizabeth the Queen figure is still valued for her gifts of fortune. In this way, his poem seems to reconcile

tensions caused by the Queenly rule of a patriarchal society. He acknowledges that the queen has some worth to her people despite her refusal to marry, but it is the Elizabeth he weds who is most valued because of her willingness to marry and ensure the speaker's immortality through the production of children. *The Faerie Queene*, much like the *Amoretti* and the *Epithalameon* and written around the same time, also reworked the Queen's representation of chastity and the late Tudor model of the chaste maiden in order to assure and sooth the masculine anxiety of her courtiers by portraying three different representations of chastity. These representations, to some extent, all embody aspects of the Queen's barren chastity that had rendered her masculine subjects anxious.

With the help of Raleigh, fellow Irish colonist and Elizabethan courtier, Spenser presented the first three books of *The Faerie Queene* to Elizabeth in 1589-1590. The poem overtly celebrates Queen Elizabeth I and the Tudor dynasty, and also establishes for her a line of descent from the legendary King Arthur; Spenser's Faeryland provides a mirror for England and her Queen, a mirror of a "Great Lady of the greatest isle" (Spenser 6). Through his characters Belphoebe, a powerful virgin queen who never procreates, and Britomart, a potentially negative figure of chaste womanhood who wants to marry, Spenser both perpetuates early modern patriarchy with the figure of a powerful woman seeking a husband and, at the same time, points out the danger of the rigid inflexibility of a woman who refuses to wed.

In his poems, Spenser demonstrates the threat these chaste and powerful female figures pose to early modern patriarchy, but at the same time he uses them to

call attention to the inconsistencies of that system. *The Faerie Queene*, like the *Amoretti*, therefore suggests that though the Elizabethan collective upper-class identity was based upon the interplay of the inner dynamics between men and women, and that such interplay can be manipulated to absorb and mitigate their threat.

I would argue that although Spenser never explicitly addresses female readers, save the queen herself, Spenser's representations of chastity give his general female audience conflicting ideals of womanhood to aspire to. In his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, he states that the "generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman," (Spenser 1) making it clear that he hopes to provide a means of fashioning masculine identities; however, he goes on to add "or a noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline" (Spenser 1). This distinction between the "gentleman" and the "virtuous or noble person" suggests that Spenser was aware that he had readers other than gentlemen that needed "fashioning," such as the educated upper class women of Elizabeth Tudor's court. While it could be read as referring to a male audience other than "gentlemen," my reading suggests that Spenser took into consideration his female audience as well, the women at court who read and discussed literature. Spenser was therefore able to give his female readers "mirrours" (Spenser 232) of womanhood in which to read themselves, but mirrours which reflected most flatteringly a womanhood which was preferred and endorsed by his male audience and thus those whose power he was invested in perpetuating.

As Spenser acknowledges in this letter to Raleigh, Elizabeth is the model for the Faerie Queene Gloriana, certainly, but he also notes that at other times he "doe[s]"

otherwise shadow her...[because] she beareth two persons, the one a most royale Queene or Emperesse, the other of a most virtuous and beautifull Lady” (Spenser 2). This enabled him to both address the self-authorized and empowered chaste female figure which threatened patriarchal masculinity, while also praising his autocratic Virgin Queen, just as he praised the Elizabeth the Queen figure in sonnet 74. This ultimately garnered for him the highest royal annuity granted to an author during Elizabeth’s reign, illustrating his success as both Elizabeth’s courtier and a poet. This suggests that she did indeed see herself in the “mirrours” *The Faery Queene* provides, the figures of Belphoebe and Gloriana.

When Spenser first represents Elizabeth in the character of Belphoebe, he describes her as the “most virtuous and beautiful Lady” (Spenser 2), as well as an empowered woman, a “mirrour” of herself that would perhaps appeal to the Queen. Later in the proem or introduction to Book III, Spenser asks the Queen to recognize that there is more than one way in which the text represents her:

Ne let his fairest Cynthia refuse,
in mirrours more than one her selfe to see
but either Gloriana let her chuse, or in Belphoebe bee
in th’one her rule, in th’other her rare chastitee (Spenser 232).

the other, presumably Belphoebe, is the figure of Elizabeth whose chastity is static and unchanging, her female and natural self. Gloriana is a great Queen, while Belphoebe is an example of an excellent and powerful maiden huntress, brought up by the goddess Diana to resist unauthorized male assaults to her chastity, and is a certainly an image of womanhood that conformed to patriarchal England’s gender norms.

While Belphoebe reinforces patriarchal values, she also resists the patriarchal confines of “good” womanhood, by providing a “dark” double of both Gloriana and Elizabeth I the Queen. As John King argues, such dark double figures can “be seen as a rhetorical strategy to counterbalance the poem’s epideism in a way that, ultimately, reinforces Gloriana (and therefore Elizabeth) as the true sovereign” (King 114-115). Readers are reminded of the dark double or contradictory representations of chastity throughout the books of *The Faery Queene*, but particularly in Book 1; the figure of Duessa appears to be a chaste maiden, but is actually an evil seductress who is meant to represent Mary, Queen of Scots. Mary was Elizabeth Tudor’s cousin, and although she did marry and produce an heir, she also allegedly murdered her second husband while having an affair with his killer and was imprisoned and forced to abdicate by her own people. She was later imprisoned in England, where she sought to instigate plots to assassinate Elizabeth in order to usurp her throne. Elizabeth, and the rest of Spenser’s audience, is left free to choose which is the better figure of a Queen. In Book III, Canto IX we are admonished that:

But never let the ensample of the bad
 Offend the good: for good by paragone
 Of evill, may more notably be rad
 As white seems fairer, amtcht with black attone (Spenser 233).

These dark doubles of Elizabeth, which appear even brighter in comparison when matched with the “black attone” represented in the poem, only serve to illustrate the positive benefits to having a Virgin Queen who is “as white seems fairer” when offset by evil, even though she never married and procreated, and thus ended the Tudor line.

Belphoebe, like Elizabeth, represents a model of chastity that is static and barren, for it is not actively being held intact for a man to “take.” In *The Faerie Queene*, Belphoebe has no intention of ever marrying. In Book III, Spenser encourages his readers to see this figure as an example of chastity:

To youre faire selves a faire ensample frame,
 Of this faire virgin, this Belphoebe faire
 To whom in perfect love, and spotless fame
 Of chastity, none living may compaire:
 Ne poysnous Envy justly can empaire
 The prayse of her fresh flowring Maidenhead;
 For thy she standeth on the highest staire
 Of th’honorable stage of womanhead,
 That ladies all may follow her ensample dead (Spenser 305)

Belphoebe is an example of a “faire virgin” who possesses a “fresh flowring Maidenhead.” Spenser praises her as a woman at an “honorable stage of womanhead” and one whom all ladies would benefit if they but “follow her ensample.” The use of the word “stage,” in line eight of the stanza, however, is ambiguous: it refers to a platform of display, but also implies that maidenhood is a natural stage, which is not permanent but temporary, though honorable. In other words, although Belphoebe is said to stand on the “highest staire.” Marriage could seem to be the natural next step. The ambiguity of “stage” would support my claim that Spenser is critical of ladies who hold out too long, like his Queen. Here, he also subtly criticizes Belphoebe’s, and by extension Elizabeth Tudor’s, refusal to embrace marriage.

Part of Spenser’s critique of the Queen at this moment of the poem lies in the fact that in refusing to marry, Belphoebe is setting a bad example for the readers he

hoped to fashion via his poetry. He declares that Belphoebe, the “flowre” planted by God, was meant to marry and produce children because:

In gentle ladies brest, and bounteous race
Of woman kind it farest flowre doth spire,
And beareth fruit of hour and chast desire. (Spenser 305).

Words such as “beareth,” “fruit,” and “flowre” carry connotations of procreation, which is seemingly contradictory to the sterile chastity that Belphoebe, and indeed Elizabeth herself, represent. Having defended patriarchy in the *Amoretti* by making it clear that the empowered beloved figure could be defeated, as it were, via marriage and that the Elizabeth who she marries is the one most prized by her suitor. Spenser and his fellow courtiers were stuck, as it were, in a relationship with a powerful woman whom they could not conquer. By representing multiple figures of empowered women, he was able to present the type of woman necessary for the self-fashioning of patriarchal masculine identities despite the anxiety created by the position of the Queen. Of course, Spenser needed to please his Queen as well; Book III’s portrayal of multiple representations of chaste female figures illustrates the juggling act that Spenser was forced to play when crafting *The Faerie Queene* for his readers, including the most important reader, the Queen herself. Belphoebe, then, as an acknowledged representation of the Queen, represents an implicit criticism of Elizabeth’s later static chastity and refusal to marry, just as Gloriana, whom Spenser addresses as the Queen, is another representation celebrating her strength and her wise rule.

Amoret, Belphoebe’s twin sister, is another example of chastity which Spenser presents and then subjugates with his writer’s pen in the poem. Though the speaker

does not directly associate Amoret with Elizabeth in the proem, she is, one could argue, another of the “mirrours” of the Queen’s chastity. She is a great virgin huntress and strong female figure who “mirrours” the Queen’s own reluctance to marry and surrender her chastity. Amoret is kidnapped on the eve of her wedding to Scudamour, a marriage she is reluctant to consummate, and their relationship is therefore represented as similar to that figured in Spenser’s tribute to marriage *Epithalamion*, whose marriage is also a love match. Frye and Berry have suggested that Amoret is kidnapped by Busirane as punishment for her reluctance to have sanctioned sex with her husband once they marry; this reading supports my argument that Spenser in *The Faerie Queene* is seeking to redefine Elizabeth’s barren chastity in order to reflect the Protestant ideals of marital chastity and procreation. In Canto XI, Stanza 16, Scudamour reveals that Amoret has been plagued by “continuell feare” (Spenser 378), a moment to which scholars point to in support of the assertion that her kidnapping is a punishment for resisting marital chastity. By inferring that there perhaps were grounds for her kidnapping, allegorically speaking, Spenser is able to educate his female readers as to a productive attitude towards sex which will inspire them to fashion a marital chastity which will move readers to virtue and uphold patriarchal values simultaneously.

Amoret’s rape at the hands of Busirane is a contentious subject in Spenserian scholarship; many scholars, such as Frye, assert that it is a move to “define rape in terms of love, love as rape-the definitive threat to women that constructs the ideology of male supremacy” (Frye 134). I argue rather that the piercing of Amoret’s heart in

canto 12 suggests that the sex act without love (represented by the heart) is unchaste according to Spenser's definition of marital chastity, which is in line with Protestant values. If one contends that Amoret's kidnapping was the result of her own fears about the marriage act, then it follows that her subsequent rape of her heart is a "dark double" of the marriage act. This, then, serves to make the marriage act look more appealing to the reader; this scene can be read as a move to "teach" women to embrace their subjugated position in patriarchal early modern England as a means of achieving virtue through a loving and harmonious marriage.

Amoret's kidnapping could also provide Spenser's female readers with an example of their role in courtship and marriage; Scudamour lays claim to her chastity lawfully, in a manner which supports patriarchal values. Her fear of surrendering that chastity to her husband, and subsequent kidnapping, demonstrate that it is far better to submit to your prescribed role than to flee from it. Eventually Amoret is rescued by Britomart, a virtuous maiden who relentlessly seeks the man she would wed in order to wed him and do the very thing Amoret had refused to do. This seems a rather pointed example of what happens when women resist the roles that have been socially prescribed for them.

The third "mirroure" or representation of Elizabeth that Spenser presents in Book III is in fact Britomart. She represents the version of chastity which most reflects the patriarchal values that Spenser is at pains to endorse in his poem. Though Spenser never makes it explicitly clear that Britomart poses as a mirror of the Queen, Britomart could perhaps be said to be the woman Spenser wishes her to be. Certainly she seems

to be the figure of womanhood that Spenser is most concerned that his non-royal female readers emulate. McManus argues that Spenser seems “lightly uneasy about the ramifications of [female] imaginative autonomy” and that he includes a “variety of competing literary images of passionate women [in order to] emphasize the choice women readers exercise in accepting or resisting particular literary conventions” (McManus 107). Essentially, by portraying Britomart as an educated, powerful woman “borrowing” a man’s armor and a woman who falls in love at first sight and relentlessly searches for her husband to be, Spenser is criticizing Elizabeth’s many delays and strategic postponing of marriage negotiations. Britomart “reads” the mirror in which she sees Artegall, putting the image into context with her knowledge of tales of romance, Petrarchan poetry, and Ovidian myths. She then actively participates in adapting the role assigned her, rather than just allowing herself to be subjugated and forced to conform to patriarchal ideals. She also, however, intends to marry and surrender her manly guise; she is only dressed as a man to ensure her own safety on her search for her would-be husband.

Britomart’s quest begins when she looks into a mirror and falls in love with a man she has never met; she proceeds to spend the rest of Book III in earnest search of him. Early in her adventures Merlin tells her in Canto III that she will marry this man and begin a line of kings, “For from thy wombe a famous Progenie/Shall spring” (Spenser 267). This, I would suggest, is an even more direct criticism of Elizabeth, who in refusing to marry or even name an heir during her reign created tense uncertainty about the future in the minds of her people. Caroline McManus asserts that

in this instance of “love at first sight” Britomart demonstrates that she acting as a chaste maiden and “dutifully acquiesc[ing] to Merlin’s patriotic and patriarchal agenda” (McManus 106), and is therefore a good model for Spenser’s female readers to emulate. Her power and independence is directed towards seeking her husband and assuming her socially prescribed gender role of wife, in order to beget the line of kings of which Merlin speaks. Spenser portrays in Britomart the “right” kind of chastity that seeks fulfillment through marriage and procreation.

More than Belpheobe, Britomart serves as a further example of womanhood that supports and sustains patriarchal masculinity and male privilege, because, she seeks only to mask her femininity with her masculine armor. She also “serves the interest of her father by not allowing her femininity to disturb the patriarchal power balance, and by defining her ‘chastity’ according to historical necessity, she is...[defining] her future motherhood by the needs of a male political hierarchy” (Berry 161). Even though Britomart reminds the reader of Elizabeth, she still is a “good” example by which other women can fashion themselves after. In other words, Belpheobe and Britomart are both women empowered by their chastity and are virtuous maidens; however, Britomart serves as a superior example of womanhood because she wishes to marry and perpetuate the bloodline of her husband by producing heirs, unlike Amoret who flees from the consummation of her marriage.

Britomart places her power within the framework of patriarchal values and willingly surrenders it to assume her socially prescribed gender role as wife and mother, while Belpheobe remains the static virgin and huntress who stands aloof from

the needs and values of her patriarchal culture, much like Spenser's Queen does late in her reign. This is once again demonstrated when Britomart rescues Artegall. She does so by defeating Radigund, Queen of the Amazons, in hand to hand combat in Book 5, Canto VII garbed as a man with a man's authority. Furthermore, before she departs the castle to flee from the sight of Artegall in women's clothing, she forces the remaining female warriors of the slain Radigund to swear allegiance to Artegall, rather than herself (Spenser 405-412). This effectively restores the patriarchal hierarchy of power. The figure of Britomart is used to reiterate the consequences of Elizabeth's static chastity and withdrawal from courtship and actively engaged chastity. That is, the end of the Tudor dynasty and the uncertainty of an undecided succession, which Merlin gloomingly anticipates in Cantos II and III of Book III.

The tradition of courtly love poetry dictated that a woman keep herself pure, certainly, but eventually, submit to her husband because it is her duty and assigned gender role to do so. Spenser is able to educate his female readers as to a productive attitude towards marriage. One could argue that he hoped that by presenting a character who adheres to the model of womanhood endorsed by patriarchy, women will be moved to fashion for themselves a chastity that upholds patriarchal values, rather than adopt the fruitless chastity of the Queen.

Spenser, by portraying representations of chaste femininity that both favored and questioned patriarchy, treaded on dangerous ground. His representations of Elizabeth in *The Faerie Queene* reflect the two bodies of the Queen's rhetoric that Elizabeth herself used to legitimize her reign within the patriarchal discourse of Tudor

England.¹⁴ Belpheobe, Amoret, and Britomart call into question assumptions about gender and the inequalities of patriarchy. If Elizabeth was such a great Queen despite her single state, why could not other women emulate her, basing their own authority on chastity withheld from men? Why did she feel the need to make clear that her body is “the weak body of a woman” and the “heart and stomach of a king simultaneously as she does in the speech to the troops at Tilbury in 1588 before the battle with the Spanish Armada? Her authority as Queen is based on her “kingly heart and stomach,” and on the reserved or static chastity of her late reign only serves to validate her single state and make it appear as though she yet adheres to the gender role expected of her. It appears, however, that her guise of chastity wasn’t enough to placate her masculine subjects, whose “anxious masculinity” is apparent in the way in which the literary works of the period seek to represent figures of womanhood who surrender their power to the men who court them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, when considering Elizabeth and the authority she crafted for herself based upon the patriarchal ideal of female chastity, it is important to remember that she was not necessarily attempting to change the early modern world; she was looking out for herself, and trying to legitimize her tenuous claim to the throne of a country in which half the population believed her to be a bastard, and thus illegitimately Queen. The ways she used patriarchal concepts of courtship and the

¹⁴ Shultz, Regina. *The Body of the Queen: Gender and Rule in the Courtly World, 1500-2000*, 2006. It provides an extensive overview of the political, gender, and religious discourses of the sixteenth century in England.

gender roles which perpetuate the paradigm to further her own agenda perhaps indicates she was not positioning herself in opposition to patriarchy. She used the power granted to maidens engaged in courtship to authorize herself and her authority for decades, until her advanced age rendered her ineligible for dynastic marriage. After her exit from courtship, she continued to base her power on her chastity, but such a justification and self-authorization of female power fell outside the traditional patriarchal framework, and caused anxiety among her masculine subjects at court.

In his sonnet sequence *Amoretti* and its companion *Epithalamion*, Spenser seeks to soothe said anxiety and redefine and expand the social practice of courtship to accommodate his Queen's agency and power in order to make her self-representation compatible with the patriarchal schema. He does, however, make it clear that the traditional figure of the wooed and won lady is ideal and superior to that of the static maiden, even if said maiden is a Queen. His representations of various types of chaste femininity work to both soothe the anxious masculinity of Elizabeth's subjects as well as lend validation to the Queen's barren version of chastity. This would explain Spenser's success as a courtier and a poet, despite his apparent recriminations and criticisms of her single and childless state.

In *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser responds to Elizabeth's claim of authority based upon female chastity and her manipulation of the social practice of upper class courtship by depicting several chaste female characters that problematize the culturally accepted ideal of womanhood. These figures both respond to the threat of a female figure outside the patriarchal framework and also in some respects validate it,

and thus validate the subservience of himself and his fellow courtiers to the Queen. In doing so, Spenser seems to have addressed the anxious masculinity felt by his fellow courtiers as they sought to shape and fashion their masculine identities in relation to an empowered and aloof female figure. The manipulation of the conventions of courtship in his sonnet sequences, and his revision of the representations of the Queen and of empowered chaste female figures in *The Faerie Queene*, demonstrate that Edmund Spenser was more than just a dilettante courtier poet. He actively sought to perpetuate the patriarchal power structure that guaranteed masculine privilege, but at the same time he underscored the contradictions of such a system by praising and validating the self-representations of his Queen while he simultaneously re-wrote them and exposed their vulnerability and weakness.

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