

## The Rendering of a Queen

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Over four centuries after the reign of Queen Elizabeth came to an end, the portraits of the 'Virgin Queen' are still powerful and breathtaking to onlookers in their detail, symbolism and their ability to inspire. These portraits that display the Queen in all the glory of kingship were only part of a larger propaganda program that was laid out by the government to remind the people of their responsibility to their Queen, as her divine right indicated. Queen Elizabeth was not the first to facilitate the use of portraits in this way but this practice would reach its pinnacle under Queen Elizabeth, especially in the second half of her reign. Interestingly, portraits were not just the prerogative of the Queen and her government. These portraits were commissioned by nobles and courtiers for their own uses and for the Queen, and even people from the masses sought out the image of her majesty, making it vital for patterns deemed appropriate by the Queen to be used. Miniatures of the Queen, seen as images of loyalty, also became fashionable in this period and would be sought after by a large part of English society. All of the forms that these portraits and images of the Queen came in were a crucial part of the relationship between the Queen and her people. Whether it came from the government, nobles, or from lower classes of society, portraiture was a way in which loyalty and the virtues of the Queen and thus the state, both real and desired, were presented.

The Tudor state was consumed with propaganda and visual images of their rulers' legitimacy. The love of ceremony and images started with Queen Elizabeth's grandfather, King Henry VII, when he founded the Tudor dynasty with somewhat limited

legitimacy.<sup>1</sup> It was a way in which the members of the Tudor dynasty could display that their rightful place was on the throne of England. This practice continued under the reign of Elizabeth's father, King Henry VIII, and was exaggerated by the fact that under Henry VIII the Reformation of the Catholic Church started. When Queen Elizabeth finally ascended the throne in 1558, she inherited this love of pageantry, which was advantageous because of the host of problems pertaining to her legitimacy as Queen of England.

After the unsuccessful reign of her sister Mary, the thought of yet another female monarch was not a popular one in England. There was also the problem of her late mother and if in fact the divorce between Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon and therefore the marriage between Henry VIII and his second wife, Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn was legitimate. Elizabeth had more to prove than any monarch had before and she used public display of her right to the throne of England as a way to strengthen views of the people in her favour. There were many ways in which the Queen did this. As pertaining to this paper, there were large number of portraits of the Queen circulating during her reign and these helped people to see their Queen and form of a sort of relationship with her. Similar to this, Elizabeth was known for making progresses throughout the country to see both the nobles and officials that were running those parts of the country and to be available and therefore somewhat accessible to her people.

Writings were another avenue in which the Queen could assert her power and her right as a divinely appointment ruler and which her subjects could espouse the values of kingship that they saw or wanted in their Queen.<sup>2</sup> Writers such as Shakespeare, Spenser (famously in his *Faerie Queen*, named for Queen Elizabeth), and even the Queen's favourite Walter Raleigh wrote about

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<sup>1</sup> Roy Strong, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Helen Hackett, "Dreams or Designs, Cults or Constructions? The Study of Images of Monarchs," *The Historical Journal* 44 (2001), 821.

their Queen and the virtues that both Elizabeth personally and the state that she controlled displayed, such as power, chastity, virtue, and righteousness to both the one true faith and to the people. This outlet of propaganda was a two way street in which the authors, within limits, were able to comment on the Queen and policies that she was espousing towards diplomatic relationships, marriages or religious settlement. Within Spenser's *Faerie Queene* there is another role for Una (the Queen Elizabeth representation), the defender of the one true faith, personifying also the Church of England.<sup>3</sup> The Reformation of the church and the change that it caused in the pageantry of the state is where we now turn.

The Reformation from the Catholic Church to the protestant Anglican Church carried with it the destruction of many religious images, symbols and pageantry. These were part of the Catholic Church but not part of Protestantism. As Roy Strong notes, in its place came greater state pageantry and imagery which "did not assume a major role until the advent of the reformation in the 1530s, which led to the first deliberately orchestrated propaganda programme designed to build up the crown in the face of the break with the Universal Church".<sup>4</sup> With a break from Rome, major secular celebrations such as the Accession Day of Elizabeth and the anniversary of the defeat of the Armada, instead of religious holidays, began to dominate. Understandably, the break with the Catholic Church brought a break with the Pope and the monarch of the English throne became the head of the Church of England. The Protestant monarch became the earthly embodiment of God.<sup>5</sup> Thus in one sweep the Reformation had rendered all the power of the church and state into one person, the monarch of England. As the reign of Elizabeth ran on, all of these aspects of propaganda such as portraits, literature, ceremony, festival and Queen Elizabeth as the leader of the Church would become more consolidated and important. Portraits would emerge

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 815.

<sup>4</sup> Strong, *Gloriana*, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Hackett, "Dreams or Designs", 815.

as symbols of loyalty that came in many shapes and sizes and by many different means apart from just that of the state's propaganda initiatives.

The portrait of the Queen was crucially important to the state and the people in the many different functions it served. Long after the ceremonies of the Accession Days were over or a progress of the Queen had passed, a portrait of the great lady sovereign remained. Having a portrait of the Queen rather than a noticeable show of arms became a sign of loyalty for the nobility.<sup>6</sup> As the Queen became more settled in her reign, she became a sort of visual exemplar for the people. One of the most important functions of the portrait was a diplomatic function. The portraits of the Queen were sent to people on the continent such as to the French court, when some sort of diplomatic alliance was being considered. They were also used in one of Elizabeth's most important diplomatic strengths: marriage negotiations. A picture of the Queen (in French style dress) was sent to the Duke of Anjou at the climax of their marriage negotiations.<sup>7</sup> These, however, were not only portraits of Elizabeth that were on the continent.

Painters from various countries abroad tended to render the Queen of England in whatever way they saw fit.<sup>8</sup> There was little fear of repercussion for the painters' actions and in areas where Elizabeth was less than popular (usually Catholic places) the images of Queen Elizabeth were usually less than flattering. One of the areas that was a huge problem for the Queen was Ireland. Although technically part of the Kingdom, the Irish had little regard for the Queen or her portrait, and were averse to putting another portrait, like that of Philip of Spain, in a more prestigious place in their home.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless the people of England acted in quite a different way in regards to portraits of their Queen.

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<sup>6</sup> Roy Strong, *Gloriana*, 22.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>8</sup> Louis A. Montrose, "Idols of the Queen: Policy, Gender, and the Picturing of Elizabeth I," *Representations* 68 (1999), 116.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 114

Nobles would have been the one with the greatest access to portraits of the Queen. They both received them from the Queen as gifts and allow commissioned portraits to keep or to give to the Queen. For many, this portrait would have been the focal point of their collections, as portraiture and painting grew more popular in these items. These portraits were the greater portraits in both talent and symbolism and provided a communication between Elizabeth and her ruling class. However, in addition to these there was also a growth in portraiture at lower levels of society. These portraits would not have been sat for by the Queen but patterns of her face were used to create portraits that would have been in the likeness of the Queen. Patterns were also used for her jewellery and clothing; and other common elements, such as chairs and fans were replicated throughout many very similar portraits. One of the most famous patterns was called the Darnley pattern in which the Queen was turned to the right or left and the portraits was three quarters in length. These portraits would have been created in workshops and available to a greater public than those personally commissioned by the nobility or the crown and sat for by the Queen.<sup>10</sup>

Another form of portraiture that grew greatly in popularity and in some measure eclipsed the regular portrait was miniatures. Miniatures were one thing in English portraiture that came directly out of the Elizabethan era. These miniatures started out as smaller portraits that were kept in boxes. As they became more in vogue they were placed in lockets and people would wear them as necklaces. This increased around 1585 after William of Orange from the Netherlands was assassinated and many feared for the life of the Protestant Queen.<sup>11</sup> There were many different types wore by different classes of people. More bejewelled ones, or those painted by more famous painters, would have been worn by the nobility. Many of Queen Elizabeth's closest counsellors and courti-

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<sup>10</sup> Strong, *Gloriana*, 117-20.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

ers can be seen in their own portraits wearing or holding miniatures of Elizabeth, men such as Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester; Sir William Cecil, and the famous privateer, Francis Drake.<sup>12</sup> The type of miniature that Drake wore in his portrait is even known as the Drake jewel. Copies of these portraits or pieces of metal with the likeness of Elizabeth stamped on them would have been worn by the lower classes.<sup>13</sup> These miniatures were a throwback to a similar 'Golden Age' of the Romans and Elizabeth was the only English monarch whose reign they were worn.<sup>14</sup> These miniatures were essentially likenesses of the Queen where little symbolism is seen. The entire scope of symbolism and virtues elicited to in portraits can only be seen in the magnificent full size portraits that were created in Elizabeth's reign.

Pleasing a rather vain Queen was not the easiest of tasks and as time continued this would become even trickier as the sovereign began to age. Portraits in the time period of Queen Elizabeth were far from pictures of today; rendering the likeness of the Queen was only one of the elements in the portraits, however important it was. Everything in the portraits was there for some reason. Before discussing three portraits in greater detail of the slowly developing 'cult' of Elizabeth the portraits of the beginning of Elizabeth's reign must be explored and how symbols in them would either be extrapolated in later years or changed. The portraits in early years of Elizabeth's life and the first years of her reign are fairly simplistic and are much in the same lines as other noble women of the era. There was not a great amount of symbolism and the dress and jewellery of the princess/Queen is fairly unadorned.<sup>15</sup> Yet in the second decade of the Queen's reign, starting

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<sup>12</sup> Susan Watkins, *In Public and in Private: Elizabeth I and her World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 78.

<sup>13</sup> Different types of Miniatures can be seen in Roy Strong's book *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987) on page 120.

<sup>14</sup> Watkins, *In Public and Private*, 78.

<sup>15</sup> Portraits of Elizabeth as a princess and a young queen can be seen in Roy Strong's book *Gloriana* on pages 48 and 58 respectively.

in the late 1560s and the early 1570s, common themes begin to develop.

These were the years in which allegory began to creep into the portraits of Elizabeth. As we will see later in the discussion of the 'Rainbow Portrait', allegorical symbolism became internalized in Elizabeth in the later years, but early on it is still externalized. She is seen conversing with goddess Pax (peace) in 'The Family of Henry VIII: An Allegory of Tudor Succession'<sup>16</sup> and then Juno, Minerva, and Venus in 'Queen Elizabeth and the Three Goddesses'<sup>17</sup> the two earliest allegorical paintings. These allegorical goddess representations continue in many ways in the later portraits of Elizabeth including portraying her as Diana, Cynthia (the moon goddess, "the origins of this cult lay earlier in the 1580s in the personal imagery with which Sir Walter Raleigh clothed his relationship with the Queen")<sup>18</sup> and Astraea, a famous ancient Virgin. Roses also become an important symbolic figure in the portraits of Elizabeth. The Tudor rose, being both red and white figured prominently, yet white was especially important because it was the colour of virginity.<sup>19</sup> On the same symbolic level was the almost inevitable presence of pearls. These were a jewel that symbolized virginity and purity and are seen in vast amounts in the portraits of Elizabeth. These symbols are important as well as many others that will be discussed in greater detail in the case studies of three portraits of the later years of Elizabeth: the 'Sieve Portraits', the 'Armada Portrait', and the 'Rainbow Portrait'.

The 'Sieve portrait'<sup>20</sup> dates from 1579, yet quite soon after, the portraits was elaborated upon in a second series of portraits

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<sup>16</sup> This portrait can be viewed online at: <http://ladysarafina.home.att.net/allegorytudor.jpg>

<sup>17</sup> This portrait can be viewed online at: <http://www.geocities.com/queenswoman/elizadoran.html>

<sup>18</sup> Strong, *Gloriana*, 125.

<sup>19</sup> Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 68.

<sup>20</sup> This portrait can be viewed online at: <http://www.marileecody.com/gloriana/eliz1-metsys.jpg>

dating from 1580-1583.<sup>21</sup> In these portraits the first tracings of two very important components of Elizabeth's identity can be found. One of these is the assertion of imperial power. This is the first time that Elizabeth lays claims to any imperial power through portraiture and it is done in two ways. The first is the globe to the right of the Queen, a globe in which the British Isles are illuminated and are surrounded by ships. In addition, "The imperial overtones of 1579 take on an even wider dimension, for at the base of the pillar to the left there is depicted not a royal crown but that worn by the Holy Roman Emperors."<sup>22</sup> The other important aspect of the 'Sieve portrait' is the presence of the sieve. The sieve is a symbol for chastity and virginity yet in the context of this portrait it is more that just the stately assertions of virginity that would appear later. This portrait was painted right around the same time as the climax of marriage negotiations between the Queen and the Duke of Anjou were happening. By a courtier commissioning a portrait, which was the case of this portrait, with such a clear symbol for chastity it was a clear message against the French marriage.<sup>23</sup> This displays the start of a shift away from the idea of marriage and towards the 'Virgin Queen'. By the 1580s Elizabeth was quite easily past childbearing, being almost fifty and by the 1590s the cult of the Virgin Queen was at its greatest extravagance as there was no hope for a child from the Queen.<sup>24</sup> Although she would not produce an heir, the people of England received reassurances of their Queen's benevolence in the greatest challenge England would face in Elizabeth's reign, the Spanish Armada.

The 'Armada Portrait'<sup>25</sup>, painted after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, is a classical example of Elizabethan portraiture, from style, dress, jewels, and symbols. The only unusual

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<sup>21</sup> Strong, *Gloriana*, 125.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>24</sup> Louis A. Montrose, "'Shaping Fantasies': Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture," *Representations* 2 (1983), 81.

<sup>25</sup> This portrait can be viewed online at: <http://www.elizabethi.org/uk/armada/>



thing about the portraits is that it is horizontally rather than vertically oriented. Portraits of Elizabethan time were still neo-gothic; they had yet to come into the new renaissance style and because of this there was no constant of time and space.<sup>26</sup> Because of this style it was possible for the two windows to either side of Elizabeth to show both the triumph of the English fleet on one side and the defeat of the Spanish ships, somewhere on the coast of Ireland, on the other. Another important aspect of this portrait is the Queen herself. She is dressed magnificently in the style of French dress, which was fitting having just defeated the Spanish. Also she is attired in black and white, the colours of Queen Elizabeth, “white is the colour of virginity, black of constancy”.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the characteristic pearls are saturating the Queen; on her dress, in her hair and around her neck. The necklace of pearls that Elizabeth is wearing is of special significance as they were given to her from Robert Dudley in his will.<sup>28</sup> As in the ‘Sieve portrait’ the symbols of imperial power are there yet they take on an even greater role in this portrait. The globe is placed under the Queen’s hand, her fingers touching the Americas and to the left of the Queen is a Roman Imperial crown, no longer just on a pillar. In this portrait Elizabeth is the liberator of the English; the condemner of the Spanish. This portrait displays a triumphant Queen who took on Europe’s superpower and won and was ready to take on the world. Yet the greatest culmination of all Elizabeth’s power and virtues in portraiture would only appear a few years before her death, as the goddess rendered in the ‘Rainbow Portrait’.

The ‘Rainbow portrait’<sup>29</sup> was painted sometime between 1600 and 1603 and was one of the last great portraits to be painted of the Queen. It was likely to have been commissioned by Robert Cecil and kept by the Cecils for a great many years. The ‘Rainbow Portrait’ is that of a goddess; not merely just a Queen. The beauty

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<sup>26</sup> Strong, *The Cult*, 43.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>28</sup> Watkins, *In Public and in Private*, 166.

<sup>29</sup> Portrait can be viewed online at: <http://www.marileecody.com/gloriana/>

of a goddess is ageless and it is clear that because Elizabeth would have been almost seventy when this was painted, the painter was following in the steps of many painters in the later part of the Queen's reign and being rather courteous, to put it lightly, with her appearance. Yet it was more than just the vanity of a Queen who have been sovereign for almost five decades, it was also to appease the uncertainty that a clearly aging sovereign with no heir brought to a kingdom that had been relatively stable for much of her forty-five year reign. Through all the symbols pictured in this portrait, the Queen is seen as the goddess Astraea, the virgin of another golden age,<sup>30</sup> yet also with this it displays the strengths and importance of Elizabeth's reign.

The Queen is dressed impeccably: yards of fabric encompass her, jewellery hangs from every possible place, and quite remarkably she is holding a rainbow. These portraits were idealized visions of statehood for the elite, full of symbolism.<sup>31</sup> The rainbow is a biblical symbol for peace and above the rainbow is the motto *NON SINE SOLE IRIS*, 'no rainbow without the sun which "identifies Elizabeth as the sun that shone upon England,"<sup>32</sup> the one who brought the people and land peace. Another striking use of symbolism to display the values of the Queen appears on the sleeve of her dress. The serpent symbolizes wisdom and holds a heart in its mouth; Elizabeth's wisdom controlled her heart. Right above the serpent is also the celestial globe which symbolizes imperial power, and also wisdom. Another interesting aspect that is displayed is the power that the Queen derives from her councilors and the information and intelligence that they gave her. This is symbolized by the ears and eyes that appear on her dress.<sup>33</sup> This is especially fitting as the portrait was commissioned by the family

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<sup>30</sup> Watkins, *In Public and in Private*, 83.

<sup>31</sup> Tarnya Cooper, "Queen Elizabeth's Public Face," *History Today* 53 (2003), 83.

<sup>32</sup> Montrose, "Idols of the Queen", 140.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 141-2.

of the two greatest councillors of Elizabeth's reign: William and Robert Cecil. The 'Rainbow portrait' is the epitome of Elizabethan portraits. Displayed in it is the power of the state through a strong Queen, with excellent councillors, peace and prosperity, and wisdom. Such greatness is legitimized by the allegorical rendering of the Queen as more than just a woman but a goddess, the virgin of a golden age, one which would never leave England unprotected even if death was surely on its way.

The portraits of Queen Elizabeth were an invaluable tool in the relationship between the Queen and her people. When commissioned by the throne they were used as propaganda to assert the divine and unchallenged right of the Queen. They were also used as diplomatic tools for the Queen abroad in both alliance and marriage negotiations. The Queen's imagery also became a tool of the Church of England which had become imageless during the Reformation. At home they were used by the people to show their loyalty to the Queen and in some cases lack thereof. They were commissioned by courtiers also in self interest or to make a point, such as the dislike of the French marriage in the 'Sieve portraits'. The culmination of the portraits displaying the virtues of the state and Queen would only begin to be realized in the second part of the Queen's reign when she would take on allegorical dressings of goddesses, and when imperial power and chastity would be integral to the image that the Queen presented. These portraits were not merely a snapshot of the Queen, far from it. In many ways the pictures were inaccurate, both of the Queen's appearance and in space and time such as the 'Armada portrait'. Yet their function was much greater than that. They were meant to espouse the values and greatness of a Queen and State, to capture the virtues of a sovereign and a reign which had brought much stability and promise to England.