The Image of a Woman's Authority: Representations of Elizabeth I in Portrait and Film

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The Image of a Woman’s Authority: 
Representations of Elizabeth I in Portrait and Film

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This thesis examines representations of Elizabeth I in portrait and film as a means of commenting on her authority as a female ruler. Using the definitions proposed by Pauline Stafford of authority as the recognized right to rule or command and of power as "the ability to have long and short-term aims and to be able to follow them—with the emphasis on strategy and pursuit rather than primarily on successful outcome," I explore the challenges to female rule in sixteenth-century England and the ways in which both governmentally- and privately-commissioned portraits helped to uphold Elizabeth I's authority over the course of her reign. Drawing on existing scholarship examining the relationship between the ruler's body and the state in the sixteenth century, I find that her portraits not only helped to negotiate contradictions between the abstract ideal and the physical body of the queen, but also came to stand in for the bodily presence of Elizabeth I as well as to depict her actual body in mid-twentieth-century film. Yet in Shekhar Kapur's 1998 film Elizabeth, the same portraits are used in a new and critical way to undermine the view of Elizabeth I as a great queen regnant. The post-colonial director adapts five historical images of Elizabeth I and combines them with ahistorical narrative elements drawn from the rule of Indira Gandhi. I find that the filmmakers draw and adapt elements of the sixteenth-century portraits to illustrate a transformation in Elizabeth's character, from private young woman to public icon, while simultaneously using narrative to tie this visual and character transformation to her ambiguous moral stance towards her advisors and her subjects. In so doing, the film suggests that authority and morality cannot co-exist in a female ruler, but that her image must differ from the reality of her actions for such a woman to claim authority.
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Dedicated to my family
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INTRODUCTION

Writing about modern representations of Elizabeth I and their relationship to the historical queen is like walking through a hall of mirrors. Most make use of historical sources such as the sixteenth-century portraits, capturing a powerful appearance of historicity even as they typically assert ahistorical interpretations of the historical queen’s character and actions. In contrast to what the use of such historical sources appears to assert, four hundred years later, there remains no clear path through the multiplicity of images and interpretations to a “truth” about Elizabeth I and her inner or private life.

It is this type of assertion that Shekhar Kapur’s 1998 film Elizabeth makes, using five iconic sixteenth-century portraits of Elizabeth I. Those portraits are the “Darnley” portrait, painted by Federigo Zuccaro in 1575; the “Armada” portrait of George Gower, 1588; the “Ditchley” portrait, painted by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger in 1592; the “Rainbow” portrait, attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, painted between 1600-1603; and the “Coronation” panel portrait, by an unknown artist, dating from 1600-1610. Whereas earlier films had reproduced sixteenth-century portraits of the queen as faithful likenesses of their Elizabths, Kapur’s 1998 film complicates its Elizabeth by linking the portraits sequentially to the development of her character. Tracing her disappointments in love and politics to her renunciation of personal fulfillment, which is thematically linked to her maturation as a ruler, the film recreates, adapts, and sequences the historical images to illustrate her transformation from an affectionate, idealistic young woman to one who is lonely, powerful and ultimately heartless. The powerful queen of the film’s
second half, however, is more closely related to the director's acknowledged model, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, than to the historical Elizabeth I. Its subtle and complex reading of Gandhian patterns into the historical queen's rule feeds directly into stereotypical dramatic traditions surrounding Elizabeth I even as its complex visual representation undermines the inherited cinematic stereotype of the queen's appearance.

As scholars like Betteridge, Carney and Levin, Doran, Dobson and Watson, and Pigeon have already observed, Kapur's representation of Elizabeth's queenship has less to do with meaningful historical commentary than with the persistent view that authority in the public sphere is antithetical to women's personal fulfillment. In the sixteenth century, speculation about her private life made Elizabeth I a controversial figure in her own lifetime; she had, after all, transcended the private sphere of marriage and motherhood that had been women's assigned place for centuries to rule in the public sphere, without what her contemporaries viewed as the benefits a husband would provide her. Elizabeth's unmarried state was both her blessing and her curse: it allowed her to exercise sole royal authority in England for forty-five years instead of consigning her to the sidelines of a reign that her husband would have been tempted to usurp; yet it also made her authority vulnerable to charges that she was "abnormal," precisely because she eschewed both the privacy and the private-sphere roles of wife, mother, and caretaker that her contemporaries believed were necessary for the fulfillment of her, and any woman's, essential nature.¹ Sixteenth-century writers saw women as inferior to men intellectually as

¹ For more on the challenges to and speculations about Elizabeth due to her unmarried state, see Carole Levin, The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power (Philadelphia:
well as physically. Indeed, many of those who supported and advised Elizabeth I considered that the only wise way for a woman to rule was to take the advice of her—implicitly male—advisers, rather than seeking to make independent judgments. Elizabeth’s refusal to marry remained a source of anxiety for her nobles and subjects alike; because of her own feminine weakness as well as her need for a male heir, they believed that Elizabeth needed to marry, yet no one wished her husband to rule in her stead, and the concern remained that the “natural” dominance of husband over wife would render a married woman incapable of exercising political power effectively over her husband.

Public representation and self-representation played a key role in Elizabeth I’s response to such challenges. Of all the modes of representation available to her, one of the most powerful was portraiture. Yates and Strong have documented the veneration of Elizabeth I’s image, as well as the many artistic tropes which sought to secure her authority by likening her to powerful mythological and religious women.

Frye has furthered examined Elizabeth I’s strategies for self-representation

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3 While the reign of Elizabeth’s predecessor, her sister Mary I, could have put these fears to rest, Mary’s own desire to please her husband Phillip II may have undermined her reputation for exercising sole political power in England, as their marriage contract had specified she should. Constance Jordan, “Woman’s Rule in Sixteenth-Century,” 439-440. Several biographies about the current royal family claim that Elizabeth II gave her consort, Prince Philip Mountbatten, unquestioned authority to make decisions in their private and family life because of his lifelong dissatisfaction with his social and political subordination to her. See Gyles Brandreth, Philip and Elizabeth: Portrait of a Royal Marriage. (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2005), 248; and Jonathan Dimbleby, The Prince of Wales (New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1994), 50-51 and 192.

throughout her reign as one half of a power struggle between crown, nobility, and commons, a power struggle expressing itself in competing artistic and theatrical representations of the queen’s image and persona. Doran and Montrose have both argued that the evolving visual expression of Elizabeth’s feminine purity came to be seen as a critical element of her power, while Levin has asserted that the queen consistently represented herself as both king and queen, male and female, in a number of rhetorical, ceremonial, and artistic devices throughout her reign.

Seen in the broader context of scholarship about queenship and women’s authority, recent work on Elizabeth I represents a shift from an earlier, radically limited and limiting historical approach to royal women. As James has noted, the historiography of queenship has tended to define medieval queens as either dependent on their husbands or, if they exercised power openly by serving as regents for underage sons, as highly unusual and therefore of exceptional personal character. This is in direct contrast to James’ own findings, which show that throughout the Middle Ages it was not an infrequent occurrence in many European countries for a queen to hold political power either in her own right or on behalf of her underage son, while queens consort and empresses were often depicted as co-rulers along with their husbands. She has further documented the importance of images in expressing the power of queens consort not as private apolitical individuals, but as holders of an

implicitly powerful office. Parsons' work on English queens consort in the Middle Ages seems to uphold James' observations; he has repeatedly documented the dissociation of the queen consort from her husband the king's political power and her value as a mother as underlining the legitimacy of the male line of succession. Both complementing and contrasting with his work, Stafford has argued that medieval queens consort, even in England, possessed legitimate power of their own, where power is defined as "the ability to have long and short-term aims and to be able to follow them—with the emphasis on strategy and pursuit rather than primarily on successful outcome." That power might manifest itself in areas other than the purely political sphere, however, as Anne Duggan has asserted with the observation that queens consort and empresses were routinely seen to embody the "benevolent" aspect of royal rule, representing the interests of the poor, the sick, orphans, and children especially. Yet Beem's study of female rule in England adds the significant observation that the status, authority, and power of a queen regnant is inherently different from that of a queen consort; in fact, for queens regnant Beem rejects the word "queen" altogether and instead uses the term "female king." With this shift, Beem acknowledges Levin's conceptualization of Elizabeth as simultaneously king and queen as redefining the ways in which rulership, circumscribed by gender, is

8 See John Carmi Parsons, Medieval Queenship (London: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1993); also Parsons, "'Never was a body buried in England with such solemnity and honour': The Burials and Posthumous Commemorations of English Queens to 1500," in Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1997).
10 Anne Duggan, "Introduction," in Queens and Queenship in Medieval England, xvii.
understood for all monarchs.

Even Beem acknowledges, however, that sex stereotyping played a large role in the definition of a queen's power. As Levin, Jordan, and Warkentin all note, the measure of a king's character—and thus of his authority—was military talent as well as bravery on the battlefield; such characteristics could even justify the crowning of a king with a dubious claim to the throne, as with Henry VII. Yet the most important determinant of a woman's character was her sexual ethics, expressed as virginity if she were unmarried, faithfulness and reproductive fruitfulness if she were married. Feminist theory has long held that this tradition of defining women's nature by their sexuality is intricately related to childbearing and nursing, and that such exclusively female responsibilities limited the time and energy women had to devote to public life, leading to their identification with the domestic sphere and their being denied political or indeed public authority. For Mary I and even more so for Elizabeth I, virginity would become a determining factor in their public personas, suggesting that essential femininity was not wholly inimical to political authority, but had to be represented within contemporary gender expectations.

The shifts in historiographical understanding of the gendered aspects of rule accords with recent scholarship on Elizabeth I's "afterlife" in popular culture. Dobson and Watson have found that in artistic, literary and theatrical representations spanning the four centuries since her death, Elizabeth I has become a powerful icon

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of both female rulership and feminine identity. Like Kapur’s film, such representations have traditionally drawn heavily on the already-iconic portrait tradition of Elizabeth I’s reign, with early Stuart court masques using the queen’s own clothes as costumes for her character.\textsuperscript{14} Shortly after her death, popular dissatisfaction with James I/VI led to theatrical portrayals not of Elizabeth I’s reign—which by the end of her life had become highly unpopular—but of her childhood and young womanhood, ending with her accession to the throne, as if “to remember her future glory.”\textsuperscript{15} Particularly since the eighteenth century, dramatic representations have depicted her as an affective Romantic heroine who was victimized not by others, but by her own inescapable position of power, which put her in situations that required her to behave in ways contrary to her passive, affectionate feminine nature. This theme of the queen divided against herself found expression in two recurring plotlines in which political need, characterized as a masculine concern, forced Elizabeth to sign orders of execution for individuals who highlighted her own compromised femininity: Mary Stuart, whose marriages and child made her Elizabeth’s rival for both the throne and femininity itself; and the Earl of Essex, portrayed as her rebellious lover.\textsuperscript{16} The implication is that being in a position of power is wholly unfeminine, and that wielding it effectively and comfortably is even less so.

The persistence of this view of Elizabeth I has been accompanied by the equally persistent re-presentation of her sixteenth-century visual image. The iconic

\textsuperscript{15} Dobson and Watson, \textit{England’s Elizabeth}, 49-65, paraphrase 64-65.
\textsuperscript{16} Dobson and Watson, \textit{England’s Elizabeth}, 88.
portraits of the end of her reign have provided the basis for her character's visual appearance throughout the twentieth century in films such as *Fire Over England*, *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex*, and *The Virgin Queen*. Yet Shekhar Kapur's 1998 film *Elizabeth* is the first to trace the development of this image and to link it with the evolving conflict the film imagines between the queen's femininity and authority. Using five different portraits from different periods in the historical queen's reign, the filmmakers sequence them within the narrative in such a way as to emphasize the stripping away of both youthful feminine energy and, crucially, privacy. As the Elizabeth of the film loses her expectations of love and personal fulfillment, so she loses any sense of being a private person not ruled by political expediency, and so her appearance step-by-step comes to resemble the familiar, highly stylized iconic image of the Virgin Queen—an image that in the sixteenth century was increasingly intended to depict not the historical queen's physical person, but her political presence.17 This concept of representing the monarch not in individual terms as he or she appeared but in the role of the ruler is closely tied to the English legal philosophy known as "the king’s two bodies," which subsumed the king’s "natural body," or the king as a private physical person, in the king’s "body politic," or his timeless role as the head of state and inheritor of the throne.18

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17 Frye has found that as Elizabeth I aged, her public appearances became less and less frequent even as her printed and painted images proliferated in the public sphere. Montrose has further argued that the familiar Mask of Youth adopted by the government as the official face-pattern for the aging queen actually was intended to represent not Elizabeth's physical body and likeness, as previous films assumed, but rather that ephemeral characteristic of any ruling monarch, her "majesty," in order to bridge the gap between the ideal of queenly rule and the reality of the 60-year-old queen's body. Susan Frye, "Turning Sixty in the 1590s," in *The Competition for Representation*, 98-107; Louis Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority, Gender, and Representation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 221.

Kapur’s characterization of the historical queen is further complicated by his own acknowledgement that it was based on the persona and rulership of Indira Gandhi. Indian journalist Pranay Gupte’s memoir of life in the press under the rule of Indira Gandhi suggests some of the bases for this comparison: much like Elizabeth I, Gandhi’s supporters widely associated her with the Hindu goddesses of motherhood, and her detractors with the goddess of destruction. Like Elizabeth I, she ruled at a time of great religious and social upheaval in India and became known for her strong but inconsistent handling of religious conflicts in particular. Her situation as the first female prime minister of India, following the highly successful rule of her father Jawaharlal Nehru, roughly parallels Elizabeth’s situation in following in the footsteps of her father Henry VIII; the parallel is strengthened by the fact that both Gandhi’s biographers and ministers in her government have written of the parliament’s assumption that she would be easily controlled by her male advisors and

19 Stephen Moss, “‘Film-making is an adventure.’” The Guardian, Nov. 1, 2007, http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2007/nov/01/ (accessed December 12, 2008). Pigeon, Levin and Carney have further linked the film to the iconography of Diana, Princess of Wales. Kapur denies that Diana was an influence on his conception of the character of Elizabeth, stating, “I can see only one connection: a girl fighting to keep her joyous, loving, normal nature, whilst also being royal.” These parallels are thus subjective and thematic, revolving largely around popular iconographies of the princess’s essentialist femininity and the destructive nature of monarchical life on her sense of self. This was detailed in a highly revealing interview she gave to Martin Bashir of the BBC in 1995, in which she makes powerful claims to public influence based largely on her private anguish at the hands of the Royal family and the press. A detailed discussion of this interview and its relationship to the film’s interpretation of Elizabeth I would be interesting to pursue; however, the lack of concrete evidence of Diana’s influence on the makers of Elizabeth places such a discussion beyond the scope of this paper. Renee Pigeon, “‘No Man’s Elizabeth’: The Virgin Queen in Recent Films,” in Retrovisions: Reinventing the Past in Film and Fiction, ed. Deborah Cartmell, IQ Hunter, and Imelda Whelehan (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 19; Carole Levin and Jo Eldridge Carney, “Young Elizabeth in Peril: from Seventeenth-Century Drama to Modern Movies,” in Elizabeth I: Always her Own Free Woman, ed. Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge Carney and Debra Barrett-Graves (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2003) 233-235; Rosanna de Lisle, “Interview: Shekhar Kapur – The original Elizabethan,” The Independent, Sept. 27, 1998, http://findarticles.com/ (accessed December 12, 2008). For more on the iconographies of Diana’s femininity see Jude Davies, Diana, A Cultural History: Gender, Race, Nation, and the People’s Princess (New York: Palgrave, 2001), and HRH Diana, Princess of Wales, interview by Martin Bashir, Panorama, British Broadcasting Corp. (November 1995), transcript accessible online via www.bbc.co.uk/politics97/diana/panorama.html.
of her own surprising strength and independence of judgment—the exact situation faced by Elizabeth I. Gandhi’s continual references to her father and self-representation as the mother of India indicate the extent to which her methods of securing power relied on gendered notions of authority, which also paralleled Elizabeth I’s responses to her situation. Yet Gandhi’s authority was undermined in the 1970s by her tolerance of her son Sanjay’s extra-constitutional power, used to perpetrate human rights abuses on India’s urban poor and on religious and ethnic minorities. This transgression of the boundary between private and public life, and its implications for the authority of the female ruler, provides the basis for one of the film’s strongest and most ahistorical comparisons between the two rulers.

In light of this wide-ranging body of evidence, I suggest that despite its ahistorical depiction of the historical queen’s personality and style of rulership, Shekhar Kapur’s interpretation of Elizabeth I from a visual perspective underlines the discourse on the relationship between image and female authority. My argument is not, however, that the makers of Elizabeth intentionally refer to the writings of John Knox or concepts such as the king’s two bodies, but that the film uses the sixteenth-century portraits which reflect such conflicts to support its assertion that power is detrimental to women, thus contributing to an ongoing discourse of gender, authority, and public-ness vs. privacy. Such an approach falls into the rough outlines of film analysis methodology proposed and exemplified by Robert Rosenstone and Robert Burgoyne, who see historical film as one means of addressing ongoing social concerns with reference to a shared past. Rosenstone in particular notes that, “You may see the contribution of such works in terms not of the specific details they
present but, rather, in the overall sense of the past they convey, the rich images and visual metaphors they provide us for thinking historically.”

Throughout this discussion, I rely on Pauline Stafford’s definitions of power, cited on page five, as “the ability to have long and short-term aims and to be able to follow them—with the emphasis on strategy and pursuit rather than primarily on successful outcome.” I have also adopted her definition of authority as the recognized right to rule in one’s own name. Throughout this work, too, I distinguish the very real historical Queen Elizabeth I from the icon she has become in the four centuries since her death. Although this iconic Elizabeth—embodying not only powerful and/or unmarried women but also aspects of English identity, culture, and history—is most often the one portrayed in, or referenced by, cinematic representation, I must stress that this “afterlife” of Elizabeth I is not the subject of this paper. Rather, I treat the iconic Elizabeth and her image as a lens through which one particular film explores the difficulties of female authority as a phenomenon. For purposes of clarity, therefore, in places where the icon and the historical person might be confused or otherwise indistinguishable, I refer to the historical queen as “Elizabeth I,” and the iconic figure as “Elizabeth,” “the film’s Elizabeth,” or using the adjective “iconic.” Chapter Two will provide the most instances of this form of clarification, since it examines the Kapur film’s use of Elizabethan portraiture and the refraction of Indira Gandhi’s rule through the historical queen’s characterization,

while Chapter One discusses sixteenth-century views of queenship, Elizabeth I’s rule, and the role of her portraits in securing her reign.
CHAPTER ONE:
Queenship, Authority, and Portraiture in the Sixteenth Century

When Elizabeth I acceded to the throne of England in 1558, she faced a number of challenges in establishing her authority. These challenges centered around questions of legitimacy and religion raised by the English Reformation, which had been accomplished largely in order to legitimize Elizabeth herself as her father’s unborn (and, it was assumed, male) heir. Yet these religious challenges were complicated by the definitions and expectations her contemporaries placed on her because of her gender and her youthful, unmarried status. As Levin has shown, Elizabeth met such challenges throughout her reign by representing herself as both king and queen in a number of rhetorical and ritual devices, and by identifying herself strongly with her father, Henry VIII. Frye has further demonstrated the importance of representations of the queen in the challenges presented to her by her nobility, while Walker, Montrose, and Levin have similarly documented the role of rumor and popular representations in the commons’ response to the queen’s claims of authority.

In this struggle over her representation, one of Elizabeth’s most powerful weapons was the institutionalized creation, dissemination and treatment of her visual image. Documentary evidence from the first months of her reign indicates that her government regarded the queen’s visual image as a key means of securing widespread recognition of her authority and loyalty to her person. The image and its significance, however, changed radically during the course of her reign. From the first naturalistic portraits of Elizabeth I as an elegantly-dressed noblewoman of twenty-five, the queen’s visual representation shifted from that of a powerful royal woman, to a mythological virgin, and finally to a personified cosmological force. This visual
change was accompanied by the well-documented shift in her government’s understanding of her image, from a likeness whose importance lay in its accuracy to one which was meant to represent the authority and majesty of her office rather than her physical person. That shift in understanding—the transformation of the image from naturalistic portrait to political icon—is reflected in the five portraits chosen by the makers of the 1998 film *Elizabeth* to illustrate its Queen Elizabeth’s shift from private person to public ruler: the “Darnley” portrait, painted by Federigo Zuccaro in 1575; the “Armada” portrait of George Gower, 1588; the “Ditchley” portrait, painted by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger in 1592; the “Rainbow” portrait, attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, painted between 1600-1603; and the “Coronation” panel portrait, by an unknown artist, dating from 1600-1610. This chapter addresses not the cinematic use of these portraits, but their roots and role in the sixteenth-century struggle to establish Elizabeth I’s authority.

As the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, born only months after the Church of England was formed in order to annul the king’s marriage to Catherine of Aragon and bless his union with Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I’s legitimacy and therefore her claim to the throne depended upon widespread acceptance of the spiritual and legal authority of the Church of England. To Catholic Europe and to Catholics within England, who held Roman Catholicism as the only true religion, the circumstances surrounding the queen’s birth made her both illegitimate—being born to a woman not legally married to her father—and a heretic, since she adhered to a Protestant sect that had broken from the true Church. Moreover, Elizabeth I rose to the throne on the death of her sister Mary, the Catholic daughter of Henry and
Catherine, undoubtedly legitimate in the eyes of Rome; Mary’s reign, initially welcomed by the people of England, had been darkened by her determined and violent efforts to restore her subjects to the Catholic faith, as well as her unpopular marriage to a foreign sovereign, Philip II of Spain. In addition, Elizabeth’s claim to the throne was contested by her Catholic cousin, Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots and the Queen Consort of Francis II of France. The problem was further complicated by the fact that Mary Stuart’s claim had the support of the Pope and Catholic Europe.

Yet Elizabeth I faced the further difficulty of being a young, unmarried woman. Genevieve Lloyd has traced the history of women’s association with the qualities of passivity and irrational emotion, which thinkers as far back as Plato had defined as inferior to the masculine qualities of action and reason; men were thus equated with the mind and the soul, dominating the femininized material body which was incapable of abstract knowledge or wisdom.22 In sixteenth-century English political thought, as Beem and Jordan have noted, this philosophical tradition manifested itself in the idea that, although a woman might legitimately inherit in her own right, the monarchy was implicitly patriarchal and female rule should adapt to this state of affairs.23 The most appropriate form of adaptation was seen as the acknowledgement by the queen that she was not capable of wise independent judgment, and her unquestioned acceptance of the advice of her Privy Council and

23 Beem, *The Lioness Roared*, 77-81; Jordan, “Woman’s Rule,” 428. The crown had traditionally descended through the male line to the eldest son of the king; securing a masculine succession had been the reason both for Henry VIII’s break with Rome and for his last five marriages. Henry’s extreme measures may have been spurred by the knowledge that his own father’s claim to the throne was dubious at best; it came through his mother, whose own claim rested on her descent from an illegitimate ancestor, John of Gaunt. Jordan, “Woman’s Rule,” 424-425.
Parliament; she was to be, in twentieth-century terms, a figurehead rather than an actual ruler.

Beem has analyzed the ways in which this expectation was made manifest under Mary I, Elizabeth’s elder sister whom she succeeded in 1558. In brief, Mary’s authority was repeatedly undermined by members of her privy council as well as by her husband, Philip II of Spain, and she was constantly reminded that “the greater part of the labour of government...was not within woman’s province, and also that it was important that the Queen should be assisted, protected, and comforted in the discharge of those duties.”24 This expectation and the ways in which Mary’s advisors attempted to enforce it clearly conflicted, however, with the official legal position on the authority of queens regnant as expressed in the Act Concerning Regal Power of 1554. This Parliamentary statute had sought to ensure that, faced with a contested succession, Mary had the same legal authority as a male ruler: “the same all regal power, dignity, honour, authority, prerogative...belong unto her Highness...in as full, large, and ample manner as it hath done heretofore to any other her most noble progenitors, kings of this realm.”25

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25 J.R. Tanner, *Tudor Constitutional Documents, A.D. 1485-1603, with an Historical Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 123-24. The contest over the succession of Mary I had several interwoven causes. As the eldest child of Henry VIII, Mary’s claim seemed the strongest at the death of her brother Edward VI without issue; however, Henry VIII had declared her illegitimate and barred from the succession upon the annulment of his marriage to her mother Catherine. He only returned Mary to the succession in his own last will and testament, which Parliament agreed to accept only if Henry signed it in his own hand. Henry’s male heir, the zealously Protestant Edward, sought on his deathbed to keep the throne from falling to the Catholic Mary by vesting the succession in his Protestant cousins the Grey sisters by means of his own personal edict, the Devise for the Succession—possibly inspired by Henry’s own will. Edward’s Devise was not accepted by Parliament, however, and therefore was considered unconstitutional; nevertheless, it held considerable significance for the powerful Protestants among the nobility. One such was John Dudley, Duke of
When Mary died in 1558, childless despite three years of marriage and two widely-reported false pregnancies, her successor Elizabeth faced similar expectations, but from an altogether different source. Neale reports that Count Feria, the Spanish envoy in London, wrote that “She seems to me incomparably more feared than her sister, and gives her orders and has her way as absolutely as her father did.”

The nobility had not tried to protect Elizabeth from religious and political persecution during her sister’s reign, and her accession was cause for them to fear her reprisal; they had therefore, presumably, given up their expectation of dominance over the young queen, and Elizabeth’s immediate assertiveness in taking control of the decision-making process only underlined her own expectation of dominance. Instead, Elizabeth faced the prospect of economic domination by the aldermen of London, who sponsored the pageants presented in her royal entry in the city of London just before her coronation on January 14, 1559. As reported by humanist scholar Richard Mulcaster in his eyewitness account, *The Queen’s majesty’s passage*, the last tableau in the entry program likened Elizabeth to Deborah, the Old Testament queen who had successfully led the Israelites in battle for their freedom. Yet instead of focusing on this strictly Biblical account, the pageant presented an apocryphal image of Deborah ruling under the palm trees not by her own judgment, but following the advice of her counselors. Mulcaster makes clear in his note that, “the ground of

Northumberland. On Edward’s death he married his son to Jane Grey and asserted her claim with the support of other powerful Protestant nobles. His support crumbled when the countryside rose for Mary, however, and Jane “ruled” for only nine days before being deposed, imprisoned, and eventually beheaded along with Northumberland himself. Beem notes that despite Jane’s youth—she was only fifteen—and her apparent status as a pawn of her father-in-law, she refused to crown her husband king, intimating that she would rule personally on her own authority. Beem, *The Lioness Roared*, 74. For more on the constitutional and legal issues surrounding Mary’s accession, see Jordan, “Woman’s Rule,” 425n5.

27 See Neale’s discussion of the queen’s assertiveness in *Queen Elizabeth*, pp. 62-67.
this last pageant was, that...[the queen] might by this be put in remembrance to consult for the worthy government of her people, considering God oftentimes sent women nobly to rule among men...and that it behooves both men and women, so ruling, to use advice of good counsel."28 Yet the Elizabeth whom Mulcaster records as responding enthusiastically to each pageant and its message, makes neither comment nor gesture at the conclusion of the Deborah spectacle, merely moves on to the next tableau, which she receives graciously.29

Yet the aldermen, whose economic support was critical to the functioning of the royal government, were not the only group expressing ambivalence about the idea of female rule in England. Humanist and scholastic scholars had been debating the question of female rule for many years. The humanists argued that women’s social status was the result of historical circumstance and beliefs, while the scholastics referred to traditional understandings of natural law, which had been derived from Scripture and the writings of Aristotle and Plato, and which placed women below men in a hierarchy of inherent worth and ability ordained by God.

Just before Elizabeth’s accession, John Knox’s 1558 treatise *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* argued vehemently against female rule on the grounds that natural law had made women inherently subordinate to men, without the authoritative male virtues required to rule, but rather with a

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28 Mulcaster, *The Queen’s Majesty’s Passage and Related Documents*. Ed. Germaine Warkentin (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 93-94. Commissioned by the aldermen of London, who held the responsibility of designing and implementing the reception of new monarchs by the city, the pamphlet went through four printings in the first ten days after it was issued. Warkentin has found that both pageants and pamphlet played a significant role both in establishing the legitimacy of Elizabeth I’s authority and in communicating to both audience and queen what was expected in return. Warkentin, “Introduction,” 20-23. Frye concurs with this assessment. Frye, *Competition for Representation*, 34.

“natural shamfastness” which was destroyed by participation in the public sphere.30 Greaves has made a convincing argument that Knox’s tract was highly personal in nature, taking aim at the two Catholic queens regnant who had given his work in Scotland the most trouble (Mary Stuart and Mary Tudor) and at the Virgin Mary herself: Knox saw a dangerous trend in these multiple Catholic queens, and felt deeply that their simultaneous rule was a harbinger of the Apocalypse—thus the reference to Revelation in his title.31 Yet his arguments addressed not only Catholics or royal women, but all women; Jordan notes, “Knox asserts...that for a woman to step out of her subordinate place in the creational hierarchy is tantamount to an act of tyranny.”32 Yet Knox’s argument also suggests the very theme that eighteenth-century drama would take up in its representation of Elizabeth I: that a woman who does demonstrate the “masculine” characteristics required to rule is inherently unfeminine, possibly even an abomination to nature.

The English humanist John Aylmer responded to Knox in An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subjects, published in 1559 to defend the right of Elizabeth I to rule England. Aylmer denied that either Scripture or nature could be interpreted absolutely to deny women authority; he argued that Scripture must be seen in

31 Richard Greaves, Theology and Revolution in the Scottish Reformation (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian University Press, 1980), 60-161. Interestingly, while Greaves argues that Knox connected the two royal Marys with the Catholic Virgin Mary only because of his equal antipathy for them, Duggan, James, and Stafford all note the medieval equation of queens consort with the Virgin, who was thus transformed into a unifying dynastic figure: “This Queen of Heaven was her Son’s spouse as well as His mother...the duality of her position in relation to Christ thus made her an ideal model for queens, as wives and mothers of kings.” Duggan, “Introduction,” xvii. Knox may therefore also have been working from an established medieval tradition, much as he does in his scholastic approach to the supporting texts.
historical context and that nature encompassed a range of possible variations rather than one absolute law. This theoretical formulation allowed Aylmer to extrapolate that for a woman to be the only legitimate heir to a throne usually inherited by men indicates that she has God's support in ruling, even over men. Dale Hoak has found that one element of this divine support was expressed through a comparison of Elizabeth to the Virgin Mary; he notes that while this comparison echoed similar references to Mary I, Aylmer's use of it in reference to Elizabeth is significant because it presages the iconic significance her virginity would acquire. In the context of this discussion, its significance revolves around Aylmer's use of this analogy—one which was quite commonly applied to queens consort throughout Europe and the Latin East in the Middle Ages—as a justification for Elizabeth's rule. Virginity was considered the measure of good character for an unmarried woman; it thus contained or expressed something of essential feminine nature, and to justify Elizabeth's authority by emphasizing her divine virginity was to state from the outset that femininity and feminine nature were not antithetical to positions of authority.

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34 Dale Hoak, "A Tudor Deborah?" 76-77. See also note 10 above, on the relationship of queens consort to the Virgin Mary.

35 Warkentin, Levin, and Frye all write of the importance placed on women's sexual chastity as a measure of their respectability, usually termed "honor." For a married queen, chastity was "generously defined as her capacity to produce offspring to inherit the kingdom;" for an unmarried one such as Elizabeth, it was defined as virginity. This measure of women's honor was paralleled by the importance placed on courage and particularly military prowess as the measure of a man's respectability. Just as a king who was deemed a coward might be scorned, an unchaste queen was subject to harsh judgment and even punishment. Throughout Elizabeth's reign, the singularity of her unmarried state, combined with the sexual duties expected of royal women, invited questions about her sexuality that threatened both her character and her rule, much as Henry VI's reign was threatened by his peers' judgments of him as a coward and a dunce. It is interesting to note that, at least among royal
Despite these points, Levin and Hoak have both observed that Aylmer’s argument for the legitimacy of women’s authority does not extend to wholehearted support for a female ruler’s *unlimited* power. Instead, he saw Elizabeth’s rule in particular as favored by God because in England, the power accorded to Parliament and the nobility ensured that the monarch would not have absolute power, thus making it “not...so daunger[ous] a matter, to have a woman ruler.” The implication is not that Elizabeth would exercise power limited by an early modern system of checks and balances, but that she would assuredly not attempt to act without the advice of Parliament.

Such expectations therefore presented challenges not from Elizabeth’s nobility, but from the educated commons—scholars and merchants—whose support she counted on to maintain her position of power. These are exactly the people at whom Elizabeth’s expressions of authority took aim throughout her reign. Those expressions of authority took multiple guises: in printed pamphlets and proclamations intended to reach the eyes and ears of her common subjects, Elizabeth continually...
identified herself with her father, Henry VIII, in speeches and art, as well as representing herself in gender-doubled or gender-ambiguous terms.\(^3\) Such rhetorical self-representation as her father's rightful heir, and as both king and queen, positioned her outside of contemporary sex stereotypes that identified women as weak, passive, and inherently un-authoritative; yet, as Levin, Frye, and Montrose have extensively documented, that self-positioning did not always have the effect she intended among her subjects, many of whom continued to see her as unfit to rule.\(^3\)8

Yet perhaps one of the most subtle and powerful means by which Elizabeth sought to establish her authority in the eyes of the commons was through her visual image. Although there is clearly no means of measuring or ascertaining the impact of the visual image on her subjects throughout her lifetime, its significance to Elizabeth's own government, and even, to a certain extent, to the queen herself is without doubt. The queen's authority, and the significance of the portraits in expressing and securing it, is visible in two interwoven strands of evidence: in the documentary history of the government's involvement in the creation and dissemination of her portraits, and in the changing nature and meanings attributed to the visual image itself. The five portraits used to characterize the young queen of the 1998 film *Elizabeth*—the “Darnley,” the “Armada,” the “Ditchley,” the “Rainbow,” and the “Coronation” panel portrait—serve almost unfailingly as prime examples in each stage of the evolution of Elizabeth's authoritative image. I therefore embed the descriptions and explanations of these key images in the discussion.

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\(^3\) See Levin, *Heart and Stomach of a King*, especially pp. 92, 142-43, 153; and Susan Frye, *The Competition for Representation*, 13, 36-40. 3\(^8\) See especially Levin, “'While the Queen lyveth,'” 77-95. See also Frye, *Competition for Representation*, 12-14; Levin, *Heart and Stomach*, esp. pp. 131-148; Montrose, *Subject of Elizabeth*, 186-209.
The documentary history of the government’s involvement in the creation and dissemination of Elizabeth’s image is not extensive, but it is detailed enough to give a sense of the purposefulness of their actions. Montrose has found that upon her accession to the throne, Elizabeth’s government suppressed Catholic religious images by authority of a royal proclamation, even as it outlawed the destruction or defacement of any monarchical image, thus purposefully endowing the royal image with a kind of holy status previously reserved only for religious icons.\(^{39}\) The proclamation of 1559 in fact preceded the well-known draft memo of 1563 upon which Strong’s theory of the Cult of the Virgin Queen relied heavily. The 1563 memo, written in William Cecil’s hand, notes the widespread desire of the queen’s subjects for a copy of her image and criticizes “painting[s], graving[s], and printing[s], wherein is evidently seen that hitherto none hath sufficiently expressed the natural representation of her majesty’s person, favor, or grace.” Finally, it suggests that these be suppressed even as the queen sits for an official portrait. The original portrait was circulated to different localities or painters’ workshops, where a face-pattern could be made, consisting of a paper silhouette with the features indicated by a row of pin-pricks. All portraits of the queen were to utilize this face-pattern; an accompanying book of dress and accessory patterns also emanated from the official image.\(^{40}\) As Montrose has noted, the wording of the memo makes clear that a naturalistic representation of the queen was highly valued by the government, and that the production and regulation of such images was seen as important in maintaining the loyalty of Elizabeth’s subjects—so that a realistic image functioned

\(^{39}\) Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth*, 73-76.

\(^{40}\) The National Archives, SP 12/31, no. 25 (f. 1). Strong, *Gloriana*, 16-17.
in effect as an ideological tool of the government. Auerbach has noted the shift from the relatively small number of Marian portraits to the larger demand for Elizabeth's image: "Elizabeth herself—though reluctantly—acknowledged the importance of a life-like image and therefore stimulated the fashion for a more realistic conception. This was only natural for a queen who was ever anxious to show herself to her subjects and to capture their admiration."42

A number of these portraits survive from the first decade of Elizabeth's reign, portraying the queen using high Renaissance stylistic techniques such as chiaroscuro, linear perspective, and plasticity of form. Despite their attempts to naturalize Elizabeth's form, these first portraits are interesting both because of their generally poor quality and because they make no visible claim to the queen's royal status, much less to her role as a sitting monarch. She is depicted merely in the dress and carriage of a noblewoman, without the crown, scepter, or other symbol distinguishing her from any other wealthy aristocratic woman. Strong has written of these early portraits that "The politico-religious pressure demanding the projection of an image did not as yet exist and the notion of royal portraiture as loyalist propaganda had yet to be conceived."43

The politico-religious pressure of which he speaks had always boiled under the surface in England, but it exploded in 1568 when the Protestant Scots nobility deposed Mary Stuart, their Catholic queen and Elizabeth's only serious rival for the English throne. Mary fled to England, where she sought protection from Elizabeth as

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41 Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth*, 220.
a sister sovereign who was a victim of rebellious subjects. Elizabeth was sympathetic
even to offer Mary military support in regaining her throne and later, to allow her
to stay in England as a half-guest, half-prisoner of the government. Yet even under
house arrest, Mary’s presence was highly disruptive to the balance of religious power,
which remained split between Catholic and various Protestant factions; she
represented the rightful Catholic sovereign and/or successor for whom the Catholic
nobility hoped, and within the year plots began to form to marry Mary Stuart to
Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, the only Catholic noble with royal blood. They
varied in their details; some aimed merely to achieve the marriage and force Elizabeth
to acknowledge the pair’s projected offspring as her heir, thus securing a Catholic
succession for England. Others actually proposed to depose Elizabeth and place
Mary and Norfolk on the throne. All such proposals were illegal, however, since
noble marriages had to be approved by the queen, and the Norfolk-Stuart marriage
had no such approval. In fact, when Elizabeth found out about it, she sent Norfolk to
the Tower, which spurred other Catholic nobles in the North of England to rebellion.
The queen’s forces quickly put this down; however, the harsh sentences of
imprisonment and execution she meted out drew the ire of Catholics in Europe as
well as in England, and in March 1570, Pope Pius V issued the Papal Bull Regnum in
Excelsis, which excommunicated Elizabeth and released her subjects from their
obligation of obedience to her.

Strong’s work in periodizing Elizabethan portraiture suggests that shortly after
this period of internal unrest and external condemnation the queen’s official portraits
underwent a radical change. This shift coincides with an intensification of the
documentary record. Between the 1563 memo and a 1575 petition of the Painters Stainers Company of London, there is no evidence to suggest whether or not Cecil's face-pattern system of controlling the queen's image was actually put into place.

That 1575 petition, from the guild to which all portrait artists belonged, requests that action be taken to remedy the large number of badly-executed portraits of Elizabeth by improperly-trained painters and asks for a charter for the guild so that they might have the authority to enforce rules regulating the training and practices of those copying Elizabeth's portraits.\(^4\) Dated more than ten years after Cecil's 1563 memo, the petition provides strong evidence that the control the memo proposed either had not worked, or was not adequately enforced. This petition is followed by another, five years later, alleging again that insufficiently trained painters are "intrud[ing] upon the saide science" of portraiture to produce poor images of the queen for "their owne private gayne," and requesting that this be ended.\(^5\)

The Painters Stainers' petition in fact coincides with the creation of the first official portrait representing Elizabeth I as a sitting monarch. The "Darnley" portrait shows Elizabeth lit from the front, minimizing the shadows on her sculpted face. She wears a scalloped, pearl-encrusted headpiece attaching her veil. Her vivid auburn hair frames an extremely pale face with a high forehead and cheekbones and large dark eyes that gaze directly out at the viewer; her mouth is unsmiling, even stern. A high white ruff, enormous sleeves, and a looped string of pearls adorn her ash-grey and gold brocade dress; behind her on the table is the crown imperial and scepter, the


\(^5\) The National Archives, SP 7/16, no. 28 (f. 1).
first appearance of these items in any of her portraits, marking her as both female and sovereign. The “Darnley” portrait is one of only four paintings for which Elizabeth is known to have sat, and Strong has documented the proliferation of paintings of Elizabeth utilizing the same pose and face pattern it established, suggesting that around this time, her government began seriously enforcing the face-pattern system laid out in Cecil’s 1563 memo. Over the next thirty years, the “Darnley” portrait would provide the basis for hundreds of other portraits of Elizabeth, ultimately contributing to the establishment of her unchanging image as a kind of political icon.

This depiction of Elizabeth’s crown and scepter as part of her image thus incorporated a clear claim to her royal authority, rather than depicting merely a noblewoman who was said to resemble the queen. In the late 1570s, as Elizabeth’s viability as a marriage partner waned, iconographic portraits increasingly represented her as both sovereign and virgin, comparing her to Tuccia, the vestal virgin who, accused of being unchaste, carried water in a sieve from the river Tiber all the way to the temple of the gods, and to Astraea, the mythological virgin whose coming announced spring and the impending salvation of humanity. However, each of these portraits took as its basis the face-pattern of the “Darnley,” creating a succession of images that represented the queen’s appearance as ever the same while her meanings and authority were ever expanded through her identification with powerful women throughout history, many of whom derived their power from their virginity.

46 Attributed to Federigo Zuccaro, the “Darnley” portrait, 1575?
In fact, Elizabeth probably did not sit for another portrait until 1588, when England’s defeat of the Spanish Armada was portrayed in association with Elizabeth’s personal power and authority. The “Armada” portrait painted by George Gower shows Elizabeth seated before two windows depicting the beginning and end of the English navy’s defeat of the Spanish Armada. In one the English fleet sends fireships into the midst of the Armada in brilliant sunlight, while in the other the Armada flounders in the stormy sea off a rocky coast. Elizabeth’s right hand is on the globe, and behind her, a crown imperial on a table is positioned almost directly over the globe, suggesting that the English crown now claims dominion over the world. Little chiaroscuro adds depth to Elizabeth’s facial features, and her face is extremely pale, almost as if it had been painted white, while her hair and lips are extremely red against the pallor of her skin. She wears a dress with enormous grey sleeves and forepart embroidered in gold with alternating patterns of diamond-mounted suns in splendor and pearl-centered flowers. Her stomacher and kirtle are black, with two rows of pearls and diamond-mounted pink and blue bows down the front, leading to a tear-drop shaped black pearl hanging from a diamond; similar jeweled bows and pearls attach her sleeves to the stomacher and edge her cloak and overskirt. Four strands of pearls hang around her neck, while her white ruff is of intricate pointed lace. The “Armada” portrait magnifies Elizabeth’s authority by associating her personally with England’s greatness in the defeat of the Armada. The painting contains an overall distortion of perspective and chronology that serve to emphasize the extraordinary nature of the sitter, even as it alludes to the tradition of similar distortions in medieval religious icons.48

48 Strong, Gloriana, 131-133; Arnold, Queen Elizabeth’s Wardrobe, 34-36.
By the 1590s, however, Elizabeth’s authority faced new challenges. The spectacular defensive defeat of the Armada had been followed by an equally spectacular offensive failure to destroy the remaining Spanish ships when her commanders paid little heed to the queen’s military goals and instead sacked Lisbon for their own profit. The English struggle against Spain’s naval power was reduced to a mildly successful naval effort to destroy Spanish trade and divert its wealth into English coffers. Simultaneously, Elizabeth agreed to lend military and financial support to the Protestant claimant to the French throne, Henry of Navarre, only to see him abandon English troops along with the English interest in protection from Spanish invasion.

At around the time that Elizabeth was writing to Henry that “she knew what became a king” and suggested that he would succeed against the Spanish if he followed her advice, Marcus Gheeaerts the Younger was painting a portrait of her that considerably re-worked the queen’s visual image even as it extended the attributions of authority begun in the “Armada” portrait. The “Ditchley” portrait, commissioned by the queen’s former champion at the tilt, Henry Lee, and painted about 1592, depicts the queen standing atop not a map, but the globe. Her feet stand in Oxfordshire, at approximately the location of Lee’s home, while her extraordinarily wide skirt stretches the width of England, suggesting her powerful identification as one being with the country she ruled. She wears a white silk dress with hanging

50 Significantly, in 1592 Lee entertained Elizabeth at his home at Ditchley. Numerous authors have suggested that he commissioned the portrait to commemorate the visit. The “Rainbow” portrait, discussed later in this chapter, may represent another example of such a commemorative portrait, this time occasioned by Secretary of State Robert Cecil’s entertainment for the queen in 1602. Strong, *Gloriana*, 135-139, 157-161; Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth*, 215-228.
sleeves and a trellis-work pattern of puffed white cypress silk; each intersection of the
trellis pattern is held down with a ruby, diamond, or four pearls set in gold, while
single pearls are also set an the center of each of the trellis's diamonds. Her pointed
lace ruff is open at the front, while the wired veil attached to her shoulders stands up
in two hoops and is similarly decorated with pearls and rubies along the edges. She
wears a necklace and crown set with pearls and rubies, with tear-drop pearls scattered
through her high-piled hair and an earring of the armillary sphere in one ear. Yet
what stands out about this portrait is the apparent age of the queen's face: her dark
eyes are hollow with circles underneath, her temples slightly sunken, and the flesh
under her jaw appears soft. This marks a significant break from the face-pattern
established by the "Darnley" portrait, whose continual employment for almost twenty
years had resulted in portrayals of Elizabeth with the features of a much younger
woman. Even the "Armada" portrait, with its lack of visual depth, had not
significantly aged Elizabeth's face. This attempt at verisimilitude echoes the 1563
memo's emphasis on resemblance to "the grace of her majesty's person," but as
Montrose has noted, at this point such realism presents a jarring visual note in a
painting that was otherwise stylistically pure; although in form and design it became a
model for other portraits of the queen, this detailed depiction of her age was not
repeated.51 Despite this stylistic incongruity, the painting is widely seen to represent
the queen's powerful identification with England; Strong even writes that "in the
'Ditchley' portrait, Queen, crown and island become one."52

51 Montrose, Subject of Elizabeth, 225.
52 Strong, Gloriana, 135-140, quote 136; Arnold, Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe, 42-44.
In fact in 1596 the government made a decision to suppress images of the queen that represented her in such verisimilar terms. This is recorded in an Act of the Privy Council of that year:

A warrant for her majesty's Serjeant Painter and to all publicke officers to yelde him their assistance touching the abuse committed by divers unskillfull artisans in unseemly and improperly paintings, gravinge and printing of her Majesty's person and visage, to her Majesty's great offence and disgrace of that beutyfull and magnanimous Majesty wherewith God hathe blessed her, requiring them to cause all suche to be defaced and none to be allowed but suche as her Majesty's Serjeant Paynter shall first have sight of.53

A related incident is described by Sir Walter Ralegh in his History of the World: "the Pictures of Queene Elizabeth, made by unskilfull and common Painters...by her owne Commandement, were knockt in pieces and cast into the fire. For ill artists...doe often leave to posterity, of well-formed faces a deformed memory."54 In fact, several of these "unskilfull" paintings do survive; see Figure 6 in Appendix One.

What have remained of interest in this "government-level decision" are the reasons for it. Many historians see this as a response to widespread anxiety over the succession. Ralegh seems to suggest that it stems at least partly from Elizabeth I's own personal vanity. Yet Montrose has noted that in the 1596 Privy Council Act the language used to define a truthful image of the queen reflects a change from the verisimilitude referenced by the 1563 memo; in 1596, a truthful image of the queen is no longer "the natural representation of her majesty's person, grace, or favor," but one which portrays "that beutyfull and magnanmious Majesty wherewith God hathe blessed her." Montrose attributes this shift to the difference between the ideal of the queen's timeless majesty and her actual physical body, which became unsustainable.

near the end of her reign, and suggests that Elizabeth’s portraits later in her life were
deemed by the government to represent not her person, but her ideal nature.\textsuperscript{55}

In any case, the official portraits following the “Ditchley” represent the queen
using what Strong has termed the mask of youth; that is, they portrayed her as
eternally young and beautiful, an image which the queen herself seems to have
endorsed. The evidence for this endorsement comes not only from the Privy Council
Act of 1596, but also from an anecdote reported by Elizabeth’s miniaturist, Nicholas
Hilliard, who gives the only known account of the queen sitting for a portrait:

This makes me to remember the words also and reasoning of her Majestie,
when first I came in her highnes presence to drawe, whoe after showing me howe
shee noted great differences of shadowing in the works and diversity of Drawers
of sundry nations, and that the \textit{Italians} who had the name to be cunningest, and to
drawe best, shadowed not, Requiring of me the reason for it, seeing that best to shewe
ones selfe, nedeth no shadow of place, but rather the open light, to which I graunted,
& affirmed that shadowes in pictures waren indeed caused by the shadow of the
place...[and] many workmen covet to worke in for ease, to their sight, and to give
unto them a grosser lyne...and maketh the worke imborse well, and shew very wel
afar of...heer her Majestie conseved the reason, and therfor chosse her place to sit for
that perposse in the open ally of a goodly garden, where no tree was neere nor anye
shadowe at all... for good favor is like cleare truth, which is not shamed with the
light, nor neede to bee obscured...if [a woman] be not very fayre...as if to palle, too
red, or freckled &ce, then shadowe to shewe her in, doeth her a favore.\textsuperscript{56}

Much has been made of this anecdote as documentary evidence suggesting
that Elizabeth participated directly in the creation of her evenly-lit, youthful image.\textsuperscript{57}
Montrose suggests also that this passage demonstrates Elizabeth’s belief that shadow
in pictures represents dishonesty in the person portrayed; however, his analysis stops
short of Hilliard’s remark that shadow is well used to portray a woman who is not

\textsuperscript{55} Montrose, \textit{The Subject of Elizabeth}, 221-222.
\textsuperscript{56} Nicholas Hilliard, \textit{Nicholas Hilliard’s Art of Limning: A New Edition of A Treatise Concerning the
\textsuperscript{57} See Strong, “Introduction” in \textit{Gloriana}, 8-45; and Strong, \textit{The Tudor and Stuart Monarchy:
Pageantry, Painting, Iconography, Volume II: Elizabethan} (Bury St. Edmonds: The Boydell Press,
1995).
beautiful.\textsuperscript{58} It is certainly possible that Elizabeth and her contemporaries believed both ideas; however, this later statement seems also to support the possibility that Elizabeth’s desire for an evenly-lit visage reflected as much her own vanity as an assertion of her purity of character.

As well as representing the queen as ever-youthful, these later portraits also represent her as the possessor of extraordinary, even cosmological power. The importance of such images is highlighted by Strong and Montrose’s findings of the popularity of mass-produced equestrian woodcuts of English military heroes around the turn of the century, and of the government’s strict suppression of them as “images of authority” that competed with Elizabeth’s own.\textsuperscript{59} Such a representational competition paralleled the political competition between Elizabeth and Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, her last favorite, whose popularity with the commons superseded Elizabeth’s own and whose rebellion in 1600 led to his execution.\textsuperscript{60}

The artistic expression of Elizabeth’s extraordinary nature reached its apex in the enigmatic “Rainbow” portrait, attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger and painted sometime before or shortly after her death in 1603. The image, a three-quarter-length portrait, depicts Elizabeth again as a woman in her twenties with a vivid realism that is missing from the “Armada” portrait. Her pale skin is bathed in a warm golden-orange glow that strikes her face and breast evenly, leaving the only

\textsuperscript{58} Montrose, \textit{The Subject of Elizabeth}, 224-226.
\textsuperscript{59} Montrose, \textit{Subject of Elizabeth}, 215-219, quote p. 218.
\textsuperscript{60} Essex’s rebellion can be seen as a highly gendered act. In her analysis of the language used by Robert Cecil to describe the rebellion, Frye has posited that the Essex rebellion, and particularly his unauthorized entry into the queen’s privy chambers and plans to seize her person as a means of gaining power, represented a symbolic rape which challenged Elizabeth’s authority by threatening or overwhelming the purity of her body. She finds considerable evidence for this interpretation in the strict division of the queen’s quarters into private and public space, the private being open only to women. Frye, \textit{Competition for Representation}, 124-126, 135-139.
shadows to the folds of her clothing. Tendrils of warm red-gold hair fall onto her shoulders and her dark eyes gaze straight out at the viewer. On her head is an elaborate jeweled hat, lavishly decorated with pearls, rubies, and sapphires and topped by a crescent moon, one of the Queen’s leitmotifs. She wears an off-white jacket embroidered with vines and flowers. A brownish cloak is slung over her shoulder and wraps around her waist, its warm orange lining highlighted in gold and shadowed with crimson. The interior of the cloak is painted all over with eyes and ears. Her high chin ruff is narrow, barely noticeable, and does not appear to be connected to her gown; the broader needle-lace ruff is open in front. A glowing orange and red pendant hangs from a double strand of warmly-lit pearls around her neck; more pearls grace her hair, ears, wrists, and the front of her gown. Surmounting the entire costume is a diaphanous veil attached to her dress by two wing-like ovals that frame her face. The light reflects off this mantle in a white haze. Most tellingly, in her right hand Elizabeth holds a nearly colorless rainbow, with an inscription above it reading, “Non sine sole iris,” or, “No rainbow without the sun.”

Scholars are divided over the meaning of this painting. While some have read into it Elizabeth’s association with the goddess of spring Astraea or symbols of religious division, the most likely interpretation is that it glorified the wise counsel provided to the queen by Robert Cecil, her last Secretary of State, who commissioned the painting. In particular, the serpent is a motif denoting wisdom, and the eyes, ears, and mouths have been read as symbolizing the gathering and sharing of intelligence.

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61 Attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, the “Rainbow” Portrait, c. 1600-1603.
The exact date of the final portrait in this discussion is impossible to pin down; chemical analysis has given it an approximate date of 1600-1610. The iconographic significance of this timeframe is important, however, for during these ten years, a significant shift occurred in attitudes towards the elderly queen. After the execution of the popularly-perceived hero Essex, Elizabeth lost whatever popularity remained her. At the time of her death in 1603, commons and nobles alike were proclaiming themselves “weary of an old woman’s government,” and her closest allies were already looking forward to the masculine authority of her successor James VI of Scotland.63 Once the fanfare of James’ accession had worn off, however, his determination to make peace with Spain and his unconcealed disinterest in his English subjects—not to mention his unfortunately grotesque habits—resulted in a resurgence of admiration for Elizabeth. This resurgence took the form of representations of the queen as a young woman, rather than as the unpopular, elderly sovereign of recent memory: of five plays presented over the period from 1605 to 1611, only two actually portray her as a reigning queen, while the other three focus on the promise of her future glory by representing her as an infant or young adult. As Dobson and Watson phrase it, “The Elizabeth who revives in the theater, so far from being an embodiment of absolute power, is more often a helpless victim, an exemplary persecuted Protestant cheated of full martyrdom only by special providence.”64

The image of the young queen presented by the “Coronation” panel portrait can be interpreted to fit either end of this ten-year time-frame. Painted by an

anonymous artist, the portrait was said to have been copied from an earlier painting made at the time of her accession; however, this original has been either lost or destroyed. In the surviving copy, Elizabeth faces forward, her full face pale but cheeks glowing pale pink, her golden hair loose and flowing over her shoulders. She is wearing a jewel-encrusted closed crown imperial on her head, her left hand grasping a black orb surmounted by the cross and her right hand holding the jeweled gold scepter upright on her lap. Her dress is made of cloth of gold with an elaborate brocade of roses and fleur-de-lys. She wears an extremely high white ruff and an ermine-edged cloak around her shoulders which again wraps around her waist in front. Her cloak is fastened at the collar with a heavy chain of jewels edged in pearls; it matches similar jewels at the waist of her gown. The background is a plain dark backdrop. Arnold and Strong have noted the extent to which the painting echoes medieval religious icons, right down to the use of real gold leaf and the wooden panel it was painted on. The dating remains an interesting puzzle. Placing it at around the time of Elizabeth’s death would suggest that it was an attempt to solidify the unpopular queen’s authority through what is truly a politico-religious icon; on the other hand, placing it closer to 1610 would suggest that it fits the representational trend of nostalgia for the young queen’s promise in response to the unpopularity of her successor.\textsuperscript{65} The intent of the “Coronation” panel portrait, and the exact details of its historical context, are therefore impossible to determine; what is certain, however, is its preeminence as the image of Elizabeth I as she appeared at her coronation. It

portrays her with a much more authoritative aspect than earlier illuminations depicting the queen at her coronation; see for example Figure 7 in Appendix I. For this reason alone, its place in the chronology of her portraiture is significant, for the queen it reflects is not the untested young woman whose very authority was in doubt, but an ideal of that woman refracted through the memory of her forty-five-year reign, a time of peace, prosperity, and even military triumph.

The role of these portraits in securing Elizabeth’s authority has been a subject of some scholarly debate for the past four decades. The work of Frances Yates and Roy Strong from the 1950s through the 1980s presented the iconographic development of Elizabeth’s official image as a clear and intentional program of government propaganda that resulted in widespread English adulation of the queen—“The Cult of the Virgin Queen”—in response to the increasingly dangerous threats posed to her by Catholic enemies. According to this theory, Elizabeth was seen as the Protestant savior and protectress not only of England, but of the Protestant faith worldwide; she was pitted against the “papal anti-Christ,” and a growing body of images and texts meant initially to convey her beauty, virgin purity, and majesty, eventually elevated her to the level of a goddess.66 More recent scholarship has not challenged the theory of the cult itself, but has re-envisioned it as arising from a constellation of persons and intents. Frye asserts that Elizabeth I and her government were not monolithic in their control over her public image but rather represented one side of a decades-long, multi-sided contest for political and military power among the English aristocracy.67 Doran has pointed out that a combination of political aims and

66 Yates, Astraea; Strong, The Cult of Elizabeth.
personal aggrandizement on the part of her courtiers contributed largely to the cult’s
development, and that it is impossible to ascertain how widespread the cult actually
was outside of the nobility. Montrose has examined the interplay between
government actions and those of the queen’s subjects, both noble and common, in
constructing her image and endowing it with significance during her reign.

In particular, Montrose understands the portraits of the 1590s as drawing on
the sixteenth-century legal doctrine of the king’s two bodies, an idea with its roots in
medieval theology which was most clearly elaborated during Elizabeth’s reign.

According to this legal doctrine, England’s ruling monarch possesses two bodies
which mirror the two natures of Christ. The first, the body politic, is abstract and
eternal, encompassing the monarch’s role as head of the state and the church as well
as his or her place in the dynastic succession; possessing an inherently royal nature
(i.e., “the King”), this body of the monarch is said never to die, and to be omnipresent
to his subjects. The second body, the body natural, is physical and therefore limited;
it refers quite explicitly to the individual who wears the crown (i.e., “the king”), and
is acknowledged to be vulnerable to the same mistakes, weaknesses, and bodily harm
as any other person’s. The two bodies were seen to be conjoined once the king had
succeeded to the throne; as discussed by the judges in the case of the Duchy of
Lancaster, which appeared in the fourth year of Elizabeth’s reign:

He has a Body natural, adorned and invested with the Estate and Dignity royal;
and he has not a Body natural distinct and divided by itself from the Office and
Dignity royal, but a Body natural and Body politic together indivisible; and these
two Bodies are incorporated in one Person...So that the Body natural, by this
conjunction of the Body politic to it (Which Body politic contains the Office,

69 Montrose, The Subject of Elizabeth.
70 Kantorowicz, The King’s Two Bodies, 7.
Government, and Majesty royal) is magnified, and by the said Consolidation hath in it the Body politic.  

Elizabethan historians have taken widely different views of how the king’s two bodies affected Elizabeth’s self-representation and her reign. Jordan believes that Aylmer classified femininity as “another form of weakness that is overcome in the body politic which therefore has no meaning in terms of gender.” Levin, however, has argued that Elizabeth’s continual self-representation as both king and queen, prince and princess, doubled her own nature: “if a kingly body politic could be incorporated into an actual natural female body—her natural self—how much more natural right Elizabeth had to rule, and to rule alone.” Howey has shown that on a practical level, the well-being of Elizabeth’s body politic was inseparable from her body natural. Examining the role of her ladies-in-waiting, whose care of the queen’s bodily needs gave them exclusive and unparalleled access to and knowledge of the state of her physical body, Howey has found that through the information about her body that they provided to members of Elizabeth’s court as well as to foreign dignitaries, Elizabeth’s female attendants exerted considerable political influence in maintaining the queen’s reputation for virginity, which served as proof of her virtue and therefore of her authority. It should be noted that this finding locates the perception of Elizabeth’s claim to authority within her physical body, paralleling the government’s early belief that verisimilitude in her portraits—that is, their true resemblance to the actual body of the sovereign—would help to secure the loyalty of

71 Plowden, Commentaries or Reports, 213 cited in Kantorowicz, The King’s Two Bodies, 9.
73 Levin, Heart and Stomach, 123.
her subjects. This early understanding of the importance of Elizabeth's image as an embodiment of the queen also re-frames Montrose's observation that the mask of youth represented not the physical person of the queen, but her office, by emphasizing the importance attached to Elizabeth's body. As Frye has observed, her youthful image proliferated in the last ten years of her reign even as her public appearances grew less and less frequent.\textsuperscript{75}

Despite, or perhaps because of, the complexity of meanings and events that surrounded Elizabeth's sixteenth-century portraits, in a sense they functioned well as a tool for securing her authority. After all, four hundred years later the iconic image of Elizabeth recognized by most Western adults is in fact a product of the system her government created to control her visual image. The importance of this fact cannot be overestimated, for it means that the image that Elizabeth herself approved is still the most commonly recognized; she is therefore in some sense still shaping how we see her. The "cult" of Elizabeth outlined in this discussion has played an equally large role in transmitting her image to modern audiences, for the sixteenth-century reification of her image as something to be venerated has its modern counterpart in cinema's remarkably consistent visual representation of the Virgin Queen. The faithful and uncritical reproduction of her iconographic image identifies her in such films as \textit{Fire Over England} (1935), \textit{The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex} (1939) and \textit{The Virgin Queen} (1955); however, this pattern of uncritical reproduction of Elizabeth's inherited visual image is broken in Shekhar Kapur's 1998 film \textit{Elizabeth}. It is to this film's representation of the Virgin Queen that I turn next, to explore how

\textsuperscript{75} Frye, \textit{Competition for Representation}, 101-108.
Elizabeth I’s image and authority continue to reflect and embody understandings of female rule.
CHAPTER TWO:
Portraiture, Authority, and Accountability in Shekhar Kapur’s *Elizabeth*

In the 1998 film *Elizabeth*, the filmmakers draw on five iconic portraits of Elizabeth I to realize both the filmed image of the queen’s character and the film’s theme that political authority, defined as the recognized right to rule, is destructive to women’s nature. In doing so, the film draws on significant dramatic and cinematic traditions of representing the iconic figure of Elizabeth, both thematically and visually. This double characterization is informed and complicated by the influence the director has cited for the interpretation of Elizabeth I: Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Throughout her public life, Gandhi was a focal point for debate over women’s authority, and she also became an iconic figure in her own right, representing herself as “Mother of India” even as her detractors likened her to Kali, the Hindu goddess of destruction. By attaching its interpretation of Elizabeth I’s person and rule to this controversial twentieth-century female leader, the film modernizes the iconic sixteenth-century image of Elizabeth I even as it historicizes the discourse about Gandhi by projecting her particular challenges onto Elizabeth I. I begin with a summary of the film, followed by an analysis of its use of the portraits and a discussion of its references to its acknowledged powerful female influence, Indira Gandhi.

Taking as its theme the development of a naïve young girl into a powerful and successful female ruler, the film traces Elizabeth’s disappointments in love and politics throughout what it claims are the first five years of her reign, but what are really the first fourteen. The persecuted young Lady Elizabeth of the film’s beginning is unrecognizable, with long, flowing red hair instead of the familiar pile of
curls, no ruff around her neck, and plain though colorful dresses; she is also naïve and eager to please her lover, the film’s interpretation of Robert Dudley, later Earl of Leicester. After the death of her sister Mary, this still-unfamiliar young girl inherits the throne, again naively trusting her counselors and giving way to the bullying of her Catholic nobles even as she consummates her affair with Dudley in the midst of the court. After a disastrous war in Scotland with the French forces of Marie de Guise, Elizabeth takes out her anger on Dudley by encouraging the courtship of Anjou, de Guise’s nephew, and then plays them off against each other. Simultaneously, she realizes that the only counselor she can trust fully is the head of her intelligence service, Francis Walsingham, portrayed as a conscienceless bisexual who will murder nobles and his own lovers alike to secure Elizabeth’s throne. An assassination attempt encourages Elizabeth—whose appearance now begins to resemble the iconic image—to seek protection in marriage; the revelation that Dudley is married already, and that their affair is public knowledge, leads her to accept Anjou. Yet the moment of her acceptance reveals Anjou to be a cross-dressing homosexual, and Elizabeth gives up the idea of marriage altogether. The Catholic nobles in her court, continually conspiring with the Pope and an anonymous Jesuit assassin, are finally hunted down by Walsingham, with the approval of an Elizabeth whose appearance is now startlingly close to that of her most widespread sixteenth-century iconic image. He uncovers the Catholic plot to marry the film’s Duke of Norfolk to Mary Stuart, thus paving the way for a Catholic succession and dooming the implicated Dudley to exclusion from the queen’s intimate circle. The final fifteen minutes of the film show Elizabeth, on Walsingham’s advice, intentionally assuming the appearance of a living
icon, presented as a replacement for the Virgin Mary. Her transformation into the familiar white-faced, red-curled, bejeweled and be-ruffed image of the “Armada” portrait is complete, as is her self-fashioning as a virgin.\textsuperscript{76}

Rosemary Sweet has documented the many historical inaccuracies of the film in her review for the \textit{American Historical Review}. She notes that Anjou’s courtship of Elizabeth, Pius V’s bull \textit{Regnum in Excelsis}, and the Norfolk plot and execution were all incorporated into the film as events of the late 1550s and early 1560s rather than, accurately, of the 1570s. In a similar vein, not only the unhistorical romantic relationship but also the kinship ties of Marie de Guise and the Duke of Anjou are completely misrepresented, while the Spanish Armada is briefly referenced in a satirical entertainment put on for Elizabeth during Anjou’s visit.\textsuperscript{77} Ian McAdam similarly addresses the film’s mangling of sixteenth-century sexual mores, highlighting especially the cinematic Elizabeth’s apparently inconsequential sexual consummation of her affair with Dudley and the openness of Anjou’s transvestitism.\textsuperscript{78} Betteridge and Walker both note that the basic trajectory of Elizabeth’s characterization in the film is an overly-simplified depiction of the historical queen’s transformation into an icon; “it shows how elizabeth becomes Elizabeth.”\textsuperscript{79} In its interpretation of Elizabeth I, the film takes liberties with both historical fact and what is actually known of the historical queen’s personality. Although early in her reign

her enthusiastic flirtation with the married Dudley certainly disconcerted her court, there is no evidence that it was ever consummated, and there is even significant evidence that it was not.\textsuperscript{80} Moreover, despite her youth upon succeeding to the throne, Elizabeth was far from naïve; she had already suffered through and learned from her own implication in several highly-publicized scandals, from the rumors of her sexual involvement with Lord Admiral Thomas Seymour when she was thirteen to the charge that she supported Thomas Wyatt’s plot to depose Mary I and place Elizabeth I on the throne. From the first day of her reign the historical queen showed herself to be keenly aware of the power of public perception; she courted her subjects as no English monarch had ever done before her, and as few would do after. None of this is apparent in Kapur’s Elizabeth; the only scene in the film depicting Elizabeth in interaction with the common people is during her ride to her audience with Queen Mary, when a Protestant woman about to be slain by a soldier calls, “Save me!” while

\textsuperscript{80} In fact, the evidence remains circumstantial at best. Neale judges as “probably true” a story that when Elizabeth nearly died of smallpox in 1562, she swore to her councilors that “nothing improper” had ever passed between herself and Dudley. Almost twenty years later, during a particularly contentious Privy Council meeting discussing Elizabeth’s spontaneous promise to marry the Count of Anjou in 1581, Dudley is said to have demanded of the queen, “Are you woman or maid?” Elizabeth’s response was, “Maid.” Jenkins and Gristwood have remarked that such a conversation was unlikely to have occurred had Dudley and Elizabeth I ever consummated their obvious affection. In addition, twice during separate marriage negotiations, Elizabeth submitted to gynecological examinations to determine whether or not she was still a virgin and fertile; both doctors reported that she was. Modern medical science has shown that fertility cannot be determined from a physical exam; however, it also suggests that the question of virginity may be impossible to determine with great accuracy, since the hymen’s durability varies widely. It often dissolves or breaks in adolescence due to strenuous exercise such as horseback riding, or it may remain intact through intercourse and even vaginal childbirth. For details on the smallpox scare, see Neale, Queen Elizabeth, 117-118. For the conversation between Dudley and Elizabeth, see Elizabeth Jenkins, Elizabeth and Leicester (New York: Coward-McCann, 1961), 269, and Sarah Gristwood, Elizabeth and Leicester (New York: Viking, 2007), 286. For details of Elizabeth’s gynecological exams, see Levin, Heart and Stomach of a King, 86-87, and Jenkins, Elizabeth and Leicester, 239-240. For general background on the hymen, see Our Bodies, Our Selves, Boston Women’s Health Collective (Boston: Brigham Women’s Hospital, 2004), 234.
reaching towards Elizabeth’s window. The movie depicts the young woman who would become queen shrinking back in fear and horror.81

Understandably, such blatant disregard for the historical record has so far distracted scholars from a detailed analysis of the film’s use of the sixteenth-century portraits. Numerous scholars have addressed the film’s interpretation of Elizabeth from the film studies and historical perspectives. Susanne Wofford has identified the film’s reliance on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestant mythology of Elizabeth first developed by John Foxe in his Actes and Monuments of the Martyrs and later adopted by playwright John Heywood in his 1605 play If you Knowe Not Me, You Knowe Nobodie.82 Julia Walker and Thomas Betteridge have both noted the movie’s theme of iconic transformation, while Renee Pigeon has observed that the film does not present the character of Elizabeth I in a way that comments meaningfully upon her historical situation or persona.83 Film scholar Julianne Pidduck briefly discusses Elizabeth in the context of films about British royalty in terms of the significance of the dual bodies of actor and character, body politic and body natural, finding that the cinematic medium always and necessarily elevates the body natural, even as Elizabeth’s narrative makes a case for the primacy of the body politic in its conclusion.84 Two other film scholars note the use of the portraits in making the film. Kara McKechnie identifies two images—the “Coronation” panel


83 Renee Pigeon, “‘No Man’s Elizabeth.’”
and the “Ditchley” portrait—as “framing” the development of Elizabeth’s character throughout the narrative and opines that Kapur’s use of them echoes their original intention: “they do not necessarily show what was, but show images constructed as appropriate vehicles for the allegorical meanings they wish to present.”

Andrew Higson meanwhile analyzes the use of recreated portraits and costumes as a means of authenticating the film’s attempt to psychologize a key historical figure in British heritage. Finally, Dobson and Watson find that Elizabeth creates a “cocktail of inherited commonplaces” by combining traditional dramatic representations of Elizabeth as widespread as the 1605 play If You Knowe Not Me, You Knowe No Bodie with the narrative tropes of Elizabeth as the eighteenth-century Romantic “queen divided against herself” and the early twentieth-century fixation on the body underneath the queen’s magnificent dress. None of these authors, however, consider the film’s use of the portraits to comment on the authority of women as participants in the public sphere.

This commentary is challenging to trace in words, for it unfolds not through speech or action that is easily narrated, but through the combination of those textual elements with the visual image. Using a combination of reproduction and collage of three portrait images (the “Coronation” panel portrait and the “Armada” and “Ditchley” portraits of 1588 and 1593 respectively) and a technique of drawing elements from one or more portraits and adapting them to fit a particular mis-en-

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85 Kara McKechnie, “Taking liberties with the monarch: the royal bio-pic in the 1990s,” in British Historical Cinema, ed. Claire Monk and Amy Sargeant, London: Routledge, 2002, 217-236, quote 233. Several scholars have identified the influence of the “Ditchley” portrait on what I interpret as a variation of the “Armada” portrait in Elizabeth; I discuss this in greater detail later in this chapter.


87 Dobson and Watson, England’s Elizabeth, 257.
scene, the filmmakers first undermine received visual images of Elizabeth I and then reconstruct a progressively iconic image of her. As she loses her youthful feminine expectations of love and privacy, increasing visual emphasis is laid on her evolving physical characteristics: an unnatural pallor, a high, bare forehead, high-piled red hair, white and black clothing, and an aura of increasing coolness and distance. This development reaches its climax in the final scene in its reproduction of the face from the “Armada” portrait, along with a dress that combines elements of the “Armada” portrait dress and that of the “Ditchley” portrait.

The Elizabeth of the film’s beginning bears little resemblance to the iconic image that develops of her throughout the film. She is essentially a lovely young woman living a quiet private life in the country, courted by a handsome young man but with no apparent or likely position of power. This is represented visually through a sequence showing the young Elizabeth dancing in a meadow with her ladies-in-waiting, her red-gold hair loose on her shoulders and her dress and jewelry simple. This appearance continues throughout the first twenty minutes of the film, including scenes of Elizabeth’s interrogation, Mary’s acknowledgement of Elizabeth as her heir, and Elizabeth’s acclamation as queen, standing under an oak tree in her garden.88

The use of the “Coronation” panel portrait as the basis for Elizabeth’s appearance in the film’s coronation scene provides a stark shift not in her appearance itself, but in the film’s approach to her representation. The portrait appears simplistically reproduced, only a few frames at the end of a long action scene: a

straight shot portrays her sitting on the throne in the exact pose of the "Coronation" portrait. The costume, jewels, crown, and scepter are pictured exactly as they are in the portrait; the only difference lies in the fact that instead of holding her left hand over the orb, as she does in the painting, Elizabeth is shown holding the orb in the palm of her hand. Yet the image is framed quite differently from the portrait: instead of standing alone before a dark background, as in the portrait, the cinematic Elizabeth is surrounded by her council, with the high-backed wooden throne of England behind her. This is certainly more fitting for a realistic film scene in which she has just been crowned, yet the effect is to highlight the iconographic nature of the filmed image. She is not just a young, crowned, female monarch, but one whose face, attire, and posture is instantly recognizable. As McKechnie has noted, the fact that the panel portrait represents a memory of Elizabeth I's coronation from the vantage point of the end of her reign plays a significant, if unacknowledged, role in the scene, for the image is not truly that of the young untried monarch the story line would suggest, but that of a ruler destined for greatness.

Director Shekhar Kapur has noted that his intention for the film was not only to explore how a person becomes an icon, but also to invoke the concept of destiny. This is conveyed, he says, partly through the visual elements:

"The look [of the film] was dominated by my need to show that destiny is bigger than man. Destiny is even bigger than Elizabeth I and becomes—is this the story of a woman that pushed herself to this point, or was it her destiny to come to this point and she was just inexorably being pulled towards this destiny?"

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That theme of destiny is particularly embodied by this painting. While there is no evidence that the filmmakers knew the history of the “Coronation” panel’s origin at the end of Elizabeth I’s reign, I suggest that their knowledge of this fact is not necessary to imbue their reproduction of it with the majesty imparted by memory; that majesty was already present in the original. A comparison of the circa 1600 “Coronation” portrait with a similar illumination by Levina Teerlinc dating from Elizabeth I’s coronation year of 1559, is enough to demonstrate the difference: the 1600 panel painting depicts the queen already in an iconic fashion, with a solemnity and reflectiveness that are not present in the 1559 painting. Its use of gold leaf and oak panel surface merely underline the intention to align the queen’s image with the venerable tradition of religious icons.91

Despite McKechnie’s analysis of the “Coronation” and “Ditchley” portraits as framing the film’s interpretation of Elizabeth, the coronation scene in fact represents the only instance of a true, direct reproduction of one of Elizabeth’s portraits in the film. The next, and closest, is the image used in the final scene, which most writers have incorrectly identified as reproducing the “Ditchley” portrait.92 Yet a closer examination of the dress reveals that it is not in fact a loyal reproduction of the “Ditchley” costume, but apparently a combination of the “Ditchley” with the “Armada” dress. The plain white silk with trellis pattern seems to be drawn from the Ditchley dress; yet it also features a row of bows down the front and along the edge of the cloak, like those lining the front and sleeves of the Armada dress, the only

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91 See Appendix, “Images Compared,” the “coronation” panel portrait and the Levina Teerlinc miniature circa 1559.
difference being that the bows in the film’s costume are silver or blue rather than blue and pink.\textsuperscript{93} The hairstyle in this scene is unquestionably from the “Armada” portrait: a high, smooth semi-circle of red curls with pearls framing the queen’s hairline. The “Armada” hairstyle contained only one pearl along the hairline, directly over the center of her forehead. The queen’s face in this scene also more closely resembles that of the “Armada” portrait than the “Ditchley”; it is smooth, pale to the point of whiteness, with extremely red lips and rouged cheeks. The “Ditchley” face in contrast was either discernibly wrinkled, as in the original, or “softened” to erase the wrinkles, but with neither the extreme pallor nor the redness of hair, mouth, and cheeks that are evident in the “Armada” portrait. Moreover, this last image of the film’s Elizabeth is balanced at the very beginning of the film by the small face from the “Armada” portrait which floats past underneath the subtitles. It is therefore the “Armada” image which actually frames the story of Elizabeth, for this image appears at the beginning through the inclusion of the sixteenth-century portrait face, as well as at the end through its recreation on the canvas of the actress’s body.\textsuperscript{94}

This amalgamation of the “Armada” and “Ditchley” portraits signals not so much the strength or importance of any one particular image of Elizabeth I but rather the importance of the iconic element in understanding the power of authoritative women. As other authors have noted, it refers to the queen of the late sixteenth century rather than the young woman who inherited the throne; this reflects not only the history of Elizabeth I’s portraits, with her image becoming most iconic and most

\textsuperscript{93} Andrew Higson cites costume historian Betty Goodwin as stating that in fact, Elizabeth never wore any white gown; however, Arnold’s twenty-seven years of research in matching the catalogues of Elizabeth’s wardrobe with her portraits belies Goodwin’s assertion. Higson, “Case Study: Elizabeth,” 250; Arnold, Queen Elizabeth’s Wardrobe Unlock’d, 42-47.

\textsuperscript{94} Hirst, Elizabeth, dir. Kapur, 1998. See Figures 9, 10, and 11 from Appendix: Images Compared.
widely disseminated at the end of her reign, but also the visual discourse of women's authority: the character of the female ruler only becomes powerful when she is iconic. Yet Kapur's *Elizabeth* links the young, un-authoritative and un-iconic Elizabeth with the older, familiar, powerful iconic figure in an extraordinarily subtle and powerful visual and thematic discourse. To understand this discourse, and its relationship to the broader interpretation of women’s authority in the late twentieth century, we must examine more closely the film’s methods of using portrait elements and mis-en-scene to comment on its Elizabeth's growing understanding of her own power. The elements it uses to do this are drawn mostly from two other images of the queen: the “Darnley” portrait, which provided the basis for the iconic image, and the “Rainbow” portrait, which incorporates iconographic elements but whose enigmatic portrayal has puzzled scholars for centuries. Using such details as hairstyle, jewelry, positioning, and even color, the filmmakers place these portraits in counterpoint to each other by using them in two extremely similar mis-en-scenes to illustrate the changes in Elizabeth’s character and circumstances from one to the other.

Elements of the “Rainbow” portrait appears in several scenes about halfway through the film, framing the development of one sub-plot expressing the film’s theme of the destruction of privacy. The first reference is glancing, and hardly noticeable to the undiscerning viewer: as Elizabeth and Dudley make love in the royal bed following her coronation, the curtains on that bed feature the same eyes and ears as the lining of the queen’s cloak in the sixteenth-century “Rainbow” portrait.⁹⁵ As noted in Chapter One, in the original portrait, these iconographic elements have been interpreted as denoting the intelligence provided to Elizabeth I by her loyal secretary

of state, Robert Cecil (historically the son of William, the secretary interpreted in the film); in the film, however, McKechnie has noted that the motif on the curtains seems to suggest the lack of privacy for the queen in her own bed.\textsuperscript{96} Indeed, this interpretation is underlined by the film’s depiction of her ladies-in-waiting standing on the other side of a tracery-work wall, watching as Elizabeth and Dudley make love.\textsuperscript{97} However, the accompanying comment of the film’s William Cecil, the secretary of state, illuminates the scene’s meaning even further; he informs the attendants that he will need to see the queen’s sheets every morning, because “her majesty’s body and person are no longer her own; they are the property of the state.”\textsuperscript{98} Such a comment reveals not only the extent to which the film’s characters will go in invading Elizabeth’s privacy, but also their understanding of the relationship between her body and her reign. Leaving aside the anachronism inherent in the use of the word “state” and substituting for it “body politic,” the cinematic Elizabeth’s physical body is seen as the property of the body politic, suggesting that the body politic exists as a separate and seemingly threatening entity, one whose responsibility or desire it is to control her natural body and its functions. This stands in stark contrast to the sixteenth-century understanding of the king’s two bodies, in which Elizabeth’s physical body was one with the body politic, and any immorality or illness inhering to her physical body reflected a problem with the body politic. This contrast reveals that, at least at this point in the film, political authority is seen to rest not with the queen herself, but with her advisors, the impersonal representatives of “the state.”

\textsuperscript{96} McKechnie, “The royal bio-pic,” 230.
The second scene featuring the “Rainbow” portrait, and completing the “framed” sub-plot, follows a scene with a fictional assassination attempt on the river. Elizabeth comes in to change her blood-stained clothes, all the while discussing the issue of her marriage with Cecil. Cecil insists that Elizabeth reconsider the suit of the film’s Duke of Anjou, and when she becomes impatient, mentioning “the secrets of my heart,” he adds that everyone at court knows of her affair with Dudley and of Dudley’s own marriage, kept secret from the queen. The news devastates Elizabeth.99

The costume and lighting of this scene use the exact colors and the hairstyle seen in the painting: Elizabeth wears a gold and scarlet dressing gown, with a few locks of loose hair falling over her shoulders and the rest set around her face in curls, while pearl-drop earrings hang from her ears. The light falling on her hair emphasizes its color: a warm, rich orange against the deeper crimson of her robe. Even the folds of the gown over her breast and around her waist and its differently-colored lining provide a visual echo of the cloak in the portrait. When she turns her face at a certain point to speak to Cecil, her posture mimics exactly that of the queen in the “Rainbow” portrait. By the end of the scene, her distress is evident: she has lost not only her own understanding of her relationship with Dudley and its possibilities, but also her illusion that as queen she can maintain an area of her life that is private or outside the knowledge of those around her.

The choice of the “Rainbow” portrait to express this realization is both backward-looking and forward-looking in the film’s universe. The theme of Elizabeth’s loss of privacy began through Cecil’s earlier comment, accompanied by another reference to the “Rainbow” portrait: the curtains on her bed covered with

eyes and ears, just like the cloak in the “Rainbow” portrait. In this second scene with Cecil, the use of the hairstyle and jewelry and the similarity in dress visually complete the picture—and through it, the sub-plot of her affair with Dudley and its thematic undertones—begun in the love scene. Elizabeth’s lack of privacy, her imprisonment by the external body politic and her resulting lack of authority, has been brought to her awareness, and she is now in a position to take action. This second scene using the “Rainbow” portrait is simultaneously the beginning of another, more complex theme: the equation of the loss of Elizabeth’s youthful feminine nature, expressed through her desire for love and sexual fulfillment, with her political maturation. The “Rainbow” portrait, though painted at the end of her reign utilizing the mask of youth, is used by the filmmakers to realize the filmed representation of the actually young Elizabeth in the vulnerable moment when she becomes aware of the incompatibility of feminine fulfillment in private and political power in public.

The development of this theme is best seen through the comparison of the “Rainbow” portrait scene with a later one which shares certain aspects of the mis-en-scene but uses the “Darnley” portrait as its basis for Elizabeth’s appearance. This later scene also depicts her in conversation about her safety alone with one of her closest advisors, in this case her councilor, spy-master, and alter-ego, the film’s Walsingham. She listens stoically as he informs her of a plot by the Duke of Norfolk to marry the Catholic Queen Mary of Scots and depose and assassinate Elizabeth. In this scene, her hair no longer falls on her shoulders; instead, it is piled regally high and strewn with pearls, emphasizing her forehead; her figure is encased in a stiff
silvery-white gown embroidered with arabesques, with a narrow ruff that brushes the bottom of her chin. White light emphasizes not the warmth of her beauty, as red-orange light did in the scene with Cecil, but a cool, distant loveliness that even the candlelight does not penetrate. As Walsingham presents her with evidence of the Duke of Norfolk’s treason, her features are the very incarnation of the “Darnley” portrait. Throughout the scene, Elizabeth is presented in a left- or right-facing half-profile, just as the face-pattern of the original painting was reversed to create both left- and right-facing images. The “Darnley” portrait was, as discussed in Chapter One, the image which through the face-pattern system provided the basis for the iconic image of Elizabeth I. In this scene, that iconic image is tied to Elizabeth’s maturation as a ruler—she is discussing not her own secret love life, but a political plot against her—and to her apparent awareness of the essentially public nature of her authority, for although she is alone with the man closest to her at this point in the film, she wears her hair formally pinned up, and her dress is so formal as to appear solid as armor.

As noted earlier, the film’s director, Shekhar Kapur, has stated that one of the most powerful influences on his interpretation of Elizabeth’s character was the Prime Minister of India Indira Gandhi. In fact, on the surface, Gandhi’s situation seems to share much in common with Elizabeth I’s: both women could be said to have been the first successful female leaders of their respective countries; both remained in their leadership position for decades (although Indira Gandhi’s leadership is divided by a four-year period during which she lost the position, but she regained it in a

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succeeding election); both led their countries during times of great internal strife and especially religious conflict which they addressed somewhat inconsistently; both helped to secure their authority through repeated public identification of themselves as their fathers' daughters, and as the mother of their countries and people; and both achieved iconic status during their period of leadership. The particular modes of expression of that iconic status are also similar; for both Gandhi and Elizabeth I, it manifested itself in a dichotomy that saw their supporters likening them to benevolent female religious figures and their detractors representing them as equally powerful destructive female goddesses or archetypes. In this mode, Elizabeth I was represented as the Virgin Mary and the goddess Astraea or the Whore of Babylon and the Amazon queen; Gandhi was similarly likened to the Hindu goddess of life and referred to as "Mother India," or she was evoked as the goddess of death and destruction, Kali.102

Yet perhaps the most evocative parallel the film draws between the two women lies in their reliance on unworthy subordinates. *Elizabeth* presents the queen as almost totally dependent on her advisor and head of intelligence, Francis Walsingham, who seduces and murders, interrogates and tortures Catholics all in the name of protecting Elizabeth and promoting her success as a ruler. Similarly, Indira Gandhi came to rely heavily on her younger son, Sanjay, during her "Emergency" period of dictatorial rule in the mid-1970s. With authority derived solely from his status as the Prime Minister's son, Sanjay designed and implemented city beautification and population control programs that systematically and forcibly

evicted and sterilized millions of people living in poverty and in the ethnic or religious minority.\textsuperscript{103}

This parallel is one based almost entirely on falsification of sixteenth-century history. The film presents Francis Walsingham as an a-religious, bisexual serial murderer/political thinker, which is far from the historical reality.\textsuperscript{104} A dedicated family man with a loving if tempestuous marriage marked by the loss of three children, Walsingham was renowned in Elizabethan England for his adherence to a strict Protestant ethic of charity, sobriety, marital fidelity, and simplicity of dress.\textsuperscript{105} He was also essentially a bureaucrat; he served on Elizabeth I’s privy council and alternated the honor of being her closest advisor with the historical William Cecil, and he administered the considerable intelligence network that he had designed and implemented to ferret out conspiracies against the queen. Contrary to the film’s portrayal of him as a master Inquisitor, there is little or no evidence that Walsingham himself participated directly in the admittedly barbaric interrogations of those suspected of conspiring against Elizabeth I.\textsuperscript{106} However, he certainly had knowledge

\textsuperscript{103} Scholarship is divided as to the reasons for Gandhi’s acquiescence with Sanjay’s interference in government; some of her colleagues claimed that he physically abused and threatened his mother, while others claimed that the Prime Minister actually supported Sanjay’s policies and possibly even his methods. Gandhi biographer Katherine Frank suggests that Gandhi was terrified of the possibility that she and her family could be murdered by the opposition, like the massacre of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of Bangladesh and his wife, two married sons and daughters-in-law, and ten-year-old son. She also argues that at this point in Gandhi’s life, Sanjay remained the only person who shared enough of her interests, and reminded her enough of her late father and husband, to give his mother a sense of intimacy. Katherine Frank, \textit{Indira: the life of Indira Gandhi} (New York: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 2002), 398-99, 388-89, 405-406.


\textsuperscript{106} At different points in Elizabeth’s reign, all it took to be implicated in a conspiracy against the Crown was to be a recusant Catholic or a Jesuit priest, whose activities were said to focus on the deposition and/or assassination of Elizabeth I. The most notorious interrogator of such prisoners was Richard Topcliffe, whose methods and attitude to interrogation more closely fit those the film attributes to Walsingham. Topcliffe’s enthusiasm for his work extended to seducing unwitting girls to gain information and torturing suspected prisoners in the comfort of his own home, on a rack he had
of these interrogations; contemporary reports have him remarking to Cecil in 1575, “Without torture I know we shall not prevail.” He and Cecil were also primarily responsible for the 1585 Act of Surety of the Queen’s Person, which gave ordinary citizens the right to hunt and kill anyone who might successfully overthrow or assassinate Elizabeth, as well as his or her co-conspirators; if such conspirators succeeded in usurping the throne, their descendants were also considered open game for the average Englishman loyal to the rightful Tudor monarch.

Yet the film presents Walsingham as both the author and committer of atrocities, all in Elizabeth’s name. It begins by subtly presenting Walsingham and Cecil as competitors for the queen’s confidence, rather than as colleagues each of whose work mutually supports and complements the other’s. Once Walsingham has won this implicit contest, he seduces and murders Marie de Guise with the queen’s approval if not her direction, and then, acting upon Elizabeth’s adoption of the counsel he has given her, he hunts, arrests, tortures, and murders each of her Catholic enemies in turn. Walsingham and Elizabeth’s relationship in the film is a kind of symbiotic merging; rather than being simply the loyal servant and protector, he acts as her mentor, giving her policy advice that she unfailingly takes (in contradiction to her declaration upon the dismissal of Cecil that she will “from now on...follow [her]

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107 Hutchinson, Elizabeth’s Spymaster, 10.
108 Hutchinson, Elizabeth’s Spymaster, 9-10.

Levin reports that his sadism was so well known in Elizabethan England that his name became synonymous with the use of the rack, which was called “Topcliffian,” while to pursue recusant Catholics was known in court circles as to “topcliffizare.” Montrose gives a thorough analysis of the torture methods approved by the Crown—and by Elizabeth I herself—as symbolic practices by which the government sought to discover traitors’ innermost thoughts and intentions. Levin, Heart and Stomach of a King, 141-43; Montrose, Subject of Elizabeth, 188-193.
own opinion”) and effectively creating her public persona. Walsingham is the one who suggests to her that she should become an icon in order to secure the loyalty of her people. Elizabeth does not seem to have direct knowledge of his transgressive sexuality, but she does demonstrate moral repugnance at his use of torture; yet she ultimately believes in the validity of the information gained by torture and does nothing to stop the practice, thus lending it her tacit approval. For his part, Walsingham appears to give her the ultimate authority over his plans by seeking the queen’s assent, even though the ideas themselves always originate with him. He thus acts as a kind of alter-ego, the personification of Elizabeth’s authority, whose separateness absolves her of direct responsibility for the violent results of her decisions. His separateness combined with his masculinity also maintains the illusion that Elizabeth’s feminine nature is untainted by the crimes committed in her name rather than turning her into the tyrannical monster her sister represented at the film’s beginning, the same tyrannical monster John Knox argued that powerful women always were by nature. Such an interpretation of Elizabeth and Walsingham’s relationship recalls both Dobson and Watson’s analysis of eighteenth-century plotlines that sought to divide the iconic Elizabeth’s character and attributes along gender lines, and Levin’s observation that in order to succeed as a ruler, Elizabeth I represented herself as both male and female. This need in a 1998 film to separate the feminine from the masculine elements of authority reflects just how little the popular conception of female authority has changed over the last four centuries. Yet this separation of masculine from feminine authority also contradicts the historical record,

which shows clearly that Elizabeth I not only knew of, but also approved, the practices of torture and dismemberment used to investigate and punish her purportedly treasonous subjects.

Sanjay Gandhi and his actions on behalf of his mother, Indira Gandhi, can be seen in much the same light, with one important difference. As Walker has noted, the Walsingham of the film bears no intimate connection with Elizabeth, he is merely an unrelated and self-appointed advisor. Sanjay, on the other hand, was Gandhi's own son. This makes his situation as her representative doubly powerful. Tariq Ali, an Indian Muslim who lived through the Emergency period, reports that Gandhi was widely perceived to be grooming Sanjay for leadership of the government after her, and that this "was the first real glimpse that India got of both a dynasty in the making and the concentration of power in the hands of an extra-constitutional figure...this attempt to project Sanjay as her successor created a generalized feeling of disgust in a country with a real democratic tradition." Elizabeth's Walsingham has no such political baggage to carry; if anything, he is the one handing on a metaphorical scepter, the begetter rather than the inheritor of a problematic rule, if ideologically rather than physically. Elizabeth's despairing wish for help from her father early in the film seems to support this, since as she gazes at his portrait it is Walsingham and not the deceased Henry VIII who appears to offer her consolation.

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Yet perhaps the crux of the parallel between Gandhi and Kapur’s Elizabeth lies in the question of accountability, morality, and authority, a question that reveals much about the film as a post-colonial commentary on the history of the metropole. The director, who was born in northern India before the partition, has stated that he regards *Elizabeth* as “the revenge of the colonials,” and that he intentionally cast ex-colonials and working-class English actors for the leading aristocratic characters as a commentary on the hierarchy of values attached to English royal history.\(^{115}\) Seen in the context of that statement, the film’s extraordinarily accurate presentation of sixteenth-century torture takes on added meaning. In the context of a twentieth-century worldview that at least nominally admits the existence of human rights, the shock value of the torture scenes is undisputed; by presenting them in such graphic detail, Kapur distances the viewer from the very characters who, in traditional English historical narratives, would be the heroes: Walsingham and Elizabeth.\(^{116}\) While torture was recognized as a common and legally legitimate method of interrogation by those in power in sixteenth-century England, there is little doubt that its potential victims took a different perspective, one much closer to that the film attempts to provoke in viewers. The Jesuit poet Robert Southwell wrote shortly before his own arrest and torture at the hands of Topcliffe, “We presume that your Majestie seldome or never heareth the truth of our persecutions, your lenity and tenderness being knowne to be soe professed an enemy to these Cruelties, that you would never permit

\(^{115}\) Moss, “‘Film-making is an adventure,’” accessed online via http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2007/nov/01/ December 12, 2008; Susman, cited in Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema*, 199.

\(^{116}\) Andrew Higson has similarly described the ways in which the cinematography visually distances the viewer from Elizabeth, through the use of techniques such as high overhead perspectives. Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema*, 199.
their Continuance, if they were expressed to your highness as they are practiced upon us.”

This letter is interesting for several reasons: first, because it expresses such profound dismay about the practice of torture during interrogation, a dismay that was quite evidently not shared by the authorities. The second interesting element is its profession of disbelief that Elizabeth I knew the details of the torture methods as they were practiced upon her subjects. In fact, multiple authors have shown that she not only knew but heartily approved of such practices. Finally, the letter’s highly sex-stereotyped assumption of the queen’s “lenity and tenderness” underlines the film’s ambiguity on the same question. Elizabeth’s knowledge of Walsingham’s use of torture is clear, but until the very last scene, when he bows to her after her transformation into the icon of the “Armada”/”Ditchley” portraits, she remains in his thrall. Can she truly be responsible for what he does if he is the one controlling her? This question is crucial, for in fact, it determines both Elizabeth’s authority and her “image,” that is, in this case, how the viewer sees and understands her.

Examining these issues through the lens of the Sanjay and Indira Gandhi relationship provides some illumination, but no true resolution. Scholarship on Gandhi is divided as to how deeply she was accountable for Sanjay’s abuses of power. Tariq Ali seems to see her as equally culpable as Sanjay, while Frank argues that Sanjay’s influence in appointing ministers and other government officers ensured

118 I question Southwell’s profession of disbelief only because such a statement might reflect not truthful disbelief but the common practice of attempting to influence the monarch’s policies through flattery of her for, in fact, doing the opposite of what her policy actually stated. See for example Doran, “Virginity, Divinity, and Power,” in *The Myth of Elizabeth*.
that Gandhi herself was kept in the dark about the abuses he perpetrated, and that as soon as the prime minister discovered them she ended them—just as Robert Southwell’s letter to the historical queen suggests the English commons believed. Using Indira Gandhi as a lens through which to view the film’s Elizabeth, Kapur seems to suggest that a female ruler who knows of and condones such actions committed by her subordinates becomes an icon of destruction and death, regardless of what public image she claims. Her power is therefore complete but destructive. On the other hand, a female ruler who does not know what her subordinates are doing on her behalf clearly has had her power and her authority undermined, yet is innocent of responsibility for their actions. If she appears to end abuses once she discovers them, she may therefore be legitimately seen as an icon of goodness—the mother or the virgin.

The film Elizabeth gives no satisfactory moral answer to this dilemma; it merely suggests that the very femininity of a female ruler may allow her to distance herself from abuses committed in her name and claim authority, and iconic greatness, on the basis of a false image of her own feminine nature. As noted by Pigeon, Dobson and Watson, this is not a new interpretation of Elizabeth I’s rule and persona; it dates from eighteenth-century dramatic representations and has its roots in the very tradition of thought exemplified by John Knox’s First Blast of the Trumpet. What is new, however, is the way in which the makers of Elizabeth use the historical queen’s sixteenth-century portraits to support their interpretation. Unlike previous films, which represented Elizabeth’s appearance, power, and compromised femininity as a fait accompli, Kapur’s 1998 film draws visual elements from five different iconic
images of the queen dating from different stages of her reign and thus from the progression of her iconographic representation. It adapts these elements and sequences them to provide a visual component to its interpretation of Elizabeth’s increasing loss of privacy and feminine fulfillment as she gains political maturity. Such a complex reading of the sixteenth-century iconographic portraits represents a new and creative manipulation of the historical queen’s image and persona, a manipulation that weds an insightful visual interpretation of Elizabeth I’s evolution as a ruler to a much older tradition of denigrating female rule. It also provides a highly critical post-colonial commentary on English history, by likening an iconic English queen to a modern female leader who embodied the same traditional view of female rule in the context of a post-colonial democracy. The result is a powerful reinforcement of the same centuries-old stereotypes that in 1558 threatened to deny Elizabeth I the throne of England.
Appendix: Images Compared
Fig. 1. Artist unknown, “Coronation” panel portrait, c. 1600-1610.

Note especially the remarkably faithful reproduction of the coronation robes and jewels. The difference in background highlights the convergence of the iconic image with the character in the film.

Fig. 2. Still from Elizabeth, coronation scene, 1998.
Fig. 3. Attr. to Levina Teerlinc, *Illuminated Initial from the indenture for the establishment of the Poor Knights of Windsor*, 1559.

Note the difference in the realism, particularly in the arrangement of the cape and torso, between this contemporary image and the turn-of-the-century memorial image in Fig. 1. *Image scanned from Strong, Gloriana, 56.*
Fig. 4. Attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, “Rainbow” portrait, c. 1600-1603.

Fig. 5. Still from Elizabeth, argument after assassination attempt, 1998.

Note especially the reproduction of her hairstyle and the use of pearls in the costume to echo the pearls in the portrait.
Fig. 6. Attributed to Federigo Zuccaro, the “Darnley” portrait, 1575.

Fig. 7. Still from Elizabeth, discussion of Norfolk plot, 1998.

Note the face-pattern evident in both images. This marks the development of Elizabeth’s easily-recognized iconic physical features.
Fig. 8. Still from *Elizabeth*, condemning Norfolk, 1998. The same iconographic image put into a different angle. The modern pose—and, in the film, the body language—in combination with the familiar face makes the image startling.
Fig. 9. George Gower, the “Armada” portrait, 1588. One of the most recognizable portraits of Elizabeth I, and the image used to identify her under the opening subtitles of the film.

Fig. 10. Still from *Elizabeth*, transformation scene, 1999. The final iconic image of the Virgin Queen in the last scene of the film.
Figure 11. Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, the “Ditchley” Portrait, c. 1592. Note especially the age of the face and the details of the dress, compared with those of Fig. 9 and 10.
Figure 12. Artist unknown, portrait of Elizabeth, c. 1600. City Museum, Plymouth. One of the very few unapproved images that survived the 1596 Act of the Privy Council ordering the destruction of portraits that didn’t represent the queen using the mask of youth. This painting depicts the queen in much less splendid dress than her typical portraits, and in its lack of reference to her royal status, it is reminiscent of the portraits predating the 1570 Papal Bull *Regnum in Excelsis*.

Figure 13. Artist unknown, portrait of Elizabeth, circa 1592, Burghley House. Another unapproved portrait. Note that the dress and jewels in this painting clearly use the pattern of those in the “Ditchley” portrait.
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Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, the “Ditchley” portrait, 1592.

Attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, the “Rainbow” Portrait, c. 1600-1603.

Artist unknown, copy of a portrait of the Queen in her coronation robes, c. 1600-1610.


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