

Becoming a Virgin:
The Rhetorical Development of Queen Elizabeth I
by
Laura Partamian

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For my mother, who proved that a little macaroni and cheese never killed anyone.

For my father, who always told his little girl she could fly.

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Abstract

According to Protestant doctrine, it is imperative for a woman to bear children to redeem herself from the inherited burden Eve commenced by eating the forbidden fruit. By this patriarchal belief, one would assume that a Protestant Queen would be eager to marry and produce an heir. This was not the case for Queen Elizabeth I of England. Throughout her forty-four year reign Elizabeth abstained from marriage and motherhood, though not without ample advice from Parliament and her Council to act in accordance with Protestant ideology. Elizabeth began to combat marital advice from the outset of her reign through her rhetoric. She realized that there were intricacies in the way she wrote and spoke that influenced the (*male*) reception of her words. This thesis will argue that Elizabeth employed strategic rhetoric in order to delay and ultimately dissipate the question of a husband and Tudor heir. I suggest that Elizabeth's rhetorical development enabled her to evade Protestant dogma and foster female power during an era of patriarchy.

In order to prove that Elizabeth's rhetoric underwent a transformation, it is necessary to analyze her early writings. The first chapter of this thesis analyzes three of Elizabeth's early works: *The Woodstock Epigram*, her letters with Bishop de Quadra regarding suitors, and her rather avant-garde Petrarchan sonnets. Each of these forms of writing illuminate a new level in Elizabeth's rhetorical maturation, which I successively term: veiled defiance, opaque avoidance, and re-scriptive rhetoric. The progression of Elizabeth's writing during her earlier years equipped her for Parliament's petitions regarding marriage and an heir later in her reign.

The second chapter of the thesis delves into Parliament's marriage petitions to the Queen and her responses. The argument focuses on three of the Queen's speeches in which she utilized particular rhetorical strategies that are highlighted within the first chapter. Elizabeth initially deferred Parliament from the marriage-track through particularly opaque and Petrarchan style prose, utilizing complex language and unnecessary imagery. These speeches lead to the climax of the Queen's rhetorical evolution as she declared her *virgin vow*: it was God's will, and for the good of England, that she remained celibate.

The argument concludes by revisiting the development of Elizabeth's rhetoric and analyzes how it enabled her to remain a single female monarch. Further, the conclusion suggests that Elizabeth's language led her to forge a female power and act with feminist intentions. To prove the power of Elizabeth's rhetoric in altering, and fortifying, her role as an omnipotent Queen I analyze the *Ditchley Portrait*, which was commissioned in 1592. The portrait highlights Elizabeth's divine virginal qualities as a matriarchal monarch. Analysis of the portrait is tangible proof of the transformative nature of Elizabeth's language in shaping her rule. The power of Elizabeth's rhetoric shaped her as England's virgin Queen, a title with which she is solely associated.

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INTRODUCTION

I met Queen Elizabeth at the ripe age of twenty. With her sharp wit and dominant female presence I had an inkling we would quickly become friends. In films I witnessed her riding horses into battle, ordering men at her beck and call, and *never* being silenced (especially when asked to be quiet). However, this image of Elizabeth is fictional. It is true that as an unmarried Queen during the sixteenth century Elizabeth was unprecedentedly self-willed. She is infamous for her speech at Tilbury Camp when she rallied the troops by stating, “I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and a king of England too.”¹ Lines such as this rightly group Elizabeth with feminist ideals. However, Elizabeth did not always act in such a valiant and princely manner. This thesis traces *how* Queen Elizabeth maintained a forty-four year matriarchal rule over England, focusing on the development of her rhetoric.

To be a woman during the sixteenth century was to live under certain, and commonly accepted, constraints. Women were limited in their choice of topics, how they spoke, and how they interacted with the opposite sex.² More importantly, it was commonplace for women to marry and bear children, preferably at a young age. As a Protestant woman, Elizabeth was expected to uphold these fundamental values and truths. During her time as a Princess, Elizabeth accepted, even if unenthusiastically, the stereotyped roles of her sex. Once crowned Queen, it became increasingly difficult for Elizabeth to manage the role of her gender while securing her rule over England.

¹ Elizabeth I quoted by May, *Queen Elizabeth I: Selected Works*, Ed. Stephen W. May (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004), 77, Subsequent citations are to this edition.

² Paige M. Reynolds, “Female Piety in the Reign of Elizabeth I”, *Explorations in Renaissance culture* 37.1 (2011): 110. Subsequent citations are to this edition.

The patriarchal customs permeated the court as well, and were often seen as necessary for the well being of the country. Marriage for a Queen could mean gaining an ally in another country, which held the potential for increased protection and wealth. After being crowned Queen, Elizabeth's court focused on finding and securing her a husband; after marriage comes an heir, and this heir would bring a sigh of relief to Parliament. An heir provided security should anything happen to the Queen. The problem with these expectations was that Elizabeth intended to be the *final* ruler in the Tudor dynasty, which she was able to achieve.

The vital question is *how*. How did Elizabeth evade the rules of patriarchy and Protestantism to renounce taking a King and declare herself England's virgin Queen? This thesis argues that Elizabeth utilized rhetoric in order to secure her singular rule. As Queen, Elizabeth's decisions were judged under the discretion of men. During the earlier years of her reign, and even while a Princess, Elizabeth began to understand the rules of court. The first chapter explores the gradual evolution of Elizabeth's writing as she began to confront marriage and male power. The second chapter delves into Elizabeth's speeches to Parliament, analyzing how her early writing taught her to speak to Parliament in an efficient manner to maintain power (in layman's terms, she needed to keep the ball in her court). Elizabeth used opaque rhetoric to create purposeful ambiguity. By making her meanings and decisions undeterminable, the Queen deferred Parliament from forcing her to marry as they continually awaited her next speech and final answer. Her writing was not meant to confuse the men, but to leave them uncertain about her ambitions. This thesis argues that it was ultimately the Queen's rhetoric that allowed her to become England's single matriarch and virgin Queen.

Therefore, the image of Queen Elizabeth as an authoritative woman is not false, but it must be traced over the years of her reign. Through analyzing Elizabeth's rhetorical strategies of

opacity and evasion one learns *how* she overcame the domination of patriarchy. Elizabeth utilized her rhetoric to secure her rule and thereby assert herself more fully. It was only after years of tug-of-war with male authority that Elizabeth created a strong voice for herself. Elizabeth developed *female power* by manipulating female stereotypes, implementing opaque rhetoric, and fostering a virginal relationship with God. In constructing power through her womanhood, Elizabeth complied with patriarchal gender roles while controlling her rule. Ultimately, Elizabeth adopted her status as a woman to forge her role as England's virgin Queen.

CHAPTER ONE: “That Milkmaid’s lot is better than mine”³

Elizabeth understood the mobilizing effects of language far before she was crowned Queen. Before she delved into poetic works, Princess Elizabeth wrote letters to numerous influential members of the court in hopes of improving her social status. For instance, on New Years’ Eve of 1544 Elizabeth wrote to Henry VIII’s sixth, and final, wife Queen Catherine Parr.⁴ Parr is one of the many wives Henry VIII wed after he beheaded Elizabeth’s mother Anne Boleyn. Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that Elizabeth was not eager to form a relationship with the King’s new wife.⁵ Regardless of internal turmoil surrounding Parr, the Princess utilized letters to regain favor within the monarchy. The letter to Parr relies on a balance of personal modesty and flattery to her addressee. Elizabeth opened the letter with an elaborate address: “To our most Noble and virtuous Queen”.⁶ Praise for the “Noble” Queen continues as Elizabeth compliments Parr for her “excellent wit and godly learning”.⁷ These instances of adulation were intended to place Elizabeth in a favorable position with the Queen. Elizabeth highlighted Parr’s position of power through her own modesty. Before she complimented the Queen’s intelligence Elizabeth first states that she herself has but “simple wit and small learning”.⁸ Though this flattery is a fallacy—by age eleven Elizabeth was versed in both Latin and French—she had to remain humble to the Queen. Since Elizabeth did not have an intimate relationship with Queen

³ Elizabeth I, “Marriage: General”, *The Sayings of Queen Elizabeth*, Ed. Frederick Chamberlin, (John Lane: the Bodley Head Bell 1923), 8. Subsequent citations are to this edition.

⁴ Stephen W. May, *Queen Elizabeth I: Selected Works*, (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004), 98. Subsequent citations are to this edition.

⁵ Mary Hill Cole, “Maternal Memory: Elizabeth Tudor’s Anne Boleyn”, *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 37.1 (2011): 45. Elizabeth I is the daughter of Anne Boleyn, who was Henry VIII’s second wife. Unable to produce a male heir for the throne, Henry VIII executed Anne Boleyn and remarried four times after. The rash beheading of her mother is often used to explain Elizabeth’s own hesitation to marry and bear children.

⁶ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 94.

⁷ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 94.

⁸ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 94.

Catherine Parr, she implemented complimentary language and humble rhetoric to makeshift an amiable relationship via letters. As a Princess Elizabeth had not yet delved into implementing works to rescript her role as a woman, but she understood the influence of words in shaping her identity.

As Elizabeth continued learning and writing she started to convert difficult translations into English, and gradually began writing poetry. The form of rhetoric Elizabeth developed allowed her to craft herself as a dominant woman within confining Protestant gender roles. Elizabeth's rhetoric manipulated the stereotypes of her sex into a form of female power. In an era where Protestantism permeated, both the government and greater society, with patriarchal norms, Elizabeth words acted as an instrument to manage her rule.

It is a scholarly commonplace that Queen Elizabeth used opaque rhetoric when confronted by Parliament in the marriage petitions.⁹ It is vital to determine the tools Elizabeth developed during the early stages of her writing, since they helped form the purposefully ambiguous rhetorical style she implemented in her addresses to Parliament later in her reign. Elizabeth encountered instances of domination, primarily from male forces, far before Parliament petitioned her for an heir. This chapter traces the development of Elizabeth's rhetorical strategies, which culminated in her purposefully evasive language. In order to track the transformation of Elizabeth's earliest writing I will examine three rhetorical forms in which she confronts external powers. The first form is in response to Queen Mary I, who imprisoned Elizabeth in the Tower of London. I term this stage of her development *veiled defiance* because it is one of Elizabeth's initial confrontations to power via language. The second stage developed after Elizabeth was crowned Queen and her court searched for man to be her King. Through

⁹ Ilona Bell, *Elizabeth I: The Voice of a Monarch*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 94. Subsequent citations are to this edition.

written letters Elizabeth developed *opaque avoidance* to deter choosing a husband. The final stage of the Queen's early development takes form within the Petrarchan sonnet. This poetic form, in which a male writes to an inaccessible virgin, allowed Elizabeth to develop *re-scriptive rhetoric* as she branched outside ideological gender roles. The second and third stages of the Queen's rhetorical development focus on her responses to male voices and reveal important virginal-rhetoric developments. Analyzing the maturation of Elizabeth's rhetoric provides insight into her later speeches to Parliament and traces how her words created a female power that she harnessed to shape her reign.

Testimony in the Tower

The Queen's first piece of confrontational writing is her famed *Woodstock Epigram*. I term this phase in Elizabeth's development *veiled defiance*. The initial stage of Elizabeth's defiant dialogue exemplifies the Queen's obstinate nature during her youth. Despite the conflicts that may have arisen in her thoughts, Elizabeth could not voice her indignation openly, and therefore concealed her meanings within writing that accorded with the power she distrusted. Without tangible power, Elizabeth cautiously denounced Mary's monarchy and council while protecting herself from harm. Within the epigram Elizabeth attacked the power structure responsible for her imprisonment, in this case Mary I, a woman. Though the *Woodstock Epigram* does not directly serve as an act of resistance to a male force, it was an attack on her patriarchal environment. In order to voice her opinion without rustling feathers, Elizabeth masked *her* truths within words. To prove the epigram's challenging nature it is necessary to provide background of the political context surrounding the text's conception.

Queen Mary I, Elizabeth's sister through their mutual father Henry VIII, came into power after the death of their brother Edward VI in 1553.¹⁰ Receiving the crown at the age of thirty-seven, Mary was eager to secure a husband. The Queen's Hapsburg cousin, the Emperor Charles V, recommended his son, and the regent-ruler of Spain, Prince Philip. Though the alliance between England and Spain would strengthen England by welcoming them into the Habsburg cooperation, the marriage would also trigger the recatholicization of England, which challenged the permanency of Protestantism that Edward VI installed during his reign.¹¹ Parliament urged the Queen to marry within the realm to appease Protestant rebels, but she refused, and soon after the Rebellion of 1554 commenced. Protestant rebels gathered, with Sir Thomas Wyatt as their leader, under a united cause: block the Spanish marriage, dethrone Mary, and allow Elizabeth to usurp the role of Queen to restore Protestantism in England. Simply, the plots leaked.¹² Queen Mary learned of the rebellion that would threaten her crown and her life, and this knowledge resulted in the Queen's hatred toward Elizabeth since the rebels gathered in Elizabeth's name.

Without substantial evidence to prove that Elizabeth promoted the riots, Mary imprisoned Elizabeth in the Tower of London beginning in January of 1554, and continued to search for incriminating evidence. Regardless of Queen Mary's disdain for her sister, no further evidence was uncovered to place Elizabeth as either an actor or endorser of the riots. For that reason Elizabeth was released from the Tower in May of 1554 and transferred to Woodstock Manor where she was confined and guarded until 1558 when Mary died, after which Elizabeth moved from incarceration to the throne. During the four years of her imprisonment at Woodstock Elizabeth inscribed the *Woodstock Epigram* on the window of the manor. The epigram reads:

¹⁰ David Starkey, *Elizabeth: The Struggle for the Throne*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 119. Subsequent parenthetical citations are to this edition.

¹¹ Starkey 125.

¹² Starkey 130.

Much suspected by me,
 Nothing proved can be.
 Quod Elisabeth the prisoner¹³

As a young imprisoned woman, Princess Elizabeth veiled her indignation toward Mary and her court within the poem. However, deeper analysis reveals Elizabeth's suspicion of her imprisonment. The epigram is unquestionably an affront to Queen Mary and her council for imprisoning Elizabeth without substantial proof of her involvement in the protests. The brief poem also questions outside individuals who may have indicted her.

Many prominent Elizabethan scholars, in analyses of the Queen's written works, have studied the *Woodstock Epigram*. The piece is often analyzed through lenses of isolation and anger.¹⁴ My reading implements a new perspective by analyzing the epigram through Elizabeth's position of disempowerment. In her essay "Elizabeth Tudor: Poet", Ilona Bell argues that Elizabeth's compact rhetoric was an effect of her position as a prisoner and suspected traitor, focusing on her physical confinement.¹⁵ Though Elizabeth's confinement at Woodstock subordinated her as both a criminal and captive, I argue that the brevity of the epigram was a purposeful rhetorical strategy that confronted her position of disempowerment. The couplet format of the epigram was intentional and necessary to veil Elizabeth's suspicions regarding her imprisonment. The text reveals Elizabeth's early attitude toward infringing power and her ability to implement poetry as a form of personal empowerment.

¹³ Princess Elizabeth, "Woodstock Epigram", *Political Rhetoric, Power, and Renaissance Women*, Ed. Carole Levin and Patricia A. Sullivan, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 61. Subsequent citations are to this edition.

¹⁴ Ilona Bell, "Elizabeth Tudor: Poet", *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 37.1 (2011): 3. Subsequent citations are to this edition.

¹⁵ Bell, "Poet", 3.

Although Elizabeth's involvement in the Protestant riots was ambiguous, she did not outwardly proclaim her innocence. Instead, she implemented equivocal language to evade threats of conspiracy. The epigram precipitates two direct readings due to the ambiguous reading of the word "by". The equivocal nature of the word lends itself to a dual reading: (1) what was suspected of Elizabeth, and (2) what Elizabeth suspected of others. This first reading lends itself to a contemptuous tone, since Elizabeth was imprisoned without evidence of her involvement in the riots. The word "by" can also indicate a "secondary issue".¹⁶ Therefore, the epigram can be paraphrased to say: Since there is no evidence against me, I suspect others have blamed me. If "by" denotes an accompanying issue, then a second reading of the poem provides insight into Elizabeth's own suspicions about those who may have implicated her.

The primary reading, where "by" denotes Elizabeth's suspected crimes as an accomplice in the riots elucidates her attitude towards restrictive power. Elizabeth was incarcerated by word of mouth, not concrete evidence. Incorporate the second line, "Nothing proved can be", and Elizabeth asserted that she was imprisoned through a corrupt misuse of power. The juxtaposition of "Much" and "Nothing" suggests that Queen Mary and her council created "much" when they had "nothing" to substantiate their claims.¹⁷ Elizabeth was cautious not to use overly confrontational or condemnatory language due to her secondary position in society as a prisoner suspected by the crown. The first reading of the word "by" calls attention to Elizabeth's supposed crimes, and impugns her incarcerators for a misuse of power.

While the primary reading is an affront to her incarcerators, the secondary reading delves into what Elizabeth suspected of others. Scholars cannot definitively state whether Elizabeth was

¹⁶ "by sb.", *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1996, *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, Accessed November, 2012, <http://dictionary.oed.com>.

¹⁷ Bell, "Poet", 4.

involved in the riots, but it is confirmed that Elizabeth was applied as figurehead by Protestant rebels in their pursuit to dethrone Queen Mary. Elizabeth was not naïve. She was aware that contemporary politics in England meant plots and suspicion. In the epigram the line “Much suspected by me” suggests that Elizabeth was untrusting of an outside individual.¹⁸ The most likely individual Elizabeth suspected was the leader of the rebellion, Sir Thomas Wyatt. On Wednesday the fifteenth of March Wyatt provided a public testimony against Elizabeth, which severely escalated the suspicion Queen Mary had about Elizabeth’s involvement in the riots.¹⁹ In his testimony Wyatt noted that he contacted Elizabeth through letters and that she would reply with a messenger, though she never allowed for written documentation to be delivered.²⁰ During his trial Wyatt arguably exploited Elizabeth as an attempt to escape a dismal fate. While confined in Woodstock Manor Elizabeth may have suspected that Wyatt would shift responsibility for the riots onto her in an attempt to save his own head. Unfortunately for Wyatt, his testimony regarding Elizabeth did not provide ample evidence and he was executed in April of 1554.

Although the *Woodstock Epigram* did not act as a mobilizing device to free Elizabeth from her state of captivity, it illuminates her use of language as a source of defiance. Instead of petitioning to outside forces Elizabeth rightly believed would deny her cause, she chose to write the epigram to protest against the corrupt powers who imprisoned and indicted her without proof. Since the poem is brief, Elizabeth was able to conceal her contempt within equivocal language. Her veiled defiance confronted two forms of infringing power. The phrase “suspected by” denotes her outside suspicions of Wyatt regarding her incarceration, while the line “nothing

¹⁸ Princess Elizabeth, “Woodstock Epigram”.

¹⁹ Starkey 137.

²⁰ Starkey 137-38.

proved can be” criticized the court for incarcerating her without evidence.²¹ The epigram acted as a pivotal moment in Elizabeth’s rhetorical evolution; it documents her utilization of language to represent her convictions.

Evading an Engagement

The second stage of development in Elizabeth’s writing is illuminated in her letters regarding various suitors with Bishop de Quadra. After she was crowned Queen her council’s primary priority was to secure her a husband. Bishop de Quadra was chosen to act as her majesty’s counselor to find potential suitors. Essentially, de Quadra was the Elizabethan matchmaker. The Queen adapted her language to appease the religious patriarch, utilizing tactics of avoidance and flattery to defer choosing a suitor. These interactions helped develop the Queen’s rhetorical abilities as she began implementing distracting language to create uncertainty within her letters. I term this stage of Elizabeth’s rhetorical development *opaque avoidance*. While the word opaque may seem out of place in describing a form of discourse, it is useful in characterizing the Queen’s rhetorical style. The term is meant to describe the nontransparent nature of Elizabeth’s responses to male authority figures. If the Queen confronted the men with decisive language they would become distraught, or worse. Women of the sixteenth century were typically mute and malleable in response to male power, and if Elizabeth acted differently the men became severely offended and, more importantly, would lose respect for their Queen.²²

Elizabeth experienced backlash from her male council, de Quadra, and the royal community after writing in a direct and assertive fashion, similar to the directness of male speech, in her initial letters to the Bishop. In her early dialogue with de Quadra, the Bishop notes multiple times that Elizabeth’s direct and abrupt language upset him, arguing that she could not

²¹ Princess Elizabeth, “Woodstock Epigram”.

²² Reynolds 112.

mean what she said in her letters, since, as a woman, she would never speak explicitly.²³

Therefore, to manage de Quadra, Elizabeth implemented cryptic rhetoric as a diplomatic strategy to delay the finality of marriage, while appeasing male authority figures. Instead of addressing the men clearly and directly about her desires, she attempted to write undeterminably through a string of paradoxical thoughts and unconnected sentences. Similar tactics are used in the Queen's first Speech to Parliament after her smallpox attack, when she addressed their fears about being left without a successor to the crown:

And though God of late seemed to touch me rather like one that he chastised than one that he punished, and though death possessed almost every joint of me, so as I wished then that the feeble thread of life which lasted methought all too long, might by Clotho's hand have quietly been cut off; yet desired I not then life (as I have some witnesses here) so much for mine own safety as for yours.²⁴

Instead of answering Parliament's fears about a successor, Queen Elizabeth focused on her mental preoccupations during her illness, noting that her main concern was not for herself but for the "safety" of Parliament and her country. The Queen implemented Clotho, the youngest of three sisters known as the Fates in Greek mythology who was said to spin the thread of life, as an obscure metaphor to distract from the question of a successor.²⁵ Opaque avoidance exhibits how Elizabeth's rhetoric transformed in order to manipulate patriarchal power. It was only through convoluted language that the Queen was able to conform to gender norms while deferring suitors.

²³ Ilona Bell, "Elizabeth I—Always Her Own Free Woman", *Political Rhetoric, Power, and Renaissance Women*, Ed. Carole Levin and Patricia A. Sullivan, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 57-84. Subsequent citations are to this text.

²⁴ May 37-41.

²⁵ May 41.

The Queen's correspondence with Bishop de Quadra acted as a rhetorical lesson for her later encounters with Parliament. The Queen's letters with the Bishop exhibit the problematic politics of responding to suitors. During the late 1550's and into the 1560's all major powers of Europe were vying for Elizabeth's hand.²⁶ A marriage with Elizabeth was a marriage with England, meaning increased military, dynastic, and political benefits. However, the Queen did not imagine marriage as a matter of state and instead took a, however primitive, feminist outlook on marriage. Instead of submissively consenting to marry, the Queen developed personal standards for her courtiers outside the potential benefits for England. The Queen developed adversarial discourse in response to the arranged marriages that de Quadra intended to provide, and often personally wrote to the suitors whom the Bishop intended her to marry. For example, Elizabeth wrote to the Ambassador of the Duke of Württemberg in 1562 stating, "I would rather be a beggar and single than a queen and married".²⁷ This is blunt, especially for a Queen, during an era of submissive Protestant women. Elizabeth was determined to off put suitors, and wrote to them directly to bypass de Quadra's plans.

Bell, again, contributes to my analysis of Elizabeth's letters to the Bishop. The scholar analyzes these works through the lens of courtship, arguing that Elizabeth's writing style both confused and constructed the type of courting practices she desired. While I agree that the Queen's writing style was a response to courtship, I argue that it was solely to deter suitors. Elizabeth's primary intention was to delay choosing a King, and she gradually learned that in order to achieve these ends she needed to make her message indeterminate. Elizabeth's enigmatic language acted as a mechanism to retain her power as a single Queen.

²⁶ Bell, "Her Own Free Woman", 61.

²⁷ Elizabeth I, *Sayings of Queen Elizabeth*, 61.

After their initial letters, the Bishop began preparing suitors for Elizabeth including King Philip of Spain, who was previously married to the Queen's departed sister Mary.²⁸ The match seemed promising considering that the King already entered into the English monarchy less than a year prior. The difference was that Elizabeth did not want to marry, and became convinced that Philip's only interest in her was to secure England as a Catholic ally. Elizabeth denied the King, which led de Quadra to arrange a marriage between the Queen and the Archduke Charles II of Austria, Philip's cousin.²⁹ The Bishop wrote to Elizabeth about the prospect of marriage and inclusion into the Habsburg realm, recounting the Archduke's abundance of virtuous qualities. However, Elizabeth refused to marry a suitor not of her own choice. In order to establish her adversarial stance to arranged marriage Elizabeth wrote to de Quadra in one of her first letters vowing to "marry no man whom she had not seen".³⁰ This statement is neither allusive nor submissive, but did not state a refusal to marry.

The more assertive the Queen became, the more her words confounded her male readers. The Bishop and Elizabeth's council were disoriented by her direct assertions for two reasons, primarily due to Protestantism. First, a devout Protestant Queen was scripted to be silent and submissive. Secondly, Protestants believed that female bodies were created as a medium to provide women with salvation.³¹ The pains of childbirth served as punishment for eating the forbidden fruit. By this assertion, women during the era were expected to marry quickly and without the intention of carnal desire to ensure that they could procreate and suffer the fated pain of childbirth. Elizabeth made malleable the cemented Protestant roles regarding marriage,

²⁸ Bell, "Her Own Free Woman", 63.

²⁹ Bell, "Her Own Free Woman", 63.

³⁰ Elizabeth I quoted by Bell, "Elizabeth I—Always Her Own Free Woman", *Political Rhetoric, Power, and Renaissance Women*, Ed. Carole Levin and Patricia A. Sullivan, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 64. Subsequent citations are to this text.

³¹ Reynolds 112.

arguing that she would judge her suitors both by physical attractiveness *and* verbal wit.³² In his dismay de Quadra continued to insist that the Queen marry for her country, to produce a successor, and secure an ally. Despite his pleas, Elizabeth only became more abrupt and assertive, imprudently stating that she would “rather be a nun than marry without knowing with whom”.³³ This was the beginning of Elizabeth’s virginal self-representation. Although the Queen did not submit to virginity and spinsterhood at the beginning of her reign, she argued that virginity trumped the stifled life of an unhappily married monarch.

While the Queen’s direct language did complicate her council’s and de Quadra’s interpretations of her words, it also had numerous negative ramifications on her reputation. As Elizabeth asserted her criteria for an adequate husband, similarly to a man, the more rumors circulated. The Queen’s council increasingly referred to her as a “strumpet”, and disapproved of her reluctance to choose a suitor.³⁴ Negative gossip surrounding the Queen’s marriage prospects proliferated into rumor quickly because of her public physical relationship with Robert Dudley.³⁵ While de Quadra hunted for a husband, Elizabeth was constantly in Dudley’s company. Shortly into their relationship the Queen named Dudley Master of the Horse, and the two went galloping through the countryside alone. Elizabeth did not attempt to veil her attraction to Dudley, and their relationship quickly turned into scandal. There was speculation that Elizabeth fondled Dudley publicly and acted openly as though he was her lover.³⁶ Being the first year of her reign, the Queen had not yet learned that the ramifications for a monarch were far different than those of a Princess. The open physical tension with Dudley stood in paradox with her letters to de

³² Elizabeth I, “Her Own Free Woman”, 64.

³³ Elizabeth I, “Her Own Free Woman”, 63.

³⁴ Bell, “Her Own Free Woman”, 63.

³⁵ Bell, “Her Own Free Woman”, 65.

³⁶ Bell, “Her Own Free Woman”, 65.

Quadra, which argued against taking suitors. Elizabeth's fickle writing did not please the Bishop, and he enforced the vow from her initial letters, stating that she must meet each suitor in person, and began to invite suitors to visit her majesty.

With backlash from de Quadra, the Queen realized that in order to control her reign she needed to submit to the role of a Protestant woman; yet she molded these rules to aid her cause. Elizabeth altered her rhetorical strategy with the Bishop and suitors. Instead of upsetting the men through her assertive language, the Queen adopted increasingly opaque and passive rhetoric to deter suitors from visiting. For example, when the Archduke of Austria accepted a request to meet Elizabeth, she wrote to the Spanish Ambassador regarding a marriage with the Archduke stating that she "dare not summon the Archduke [for] fear he might not be satisfied with me...not dissatisfied with what he sees, but with what he hears about me".³⁷ With de Quadra's persistence for her to meet a suitor the Queen wrote to the Archduke herself, delicately yet deliberately stating that she did not want to be rude by sending for the Archduke without the intention to bind herself to marriage.³⁸

The Queen constructed addenda to her original request to meet and judge a suitor, arguing that it was unfair for a man to tire himself with travel when she may choose not take his hand. Elizabeth argued it was "not fit for a queen and a maiden to summon anyone to marry her for her pleasure".³⁹ The language Elizabeth implemented became increasingly ambiguous and pious in an attempt to distract de Quadra from her intentions *not* to secure a suitor. The Queen adopted paradoxical rules for each of her suitors, and implemented elusive images to leave the reader uncertain about her meaning. For example, Elizabeth wrote to the Swedish Ambassador in

³⁷ Elizabeth I, *Sayings of Queen Elizabeth*, 63.

³⁸ Bell, "Her Own Free Woman", 67.

³⁹ J.E. Neale, *Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1958), 117.

1561 stating, “I cannot yet lead myself to marriage; but I see it will be necessary; the safety of my kingdom requires that I shall bring myself to it, so I have changed my first purpose and am thinking of it”.⁴⁰ The Queen voiced her hesitations to marriage, asserted that it was necessary, but concluded by stating she was currently only *thinking* of the prospect of a husband. Her writing never renounced marriage, but she refused to accept it either. The Queen’s circular prose would leave the reader debating which route Elizabeth intended to follow. This rhetorical strategy benefited the Queen by allowing her to defer a marriage while appeasing de Quadra and her council by noting that she was taking their suggestions into consideration, an aspect she later implemented with Parliament in their petitions for a successor.

After discussing the assertive nature of the Queen’s rhetoric in her initial letters with de Quadra it may seem counterintuitive to define this stage of her writing as opaque avoidance. However, it is the obscure formulations regarding suitors and courtship that limit de Quadra and the council’s involvement in Elizabeth’s romantic relationships. Had the Queen not developed convoluted conclusions in regard to her courting procedures and suitors, her reputation may have been more permanently tainted, especially with the rumors regarding her relations with Dudley. As Queen, her institutional position required respect, but her role as a woman in Protestant England weakened her abilities to assert her role as monarch in the same way a King would have.⁴¹ The transition of Elizabeth’s writing from authoritative to ambiguous exhibits the

⁴⁰ Elizabeth I, *Sayings of Queen Elizabeth*, 59.

⁴¹ Carole Levin, “‘We Shall never have a merry world while the Queene lyveth’: Gender, Monarchy, and the Power of Seditious Words”, *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana*, Ed. Julia M. Walker, (United States: Duke University Press, 1998), 77-98. Henry VIII, despite reluctance from Parliament, married six times during his reign in hopes of producing a male successor to the throne. Levin argues that there is an implicit irony between the father and daughter; Elizabeth is reprimanded by Parliament for her refusal to marry and provide an heir, while conversely, Henry VIII will not cease beheading and remarrying to leave England with a male successor.

purposeful exploitation of rhetoric the Queen invented as a means to achieve her own ends as an independent monarch. Elizabeth realized the problematic nature of her sex despite her monarchical power.

The change that emerged in the Queen's letters to de Quadra is representative of the development of her rhetorical style throughout her early writings. Through the *Woodstock Epigram* the Queen realized the power to critique royal power through the written word. Elizabeth used equivocation to veil her meaning and protect herself from danger. This rhetorical development equipped Elizabeth for her interactions with de Quadra, and once she adapted to the restricted aspects of female speech, she became purposefully opaque. In order to defer her council's goal for marriage Elizabeth discussed her preference to remain pious rather than pathetically married. In her letters Elizabeth began to focus on the ideals of virginity and subtly allude to her preference for celibacy. Through Elizabeth's adoption of each new rhetorical form she learned to further control and exploit evasive forms of language, which helped her adapt to her unique position as a female monarch.

Not Your Typical Petrarchan Lady

The final stage of Elizabeth's writing transpired in the poetic arena of the Petrarchan sonnet. The Petrarchan form places the virgin as a remote object of desire and consumption. As a female writer, Elizabeth embodied a resistant voice for the silent virgin. I term this stage *re-scriptive rhetoric*. This stage in Elizabeth's writing centers on the Queen's attempts to ground herself in the male dominated poetic form. Elizabeth wrote her Petrarchan poetry after she took the throne and was in a position of power. As Queen, Elizabeth had the ability to remodel aspects of society that subordinated her for her gender. In the example of the Petrarchan sonnet, the Queen transformed the virgin from a chaste and remote object into a present voice. Elizabeth

manifested the inaccessible virgin through a voice of self-assertion, a voice typically represented as male. In subverting the patriarchal norm of the Petrarchan sonnet Elizabeth broadened the definition of the idealized virgin, absorbing stereotypically masculine characteristics into the feminine. Although it may not have been the Queen's initial purpose in writing her sonnets, she revolutionized the Petrarchan form as a platform for women.

The divine image of virginity that Elizabeth implemented when addressing Parliament during the later years of her reign did not arise suddenly. Her poetry, both in the Petrarchan style and as a Petrarchan woman, confronted male voices. Further, there is a public dimension to her poetry. Elizabeth publicized her own poetry by responding to prominent male Petrarchan authors of the time. The Queen's works in the Petrarchan form were not composed to present her as a virgin, but were intended to challenge common gender roles. By confronting the role of the virgin in the Petrarchan sonnet, Elizabeth provided a voice for the objectified virgin. In her poetry Elizabeth merged herself with the female speaker in the poem, thereby defining herself as a virginal figure. Through writing in the Petrarchan form Elizabeth gained insight into gingerly speech and circular language, which she later implemented when addressing men of power. Because she wrote in the prominent poetic form, Elizabeth's embodiment of the virgin, and her resistance to its gendered structure, became a public act. The Queen's response to male voices and presence demonstrate important virginal-rhetoric developments during the early years of her reign.

Before analyzing the poems, it is essential to establish *why* the Petrarchan style is influential in this context. During the sixteenth century male poets wrote in the Petrarchan form to discuss the inaccessibility of a female love interest. Prominent poet Sir Thomas Wyatt wrote

to the unreachable virgin in his sonnet “The Lover Having Dreamed Enjoying of His Love”.⁴² In the sonnet, Wyatt expressed that he “tasted sweetness” in his dream when his “body tempest her delight to embrace”.⁴³ When he awoke without his love he cursed dreams, arguing they only “turn to deadly pain”.⁴⁴ Wyatt’s poem showcases the typical role of a woman within the Petrarchan sonnet. The virgin is completely inaccessible since the poet can only caress her in his dreams. Despite Wyatt’s discussion of the virgin, the reader never hears her voice. The virginal figure remains distanced and silenced within the poem.

Therefore, when the Queen wrote in the Petrarchan form, it was perceived as a response to a poem written by a male counterpart. Susan Frye analyzes Elizabeth’s emergence within the Petrarchan form through the lens of gender reconstruction. Frye argues that the Queen utilized the form in order to break into the male-dominated field of poetry and deconstruct ideas of a powerless virgin. Instead of accepting the typified norms of the Petrarchan, Elizabeth embodied the chaste maid through a poetic voice.⁴⁵ My argument regarding Elizabeth’s development into the Petrarchan style hinges on power relations rather than gender norms. While the two seemingly go hand in hand, I extend Frye’s argument by analyzing the powerful aspects of Elizabeth’s Petrarchan works that expand beyond merely providing the virgin with a voice. Frye argues that poetry acts as an equalizer, and while this is true, Elizabeth’s poetry suggested more than equality. Elizabeth’s Petrarchan style positioned her in the position of power in the gendered poetic relationship. The voice Elizabeth developed was both controlled and

⁴² Sir Thomas Wyatt, “The Lover Having Dreamed Enjoying of His Love”, *Poetical Works of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, Ed. Robert Bell, (London: J.W. Parker, 1854), 64-65. Internet. Subsequent citations are to this edition.

⁴³ Wyatt 64.

⁴⁴ Wyatt 65.

⁴⁵ Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I: The competition for Representation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 37.

commanding. By disassociating the Petrarchan form from a silent woman, the Queen established an alternate subject position within the poem, mobilizing the virginal figure.

One of Elizabeth's most prominent Petrarchan lyrics emphasized the sheer number of suitors she had denied in her quest to maintain solitary power. The sonnet "When I was Fair and Young" positions Elizabeth as the inaccessible Petrarchan lady. By writing in the Petrarchan form about her inaccessibility the Queen created a Petrarchan paradox of the virginal voice. Though Elizabeth repudiated the distant and silent role of the virgin, she revealed the isolation of her virginal state. The first two stanzas of the poem read:

When I was fair and young, and favor graced me,
 Of many was I sought, their mistress for to be;
 But I did scorn them all, and answered them therefore,
 "Go, go, go seek some otherwhere,
 Importune me no more!"
 How many weeping eyes I made to mine with woe,
 How many sighing hearts, I have skill to show;
 Yet I the prouder grew, and answered them therefore,
 "Go, go, go seek some otherwhere!
 Importune me no more!"⁴⁶

These stanzas of the poem exhibit the Queen's determination to retain power as a female monarch. They acknowledge that the Queen *was*, for a time, the inaccessible Petrarchan lady. In her quest to retain political power she "scorn[ed]...all" her suitors. By using the words "proud" and "skill", the Queen revels in the power she had over her suitors. In this way she tied power to

⁴⁶ Elizabeth I, "When I Was Fair and Young", *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, Ed. Alexander W. Allison, (New York: Norton, 1970), 100.

the Petrarchan lady. Although the first two stanzas exhibit the young Queen's female power, as the poem develops the tone shifts to exhibit the Queen's loneliness with age. Her "coy" nature in her youth led to an emptiness, as the Queen notes that a "change grew in [her] breast." By distancing herself as the Petrarchan lady to retain political power, the Queen was left alone to age. Enlightened to these facts as a mature Queen, Elizabeth states with emphasis, "Then lo! I did repent." She *repented* for the actions of her youth, and her naïve sensibility to retain power. The poem opened up to show the Queen's subjectivity as a virgin monarch. Throughout the poem Elizabeth played with the idea of the Petrarchan lady, providing a voice to her isolated state.

Furthermore, the word "importune", which appears in the final couplet of all four stanzas of the poem, acts equivocally to highlight the Queen's divided self. In the first stanza Elizabeth expresses that she was "fair" and in good "favor" with her suitors, who flocked for her hand.⁴⁷ This context shapes the connotation of importune into a haughty dismissal of the men. The "importune" begging by this definition subordinates her suitors since they fell to *her* feet, placing Elizabeth in a position of power. The second stanza recognizes a shift to the connotation of the word, as Elizabeth tells that she grew "prouder".⁴⁸ The pomposity the young Queen experienced, which caused her to dismiss suitors, transformed into a fight for pride, as though, despite her aging, she must protect her female power as a virgin. Finally, in the fourth stanza, after the Queen admitted that she repented for dismissing suitors, "importune" shifts to represent her desire not to be petitioned to marry. The Queen wrote the poem at the age of fifty-two, circa 1585, around the time Parliament petitioned the Queen to marry and produce an heir. Instead of the suitors begging, Elizabeth was isolated within the confines of her virginal status, now

⁴⁷ Elizabeth I, "When I Was Fair and Young", 100.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth I, "When I Was Fair and Young", 100.

“importuning” Parliament and her Council to leave her as their monarchical mother, vowing herself to England instead of any man.

The Queen’s powerful poetic language is similarly exhibited in her poetic exchange with Sir Walter Raleigh. Her poetic communication with Raleigh is not in the Petrarchan form, and is instead written in six-stanza quartets. However, the Queen mirrored Raleigh’s form to assert she could match him in intellect and prevail over him with power.⁴⁹ Though the Queen was older when she met Raleigh, arguably in her early fifty’s, there was still considerable courtier tension between the two.⁵⁰ Raleigh was a rugged younger man in his thirties who was unthreatened by the court or the Queen. Elizabeth learned to rely on Raleigh in many respects, both politically and socially. Though their written dialogue failed to evolve into a physical relationship, the Queen deeply respected Raleigh, knighting him in 1584. Shortly after, Elizabeth became infatuated with a new gentleman, Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex, who eclipsed Raleigh as the Queen’s favorite.⁵¹ Raleigh wrote to Elizabeth lamenting the loss of her favor. The beginning of his first stanza begins emotionally: “Fortune hath taken thee away, my love,/My life’s joy and my soul’s heaven above”.⁵² The young suitor’s poem is drenched in sorrow and mourning. Raleigh’s poem to the Queen emphasizes “fortune” as the force that ended their love, implementing the word twelve times. He ends the poem by stating, “No Fortune base shall ever alter me”.⁵³ In this line Raleigh argues that Elizabeth could be swayed by fortune. Elizabeth responded to her former suitor by arguing that Fortune “could not rule [her] mind”.⁵⁴ Her Petrarchan response addressed

⁴⁹ Bell, *The Voice of a Monarch*, 23.

⁵⁰ May 17.

⁵¹ May 17.

⁵² Walter Raleigh quoted by May, *Queen Elizabeth I: Selected Works*, Ed. Stephen W. May, (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004), 14. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁵³ Raleigh 15.

⁵⁴ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 16.

that as a Queen she was not controlled by fortune, but failed to reveal why their love perished. The Queen was ambiguous to her own emotions in the poem, and instead focused on Raleigh's heartache as she gingerly urged him to "pluck up" his heart.⁵⁵ By refraining from exposing her own emotions the Queen asserted her dominant role in her poetic exchange with Raleigh.

Elizabeth's poetic works in the Petrarchan form are a development of the two previous forms of writing she devised. In the *Woodstock Epigram* Princess Elizabeth delved into poetic works in order to combat her patriarchal environment without further punishment. Secondly, her letters in response to courtship with Bishop de Quadra gradually taught the Queen how to speak to men in order to convey her message most subtly. The Petrarchan form allowed her to implement a defiant opacity, whereby she rebukes male power through ambiguous poetic language. The rhetorical skills that Elizabeth gained through her works in the Petrarchan form act as a preparatory aid for her interactions with Parliament regarding a successor.

The Contextual Culmination: Chastity

When analyzed independently each rhetorical style may seem insignificant. However, as evolutionary steps, each moment taught Elizabeth a new way to refine her writing and mold her intended meaning. The epigram at Woodstock, before Elizabeth was recognized as Queen, masked her indignation toward external and constricting power. The equivocation within the epigram showed Elizabeth how to veil her opinion within the confines of her subordinated status. As Elizabeth transitioned from prisoner to Queen her voice developed within her exchanges with Bishop de Quadra as she learned to conform to gender roles. Realizing that her direct language only distracted from her cause, to delay choosing a suitor, Elizabeth developed her infamously opaque rhetorical style, drawing on the equivocal language of her epigram. After she adapted to

⁵⁵ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 16.

asserting herself within the stereotypes of her gender, the Queen embodied the Petrarchan lady to create a voice for the otherwise silenced virgin. Through this poetic form Elizabeth became more secure in asserting herself while beginning to shape her image as a virgin Queen.

The next chapter argues that the culmination of these elements is fully realized in multiple conversations with Parliament regarding her marriage and an heir. The Queen understood that Parliament, composed of Protestant noblemen, would not respond well to direct demands. Therefore the Queen compiled the rhetorical strategies she learned in her early writing within her speeches to Parliament and the House of Commons' pleas, implementing equivocation, poetic language, and apologies regarding the shortcomings of her sex. These strategies are calculated to satisfy Parliament within the moment and, ultimately, lead the Queen to her desired ends, as a single motherly monarch.

CHAPTER TWO: “I am attracted to perpetual spinsterhood”⁵⁶

Current scholars often analyze Queen Elizabeth as a pre-feminist, re-scripting common stereotypes ascribed to the female gender.⁵⁷ However, there is a subversive aspect surrounding the feminist aspects of Elizabeth’s writing; it was not *for* women. In the early years of Elizabeth’s reign as Queen she held herself to the standards of a man, asserting that the monarchical power of divine right superseded her gender. As she realized in her correspondence with Bishop de Quadra, her power as Queen did not fully remedy her disempowered state as a woman. Elizabeth became a pre-feminist by mobilizing her immobility, exploiting the supposed meekness of women to strengthen her cause. Due to the paradoxical nature of this assertion an example is warranted. The Queen’s “Golden Speech” presented to the House of Commons on November 30, 1601 defended the multiple monopolies for which the Queen signed patents earlier in the year.⁵⁸ At the time in England overseas monopolies compromised local business, hurt the local economy, especially small business owners, and were resented by the public. Due to public animosity regarding the patents, the Queen issued a proclamation on November 28 that revoked most of the patents she signed. The Queen’s speech was intended to convince a discontented Parliament that the weaknesses of her gender caused her to make a mistake with the patents, but that her intentions were for the public good. In regards to the patents she stated, rather randomly, “though you [Parliament] have had and may have many princes more mighty and wise sitting in this state, you never had nor shall have any that will be more careful and loving”.⁵⁹ The Queen argued that she did not make a mistake as a monarch, but signed the patents due to her “careful” and “loving” qualities as a woman. She positioned herself against

⁵⁶ Elizabeth I, *Sayings of Queen Elizabeth*, 61.

⁵⁷ Frye 110.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 87.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 87.

male figureheads, arguing that though they may be more “wise” they could never love them half as much, thereby transforming the Queen’s mistake into matriarchal instinct for her people.

Immediately after this sentence the Queen states:

Shall I ascribe anything to myself and my sexly weakness, I were not worthy to live then, and of all most unworthy of the mercies I have had from God, who hath ever yet given me a heart which never yet feared foreign or home enemy. I speak it to give God the praise as testimony before you and not to attribute anything unto myself, for I, O Lord, what am I whom practices and perils past should not fear, or what can I do? (*These words she spake with a great emphasis.*) That I should speak for any glory, God forbid.⁶⁰

The only link between these two sentences is the Queen’s admittance of her “sexly weakness.” The remainder of the quote is disconnected from the question of gender as Elizabeth notes that God provided her with her strong heart in order to protect her people. By “prais[ing]” God for her strength, Elizabeth reminded Parliament of her divine right as Queen. Elizabeth stated that as a devout Protestant woman her heart “never yet feared foreign or home enemy”. The Queen supplemented the weaknesses of her sex with her strength as a monarch in order to conform to gender roles while subtly asserting her power as Queen. By the end of the speech Elizabeth removed all question of her fault with a final sentence stating, “I pray you, Master Comptroller, Master Secretary, and of you my Council, that before these gentleman depart into their countries you bring them all to kiss my hand”.⁶¹ Elizabeth established that she only acted as a good mother would, thereby necessitating the men again bow before her as their loving Queen. The speech closed and Elizabeth remained in high regard as England’s reigning monarch. This is merely one example of how the Queen used language and the attributes of her sex to manipulate Parliament.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 87.

⁶¹ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 88.

This chapter will explore the rhetorical strategies the Queen utilized in her addresses to Parliament, particularly her responses to Parliament's petitions to marry and bear a successor. Both Houses of Parliament, the House of Lords and the House of Commons, petitioned the Queen for a successor multiple times, yet clearly, Elizabeth never consummated their desires. The Queen implemented several strategies, similar to those presented in the speech above, to evade Parliament's requests. Despite the Queen's status as a "weak and feeble woman" (her words not mine), Elizabeth subdued the pleas from the Protestant men of Parliament, leading them to submit to her will.⁶² Throughout this chapter the Queen's language will be described as *opaque*. The word, for the purpose of my argument, is meant to call attention to the unclear nature of the Queen's writing in each speech. These moments of obscurity within the Queen's speeches primarily occurred when she described her gender or religion, often combined, as in the previous example. Elizabeth distracted Parliament from their requests for an heir by focusing on vaguely related topics, such as her virtuous attributes. This chapter will explore three of the Queen's responses to Parliament with each response nearing the Queen's ultimate goal: "I would not marry...to be empress of the world".⁶³

*"I shall turn my mind to marriage if it be for the public good"*⁶⁴

Speaker of the House of Commons, Thomas Williams, presented a petition to the Queen on the afternoon on January 28, 1563. The petition voiced Parliament's most pressing issue, the question of the succession to the crown.⁶⁵ The Queen suffered an attack of small pox in the fall of 1562, alerting the Commons to the dangers of losing her Highness without an heir. Williams recollected these events to Elizabeth stating, "almighty God to our great terror and dreadfull

⁶² Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 89.

⁶³ Elizabeth I, *Sayings of Queen Elizabeth*, 93.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth I, *Sayings of Queen Elizabeth*, 60.

⁶⁵ May 41.

warning lately touched your Highness with some danger of your most noble person by sickness”.⁶⁶ The petition reminded the Queen of her mortality, and urged her to marry for the well being of her people and her Parliament, focusing on two main points: first it asked that the Queen marry in order to continue the Tudor dynasty by choosing a husband; second, and more political, it entreated the Queen to establish the succession in a *legally binding fashion*.⁶⁷ In a modern sense, Parliament wanted the Queen to create a formal will that would assign a successor to the crown. The Queen’s response, given later on January 28, appeased Parliament by deferring an answer until she could seek “further advice to further answer”.⁶⁸ The speech relied on the Queen’s silence. Elizabeth argued for the necessity of a time lapse, stating that in order to heed the “safety of [Parliament’s] help” she needed to seriously dissect the idea mentally.⁶⁹ Along with this, Elizabeth contrasted the shortcomings of her sex with her right as Queen. Elizabeth focused on how she aided Parliament stating “do not forget that by me you were delivered whilst you were hanging”.⁷⁰ In this quote Elizabeth highlighted that she previously “delivered” Parliament, and therefore resents that they doubt her. The Queen went on to remind Parliament of their “duties and due obedience” to her as a monarch.⁷¹ By partnering her previous accomplishments with a reprimand Elizabeth was able to reestablish her role as England’s matriarchal master.

In the opening of her speech the Queen noted the gravity of the request for a successor. Due to the significance of the subject Elizabeth did not immediately voice her opinion on the

⁶⁶ Thomas Williams quoted by May, *Queen Elizabeth I: Selected Works*, Ed. Stephen W. May, (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004), 41.

⁶⁷ May 41

⁶⁸ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 39.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 39.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 39.

⁷¹ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 39.

topic (perhaps recalling the reaction of Bishop de Quadra to an assertive woman). Instead she purposefully flattered Parliament and their dominant attributes as men, though subtly accenting her undeniable rule as Queen. In order to subdue the men's anxiousness and acrimony regarding the topic Elizabeth subordinated herself via gender stating:

The weight and greatness of this matter might cause in me, being a woman wanting both wit and memory, some fear to speak and bashfulness besides, a thing appropriate to my sex. But yet the princely seat and kingly throne wherein God (though unworthy), hath constituted me, maketh these two causes to seem little in mine eyes though grievous perhaps to your ears, and boldenth me to say somewhat in this matter.⁷²

The Queen was cautious in the beginning of the speech and spoke submissively by accenting the weaker aspects of her sex. Elizabeth prepared for the awkwardness in discussing the subject by noting her "bashfulness". By openly discussing the inferiority of her sex Elizabeth provided Parliament with the feeling of an *upper hand* in the relationship. However, the Queen did not relinquish her royal power easily. Instead of telling Parliament that she was their Queen and thereby ruler in all decisions, she called upon God to remind them of her divine right to rule. Skillfully, Elizabeth noted that "God" provided her with a Kingly seat despite how "unworthy" she may be as a woman. Therefore, Elizabeth divided herself into two categories: the first, a feeble minded woman unworthy of her royal seat, and secondly, a prince, who through the intermediary actions of God permitted her to speak wisely about a successor. Pairing her unquestionable divine right with the questionable aspects of her sex enabled Elizabeth to remain in charge, both of the realm and her rule. The Queen then stated the thesis of the speech, "I mean only to touch but not presently to answer [the question of a successor]: for this so great a demand

⁷² Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 37.

needeth both great and grave advice”.⁷³ In layman’s terms, the Queen’s answer was that she, at the time, would not answer. She followed this assertion with an interesting, yet unnecessary, parallel:

I read of a philosopher whose deeds upon this occasion I remember better than his name, who always when he was required to give answer in any hard question of school points, would rehearse over his alphabet before he would proceed to any further answer there, not for that he could not presently have answered, but have his wit the riper and better sharpened to answer the matter withal.⁷⁴

In this case a philosopher, that she could not remember, also refused to answer upon first questioning. Who is this philosopher? The answer is unknown. I argue that the philosopher is a mental construction of Elizabeth’s, whose purpose is to aid in strengthening her decision to postpone her answer to the Petition. The Queen implemented this example to mirror her own necessity to *ripen* her wit and provide Parliament, and more importantly her people, with the most well thought and thorough decision on a successor.

The remainder of the Queen’s response to Parliament divulged the necessity to provide an answer later once she had sought “further advice”.⁷⁵ Elizabeth stressed that her answer would not be based on her own determinations, but would be fully considered regarding the safety of her people. Elizabeth crafted herself as the *mother* of England by stating “though after my death you [Parliament] may have many stepdames, yet shall you never have any more a mother than I mean to be unto you all”.⁷⁶ Elizabeth asserted that her primary goal for her country is similar to that of mother and child. The use of the word “stepdames” stresses that Elizabeth is the *true*

⁷³ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 37.

⁷⁴ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 37.

⁷⁵ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 39.

⁷⁶ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 39.

mother of England, and that later matriarchs will merely live in her shadow. A deferral of an answer without a greater cause would have been questioned as egoistic and erratic, but the Queen's answer, or rather lack thereof, was for the well being of both Parliament and the people of England. She states:

...for the benefit of this realm and the safety of you all to defer mine answer till some other time, wherein I assure you the consideration of my own safety (although I thank you for the great care that you seem to have thereof) should be little in comparison of that great regard that I mean to have to safety and surety of you all.⁷⁷

The Queen postponed an answer for the protection of her *people*, an argument that would be difficult for Parliament to challenge. She gingerly flattered Parliament by regarding that their Petition was created out of the "great care" they have for her; yet in order to fully answer their *caring* request she required time. In this regard Elizabeth's answer became one of silence. By noting the weaknesses of her sex and her ultimate goal to benefit England, the Queen convinced Parliament to defer their petition and allow time for Elizabeth to consult male advice. The defects of her sex allowed the Queen to maintain control of the situation.

*"I would not marry, as that is a thing for which I have never had any inclination"*⁷⁸

Although Elizabeth promised to return to Parliament with a decision regarding a successor after seeking further counsel, they became restless at her silence. The Queen did not return to address Parliament with a decision regarding a successor until Williams petitioned her for a second time on April 10 of the same year (1563).⁷⁹ Only then did the Queen provide Parliament with a response, which was delivered by the Lord Keeper, Sir Nicolas Bacon, instead

⁷⁷ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 39.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth I, *Sayings of Queen Elizabeth*, 69.

⁷⁹ May 44.

of the Queen herself.⁸⁰ The nearly three-month silence should have served as a hint to Parliament about her answer; she did not intend to marry or bear an heir. Her silence was a form of disregard, and more importantly, an assertion of her authority. With the pressure from Parliament, the Queen provided a brief speech for Bacon to read aloud, deferring confronting the Commons herself. She was physically absent from Parliament and only spoke through Bacon. The Queen's absence showed her disregard for the issue of a successor, and her words spoken through Bacon continued to postpone providing Parliament with an answer.

The Queen's second response to Parliament is latent with what I have previously termed *opaque avoidance*, which defines the nontransparent nature of Elizabeth's language when addressing to male figures of authority. Within the brief speech Elizabeth utilized unnecessarily extended sentences to convey a simple thought. An example of this occurs at the outset of the speech when she states:

An answer therefore I make and this it is: the two petitions that you presented me in many words expressed contained these two things in sum as of your cares the greatest: my marriage and my successor, of which two the last I think is best be touched and of the other a silent thought may serve, for I had thought it had been so desired as none other tree's blossoms should have been minded ere hope of my fruit had been denied you.⁸¹

This statement is a prime example of the elusive rhetoric Elizabeth deployed in order to inform Parliament of her convictions while confusing them about the current state of determining an heir to the throne. The Queen began with evasive language stating: "the two petitions that you presented me in many words expressed contained these two things in sum of your cares the greatest". More intelligibly the sentence states: during our last Parliament you stated that these

⁸⁰ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 39.

⁸¹ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 39.

two points were of great concern. Not only is the statement extraneously long, but it is written to become increasingly ambiguous. The statement begins as the Queen clearly asserts that she has an answer for Parliament, but as the sentence continues her response grows convoluted. For example, Elizabeth separated the noun “things” from its modifier “the greatest” by implementing “in sum of your cares”; the sentence should read, “contained these two things the greatest in sum of your cares”. If the Queen reworked this sentence her response to Parliament would have been more accessible to understanding; yet her purpose is to be indirect. The Queen attempted to fill the speech with lengthy and obscure sentences in order to distract the men from cornering her to choose a suitor and provide a successor. Elizabeth’s moments of opacity were purposefully implemented to obscure her true intentions *not* to marry. A critique of this argument may suggest that Elizabeth’s confusing writing was accidental. However, the Queen fiercely edited her writing and this piece was not an exception.⁸² Elizabeth could further review the reading of her speech before she let it stand in Parliamentary manuscripts. Therefore the Queen edited her writing both before and after the words were spoken aloud, proving that their order was purposeful. This critique may be dismissed through the background of this particular speech and the style of other speeches.

Upon delving into the question of her marriage and a successor, the Queen stated her opinions on a future heir but muddled her words with inflated language and imagery. In terms of discussing marriage Elizabeth argued that “silent thought may serve, for I thought it had been so desired as none other tree’s blossoms should have been minded ere hope of my fruit had been denied to you”.⁸³ Elizabeth began this phrase with purposeful ambiguity by providing them with a “silent thought”. She provided Parliament with an answerless *answer*. By intermingling poetic

⁸² May 44.

⁸³ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 39.

language within her “answer” Elizabeth made it difficult for her Counsel to determine precisely *what* she was saying, as if she desired them to solve a puzzle within her words.⁸⁴ This statement continued Elizabeth’s deferral from providing Parliament with an answer to their petitions. The Queen could not assert herself too boldly to her Counsel and reveal that she did not intend to marry or produce an heir. Therefore, Elizabeth implemented the words “tree’s blossoms” and “fruit” as a metaphor for bearing children. The Queen stated that no outside “tree blossoms”, which refer to successors outside the realm, should be sought out since she had not refused to bear “fruit”.⁸⁵ Elizabeth did not state whether she would or would *not* bear “fruit”, but argued that Parliament should not search for foreign “tree blossoms” until she definitely denied them a Tudor heir. The statement continued Elizabeth’s evasion from Parliament’s petitions and convinced them to await her final answer. While this reading of the statement is comprehensible, the opacity of the imagery lends itself to multiple readings, which would have disoriented Parliament. Through implementing the rhetorical strategy of poetic metaphors to relate to Parliament’s petitions Elizabeth drew upon her knowledge of the Petrarchan sonnet. Instead of speaking bluntly, the Queen separated her heir as a distant “fruit”, thereby constructing it as possibly obtainable.

While the previous statement suggested that the Queen’s choice of marriage and childbearing was under consideration, the sentence immediately following this poetic assertion makes her stance more ambiguous. Elizabeth addressed her Counsel stating:

And by the way, if any here doubt that I am, as it were by vow or determination, bent never to trade that life, put out that heresy; your belief is awry, for, as I think it best for a

⁸⁴ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 39.

⁸⁵ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 39.

private woman, so do I strive with myself to think it not meet for a prince; and if I can bend my will to your need I will not resist such a mind.⁸⁶

In order to fully digest the statement's importance it is necessary to work through it in two sections. After stating that she was undecided on whether to bear "fruit" for the throne, she states that she would "bend" her decision for the benefit of her people.⁸⁷ Her statement acted as an affront to those members of Parliament who may have wanted to choose foreign "tree blossoms" to name a successor to the throne.⁸⁸ Elizabeth stated that if any "doubt" remained in Parliament that she refused to marry, the men should "put out that heresy". The first section of the quote continued her deferral from providing an answer, and left Parliament confused to what she would decide. However, the second section of the quote provided minor insight into Elizabeth's desire to remain a virgin. She argued that a proper woman should remain "private", whereas it is not unfit for a "prince" to continuously strive to produce an heir. In this statement the Queen utilized the ideals of Protestantism, which defined that women must be both prudent and pious, to appeal to Parliament. This statement provided Parliament with a glimpse into the Queen's goal to remain a single monarch, but this moment of clarity is met with further confusion. After she suggested that a woman should remain "private" she shifts back to her deep maternal care for her Counsel as their matriarch stating, "if I can bend my will to your need I will not resist such a mind". The final sentence of her assertion yields with concession that she might alter her mindset for the good of Parliament and her people. The key in this sentence is the word "need", which demonstrates that the Queen preferred to secure her sacred body as a "private" woman, but that she would concede if it became necessary for her people.

⁸⁶ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 42.

⁸⁷ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 39.

⁸⁸ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 39.

While this speech is brief, it is replete with rhetorical strategies that subtly revealed Elizabeth's aims without distressing her Counsel. The Queen continued to defer the question of an heir, arguing to Parliament that she was not opposed to either decision. Elizabeth alluded that she would prefer not to marry, by manipulating Protestant ideology. The Queen's speech closed with the statement, "I hope I shall die in quiet...which cannot be without I see some glimpse of your following surety after my graved bones".⁸⁹ This final sentence ended the speech with hopeful assurance that Elizabeth would provide them with a successor to the throne, though this individual may or may *not* be of Tudor blood.

*"There is one thing higher than Royalty: and that is religion"*⁹⁰

After the speech delivered on April 10 of 1563 Parliament continued to brood over the question of a successor, but did not again address the Queen regarding the issue until September of 1566 when she learned that both houses and her Privy Council were united in their insistence that she name a successor to the throne.⁹¹ Her response came on November 9 of the same year when she declared to the House that no further questions regarding a successor would be allowed. The Queen's decree was not received well, and it prompted great debate about Parliament's traditional liberty to raise *any* matter regarding the well being of the nation.⁹² Despite the Queen's decree, Speaker of the House Richard Onslow addressed Parliament on January 2 of 1567 and questioned the succession, arguing that the topic was of such great importance to the public that Elizabeth must respond.⁹³ Respond she did. On March 15 of the same year Elizabeth answered the petitions for a successor with a *Godly* response.

⁸⁹ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 42.

⁹⁰ Elizabeth I, *Sayings of Queen Elizabeth*, 100.

⁹¹ May 46.

⁹² May 50.

⁹³ May 50.

Although in her two previous speeches to Parliament Elizabeth applied the weaknesses of her sex and opaque language to bide her time, she did not use such devices in this speech. This speech is the most explicit regarding the question of a successor, and it hinges on one major ploy: God. The Queen argued that she was unable to marry and produce an heir because of her relationship to God, and how that relationship affected God's relationship to England. Elizabeth shifted her writing from opaque avoidance to direct assertion. The Queen was able to cast off ambiguity in this speech because she attributed her answer to the unquestionable power of God. By developing the idea that she is divinely ordained to rule as a virgin Queen, she denied Parliament any right to petition for an heir to the throne since any such petition would be an act against God's will.

Throughout the speech Elizabeth argued that God had bequeathed her with the responsibility of caring for England, and that all of the wealth that the country had received during her seventeen-year reign transpired because she did not marry. At the outset of the speech the Queen states, "I cannot attribute this happy and good success to my devise without detracting much from the divine providence nor challenge to my own commendation what is only due to His eternal glory".⁹⁴ Immediately Elizabeth began to remind Parliament of England's prosperity during her reign while refusing to receive credit for the country's current state. The Queen noted her "good success", but highlighted that she only achieved such prosperity because she never strayed from "the divine providence", which is the Almighty. The Queen further distanced herself from her achievements by stating that all of her triumphs were "due to His eternal glory".⁹⁵ Elizabeth humbled herself before God, thereby coercing Parliament to humble

⁹⁴ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 52.

⁹⁵ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 52.

themselves before their Queen. As her speech continued the Queen only became more forthright in arguing that God led to her successful reign and the prosperity of England. She clearly states:

And as for those rare and special benefits which many years have followed and accompanied my happy reign, I attribute to God alone, the prince of rule, and count myself no better than his handmaid, rather brought up in a school to bide the ferula than traded in a kingdom to support the scepter.⁹⁶

Again the Queen “attributes to God alone” for her fortunate reign, but in this sentence Elizabeth extends her relationship with the Almighty. Instead of merely serving as a pious Protestant woman, Elizabeth situates herself as God’s “handmaid”, meaning that her role as Queen is as a servant to God. By arguing that she is a *servant* of God the Queen begins to construct her unwed status as a necessary condition in order to carry out God’s will. The use of the word “handmaiden” parallels the Queen with the Virgin Mary who greets the Angel Gabriel by stating, “I am God’s handmaiden”.⁹⁷ The term mirrors the Queen’s relationship with God to that of the Virgin Mary, and proved the necessity for her celibacy. I term this moment in the speech Elizabeth’s *virgin vow* since it cements her decision to remain a celibate servant to God. Elizabeth expanded this idea within this next phrase when she states that she was “brought up in a school to bide the ferula than traded in a kingdom to support the scepter”. In this context the phrase *bide the ferula* means to endure the rod.⁹⁸ Therefore the Queen enhanced the assertion that she was a servant of God by stating that her purpose was to follow the rule of God rather than seek glory through ubiquitous power. Elizabeth convinced Parliament to support her vow of virginity by stressing that her role as God’s “handmaid” would ultimately benefit England.

⁹⁶ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 52.

⁹⁷ Luke 1:26-38, *Holy Bible: King James Version*, (American Bible Society, 1980).

⁹⁸ May 57.

After positioning herself as an ally to God for England the Queen delved into the benefits of her status as a single monarch. The beginning of the speech focused on Elizabeth's divine relationship, but she still had to answer the question of a successor. The Queen began to answer the petition by stating:

It cannot be denied but worldly wisdom rather bade me link myself in league and fast alliance with great princes, to purchase friends on every side by worldly means and there repose the trust of mine assured strength, where force could never want to give assistance. Was I to seek that, to man's outward judgment this must needs be thought the safest course.⁹⁹

In this section Elizabeth reflected on the previous events when Parliament urged her to "link" herself to a husband in order to secure the future of England. The Queen negatively describes that the match would have lent England only mortal mediocrity, arguing that a match would have merely "purchase[d] friends" through "worldly means". Elizabeth argued that should she have wed a "great prince" England would have resigned to a lesser status. The most powerful phrase within this statement is when the Queen states it was "man's outward judgment" that funneled her down the "safest course" toward marriage. The *man* Elizabeth referred to within the statement are the men of the houses and her privy council. Through their petitions Parliament urged the Queen to marry and stick to the "safest course" for England, but Elizabeth argued that should she have heeded their advice England would not have prospered to their current state since Elizabeth would not have been a *servant* to God. The Queen continued this thought by stating:

⁹⁹ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 52.

No, I can never grant myself so simple as not to see what all men's eyes discovered. But all these means of leagues, alliances, and foreign strengths I quite forsook and gave myself to seek for truth without respect, reposing mine assured stay in God's most mighty grace with full assurance. Thus I began, thus I proceed, and thus I hope to end.¹⁰⁰

This section continued Elizabeth's condemnation of Parliament for pressuring her to marry by stating that she sought "truth without respect" during her reign. The Queen contended that while England did not secure "leagues, alliances, and foreign strengths" during her reign they maintained "mighty grace" with God. The Queen expressed that she "gave [herself] up" to God instead of foreign princes. Elizabeth focused on England's alliance with God rather than with foreign allies in order to appeal to Parliament and silence any future upset. If Parliament still desired the Queen to marry they would sever England's relationship with God. Elizabeth closed this section of the speech with, possibly, one of the most intelligible sentences of her reign: "Thus I began, thus I proceed, and thus I hope to end". In this moment Elizabeth asserted that she would *never* marry or produce an heir and attributes this decision to the well being of England. The Queen explicitly voiced her determination to remain celibate because she bound herself to God, protecting herself from backlash from Parliament.

After forging England's relationship with God, Elizabeth inserted clear statements that declared her virginity to argue that in order to be mother of England and preserve her relationship with God she must remain chaste. The Queen began the discussion of her virginity by asserting her determination not to marry, stating that she "would not forsake that single state to match [herself] with the greatest monarch".¹⁰¹ This sentence expressed Elizabeth's virgin vow more fully. In the following sentences Elizabeth stated that she was unwilling to "spoil herself"

¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 54.

¹⁰¹ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 55.

in order to rid England of its “present state” without a successor.¹⁰² By asserting that she would be *spoiled* through sex Elizabeth is reconnecting herself with God, thereby linking her virginity with the health of England. Further, before the conclusion of her speech Elizabeth stated, “Mine experience teacheth me to be no fonder of these vain delights than reason would, nor further to delight in things uncertain than may seem convenient”.¹⁰³ By outwardly stating that she would not succumb to “vain delights”, Elizabeth strengthened her determination to remain a virgin until the end of her reign. The Queen conceded that it may have been more “convenient” for her to marry and bear an heir, but in order to protect England her covenant must remain with God instead of man. Elizabeth’s decision to remain chaste was also in alignment with Protestant virtue since she devoted herself to God instead of the sinful pleasures of the body. In this, the Queen’s final major speech regarding marriage or a Tudor heir, Elizabeth shed her cryptic language to declare her virginity and role as a God’s “handmaid”.¹⁰⁴

*“I solemnly bound myself in marriage to the realm ”*¹⁰⁵

Despite Parliament’s persistence that Elizabeth marry and produce an heir, neither event transpired. The fundamental reason the Queen evaded the pleas from her Council was due to the rhetorical strategies she implemented within her three major response speeches. In the first speech Elizabeth exploited both the stereotypes of her sex and excessive flattery of Parliament in order to defer a response. The Queen knew to implement these strategies within her speech because of her letters with Bishop de Quadra, in which she constantly humbled herself as a feeble woman who was gracious for the Bishop’s help in her supposed search for a husband. After a long silence, which served as a response to Parliament in itself, Elizabeth’s second speech

¹⁰² Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 55.

¹⁰³ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 55.

¹⁰⁴ Elizabeth I, *Selected Works*, 52.

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth I, *Sayings of Queen Elizabeth*, 57.

relied on opaque language to complicate Parliament's understanding of her words. These skills are a result of the Queen's earlier Petrarchan sonnets, which taught her the power of poetic language, and her letters.

Although many of Elizabeth's earlier writing aided in preparing her for the petitions from Parliament, the Queen's final speech proved the complexity of her rhetoric. The final speech stretched beyond Elizabeth's previous rhetorical strategies as her words provided her with the strength to take action. In her final speech she forged a relationship with God to humble Parliament into accepting her as a celibate Queen. Her virgin vow is an assertion of her *own* will, and is a reflection of how far she developed from her earlier writings. Elizabeth relied on gender roles in order to use piety as a form of power. By devising divinity as her protection the Queen was able to be bolder and finally state that she would not marry or produce an heir.

The CONCLUSION: ““The word ‘must’ is not to be used to princes”¹⁰⁶

Queen Elizabeth remained unmarried and without a Tudor heir to the throne for the entirety of her forty-four year reign. The Queen’s opaque rhetoric, assertive directness, and female power allowed her to retain the status of a single matriarch. The maturation of Elizabeth’s rhetorical style and her gained knowledge on *how* to manipulate her audience equipped her to respond to Parliament regarding a Tudor successor. No serious petitions followed after Elizabeth’s speech to Parliament in November of 1566, where she called on God as her reason to remain celibate. Elizabeth’s virgin vow argued that in order for England to remain under the protection of God she must remain chaste and in service to Him. By tying her virginity to God for the sake of England Elizabeth transformed into a saint for the sake of her country. The Queen asserted herself in this speech only under the protection of her religion. This speech serves as the culmination of her rhetorical development. Through her earlier writing Elizabeth gleaned that in order to achieve her ends she must develop the appropriate *means*. In the case of Protestant England, a woman could not be assertive about her desires because it transformed her into a trollop, as she learned in her letters with Bishop de Quadra.¹⁰⁷ Elizabeth adapted to these rules by disguising her ultimate end not to marry within opaque rhetoric, only shedding her ambiguity after fashioning, and fabricating, protection from God.

As discussed within my argument, the language Elizabeth implemented in her writings intended to complicate her message to deter any action by outside power, ranging from suitors to Parliament. Before she took her virgin vow both Houses of Parliament had intended to find her a suitor. Therefore, Elizabeth was dominantly portrayed as a prudent and desirable woman in search of a husband. With the Queen’s tug-of-war over an heir to the throne ceasing only seven

¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth I, *Sayings of Queen Elizabeth*, 311.

¹⁰⁷ Reynolds 112.

years into her reign, how did her image change? For the next thirty-seven years of her reign Elizabeth's virgin vow reshaped her image, and she gradually transformed into England's Virgin Queen. Today this title is directly associated with Queen Elizabeth, but *why*?

Figure 1: Gheeraerts, Marcus the Younger. *The Ditchley Portrait*



The preceding pages argue that Elizabeth's rhetorical evolution allowed her to manipulate language to remain a single monarch, but her words also progressed into portraiture. The Queen's image transformed from a desirable and fruitful woman into a royal virgin.¹⁰⁸ The evolution of her image is cultivated through her speeches to Parliament. Portraits portraying Elizabeth as a virgin Queen prove the salience of her words in affecting her status as a monarch. The Queen's vow to remain celibate reverberated beyond Parliament and into the public, cementing her refusal to take a husband or produce an heir. In

order to prove the resilience of the Queen's rhetoric in altering her role as Queen and image as a female monarch, one need only to examine the *Ditchley Portrait* (Figure 1).

The *Ditchley Portrait* exhibits Elizabeth's absolute image as a virgin monarch both through the history of the portrait and the portrait itself. To begin, the commissioning of the portrait is a testimony to the change in Elizabeth's rule after her final speech to Parliament. Sir

¹⁰⁸ Debra Barrett-Graves, "Queen Elizabeth I and the Hampden Portrait", *Explorations in Renaissance culture* 37.1 (2011): 9-29.

Henry Lee commissioned the portrait for the Queen to seek redemption¹⁰⁹. Lee acted as the Queen's Champion until he retired in 1590 at which time he moved to his home in Ditchley, England with a mistress, Anne Vavasour. Elizabeth learned of Lee's mistress and subsequently isolated him from her court. As a virgin Queen, Elizabeth rid herself of constituents who did not live faithfully and in accordance with God. Lee's mistress was not a symbol of faith or fidelity. In order to redeem himself with the Queen, Lee had a ball in her honor at his home in Ditchley and later commissioned the portrait in 1592.¹¹⁰ Her appearance at the ball and acceptance of the portrait confirmed her forgiveness of Lee. Elizabeth's virginal relationship with God expanded beyond her own body to influence her council, who conformed to her religious standards.

Beyond the history of the portrait's commissioning, the image itself contains multiple symbolic aspects that highlight Elizabeth's role as England's chaste matriarch. Elizabethan scholar Albert Labriola analyzed the symbolism of the *Ditchley Portrait* in regards to its religious connotations. While the portrait is laden with insignias of the Queen's religious role, my reading of the portrait focuses on her virgin status. I argue that there are two core elements that starkly represent her role as a single yet powerful ruler: the draping pearls and her stature.

In the portrayal of the Queen, much of her attire is embellished with pearls. The pearl was utilized as a symbol of chastity and virginity. Women of the Queen's age would wear pearls as a garnish rather than in great quantities. However, Elizabeth's virgin vow cemented her as the Virgin Mother of England, and individuals treated her as such. The placement of the pearls further highlights the Queen's chastity. The V-design of her stomacher is embellished with pearls to feature her purity. Further, the Queen is decorated with four strands of pearls around her neck.

¹⁰⁹ Albert C. Labriola, "Painting and poetry of the cult of Elizabeth I: The Ditchley portrait and Donne's "Elegie: Going to Bed"", *Studies in Philosophy* (1996): 42-43. Subsequent parenthetical citations are to this edition.

¹¹⁰ Labriola 42.

One strand of pearls is tied into a virgin knot at the center of her chest.¹¹¹ The other three strands sit to the side of the Queen's chest, and are positioned concentrically to represent the holy trinity. The lavish amount and calculated positioning of the pearls that decorate Elizabeth are intended to herald her virginity, which was previously petitioned.¹¹²

An obvious aspect of the portrait is Elizabeth's grandeur. The Queen's size is meant to express her role in bridging the worlds of materiality and divinity. As England's monarch, Elizabeth is depicted standing on a map of England with her toes touching Ditchley. The borders are also clearly designated within the Atlantic Ocean where multiple ships are drawn approaching various ports. Elizabeth controlled the intercourse between sea and land, aiding both in the protection and prosperity of her country. However, it is not merely what is under the Queen's feet that designate her authority. Elizabeth's size transforms her into a celestial being, highlighting her divinity. The Queen proclaimed that her virgin vow was a response to God, and that she *must* adhere to his word for the sake of England. Elizabeth's height elevates her to the heavens, appointing her the intermediary between God and England. The portrait constructs the Queen's virgin vow through her image, and depicts the omniscience bore through her immenseness.

The *Ditchley Portrait* is evidence of Elizabeth's ability to create herself as England's virgin Queen, but her development did not occur organically. As a young Queen, Elizabeth began to mold herself and her words in order to adopt her role as a singular monarch. Always lionhearted, Elizabeth began her rule with a rickety beginning, voicing her determinations and desires. She was never a Queen in search of a King. Since Parliament did not initially accept her

¹¹¹ Labriola 42.

¹¹² Labriola 42.

singular status, Elizabeth adapted her rhetoric to gain their support for her role as virgin matriarch. The Queen's rhetoric transformed as she became increasingly opaque in her writing. The development of Elizabeth's rhetoric during her earlier years equipped her with knowledge on *how* to deter Parliament from forcing her to marry and produce an heir. I suspect that without the knowledge she acquired through her letters with Bishop de Quadra and work in the Petrarchan form, Parliament may have prevailed and the Tudor dynasty would have continued. However, in spite of Parliament's relentless petitions, Elizabeth evaded their recommendations through elusive and God-fearing language. Her speeches to Parliament culminated with a vow of virginity for the sake of England. Her chaste bond with God secured her role as England's monarchical matriarch. The image of Queen Elizabeth as a virgin continued for the remainder of her reign, as proven through the *Ditchley Portrait*. Queen Elizabeth determined her path and created herself *through* her words.

The significance of Elizabeth's rhetoric expands beyond her words themselves. During the Elizabethan era it was not obvious that a woman was able, through her mental or physical faculties, to rule a country. Elizabeth's rule was complex, and while her rhetoric had a substantial effect on her reign no single speech secured her rule as a solitary female monarch. It was Elizabeth's creation of female power through the combination of her words and actions that allowed her to gain strength within Protestant gender roles. Elizabeth learned her subordinated status as a woman living in a patriarchal society, and manipulated female stereotypes to her advantage. As the Queen's rhetoric adapted so did her sexuality and strength. Elizabeth's words shaped into action as she increasingly accented her maternal role for England, ultimately claiming *her* chastity as the country's greatest asset. By taking a virgin vow Elizabeth fashioned herself to rule in place of God. It is Elizabeth's female power that strengthened her to abstain

from marriage despite Parliament's continuous petitions. Peering through the lens of time, it is historically unlikely that a Queen would retain solitary power throughout her reign. Elizabeth accomplished this feat for forty-four years through the development of her rhetoric and powerful actions as a woman, which is a testimony to her rule.

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