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*Refashioning Gloriana: Elizabeth I in contemporary
drama and film*

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Introduction

Amongst the many names for Elizabeth I, “Gloriana”, given to her by Edmund Spenser in 1590 *Faerie Queene*, is undoubtedly the most popular nowadays, together with “the Virgin Queen”. Elizabeth is considered still to this day one of the most famous women of the United Kingdom to have ever lived. She was a great monarch who *alone* restored unity in her 45-year reign and turned England into a powerful country, no more at the mercy of Spain and France. At the time of her death in 1603, she was praised as a symbolically sacred icon to such an extent that the “cult of Elizabeth” came into existence. This “cult” continues to exist even today, in the widest sense of the word, when one considers that Elizabeth as an icon has become a saleable commodity. As Julia M. Walker reports in *The Elizabeth Icon: 1603-2003*, there is a wide range of objects with images of the Tudor Queen: from teapots to all kinds of stationery, and collectable dolls — to say nothing of Shakespeare and Elizabeth rubber bath ducks which came out the same year as the release of *Shakespeare in Love*, and made a quick sell-out of a 5000 copy run (Walker, 2004: 194). In addition, she has been chosen as the subject of countless books and films. Her red hair, white face and ornate gowns with ruff have made her internationally recognisable, even by people who may actually know very little of her life. But what makes this Queen so fascinating? The aim of this dissertation is to offer a portrayal of Queen Elizabeth I through a body of contemporary plays and movies, and in doing so to try to find a reason for the lively interest she arouses amongst today’s audience more than four hundred years after her death. As will be seen through the pages of this thesis, she was an independent “career woman” in a Renaissance patriarchal society. In a way, she can be considered a current role model of female independence for working women of the present.

My dissertation will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter provides an overview on Elizabeth’s life, and focuses on some of the aspects which have been crucial to her personal

history. Thus, this chapter will discuss the controversial issue of religion, which Elizabeth had to deal with throughout her reign; and her celebration in texts, iconography and rituals as a virginal figure onto which many symbolisms were transferred, including the one of a (Protestant) Virgin Mary. Moreover, the events that led her to a personal struggle will be considered: the “affair” with her beloved Dudley, the tormented relationship with her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots (also known as Mary Stuart or Mary I of Scotland) and the one with Dudley’s stepson Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex. Elizabeth’s relations with the Scottish Queen and Essex culminated in the execution of them both, respectively, in 1587 and 1601.

The second chapter of this thesis focuses on theatre. I provide an introduction to the legendary face-to-face encounter between Shakespeare and Elizabeth, which although often represented in the works by writers and artists, in fact never occurred. Then, this chapter will analyse the practice of boy actors playing the part of women on the Elizabethan stage, as until 1660 actresses were not permitted to perform in public playhouses in England. Also with regard to this stage convention, the chapter will explore Elizabeth’s “androgynous” role in Timothy Findley’s *Elizabeth Rex* (2000) and Lee Hall’s *Shakespeare in Love: The Play* (2014). As a female head of state and governor of the Church of England in a patriarchal society, Elizabeth needed to be more *man* than *woman* and used to refer to herself as “a Prince of Europe”. Furthermore, there were a combination of tragic circumstances in her life which may have contributed to her adopting male patterns of behaviour. In the above plays Elizabeth is a woman in a man’s position and with a combined identity as “king and queen”. An emphasis will be put on the different ways *Elizabeth Rex* and *Shakespeare in Love: The Play* consider the topic of Elizabeth’s “androgyny”.

Lastly, the third chapter is devoted to a selection of biopics about Elizabeth. After a general explanation about this film genre, which shows the life story of an actual person, the chapter

focuses on the sub-genre of the royal biopic. In particular, the recent trend of female sovereigns on screen will be discussed with special reference to the case of the iconic Tudor Queen. This chapter will also examine the various manners in which the key events and figures of Elizabeth's life are presented in Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth* (1998), *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007) and the miniseries: *Elizabeth R* (1971), *Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen* (2005) and *Elizabeth I* (2005). These people and events include: Elizabeth's marriage proposals and negotiations, her presumed romantic affairs (especially with Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, and Essex), her difficult relationships with her half-sister Mary Tudor and the Queen of Scots, as well as the complicated matter of religion and the defeat of the Spanish Armada. The chapter will also analyse how the above biopics diverge from historical records. For this reason, it concludes with an overall review of the portrayals of the historical Elizabeth by the actresses playing in the above biopics, namely: Cate Blanchett, Glenda Jackson, Anne-Marie Duff and Hellen Mirren. The multiple characterisations of Elizabeth on screen resonate with the rhythm of decades. Regarding the ones selected for this dissertation, it can be generally stated that they reflect the new achievements of women in recent years, such as the improved situation in equal rights both in the political arena and the common workplace.

Through these "refashionings" of Elizabeth, audiences see an Elizabeth who more or less resembles the "original one". This is because these alternative interpretations represent different aspects of the same person. The historical Elizabeth had a multifaceted personality: "She is a fascinating and complex example of an icon stored in memory, but that complexity is what has given her such a long afterlife" (Walker, 2004: 199). *Long Live the Queen!*

Chapter 1

Elizabeth Regina

1.1 Brief overview on Elizabeth's life story

Elizabeth was born on 7 September 1533 to Henry VIII and his second wife, Anne Boleyn. The fact that Elizabeth was a female caused displeasure to her father who had fervently hoped for a male heir in order to secure the succession. However, after a few years, Henry and his third wife, Jane Seymour, gave birth to a son, Edward, who reigned from his father's death in 1547 to 1553, prematurely dying at the age of 15 years.

It is common knowledge that Henry VIII entered into six marriages and beheaded two of his wives. When he became King of England in 1509 he married the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, Catherine of Aragon. As Carol Levin recounts in *The Reign of Elizabeth I*, she was "highly educated", "loyal", and "strong willed", but she totally failed in her primary duty of Queen: all but one of her offspring died at birth or in infancy (Levin, 2002: 6). Indeed, their only daughter was Mary, who was born in 1516. At the beginning of 1520s it was clear to everybody that Catherine could not fall pregnant again, and in 1527 Henry intended to annul his marriage. Nevertheless, divorcing from Catherine seemed very complicated as she was the aunt of the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain, Charles V, and the last thing Pope Clement VII wanted to do was to antagonise him. Henry's intention to marry Anne Boleyn, who in those days was a lady-in-waiting, further worsened the situation.

The Pope proposed to pass a dispensation according to which Henry could be married to two wives or, alternatively, have his daughter Mary wed his illegitimate son, Henry Fitzroy, namely the Duke of Richmond, but Henry rejected both suggestions (Levin, 2002: 6). Later in 1529 he summoned Parliament to support him obtaining his divorce, yet the Pope still did not agree to the dissolution. Under those circumstances, therefore, the Parliament proclaimed England as an "empire", thereby implying that "neither Pope nor the Emperor could tell its

King, or its people, what to do” (Levin, 2002: 7). Furthermore, they declared that “all spiritual cases” had to be decided by the King of England (Levin, 2002: 7). As a result, Henry broke away from the papacy, and the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, granted him the divorce and, consequently, the marriage to Anne Boleyn in 1533.

Their marriage lasted until Anne’s execution for adultery when Elizabeth was nearly 3 years old. For this reason, Elizabeth had a traumatic childhood — as previously happened to her older half-sister Mary, she was demoted of her rank and proclaimed illegitimate. It was only when Henry married his sixth wife, Katherine Parr, in 1543 that Elizabeth was restored to the status of princess. “Katherine was an important model for Elizabeth of a pious, able Queen” (Levin, 2002: 7). During that same year both Mary and Elizabeth were reinserted into the succession, and in 1546 Henry declared that “if Edward were to die without heirs, the throne would pass to Mary; if she were to die without heirs, to Elizabeth” (Levin, 2002: 7). In addition, in case of Elizabeth’s death, Henry granted the right to succeed to the Suffolk line deriving from his younger sister Mary, rather than to the Stuart line connected to his older sister Margaret. Nevertheless, despite Henry’s intentions, Margaret’s Catholic granddaughter Mary, Queen of Scots attempted to claim Elizabeth’s throne in every way.

Since her childhood Elizabeth was highly educated by teachers from Cambridge who supported the Reformation. In particular she received a humanist education, learning to speak fluently Latin, Greek, French and Italian (Levin, 2002: 8). Moreover, “she studied history, theology, philosophy, and the other sciences that comprised the advanced curriculum of the day” (Levin, 2002: 10). She also played musical instruments like the virginal and the lute, and loved listening to music and dancing, especially in the Italian manner. She could also ride horses and go hunting (Levin, 2002: 10). Differently from her brother Edward, however, she was never specifically instructed to rule and, accordingly, Edward’s and Mary’s reign provided her with a model of how (not) to reign in the future.

After the death of Henry VIII in 1547 and following the rise to power of boy-King Edward, Elizabeth moved into Katherine Parr's house. Later, Parr married Thomas Seymour, who in the meanwhile seemed to enjoy an intimate relationship with Elizabeth. He used to go into her bedroom and try to seduce the then naive Elizabeth (Levin, 2002: 8). Therefore, Parr, who was pregnant with Seymour's child, asked Elizabeth to leave (Levin, 2002: 9).

Edward died in the summer of 1553; Mary was next in line, but her fervent Catholicism caused some dissatisfaction amongst certain Protestants who, led by John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, placed his daughter-in-law, Lady Jane Grey, on the throne as Henry VIII's grandniece.

After Jane's nine-day reign, Mary became the new Queen and her main priority was reconverting England to Catholicism. Thus, once she realised that Elizabeth was not inclined towards the Catholic faith she sent her half-sister to the country (Levin, 2002: 10). A year later, in 1554, the Wyatt's Rebellion against Mary's impending marriage to the Catholic Philip of Spain failed. Given that the aim of such rebellion was to place Elizabeth on the throne, Mary firmly believed that her half-sister was actively involved in the uprising and, even though there was no concrete proof, she ordered to take Elizabeth to the Tower (Levin, 2002: 11). Wyatt died on the scaffold proclaiming Elizabeth's innocence; consequently, her imprisonment in the Tower became more and more complicated to rationalise (Levin, 2002: 12). Under those circumstances, therefore, Elizabeth was allowed to leave the Tower for Woodstock where she was to be put under house arrest.

In July 1554 Philip of Spain arrived in England and married Mary, who after a few months believed she was expecting a child. Yet, her pregnancy "proved to be an illusion" and her determination to restore the papal authority in the kingdom led to the persecution of the heretics (during her reign about 300 people were burned at the stake) (Levin, 2002: 13). In 1557 Mary was persuaded by her husband to support Spain in a war against France. The

military conflict ended in a complete failure for England which lost the city of Calais (Levin, 2002: 13). Mary, extremely unwell, died the following year begrudgingly naming her half-sister as her successor.

Elizabeth was crowned Queen on 17 November 1558. However, though many English felt relieved at the news of Mary's death and the resulting termination of the burnings at the stake that had killed hundreds of heretics, they were at the same time concerned about the potential capabilities of a 25-year-old woman on the throne, notwithstanding her Protestant faith. After all, it must be remembered that she came to power shortly afterwards the circulation of the Scottish Calvinist John Knox's *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, and many of her contemporaries were terrified at the thought of being ruled by a woman.

Nonetheless, Elizabeth started her regency restoring a sense of unity to the nation as she intended to be the Queen of every Englishman, not only of those who were Protestants. Furthermore, she actively sought to gain England's independence. She promoted national industries and encouraged new business so that foreign trade decreased. Especially, she no longer permitted the country to be at the mercy of the two Catholic superpowers of the time: France and Spain.

She also surrounded herself with a "united aristocracy", appointing William Cecil as secretary of state (Levin, 2002: 14). Consequently he reached the rank of Baron Burghley and was conferred the title of High Treasurer. The other men committed to her service were: Sir Francis Walsingham; Sir Christopher Hatton; Richard Ratcliffe; the Earl of Sussex; John Whitgift, appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1583; and Sir Robert Dudley, eventually Earl of Leicester. Dudley made several attempts to persuade Elizabeth to marry him, but he failed. However, since they enjoyed a "close relationship", malicious gossip spread about the two of them (Levin, 2002: 15).

The fact that Elizabeth in the early part of her reign seemed interested in marrying Dudley was cause of serious concern to Cecil, who was unsuccessfully trying to convince her to secure her reign by entering into marriage with a powerful prince, thereby producing an heir to England. Elizabeth had an “enduring political relationship” with Cecil (Levin, 2002: 15). He was so efficient as secretary of state that when Walsingham later occupied his position Elizabeth continued to consult Cecil about international and national affairs. Besides Cecil, Elizabeth mostly conferred with Walsingham and Leicester, and although the other advisors also made their contribution, they sometimes felt not adequately considered (Levin, 2002: 15).

Elizabeth’s advisors were often members of her privy council, “which was an important place for making policy” (Levin, 2002: 16). Since the last years of Henry VIII’s reign it was responsible for the general administration of the country and regularly met to advise the monarch. Once Elizabeth came to the throne, she dramatically decreased Mary’s privy council, remaining initially with 18 men and then with 11 by eliminating some of its members. When Elizabeth was not satisfied with the council’s opinion, she summoned Parliament which, under her absolute control, had the crucial function of legislation, advice and taxation (Levin, 2002: 16). Yet, in spite of its authority (between the House of the Lords and the House of the Commons it counted more than 500 members), it “frequently failed to compel the Queen to act as it wanted” (Levin, 2002: 17).

These problems with the council and Parliament had worsened with the Queen of Scots’s arrival in England in 1568 (Levin, 2002: 19). As mentioned before, she was the Catholic granddaughter of Henry VIII’s older sister Margaret, and since her cousin Elizabeth had so far refused to marry and name an heir, Mary claimed the English throne by “primogeniture” (Levin, 2002: 19). She was then made a prisoner for 19 years, but this fact did not prevent her from becoming involved with machinations for her liberation and for

reinstating a Catholic queen on the English throne. Eventually, Elizabeth had no choice but to order, reluctantly, Mary's execution; Mary died on 8 February 1587.

In the meanwhile, the English were fighting the Spanish troops in the Netherlands as Elizabeth had been supporting the Protestant Dutch against the Catholic Philip of Spain since 1584. Accordingly, Mary's execution gave Philip the legitimate reason to declare war on England and return it to Catholicism. In July 1588 the Spanish Armada arrived, but it was soon defeated by poor naval tactics and bad weather.

Though successful, the period following the defeat of the Armada was emotionally painful to Elizabeth as she lost her most loyal servants: Dudley died in 1588; followed by Walsingham in 1590; and finally by Cecil in 1598. Additionally, there was a dangerous situation in Ireland where the Earl of Tyrone had been staging a revolt against the English rule (Levin, 2002: 20).

When in 1599 Elizabeth sent Dudley's young stepson, namely Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, to suppress the rebellion in Ireland, he conducted a "disastrous campaign" (Levin, 2002: 21). Ultimately, in 1601 he launched an unsuccessful coup d'état against Elizabeth. Consequently, he was executed leaving Elizabeth permanently scarred. In early 1603 her health gradually deteriorated, and she succumbed to death on 24 March of that same year. James VI of Scotland, son of Mary, Queen of Scots, succeeded to the English throne (Levin, 2002: 21).

1.2 A (Protestant) Virgin Queen

When Elizabeth succeeded her half-sister Mary, she returned the country to Protestantism. However, Susan Bassnett in *Elizabeth I: A Feminist Perspective* explains that Elizabeth in the early stages of her reign tried to follow a "non-committal" policy in matters of religion, spreading discontent both amongst the most devout Catholics and Protestants (1997: 81). She seemed inclined towards a less radical kind of religion, thereby allowing her subjects to

practice their faith, whichever it may be (Bassnett, 1997: 82). Nevertheless, Elizabeth's "ideals of tolerance" regarding religion were doomed to fail from the very start (Bassnett, 1997: 83). In fact, even though she kept some of Mary's Catholics at her service, the strong dissent of the Marian bishops against the reform proposals by Parliament resulted in their banishment (Bassnett, 1997: 82). Then, these bishops wrote to Elizabeth urging her not to commit heresies and to deny the schism from the Church of Rome as it was responsible for the spread of Christianity in Britain. Such statements infuriated Elizabeth to such an extent that she replied to the letter saying they deliberately distorted the history of British Christianity. She argued:

As for our father being withdrawn from the supremacy of Rome by schismatical and heretical counsels and advisors; who, we pray, advised him more, or flattered him, than you, good Mr Hethe, when you were bishop of Rochester? And then you, Mr Boner, when you were archdeacon? And you, Mr Tuberville? Nay further, who was more an advisor of your father, than your great Stephen Gardiner, when he lived? Are not ye then those schismatics and heretics? If so, suspend your evil censures. Recollect, was it our sister's conscience made her so averse to our father's and brother's actions, as to undo what they had perfected? Or was it not you, or such like advisors, that dissuaded her, and stirred her up against us and other of the subjects? (Bassnett, 1997: 83)

Furthermore, she bluntly warned them against such behaviour, otherwise she wrote "lest you provoke us to execute those penalties enacted for the punishing of our resisters" (Bassnett, 1997: 83). Taking into consideration Elizabeth's sharp reply, it is also observable that her father's schism from the papacy had been the necessary condition for marrying her mother, and beyond religious beliefs, she was perfectly conscious of the crucial role of some advisors in her mother's execution (Bassnett, 1997: 83-84).

In 1559 Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy and the Act of Uniformity; consequently, Elizabeth was compelled to become more doctrinaire in terms of religion than she had previously been. Additionally, she was forced to agree to clerical marriage, which was a fact

she greatly disliked (Bassnett, 1997: 84). The Act of Supremacy re-elected the sovereign to lead the Church, yet Elizabeth cleverly defined herself as “supreme governor” instead of “supreme head” as her father had. In this way she appeased tensions amongst those Protestants and Catholics hostile to the idea of a woman bearing the title of head of the Church. As for the Act of Uniformity, it consisted in a new Book of Common Prayer, and compulsory Mass attendance (Bassnett, 1997: 85).

Despite new ordinances, Elizabeth was criticised for being a hypocrite by a Catholic priest named Edward Rishton, who stated:

This queen is in the habit of boasting before strangers and the foreign ambassadors that the clergy of her sect are held in honour, and are not mere starvelings like those of Geneva, and other Churches of the kind, not so well ordered as hers; and that she had not gone so far from the faith of other princes and of her own ancestors as many think. The better to keep up this fraud, she retained for some years on the table, which she had set up in the place of the altar, in her chapel, two wax candles, which were never lighted, with a silver crucifix between them. And then in order to please the Catholics, and to impose more easily upon foreigners, she used to say from time to time that she was forced, not by her own convictions, but by the clamours of her subjects, to make a change of religion, but that she had practiced great moderation in making it (Bassnett, 1997: 85-86).

Though acting as negative evaluation of Elizabeth, this adequately conveys her behaviour and attitudes towards religion. Indeed, albeit she proclaimed herself as a Protestant, she maintained some Catholic traditions within her Church (Bassnett, 1997: 86). Moreover, she did not intend to follow her half-sister’s example in persecuting subjects with an alternative religion.

The difficulty in pursuing a line of religious tolerance at those times was given by the fact that religion and politics were inextricably linked. As soon as Elizabeth became Queen, she needed to act with urgency about the poverty in the country, the possibility of dangerous foreign wars, not to mention the religious discord. Then, when Mary, Queen of Scots arrived

to England in 1568, asking for Elizabeth's protection but in reality conspiring to take her throne, it proved increasingly difficult to remain tolerant towards religious dissenters.

Besides the Northern Rebellion and the Ridolfi Plot, Elizabeth's excommunication by the Pope in 1570 dramatically worsened the situation. Finally, the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572, in which thousands of French Huguenots were killed, increased the anti-Catholic sentiment amongst the Protestants, including Elizabeth (Bassnett, 1997: 87). In the meanwhile, in Europe special training centres were born for priests who would contribute to reinstate Catholicism in England (Bassnett, 1997: 87-88). Consequently, such priests travelled to England disguised, and commenced their missionary work, which was sponsored by France and, especially, Spain. The movement of the Counter-Reformation spread quickly across England, and, therefore, Members of Parliament placed pressure on Elizabeth to pass stricter legislation. She was initially reluctant, but in 1585 she introduced an act which banned Jesuits and priests from the country, otherwise they would have been charged with high treason. In addition, people who did not prove their loyalty to the English Crown were denounced as traitors; and any person who was discovered to be in favour of the schools for missionary priests or having children attending these centres was heavily fined or imprisoned. Later, in 1593, penalties were made harsher for recusants, namely, for those who refused to go to the services of the Church of England. Studying the English Reformation, Philip Hughes examines the number of Catholics killed during the Elizabethan regency. "Between 1577 and 1603, some 183 were executed, of whom 123 were priests, one a friar and the remainder lay people, three of whom were women" (Bassnett, 1997: 88). As a result, Elizabeth's relationships with English and foreign Catholics worsened considerably. She was now considered by the Roman Church not only as a heretical monarch but also a "persecuting tyrant" (Bassnett, 1997: 89).

When Mary, Queen of Scots was executed in 1587, some believed she was the rightful Queen of England. Then after her death, and with the remaining possibility of a future Protestant reign through her son, logical successor to Elizabeth, Catholics gradually diminished their power in the country (Bassnett, 1997: 89). The following year, in 1588, the Spanish were finally defeated; yet another urgent matter had risen, again directly connected to religion. Ireland was a mainly Catholic territory which Elizabeth had continued to ignore until the Protestant Reformation occurred. From that moment on, the problem of having a pro-Catholic area within the kingdom needed to be solved and, consequently, a new course of action was taken in order to introduce the reformed Church of England into Ireland (Bassnett, 1997: 91). However, the miserable quality of life in Ireland, feudalism, and landowners who remained largely absent from their properties, sparked risings in the early 1560s, from 1569 to 1572, and again from 1579 to 1583. Such risings were all suppressed, but the introduction of a Protestant state Church into Ireland caused an increase in anti-Protestants and anti-English sentiment amongst the population. In 1595, Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, staged a major rebellion against the British rule in Ireland, receiving economic support from Spain. The Irish situation had reached crisis proportions and this really worried Elizabeth, who remained in London (Bassnett, 1997: 92). The Tyrone rebellion was crushed in 1602, thanks to Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy; Ireland was finally under the control of the English crown (Bassnett, 1997: 93-94).

With the passing of time, Elizabeth took a more extreme position on religious matters. When she knew that the Protestant King of France, Henri IV, had become a convert to Catholicism and supported the Catholic insurrectionists, she addressed an indignant letter to him, signing as "Your very assured sister, if it be after the old manner; with the new, I have nothing to do" (Bassnett, 1997: 94-95). Certainly, she was more frightened of Henri's eventual alliance against England than of his sudden conversion. Even so, her rejection of the Catholic doctrine

well illustrated that “she held firm to the rightness of her chosen religious path” (Bassnett, 1997: 95).

The (controversial) issue of religion during Elizabeth’s reign can be connected also with the celebration in texts, iconography and rituals of the Tudor Queen as a virginal figure onto which many symbolisms were transferred. Helen Hackett in *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* affirms that “[...] the celebration and elevation of Elizabeth as a symbol partly depended on an identification of secular power with sacredness. It also, though, depended on a separation of the secular and the sacred” (1995: 6). When Elizabeth ascended to the throne, she required a new Protestant iconography which effectively restored the trust in a new female monarch. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, she came to power shortly following the 1558 publication of John Knox’s *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* which not only created much controversy by attacking Elizabeth’s half-sister Mary and other European queens for being Catholic, but also for being women and, consequently, not good at governing (Hackett, 1995: 38). Knox, amongst others in that period, considered female rulers as “monstriferous” (Hackett, 1995: 39). As a result, eulogists of Elizabeth turned to icons of positive female rule from the Old Testament like Deborah, Judge of Israel, and to Isaiah’s metaphor of queens as the nursing mothers of the church.

Another solution to the problem of controversy about female rule was to stress the “sacredness of monarchy”, especially the theory of the King’s Two Bodies (Hackett, 1995: 40). According to this medieval doctrine, the King had a body politic and a body natural: the former was “the timeless institution and essence of the monarchy”, the latter was “the private, human, mortal body of the temporary incumbent” (Hackett, 1995: 21). Specifically, “if an ordinary man had only daughters, the inheritance should be shared between them, whereas if a

king had only daughters, the whole inheritance passed to the eldest, as if she were a man” (Hackett, 1995: 40). Therefore, regardless of her feminine body natural, Elizabeth had every right to rule by way of the “masculine” qualities of her body politic.

From the early years of her reign, Elizabeth herself used the rhetoric of the King’s Two Bodies and presented her role as divinely imposed. In one of her speeches to the councillors she said:

[...] considering I am Gods Creature, ordeyned to obey his appointment I will thereto Yelde, desiringe from the bottom of my harte that I may have assistance of his Graces to bee the minister of his Heavenly Will in this office now comytted to me [...]. I am but one Body naturallye Considered though by his permission a Bodye Politique to Governe (Hackett, 1995: 40).

Elizabeth here does not oppose Knox’s idea that women in power are unnatural, but rather she implies that God has wanted kingship to be embodied in her, despite her undesirable condition of being female (Hackett, 1995: 40-41).

Elizabeth had already expressed her reluctance to matrimony before coming to the throne (Hackett, 1995: 52). In February 1559, however, she assured Parliament that if she were to have a husband, it would be a suitable one for her kingdom. Additionally, she told them that as she was God’s instrument, he would have given her an heir if needed; otherwise, she concluded, “And in the end this shalbe for me sufficient that a marble stone shall declare that a Queen, hauing reigned suche a tyme, lyued and dyed a virgin” (Hackett, 1995:53).

Besides politics, Elizabeth’s aversion to marriage clashed also with the Protestant religion given that celibacy was regarded as unnatural for human beings. Protestants recommended matrimony over perpetual virginity as this latter could only belong to a small circle of sinless souls, helped by God. In particular, female virginity maintained an attractive aura of mystery because the belief that the female body needed to be cleansed of sin after menstruation or

pregnancy persisted in the post-Reformation period, and “the intact female body continued to be seen as charmed in the lore of folk-magic” (Hackett, 1995: 54).

These holy or magic virtues of the virginal female body were typical of the cult of the Virgin Mary, and of other saintly figures. For this reason, Elizabeth’s 1559 speech to Parliament is remarkable for the fact she confers such “unique” qualities to herself (Hackett, 1995: 55):

I may saye vnto yow, that from my yeares of vnderstanding syth I first had consideracion of my self to be borne a servitor of almightie god I happelie chose this kynde of life, in *which* I yet lyve *which* I assure yow for myne owne *parte*, hath hitherto best contended my self and I trust hath bene moost acceptable to god (Hackett, 1995: 53).

Furthermore, there is a twofold explanation for her following statement “God who hath hitherto therein preserued me, and led me by the hand, will not nowe of his goodness suffer me to goe alone” (Hackett, 1995: 55): will she be not alone because God provides her with a husband? Or is God himself her husband, who leads her by the hand?

The figure of the “bride of Christ” derived from the Catholic iconography of the Virgin and from female saints and nuns. Medieval songs already presented the Virgin Mary as the spouse of Christ, in view of the fact that she personified the Church itself. Protestant variations scrupulously avoided the Marian identification, but continued to bear the relation between the bride and the Church. This, consequently, was the main cause for the production of an iconography of Elizabeth as the virginal spouse of the Protestant Church and nation (Hackett, 1995: 55).

Elizabeth, in reality, was considered by her subjects a virgin Queen not because she was dedicated to a life of perpetual virginity, following the example of the Virgin Mary, but because she was nubile, and therefore physically mature for getting married (Hackett, 1995: 73). In the 1560s and 70s Elizabeth was also viewed as mother of the Church and nation both

for her position of authority over her subjects, and for being capable of parental love for them (Hackett, 1995: 77).

It was then in 1582, at the end of the failed marriage negotiations between Elizabeth and Francis, Duke of Anjou and Alençon (youngest son of Catherine de Medici and Henry II of France) that some substantial variations in representations of Elizabeth from an iconographic perspective occurred. Indeed, Elizabeth's subjects realised that it might be better to be governed by a virgin Queen than by one married to a foreigner; and, at the same time, they allowed for the possibility that she might never produce an heir to the throne. Thus, from this time forward she assumed the attributes of "ever-virgin" and "divine" (Hackett, 1995: 95-96). Finally, during the 1590s writers began to address Elizabeth using specifically Catholic terminology as the increasing confidence in her regime had significantly reduced the former anxiety at adopting Marian iconography (Hackett, 1995: 161). Simultaneously, panegyrists of Elizabeth drew on a variety of other sources in order to illustrate her different aspects. For example, in the 1590 *Faerie Queene* Spenser celebrated Elizabeth through formidable different characters: "she was Gloriana, Una, Belphoebe, Britomart, with more personae to come in the 1596 instalment" (Hackett, 1995: 163). She was also called "Cynthia, Phoebe Flora / Diana, and Aurora" in a lyric composition by Raleigh (Hackett, 1995: 163). Additionally, in the 1599 Prologue to Dekker's *Old Fortunatus* there is this dialogue between two elders:

A) Are you then traueilling to the temple of *Eliza*?

B) Euen to her temple are my feeble limmes traueilling. Some cal her *Pandora*; some *Gloriana*, some *Cynthia*: some *Belphoebe*, some *Astraea*: all by seuerall names to expresse seuerall loues: Yet all those names make but one celestiall body, as all those loues meete to create but one soule.

A) I am one of her owne countrie, and we adore her by the name of *Eliza* (Hackett, 1995: 163-164)

Whereas other panegyrics expressed disillusion about the “fracture” between Elizabeth the (divine) Queen, and the (fallible) woman (Hackett, 1995: 166).

As has been noted, over the course of her reign, Elizabeth assumed distinguishing characteristics according to the diverse symbolic needs she was required to satisfy, and because of her anomalous status of being an unmarried woman in power (Hackett, 1995: 164). Moreover, in light of the fact that she had been praised as a symbolically sacred icon, the 1590s brought into existence something which has been defined as “cult of Elizabeth”, variously interpreted by modern scholars, including the controversial religious connotations of her as a Protestant quasi-substitute of the Virgin Mary. Such “cult” continues to exist in the widest sense of the word, even today.

1.3 A clash between the private and public

Elizabeth seems to have been characterised, amongst other things, by a clash between her private and public self. Indeed, in her life a series of events happened that led her to a personal struggle. The Dudley affair, the relationship with her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots and the one with Dudley’s stepson Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, were such occurrences which also caught the attention (to say nothing of the imagination) of countless of writers and artists.

According to what Susan Doran states in *Elizabeth I and Her Circle*, Elizabeth was 8 years old when she became friends with Robert Dudley, who was a year younger. However, it was only after 1542 that the two often met at Henry VIII’s court and later at Edward VI’s. Then, in early 1553 they had greater opportunity to meet as Dudley performed the function of guardian of Somerset House, which was Elizabeth’s official residence in London. Nevertheless, at that time Dudley was already married to the daughter of a Norfolk gentleman, named Amy Robsart.

When Mary came to power in July 1553 they both experienced a dark period in their respective lives. Dudley was imprisoned in the Tower, together with his four brothers, for having participated in his father's attempt to usurp the throne for Lady Jane Grey; Elizabeth suffered the same fate in March 1554. In spite of what novels and films sometimes present, they were not able to communicate as they were kept under constant guard.

Both of them were eventually released: Elizabeth, following the confinement in the Tower and the house arrest at Woodstock for almost a year, moved to Hertfordshire; Dudley went to fight in the war against France on behalf of Mary. After his return in England, they had frequent meetings as Dudley's wife was subsequently based in Throcking, a place near to Elizabeth's residence at Hatfield (Doran, 2015: 118). Under those circumstances, the two developed an intimate relationship and at the time Elizabeth became Queen, in November 1558, Dudley became an influential person in the new government (Doran, 2015: 118-119). Elizabeth appointed Dudley master of the horse, which was an important position, "coming third in rank after the lord steward and lord chamberlain" (Doran, 2015: 119). Additionally, he acquired properties in Kew, not distant from the Royal Palace of Richmond. The real reason of these concessions, however, was not to favour him over others but to reinstate the status of his family, given that Elizabeth promoted the restoration of those loyal people who had lost offices and titles under the previous reign of Mary (Doran, 2015: 119).

As master of the horse, Dudley saw Elizabeth every day and for that reason he always accompanied her while hunting, lifting her on and off the horse, he was also in close physical contact with her. Being a good-looking and athletic man, the Queen found him attractive. Moreover, they had not only common interests such as dancing, music, and plays, but also talents as "like Elizabeth [and many courtiers], Dudley was an accomplished linguist, reading French and Latin, and speaking Italian fluently" (Doran, 2015: 119).

As they were constantly at each other's side, gossip about a possible affair between them began to circulate (Doran, 2015: 119). Furthermore, there were persistent rumours of Elizabeth being in love with Dudley and planning to marry him after the expected death of his critically ill wife (Doran, 2015: 119-120). In April 1559, Feria, the Spanish ambassador, was informed that the Queen went into Dudley's bedroom during the day and night, and never permitted him to leave her company (Doran, 2015: 120). Concurrently, she gave him the special honour to be a knight of the elite, chivalric order of the garter together with members of more noble status.

In the meanwhile, Elizabeth refused the marriage proposals from the Archduke Charles, son of the Emperor Ferdinand, and Eric XIV, future King of Sweden. As a result, malicious rumours of her affair with Dudley corroborated to such an extent that she was labelled internationally as a "loose woman" (Doran, 2015: 120).

Considering that historians seem to agree that she never lost her virginity, Elizabeth appeared unaffected by these opinions and slanders, and continued to give her favourite special honours, offices and lands (Doran, 2015: 121). Yet, it was in early September 1560 when Dudley's wife, Amy, was found dead at the foot of the stairs that their relationship came to a (temporary) halt (Doran, 2015: 122). Indeed, Amy's death was shrouded in mystery because of some strange details. The coroner said the cause of death was an accidental fall which resulted in a fatal neck breaking: could she have had a sudden collapse due to her poor health conditions? It cannot be determined. However, still nowadays, certain historians have considered the possibility of murder by also identifying plausible different killers. Initially Dudley was believed guilty, whereas Cecil was later also accused, or better, accused of ordering the homicide to incriminate Dudley and, consequently, interrupt any possible marriage negotiation with the Queen. Finally, also the hypothesis that the evil deed was performed by Dudley's servants was also taken into consideration.

If accidental injury is excluded, also the theory of suicide can be proposed, and maybe proves to be the most coherent (Doran, 2015: 123). Possibly, having become severely depressed by her husband's behaviour, always away from home, Amy might have thought of killing herself, or merely of catching his attention without even considering such a tragedy.

Similarly to Dudley, Elizabeth was visibly shocked by the news of Amy's death, but she never appeared to doubt Dudley's innocence, at least publicly. In any event, Dudley stayed at Kew until the inquest returned a verdict of accidental death. Thus, after the funeral, he was again at court and many believed he would soon marry the Queen. In reality, this had put Elizabeth in a difficult position. If, on one hand, she felt strongly attracted to him; on the other, she was well aware of the dangers of such a union. In other words, "the damage to her reputation, the factionalism that would result in England, and the lack of political advantage in such a match, especially in contrast to one with a foreign prince" (Doran, 2015: 124). Accordingly, Elizabeth was rather uncertain of which direction to take. She remained undecided until the end of that year, then she started to reject the idea of a marriage with Dudley, who had even obtained the Spanish approval of the matrimony, and by May 1561 she appeared resolute not to marry (Doran, 2015: 124-125).

In the following years, Elizabeth assigned Dudley to new grants, and tasks: in 1562 he was nominated as member of her privy council and in 1563 he was recommended as husband for her Scottish cousin Mary.

In order to make Dudley potentially suitable as a royal consort, the Queen conferred the title of Lord of Kenilworth, Denbigh, and Chirk on him, together with the one of Earl of Leicester in 1564 (previously bestowed upon sons of English kings). Even so, Mary refused Dudley and eventually married Lord Darnley (Doran, 2015: 127). As for Elizabeth, she reopened marriage negotiations with the Archduke Charles. After two years, though, the negotiations collapsed because of matters concerning the Catholic religion of the Austrian Archduke.

During this period, Dudley was always by Elizabeth's side, supporting her both emotionally and politically, not to mention constantly trying to oppose any of her possible marriage plans to a princely candidate. Nevertheless, Elizabeth never permitted him to perform the function of a kingly figure, nor the one of a "substitute for a royal consort" (Doran, 2015: 128). She also reminded him that he had no control over her heart but was on the same level as other courtiers. In fact, in the seventeenth century Sir Robert Naunton recounted that Elizabeth spoke the following words to him: "(God's death) my Lord, I have wisht you well, but my favour is not so lockt up for you, that others shall not partake thereof [...] I will have here but one mistress, and no master" (Doran, 2015: 129).

Despite some angry scenes, however, Elizabeth's relationship with Dudley was a special one. She sought his comfort when she was not well, and enjoyed his companionship when possible. In written correspondence, then, he used the nickname she gave him, her "eyes", signing as "ÖÖ" or referring to her as "My mōōst gracious lady" (Doran, 2015: 134).

Having realised that Elizabeth would never become his wife, in September 1578, Dudley secretly married Lettice Knollys, widow of Walter Devereux, the Earl of Essex, from whom she had also had a son, named Robert.

It was probably a year later, when Elizabeth was entertaining the courtship by Francis, Duke of Anjou and Alençon, that she discovered Dudley's second marriage (Doran, 2015: 135). She was so deeply irritated at hearing the news that she threatened to send him to the Tower (Doran, 2015: 136). Yet, he was restored to her favour in 1580, shortly after the death of his young son (Doran, 2015: 137).

Elizabeth did not wed Anjou, and the French Duke left England in 1581; he died in 1584. At the time of his death, then, Elizabeth had lost the French support against the Spanish forces in the Netherlands. Therefore, when Philip II reestablished his supremacy over the Low Countries she had no choice but to send Dudley there commanding the English army.

Once in the Netherlands, he accepted the appointment of governor general from the States-General without the Queen's approval (Doran, 2015: 138), even though he proved to be a poor military commander and was discharged from his service abroad within a year, in 1587 (Doran, 2015: 140).

In the war with the Spaniards in 1588, Elizabeth designated him lieutenant general of England's land forces and, for this reason, he was next to her at Tilbury when she delivered one of her most memorable speeches to the troops. After suffering a period of poor health, Dudley died on 4 September 1588. This communication made Elizabeth desperate, and drove her to lock herself in her room for days. She jealously kept "his last letter" to her until the end of her days.

Dudley's military and political career was a beneficial consequence of intimate familiarity with Elizabeth. Their long-term relationship was one of fondness, presumably love, for each other. However, at the same time, it was troubled because of Elizabeth's role as Queen, with Dudley subordinated to her preeminent position (Doran, 2015: 141). During his lifetime he acquired a poor reputation as he was considered as a man of "sexual excess" and "Machiavellian politics" (Doran, 2015: 142). In addition, there were rumours that "he and the queen were lovers who had produced numerous bastards" (Doran, 2015: 142). Even though analogous insinuations persisted through the centuries and still continue to be part of countless works of fiction, professional historians nowadays question this "popular" version of events. They consider the fact that Elizabeth and Dudley had a "full sexual relationship" as highly improbable (Doran, 2015: 142). They undoubtedly may have behaved in a flirtatious manner towards each other, or something more, but lovemaking was an extremely risky choice for Elizabeth to make. Likewise, Dudley's reputation of dishonest politician was unfounded. Certainly, he had personal ambitions and sometimes deceived Elizabeth, but few were not self-interested in contemporary court politics. After all, "she was usually a good

judge of a person's worth and soon came to recognize his abilities, respect his judgement, and admire his style, even while she was wary of his ambition and ready to cut him down to size" (Doran, 2015: 142).

As far as Elizabeth's relations with Mary of Scots are concerned, it can be stated that they acquired the dimension of a conflict from the very moment Elizabeth came to power. In fact, Bassett explains that since that time the 16-year-old Mary and her husband Francis, Dauphin of France, presented themselves as the legitimate King and Queen of England at the French court. As mentioned before in this chapter, the reason why Mary claimed the English throne was her common lineage with Elizabeth, deriving from Henry VII. She was the daughter of the French Mary of Guise and James V of Scotland, son of Henry VIII's elder sister Margaret (Bassnett, 1997: 103). The point of contention was substantially due to a problem of religion as the Stuarts were Catholics, and the Tudors stemming from Henry VIII, with the exception of his daughter Mary, were Protestants (Bassnett, 1997: 103-104).

The Scottish Mary revealed herself to be a potentially dangerous female relative for Elizabeth as she was heir to the throne of Scotland and had a husband who became King of France in July 1559. Then, Mary's mother became Regent of Scotland in her daughter's name, and this led to the Scottish Protestants staging a rebellion against Catholicism. Shortly afterwards, Mary of Guise was removed from power and the local Protestant aristocracy sought support from Elizabeth.

Initially Elizabeth felt compelled not to support the Scottish Protestants publicly, otherwise the French might have attacked her kingdom. At the same time, not to take action was far too dangerous as the French would inevitably take the side of the Catholics in the Scottish rebellion, and because Mary of Scots was trying to usurp her throne. Thus, Elizabeth secretly sent money and military aid to Scotland. Later, when in 1560 the conflict reached crisis proportions, she decided to intervene directly and sent soldiers into Scotland. Her strategy

proved to be effective; the peace Treaty of Edinburgh was signed in July of that same year. Under the conditions of the agreement, Mary and Francis had to abandon their claim to Elizabeth's throne and stop adopting the English royal arms in their shield (Bassnett, 1997: 104).

However, Mary and Francis did not accept such conditions, and after Francis died, Mary soon after decided to leave France for Scotland, where she resumed the role of "reigning queen" (Bassnett, 1997: 105). John Neale gives an account of what was happening between the two Queens at that time:

The crowding drama of Elizabeth's reign changed, and interest began to centre on the personal relations between herself and Mary, two young queens, cousins and neighbours. What was to be expected but restless enmity? Elizabeth had as good as robbed Mary of the allegiance of her subjects, and set up a religious and political rule in Scotland that was obnoxious to her. Mary on her side had refused to ratify the Treaty of Edinburgh, and, given the will and power, could take a leaf out her rival's book, stir up Catholic discontent in England, perhaps make a bid for the English throne. There was a provocation and danger in her very widowhood, for she could challenge her cousin's attractions as the best marriage in Europe. Suitors who had spent money, time and temper on Elizabeth, were turning to woo a woman less virginal and elusive, and it was not many weeks before the names of Don Carlos of Spain, the Archduke Charles, the King of Sweden, and the King of Denmark were on people's lips. With Elizabeth it was political necessity — perhaps it was also instinct — to begrudge another her half or wholly rejected suitors (Bassnett, 1997: 105).

Neale's summary reveals the way in which historians, to say nothing of novelists and filmmakers, have looked at the rivalry between Elizabeth and Mary in terms of sexual supremacy. Of course they were not friends given the actual state of things, but it would not be appropriate to consider them as competing for suitors against each other (Bassnett, 1997: 105). In reality, the conflict arose from their different religion, politics and education.

As mentioned previously, Elizabeth received an excellent humanist education by means of which she came to study classical authors, and to speak several languages. Mary, in contrast,

was given a different education as the attention towards women's erudition that had particularly characterised Henry VIII's court had not been so crucial in her training. She spoke three languages (Latin, French and English) but she was not as cultured as Elizabeth. As the story of her life demonstrates, she was certainly a woman of courage, "with tremendous stamina and physical resilience" (Bassnett, 1997: 106). In addition, she appears to have been a rather quick decision maker, in many cases to her own disadvantage because of her taking action without weighing all of the consequences. Her personal inclination towards precipitous resoluteness, therefore, stands in stark contrast to that of Elizabeth who, conversely, was naturally inclined to the middle way (Bassnett, 1997: 106).

With her accession to the Scottish throne, Mary planned to marry again, and until she married her cousin Lord Darnley in 1565, "the question of Mary's marriage preoccupied Elizabeth as much as her own" (Bassnett, 1997: 107).

Mary openly declared that she would never have celebrated marriage with a husband who was not of her own religion, not to mention with one suggested to her by Elizabeth. In actual fact, Elizabeth hoped that Mary would choose a partner who would further decrease her chances of becoming future Queen of England. Thus, Elizabeth appointed Robert Dudley as Earl of Leicester and offered his hand to Mary, who finally married Henry Stuart, known as Lord Darnley, making him King of Scotland (Bassnett, 1997: 107). To clarify, much the same as Mary, Darnley could be regarded as a claimer to the English throne for he descended from Margaret Tudor, Queen Dowager of Scotland and Mary's grandmother, and her second husband, the Earl of Angus (Bassnett, 1997: 108).

Mary and Darnley's son James (future King of Scotland and England) was born in June 1566. Nevertheless, their marriage lasted less than two years; Darnley revealed himself to be often "drunken" and "debauched", while Mary was implicated in scandals with other men, such as David Rizzio and the Earl of Bothwell (Bassnett, 1997: 109).

In February 1567, Darnley was found strangled in a garden next to the house in Edinburgh where he was staying.

When Elizabeth received the news of Darnley's death, she wasted no time in writing a letter to Mary to give her some sensible suggestions. She wrote the following words:

My ears have been so astounded and my heart so frightened to hear of the horrible and abominable murder of your husband and my own cousin that I have scarcely spirit to write; yet I cannot conceal that I grieve more for you than for him. I should not do the office of a faithful cousin and friend, if I did not urge you to preserve your honour, rather than look through your fingers at revenge on those who have done you that pleasure as most people say. I counsel you to take this matter to heart, that you may show the world what a noble Princess and loyal woman you are. I write you vehemently not that I doubt, but for affection (Bassnett, 1997: 110).

Mary did not listen to her cousin's advice and entered into marriage with Bothwell. Then, a month later, she was imprisoned. Elizabeth addressed her another letter, this time in a far different tone:

Madam, to be plain with you, our grief hath not been small that in this your marriage no slender consideration has been had that, as we perceive manifestly no good friend you have in the whole world can like thereof, and, if we should otherwise write or say, we should abuse you. For how could a worse choice be made for your honour than in such haste to marry a subject who, besides other notorious lacks, public fame hath charged with the murder of your late husband, besides the touching of yourself in some part, though we trust in that behalf falsely. And with what peril have you married him, that hath another lawful wife alive, whereby neither by God's law nor man's yourself can be his lawful wife nor any children betwixt you legitimate? (Bassnett, 1997: 110).

Elizabeth's opinion of Mary's situation in these letters reveal also much about herself. Her honour had always represented a priority in her life as Queen, and she must have expected the same applied to Mary. On the contrary, Mary's overwhelming love for Bothwell came before any other interest (Bassnett, 1997: 110).

Formerly dethroned by the Scottish nobility in 1567, Mary was sent to the island prison of Loch Leven Castle, where her pregnancy ended in miscarriage. In 1568 she managed to escape and arrived in England, asking for her royal cousin's protection.

Even though Mary remained in England until the day of her death in 1587, she never met with Elizabeth. Certainly, from the moment of her arrival, the relationship with Elizabeth took a turn for the worse. As already noted, despite being imprisoned, she attempted to usurp the English throne in various ways.

No longer the official Queen of Scots, Mary took part in plots for becoming the Catholic ruler of England both in 1569 Northern Rebellion and in 1571 Ridolfi Plot. Thus, when they were uncovered, Elizabeth came to realise that Mary would be taken prisoner forever (Bassnett, 1997: 111). Considering that Elizabeth's life was in danger, her councillors pressurised her into acting quickly against her Scottish cousin.

Then in 1583, it was discovered that there was an international conspiracy to depose Elizabeth and replace her with Mary. Three years later, in 1586, Walsingham foiled the Babington Plot which finally proved Mary's complicity to assassinate Elizabeth. Still, the Tudor Queen was unwilling to condemn her, as her answer to the members of Parliament demonstrates:

And now though my life hath been dangerously shot at, yet I protest there is nothing hath more grieved me, than that one not differing from me in sex, of like rank or degree, of the same stock, and most nearly allied unto me in blood, hath fallen into so great a crime. [...] And even yet, though the matter be come thus far, if she would truly repent, and no man would undertake her cause against me, and if my life alone depended hereupon, and not the safety and welfare of my whole people, I would, (I protest unfeignedly) most willingly pardon her (Bassnett, 1997: 112).

It became impossible for Elizabeth to pardon Mary. Also, the Spanish possibility of an invasion was increasing. In October 1586, she wrote to Mary, again:

You have in various ways and manners attempted to take my life and to bring my kingdom to destruction by bloodshed. I have never proceeded so harshly against you, but have, on the contrary, protected and maintained you like myself. These things will be proved to you and all made manifest. Yet it is my will, that you answer the nobles and peers of the kingdom as if I were myself present. I therefore require, charge and command that you make answer for I have been well informed of your arrogance. Act plainly without reserve, and you will sooner be able to obtain favour from me (Bassnett, 1997: 113).

Mary's execution took place on 8 February 1587 at Fotheringhay Castle. She died aged 44 as a Catholic martyr, affirming her religious beliefs. Reportedly, she did not appear in good health on that day, as her body had gained weight and her hair had grown grey. When Elizabeth learnt the news, she gave vent to her rage saying she had never formally ordered the death warrant to be performed and accusing her councillors as traitors. After Mary's death she was overcome by a feeling of utter despair; her calligraphy became rather illegible in the period following her cousin's execution, a detail which was evidence of her psychological distress.

In the aftermath of Mary's death Elizabeth witnessed a series of other traumatic events: the coming of the Spanish Armada, the death of her beloved Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and the growing crisis in Ireland. Progressively, in the years that followed, she also lost other close companions (Walsingham died in 1590 and Cecil in 1598) which must have left her feeling quite alone (Bassnett, 1997: 113). In this critical moment of her life she possibly became attracted to "an image of youthfulness", especially if this was directly related to Robert Dudley (Bassnett, 1997: 114). Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, became Dudley's stepson after her mother's second marriage in 1578. In 1584 he attended court regularly and by 1587 he was said to be one of the Queen's favourites. Moreover, it was noted that Elizabeth stayed up and played cards with him all night until sunrise. Later, she appointed him master of the horse and member of the privy council.

Novels and films often present Elizabeth and Essex as two lovers: she bought the attentions of a sexy, young man with special privileges; he was more than attentive to an older woman in order to repay her favours. There may be some truth to this typical stereotype, but it is very improbable that they enjoyed sexual relations. In the beginning Elizabeth had admitted Essex into her circle to please Dudley, and soon came to enjoy his company for he was energetic and charming. On the other hand, “he was reckless, arrogant and incapable of listening to advice” (Bassnett, 1997: 114). His behaviour towards Elizabeth resembled one of a spoilt child with a “doting” mother, and she suffered his bad manners for longer than expected (Bassnett, 1997: 114). However, she must have critically examined his position. In fact, she told Bacon “Essex has written me some dutiful letters, which moved me; but after taking them to flow from the abundance of his heart, I find them but a preparative to a suit for renewing his farm of sweet wines” (Bassnett, 1997: 115).

Essex’s situation was certainly not simple. During the 1590s in Elizabeth’s circle there were other aspiring, young men who competed with each other to win the Queen’s favour, namely Sir Walter Raleigh, Francis Bacon, and Robert Cecil (son of William Cecil). Essex therefore felt a strong sense of rivalry with such courtiers who, in the meantime, also paid attention to Scotland, where James VI was patiently waiting for his turn to the English throne (Bassnett, 1997: 115).

In 1598 Elizabeth appointed Essex to conduct the military operation against the Irish revolt but he failed. He had practically ignored the Queen’s orders and, on his own initiative, had proposed a truce with the leader of the Irish rebels Hugh O’Neill, Earl of Tyrone (Bassnett, 1997: 115-116). When Elizabeth discovered this, he returned to England where, consecutively, he was put under house arrest for a period (Bassnett, 116-117). Then in February 1601, having lost the Queen’s affection forever, he plotted an abortive attack against Elizabeth and her government. He was thus beheaded that same month (Bassnett, 1997: 117).

Essex's death was presumably the last psychological trauma in Elizabeth's life. Biographers of her say she never recovered from it, dying two years later after having finally succumbed to a permanent state of depression and paranoia. She possibly spent almost all of her life trying to maintain a balance between the *woman* and *queen*, that is, between her private and public self. As has been seen, it must have proved very difficult for her, not to say nearly impossible. The intense relationship with Dudley, and then the troubled ones with the Queen of Scots and the Earl of Essex made her face a serious personal crisis, though there are those who believe that the aftereffects of Mary's execution was a strategy to diminish her responsibility in such a deed. Certainly, Elizabeth did her best at riding through the vicissitudes of life, both as a woman and as a Queen.

Chapter 2

Elizabeth the Drama Queen

2.1 The myth of a meeting between Shakespeare and Elizabeth

Hackett's book, entitled *Shakespeare and Elizabeth: The Meeting of Two Myths*, explains that, like many British people who were children during the 1960s and '70s, she grew up with the entertaining and educative Ladybird Books stories. This series included one of *Adventures from History*. In *The Story of the First Queen Elizabeth* she read that "The Queen liked Shakespeare's plays so much that he was frequently commanded to bring his company to the palace" (Hackett, 2009: 1). One of the coloured illustrations accompanying the text showed William Shakespeare reciting lines from his manuscript while Elizabeth I, only a few steps away from him, pays careful attention from her throne. In addition, her rather inclined posture towards the playwright indicates a feeling of great approval and, possibly, of attraction. Undoubtedly, it was a striking picture: "England's most celebrated ruler and most revered poet brought together in one and glorious historical moment, jointly producing the birth of England's national literature and national greatness" (Hackett, 2009: 1). Years later, however, she discovered that this scene never occurred. Shakespeare's Company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, performed at Elizabeth's court, but there is no proof of any personal meeting between the two (Hackett, 2009: 1).

When Hackett became a Renaissance scholar, then, she realised that there was a century-old tradition eager to relate closely Elizabeth to Shakespeare. Indeed, in 1709, the first biography of Shakespeare by Nicholas Rowe affirmed that "Queen *Elizabeth* had several of his Plays Acted before her, and without doubt gave him many gracious Marks of her Favour" (Hackett, 2009: 3). Rowe did not explain anything about Elizabeth's "gracious Marks" towards Shakespeare, but his description of a "warm patronage relationship" had an extensive influence for the years to come (Hackett, 2009: 3). In 1825, Richard Ryan stated that

It is well known that Queen Elizabeth was a great admirer of the immortal Shakespeare, and used frequently (as was the custom with persons of great rank in those days) to appear upon the stage before the audience, or to sit delighted behind the scenes, when the plays of our bard were performed (Hackett, 2009: 3).

He also reported that during a performance Elizabeth distracted the Bard while he was playing by dropping one of her gloves on the stage, and he gracefully lifted it continuing with his acting to delight the Queen. At this point Shakespeare and Elizabeth were imaginatively enjoying a relationship that went beyond mutual appreciation. In the twentieth century, E. Brandram Jones's 1916 novel *In Burleigh's Days* portrayed Elizabeth seeing *Romeo and Juliet* at court, and having a face-to-face meeting with Shakespeare after the performance: "The player had interested her; his refined, handsome, and poetic face appealed to her as a woman, as much as the sonnets had appealed to her mind" (Hackett, 2009: 3). Under those circumstances, Elizabeth and Shakespeare together came to represent one of the most deep-rooted and enduring English cultural myths (Hackett, 2009: 3).

Yet, when Britain lost some of its status as a world superpower country, correspondingly, such mythical pairing lost part of its allure. Therefore, the 1709, 1825, and 1916 scenes might be interpreted as products of British imperialism, and the Ladybird one as nostalgic memory of that political doctrine. For this reason, *The Story of the First Queen Elizabeth* might be considered as a "simplified" adaptation of history for children who would discover the precise historical details in the future. In fact, just as many British children were reading the Ladybird book of Elizabeth I, in the late 1960s some Shakespeare scholars were rejecting the legendary couple, distancing the poet and playwright from his Queen so as to profess his "populist" and "protosocialist" attitudes (Hackett, 2009: 4). Expressions like "Shakespeare, the man of the people" and "Shakespeare our contemporary" became popular, whereas descriptions of him as the "Queen's poet" or "literary lackey" were regarded as traditionalistic and old-fashioned

(Hackett, 2009: 4). During the twentieth century the myths of the past were once again reshaped by the modernist, poststructuralist and postmodernist movements. In 1998 *Shakespeare in Love* was released, and crowds gathered outside the cinemas to watch this film (defined by the critics as postmodern costume drama) which was “widely acclaimed for its irreverent, ironic, and self-conscious treatment of the Bard” (Hackett, 2009: 4). Audiences perceived history and its personalities differently by this time, that is in a skeptical and playful way. Indeed, in a scene of the film a Judi Dench’s oscar-winning Elizabeth complimented Shakespeare on *Romeo and Juliet* and invited him to visit her at Greenwich to “speak some more”. Consequently, this late 1990s film captured a moment that could have actually belonged to 1790s or 1890s works too.

The fictional encounter between Shakespeare and Elizabeth has been so taken for granted in its frequent recurrence that it has come to be part of the collective imagination. The myth of their meeting commenced in England, then spread to Great Britain, and finally arrived in America where it was readily adapted (Hackett, 2009: 4). Now, because of the dominion of the American culture, it is America’s business plans on the couple of Shakespeare and Elizabeth that has provided its continuity (Hackett, 2009: 4-5). *Shakespeare in Love* had a lot in common with British costume dramas and had a cast of several British actors, though there were also Hollywood celebrities in it and the film was financed by the American Miramax. Its characteristic British style was cleverly studied in order to prove successful in America. As a result, the film achieved an enormous success breaking the records at the U.S. box offices and winning a number of Academy Awards that year.

It is probably because there is no record of any face-to-face meeting between Shakespeare and Elizabeth that writers have always wanted this meeting to happen. As a “missing scene” in history, it has provided a creative inspiration for novels, paintings and films. It has also brought a touch of originality in the works of many biographers and critics, blurring the lines

between scholarship and fiction. Another remarkable characteristic of their legendary pairing is the various ways in which their relationship has been imagined. For example, it has been claimed that they had a love affair, or that Elizabeth was Shakespeare's secret mother, or that she was the real author of his works (Hackett, 2009: 5). On the other side, they have been represented as rivals, with Elizabeth acting tyrannically and Shakespeare fiercely criticising her actions. Paradoxically, those writers who have implied that Elizabeth was Shakespeare's secret mother, have been the same who have also proposed a strong antagonism between them (Hackett, 2009: 6).

The genres of historical novels and films have been labelled as "popular culture" and consequently considered unworthy of value or special attention (Hackett, 2009: 7). Similarly, literary theories connecting Shakespeare with Elizabeth have been (sometimes justifiably) refuted because "unscholarly" (Hackett, 2009: 7). Yet, it is not appropriate to ignore the cultural background against which these materials and concepts have developed. The ideas coming from these genres may often sound "bizarre" or "ludicrous", but they define the age that originated them (Hackett, 2009: 7). Some biographers and scholars of Shakespeare have supported assertions about the poet and playwright being in contact with Elizabeth which have been still (partly) commonly accepted because they derive from very deep-seated beliefs.

In 1876, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche maintained that historicity was illusory:

[The past] is always in danger of being a little altered and touched up and brought nearer to fiction. Sometimes there is no possible distinction between a "monumental" past and a mythical romance [...]. For the things of the past are never viewed in their true perspective or receive their just value; but value and perspective change with the individual or the nation that is looking back on its past (Hackett, 2009: 7).

Accordingly, historical truth is a matter of opinion which can change into fiction too. Thus, “Works of history, biography, or textual scholarship may aspire to objectivity but cannot avoid selective emphases, omissions, and interpretations which reflect the concerns and interests of their authors and readerships” (Hackett, 2009: 7). Works of fiction, drama, paintings, and films become adaptations which inevitably reshape the understanding of the historical records. All these genres with their different contributions to history create a “metahistory”, that is a “history of ideology” (Hackett, 2009: 7). Invented encounters between Shakespeare and Elizabeth appear interesting as they reveal the readers or viewers the times and places that they belonged to. They also unveil the illusions which they fostered and the ideologies adopted to create versions of a mythical past. Because of this, the myth of a meeting between Shakespeare and Elizabeth has been an important part of the British cultural heritage for a long time now (Hackett, 2009: 7).

Examining Shakespeare and Elizabeth’s meeting from a historical perspective, it is reasonable to assume that the most realistic chance of any communication between the two would have been during one of Shakespeare’s visits at court for his plays. In fact, Shakespeare worked as a resident playwright for the Lord Chamberlain’s Men from 1594 until the end of his career. The first time he related to the playing company was at Christmas of that same year for a play at court which he was paid for on behalf of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men. In 1594, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men and the Lord Admiral’s Men largely dominated London commercial theatrical performances from their respective playhouses. The Lord Chamberlain and the Lord Admiral were both members of the privy council, but the former officially managed the court entertainments and therefore his company was more well-established at the palace(s). Moreover, until 1596 the patron of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men was Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, who was the Queen’s cousin as well as one of her most favourite courtiers. In 1597,

his son George Carey became Lord Chamberlain. Elizabeth preferred not to sponsor the Lord Chamberlain's Men openly, but they effectively became the official playing company at her court. They had the special privilege of performing in front of the Queen: "record can be found of thirty-three performances by them at court between their inception in 1594 and Elizabeth's death in 1603, compared with twenty by the Admiral's Men, and many fewer by other, less flourishing companies" (Hackett, 2009: 8). However, it was only when James I succeeded Elizabeth that they became the official royal players, named the King's Men. Nevertheless, their condition remained essentially a poor one as being an actor was seen as a very low-status occupation in those times.

The playing companies often found themselves struggling with the local authorities who were Puritan, as they believed plays to influence the playgoers in an immoral way. In these struggles the players laid claim to their right to practice their profession for commercial purposes so as to be prepared for entertaining the court when needed. Precisely, the players were called by the Queen for special events like the arrival of a foreign ambassador, holidays, and festivities (Hackett, 2009: 8). Plays were performed in "the old Banqueting House at Whitehall, or in the Great Halls of Hampton Court, Greenwich, Richmond, or Windsor, and took place after supper, between around 10 PM and 1 AM" (Hackett, 2009: 9). The Queen watched the performances from a "state" or throne which was placed opposite the stage but visible to all of the audience in order to include her in the spectacle itself (Hackett, 2009: 9). According to the evidence, she seemed to enjoy dramas greatly and continued to see them almost until the end of her life.

Even though there were plays which had been written specifically for royal performances, the ones enacted by the playing companies at court were generally those which had achieved greater success at the public playhouses. It is not possible to give a precise account of the number of Shakespeare's plays Elizabeth attended. There are more detailed records for the

reign of James I, when an account book recorded payments for some plays by “Shaxberd”. Performances of Shakespeare’s plays at court are not registered until 1603, but the Queen is likely to have seen many of his pieces written for the Lord Chamberlain’s Men.

Possibly, on one of such occasions Shakespeare might have been introduced to the Queen as the author (though this usually rarely happened). Or, it is probable that the Queen might have seen some of Shakespeare’s performances as an actor (Hackett, 2009: 9), given that he was in the First Folio list of “The Names of the Principall Actors in all these Playes” (Hackett, 2009: 10). It seems that he interpreted the role of Adam in *As You Like It* and the Ghost in *Hamlet*; and he played in Ben Jonson’s *Every Man in his Humour* (1598) and *Sejanus* (1603-4). However, even if he had had the realistic chance of encountering the Queen as actor or author, it would have been exclusively for a “brief” and “formal” talk (Hackett, 2009: 10).

Beyond the pure fantasies of many myth-makers about Elizabeth going to see one of Shakespeare’s plays at the Globe, it is extremely unlikely that the Queen ever attended performance in a public playhouse. Such a significant event would certainly have been chronicled, but there is no documentation relating to it.

There exists only a letter dated 29 December 1601 which might prove that Elizabeth visited a playhouse. It was addressed by the courtier Dudley Carleton to John Chamberlain, and it explains that

The Queen dined to-day privately at my Lord Chamberlain’s. I have just come from the Blackfriars, where I saw her at the play with all her *candidae auditrices* [fair attendants]. Mrs Nevill, who played her prizes, and bore the bell away in the Prince de Amour’s revels, is sworn maid of honour; Sir Robt. Sydney is in chase to make her foreswear both maid and honour (Hackett, 2009: 10).

It is possible that the above-mentioned “Blackfriars” might actually refer to the Blackfriars Theatre: a “private” indoor playhouse where, in order to select the audience, the catering

service was more expensive than in the open-air playhouses (Hackett, 2009: 10). This letter suggests that Elizabeth was going to see a play in a rather different theatre from the Globe and the other ones close to it, and for which Shakespeare mainly worked. At the same time, “Blackfriars” might not refer to the playhouse but to the Blackfriars area as the Lord Chamberlain’s house was located there. Accordingly, Elizabeth attended a private performance hosted at Lord Chamberlain’s place after dinner, and the playing company might have been The Lord Chamberlain’s Men. The play might have been enacted by Elizabeth’s ladies-in-waiting due to the reference in the following line to Mrs Nevill who “bore the bell away in the Prince de Amour’s revels”; or the “play” referred to in the letter might have regarded simply “gambling” (Hackett, 2009: 11). As a result, Carleton’s letter is an ambiguous and inconclusive document as it can be interpreted in different ways.

Certainly, it would have been easier for Shakespeare to recognise Elizabeth rather than vice versa. At those times London was not a big city yet, having a population of 200.000, and it was fairly common for the subjects to see their Queen. Each year hundreds of people used to greet her at the departure and arrival from her summer progresses. Given that the royal barge was situated close to the playhouses, it is highly probable that Shakespeare would have seen Elizabeth traveling for business or recreation along the Thames. In addition, in 1596 he was appointed holder of a family crest and therefore was allowed to attend Sunday ceremonies at the Queen’s palaces. In these and similar circumstances Elizabeth made appearances in public, and Shakespeare might have been amongst the audience. Yet, any close encounter between them would have taken place with difficulty on such events.

There were occasions in Shakespeare’s early life when Elizabeth came close to the city in which he lived, named Stratford-upon-Avon, for her summer progresses (Hackett, 2009: 11). She went to Charlecote Park in 1570; then she stayed in Warwick in 1574; and she stopped at Kenilworth Castle in 1575 (Hackett, 2009: 11-12). Again, if ever Shakespeare with his family

had managed to see the Queen in one of such places, it would have been exclusively from a considerable distance.

As can be seen, the historical evidence for a face-to-face meeting between Shakespeare and Elizabeth remains fundamentally weak and ambiguous. There have also been scholars who argued that the *Twelfth Night* was specifically written for being performed at court, and that some epilogues to Shakespeare's plays, for instance the one to *Henry IV* part 2, might be the speeches he personally made and delivered to the Queen herself (Hackett, 2009: 12). Consequently, it is not difficult to understand why the debate is still open.

From a literary point of view, many critics have resorted to Shakespeare's works to give proof of his feelings for Elizabeth. The evidence supports that there are number of direct allusions to her in his oeuvre (Hackett, 2009: 12). These are contained in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* where "Oberon explains to Puck the provenance of the love charm, as a reference to Elizabeth I" (2.1.148-64) (Hackett, 2009: 1); in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* where there is the definition of her as "owner of Windsor Castle" (5.5.57); in *Henry V* where she is defined as "our gracious Empress" (5.0.30); and in Sonnet 107 as "mortal moon" (Hackett, 2009: 12). In reality, Shakespeare's references to Elizabeth in some of his plays and poems are comparatively small in a period when many writers were celebrating her as "Gloriana, Cynthia, Diana, Astraea, and so on" (Hackett, 2009: 12). Yet, there are other passages in Shakespeare's materials which some critics have considered more or less directly related to the Queen. According to them, Gertrude, or Cleopatra, or even the heroines in the cross-dressing comedies might have several characteristics in common with Elizabeth (Hackett, 2009: 12).

Overall, critics have found themselves in wide disagreement on Shakespeare's writings about his "attitude" towards the Queen (Hackett, 2009: 12-13). Some have provided evidence that

Shakespeare was fond of Elizabeth; others have argued the opposite. The case of *Richard II* is an example of this: since mid-nineteenth century the subject of the debate has been “whether it was the play performed to entertain the conspirators on the eve of the Essex Rebellion in 1601 and whether Shakespeare was involved in this apparently seditious performance” (Hackett, 2009: 13). Furthermore, in the scene of *Henry VIII*, written together with John Fletcher in 1612-13, when the christening of the baby Princess Elizabeth is taking place, Archbishop Cranmer (her godfather) “is seized by prophetic inspiration and eloquently sets forth a vision of the peace and plenty that will be brought up by her rule” (5.4.14-62) (Hackett, 2009: 13). Also in this case, there have been scholars who affirmed that this was a postponed tribute to Elizabeth’s reign which Shakespeare had previously not written; and others who have underlined the ambivalent style of the speech. To clarify this point, most of the scholars agree on the fact that this scene of the play was written by John Fletcher. As for the historical records, the evidence regarding the pairing of Shakespeare and Elizabeth coming from the poet and playwright’s works are rather vague and fragmented. Moreover, any belief about Shakespeare’s association with Elizabeth tends to be considered as formed by a particular cultural and historical background (Hackett, 2009: 13).

Nowadays Shakespeare and Elizabeth are certainly two icons with their own flair for leadership, but they have been equally powerful (perhaps even more) when together. Shakespeare’s celebrity from the eighteenth century onwards partly derived from the idea that he was the poet and playwright par excellence at the court of “Good Queen Bess”, the formidable protector of her kingdom (Hackett, 2009: 14). At the same time, the fame after Elizabeth’s death celebrating her as one of the most distinguished female monarchs partly derived from the idea that she discovered and nurtured the brilliance of Shakespeare. Their relationship has contributed to create an ideal (Elizabethan) golden age which the following

eras have remembered with a feeling of nostalgia and have employed to keep alive their national myths.

The story of Shakespeare and Elizabeth is a charming one for a panoply of reasons. Firstly, it has attracted the interest of the generations to come for the simple motive that they were two people of the opposite sex. Starting from the 1980s, with the new historicism, some literary critics have tried to understand better the relationship between Shakespeare and James I once the Lord Chamberlain's Men became the King's Men, and in which ways this might have influenced the relationship between power and drama. In general, however, criticism has been much more interested in uncovering Shakespeare's references to Elizabeth in his oeuvre than any meeting between James I and the poet and playwright, despite the fact that James was King during almost half of Shakespeare's career. An invented face-to-face meeting between Shakespeare and Elizabeth, in light of the fact that they have both been well known to be brilliant speakers, increases the chance for stimulating and potentially seductive conversations. Elizabeth was nearly 30 years older than Shakespeare, but, because of her reputation for having had various special favourites, this has not prevented creative writers from representing her as a coquettish woman flirting with a younger man. It must be remembered that her last favourite courtier, Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, was only a year younger than Shakespeare. Elizabeth's supposed liaison with Essex was fictionalised in scabrous "secret histories" in the late seventeenth century, and this version has continued in a dual biography by Lytton Strachey entitled *Elizabeth and Essex* (1928) and into more modern historical fiction and films about Elizabeth's life. Many adaptations of Shakespeare's relation with Elizabeth put him in the same position as Essex: "a witty and attractive young sparring partner who enflames the interest of the mature but passionate Queen" (Hackett, 2009: 15). Nonetheless, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, their meetings were completely cleared of any sexual implication. Passion was exclusively implicit or expressed in

appropriate ways. Indeed, depicting Shakespeare and Elizabeth keeping their relationship immaculate was basically a strategy for conventionalising their sexuality, which in both cases challenged the bourgeois moral standards of the time. Shakespeare's unlucky love life consisted of a wedding to an older woman because she was pregnant, gossip about being a womaniser, and a number of sonnets addressed to "a fair young man" and "a promiscuous dark lady" (Hackett, 2009: 15-16). Elizabeth as a virgin Queen went against the tide of the Protestant middle-class ideal of marriage, and was subject to malicious rumours concerning her relations with favoured courtiers or her "freakish hermaphroditism" (Hackett, 2009: 16). For example, Ben Jonson insinuated that "she had a membrana on her, which made her incapable of man, though for her delight she tried many" (Hackett, 2009: 16). Additionally, after Elizabeth had died, Robert Cecil told that "she was more than a man, and in troth, sometimes less than a woman" (Hackett, 2009: 16).

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, however, there has been a new wave of interest in the distinctive characteristics which both Shakespeare and Elizabeth have — especially, the "homoerotic" allusions in some of his writings, and her feminine power in a male-dominated world (Hackett, 2009: 16). Contemporary works of fiction have resolved Shakespeare's and Elizabeth's ambiguities by representing them in a sexual affair including other partners too. Thus, they can be seen as "subversive" as well as "normative" personalities (Hackett, 2009: 16).

The eroticism of the invented meeting between Shakespeare and Elizabeth is enhanced by the breaking of the boundaries between female monarch and common man. Shakespeare's humble origins have contributed to foster the belief that he was a very ordinary man, though artistically gifted (Hackett, 2009: 16). Conversely, part of Elizabeth's fascination lies in her royal status at the top of the kingdom (Hackett, 2009: 16-17). However, their respective lives have been marked by social mobility. From Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare succeeded in

enacting his plays at court and after his death he was universally acclaimed as a literary genius. Elizabeth was exposed to danger for most of her youth as she was considered a bastard by her father and imprisoned in the Tower by her half-sister. This entitled her to protest for her right as possible future queen and, at the same time, made her capable of gaining the affection of the realm. Therefore Shakespeare and Elizabeth, each in their own way, embodied values proper to democracy and consequently proper to England, Great Britain, and America too. Not by chance, in *Shakespeare in Love* and other previous fiction Elizabeth goes to see a Shakespeare play at a public playhouse.

Also the Elizabethans loved to invent stories in which kings and queens met with their subjects. For example, a number of their history plays and ballads narrated stories about “Richard Lionhearted in disguise feasting on venison with Robin Hood and his merry men, then pardoning them, thus foxing the wicked Sheriff of Nottingham, or Henry II rewarding a miller for his rustic hospitality by knighting him” (Hackett, 2009: 17). The enjoyment deriving from such stories was that if monarch and commoner began a relationship without the interference of any member of the nobility, they would develop a feeling of mutual empathy. As a result, invented encounters between Shakespeare and Elizabeth revive this magical disappearance of social boundaries (Hackett, 2009: 17).

The building of nationhood played then another important role in the evolving myth of Shakespeare and Elizabeth (Hackett, 2009: 17-18). Such procedure has been purposefully based on a romanticised and sometimes even invented versions of the past — as Ernest Renan stated in 1882, “getting its history wrong is part of being a nation” (Hackett, 2009: 18). Accordingly, Great Britain and other Anglophone countries have altered the historical fact with encounters or affinities between Shakespeare and Elizabeth in order to create their national identity. The Act of Union was introduced in 1707, uniting the kingdoms of Scotland, England and Wales into Great Britain governed from London, the notion of “Englishness”

was most of the times replaced with the notion of “Britishness”, and the ideology carried by the mythical couple of Shakespeare and Elizabeth was adopted as a symbol of the British identity of not only the United Kingdom, but also the British Empire (Hackett, 2009: 18).

The historian Adrian Hastings explains that in the formation of nation “by far the most important and widely present factor is that of an extensively used vernacular literature”. In other words, nationhood is “normally identified by a literature of his own” (Hackett, 2009: 18). From this point of view, therefore, Shakespeare’s writings have been instrumental in the development of the national identity to England, Great Britain, and the other Anglophone countries as well. During the nineteenth century, Shakespeare increased in importance in America as some English speaking intellectuals fought for a “unified national identity” instead of the linguistic variety imported by immigrants (Hackett, 2009: 18). The myth of Shakespeare and Elizabeth proved adequate for the history of America. After all, the epoch of Shakespeare and Elizabeth was one of discovery in which the extensive overseas explorations made by the explorers and the colonisers to find new worlds also included America (Hackett, 2009: 18-19). In 1914, Charles William Wallace presented this “view of history” in one of his lectures: “England in the days of Queen Bess was only young America in the buoyant heedlessness and lawlessness of childhood in chasing over all obstacles after the purse at the end of the rainbow”. He continued by saying that men travelled to the West for new economic and personal advantages, and “into this age and of it were Shakespeare and America born” (Hackett, 2009: 19). From this perspective, thus, Elizabeth was the mother of Shakespeare and the American nation; or, to use the metaphor in a subtly different manner, “Shakespeare and Elizabeth were the proud parents of the American Dream” (Hackett, 2009: 19).

Shakespeare’s legendary encounter with Elizabeth may be put on the same level as another famous face-to-face meeting from the Tutor era, the one between Elizabeth and her cousin

Mary, Queen of Scots. As will be discussed in chapter 3, also this event, even though often represented in the works by writers and artists, in fact never occurred. It is a fictitious scene that may provide readers or viewers with satisfaction in confirming what they might have expected to happen. Similarly, the fabricated encounters between Shakespeare and Elizabeth may be conceived as a “wish-fulfilling fantasy” and as indicative of the culture that generated them (Hackett, 2009: 19). The meeting between Elizabeth and Mary of Scots has captured the attention of countless adaptations because their clash of personalities: in short, “[...] androgyny versus femininity [...] head, versus heart” (Hackett, 2009: 19). The couple of Shakespeare and Elizabeth may diverge from that as they either complete each other or are in a situation of conflict. They can personify: “masculinity and femininity; a man who loves men and woman with male qualities; [...] a writer who understands human nature and a ruler who understands her people” (Hackett, 2009: 19). Furthermore, they have also been depicted as enemies (Shakespeare, 2009: 19). For instance, Shakespeare criticism has recently described Shakespeare as a Catholic believer or “sympathizer” when Elizabeth was fighting for Protestantism (Hackett, 2009: 19-20).

To conclude, it is possible to state that the myth of a meeting between Shakespeare and Elizabeth has changed in relation to the eras and consequently to the necessities of the different cultures (Hackett, 2009: 20). According to the evidence it is hard to believe that Shakespeare and Elizabeth ever met in their lifetime; and if this happened it would have been only on a formal occasion. What is certain is that they will encounter each other in new adaptations, as they have always done.

2.2 Gender roles in English early modern theatre and society

As is well known, in Shakespeare’s time (1564-1616) female roles were played exclusively by boys or men. The Shakespeare’s Globe website reports that in other parts of Europe there

were women practising the profession of acting, but in England they were not permitted to appear on the stage of public playhouses until 1660 — a tradition which dates back to the Greeks who considered women playing as “too dangerous” (Gewertz, 2003). In contemporary dramatic productions boys would portray the female characters like Desdemona in *Othello* or Ophelia in *Hamlet*, and sporadically men would portray the older ones. In “ ‘Do you not know I am a woman?’: The Legacy of the First Female Desdemona, 1660”, Hannah Manktelow explains that the actors of these playing companies had “special training” so as to play the opposite-sex parts better (2016: 82). In those days, differently from today, it was not particularly important that the players physically resembled the character they portrayed. Yet, those performing female roles needed to distinguish themselves by some feminine characteristics when acting, in particular by their tone of voice. Indeed, boy actors (generally between 13 and 21 years of age) stopped acting women on stage once they became “unable to reach higher vocal registers”, and if they did not succeed in male parts with equal merit they had to abandon the profession (Manktelow, 2016: 82).

Even though in the twenty-first century it might be hard for the audiences to imagine a teenage boy playing an adult female character in a plausible way, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries spectators were “untroubled” by this kind of stage convention (Manktelow, 2016: 82). Shakespeare himself did not hesitate about creating remarkably powerful and seductive female figures specifically designed for boys players to perform — for instance, the characters of Cleopatra, Gertrude or Lady Macbeth. A letter written by a playgoer in 1610 provides evidence that the all-male performances of Shakespeare’s plays proved successful amongst the audience. The writer of the letter expresses his opinion about seeing *Othello*, enacted by the King’s Men:

They also had their tragedies, well and effectively acted. In these they drew tears not only by their speech, but also by their action. Indeed Desdemona, killed by her husband, in death moved

us especially when, as she lay in her bed, her face alone implored the pity of the audience (Manktelow, 2016: 82).

Despite the fact that he certainly knew Desdemona to be in reality a man, his compassion for Desdemona's death testifies that "the sex of the actor was no barrier to an effective, and emotionally moving, performance" (Manktelow, 2016: 82). To demonstrate this, it is worth mentioning that the practice of boy actors taking the part of women on stage remained popular even for a period after the coming of professional actresses. As already mentioned, women were excluded from the English public stage until 1660 but, ironically, before this date actresses and singers from other parts of Europe travelled to England to perform privately at the houses of the English aristocracy. Concurrently, there were women from every social order participating in different kinds of performance. At the Stuart court, for example, noblewomen used to join the masques. These were short allegorical representations performed by players wearing masks, having both an entertaining function and a didactic one related "to reinforce the social hierarchy" (Manktelow, 2016: 83). Professional actors entered the scene playing the role of the evil characters before the Queen and her ladies-in-waiting as monarch and goddesses respectively, arrived to impose order on chaos.

However, participating in non-professional shows was not an exclusively prerogative of the women belonging to the aristocracy. Dance, music and drama were amongst the favourite "pastimes" of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English people in general. There existed "parish performance[s]" in which both men and women were involved in the spectacle (Manktelow, 2016: 83) and others in which women living on the margins of society interpreted different roles: "as circus acts; as mountebanks or peddlers, selling various entertainments to lure in punters for their dubious 'medicines'; and even [...] as a kind of dancing-and-fighting human spectacle in the Southwark Bear Garden" (Manktelow, 2016: 85).

Women from the lowest social strata sometimes appeared at the public playhouses too. For instance Mary Frith, also known as ‘Moll Cutpurse’, who was a drunkard and a thief usually playing the lute along the streets of London dressed as a man. Frith’s vicissitudes were inspiring for a number of stories, including Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker’s play *The Roaring Girl, or, Moll Cutpurse*. In April 1611, Frith made her debut on the stage of the Fortune Theatre “in mans apparell & in her boots & with a sword by her side” and gave her performance. As a consequence of this, in January 1612 she was put in prison for “indecenty” by the local authorities (Manktelow, 2016: 85).

Besides being an actress, also crossdressing (that is wearing clothes made for the opposite sex) was a prohibited social practice during the English Renaissance. As Jean E. Howard argues such prohibition was symptomatic of

a sex-gender system under pressure and that crossdressing, as fact and as idea, threatened a normative social order based upon principles of hierarchy and subordination, of which women’s subordination to man was a chief instance, trumpeted from pulpit, instantiated in law, and acted upon by monarch and commoner alike (1988: 418).

Nonetheless, manifestations of this potentially “subversive” or transgressive” practice were deployed in various ways by the society, and amongst these ways “the theatre [...] played a highly contradictory role” in giving expression to the struggles between social classes and between gender roles (Howard, 1988: 418). For this reason, the topic of crossdressing in the Renaissance theatre has become a basis for the discussion about the contemporary sex-gender system and about the transgressions in the hierarchical system. Supporting materialist feminism¹, Howard suggests that

¹ “Materialist or social feminism [...] assumes that gender differences are culturally constructed and historically specific, rather than innate, and that the hierarchical gender systems based on these differences can therefore be changed” (Howard, 1988: 419-420).

contradictions within the social formation enabled opposition to and modification of certain forms of patriarchal domination, and that struggle, resistance, and subversive masquerade are terms as important as recuperation and containment in analyzing Renaissance gender relations and female crossdressing in particular (1988: 419).

During the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras crossdressing, especially female one, was a controversial issue (Howard, 1988: 420). In 1620 two polemical tracts were published, namely *Hic Mulier* and *Haec-Vir*. The former was in favour of crossdressing, while the latter unfavourable. Both of them, however, state that crossdressing had become an *à la mode* social practice amongst the wives of prominent London merchants who were consequently blamed for breaking with conventions of social class and gender roles. In the earlier reign of Elizabeth, tracts against the theatre had attacked not only boy actors who crossdressed, but also lower-class women who wore men's clothing. These latter were regularly referred to by social commentators as "trulls" which means prostitutes. It may therefore be assumed that while middle-class women of the Jacobean era dressed mannishly to look fashionable as well as rich and independent, those of a low class position did it driven by a "sense of vulnerability", and possibly because of this they were involved in prostitution (Howard: 1988: 420-421).

The fact that women coming from different levels of society crossdressed in Renaissance England was interpreted as a transgression of the "providentially determined" and "immutable" hierarchical social order to which a person belonged given that clothes were "precise indicators of status and degree" (Howard, 1988: 421). Although social mobility was by then a common phenomenon in London, contemporary social ideologies rejected any modification within the social order and, precisely for this reason, "Dress, as a highly regulated semiotic system, became a primary site where a struggle over the mutability of [such] order was conducted" (Howard, 1988: 422).

The basic point is that “Renaissance needed the idea of two genders, one subordinate to the other, to provide a key element in its hierarchical view of the social order [...]” (Howard, 1988: 423). In his *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, Stephen Greenblatt specifies that as during the Renaissance gender differences were not as fixed as they would have been in later centuries, it was necessary that they were “produced” and “secured” within other contexts. Indeed, women’s subordination could be explained by their “lack of masculine perfection (softer, weaker, less hot)”, regardless of the fact they were not always conceived as “anatomically different from man in an essential way” (Howard, 1988: 423).

It is important to realise that crossdressing was differently interpreted depending on gender (Howard, 1988: 423). Men adopting women’s clothes were said to weaken their position of superiority over women, and as result they were regarded as “out of place” and “monstrous” (Howard, 1988: 424). On the other hand, women who crossdressed were seen as “whores” in view of the fact the contemporary society considered them to be inferior and loose, and thus needed to be ruled, not to say punished, by men. Women had to stay “silent”, “chaste”, and never leave their house in order to be respectable. Accordingly when these dressed in men’s clothing, they became potentially “masterless”, creating chaos in the traditional (and patriarchal) organisation of the society (Howard, 1988: 424).

Correspondingly, numerous crossdressing plays reflect the above-mentioned preoccupations with menaces to the existing sex-gender system. They enact, albeit differently, the fear about “women on top”, women who are to some extent living life on their own terms and are undermining the authority of men. It must also be remembered that the dramas in which “real” women perform the role of men on stage do not necessarily represent a significant threat to the gender relations of the time (Howard, 1988: 439). Female crossdressing on stage can in fact underline gender differences by showing the limited freedom of the woman “in

disguise”, or by showing the attitudes required to form a proper female subjectivity — that is to say, acknowledging women’s subordinate position in society. For the period’s social order the crossdressed heroine did not create a problem if the core of her female subjectivity was “untouched” (Howard, 1988: 432). In other words, if she did not challenge male dominance by claiming female rights. Even if some plays showed women perfectly able to play the man’s part, they generally ended with the heroine reverting to her normal gender and, it is assumed, abandoning male ways of thinking and behaving.

However, “the very fact that women went to the theatre to see them attests to the contradictions surrounding this social institution” (Howard, 1988: 439). Andrew Gurr in *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London* affirms that there is evidence of women going to the public theatres from 1577 to 1643, and that most of them were apparently citizen’s wives (1987: 60). They left their domestic commitments paying money for the pleasure of seeing a play and, possibly, in order to be noticed by the male audience (Howard, 1988: 439). Exactly where they were not supposed to be, paradoxically, women playgoers were not only countering criticism against crossdressing, but also rebelling against class and sex-gender system.

2.3 Elizabeth as King and Queen: the question of gender in *Elizabeth Rex* (2000) and *Shakespeare in Love: The Play* (2014)

Before analysing Elizabeth’s “androgynous” role in the above plays, it is worth providing a preamble on the combination of personal circumstances which may have contributed to the historical Elizabeth adopting male patterns of behaviour throughout her life and reign.

Setting the social reasons aside according to which Elizabeth found herself to reign in a world of men, it is well known that she was affected by a number of traumatic events from early childhood. In “Elizabeth I: A Psychological Profile”, Larissa J. Taylor-Smith believes that

Elizabeth's sexual ambiguity resulted from her own psychological development. For this reason, Taylor-Smithers assumes that the application of psychoanalytic theory to Elizabeth's life may provide an explanation to her enigmatic personality, at least for the standards of her time, and it can be summarised as follows.

From the moment Anne Boleyn was pregnant, the sex of the child she carried was of paramount importance, and "doctors, wizards, and soothsayers all heralded the birth of a male heir" (Taylor-Smithers, 1984: 49). In fact, there have been those who spoke of Elizabeth as "[...] the most unwelcome royal daughter [...] in English history" (Taylor-Smithers, 1984: 49). However, "documentation for the two earliest phases of Elizabeth's infantile development, the oral and the anal phases, is unfortunately sparse" (Taylor-Smithers, 1984: 49). In the opinion of Erikson, "the basic developmental task of the oral phase (0-2 years), the formation of trust, is facilitated by the steady availability of food and nurturance" (Taylor-Smithers, 1984: 50). Similarly, pieces of evidence relating to the anal phase (2-3 years) and the resulting "foundation for future autonomy" are missing (Taylor-Smithers, 1984: 50). Nevertheless, the fact that Elizabeth became an independent, devout woman and one who was faithful to her circle testifies the serenity of her first two years.

When she was nearly 3 years old Elizabeth's happy childhood drew to a close. Approaching the beginning of the phallic stage (3-6 years), her father ordered the execution of her mother, guilty of having committed adultery with five men (Taylor-Smithers, 1984: 50-51). Elizabeth could not comprehend the seriousness of the situation, but she undoubtedly realised that her mother disappeared, facing the consequences related to this tragic event. During Elizabeth's childhood and adolescence it would not have been easy for her to come to terms with the loss of her mother as "Anne Boleyn's name could not even be mentioned without provoking a fearsome reaction from Henry VIII" (Taylor-Smithers, 1984: 51). The Oedipus complex suggests that

Hostility toward her mother, who is seen as responsible for her castration, leads the [female] child to desire her father and adopt flirtatious behaviors toward him, thus setting the tone for later femininity. The desire for a penis is eventually replaced by the wish to bear the father's child. In the "normal" Oedipal resolution the cathexis of the father is not abandoned, but is de-eroticized, during latency; the female child accepts her symbolic castration and identifies herself with her mother, thereby preparing herself for adult roles, including childbearing (Taylor-Smith, 1984: 51).

Thus, for Elizabeth the Oedipal mechanism happened in the most dramatic way. When Elizabeth felt antagonism towards her mother and had sexual feelings for her father, her mother was killed on her father's order. The fulfilment of such "repressed" wish, that is in this case to kill the mother and marry the father, engenders terrible guilt on a psychological level (Taylor-Smith, 1984: 51). In this there is a point of similarity between Elizabeth and Hamlet. Indeed, according to what maintains Ernest Jones in "A Psycho-analytic study of *Hamlet*", his father's death and his mother's second marriage to Claudius instigate "old conflicts in Hamlet's mind" (1922: 268). Therefore, Hamlet identifies with his uncle, Claudius, who actually killed his father and married his mother — somewhat satisfying an incestuous fantasy.

In addition to this, there were other events which undermined Elizabeth's "mental well-being" throughout the course of her childhood (Taylor-Smith, 1984: 51). The act designating her heir to the throne was amended by Parliament in 1536 and she was declared a bastard together with her half-sister Mary. The duke of Richmond (who was, amongst others, the illegitimate son of Henry VIII) became the first in line of succession and, consequently, Elizabeth's standard of living changed for the worse (Taylor-Smith, 1984: 51).

Elizabeth's feelings of rejection were completed once the marriage between her father and Jane Seymour was celebrated. Henry VIII's third wife gave birth to the long-awaited male child, and "the child that Elizabeth would theoretically have wished for" (Taylor-Smith,

1984: 52). Jane Seymour died less than two weeks after Edward's birth, and Elizabeth's father, despite having grieved over her death, almost immediately restarted his search for another queen consort. In any case, from the moment Edward was born, there were further negative consequences for Elizabeth as the new baby was now the centre of attention of her father and her ladies-in waiting. To put it simply, from the age of four she understood that "maleness was what counted" (Taylor-Smith, 1984: 52). Moreover, the fact that Elizabeth was left at this age with no female role model caused a partial assimilation of feminine characteristics and an easier identification with masculinity, that is with her father (Taylor-Smith, 1984: 53). Elizabeth's tendency towards masculine identification could have been somehow resolved, but her sexual identity was influenced by subsequent traumas. Indeed, even though during the latency phase (6 years-puberty) "sexual interests become dormant", Elizabeth witnessed the marriages between her father and three other women, amongst whom was Katherine Howard (Anne Boleyn's cousin) who suffered the same fate as her mother (Taylor-Smith, 1984: 54). Furthermore, the death of her father at the onset of the genital stage (adolescence) brought new sorrow to Elizabeth's life. To clarify, if the Oedipal complex has not been resolved, as in Elizabeth's case, "[...] the old familiar incestuous objects are taken up again and freshly cathected with libido" (Taylor-Smith, 1984: 55). At this point, however, "Elizabeth's maturation required that she make an attempt to come to terms with her developing sexuality by filling that void" (Taylor-Smith, 1984: 56). In fact when the 38-year-old Thomas Seymour proposed to Elizabeth, she declined but seemed very pleased at his proposal (Taylor-Smith, 1984: 56). As previously mentioned in this dissertation, Seymour eventually married Katherine Parr (Henry VIII's sixth and last wife) and Elizabeth, after her father's death, went to live with them until she was forced to leave because of Seymour's continuing advances. Parr died in September 1548 after giving birth to Seymour's child; meanwhile, Seymour was executed for treason in March 1549 (with Elizabeth questioned and

kept in the Tower of London in connection to him). These events may well have further developed Elizabeth's aversion to maternity as well as matrimony. Additionally, "Her first tentative exploration of realistic male-female relationship had led to her disgrace and Seymour's death" (Taylor-Smith, 1984: 58).

Successively, the reign of Mary represented a period of great uncertainty for Elizabeth. Her life was put at serious risk as her half-sister tried her best to prevent Elizabeth's rise to power. On the other hand, Mary's unwise choices, including the unpopular marriage with Philip of Spain, taught Elizabeth to become a better Queen and, given the result of her own experiences, "[she] ruled in the only way she knew how — as a man" (Taylor-Smitter, 1984: 62).

As cited at the start of this subchapter, Elizabeth's role and rule as a man was explored in Timothy Findley's play *Elizabeth Rex*, produced for the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Ontario in the year 2000. This drama opposes the more "heteronormative" interpretation of Elizabeth (and Shakespeare) in *Shakespeare in Love* (Hackett, 2009: 227) which follows in the form of stage adaptation. Specifically in the "Playwright's Note" to the play, Findley writes:

I remembered that Elizabeth I often referred to herself as "a Prince of Europe" and even declared that in order to maintain her grasp on the British monarchy and to rule her England, she was called upon to be more man than woman. Suddenly, a phrase drifted into my mind. *Elizabeth Rex*, "King Elizabeth" (Findley, 2000: 9).

At the crossroads between fact and fiction, *Elizabeth Rex* is a play-within-a-play taking place in a barn where, on the night of Shakespeare's death, 22 April 1616, the poet and playwright conjures a story which is set in another barn and another night: Shrove Tuesday 1601, the eve of Essex's execution. Elizabeth is passing her time with The Lord's Chamberlain's Men, who had been called to her palace to perform *Much Ado About Nothing*. In the post-show Elizabeth

confesses “I have come here to be in your company, Master Shakespeare. I require distraction. [...]” (act 1, scene 3, p. 30), and later she admits “[...] I wish I were an actor” (act 1, scene 3, p. 32). Trying to evade the burden of her responsibilities, she is in the meantime attracted to the character of the strong and independent Beatrice who is played by an actor named Ned Lowenscroft. This man is “a mature leading actor of female roles” who contracted syphilis through sexual contact with a soldier (Findley, 2000: 9). He is intended to be a sort of “counterpart” to Elizabeth as, more or less like her, he wears white make-up, with rouged cheeks and lips, and has shedding hair under his wig because of the open sores on his head (Hackett, 2009: 227). Ned and Shakespeare are unable to persuade Elizabeth to save Essex and the other man he is towered with — Harry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton who, according to Findley, was “the true love of Shakespeare’s life” (Findley, 2000: 10). Here is the dialogue between the three:

WILL: Then, what are you? Is it not true you will kill your lover in the morning? And is that not monstrous? You tell me you have killed the woman in your heart ... and now you want to kill the man who gave that woman life. Why?

ELIZABETH: Because I love him. And if, because I love him I spare him, I will have killed the man in me who is England’s only defence against her enemies. I will not spare him. Nothing will shake me in this. Nothing. Oh, God. Oh, God ... if only I had your capacity for womanhood, Master Lowenscroft. Then at least I could mourn him. [...] Tell me what you are thinking, actor.

NED: I am thinking that I am in the Tower with Essex — and that both of us wish there was a safe, dark place where we could hide from death.

ELIZABETH: Your problem is that you have forgotten you’re a man. Listen to me. *Listen*. I will strike a bargain with you. If you will teach me how to be a woman ... I will teach you how to be a man (act 1, scene 8, p. 50).

If Ned has forgotten he is a man, Elizabeth, to the same extent, has forgotten she is a woman. For this reason, the second act opens the day after (Ash Wednesday, 1601) with Shakespeare working at *Antony and Cleopatra*, inspired by Elizabeth and Essex’s story, and reflecting

“[...] And if that man — that woman — could be found, lives might still be saved ... [...]” (act 2, scene 1, p. 51). At this point scenes of the tragedy unravel; initially, it is Elizabeth who portrays Cleopatra, and afterwards is substituted by a more moving interpretation by Ned (act 2, scene 4, pp. 59-61). Will, Ned, and Elizabeth all confess their love respectively for the Earl of Southampton, the Captain, and Essex (act 2, scene 4, pp. 57, 61-62; scene 7, p. 69).

The exchange of roles between Elizabeth and Ned implies that they help each other to become what they apparently want to be. In doing so, it is possible to note that “there is both opposition and affinity between this effeminate man and masculine woman” (Hackett, 2009: 228). Ned and Shakespeare as gay male partners are similarly reflected by Elizabeth as a “masculine lover” of Essex (Hackett, 2009: 228).

Another focal point in the play is Ned’s syphilis, which Findley clearly intends as a metaphor for AIDS with regard to homosexuality — both sexually transmitted fatal diseases. This and the related exploration of same-sex relationships were central topics at the turn of the twenty-first century, and remain so even today although to a lesser degree. However the characters’ various identities are not discriminated against during the play, but treated as subjects for “sympathy and tragedy” (Hackett, 2009: 228). Furthermore, the fact that a drama about the “queerness” of its protagonists was premiered in the 2000 season of the prominent Stratford Festival clearly demonstrated a change in attitudes towards homosexuality (Hackett, 2009: 228). *Elizabeth Rex* also won the Governor General’s Literary Award for English Language Drama — Findley, who died in 2002, was indeed “one of Canada’s most respected and garlanded authors” (Hackett, 2009: 228). He himself reveals:

What emerged, for me, from this barn filled with contradictions and emotional conflicts, was a sense that neither gender nor sexuality, politics nor ambition, are as important as integrity. As

Shrove Tuesday passes into Ash Wednesday, playwright, player, and Queen must come to terms with who they truly are, and how they will cope with the inevitable (Findley, 2000: 10).

In fact, just before Essex's impending execution, Elizabeth desires to see him even if it is prohibited, appearing more *womanly* than ever — "Someone ... someone take me to him. Someone bring him to me. Someone — do something!!" (act 2, scene 9, p. 74). She then addresses Will by saying

Elizabeth Rex. There's your title, sir. *Elizabeth Rex, The Queen.* Have me say that "all my life, for the sake of my kingdom, I have played the Prince." And have me say that, "for the sake of my kingdom, I willingly took up the sword of the Headsman and brought it down where I would rather kiss". [...] I cannot achieve this moment. How does one say *goodbye*? (act 2, scene 9, p. 75).

It is Ned who goes to bid farewell to Essex, interpreted by an actor who actually resembles the real one. Ned has become Elizabeth herself and, in the course of this external reality, he/she openly admits "[...] In killing you — I kill myself" and "[...] Nothing will remain of me when you are gone. I renege my right to the man who killed you. He is dead — and only I am left" (act 2, scene 9, p. 76). When the "authentic" Elizabeth arrives, Essex is gone; thus she conjures him who this time is played by Ned. Yet, she clarifies "[...] I did not come here — I could not — but in my heart, I came" (act 2, scene 9, p. 77). The scene concludes with Ned, as an actual actor, dying and finally telling Elizabeth "[...] Madam, here is your man. I can let him go — I can go myself" (act 2, scene 9, 77).

The central message of this is that an individual's identity, as a whole, is not fixed and something to have been born with but, on the contrary, has to be developed and, Findley seems to imply, invented at the cost of breaking social conventions. Indeed, in the end Ned and Elizabeth have become what they really are: a man and a woman having different sexual attitudes towards their "given" genders. Findley's Elizabeth is one that is neither completely

feminine nor masculine, she is a character whose sexuality, no matter how ambiguous, makes her perfectly true to herself.

Shakespeare in Love: The Play is a Walt Disney theatrical production, based on the 1998 Oscar-winning film of the same title, which opened at the Noël Coward Theatre in London in July 2014. Many of the best lines of the drama come from the screenplay by Tom Stoppard and Marc Norman, “but in Lee Hall’s delightful stage adaptation the piece seems to have found its true home” (Spencer, 2014). Indeed, this fictional story is basically about Shakespeare, love, and the conditions of the Elizabethan theatre in 1593 — “Shakespeare-flavored” as it has nicely been described (Brantley, 2014). Regarding the question of gender there is then Viola de Lesseps whose dream is to be an actress and therefore, according to the contemporary stage conventions, has disguised herself as a boy-player in Henslowe’s acting company. Will soon falls in love with her, and Queen Elizabeth I is the character, though paradoxically not the central one, around whom the action revolves. With her small part she has been compared to a *dea ex machina* whose intervention leads to the plot resolution. It is necessary to examine the part of Viola and her relationship with Will first in order to make some considerations about male and female identities within the play and, consequently, to evaluate Hall’s Elizabeth in relation to her role as “king and queen”.

Initially Viola is a kind of crossdressed heroine: she presents herself as Thomas Kent at the audition for Will’s new play: *Romeo and Ethel, the Pirate’s Daughter*, in the end entitled *Romeo and Juliet*. Will is immediately impressed by Viola’s talent and wants her to take off the hat, but she escapes. When Marlowe (Shakespeare’s contemporary English dramatist) asks him “Who is he?”, Will replies “My Romeo. Hands off” (act 1, scene 6, p 20). Apart from being a clear allusion to the fact that Marlowe was historically rumoured to be homosexual, this begins a mechanism according to which Will starts his search for Kent and, almost contemporaneously, for Viola too. Having seen her at a dance, Will is captured by her beauty

and in a flash he is under her balcony reciting *Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?* (act 1, scene 8, p 29). In the meanwhile she is about to be married to Wessex, waiting for the Queen's consent.

Once Viola/Kent takes the role of Romeo Montague in the play, Will has found a way to be in touch with his lover: "Thomas, Master Kent, I have a letter for Lady Viola de Lesseps. The lady of your house. You know her?" (act 1, scene 9, p 39). In one of the rehearsals there is a rather comic scene where Will interrupts the two actors Sam and Viola. Will proceeds to step in and replace Sam during a passionate kiss between the two characters of Romeo and Juliet respectively (act 1, scene 11, pp. 45-46). The aim is that Romeo has his Juliet, but these quite rapid changes of roles seem to account for the fact that "gender identities may fluctuate" as it happens in *Elizabeth Rex* (Hackett, 2009: 228). When in the following scene Will discovers Kent to be in reality the woman he loves, he wastes no time in entering her bedroom. Viola questions him "Can you love a player?" "If she is a maid", he answers (act 1, scene 13, p 52). Differently from Findley's play, in this case Shakespeare results in being heterosexual yet, before this point, it was not so predictable.

Elizabeth appears as sharp and clever as she used to be in real life. At Greenwich, she tells ironically to Wessex "[...] My Lord when you cannot find your wife you had better look for her at the playhouse" (act 2, scene 2, p 62). She later concludes "Have her then, but you are a lordly fool. She has been plucked since I saw her and not by you. It takes a woman to know it" (act 2, scene 2, p 63). Viola is in fact not a virgin and has given herself to Will in a previous scene. Hall's Elizabeth is one who looks commanding and powerful but, at the same time, she has remarkably feminine qualities, including intuition. Also, at the moment Viola dares to interpret Juliet on the stage, no longer crossdressed, Elizabeth expresses solidarity with her. Here is the climax of the story:

TINLEY: That woman is a woman!

NED: A woman?!

TINLEY: Yes. So in the name of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth ...

QUEEN (off): Have a care with my name, you'll wear it out. Oh, you are sick of self-love, Lord Chamberlain. The Queen of England does not attend exhibitions of public lewdness, so something is out of joint. Come here Master Kent. Let me look at you. Yes, the illusion is remarkable and your error, Tinley, easily forgiven, but I know something of a woman in a man's profession, yes by God. I do know about that. That is enough for you, Master Kent. If only Lord Wessex were here.

[...]

WESSEX: Your Majesty! How is this to end?

QUEEN: As stories must when love's denied with tears and a journey. Those whom God has joined in marriage, not even I can put asunder. Master Kent, Lord Wessex, as I foretold, has lost his wife at the playhouse — go make your farewell and send her out [...] (act 2, scene 9, pp. 100-101).

Like Viola, this Elizabeth is a woman in a male role. However, she seems conscious of the limits of her power: she can bring no happy ending for Viola and Shakespeare. He is married with children, she is now married to Wessex, and she must leave with him for Virginia.

In comparison to *Elizabeth Rex*, Hall's Elizabeth is less emotional and more confident in her way of being as an androgynous woman, which is possibly because her masculinity does not make her feel a diminished woman.

In the final analysis it is possible to say that even though she referred to "the weakness of her sex" when publicly speaking, the historical Elizabeth encountered few limitations in her path as a woman in a man's position (Taylor-Smith, 1984: 63). In one of her speeches to Parliament she declared wanting to die as a virgin Queen, despite the political pressure she was under for a marriage and producing an heir. Because of her ambivalent feelings about men, she enjoyed maintaining control over the opposite sex — and she well succeeded in doing it. Under those circumstances, her reign proved successful thanks to "her ability to function comfortably on a masculine level" (Taylor-Smith, 1984: 71). "Court behavior" and "etiquette" were instead the only occasions in which she adopted a feminine role (Taylor-

Smither, 1984: 71). It is therefore not surprising that William Cecil commented on her being: “more than a man, and, in truth, sometimes less than a woman”.

Given these points, both *Elizabeth Rex* and *Shakespeare in Love: The Play* shed light on Elizabeth’s “androgyny”. They explore the topic in different ways: the former presents an Elizabeth who is a masculine woman in love with an effeminate man, and eager to learn through the play the meaning of “how to be a woman”; the latter deals with another who is called to give consent to a marriage, and in doing so she imparts the wisdom of “a woman in a man’s profession”. Thus, if Findley’s Elizabeth suffers for not being a traditionally enough woman to forgive Essex, Hall’s is quite comfortable in her androgynous condition. She only seems to imply it has not been easy for her, yet she apparently has come to terms with her situation. As a result her character appears less faceted, not to say self-conflicted, than in *Elizabeth Rex*. This is probably due to the fact that in *Shakespeare in Love: The Play* she has a too minor part to portray additional aspects of her personality and there is no lover to cause her emotional distress. What both plays share, however, is the idea to live in accordance to one’s nature within. Despite the difficulties involved, the two Elizabeths’ final choice was to not bend to society’s wish for her to be conventionally *woman*. They struggled to maintain their combined identity as “king and queen”; and for this reason they are not perceived as less feminine by modern audience, also because she chose to neither become wife nor mother. After all, today more than ever it is widely acknowledged that there are different ways to be both male and female.

Chapter 3

Filming Elizabeth

3.1 Mapping the field of the genre: defining biopics

It seems that the origins of the biopic, a film that tells the life story of an actual person or people, date back to ancient times. Indeed, the etymology of the term, which derives from the expression “biographical motion picture”, inevitably attaches the biopic to the literary genre of the biography. As Márta Minier and Maddalena Pennacchia explain in “Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Biopic: An introduction”, it is worth considering the case of Plutarch, one of the most ancient and important sources of “telling lives” (2014: 15). The Greek biographer in *Parallel Lives*, a collection of biographies of famous Greeks and Romans, associates his role with that of the portraitist and affirms:

Just as painters get the likeness in their portraits from the face and expression of the eyes, wherein the character shows itself, but make very little account of the other parts of the body, so I must be permitted to devote myself rather to the signs of the soul in men, and by means of these portray the life of each, leaving to others the description of their great contests (Minier and Pennacchia, 2014: 15).

Additionally, other cases of the interaction between portraits and biographies are supported by the sixteenth-century Italian Paolo Giovio and Giorgio Vasari. The former organised his exhibition matching portraits with pieces of writing regarding the portrayed person; the latter gave life to the first illustrated biography named *Le vite de' più eccelenti pittori, scultori e architettori* (Minier and Pennacchia, 2014: 16-17).

These interesting examples reveal that biographers, over the years, used to relate portraiture to their method of working, and even at the very beginning, the biographical genre seemed to have conflated the “telling and the showing mode” (Minier and Pennacchia, 2014: 16). This is the reason why Pennacchia reports Custen’s definition of the biopic as a film “which depicts the life of a historical person, past or present” (2014: 14). In using the verb “depict”, the film

scholar connects the biopic to a visual tradition (Minier and Pennacchia, 2014: 14). Equally to the written biography, this film genre adopts its manners from older means of individual representations, and it is thus characterised by a predisposition to draw on a variety of influences. Therefore, blending together memoirs, storytelling and images, thanks to the specificity of the cinematographic medium, the biopic may be considered as the evolutionary development of the biography, from the page to the screen.

In the opinion of Minier, the biopic may be regarded as an example of adaptation. In the case of the biographical film, what Linda Hutcheon in *A Theory of Adaptation* defines as “the adapted text” (2006) is a life story that, when retold, is placed on the threshold of fact and fiction (Minier and Pennacchia, 2014: 7).

Nowadays, past events are only accessed through mediated sources that inevitably reshape the understanding of history. Similarly, a film that is based on the life of an actual person is unlikely to be absolutely truthful, but rather a remake of his or her story “at best” (Minier and Pennacchia, 2014: 8). Indeed, Hutcheon’s assertion “Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication” (2006: 7) holds true also for the biopic (Minier and Pennacchia, 2014: 8). Moreover, the reproduction of the most significant moments of such historical individuals occurs together with a touch of liberty added by the adapters. This is the reason why some of the contemporary biopics open with the standard disclaimer: “This film is based on a true story. Some events have been created or changed” (Minier and Pennacchia, 2014: 8). One may wonder, in fact, what source or sources constitute the starting point of a biographical film. The answer is that the type of material varies depending on the biopic. Whether it is through the consultation of a written source as a biography, letters, an interview, or of visual and aural nature such as pictures, photos, videos and recordings, all are of crucial importance in the making of a biopic (Minier and Pennacchia, 2014: 8). Biographical films, similarly to adaptations, do not correspond to a single source, but rather they have been informed by

multiple sources in a complex exchange of texts and media (Minier and Pennacchia, 2014: 9). Then, the biopic, as a model of adaptation, is related to the “problematic issues of truth-value and fiction-versus-fact debate” (Minier and Pennacchia, 2014: 11). Biopics, being a screen remake of real stories, involve mechanisms of reorganisation and sometimes invention of selected aspects and events about the original character. Consequently, the concern for this kind of relationship between source and film can be justifiable (Minier and Pennacchia, 2014: 11). Nevertheless, as Brian McFarlane observes, it is important to keep in mind that

when we turn to a film adapted from literature, or in some other way connected to a literary text or texts, we need to realize and allow for the fact that the anterior novel or play or poem is only one element of the film’s intertextuality [...] (Minier and Pennacchia, 2014: 10).

According to the criteria of cinematic practice, slight deviations from reality in storytelling are inevitable. In addition, as Dennis Bingham notes in *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?: The Biopic As Contemporary Film Genre*, “What would be gained in terms of realism [...], would surely be lost in interest” (2010: Intro.). Therefore, evaluating a movie only through the degrees of “loyalty”, supposing they can really be established, represents a constraining belief. In any case, each biopic, more or less loyal to historical or factual events, offers viewers the opportunity to see new facets through different lenses and perspectives, perhaps challenging or enhancing ideas previously formed about the subject (Minier and Pennacchia, 2014: 12).

Bingham observes that the biopic has undergone an evolutionary process of changes from the Hollywood studio era to the present. This film genre has adopted specific manners from each period that “continue to be available to filmmakers [who are] working in the form” (2010: Intro.). For example, 1930s biopics namely *Voltaire* (1933), *The Affairs of Cellini* (1934) and *The Scarlet Empress* (1934) appear as a series of melodramas which usually take place in an

“exotic” Europe (Bingham, 2010: Intro.). The so-called classical biopics “are mostly those produced after the Production Code took full effect in July 1934” (Bingham, 2010: Intro.). Their aim was presenting the historic events in a conservative way in order to offer an analysis of the contemporary society. Therefore, even the entertaining *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942) provided encouragement upon the American entry into World War II. Later, the shift of focus from the war to the lives of artists and athletes produced some interesting films in the 1950s, such as *Love Me or Leave Me* (1955), *The Joker is Wild* (1957), and *I Want to Live!* (1958). Then, during the 1970s the biopic suffered a period of rest, supply in the meanwhile material for television. Moreover, biopics like *Gable and Lombard* and *W. C. Fields and Me* (both 1976) continued to fuel the poor reputation of the genre. Biographical films instead gained popularity in 1980s for a variety of reasons. The most important amongst which were

the rise of the auteur and the film school generation and the attendant shift of the biopic from the producer’s genre [...] to the director’s medium of *Raging Bull* (Martin Scorsese, 1980), *The Last Emperor* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1980), *Tucker: A man and His Dream* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1988), *Malcolm X* (Spike Lee, 1992), and many others (Bingham, 2010: Intro.).

Therefore, the developmental stages of the biopic “have been held up and interrupted, and re-started more than once” (Bingham, 2010: Intro.). For this reason, twenty-first century films such as *Ray*, *The Aviator*, *Capote*, and *Infamous* which integrate elements of all or most of the biopic life cycles, lead the film scholar to believe that the process may be recommencing. However, biopics like *American Splendor* (2003) and *I’m Not There* (2007), which condense modes of the parody, pastiche and deconstruction, periodically “continue to redefine the genre and to shake it up” (Bingham, 2010: Intro.).

The dynamic evolution and continuous redefinition of the biopic through different genres and modes of presentation is strictly connected to the fact that, as Minier and Pennacchia remark, often the biopic merges with other screen categories. For instance, *The Edge of Love* (2008), a

biopic about Dylan Thomas, shares characteristics with sentimental melodramas and war films. Additionally, certain literary screen biographies may be considered as heritage films — a genre that conveys “contemporary [...] ways of relating to the past as a community-forming concept” (Minier and Pennacchia, 2014: 6). Furthermore, a great number of biopics also appear as film epics (*Elizabeth: The Golden Age*, 2007; *The King’s Speech*, 2010) or period films. In fact, given that many biographical films intend to reproduce a specific historical background through elements like costume and setting, some scholars examined the biopic as costume drama and historical fiction too (Minier and Pennacchia, 2014: 6). Finally, Minier illustrates that the biopic may be perceived as a case of docudrama. The attempt to provide documentary evidence combined with the dramatic form has influenced some recent biographical films, for example in the “documentary footage” employed in *Milk* (2008) or in the fictional chronicling by the two main characters of *Liz & Dick* (2012) (Minier and Pennacchia, 2014: 7). It is in the matter of these considerations that the biopic can be defined as a product characterised also by “Generic hybridism [...], a common phenomenon in contemporary cinema and television [...]” (Minier and Pennacchia, 2014: 6).

Bingham throughout his work affirms that biopics originate from the filmmaker’s intent to dramatise the lives of actual individuals of interest. Biopics are not made in order to entertain with lies, but rather to convey the director’s own version of the truth, reproducing the most significant moment of a person’s life. For this reason, the biopic is one of the most questionable film genres for viewers and critics longing to evaluate its “general framework”: some of them disagree with the truth of the film; others limit themselves to appreciate the ideas of a certain filmmaker about the life of a certain person (Bingham, 2010: Ch. 18). In general, film genres, however, tend to address particular audiences highlighting different aspects of the story and/or its main characters to capture a higher level of interest. Today film

companies produce movies with “universal appeal” in order to overstep the “boundaries of genre” that may be posed by the audience (Bingham, 2010: Ch. 18).

Moreover, biographical films are an expression of the ability of actors to create characters playing the role of a public person. Very often, the most successful biopics “are about people who play a role and about how they feel within those roles” as viewers are strongly interested in the psychological foundations of the characters. Indeed, in a process of self-identification, as characters find their purpose and meaning in life, so does the audience (Bingham, 2010: ch. 18). To conclude, it is possible to say that the reason for the worldwide success of the biopic lies in the perception of reality that this particular genre conveys. People love biopics because they always tell others about their life in a story form, imaging themselves as the deserving subject of their own wonderful biopic.

3.1.1 British royal biopics and the nation’s sense of identity

Minier and Pennacchia point out that the biopic, as numerous other screen categories, has evolved into several sub-genres such as “the literary biopic, the artist biopic, the musician/composer biopic, the scientist biopic, the sports biopic, the culinary biopic, the royal biopic, more recently even the queenly biopic [...], and so forth” (2014: 19).

Even though Bingham stresses that he does not perceive these differentiations as too marked, but rather “see[s] the genre whole” (2010: Intro.), there are some sub-genres that seem to have been more successful than others. In fact, in “Taking liberties with the monarch: The royal bio-pic in the 1990s”, Kara McKechnie explains that films about British monarchs have enjoyed recurring revivals which still continue to the present day (2002: 217).

Historical events in films lead the viewers to draw parallelisms with the contemporary situation. In addition, observing that the course of history is cyclical, and realising that analogies exist between the past and the present may reassure the audience and mitigate “the

urge for change” (McKechnie, 2002: 220). In moments of crisis and disillusion, historical films have the function to diminish current problems and the resulting “solution” serves as a glorification to the ruling power.

On the other hand, connections with the present age in historical films may produce the contrary effect and give rise to discontentment with social conditions as the lesson of the past is perceived to have been lost.

Nevertheless, it is important to consider that the portrayal of the monarchy in films always reflects present circumstances. For example, during the Great Depression *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933), dealing with the King’s troubled marital relationships, provided viewers with a moment of comic relief. Furthermore, as a result of the 1938 Abdication Crisis, films like *Victoria the Great* (1937) and *Sixty Glorious Years* (1938) offered reassurance to the concurrent lack of confidence in the monarchy. Vice versa, once royalty was restored to its former glory thanks to Elizabeth II, farcical monarchs appeared on screen, as in *Beau Brummell* (1954) (McKechnie, 2002: 220). As a consequence, in days of greater stability, films about monarchs

[seem] to lose its significance as a way of articulating issues and reassuring anxieties, and it is therefore worth noting that there were far fewer monarchy films in the decade after *Beau Brummell* (McKechnie, 2002: 220-221).

Again, they came back in the 1960s and filmmakers adjusted royal biopics to the specific needs of the time. The new ideologies of feminism were required to appear on screen and films such as *Anne of the Thousand Days* (1969) and *Mary Queen of Scots* (1972) were released. With a pause of twenty years, monarchy films returned in the middle of the 1990s. At that time, films like *The Madness of King George* (1994) and *Mrs Brown* (1997) reflected the lack of confidence in the monarchy as a “role model” — “fairytale marriages ended, dated

rituals were questioned and public reluctance to provide for the extravagance of a dysfunctional and distant family unit grow” (McKechnie, 2002: 221).

More recently, British royal biopics promote an image of the monarchy that apart from mirroring the contemporary context, also greatly contribute to creating a national sense of identity (McKechnie, 2002: 217). This is the reason why, in her essay, McKechnie emphasises Moya Luckett’s opinion about Shekhar Kapur’s *Elizabeth* (1998), who argues:

Elizabeth [...] narrates a new history, one that reinforces the power of images over archival knowledge, and thereby legitimises a similar strategy for more contemporary narratives. The film might be seen in the context of Tony Blair’s attempt to update the monarchy by demonstrating how the image of a monarch might produce national renown, even in the face of very real domestic problems and their potential threat to nationhood. *Elizabeth* suggests, then, how a reconceived history — both as a discipline and a specific narrative — might have practical efficacy in pre-millennial Britain. If “authentic images” replace contested facticity, then the nation might find its identity again (2002: 218).

Similarly, in “Culturally British Bio(e)pics: From *Elizabeth* to *The King’s Speech*”, Pennacchia observes that towards the end of the twentieth century the profound political changes in the United Kingdom significantly affected the sense of belonging to the country, and “a number of culturally British biopics have been produced either on large or small screens [...]” (2014: 33-34). Even if the main character of these films is not always a sovereign, it is worth considering that the latest examples of this film genre mainly dramatise “the life of a princely character” (Pennacchia, 2014: 35). Indeed, Pennacchia elaborates another line of reasoning by quoting Andrew Higson, who affirms:

cinema is one of the means by which national communities are maintained, [because it creates] particular types of stories that narrate the nation imaginatively, narratives that are capable of generating a sense of national belonging among their audiences (2014: 33).

Therefore, the retelling of fascinating stories of the lives of British monarchs in biopics represent a valuable help to define and understand the heritage and identity of Great Britain, a country that more than others has always been closely related to the history of its kings and queens.

3.1.2 Female sovereigns revived

According to what Elizabeth A. Ford and Deborah C. Mitchell observe in *Royal Portraits in Hollywood: Filming the Lives of Queens*, in recent years, female sovereigns seem to have been back in vogue, in the literal sense of the word. In September 2006 the fashion magazine *Vogue* dedicated a cover to a modern Marie Antoinette dressed in shiny pink and with a trendy hairstyle, entitled “The Queen who Rocked Versailles”. Obviously, it was the actress Kristen Dunst, playing the role of the French Queen in Sofia Coppola’s *Marie Antoinette* (2006). However, this is just one example of the recent explosion of screen remakes of the lives of iconic queens (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 1). In *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007), Cate Blanchett reassumed her 1998 leading role as the red-haired Tudor Queen, while in 2008 Justin Chadwick’s *The Other Boleyn Girl* was released, featuring Scarlett Johansson and Natalie Portman. In addition, in 2009 Jean-Marc Vallée’s *Young Queen Victoria* starred Emilie Blunt, Miranda Richardson and Jim Broadbent (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 1-2), and in 2013 Thomas Imbach’s *Mary Queen of Scots* cast Camille Rutherford in the role of the ill-fated Queen.

In the opinion of the two authors, the revived interest in female monarchs on screen receive an answer in the atmosphere of change that pervades recent times. Actresses like Blanchett demonstrate that the film industry has finally recognised that with the passage of time also female actors are able to grow in depth and complexity. Furthermore, the modern revival in queens mirrors a substantial alteration in political affairs as women have achieved equality of

opportunity both in the working and political environment. Ségolène Royal, Angela Merkel, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Hilary Rodham Clinton constitute only a part of the “long line of women willing to risk everything for a chance to lead” (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 2). (As this dissertation is close to being finalised, Mrs. Clinton is favoured to win the 2016 United States presidential election becoming America’s first female president. Additionally, Theresa May has just become Britain’s new Prime Minister, in a time when this country has decided to politically distance itself from the EU.) The women who preceded them were the female sovereigns of history. In fact, the need for representing the lives of queens in films is nothing new. Moreover, Ford and Mitchell, taking into consideration George Custen’s argument in *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood constructed Public History*, explain that female sovereign biopics “have always punctuated a genre that has been traditionally focused on men” and accordingly, royal female biopics prevail over the male ones (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 2-3).

Biographical films about royalty started with silent films as Sara Bernhardt’s *Queen Elizabeth* (1912) and Theda Bara’s *Cleopatra* (1917). Then, thanks to the 1930s addition of sound, films combined action with the power of language.

In the 1930s there was a significant production of royal biopics, and films about queens like *Queen Christina* (1933), *Cleopatra* (1934), *The Scarlet Empress* (1934), *Catherine the Great* (1934), *Mary of Scotland* (1936), *Victoria the Great* (1937), *Marie Antoinette* (1938) and *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* (1939) “presented an essential set of female royal lives that film biographers would revisit” (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 3).

Films about royal lives echo the spirit of the time, but only the 1990s and the beginning of the twenty-first century mark a return of the massive production of female sovereign biopics which took place during the 1930s. The two authors note that the reason lies also in Hollywood’s star system. As Americans “adore the glamour of the monarchy [...]”, what is a better way to guarantee absolute success than portraying their celebrities as real royals? (Ford

and Mitchell, 2009: 3) Hellen Mirren, Judi Dench, Vanessa Redgrave were all award winners for having performed the role of a female monarch, but even in the 1930s fan magazines used to refer to stars of the cinema as “queens”. In this manner, Hollywood placed its divas at the crossroads of reality and fiction, and of private and public. Ford and Mitchell add:

[this] double view of stars [...] quickly became the norm, [...] and not much has changed since then. Just as our current fashion magazine covers declare stars unreachably lovely while the national tabloid front their woes and their cellulite, so early issues of Hollywood trades like *PhotoPlay* ran glamour shots of “goddesses” alternating with less flattering pieces with titles like “Pictures They Wish They’d Never Posed For” (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 4).

Over the years, Hollywood has proclaimed the coronation and often deposition of its queens, and public passionate interest in the monarchy has provided breeding ground for such “bipolar” mechanisms (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 4). The strong feelings of love and malicious gossip that characterised the life and death of Princess Diana are one of the most significant demonstrations of such a phenomenon (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 4). It is worth mentioning Stephen Frears’s *The Queen*, in 2006, having Helen Mirren in the part of Elizabeth II, presents a newly elected Tony Blair (Michael Sheen) trying to convince the Queen to speak publicly about the death of Lady Diana in an attempt to recover public opinion regarding the monarchy.

The desire of the audience to see these historical women beyond their public roles place writers and filmmakers in the same perspective. Even if the lives of the queens may appear incredibly diverse from those of mere mortals, biographers affirm that they lived in quite an ordinary way. They could rarely oppose themselves to the obligations of mandated paths like appearance, marriage and motherhood (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 5).

Thus, royal biopics about female sovereigns appear extremely relevant to the contemporary condition of women in the society. In the 1930s screen queens enacted women’s difficulties in

achieving independence (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 6). Nowadays, after years of battles for female emancipation, they have become a dramatic symbol of the women's march away from a totally male-dominated world, which hopefully continues towards a better future.

3.1.3 The case of Elizabeth I's life on screen. Why is she the most portrayed English monarch in films?

Amongst female sovereign biopics the case of Elizabeth I is one of the most popular. Bethany Latham in *Elizabeth I in Film and Television: A Study of the Major Portrayals* explains that the iconic Tudor Queen has been the most portrayed English monarch on screen. There are plenty of biopics about the story of her life, with a possible sequel to Shekhar Kapur's 2007 *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*, featuring Cate Blanchett. Elizabeth has been performed by the most revered theatre and cinema actresses, like Sarah Bernhardt and Bette Davis. In addition to the countless films, to say nothing of the books, also several TV series have been produced regarding her persona — what arouses such intense interest about this Queen? In history there have been other monarchs who lived comparatively captivating existences, but they have not been chosen as the topic of dozens of films and books. Therefore, why specifically Elizabeth? Certainly, there is not a single cause which can be identified as the explanation of Elizabeth's long-lasting fame. Elizabeth's allure is linked to a variety of factors which contributed to making her life “not only fascinating and enduring in the collective imagination, but also continually relevant” (Latham, 2011: 3).

However, Elizabeth's character in films is “at once the quintessential Elizabeth and not Elizabeth at all” (Latham, 2011: 3). By acknowledging that “historical truth is a myth”, each individual views history according to his or her own perspective (Latham, 2011: 3).

Whether the person is a modern filmmaker examining Elizabeth's behavior from a feminist view-point or an Elizabethan courtier writing about Elizabeth's "female fault" of indecisiveness, the perception is different, and the picture which emerges of Elizabeth differs accordingly. Views of Elizabeth as a queen, as a politician, and as a woman vary, and scholars, novelists, biographers, and especially filmmakers enjoy coming up with their own "version" of Elizabeth [...]. Each film and television adaptation bring something new to the historical perception of Elizabeth, and each actress who portrays her adds a fresh interpretation to the ever-expanding canon (Latham, 2011: 4).

Undoubtedly, a reason why Elizabeth is particularly fascinating to filmmakers is her appearance (Latham, 2011: 4). Indeed, Ford and Mitchell remark that

images of the Virgin Queen fast-forward across film history, unforgettable, [emblematic] images: the stately bearing; the red wigs; the high forehead; the long, aristocratic nose; the alabaster make up; the pearl-drop earrings; the stiff, ornate ruffs; the fingers dripping with jewels; and the gowns, with yards and yards of white satin, purple velvet, gold, and silver ornamented and sparkling with rubies, diamonds and more pearls. Even a schoolchild would be hard-pressed to mistake her for any other monarch (2009: 226).

Over the years, this Queen has become a kind of "brand" that can be connected with a variety of circumstances (Latham, 2011: 4). In fact, "all the glory of Elizabethan Age, [...] and everything from William Shakespeare's plays to the flowering of English Protestantism is associated with Elizabeth" (even though Shakespeare's plays were also enacted in the reign of King James I, and Elizabeth's throne was characterised by religious turmoil too) (Latham, 2011: 4). Nevertheless, the key to her enormous success is not factual events but the favourable impression she is able to create on the audience. In particular during her reign, Elizabeth and her entourage carefully took care of her image and the connections it established. She masterfully manipulated people's views and transformed unfavourable situations into advantages for her royal persona. For example, her governance without a royal consort. She used her marriageability as a political strategy in order to prevent the male sovereigns of Europe from forming a coalition against England. When it was clear that she

would never take a husband and produce a legitimate heir to the throne, she once again “put a positive spin on this [...] by instituting the cult of Gloriana” (Latham, 2011: 4). Therefore, rather than justify her unnatural unmarried state as a consequence of her own choice (and probably of the choices of her councillors too), she explained she sacrificed herself for the sake of her kingdom, and changed her image into that of a virgin Queen who was safely married to her country (Latham, 2011: 4).

A second aspect that makes Elizabeth an attractive subject for filmmakers is the period in which she lived, as the Tudor era is culturally associated with violence and sensuality which prove particularly suitable for dramatic effect. Additionally, the Tudor age includes a series of occurrences that seem to be designed for staging. When in 1558 Elizabeth was proclaimed Queen, England had undergone a profound change brought about by her grandfather Henry VII. Apart from being the founder of the Tudor dynasty, Henry VII was the driving force behind the end of the War of the Roses. Then, Elizabeth’s father Henry VIII is well-known for having had six wives and breaking with the papacy, proclaiming himself supreme head of the Church of England thus significantly revolutionising the sixteenth-century European arena. Accordingly, Elizabeth came from a family who represents another factor of attraction to filmmakers. She was possibly the prominent figure of the Tudors, but also other members of her family were historically famous figures: her mother Anne Boleyn, her half-sister Mary, and her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots. As will be seen in later subchapters, by exploiting her family relationships, filmmakers often rewrite Elizabeth’s life in order to make it more impressive (Latham, 2011: 5). For instance, Elizabeth and Mary’s difficult sisterhood is amongst the events which filmmakers most often dramatise.

Once she became Queen, the England that she inherited was on the verge of bankruptcy, fraught by religious discord, and dependent upon the greatest superpowers of the time: Spain and France. Nevertheless, she skilfully handled the situation, and together with the aid of her

advisors, she restored unity in her kingdom and turned it into a world power. Her story is a successful one, and filmmakers have always had difficulties in resisting it (Latham, 2011: 8). Filmmakers have a weakness for characters that are good-looking or, at least, looking unique for some particular characteristics, and Elizabeth falls into both categories. Though she was defined as beautiful by her royal attendants, even at an advanced age, she could only best be described as attractive (Latham, 2011: 10-11). During her throne, she and her councillors established strict criteria for her royal portraiture. Although in these portraits her appearance was altered, due to political propaganda, they “conveniently provide filmmakers and their make-up and wardrobe artists with detailed visual documentation from which to work” (Latham, 2011: 11). In fact, as mentioned before, Elizabeth is well-known for her fair complexion, which when she aged she used to refine by using white face paint, contrasted with her red hair, at a later stage of her life styled with the use of elaborated wigs. Together with her physical characteristics, Elizabeth clearly distinguished herself by her way of dressing that with the passing of time became more and more sophisticated. Indeed, the Tudor world of clothing supplies filmmakers, costumers and actors “with a multitude of fabulous costuming possibilities that appear to great advantage on screen” (Latham, 2011: 11).

Another point of interest of the Elizabethan era lies in “court intrigue”, and Elizabeth’s life is full of events produced by such dynamic (Latham, 2011: 12). Indeed, due to the various conspiracies she was involved in, films give prominent importance to Francis Walsingham, also known as Elizabeth’s “spymaster” (Latham, 2011: 13). Even if he occupied varied positions during Elizabeth’s throne, he is famous for having uncovered death conspiracies against his Queen, like the Ridolfi, Throckmorton and Babington plots. Moreover, the executions of conspirators such as Mary, Queen of Scots, amongst others, offer opportunities for dramatic (death) scenes.

As can be seen, the Tudor historical context alone may offer to viewers overwhelming emotions, but ultimately “Gloriana is the one [they] pay to see”, especially for her formidable personality (Latham, 2011: 13). Precisely because she was impeccably educated and very eloquent, her brilliant speeches and memorable quotes such as “I will have here but one mistress and no masters” make “Elizabeth [...] frequently her own screenwriter” (Latham, 2011: 13).

Answering the question why Elizabeth has exercised such an enduring fascination for filmmakers and has become a household name for the audiences all over the world is neither simple, nor does it have a sole explanation. The contribution to Elizabeth’s rise to fame is made by a variety of factors like her appearance, the impression she is able to convey, her family, her virginity, her character, and the era in which she lived. However, the most important one to consider is “Elizabeth herself” (Latham, 2011: 14-15). She was a totally unique woman, and precisely because of this she has always had the power to capture the heart of those all around.

3.2 Private life, fictional meetings and religious struggle for power in Shekhar Kapur’s *Elizabeth* (1998), *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007) and Elizabeth’s miniseries: *Elizabeth R* (1971), *Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen* (2005) and *Elizabeth I* (2005)

The remarkable events in Elizabeth’s life make her an appealing subject of a multitude of films. Nevertheless, apart from the miniseries, sometimes, no big screen or television film can show every important moment of her existence. Therefore, those aspiring to produce a biopic about Elizabeth have to carefully select the characters worthy of inclusion, and the episodes which can effectively take place “within the constraints of time, technology and budget” (Latham, 2011: 8). As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, biographical films do not intend to provide documentary evidence, but rather offer the director’s interpretation on

the life of the original character. On several occasions, they tend to distort history in order to further a political or ideological message (Latham, 2011: 8). Consequently, the way the story of Elizabeth is depicted in these films and miniseries may cause bitter disappointment amongst the well-informed. However, it is worth noting that there is a group of events and characters which filmmakers and screenwriters repeatedly portray in film adaptations of Elizabeth and, as such, deserve thorough examination. Such people and events include: Elizabeth's marriage proposals and negotiations, her romantic affairs (especially with the Earls of Leicester and Essex), her difficult relationships with Mary Tudor and Mary, Queen of Scots, as well as the complicated matter of religion and the defeat of the Spanish Armada (Latham, 2011: 9). This subchapter will analyse the various manners in which these key events and figures of her life are explored in Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth* (1998), *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007) and the miniseries: *Elizabeth R* (1971), *Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen* (2005) and *Elizabeth I* (2005), and how they diverge from historical truth.

3.2.1 Elizabeth's marriageability and chief favourites

Elizabeth's reluctance to marry and her relationships with Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, and Robert Devereux, the second Earl of Essex, are part of those aspects of her life which filmmakers most frequently dramatise.

As Susan Doran writes in her essay "Why Did Elizabeth not Marry?", during the initial years of her reign, matrimony and producing a male heir seemed to be the best ways to prevent a civil war in the case of the Queen's early death. Then, in the 1570s, when it became less likely that Elizabeth would give birth to a child as she was in her forties, the nation urgently needed a marriage alliance in order to strengthen its position in the European continent. Yet, in spite of these reasons, she continued to dismiss the proposals of a long list of suitors, namely "King

Philip II of Spain, King Eric XIV of Sweden, King Charles IX of France and his two brothers, Henry and Francis, and an Austrian Archduke” (Doran, 1998: 30).

The majority of historians and biographers agree that Elizabeth consciously decided to remain unmarried (Doran, 1998: 30). However, Helen Hackett in *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* argues that finding an explanation for Elizabeth’s great hostility to marriage is a matter of great speculation. Maybe it was the consequence of her mother’s beheading by her father for adultery when she was only a child; or the resolution not to share her power with a royal consort; or because all the contenders posed problems about politics or religion; or the fact that she used her marriageability as a political tool with foreign countries; or for all these motives combined together (Hackett, 1995: 53-54).

Nevertheless, there were two moments in Elizabeth’s life in which she was possibly contemplating marriage. Firstly, when Robert Dudley’s wife died in September 1560, many of Elizabeth’s contemporaries thought that she appeared interested in marrying her favourite. Secondly, in 1579 she was rather resolute to entering into marriage with Francis, Duke of Alençon to gain political advantages. Additionally, she showed an attraction to him when he came to visit her during the summer of that same year.

Because of the insistence by her council, she agreed to negotiate marriage with other suitors. In the mid-1560s she considered the Archduke Charles of Austria’s proposal as marriage to him meant cementing an alliance with the Habsburgs. Furthermore, between 1570 and 1571, she initially accepted Henry, Duke of Anjou’s courtship (who was Alençon’s older brother, and King of France in 1574) in order to form a coalition with France against Spain (Doran, 1998: 39-40). However, every marriage negotiation came to nothing: this could have been because of the objections of certain councillors (Doran, 1998: 41). Specifically, they believed that by marrying Dudley she would have fuelled the rumours about their adulterous liaison, thereby “confirming the suspicions that her favourite had conspired to bring about his first

wife's death, and implicating her in the murder" (Doran, 1998: 44). Marriage to a foreigner like Charles of Austria, Henry of Anjou, and Francis of Alençon would have displeased most of the subjects and caused political and religious unrest (Doran, 1998: 46-47). Under those circumstances, therefore, she could not do anything other than listen to advice, and prefer the unmarried state.

As a result, filmmakers take advantage of the fact that Elizabeth did not wed in order to give a version of the events in film adaptations of her life according to which she is in love with Dudley, sometimes even questioning her own professed chastity. Furthermore, hating the idea of marriage due to the trauma of her mother's execution by her father, she becomes a virgin Queen, married to her people, thereby compensating for the "unnatural" choice for a sixteenth-century woman to be childless, and especially "having no master".

As mentioned previously, the Earl of Essex is the other male character who filmmakers use to present next to Elizabeth in the latter part of her life. As Doran explains in her book, namely *Elizabeth I and Her Circle*, Essex was Lettice Knollys and Walter Devereux's elder son, and when his father died, his mother (Elizabeth's cousin) married to Dudley.

Dudley and his new wife had a son who died in 1584. For this reason, it was now Dudley's intention to take care of Essex, his new stepson, as a "protégé" and take the 19-year-old boy to court (Doran, 2015: 166). Rapidly, Essex became Elizabeth's favoured courtier, and subsequently she rewarded him with countless "offices, honours, and material rewards" (Doran, 2015: 181). Nonetheless, he often jeopardised his position at court: he married Frances Walsingham without royal consent, had an illegitimate child with his mistress Elizabeth Southwell (Doran, 2015: 171), and generally took the initiative on the battlefield against Elizabeth's will. In particular, in 1599 he mismanaged the military operation in Ireland to defeat the leader of the rebels, Hugh O'Neill, the Earl of Tyrone, for ever falling from

Elizabeth's favour. Two years later, then, he led an abortive coup d'état against her. Thus, he was executed on 25 February 1601.

Many times Elizabeth's relationship with Essex has been presented as a whirlwind romance: "an elderly, powerful, woman, flattered by and half in love with a young, fascinating, but immature nobleman who resented her attempts to keep him in thrall and eventually resorted to rebellion" (Doran, 2015: 190). It appears that, the historical Elizabeth initially held Essex in special affection, but she was not in love with him, nor he with her. On the contrary, "her anger at his marriage was short-lived; he had no monopoly over her attention at court; and she did not hesitate [...] to issue his death warrant" (Doran, 2015: 190-191).

With this in mind, let us compare how these historical events belonging to Elizabeth's life have been portrayed in the biopics chosen for this dissertation.

Elizabeth is a 1998 biopic written by Michael Hirst, directed by Shekhar Kapur and featuring Cate Blanchett in the leading role of Queen Elizabeth I of England. As historicity is not the focus of this biographical film based on the early years of Elizabeth's reign, fact and fiction blend together in order to generate an extremely "emotional portrait" of this Tudor Queen, magnifying the dramatic effect (Latham, 2011: 150). Even the film sequences of Elizabeth's marriage plans and close relationships resonate with the general mood of the film and fail to fully conform to the way they may have actually happened in the historic past.

As soon as Elizabeth appears in the film dancing and laughing with other ladies, a charming Robert Dudley (Joseph Fiennes) gallops towards her. They longingly look at each other, making the viewer realise at first the power of their liaison. She continues to dance alone, waiting for him to come; "May I join you my lady?" he asks her, with his shirt open.

Kapur has a strong inclination for "intercutting disparate scenes", therefore at the same time as Elizabeth and Dudley exchange sensual overtures in the golden sunlight, Kat Ashley

(Emily Mortimer) is quickly running to Hatfield (Latham, 2011: 151). Her mistress has been accused of conspiring with Sir Thomas Wyatt against Her Sovereign Majesty, and Mary's soldiers are coming to take Elizabeth to the Tower and put her under arrest (Latham, 2011: 151).

Progressively events develop in favour of the young Elizabeth and when it is clear that Mary is going to die, she unexpectedly encounters Sir William Cecil (Richard Attenborough) in a confessional. He warns her that as her life remains seriously in danger, she must do nothing which may compromise the security of her throne, not even meeting with Lord Robert. Nonetheless, she ignores Cecil's verbal warning, and in the following scene she plays draughts with Dudley. With tears in their eyes, the two profess their love for each other, as Elizabeth says "Robert, you know you are everything to me", he softly replies "All that I am, it is you" (Latham, 2011:153).

In *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power*, Carole Levin recounts that Dudley's family shared bad blood with the Tudors for two generations. Robert's grandfather, Edmund, was executed by Henry VIII for stealing money from Henry VII's kingdom, and Robert's father, John, Duke of Northumberland, plotted a coup d'état in 1533. He wanted to place Lady Jane Gray on the throne in order to continue the power he had gained during the reign of Edward VI. When the attempt was foiled, Mary I sentenced him to death. Thus, Elizabeth had known Robert since childhood, and she "clearly cared deeply for him" (Levin, 1994: 71-72). Furthermore, Bassnett affirms that their friendship may have been cemented by the fact that they had been kept prisoners in the Tower in the same period during Mary's reign. "Whether she seriously thought about marrying him or not, she did enjoy his company and the two of them rode, talked and played together in a way that she did not find possible with others" (Bassnett, 1997: 45).

When her half-sister Mary dies, Blanchett's Elizabeth is bluntly informed by Cecil, now her chief advisor, that she has become Queen of "a most parlous and degenerate state". In addition, he explains "Here at home there are those who wish Your Majesty ill. [...] Until you marry and produce an heir, you will find no security" (Latham, 2011: 153-154). Again, she discounts his advice as she is inevitably involved in the great celebrations following her coronation. Amongst the crowd gathered in her honour, she notices a mysterious middle-aged man who seems to be in control of the overall situation. He is Sir Francis Walsingham (Geoffrey Rush), the person who has been appointed to fully supervise Her Majesty's person (Latham, 2011: 154).

Under Walsingham and the public's watchful eye, Elizabeth requests Dudley to perform a Volta with her. Apart from being a public demonstration of their relationship, this is also an explicit reference to history as the historical Elizabeth effectively performed the Italian dance with Dudley.

The dance steps are comprised of a series of turns and jumps, and unlike most Tudor-period dances, it requires an embrace, with the man grasping the woman at the waist, underneath the busk of her dress, to lift her for the high jumps (Latham, 2011: 155).

They make a sequence of body movements considered scandalous in the English society of those times. Then, Fiennes's Dudley asks Elizabeth "When may I see you in private?" She deliberately provokes him by replying "Have you forgot, my Lord? I am Queen now".

Although Kapur, unlike any other filmmaker, shows the "physical consummation" of their love (Latham, 2011: 155), his Elizabeth is constantly reminded of her primary duties. For the safety of her realm, she must marry and give birth to a child. Until this time, she has successfully managed not to commit heresy about the question of her marital status, but things

are not proceeding well for her kingdom and she is forced to consider the possibility of matrimony.

Alison Weir in *Elizabeth the Queen* reports that from the beginning of Elizabeth's throne, the Queen's marriage had been an extremely important issue. The matter was not only about "whether she would marry, but whom she would marry" (2008: 40). Directly connected to this was the then long-standing problem of the Tudor succession as "it was not clear who would succeed in the event of Elizabeth's early death" (Weir, 2008: 40). Despite the intense pressure she was under, Elizabeth seemed to prefer to remain single and somehow or other continued to dismiss marriage proposals from European princes. However, in 1579 she agreed to revive negotiations with France and entertained Francis, Duke of Anjou and Alençon's courtship in order to secure a strategic alliance.

Blanchett's Elizabeth considers the offer due to the defeat of the English forces in Scotland by the French troops. Apart from presenting Anjou as Mary of Guise's nephew, instead of Catherine de Medici's youngest son, Kapur dramatically alters the whole episode. In fact, his Duke of Anjou, brother of Henry III of France, became Elizabeth's suitor long after her accession to the throne and was 20 years younger than the Queen (Levin, 1994). Anjou (Vincent Cassel) arrives at court masked as a musician and, disclosing his true identity, inappropriately begins to embrace and kiss Elizabeth. Even if she delivers him a resounding slap in the face, he wastes no time in expressing his desire for her. The Duke reveals himself to be a vulgar "buffoon": neither Elizabeth nor the audience can accept his proposal seriously — "[he] is placed almost entirely for a comic effect" (Latham, 2011: 158).

In another scene, during a night masquerade on the river, Elizabeth shares her boat with Dudley. On board of another one, the Duke of Anjou, together with the ambassador, watches them from a distance and asserts "her life depends on the feeling of my heart, yes?" Despite his foolishness, Anjou perfectly illustrates the danger Elizabeth is going to face. An hail of

arrows descend from the darkness, mortally wounding one of her guards and “pinning her to pillows” of her vessel (Latham, 2011: 158). Subsequently, by means of this purely fictitious incident, Cecil makes Elizabeth realise how pressing the point of her marriage is. As she imperiously tells the French ambassador “Do not presume, monsieur, to know the secrets of my heart”, Cecil angrily exclaims “Secretes, madam? You have no secrets! The world knows that Lord Robert visits your chamber at night and that you fornicate with him. It’s even said that you already carry his child!” she appears somewhat stunned by this news, but Cecil has another blow to deliver “You cannot marry Lord Robert. He is already married!” The shocked Elizabeth collapses into her chair, this time she is left speechless.

In historical fact, everyone knew of Dudley’s marriage to Amy Robsart, including Elizabeth. Initially, what she did not know was his second marriage to Lettice Knollys. Presenting Elizabeth as totally unaware of the existence of Dudley’s wife, Kapur gives the audience a plausible explanation for her reaction to his beloved’s disloyalty. Additionally, switching the wife from Knollys to Robsart is another of his inventions (Latham, 2011: 159).

In the film, Elizabeth’s bitter disappointment at Dudley fuels her relationship with the Duke of Anjou and, for a moment, she reconsiders his proposal. She goes to visit him in his apartment and she unexpectedly finds herself in the middle of a bacchanalian party. Behind a thin curtain, Anjou, dressed as a woman, is lying in bed with two boys. Showing a tolerance and a sense of humour ahead of her times, she observes “You are wearing a dress, Your Grace” (Latham, 2011: 159). He coolly responds “Yes, yes, I am wearing a dress, like this, like my mother and you. But I only wear a dress like this when I’m alone. In private, with my friends”.

In this wholly fictional circumstance, the Duke proves to be even more unsuitable than in their first meeting, and Elizabeth tries to repress a smile while affirming “I have, after an

agonising struggle, determined to sacrifice my own happiness for that of my people”. She categorically rejects his courtship (Latham, 2011: 160).

Blanchett’s Elizabeth dances a second Volta with Dudley — this time in an totally different spirit. When he tells her “You are still my Elizabeth”, she cries aloud “I am not your Elizabeth. I am no man’s Elizabeth. If you think to rule here, you are mistaken. I will have one mistress here, and no master!” This is partly a nod to historicity — the real Elizabeth pronounced almost these very words when she had understood that Dudley presumptuously hoped to become king by marrying her.

Fiennes’s Dudley is heartbroken, and Kapur freely chooses to have him unwittingly take part in a conspiracy against his Queen. When the fiendish plot is foiled by the Walsingham, Lord Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, is amongst the ones implicated — their troubled love story has definitely come to an end. The scene shows a devastated Dudley, sitting by fireplace, openly admitting “It is no easy thing to be loved by the Queen. It would corrupt the soul of any man”. He implores Elizabeth to kill him, but she denies it declaring “He shall be kept alive to always remind me of how close I came to danger” (Latham, 2011: 162).

The film moves to Elizabeth in front of a Virgin Mary statue in an empty chapel. She asks Walsingham “Am I to be made of stone?”, he answers “Aye, Madam, to reign supreme. All men need something greater than themselves to look up and to worship”. The camera frames the face of the Virgin Mary and that of Elizabeth one after the other, clearly connecting the two. She reflects “She held such power over men’s hearts. They died for her”, Walsingham finishes by saying “They have found nothing to replace her” (Latham, 2011: 162).

In *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, Hackett explains that, as the 1570s progressed, Elizabeth’s iconography proved a direct association with the Virgin; she had decided not to marry “in order to devote her whole care to sustaining the nation from her person alone” (1995: 81). Kapur seems to have borrowed a page from

Hackett's book when, once turned away from her beloved, his Elizabeth is about to sacrifice herself for the sake of her kingdom.

Blanchett's Elizabeth is completely static; one of her ladies sobbing cuts her hair uncharacteristically short while the others prepare a white face paint to apply onto her skin. She stares impassively, collecting long locks of hair on her lap. She starts reviewing her life in the form of flashback. Her mind lingers over the scenes where she was at Hatfield with Dudley at the beginning of the film, displaying how magical these moments of her life had been (Latham, 2011: 162). Finally, she appears before the court: she has become a "virgin". As her subjects kneel, the divine Elizabeth comments "Observe, Lord Burghley. I am married to England". She proceeds to the throne, her face is a portrait of the existed "Virgin Queen". The closing titles informs the viewer that Elizabeth reigned for another 40 years, never marrying. She leads England into the richest and most powerful country in Europe. Ultimately Kapur unveils his own (invented) version of the story: Elizabeth "never saw Dudley in private again, [but] on her deathbed she was said to have whispered his name [...]" (Latham, 2011: 163).

Elizabeth: The Golden Age, directed by Shekhar Kapur and written by William Nicholson and Michael Hirst, is the 2007 sequel to *Elizabeth*. Again it is Cate Blanchett who plays the role of Queen Elizabeth I, but this time the film does not start where the previous film was interrupted; the year is 1585, nearly thirty years into Elizabeth's throne (Latham, 2011: 165). A few minutes into the film and Elizabeth is in the royal barge to her chapel. This occasion gives Walsingham an opportunity to remind her of the dangers of spinsterhood, but additionally introduces her relation with the young and pretty lady-in-waiting, namely Elizabeth "Bess" Throckmorton (Abbie Cornish). Throughout the film Bess acts as Elizabeth's surrogate for her "body natural" as she represents her femininity and "feminine

weaknesses” (Latham, 2011: 166). In fact, the two discuss their type of ideal man, with Elizabeth concluding “There must be any amount of princes in the undiscovered lands across the sea. Find me an honest one of those”.

An engaging Walter Raleigh (Clive Owen) seems to arrive at the right moment. In keeping with the episode Trevelyan recounts to have happened at Greenwich in the biography *Sir Walter Raleigh* (2014), Owen’s Raleigh casts his cloak on the puddle Elizabeth was about to step on. Later, she sends Bess to find out about him while she is examining, complete with hand lens, the long portrait-procession of suitable husbands for her. Listening to the old refrain about the political advantages her kingdom may gain from a marriage, Elizabeth, terribly bored, asks Walsingham “How much longer do you think I can play this game, Francis?” “Virginity is an asset that holds its value well”, he sarcastically replies — as in *Elizabeth*, the Queen’s virginity “is not a literal fact but rather a political playing card” (Latham, 2011: 167).

Raleigh enters and informs Elizabeth that he is back from the New World where he named the fertile coast “Virginia”, in her honour. He has also brought her some gifts: “patata, Majesty. You eat it. Very nourishing” and “tobacco [...], very stimulating. Gold”. By way of his behaviour and speech, “Owen does his best to charge the exchange with sexual undertones” (Latham, 2011: 167), but he is accused of piracy by Elizabeth and the Spanish ambassador. Indeed, his characterisation in *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* is precisely one of a “romanticized pirate” (Latham, 2011: 167) — with his exotic stories and big dreams, he loses no time in finding his way into the Queen’s heart.

From the parade of portrayed suitors, a teenaged Archduke Charles of Austria (Christian Brassington) has come to court. Like a “desperate-to-please-child”, he pays Elizabeth with the highest compliments in his “broken English” (Latham, 2011: 168). She helps him to relax, suggesting “I pretend there’s a pane of glass between me and them. They can see me but they

don't touch me. You should try it". Yet, the Archduke does not even utter a word. Obviously she can hold no interest for such a clumsy boy, and she kindly dismisses him in his mother tongue (Latham, 2011: 168).

Once again Kapur has changed the timeline of the marriage negotiation which really took place in the mid-1560s — much earlier than in the film. Apart from the fact that he was only seven years younger than Elizabeth, the real Charles never met her in person and was finally refused because of his Catholicism (Levin, 1994).

Bess questions Raleigh on behalf of Elizabeth and decides to help him to gain the Queen's affections. She advises him to be as sincere as possible for "all men flatter the Queen in hope of advancement. Pay her the compliment of the truth". In addition, Raleigh comes to know Bess's name and teases her by saying "a second Elizabeth" (Latham, 2011: 168).

Elizabeth grants Raleigh a private audience and he describes to her what it is like to cross an ocean. He speaks as the well-versed poet Trevelyan in his work affirms he did, and Elizabeth listens, bewitched. "If [she had] martyred her sensuality at the end of the previous film, then Raleigh has [definitely] resurrected it" (Latham, 2011: 169).

Owen's Raleigh greatly resembles the historical one. According to Trevelyan, the fact he was already experienced as soldier and sailor, handsome, and extremely intelligent "gave him an advantage over most courtiers" (2014: ch. 6). Indeed, by 1583 he became a favourite of the Queen, together with the Earl of Leicester, Sir Christopher Hatton, and the Earl of Essex (Trevelyan, 2014).

Since Raleigh symbolises escape in the film, the following scene shows he and Elizabeth riding together at great speed — "a trope which is also used in films as a substitute for sex, and certainly appears to this effect in multiple Elizabeth films" (Latham, 2011: 169). On their return, the court watch them with disapproval; Elizabeth might never marry but her body politic must not be overcome by the natural one (Latham, 2011: 169).

While Elizabeth has been informed about the Spanish plan to attack her country, Raleigh requests permission to return to his colony, telling her “There’s nothing for me here”. She rebuts that he is “needed here” and makes him Captain of the Guard — a title historically bestowed in 1587 (Trevelyan, 2014). He remains silent, and Elizabeth inquires why he does not express his gratitude. “Why do you speak like a fool when you’re anything but a fool?” he answers; Owen’s Raleigh is a man of action who just wants his ships and Elizabeth knows it perfectly well. She collapses at the foot of her throne, revealing him “You have real adventures. You go where the maps end. And I would follow you there if I could. Believe me”.

As in a love triangle, Raleigh finds in Bess what Elizabeth could not give him — “men have needs”, he had previously affirmed in the film. Elizabeth stands totally naked in front of a mirror, looking at herself, while Raleigh is making love with her surrogate. Continually cutting from one scene to the other, the camera displays Elizabeth as if looking on their situation with a nostalgic air and, at the same time, connecting with it (Latham, 2011: 171-172).

This same mechanism characterises the sequence where Elizabeth has Bess and Raleigh learning the Volta, that particular dance she performed with Dudley in *Elizabeth*. Times have changed and Elizabeth is now forced to re-experience it vicariously through Bess. Through a series of “juxtapositions of Raleigh dancing with Elizabeth watching”, and with Elizabeth’s close-ups from the previous film, the overall effect is one of Elizabeth and Raleigh dancing together (Latham, 2011: 172).

As the film develops, the plot to assassinate Elizabeth and put her cousin Mary Stuart on the English throne fails, and the latter is executed thus giving Philip II of Spain a plausible reason to declare war against England (Latham, 2011: 173).

“In [such] a vulnerable moment”, as Ford and Mitchell observe, “[Elizabeth lets] her guard down and [bares] her soul to Raleigh” (2009: 292). Sitting by the fire, she poses the question “In some other world, in some other time, could you have loved me?” He responds “I know only one world. And in this world I have loved you”; they happen into a lingering kiss. She then discovers that Bess is pregnant with Raleigh’s child and has secretly become his wife without first obtaining her permission.

Uncovering their secret, Blanchett’s Elizabeth sends Raleigh to the Tower and banishes Bess from the court — historically, the secret marriage took place in 1591, therefore later than in the film’s chronology (Trevelyan, 2014). However, Blanchett’s Elizabeth will shortly release him for she needs him as a soldier for the country (Latham, 2011: 175).

Once the Spanish Armada is defeated, the English “Golden Age” is about to begin. In the last scene, having resumed her “divine being”, Elizabeth gives Bess and Raleigh’s son her blessing. She softly exclaims to Raleigh “Elizabeth has a son”, directly equating Bess with herself. Elizabeth maternally holds the baby in her arms; they are a living image of a Madonna with child (Latham, 2011: 176). “I am called the Virgin Queen”, she finally concludes in her voiceover. “Unmarried. I have no master. Childless. I am mother to my people. God give me the strength to bear this mighty freedom”.

Elizabeth R is a 1971 BBC miniseries starring Glenda Jackson in the lead role of Elizabeth I. Each one of the six ninety-minute episodes which composes this TV series is made by a different production team. Nine hours in overall length, every episode provides the audience with a special focus on Elizabeth’s life and presents a close adherence to historical facts and sources (Latham, 2011: 191-192).

This series does not distinguish itself for grand passion, but rather conforms to stage Elizabeth’s marriageability and love life as if stripped of overwhelming emotions. The story

begins with “The Lion’s Cub”, penned by John Hale and directed by Claude Whatham, with an Elizabeth who has not yet ascended the throne and is informed by Robert Tyrwhit, an agent of the Crown, that Thomas Seymour is in the Tower because he has proposed marriage to her. Deeply touched by the terrible news, Elizabeth categorically states “I will never marry. Never, never, never”. From the very beginning, Jackson’s Elizabeth rejects the idea of marriage.

She flashes back to the time when she was in her teens and Seymour was her guardian. The first-person camera makes the viewer see the scene through Elizabeth’s perspective while Seymour (John Ronane) tries to seduce her into bed; cuts her gown into pieces; and expresses his love for her regardless of his pregnant wife Katherine Parr (Rosalie Crutchley) (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 259). Elizabeth seems amused by the bizarre situation and innocently tells her worried lady-in-waiting Kat Ashley (Rachel Kempson) “It’s only a game”. After returning to reality, she thinks to herself “What harm is there in flattery?”

William Cecil (Ronald Hines) enters and suggests that Elizabeth should admit everything that happened in the house of Seymour. He also carefully instructs her on how to answer the questioning in order to ensure her own innocence. Finally, she avoids a charge for treason and Thomas Seymour is beheaded.

According to Bassnett, the Seymour affair “remains a disturbing and unsolved passage in Elizabeth’s early life” (1997: 23). In 1547, after the death of her father Henry VIII, she resided in Chelsea with her stepmother Katherine Parr. Even if Elizabeth was only 14 years old, many suitors had already asked for her hand in marriage, including Thomas Seymour. When the royal council rejected his proposal, he secretly married Parr and went to live with her. At the same time, Seymour seemed to enjoy a relationship with Elizabeth that rose doubts in the people questioning her chastity. Gossip grew, Parr was bearing Seymour’s child and Elizabeth was forced to leave their house in May 1548 (Bassnett, 1997: 24). As in *Elizabeth R*, the conclusive proof of what really happened in the household was given by Elizabeth’s

deposition during Seymour's trial, which culminated with his execution in March 1549. Apparently, it was "sexual harassment of Elizabeth by Seymour, and extreme naivety on Elizabeth's part that many have chosen to construe as evidence of her love for [him]" (Bassnett, 1997: 25).

After Mary's reign and death, the plot develops with "The Marriage Game", written by Rosemary Anne Sissons and directed by Herbert Wise. Elizabeth is now Queen of England and the moment comes for the council to raise the matter of marriage. Nevertheless she skilfully evades the issue stating "Leave that aside", while proposals begin to arrive at court. Cecil, appointed principal secretary, informs her about the advantages and disadvantages of each offer. King Philip of Spain, Prince Eric of Sweden or the Archduke Charles of Austria were the candidates: sooner or later she must marry one of them and produce an heir.

Elizabeth's special favourite, the Master of Horse Robert Dudley (Robert Hardy) is helping his wife Amy Robsart (Stacey Tendeter) to relocate into a new house. She is extremely sick, and jealous of her husband, who is always away from home. Dudley yells at his wife that "The Queen does not like wives at court" and explains "Whoever sits beside [Elizabeth] on the throne must know that I helped put him there". "You want to marry her yourself", Amy rebuts; "How could I marry her? I am already married", he bluntly replies on the way out to the door. It is perfectly clear that Dudley cares nothing for Amy and sees her as a great impediment to Elizabeth. Hardy's Dudley is a social climber, constantly trying to "[sabotage] the Queen's marriage prospects by manipulating the major players [involved]" (Latham, 2011: 200).

Despite his negative characterisation in this series, Jackson's Elizabeth defines him as her "Eyes" and "the most handsome man in the kingdom", and shares with him a lingering goodnight kiss in front of the astonished ladies-in-waiting (Latham, 2011: 200).

In the meantime, Amy lies dead at the bottom of the stairs. While the viewer wonders about the possible causes of her death, Mary Stuart's comment "The Queen of England is going to marry her horse keeper, and he has killed his wife to make room for her" well summarises the talk of Europe at the time.

The jury returns a verdict of accidental death but Cecil warns Elizabeth: "If you marry Lord Robert your good name will go forever" and with it the safety of the realm (Latham, 2011: 201).

Sarah Gristwood in *Elizabeth & Leicester: Power, Passion, Politics* affirms that in 1562 Elizabeth caught severe smallpox. Initially refusing medical treatment, she entered into a semiconscious state. In front of her councillors and courtiers, panicked at the idea that she was about to die leaving no successor, she appointed Robert Dudley Lord Protector of England with an annual salary of twenty thousand pounds (Gristwood, 2007: 153-154). Furthermore, the Spanish ambassador de Quadra reported that Elizabeth declared that "although she loved and had always loved Lord Robert dearly, as God was her witness nothing unseemly had ever passed between them" (Gristwood, 2007: 128). Fortunately, once treated by the German physician Dr Burcot, Elizabeth rapidly recovered from the illness (Gristwood, 2007: 155).

In *Elizabeth R*, after the faithful representation of this historic event, the question of the Queen's marriage is again revived. Elizabeth is resolute not to marry, stating "I am married to England. I am married to my people. For the succession [...] when times comes, I will take care of that". Then, quoting the historical Elizabeth from a 1559 speech, she continues "[...] At the last, a marble stone shall record that this Queen, having reigned for such and such a time, lived and died a virgin".

Regardless of Elizabeth's categorical assurances that she won't marry, Hardy's Dudley arranges for her a (fictional) meeting at St. Within's Church. "If you come, then we will be married, and I will love you for ever", he tells Elizabeth.

The Queen's carriage approaches intentionally late; she steps out of it and explains to Dudley why she will never marry. Speaking of her mother's execution and that of her step-mother Katherine Howard when she was only a child, Elizabeth admits "I learned then how dangerous life was". "As I am now", she concludes, "I owe my life to no man's goodwill, except the goodwill of the people — and I have always known how to keep that". He understands, and the two go back to Greenwich in the same coach.

Elizabeth the Queen continues to play the game of courtly love — as she says to Cecil: "no [suitor] should be discouraged". "Shadow in the Sun", by Julian Mitchell and Richard Martin, deals with the marriage suit of Francis, the Duke of Alençon (who later becomes the Duke of Anjou). The episode starts with Elizabeth and her court grieving for the thousands of French Protestant, Huguenots, slaughtered on St. Bartholomew's Eve (Latham, 2011: 202). "There can be no further question of marriage between the Queen and the Duke of Alençon", Dudley, now a member of the privy council and Earl of Leicester, promptly informs the French ambassador.

On the one hand this wedding would bring peace with France and remove the Spaniards from the doorstep; on the other, the fact that Alençon is Catholic, even if a tolerant one, poses an enormous obstacle in a Protestant country. Elizabeth's councillors hold dissenting opinions on this matter. In addition, they are worried about their Queen's reaction to her cousin Lettice Knollys's secret marriage to Dudley who, in the meanwhile, is flirting with Elizabeth and imploring her not to marry.

For her part, Elizabeth seems prepared to accept Alençon's proposal — "she knows it's the last chance for marriage or an heir" (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 262). Alençon (Michael

Williams) comes to England; he is not the vulgar buffoon played by Vincent Cassel in *Elizabeth*, but in any case a comic character who is explicitly instructed how to behave by his representative. Indeed, Elizabeth says to her maid that Alençon “will do very well”, and, to Cecil, “I mean to have him, you understand that?” (Latham, 2011: 204).

Elizabeth R focuses on every factual detail: Jackson’s Elizabeth enjoys the company of Williams’s Alençon and nicknames him “Frog” — a “love charm” for the Romans as “it signified mutual ardour and constancy”, Hines’s Cecil clarifies for the audience. Furthermore, Alençon bears on his face the disfiguring scars left by smallpox in his childhood (Bassnett, 1997).

To her bitter disappointment, Elizabeth is dissuaded by the council to proceed with the marriage as Walsingham (Stephen Murray) sternly warns her “The people fear for their religion”. Afterwards, she also finds out that Dudley has married a second time.

As recorded in history, only Sussex (John Shrapnel) is able to convince Elizabeth not to convey Dudley to the Tower (Levin, 1994) , since “he has committed no legal offence” and “the marriage was legally conducted”.

Later, Jackson’s Elizabeth reveals “It is a Queen who means to marry, not I”, not the *woman* she is. “I hate the very idea of marriage. I cannot do it”, she confesses as well. The Duke of Alençon is made to leave with a large sum of money, while Elizabeth recites in voiceover the poem *On Monsieur’s Departure* (from which comes the title of the episode):

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

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

Some gentler passion slide into my mind,
For I am soft, and made of melting snow;
Or be more cruel, Love, and so be kind.
Let me or float or sink, be high or low;
Or let me live with some more sweet content,
Or die, and so forget what love e'er meant.

This poem was composed by the historical Elizabeth “as a sort of farewell to the man she came closest to marrying” (Latham, 2001: 202).

Hardy’s Dudley is back at court but Elizabeth states unequivocally “we will deal with each other more honestly from now on”. Gay times have gone forever.

In the final scene of “Enterprise of England”, written by John Prebble and directed by Donald McWhinnie, Elizabeth is informed by Cecil that Dudley is dead. As Elizabeth I did in 1588, Jackson preserves his last letter until the end of her days, then she starts to weep uncontrollably.

In last episode, “Sweet England’s Pride”, penned by Ian Rodger and directed by Roderick Graham, the Spanish Armada is defeated but the ageing Elizabeth faces growing problems given by her new favourite Robert Devereux.

In this series there is no fictional love relationship between Elizabeth and Essex. Jackson's Elizabeth just describes Robin Ellis's Essex as "the sun in splendour" and "all our pride", despite he imperilled the kingdom in the nonperforming 1596 counter-attack on Spain.

He is an arrogant, selfish person who seeks nothing but personal glory. When Elizabeth sends him to Ireland to attack Tyrone, the leader of the rebels in Ulster, he seriously mismanages the entire operation. Additionally, he marches to London leading an abortive coup d'état against the Queen. Consequently, Ellis's Essex goes to the axe. He bitterly repents before his decapitation.

Elizabeth R ends with Elizabeth's death in 1603. The ring of state is going to be delivered to James VI of Scotland.

Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen is a TV serial made for Masterpiece Theatre. It is written by Paula Milne, directed by Coky Giedroyc and featuring Anne-Marie Duff in the title role of Queen Elizabeth I. This 2005 miniseries mainly aims for historical accuracy and presents, in less than four hours divided into two parts, essentially the same sequence of events as in the 1970s *Elizabeth R* (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 268). However, its mix of relatively young cast, modernisation of historical dialogues with contemporary references, elaborate visual effects and upbeat soundtrack (a blend of modern and Elizabethan music) adds a new freshness to the story.

As usual, the matter of marriage remains a taboo also with Duff's Elizabeth. Indeed, once proclaimed Queen, she pays little attention to her counsellors' recommendations to secure the succession, and enjoys spending her time with a good-looking Robert Dudley (Tom Hardy). This Elizabeth is perfectly aware of his married state, and when he becomes too flirtatious, she distances herself from the situation asking about his sick wife (Latham, 2011: 225).

In this version, Dudley's spouse, Amy Robsart (Emilia Fox), is portrayed as "an intensely tragic and almost saintly figure" (Latham, 2011: 226). She has fair skin and dresses in demure colours, quietly waiting at home for her husband to come. Though Dudley tells Elizabeth that his was an arranged marriage and there is no love involved, when he is with his wife it is apparent he feels affection for her. He is not the totally immoral person of *Elizabeth R* and, before returning to court, says to Amy's maid "Be vigilant in your care of her, Madam. She might well be the best part of me".

The secretary of state William Cecil (Ian Hart) makes Elizabeth face up to practical reality stating "Your duty is [...] provide England with an heir". Moreover, he hastens to add "We feel that a match with the Archduke Charles of Austria is most propitious. [...] A union with the Habsburg will not only assure your future prosperity but will deter any act of aggression from France or Spain". At first Elizabeth has an extremely negative reaction, but she later promises Cecil to consider the Archduke's proposal.

In a scene in front of the fireplace, Elizabeth explains to Dudley that "a woman ruler is not as other women [...]. Like the coin that bears her image, there are two sides to her. On the one she embodies the feminine frailty of her sex and on the other, she is the body politic. Ordained by God". That is to say: even if I never want to, I have to take a suitable husband for the political responsibility towards my country.

Revealing the depth of her feelings for Dudley, the camera, in a slow-motion shot, films Elizabeth dancing the Volta with him. Then, she confesses to her lady-in-waiting Kat Ashley (Tara Fitzgerald) "He is my only joy [...].! When I am with him, the burden I must carry is lifted".

In this version Amy is shown dead — this time she commits suicide after realising Dudley's love for Elizabeth and power.

Hardy's Dudley asks Elizabeth to marry him; they kiss passionately but all of a sudden she stops and orders him to leave the court. When he bluntly warns her that "If I leave, I won't return [...]", she furiously shouts the very famous quote "I will have but one mistress and no master!".

Although the only words *Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen* speaks about Dudley's proposal are: "We must not! I cannot!", the reasoning behind them is the same as *Elizabeth R*. According to Jenkins's assumption in *Elizabeth the Great*,

No one who saw her among men doubted her extreme susceptibility to male attraction; it was in fact more than ordinary; but it would seem that the harm done to Elizabeth as a small child had resulted in an irremediable condition of nervous shock [...]. Held up in the arms of her imploring mother her terrible father as he frowned down upon them; hearing that a sword cut off her mother's head: that her young stepmother had been dragged shrieking down the gallery when she tried to reach the King to entreat his mercy — these experiences, it would appear, had built up a resistance that nothing, no passion, no entreaty, no tenderness could conquer. In the fatally vulnerable years she had learned to connect the idea of sexual intercourse with terror and death; in the dark and low-lying region of the mind where reason cannot penetrate she knew that if you give yourself to men, they cut your head off with a sword, an axe (1958: 95-96).

Following the smallpox episode, the negotiations with the Archduke Charles collapse and Elizabeth quickly reassures the Parliament: "It is England I married, my Lords".

Nonetheless, as time passes, Elizabeth agrees to marry the Duke of Anjou, her "Frog prince" — "Do not undermine that now [...]", Cecil begs Dudley who was now appointed Earl of Leicester. Anjou (Matthias Girbig) looks like the 25-year-old boy who courted Elizabeth in 1579. By contrast, his face is not badly disfigured and his love for Elizabeth not pure. When she sends him back to France, he is not heartbroken and defines the whole situation a "farce" and a waste of time.

Elizabeth's reaction to Dudley against his marriage with Lettice Knollys is a violent one. The camera is "hand-held" and "jerky" to emphasise the nervousness and instability as they

confront each other (Latham, 2011: 230). He seems painfully honest and admits “I have mortgaged my life in the hope that some day we’d be together! [...] It was for comfort, Bess. It was a diversion”. She accepts no excuses (for the moment) and, with tears in her eyes, Elizabeth dismisses Dudley with “You are dead to me”.

Regardless of the vicissitudes of their relationship, the historical Elizabeth always remained strongly attached to Dudley. So too is Duff’s Elizabeth: learning of his death, she desperately cries “My heart is wretched from me! Oh God — Not this! Anything but this!” His last letter to her is put away in a jewellery box (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 269).

The timeline shifts to 1596. The viewer is informed that “Elizabeth has reigned for 37 years”, and the Earl of Essex (Hans Matheson) disrespects the ageing Queen. He is faithfully presented as a naughty boy who constantly betrays the trust of his Queen, not only on the battlefield.

Again, also in this miniseries, Elizabeth and Essex have no romance. She rather sees him as a son, telling Essex “A mother’s love obeys only one rule. That is given without expectation of any in return”. Even so, he prepares for the coup and describes her as a “wretched crooked carcass”. As a result, Essex is executed.

Elizabeth gradually approaches her own death — James VI of Scotland is the next King. The final scene discovery of Anne Boleyn’s hidden miniature inside the ring of state beautifully embroiders her departure from the living beings.

Elizabeth I, directed by Tom Hooper and written by Nigel Williams, is another 2005 miniseries about the life of Queen Elizabeth I — in fact, the release of the previously examined *Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen* was delayed in the United Kingdom in order to stagger two viewings on the same topic (Latham, 2011: 237). This HBO two-part series (each episode lasting two hours) begins in *medias res*: the opening titles tell the viewer that the year

is 1579 and “Elizabeth has been on the throne for twenty years”. Furthermore, “[she] has so far refused to marry” and without a direct heir “there is a danger of civil war between those competing over the succession”. Played by Helen Mirren, Elizabeth is introduced while being undressed (against a backdrop of Tudor roses as decorative motif on the wall) for a gynaecological exam (Latham, 2011: 239). “Her Majesty is still capable of bearing children” and she is “virgo intacta”, the doctor is pleased to report to the council. “If she were too old to bear children [...], there would be little sense in her marrying”, Francis Walsingham (Patrick Malahide) promptly says to William Cecil (Ian McDiarmid). Elizabeth is now forty-six and the young Duke of Anjou has proposed marriage to her.

Robert Dudley (Jeremy Irons), the Earl of Leicester, openly opposes the Anglo-French marriage alliance but Elizabeth does much to reassure him in her chamber: “Be not afraid, I will not marry. [...] We have each other as always, Robin, since that way our affections tend”. This Elizabeth and her Dudley make a lovely middle-aged couple with a longstanding relationship behind them. “Their romance has matured” and great passion has been replaced by great esteem (Latham, 2011: 241).

Nonetheless, later in the TV serial, Elizabeth explains to Dudley that for the safety of her person and kingdom, she intends to proceed with the French match. After all, “If I marry, I must marry royalty”; “I could not marry you”, she earlier cautioned him.

Even if *Elizabeth I* “step[s] in and out history [...] at will”, it gives a highly plausible interpretation of the life of the Tudor Queen (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 272). Indeed, as Weir comments, it is really not possible to assert whether or not the historical Elizabeth wanted to marry Robert Dudley (malicious rumours aside), but she knew for certain that marrying him would mean “taking herself out of the European marriage market and abandoning her chance of making a match that would bring economic and political advantages to England”. Additionally, “[...] her marriage was the most advantageous asset she had, the means

whereby she could keep other princes' goodwill and help maintain the balance of power in Europe" (Weir, 2008: 112).

"Well, gentlemen, if marriage must be, then it must be", Mirren's Elizabeth announces to the council — in a flash Anjou is at her feet, in disguise. Once he discloses his identity, Anjou (Jérémie Covillault) is a personable dark-haired young man with nice manners (Latham, 2011: 244). He and Elizabeth are shown spending much time together in the open air at Greenwich, cruising the Thames in the Royal Barge and, inside, talking. Regardless of the age difference and the political interests, Covillault's Anjou feels attracted to Elizabeth, and murmurs to his representative "she is quite pretty". Moreover, "I have never felt more natural", he confesses to Elizabeth, and she replies it is precisely the same for her (Latham, 2011: 245).

These Anjou and Elizabeth are particularly fond of each other but it soon becomes obvious that this marriage must not be. Apart from Dudley who has implored her not to marry from the beginning, now even the court seems rather doubtful as a pamphlet by John Stubbs has been published against this union. As in history, the author has his hand cut off before a disappointed audience (Bassnett, 1997). Mirren's Elizabeth cannot ignore the wide disagreement, and halts the negotiations. Before Anjou leaves, she vents her frustration with the council "Do you imagine I do not want a child? Do you imagine I do not have the desire to hold a babe in my arms? [...] Am I made of stone gentlemen?".

Of course the real Elizabeth never pronounced these words and biographers seem to agree she personally preferred the life of celibacy. Yet, Doran believes that "had Elizabeth's council ever united behind any one of her suitors, she would have found great difficulty in rejecting his proposal; likewise without strong conciliar backing Elizabeth would not or could marry a particular candidate" (1998: 41).

As *Elizabeth R*, also *Elizabeth I* recites in a voiceover the poem *On Monsieur's Departure*. "Well, England, the Queen is all yours", she sighs, looking at Anjou's boat sails away.

Seven years later, Iron's Dudley is back at court; Elizabeth's rage at the discovery of his marriage to Knollys is faded away but their relationship has changed — she now calls him “brother Leicester”. “Tell me the difference between love and friendship”, Elizabeth questions him during a conversation. “There is none”, he answers. She then comforts him for the loss of his only child (Latham, 2011: 249- 250).

This time, there is neither William Cecil who informs Elizabeth about Dudley's death, nor a last letter; she sits by his side when the moment comes. Before dying, he tells her “There are those who say I was of the calculating kind. But what I felt for you I could not help. Sometimes it did not help my cause at all. But, truth to be told, it was as constant as the heavens”. Elizabeth loves him, too. In addition, Dudley advises his stepson, the Earl of Essex (Hugh Dancy), “Take care of her, young man. She needs looking after [...]. And I will not be there”.

Immediately after, Mirren's Elizabeth assumes the white mask of the iconic “Virgin Queen” (only for a moment) and turns to her only solace, which is the people of England. “[...] They may have yet a greater prince, but they shall never have a more loving one”, she loudly declares.

The second part begins in 1589 and Elizabeth looks slightly aged. The viewer is provided with captions: once defeated the Spaniards, “There was no more talk of her to take a husband and produce an heir. But who would succeed her? Who would take the extraordinary power for themselves?”

This episode focuses on Mirren's Elizabeth obsession with Dancy's Essex; as recorded in history she gives him Leicester's old apartments (Doran, 2015), and calls him in the same way as his stepfather, “Robin”. Elizabeth is totally overwhelmed by Essex's boyish fascination, one moment she scolds him for his rashness, “Men like you must be ruled”, and the following she tells him “[...] you'd better kiss me again”. They kiss often in the series.

At one point, Elizabeth expresses her emotional difficulty in a monologue: “The more I let you go, the more I seem to have need of you. And it will not go away, no matter I command it. Do you think the Queen is mistress of her feelings? No, she is a fool for love. A hopeless fool” (Latham, 2011: 259).

Despite their fictional all-consuming passion, Dancy’s Essex cannot escape his grim fate; there is no difference with *Elizabeth R* and *Elizabeth: The Virgin Queen*, after having sabotaged the Irish operation, he is sentenced to death.

“There was a man once... the hardest thing to govern is the heart”, Mirren’s Elizabeth whispers shortly before dying. Is she alluding to Leicester or Essex? Maybe Anjou? There is no answer (Latham, 2011: 263). Elizabeth closes her eyes for the last time.

3.2.2 Elizabeth’s rival Queens: Mary Tudor and Mary, Queen of Scots

As mentioned before, Elizabeth’s complicated relationships with her half-sister Mary and her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots are amid those events which have particularly attracted the interest of numerous screen adaptations.

When Elizabeth was born, Mary was deprived of her title of princess and declared illegitimate. Not more than three years later Anne Boleyn was beheaded, guilty of adultery, and therefore the little Elizabeth was demoted of her rank too (there were even rumours suggesting that she might not have been the daughter of Henry VIII) (Bassnett, 1997: 18-19).

For a period Mary maintained formal relations with Elizabeth, even if she was the fruit of the marriage which had caused her parents to divorce and the schism from the Catholic faith (Bassnett, 1997: 17). However, when Elizabeth did not convert to Catholicism, Mary proved uncompromising — she confined her half-sister to the Tower without proof, and refused to name her as a successor till the very end (Bassnett, 1997: 34).

Once she became a queen, Elizabeth struggled with another potentially dangerous female relative: Mary, Queen of Scots. As soon as Elizabeth came to power in 1558, Mary claimed the English throne as Henry VII's great-granddaughter and next in line of succession after Henry VIII's children. Though made a prisoner in England, Mary attempted to seize her cousin's kingdom and become its Catholic ruler in various ways. Nevertheless Elizabeth "was [always] reluctant to condemn another monarch" (Bassnett, 1997: 112), and only when she was informed about the Babington Plot and Mary's involvement in it, she was left with no other choice than to order the execution of the Queen of Scots in 1587.

Accordingly, these conflicts provide filmmakers with material for rivalry between women on a grand scale. As usual, the majority of filmmakers cannot resist rewriting the past, even arranging invented meetings in which they strenuously defend their position and incur the enmity of each other. Let us see how their meeting is recreated and shown in the selected filmography.

The first one of the two Shekhar Kapur's films deals with a fragment of the life story of Elizabeth and her half-sister. Beginning in 1554, *Elizabeth* opens in the last years of Mary's reign — Protestants are persecuted and the Wyatt Rebellion has just failed (its aim being to depose Mary and replace her with Elizabeth). As in historical fact, Mary (Kathy Burke) presumes Elizabeth guilty of joining the uprising and orders to take her to the Tower. There is no proof Elizabeth was involved but as a member of the council suggests "She must never be allowed to succeed". After all, "My sister was born [...] a bastard. She will never rule England!", Burke's Mary hysterically screams at her councillors.

Blanchett's Elizabeth arrives at the Tower's Water Gate, and "her world literally grows darker as she enters Mary's" (Latham, 2011: 151). Once inside, she is shown dressed in white and surrounded by black-coated questioners (Latham, 2011: 151). "I cannot confess to something

I did not do! [...] You must let me see the Queen”, Elizabeth indignantly protests. She is then dragged away by some soldiers; Elizabeth openly confesses to her ladies-in-waiting “Tonight I think I die”. Consecutively, she is in a carriage, and from the window images of terror and death accompany her journey (she does not know where she is taken).

The scene suddenly moves to Elizabeth opening a door with a tapestry of the Virgin with child — she meets her half-sister. Mary is desperate: her husband King Philip has gone and the child she was expecting turns out to be a fatal tumour. She cruelly tells Elizabeth “When I look at you, I see nothing of the King, only that whore, your mother. My father never did anything so well as to cut off her head”.

Elizabeth is informed about her death warrant but she pleads innocent to the charges and helps her cause by saying “If you sign that paper, you will be murdering your own sister”.

Even if she does not promise to practice Catholicism, Elizabeth is allowed to return to Hatfield (Latham, 2011: 152). “Do not think to be Queen at all!”, Mary dismisses her.

In *Elizabeth* facts merge with fiction but there is a sixteenth-century Protestant chronicler, named John Foxe, who gave a description (maybe invented) of a 1555 face-to-face meeting between the two women. Additionally, he reported that Philip spied on them — a detail which many have chosen to construe as a proof of his passion for Elizabeth (Bassnett, 1997).

Later in the movie, the Spanish ambassador brings Blanchett’s Elizabeth a message: “The King of Spain is enraptured, and offers you his hand in marriage” (in *Elizabeth the Queen*, Weir specifies it happened in 1559, the year after Mary’s death). The camera cuts to Burke’s Mary agonising on her deathbed. Immediately after, Elizabeth is the new Queen of England.

Covering the period from 1585 to (about) 1592, *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* presents the final stage of the difficult relations between Elizabeth and Mary, Queen of Scots, relying on a “scrambled chronology” (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 288). When the movie starts, the opening

captions outline the current situation: “Spain is the most powerful empire in the world. Philip of Spain, a devout Catholic, has plunged Europe into holy war. Only England stands against him, ruled by a Protestant Queen: Elizabeth”.

The plot begins to unfold as Elizabeth’s advisers fear for the safety of their Queen and Mary Stuart (Samantha Morton) is under house arrest receiving secret messages. Mary’s lady-in-waiting unravels the mystery to the viewer, saying “Soon England’s true believers will rise up against the bastard usurper Elizabeth and slit her throat. And [...] my lady will be queen”. The 1586 Babington Plot has been set in motion together with the older Spanish *Empresa de Inglaterra* to conquer the country and place the Queen of Scots on the English throne.

When Blanchett’s Elizabeth discovers the existence of the Armada, something is about to happen that will change her destiny forever. Anthony Babington (Eddie Redmayne), a young Catholic supporter of Mary, enters the chapel and yells “Elizabeth! Whore!”, holding a gun. Dressed in a white bridal gown, she turns and slowly opens her hands. He pulls the trigger, the gun empty, and Elizabeth falls to the floor unharmed. Obviously, none of this ever happened historically as Walsingham foiled the Babington Plot before it was carried out.

By way of this scene Kapur offers his modified version of the history: the purpose of the plot was not to assassinate Elizabeth and replace her with Mary, but to involve the latter in the action deceptively. Additionally, Francis Throckmorton’s confession in 1583 (revealing the Spanish conspiracy had international support) overlaps with Walsingham’s ploy in 1586 for intercepting Mary’s letters via the casks of ale (Bassnett, 1997). As a result, Morton’s Mary is found guilty of complicity in the Babington Plot with a considerable variation: it is all part of Philip of Spain’s plan to attack England.

Mary’s jailer, namely Amyas Paulet, announces to her that she is to be tried for treason. Removing one of the messages from a little wallet, he continues “With so many secrets, you can never quite be sure who’s on whose side till the game ends. Walsingham has every letter

you've written". She cannot believe Elizabeth has not been hurt in the attack, and begins to scream hysterically "Traitor! Traitors!", fainting to the ground.

As recorded in history, Blanchett's Elizabeth is tormented — "[...] Mary Stuart must die? Where is it written? Who says so? Have I ordered it?", she vehemently protests to Walsingham.

The camera frames the death warrant bearing Elizabeth's signature; a moment later, Mary is told she will be executed the next morning.

When the moment comes, she appears particularly beautiful and calmly proceeds to the block — "And if I die, it shall be as I have lived. As a queen, trusting in the mercy of God, my Father", Mary had previously stated.

Then, the historical quote "I forgive you with all my heart" to the executioner (as cited in Anka Muhlstein's 2007 *Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart: The Perils of Marriage*). This sequence is filmed in slow motion and clashes with the parallel one of Elizabeth fast walking through her palace screaming "It must be stopped! I want it stopped!", falling to the ground in despair (Latham, 2011: 174).

In *Elizabeth R*, the historic sequence of events between Elizabeth and her half-sister Mary Tudor and then with her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots is presented in great detail — matching the mood of the whole miniseries.

In "The Lion's Cub", as Jackson's Elizabeth kneels before Mary Tudor (Daphne Slater) who is now Queen of England, Thomas Wyatt's voice rises from the crowd: "God save the princess Elizabeth!" Immediately, the two women leave the scene for a private conversation.

"The people are glad that I'm old enough to die in time for you to become queen", Mary bluntly tells Elizabeth. The younger sister answers "I am your loyal servant. I want nothing". However, she rejects the Catholic religion and is to be strictly confined to her apartments for

safety reasons. The reference to Anne Boleyn is inevitable — “You look at me with the eyes of your mother [...]” who caused the death of my mother by “foul practices of witchcraft”, Mary finally provokes Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth learns that Mary plans to marry Philip of Spain (Peter Jeffrey) and have an heir, she goes to her sister asking for instruction and guidance about the Catholic faith — she is said to mock the Mass but obtains permission to leave the court.

Later, Elizabeth is believed guilty of supporting the Wyatt Rebellion and is taken to the Tower. As chronicled by Foxe, she arrives at the Traitors’ Gate by boat on Palm Sunday. Elizabeth initially refuses to enter and sits in the pouring rain stating “Better sit here than in a worse place [...]” (Bassnett, 1997: 31). “I pray God may confound me eternally if I ever, by any means, was privy to the treachery of Sir Thomas Wyatt or any that rebelled with him against the Queen’s lawful majesty”, she protests.

While Elizabeth is in prison fearing for her life, Mary’s pregnancy fails to bear fruit and her husband returns to Spain. Therefore, Mary informs her sister that Philip (who is spying on them) has ordered her release from imprisonment and wishes to see her before his departure. As Mary leaves the room, Jeffrey’s Philip makes his entrance — “Princess, what’s the past is dead [...]. You have all the virtues, lady. And you have a loving Prince for a friend”, he says to Elizabeth. Still, Mary intends to banish her from the court and, in a final meeting, she swears to her sister she will die before acknowledging the succession.

Shortly afterwards, Mary dies and Philip proposes to Elizabeth, crowned Queen of England.

In this series, Elizabeth’s uneasy relationship with her cousin is represented from beginning to end. In fact, in “The Marriage Game” Mary, Queen of Scots and her husband, the King of France, make a claim to the English throne. Elizabeth publicly announces that “He should have a care how he tries to take my crown. Or I’ll take a husband to make his head ache”,

such as the Earl of Arran, a Protestant claimant to the Scottish crown, in order to depose Mary, unite England and Scotland, and exile the French forever. Though, as Cecil later comments, “Mary Stuart will have her second husband before the Queen has her first”.

Robert Dudley is appointed Earl of Leicester — a cut to Mary (Vivian Pickles) reveals that Elizabeth offers to her his hand in marriage. Nonetheless, Mary marries Lord Darnley and proclaims him King of Scotland. Opening in 1572, “Shadow in the Sun” introduces a change in the relationship between the two cousins as Elizabeth defines the Queen of Scots as “my guest”, with Dudley specifying “The sort that will cut your throat in the night”. However, the climax comes in “Horrible Conspiracies” which “begins in 1585 with a death mask and ends in 1587 with the Scottish’s queen beheading” (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 262). A few minutes into the episode and Walsingham reminds Elizabeth of the growing problem of Mary Stuart (also giving the viewer a history lesson):

Following her various marriages, Darnley’s murder, and the rising against Bothwell, your royal cousin [...] fled to this country and threw herself upon your great mercy. She rewarded Your majesty’s protective kindness by inspiring numberless plots, encouraging hellish priests, popish conspiracies and... all manner of dangerous wickedness. For well-nigh twenty years, she’s infected this realm while her son James sits upon the Scottish throne. And yet, madam, you refuse to recognize her as your enemy and do nothing to rid yourself and your kingdom of this bosom serpent.

Elizabeth tries to pretend Mary is not a threat — her cousin is “Safely stowed at Chartley with Sir Amyas Paulet”, she says.

When Walsingham uncovers the Babington Plot with the help of Gifford and Phelippes who respectively carried and decoded the correspondence involving Mary’s conspiracy, Elizabeth is forced to take action. Once she signs her cousin’s death warrant, the privy council acts immediately.

As the historical one, Pickles's Mary spends her final hours with calm dignity, meeting her destiny as a Catholic martyr (Muhlstein, 2007). She had revealed earlier in the episode:

I regret nothing. I know my faults and my virtues. I know that I am a creature of impulse seldom thinking before I act, driven on by passions, delighting in the unexpected, and bored by sensible caution, and disliking all who are not of my humor. This is my alchemy, and I rejoice in it, even though it has brought me much unhappiness, even though it has led me here. I would not have been created differently. and this is not self-love [...], merely an acceptance of what I am and what I ever shall be. God made me thus, and I am glad he did so.

After the execution, Elizabeth is given the historical details of Mary's death:

Her blazing hair was false [...]. It was a wig. In truth, she was grey and aging, her beauty gone [...]. The dead woman's lips moved, trembling, as if trying to speak [...] for a full fifteen minutes. As the body was lifted, the queen's terrier dog crept from beneath the skirts where it had been hiding, and lay down beside the displaced head.

"I gave no orders that the warrant was to be dispatched. [...] I am innocent of her death", she cries. Then, Elizabeth blames Walsingham — "When you are lying on your last bed, remember my words [...]. And recall how you plotted my cousin's terrible end", she gravely tells him.

As in *Elizabeth*, the series *Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen* opens in 1554. Again, Mary Tudor's reign is one of death and terror — Protestants are burned at the stake and anonymous eyes spy on the characters through peepholes.

In this version Elizabeth appears guilty of supporting the Wyatt's Rebellion. For this reason, Duff's Elizabeth asks Ashley about Wyatt's letters once inside the Tower. However, her lady-in-waiting has destroyed the correspondence, and with it any proof of Elizabeth's involvement in the conspiracy (Latham, 2011: 222).

Immediately after, Wyatt is executed on the scaffold declaring Elizabeth's total innocence, and she is taken by boat to meet her sister — "God be with you, Lady Elizabeth!", the crowd yells along the banks.

A portrait of Henry VIII hangs in the room where Elizabeth waits for Mary. Philip (Stanley Townsend) enters first — as reported by Foxe, it is he who intervenes with the Queen on Elizabeth's behalf (Bassnett, 1997). Philip fondles Elizabeth's hair and warns her against his wife.

When Mary (Johanne Whalley) bursts into the room, the two sisters are left alone. This Mary, who wears an armoured breastplate and sleeps with a sword next to her for fear of assassination, looks particularly wicked. As soon as Elizabeth pronounces her opinion in favour of the Catholic doctrine, Mary gives vent to her anger saying

Do you think I don't know hypocrisy when I see it? That you can fool me as you do with others? Not enough that my mother was left to die alone in exile while yours stole her place in our father's favour... That I was forced to wait upon her as a mere servant! Must I now endure the deceit of her daughter too? It is I who now bestow the favours. And where I see fit, the punishment.

Elizabeth begs her sister to "put the past to rest" and denies the charge of treason; still her captivity continues under house arrest at Woodstock.

Mary dies suddenly; her pregnancy was another false alarm. The scene shifts from dark to bright once Elizabeth learns she is Queen.

Regarding the conflict between Elizabeth and Mary Stuart, this miniseries follows the same storyline as *Elizabeth R* — the Scottish Queen persists in her cause to seize the English throne, Walsingham puts his plan into action to incriminate Mary and Elizabeth is compelled

to sentence her cousin to death. Nevertheless, this time there are some differences from the 1970s series and the previously examined biopics which are worth mentioning.

Firstly, *Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen* includes part of the 1571 Ridolfi Plot meant to assassinate Elizabeth and crown the Queen of Scots in her place. As recorded in history, once the conspiracy was uncovered, Duff's Elizabeth orders the execution of the Duke of Norfolk (Kevin McKidd) but declines to indict Mary (Charlotte Winner) (Bassnett, 1997). She gives reasons for her choice asserting "And If the claimant is ignorant of any conspiracy on their behalf? On that account, my sister could have sent me to the scaffold".

Secondly, Walsingham (Ben Daniels) has Phelippes add a post script to Babington's letter, pretending it was Mary's written approval for the plan. Consecutively, Mary refuses the charges writing to Elizabeth:

I repudiate the legality of these proceedings against me. Like you, as a queen, I am subject only to God's jurisdiction. The evidence against me is forgery! I know nothing of this man Babington nor ever exchanged letters with him. I declare I would rather shipwreck my soul than seek your death!

In fact, the historical Queen of Scots blamed Walsingham for having forged the response to Babington, but in the end she was proved guilty of having conspired against Her Majesty (Muhlstein, 2007).

Finally, the execution of Winner's Mary is a peculiar one. The camera makes the viewer see the scene through Mary's point of view while she walks to the scaffold. Then, when she puts her chin over the block, the camera frames Elizabeth as if waiting to be executed — it is obviously a nightmare. "Oh God in Heaven, forgive me! What have I done?", she screams getting out of bed.

There is no account of Elizabeth's troubles with her elder sister Mary in *Elizabeth I*. Beginning in 1579, this TV serial proceeds directly to witness the events coming before the execution of the Queen of Scots.

The exchanges between the characters provide the viewer with plot details: though Mary is taken prisoner in England, she is believed to scheme for her release with the help of the Spanish and the Pope's blessing.

Then, a caption reveals the passing of time — the year is 1586 and Mirren's Elizabeth is informed that Mary might be involved in the Babington Plot. Therefore, she wants Leicester to organise a meeting between her and her cousin — a face-to-face that never happened in history. In a plausible way, Elizabeth says to Leicester

All these conspiracies have her at the centre. Why should I not reason with her, my lord? If I cannot dissuade her from the course she is on, what else can I do but seek her death, upon which the whole world will break about my ears? It is not too late to turn her. Tell me that is true, for I would have it so.

The camera cuts to Elizabeth arriving at Mary's prison. This Mary (Barbara Flynn) resembles the Scottish Queen at this point of her life, after many years of imprisonment: "she's overweight, sickly pale, with greying hair that frizzes out from underneath her auburn wig" (Latham, 2011: 250). Additionally, she speaks with a French accent (another realistic feature). Elizabeth treats Mary leniently and explains to her the reason of her visit. She even tells her cousin "I am more your friend than you imagine. I am the only thing that stands between you and destruction". By contrast, Mary remains emotionally detached from Elizabeth and does not listen to her advice. It is clear she doubts Elizabeth has the courage to kill her. However, she swears "I have no intent against you, cousin, all I seek is liberty". Elizabeth seems uncertain about Mary's assertion, and concludes "I pray to God the death of one of us is not the only way to buy the freedom of the other" (Latham, 2011: 250).

As always, Mary is found guilty by trial, and Elizabeth hesitates over signing the death warrant. Finally, Leicester persuades her to do it: “Bess, I cannot lie to you. The Scottish queen must die”. Moreover, he is the only one who dares give Elizabeth the (historic) details about Mary’s execution: she was denied her rosary and her priest (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 274).

Flynn’s Mary looks physically exhausted on the day of her death — the exact opposite of the sensual Morton’s characterisation in *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*. She dies as a martyr — “I shed my blood for the ancient Catholic religion” are Mary’s last words before the strokes of the axe.

Elizabeth had not ordered her cousin’s execution formally but the council had taken action anyway. Again, she collapses in hysterics on hearing the news, and cries desperately to Leicester “Why could you not have stopped this?”

As a result, even this biopic, together with *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* and *Elizabeth R*, supports the version of events according to which Elizabeth has diminished responsibility for having beheaded her cousin. Possibly, Elizabeth’s anguish to behead the Queen of Scots could be linked to the fact that at the age of 53, it was then clear she had provided no biological heir to the throne. She may have perceived, in some tormented way, that her cousin was in fact a kind of “surrogate mother” offering a son, James VI of Scotland, as a possible future King to England. Looking at things from another perspective, it could also be that Elizabeth, identifying herself with James, relived her own pain of losing a parent by beheading, thereby providing her with much emotional difficulty.

3.2.3 Religious struggle for power and the defeat of the Spanish Armada

The matter of religion coupled with the defeat of Spain’s so-called “Invincible Armada” in 1588 are other highly recurrent themes in Elizabeth’s biopics.

During the reign of her sister Mary, Elizabeth did her best to protect her vulnerable position of “monarch-to-be”. If on one hand, she was compelled to please Mary by (passive) Mass attendance, fearing imprisonment or execution for heresy, on the other she carefully protected her reputation as the future Protestant saviour (Bassnett, 1997: 81). Indeed, once she became Queen, she reinstated Protestantism to England and proclaimed herself supreme governor of the Church of England. Even so, she declared “I have no desire to make windows into men’s souls”, thereby demonstrating her belief in religious tolerance, at least in the first years of her throne (Bassnett, 2011: 38).

Later, however, with the Queen of Scots’s arrival in England in 1568, it became more and more dangerous to maintain a neutral stance in matters of religion. In fact, the Pope excommunicated Elizabeth in 1570 and Catholics were believed to be scheming to place the Catholic Mary on the English throne, assassinating the heretic Queen (Bassnett, 1997: 87). Nevertheless, Elizabeth was perfectly aware that Mary’s imprisonment did not prevent her from taking part in these criminal conspiracies, but she had always taken great care to condemn an anointed Queen.

Then in the 1580s, Walsingham discovered the existence of other machinations to bring Mary to the English throne: the *Empresa* in which the Pope, the Duke of Guise, the King of Spain and the English Jesuits were all involved, and the Babington Plot which ultimately proved Mary’s complicity to kill Elizabeth (Bassnett, 1997: 112). Under those circumstances, Elizabeth was forced to sign Mary’s death warrant, and her Scottish cousin died at Fotheringhay Castle on 8 February 1587.

Mary’s execution provided the devout Catholic King of Spain, Philip II, with justification to launch his Armada against England — as the legitimate successor of the Queen of Scots, he intended to invade the country and restore Catholicism.

As Susan Ronald recounts in *Heretic Queen: Queen Elizabeth I and the Wars of Religion*, the Spanish Armada of 132 galleons appeared in the English Channel on 30 July 1558; they were huge, but heavier and slower than the sleek and heavily armed English ships (2012: 269). However, the Spaniards were essentially defeated by poor tactics and by bad weather; they retreated from English shores on 7 August 1588. Over half of the Spanish army never returned to Spain and “It was commonly murmured there that every noble family had lost a son in the Spanish Armada” (Ronald, 2012: 272).

Still, there was the risk of a final invasion and Elizabeth decided to travel to Tilbury to encourage her army. On this occasion, on 9 August 1588, she delivered one of her most famous speeches, passed down in history as the Tilbury speech:

My loving people, we have been persuaded by some that are careful of our safety to take heed how we commit ourself to armed multitudes for fear of treachery; but I assure you, I do not desire to live to distrust my faithful and loving people. Let tyrants fear. I have always so behaved myself that, under God, I have placed my chiefest strength and safe guard in the loyal hearts and good will of my subjects, and therefore I am come amongst you, as you see, at this time, not for my recreation and disport, but being resolved, in the midst and heat of the battle, to live or die amongst you all, to lay down my life for my God and for my kingdom and for my people, my honour, and my blood, even in the dust. I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and a king of England too, and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any prince of Europe should dare to invade the borders of my realm; the which, rather than any dishonour shall grow by me, I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of every one of your virtues in the field. I know, already for your forwardness, you have deserved rewards and crowns; and we do assure you, in the word of a prince, they shall be duly paid you. In the meantime my lieutenant-general shall be in my stead, than whom never prince commanded a more noble or worthy subject, not doubting but by your obedience to my general, by your concord in the camp, and your valour in the field, we shall shortly have a famous victory over those enemies of my God, of my kingdom, and of my people².

² Elizabeth's Tilbury Speech, <<http://tudorhistory.org/primary/tilbury.html>>. Accessed 27 September 2015.

Shortly afterwards, she learnt that the Spanish Armada had been defeated (Muhlstein, 2007: 300-301).

Again, let us analyse how this page of history has been treated by different filmmakers and screenwriters.

In Shekhar Kapur's films *Elizabeth* and *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*, it is obviously the second one which contains scenes of the religious struggle for power between Elizabeth and her ex brother-in-law, Philip of Spain, with the resulting defeat of the Spanish Armada. For this reason, as if to illustrate the story, this film opens with stylised images of soldiers, Philip with the red-dressed cardinals, galleons on fire, and Elizabeth herself. Additionally, "the "t" of Elizabeth's name in the title is a cross" (Latham, 2011: 165).

In line with the previous *Elizabeth*, here Catholics are portrayed as the wicked ones: Philip (Jordi Mollà) is a black-clad figure who walks with a decidedly odd gait along the corridors of his gloomy palace. He is introduced to the viewer with a rosary in his hands whispering in front of a lighted candle, which turns out to be symbol of Elizabeth and her realm (Latham, 2011: 165). Only Philip thinks the contrary maintaining "Elizabeth is darkness. I am the light".

Other additional symbolic representations of Elizabeth in the film are Philip's daughter, Isabella, and her red-haired doll dressed in a royal gown. Although the historical Isabella was almost 20 years old in 1585 (as before-mentioned, the year in which *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* begins) in this film she is a child. She is a totally silent character to whom her father speaks in Spanish, but actually he delivers monologues on his own. At the beginning of the film, Philip tells her "The time of our great enterprise has come. England is enslaved to the Devil. We must set her free"; and after Mary's execution, "My daughter, would you like to be Queen of England?" (Latham, 2011: 166).

In contrast, with regard to the religious matter, Blanchett's Elizabeth is presented as an enlightened monarch who insists with his councillors " [...] I will not punish my people for their beliefs. Only for their deeds".

At a later stage in the movie, Elizabeth is informed that the *Empresa de Inglaterra* has begun. Therefore, she rages against the Spanish ambassador: "Go back to your rathole. Tell Philip I fear neither him, nor his priests, nor his armies [...]. I have a hurricane in me that will strip Spain bare when you dare to try me". Then, however, the Queen of Scots' execution gives Philip the just ammunition for declaring war on England: "I call the legions of Christ to war! Blood-soaked virgin. She will pay with her country, her throne, and her life!"

In a flash, the Spanish Armada attacks — "If England falls, my last days will be in a Spanish prison", Elizabeth ruefully confesses to Raleigh.

The scene moves to Elizabeth planning the effective strategies for defeating the Spaniards. Evoking the Ditchley portrait, she stands upon a world map which decorates the floor, as she discusses war tactics with her councillors (Latham, 2011: 174).

Elizabeth: The Golden Age mixes fact and fiction at will, but it provides the viewer with historical accuracy when Francis Drake's plan to attack the Armada with fire ships together with a fierce wind force the Spanish to leave (Ronald, 2012). Elizabeth's romanticised version in full armour on a white horse delivering the Tilbury speech works perfectly: "While we stand together, no invader shall pass. Let them come with the armies of hell! They will not pass!"

Again, Philip is filmed in front of a lit candle which this time is symbolically extinguished by the wind of Elizabeth's power. Consecutively, Philip is desperate as he has failed in his ambitious enterprise — his daughter, Isabella, turns her back on him holding her doll in her hand.

The final shot recalls the Ditchley portrait one more time: Elizabeth stands majestically on a floor world map (Latham, 2011: 175). The closing captions reveal that “The loss of the Armada was the most humiliating defeat in Spain’s naval history. Philip died ten years later leaving Spain bankrupt. England entered a time of peace and prosperity”.

The miniseries *Elizabeth R* portrays the aftermath of the Queen of Scots’ execution accurately. As the title suggests, the episode “Enterprise of England” fully deals with the historical background to the defeat of the Spanish Armada — the plot alternates between Philip’s court and Elizabeth’s one.

The episode opens with an ageing Jeffrey’s Philip at the confessional while his little son plays with a model ship which is intended to be the symbol of the Armada. Nevertheless, differently from *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*, in this version Philip is initially not eager to avenge Mary’s death because of the cost in money and manpower of making war on England. In fact, when he decides to send the Armada against England, his fleet is not appropriately outfitted and requires the military assistance of the Duke of Parma, governor of the Spanish Netherlands, and the English Catholics. This is a nod to historicity which few films make with regard to the Spanish forces, which are usually presented as extremely powerful and organised (Latham, 2011: 209).

Under those circumstances, Philip’s experienced admiral, Don Alvaro de Santa Cruz, begs Philip to abandon the enterprise. However, Santa Cruz dies unexpectedly and he is replaced by the incompetent and unwilling Duke of Medina Sidonia. There is a tragicomic scene in the episode in which the latter admits “I am always seasick; I always catch cold at sea”. In addition to this, he accidentally stumbles on the model ship and breaks it — “everywhere Philip is warned of failure, but he remains stubbornly and irrationally assured of Spanish victory” (Latham, 2011: 210).

Jackson's Elizabeth is not afraid of the Spanish threat and tells her councillors she fears a mistake in her Latin more than she does Philip. She hastens to add "He has been talking of his enterprise for 20 years. [...] Nothing is changed". On the contrary, Mary's execution has actually changed everything.

Elizabeth has desire for peace and has been negotiating a permanent truce with the Duke of Parma in the Netherlands. As always in this TV serial, the viewer is supplied with the historical information: the Spanish troops had been fighting against the Dutch in the Netherlands and the English had sent soldiers to help the Dutch.

Later, Elizabeth receives the news that Parma has abandoned the peace treaty. She is also informed about Dr. Allen's book *An Admonition of the Nobility and People of England*. In his book, Cardinal Allen argues that "The deposition of Elizabeth will be right in natural law because she is a tyrant and in divine law because she is heretic". Furthermore, he expounds the instructions of the Pope: "no Englishman need obey or defend her but must be ready to join with [Philip's] forces in deposing her and restoring the Catholic Church".

Though Allen's work had really been published (Weir, 2008), in this series it becomes the fictitious reason that makes Elizabeth take measures against the Spaniards. Therefore, she sends her ships and armies to sea to defend England against the enemy — "with God's help I will strike those braggarts down", she declares. In *Elizabeth R* there are no images of the battle itself, but the exchanges between the characters function as a factual and detailed report of the events (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 266). Then, Elizabeth's memorable speech at Tilbury is followed by the English victory over the Armada. The camera cuts to Medina Sidonia giving an account of what happened; "I sent my ships and soldiers against men, not against winds and hurricanes. It is God's will", Philip concludes.

In *Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen* the Queen of Scots' death triggers the series of events which lead to the Spanish Armada and its following defeat. However, in comparison to *Elizabeth R*, this TV serial presents the military conflict on "fast-forward" and "viewers not familiar with the life of Elizabeth might find themselves a bit lost and confused" (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 268).

The Armada directly follows Mary's execution, and immediately Duff's Elizabeth is with her councillors collecting information about the enemy activity. The camera films the characters moving quickly through the palace and receiving up-to-date reports on the current situation. One of the reports relates to Allen's *An Admonition of the Nobility and People of England*, but Elizabeth is simply told it is "More Papal propaganda the Spanish carry". She reads aloud: "Incestuous bastard of depraved courtesan Anne Boleyn — cursed heretic — shame of her sex and princely name", then she burns the paper.

The scene suddenly shifts to Tilbury; the soldiers rejoice at seeing Elizabeth at the camp mounted on a white horse. This version chooses to show Elizabeth while she is writing the Tilbury speech before delivering it to her troops.

Again, there is no reconstruction of the battle itself, yet the defeat of the Spaniards is represented in a plausible way. Indeed, Leicester reads a letter to Elizabeth which contains the historical details of the Armada's failure:

Drake unleashed eight fire ships among the anchored Spanish galleons to dislodge their formation. Believing the ships were primed with gunpowder, the Spanish cut their anchors and fled utmost confusion! [...] Then the wind shifted. What remained of the Armada was swept by storms and gales to founder in the North sea!

With tears in her eyes, Elizabeth exclaims "God breathed and they were scattered! We are saved, Robbie!"

The event of the Spanish Armada covers the last fifteen minutes of the first part of *Elizabeth I* — in this miniseries, as in *Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen*, the war with Spain is portrayed in few scenes.

Previously in the series, Mirren's Elizabeth was told by her councillors that not only had the Pope declared her a heretic and excommunicated her, but he also intended to reinstate a Catholic on the English throne. For this reason, there were plans to replace Elizabeth with the Queen of Scots. Then, after her execution, Philip moves his fleet ("the largest ever seen") to avenge her death.

Thus, immediately after, Elizabeth is at the council table studying the maps and planning the attack against the Spanish: Leicester to be in charge of the land forces, the army to set at Tilbury where the Duke of Parma may land and Drake to fight the Armada at sea.

In the following scene, she goes to Tilbury and asks Leicester "What shall I say to those who are prepared to fight and die on my behalf?" This time it is Leicester who suggests the essence of her speech: "Your Majesty will give them courage and breathe scorn on the invader"; "I could swear Your Majesty had the heart and stomach of a king".

When Elizabeth arrives with Leicester in front of the troops, which sing incessant chants of "God Save the Queen", she wears an armoured breastplate. She gives her speech walking amongst the soldiers, reassuringly touching their arms and smiling at them. Appearing particularly self-confident and joyful while speaking, as if the enemy were already destroyed (Latham, 2011: 256).

Soon thereafter, the news of the defeat of the Armada comes. As the English ships arrive, it raises its flag in sign of victory. Leicester announces to Elizabeth "the day is ours, ma'am", and Elizabeth's reign is, once again, safe.

3.3 Multiple portraits of Elizabeth Tudor: Cate Blanchett, Glenda Jackson, Anne-Marie Duff and Helen Mirren

After having considered the themes which are most commonly dramatised in Elizabeth's biopics, and examined how they are explored in the selected films and miniseries and how they differ from historical records, it is worth including an overall review of the portrayals of the historical Elizabeth by the above actresses.

As far as films are concerned, Cate Blanchett's portrait of Elizabeth in Shekhar Kapur's films appears to be "evolving" in the course of the film: it "begins as one thing, finishes as another, and there are glimpses of transitional points in between" (Latham, 2001: 163). Kapur's stated intention in *Elizabeth* (1998) is not to tell "the truth, but a truth of Elizabeth, the woman and the monarch" (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 277). Consequently, the film provides the viewer with Elizabeth's journey from what Cate Blanchett defined "girlhood to statehood"³. When the film begins, Blanchett's Elizabeth is not yet Queen and she is first introduced as a carefree girl who dances and giggles with other ladies in the open-air. Furthermore, she "wears no make-up, indicating her lack of artifice" (Latham, 2011: 151). Then, as the plot develops, the viewer sees Elizabeth's gradual transformation not only from a young woman into a queen, but also from a queen into a martyr. Towards the end of the film, once betrayed by her beloved Dudley, Blanchett's Elizabeth decides to sacrifice her personal happiness for the sake of her kingdom, becoming a "virgin".

In the sequel *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007) Blanchett's Elizabeth looks less iconic and more like a self-confident ruler: her make-up is more natural and her clothing less stiff while she discusses the matter with her councillors. However, Kapur affirms that this film is about "absolute power and aspiring to divinity"⁴ and, therefore, the viewer witnesses another one of

³ *The Making of Elizabeth. Elizabeth DVD Special Feature. Universal, 1998.*

⁴ Kapur, S. "Golden Age/Divinity/History/Desire", 24 November 2007, <<http://shekharkapur.com/blog/2007/11/golden-agedivinityhistorydesire/#more-262>>. Accessed 20 November 2015.

Elizabeth's metamorphosis: "from monarch to madonna" (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 287). Again, her journey is not a simple one as she has to pass various critical phases before becoming fully goddess-like. As a result, Blanchett's portrait of Elizabeth changes according to the situation she encounters: she is particularly vulnerable while being with Raleigh, fearless in facing Babington's gun (Elizabeth is dressed in a white bridal gown signalling the beginning of her divine transformation), desperate during Mary's execution, resolute in attacking the Armada, and so on. Finally, once having defeated the Armada, Blanchett's Elizabeth totally resumes her identity as a holy being. To demonstrate this, she is framed holding a baby in her arms — a living image of a Madonna with child. Following this, the moment has come for England's "Golden Age" to begin.

Despite mixed reviews both Kapur's films received, Cate Blanchett's portrayal of Elizabeth was highly praised by the critics, and from this, she received several nominations and awards. As for the series, Glenda Jackson's portrait of Elizabeth from youth to death in the BBC miniseries *Elizabeth R* (1971) displays a close adherence to the life and times of the Tudor Queen, and for this reason, it is a favourite amongst historians (Latham, 2011: 192). Indeed, Jackson's Elizabeth "[has] been built as closely as possible around [her] historical [original]" (Hudson, 1972: 23). Jackson even learned how to ride a horse, perform Renaissance dances, play the virginal and faithfully reproduce the historical Elizabeth's signature (Latham, 2011: 214). Accordingly, she delivers a "magnificent performance" which platformed Elizabeth's debut into modern stardom (Hackett, 2009: 209). In addition, it was noted that "In her portrayal of Elizabeth, [she] brings to life the stormy, complex personality of this woman [...] with great zest, humor, and insight into the driving ambitions of a power-hungry woman" (*Senior Scholastic*, 1972: 18). In particular, Jackson's biographers state that "Elizabeth I, high-handed and autocratic, was very much Glenda's kind of woman" (Woodward, 1985: 80). In fact, Jackson transitioned from her acting career to British

politics, and this is probably the reason why in the series she is able to effectively convey Elizabeth's political aspect. Moreover, it is important to remember that Jackson's portrayal resonates with the blossoming of Women's Liberation of the 1970s as women, for the first time in the working environment, were occupying positions which surpassed those of men (Latham, 2011: 215). Despite Jackson having stated "I should have given [Elizabeth] a lot more brilliance" (Woodward, 1985: 80), she received very little criticism and won two Emmy Awards for her performance. Certainly, "Jackson's Elizabeth reveled in her own wit, independence, and power and offered a compelling feminist characterisation which is still widely remembered" (Hackett, 2009: 209).

In comparison with her other on-screen sisters, Anne-Marie Duff's Elizabeth in the TV serial made for Masterpiece Theatre *Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen* (2005) seems to better showcase the formidable intellect of the historical woman. From the very beginning, the viewer realises that Duff's Elizabeth is "clever, quick, and does not falter under pressure" (Latham, 2011: 221). While she is imprisoned during her sister's reign she demands her books and tutor in order to continue with her studies — "How can I endure this purgatory without stimulation?", she shouts at the jailer. When she becomes Queen, then, she hastens to add "I was tutored by the finest scholars in the land. I am fluent in five languages and know the principles of economics, as well as philosophy, ancient and modern. I'm also expert in music, literature and poetry. My horsemanship, they say, is unparalleled".

In one scene, she explains to the portrait painter how she wants to appear:

Let the jewels of my dress be like a thousand eyes so that my subject know [...] I am always watching after them. And let it be no shadows on my face and neck for they accentuate age. Immortal is the look we're after, Sir. And virginal. Divinity, if you can so render it. My hair must be loose. And make much of my hands — emphasize their slenderness for I am told they are my best feature. Henceforth, when my people think of their queen, this is the image they must see.

The finished product is the *Rainbow Portrait* which in this case marks with originality the beginning of her “becoming an icon” (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 271).

In the second part of the miniseries she cares more about her inner self and less about how other people think of her. There is a beautiful moment in which she, no longer young, suddenly starts to dance alone in the cloister.

Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen mainly aims for authenticity and presents essentially the same sequence of events as in *Elizabeth R* for half the duration — which gives this series a very fast pace. Even so, Duff’s portrayals of Elizabeth prove to be slightly inaccurate. In the second part of the series, at times Elizabeth looks old (but with unwrinkled hands), on other occasions comparatively younger (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 268). For the most part, however, Elizabeth is portrayed in a plausible way. Duff’s brilliant performance “has launched her into the world of film” (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 270).

When Helen Mirren was asked to play the role of Elizabeth in the HBO miniseries *Elizabeth I* (2005), she was happy to accept it for “There are so few truly great roles for women, and this is one”, she explained (Mirren, 2006: 33).

The 61-year-old actress takes Elizabeth from middle age and delivers a portrayal which has been defined as one of the most “hypnotic” and “stirring” (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 271). She manages to perform the historical Queen in such a charming manner which fully engages the viewer. As the director Tom Hooper affirms “When she acts, it feels incredibly real and truthful, and natural, and I think that’s one of her great gifts”⁵.

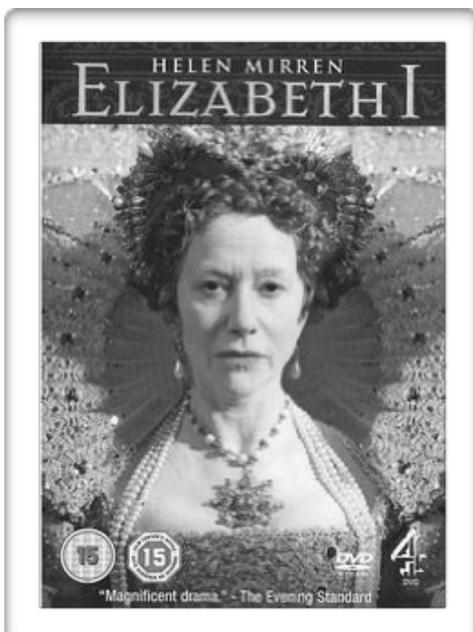
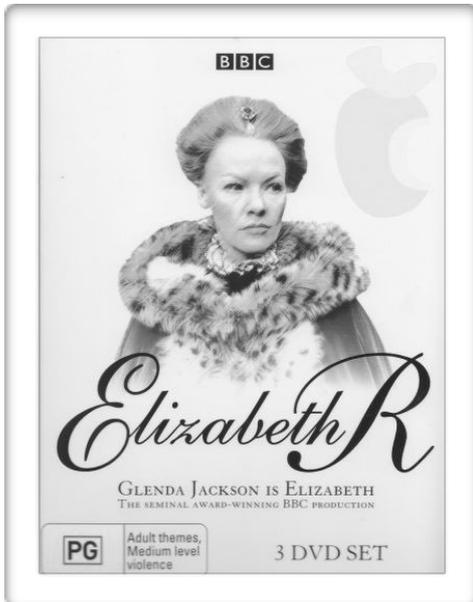
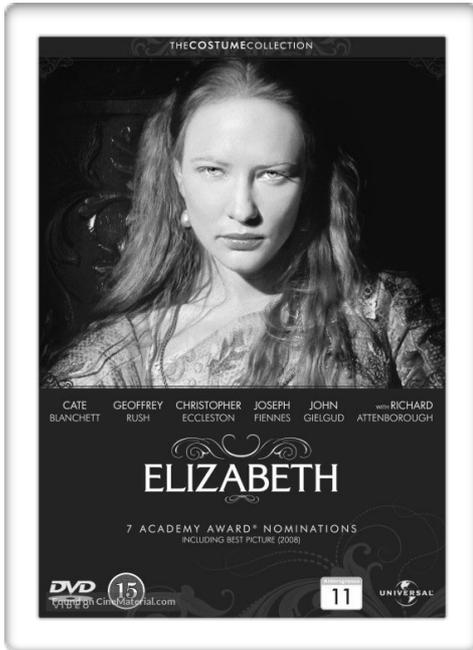
The overall impression of Mirren’s Elizabeth in this TV serial is one of an attractive queen who feels deeply and has a great sense of humour. In other words, she is a less formal monarch, yet an efficient one. Correspondingly, Elizabeth’s external appearance also reflects

⁵ *The Making of Elizabeth I. Elizabeth I DVD Special Feature*. HBO, 2006.

this as her costumes, wigs and make-up are generally not vastly exaggerated, including when looking iconic (Latham, 2011: 242). Blending fact and fiction, this series intends to present a “very personal story”, and so Mirren had to challenge the stereotypical image of Elizabeth (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 272). In fact, she says

Costumes are marvelous because they obviously make the statement for you, but then you have to start fighting your way out of the costume and out of the make-up, so it’s both a tool and a liability because you want to make this a living, breathing person and not just a painting (*The making of Elizabeth I*).

Certainly, Mirren does display a great sense of humanity in her portrait of Elizabeth. For the first time they cast a 61 years old woman in the role, and still she is capable of being incredibly sensual in her journey of love — even compared to the younger Blanchett, Jackson and Duff’s Elizabeth. Furthermore, the fact that she is of mature age makes her very believable interpreting the latter part of Elizabeth’s life. For these reasons, “Giving Mirren the lion’s share of praise for this adaptation is appropriate; [...] she [breathes] new life in what could have been one tired piece of cinema, especially given how close the release of her Elizabeth and Duff’s were timed” (Latham, 2011: 265). It is worth mentioning that other than winning a Golden Globe and an Emmy Award for her interpretation of Elizabeth I, Mirren was also highly praised for another royal role: the one of Elizabeth II in 2006 Stephen Frears’s *The Queen*.



3.3.1 A *Semper Eadem* Elizabeth?

One of the mottos Elizabeth used was *Semper Eadem*, meaning “Always one and the same” (Hackett, 1995: 81). Surely, this constant, consistent characterisation of herself must have evoked in her subjects a strong feeling of “stability” and “security” (Latham, 2011: 267). However, despite what Elizabeth used to say about herself, over the course of the years portrayals of her person in films have changed continuously; at times, a viewer may even doubt that they all deal with the same subject (Latham, 2011: 267). As already mentioned, the representation of monarchy in films has inevitably reflected present circumstances and concerns and, consequently, every age has refashioned the image of the monarch in line with the times (McKechnie, 2002: 220).

Regarding the characterisation of Elizabeth in the biopics selected for this dissertation, it can generally be stated that it mirrors the improvement in the equality of opportunity both in the working and political environment that women have achieved in recent years. In fact, starting from the BBC 1971 miniseries *Elizabeth R*, “the Queen began to look more and more like a feminist icon” (Hackett, 2009: 108). Also, her image became “sexier” (Latham, 2011: 270). Later, in twenty-first century film adaptations of Elizabeth, the portrait of her as an independent “career woman” persists, but at the same time, it offers a kaleidoscopic vision of new “multiple” Elizabeths. Indeed, Glenda Jackson, Cate Blanchett, Anne-Marie Duff and Helen Mirren actually interpret their leading role in comparatively different ways.

Jackson in *Elizabeth R* greatly resembles a shrewd politician — as is commonly said, a woman choosing career over love or family. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that she was “the canonical face of Elizabeth for the last quarter of the twentieth century” (Dobson and Watson, 2002: 246). Then, Blanchett successfully challenges that image in Kapur’s 1998 *Elizabeth*, also sparking a revival of interest in Tudor sovereignty (Ford and Mitchell, 2009: 267). In both Kapur’s films Blanchett’s Elizabeth has breathtaking beauty, absolute power and

love affairs as well. She later transforms herself into a “virgin”. For this reason, Blanchett has been considered “a romanticized, Hollywoodized version of Elizabeth” (Latham, 2011: 151). In the 2005 series made for Masterpiece Theatre *Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen* Duff delivers an Elizabeth who is as capable as Jackson’s but more intellectual. Finally, Mirren’s Elizabeth in the HBO 2005 TV serial *Elizabeth I* differs in that she is displayed as being more natural and human (Latham, 2011: 270). Thus, all of these portrayals have elements in common, but each one adds a distinguishing characteristic to the portrait of Elizabeth. On the other hand, however, given that the historical Queen had a multifaceted personality, it could be said that all these alternative interpretations represent different facets of the same person. Even though there are different images portrayed of her by the various actresses, the viewer still sees, from combined perspectives, a *Semper Eadem* Elizabeth, just more complete.

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