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“Maiden vs. Monarch: The Roles of Elizabeth I in Contemporary Depictions”

People have been creating popular culture depictions of historical figures since forever. We, as a species, love telling stories, especially stories about people whose legacies have lasted for centuries. We create narratives centered on bygone people because we long for the past and enjoy delving into time periods we are not physically able to experience. When building these narratives, creators often manage to reflect their own time and culture in some way whether intentionally or not. They adhere to genre conventions and aim to please specific audiences. One historical figure whose story has been told and retold is Elizabeth I, the Queen of England from 1558 to 1603. Modern depictions of Elizabeth are used in part to simply tell the story of Elizabeth, but they are also used to reflect the wants and needs of specific modern audiences. Each pop culture version of Elizabeth is different and serves a different purpose. In this thesis, I analyze four different pop culture adaptations of the life of Elizabeth I and discuss how the creators of the works chose to present Elizabeth. The creators of each work had to choose which parts of Elizabeth’s life they wanted to depict in order to create an overall image. The Elizabeth of each depiction reflects the creators’ individual interpretations of her story, and each Elizabeth embodies a different role. Although each work is telling the story of the same woman, they all have very different ways of using Elizabeth as a character. In this thesis, I explore different adaptations and what they are trying to portray through the character of Elizabeth. Each piece I watched or read targets a different audience and falls into a different genre. In this paper I will discuss five Elizabeths: the actual Elizabeth I, the Elizabeth of Philippa Gregory’s *The Virgin’s Lover* (2004), the Elizabeth of the CW network’s television show *Reign* (2013-2017), the

Elizabeth of Shekhar Kapur's film *Elizabeth* (1998), and the Elizabeth of the British Broadcasting Corporation's *The Virgin Queen* (2005).

The first depiction of Elizabeth that I analyzed is *The Virgin's Lover*. *The Virgin's Lover* is a historical romance written by Philippa Gregory, the author of multiple novels centered on the lives of women within the Tudor court. *The Virgin's Lover* focuses on Elizabeth I in the first two years of her reign and her relationship with her courtier, Robert Dudley. The novel also narrates the story of Dudley's marriage to Amy Robsart, speculating on the events that led to Amy's death in 1560. William Cecil, Elizabeth's chief advisor, plays a major role within the novel, guiding Elizabeth in her new role as queen and scheming to keep Elizabeth from being manipulated by Dudley. The novel begins with Mary I still on the throne, shows Elizabeth's accession after the death of her half-sister, and ends with the conclusion by Elizabeth, Cecil, and Dudley that Elizabeth and Dudley can never wed because of the speculation surrounding the death of Amy that would forever follow Dudley. Gregory's novel was released in 2004 and is a drama-filled retelling of Elizabeth's relationship with Robert Dudley that greatly emphasizes the speculation and rumors that surround Elizabeth's romantic history. I think Gregory's depiction of Elizabeth is heavily influenced by its genre and even goes as far as falling into the "damsel in distress" trope with Elizabeth having to be saved by the men in her life (Dudley and Cecil).

Throughout the novel, Gregory attempts to feminize Elizabeth. She first does this through the way Cecil addresses the queen. Elizabeth I had many titles during her life and reign. She is a princess at the beginning of Gregory's novel, but quickly ascends to the throne and becomes queen. Still, throughout the novel, William Cecil calls Elizabeth by the epithet "Princess." In *Elizabeth I and Her Age*, Donald Stump and Susan M. Felch note that "Elizabeth preferred the title 'Prince' to 'Princess'" (240). In Gregory's novel, Cecil's calling Elizabeth "Princess"

feminizes and infantilizes her, something the real Elizabeth would most likely not have put up with. Gregory's choice to have Cecil call Elizabeth "Princess" instead of "Prince" shows either her own attempt to depict Elizabeth as more vulnerable, youthful, and feminine, or she is attempting to show how Cecil might have been more dismissive of Elizabeth during the earlier years of her reign because she was a woman. The actual William Cecil frequently had his doubts about Elizabeth's ability to rule, especially during her early years as queen, because she was female. Alison Weir writes that, after Elizabeth appointed Cecil as Secretary of State, he "had his misgivings, for he subscribed to the almost universal masculine view that women, being wayward, emotional, weak and vacillating creatures, were unfit to govern and incapable of running an administration" (22). However, it seems more likely that Gregory is simply trying to feminize Elizabeth only because when Cecil calls Elizabeth "Princess" in Gregory's novel, it is used more as a term of endearment than anything.

Philippa Gregory really emphasizes the traits that Elizabeth is reported to have had that made her advisors and courtiers wary of a female ruler. Alison Weir writes:

Men might despise her sex, and they might mistake her finely-calculated sense of timing for dithering, but they learned to appreciate her abilities, even if they did not always understand how her mind worked, her unpredictability, her tendency to unconventional behavior, and – above all – her ability to change her mind far more than they deemed necessary, or put off making decisions for what seemed an inordinate length of time. (17)

Elizabeth's advisors frequently attributed her personality traits to her sex in general, blaming her indecisiveness on the fact that she was female. Elizabeth knew her councilors treated her differently because she was a female ruler and "learned to use her femininity to advantage,

artfully stressing her womanly weaknesses and shortcomings, even indulging in effective storms of weeping, whilst at the same time displaying many of the qualities most admired in men” (Weir 17). Elizabeth was able to manipulate her advisors and courtiers by behaving emotionally, leading the men to give in to whatever she wanted in order to pacify her. The Elizabeth of *The Virgin’s Lover* is volatile and temperamental, and the majority of the scenes where she is with her Privy Council show her as being nervous and indecisive. However, Gregory does not describe Elizabeth as being manipulative with her emotions. Gregory’s Elizabeth becomes emotional and upset during her Council meetings, but Gregory does not make any mention of Elizabeth’s emotions being used as a tool to get what she wants; Elizabeth is simply anxious and unsure of her decisions.

In *The Virgin’s Lover*, when the Protestant lords in Scotland ask for Elizabeth’s support, she worries for days about whether she has made the right decision to send aid to the siege against Mary de Guise. Three days after Elizabeth agrees to send ships to Scotland, she calls a meeting of the Privy Council and declares, “I have spent all night on my knees. I cannot do this. I dare not take us to war. The ships must stay in port; we cannot take on the French” (Gregory 275). After Cecil informs her that the ships left the moment she agreed, she says, “How could you do this Cecil? You are a very traitor to send them out” (Gregory 275). Moments such as this one appear throughout the book, pulling from historical accounts of Elizabeth’s tendency to blame Cecil for failures and to accept achievements as her own. Weir writes, “In day to day matters, Elizabeth delegated the decision-making to her Council, taking the credit herself when things turned out well. If disaster struck, the councilors got the blame” (227). Quoting Elizabeth’s godson, Sir John Harington, Weir continues, “Cecil would ‘shed a-plenty tears on any miscarriage, well knowing the difficult part was, not so much to mend the matter itself, as

his mistress's humour'" (227). Elizabeth's advisors had to learn how to keep her happy in order to get anything accomplished. Elizabeth and her advisors learned how to manipulate each other as a way to keep their country working. Gregory depicts Elizabeth as being quite emotional, but not as a way to show her as cunning. Moments throughout the book which highlight Elizabeth's weaknesses and worries work to humanize her, to show her as just a young woman who has too many responsibilities, someone relatable who is not perfect and deals with self-doubt.

Philippa Gregory uses Elizabeth's relationship with Robert Dudley as a way to portray the young queen as a damsel in distress. Many rumors surrounded Elizabeth concerning her personal relationship with Dudley. People claimed that Dudley was her lover, some rumors going as far to say that they had a child together, even though there is no actual evidence to support this, only speculation. Alison Weir argues that:

Court etiquette was such that [Elizabeth] was hardly ever alone, and there would have been very few opportunities for her to carry on a sexual relationship with Dudley without other people finding out. The few allegations that the affair had progressed this far were made only by hostile ambassadors who would believe anything of a Queen who had embraced heresy. Yet even de Quadra, whose spies were everywhere, could find no evidence of a sexual relationship and refused to believe the rumours. (72)

In her work *Elizabeth I*, Alison Plowden writes about the Austrian envoy, Caspar von Breuner, who was at court on behalf of the Archduke Charles at the same time as Bishop de Quadra, a Spanish ambassador to England. Plowden states, "According to von Breuner's account, [Elizabeth] had gone on to say that she failed to understand why anyone should object, 'seeing that she was always surrounded by her ladies of the bedchamber and maids of honour, who at all

times could see whether there was anything dishonourable between her and her Master of Horse” (102). Elizabeth and Robert Dudley had a very intimate friendship, but Elizabeth always claimed to be a virgin and no concrete evidence exists to contradict that claim, only gossip and rumors.

Despite the lack of proof, Gregory depicts Elizabeth as having a physical relationship with Dudley, one that begins just after Dudley comforts Elizabeth after she thought she was being pursued by an assassin. During the scene, Elizabeth is put into the role of the damsel-in-distress, further feminizing her, with Dudley being her manly hero. The physical relationship that follows allows Gregory to further emphasize Dudley’s influence over Elizabeth, portraying Elizabeth as being under Dudley’s spell in a way. After they sleep together, Dudley begins pushing Elizabeth to marry him. He even convinces her to become his betrothed in front of two witnesses. The scenes that portray the physical aspects of Elizabeth and Dudley’s relationship are not vital to the plot, but rather add sex appeal to the novel. The physical relationship itself creates another element to Elizabeth and Robert’s relationship along with the rumors that existed just because of their public displays of affection. The physical relationship adds a sense of scandal to the novel by claiming that the rumors around the queen and her courtier were true. Gregory is able to portray Elizabeth as being love sick by depicting a high level of physical intimacy between her and Dudley.

Because of the level of intimacy between Elizabeth and Dudley that she displays, Gregory is able to portray Elizabeth as being greatly influenced by Dudley. Historically, Dudley was actually very influential to Elizabeth, being one of her earliest and closest courtiers and friends. Weir states, “There are indications that [Dudley] had influenced her to stand her ground against the bishops during the discussions that preceded the recent religious legislation. Certainly

he was instrumental in the advancement of no less than twenty-seven of the higher clergy during the early years of the reign” (71). He and William Cecil both worked to advise Elizabeth and were considered the most powerful men at her court. In 1550, Dudley was appointed the position of Master of the Buckhounds, and he was made a Member of Parliament in 1553 (though he was imprisoned shortly after for supporting the coup to put Lady Jane Grey on the throne) (Weir 20-21). Weir also points out that Dudley was “particularly skilled in equine matters” (20) and was well qualified for his first appointment by Elizabeth as Master of Horse. That considered, Gregory does not tie Dudley’s influence to his capabilities as a statesman, but rather to his romantic relationship with Elizabeth. Toward the beginning of the novel, Cecil reflects on his, Elizabeth’s, and Dudley’s current situations, Gregory writing that, “Of the three of them it was Dudley who was most accustomed to power and position” (35). Robert is the most experienced with court life, making him an asset to the queen in that respect. Once Gregory establishes Elizabeth and Dudley’s romantic relationship, Dudley’s influence no longer has to do with the fact that he is experienced, but rather the fact that Gregory’s Elizabeth cannot tell him no or be without him. Gregory describes how Cecil left court after Elizabeth hesitated to declare war on France and writes, “In the absence of Cecil, Robert was her only trusted advisor. No one was seen by the queen except by Dudley’s introduction; she never spoke to anyone without him standing, discreetly, in the background. He was her only friend and her ally. She took no decision without him; they were inseparable” (287). Gregory makes Elizabeth out to be vulnerable and dependent on Dudley, taking away a large portion of her agency as a character.

Amy Dudley is another central figure in *The Virgin’s Lover*, the third-person point of view spending half of the book over her shoulder as well as Elizabeth’s. While Amy’s primary role in the novel is to emphasize the complicated dynamics that Robert Dudley has with the

women in his life, a secondary part she plays is demonstrating the resistance of Catholics to a Protestant queen. England was greatly divided by religion during Elizabeth's reign. The country switched from a Protestant king to a Catholic queen and then to a Protestant queen within the span of ten years. Elizabeth's relationship with Catholic clergymen during her early years as queen were very strained. During her first Christmas mass as queen, Elizabeth asked Owen Oglethorpe, the Bishop of Carlisle who would be performing the mass, not to raise the Host, denying the concept of transubstantiation that Catholics believe in. Alison Weir records:

When the Gospel had been read, and the Bishop started to raise the bread and wine before the congregation, the Queen loudly ordered him to desist, to the astonishment of those present. But Oglethorpe merely frowned at her and went on with what he was doing, whereupon Elizabeth, in a fury, rose and withdrew from the chapel, determined not to witness what was offensive to her. (31)

Early in Elizabeth's reign, measures were put in place in order to suppress Catholic practices including the Act of Supremacy and the Act of Uniformity. Alison Plowden writes:

The new Prayer Book came into use officially on Midsummer Day [1559] and by August a series of visitations had the dioceses of England and Wales to enforce nationwide obedience to the provisions of the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity, as well as the newly issued Royal Injunctions which dealt, among other things, with such important matters as the replacing of stone altars by communion tables. (205)

Elizabeth herself was fairly tolerant when it came to religious matters, hating fanatics of any sort, but she was aware that the majority of Catholics did not view her as a legitimate ruler because of her father's divorce. If she gave any support to the Catholic Church and allowed Catholics to



keep practicing within her country, she would have been allowing a portion of her citizens to believe that she was not the rightful queen of England. She solidified her rule as best she could by supporting a unified Church of England.

In the sections that center on Amy in *The Virgin's Lover*, Gregory focuses on Amy's religious beliefs and practices which become stronger as the novel progresses and she is exposed to more and more rumors about her husband and the queen. Amy goes out of her way to see Catholic priests in secret to seek counsel about her deteriorating marriage. Amy even has a conversation with Robert in which she tells him that she is a Catholic and has always been Catholic and that she "never thought [Elizabeth's] claim was the best" (Gregory 255). She tells Robert that Elizabeth "is turning against the true religion" (255). By using Amy in this way, Gregory is able to show the Catholic dissent that plagued Elizabeth's rule without focusing too much on the political history, being able to stay within the personal, private realm of the characters. The novel is not meant to be a history so Gregory avoids abandoning the private realms of the characters just to discuss political matters, instead making the political moments evident during personal moments.

The death of Amy Dudley remains a mystery to this day, with many theories surrounding the event as to how she ended up at the bottom of a set of stairs with her neck broken. Some historians even speculate that Amy was murdered in order to make a path for Dudley to marry Elizabeth. Susan Doran writes, "Unquestionably the death of Dudley's wife on 8 September 1560 had a number of unusual, not to say suspicious, features but it is unlikely that it would have aroused such a stir had it not been for its timing" (42). Elizabeth had taken care of matters in Scotland and was back to spending much of her free time with Dudley, causing rumors to fly once again. Doran says, "At court there was a renewed rumour, possibly initiated by Cecil, that

Dudley intended to poison his wife, while in east Essex a woman from Brentford was spreading stories of Elizabeth's supposed pregnancy by the Lord Robert" (42). The woman Doran is referring to is Annie Dowe of Brentwood who is quoted as telling fellow villagers that "My Lord Robert and the Queen have played at legerdemain together and he is the father of her child" (Weir 90). Annie Dowe ended up being arrested and imprisoned for her words about the queen. Because of the rumors, some people believed that Elizabeth and Dudley would have happily had Amy disposed of so that they could finally marry. The suspicious details around Amy's death scene turned Dudley into an obvious suspect. Doran recounts, "Amy Dudley had broken her neck after a fall down a 'paier' of stairs (a staircase with two landings) 'which by reporte was but eight steppes', not a likely occurrence, especially if her head-dress was undisturbed by the accident as was later claimed" (42-43). Doran continues, arguing that "It was all too easy to believe that one of the gentlemen living in the house, either Anthony Forster or Sir Richard Verney, both friends of Robert Dudley, had orchestrated or personally carried out her murder" (43). Many people of the time believed that Dudley had something to do with Amy's death either directly or indirectly, and this greatly tarnished his reputation.

In Gregory's novel, William Cecil actually plans Amy's murder after Elizabeth tells him to do whatever he needs to do in order to make it impossible for her to marry Robert. Cecil knows that if Amy dies mysteriously, people will blame Robert and her death will forever stain his reputation, ensuring that the people of England would never accept him as king or consort. Gregory's own theory is built around a comment that the real Elizabeth made to the Spanish ambassador that was perplexing. On September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1560, the day before Amy's death, Bishop de Quadra, the Spanish Ambassador, spoke with Elizabeth, hoping to wish her a happy birthday. He is quoted as saying in Alison Weir's book, "The Queen told me, on her return from hunting, that

Lord Robert's wife was dead, or nearly so, and begged me to say nothing about it" (96). Cecil later implied to the Spanish ambassador that Elizabeth and Robert might have been planning Amy's death together, with Elizabeth and Robert spreading rumors that Amy was ill to lesson suspicions. Weir claims, "At the very least, Cecil was stirring things up; at the worst, he was deliberately planting in the ambassador's fertile mind the notion that the Queen – whom he served, and was to continue to serve, with loyalty and devotion – and her lover were plotting murder" (97). She continues, "In fact, what [Cecil] was trying to do was bring the Queen to her senses, by fair means or foul" (97). Weir speculates that Cecil knew the rumors would get back to Elizabeth and she would realize that she could not marry Robert after Amy's death because the suspicion would be directed toward her as well if they married. Weir argues, "Cecil knew that, if Amy Dudley were to be murdered, her husband would be a free man; he also knew that the public outcry would be so great that Robert could never marry the Queen, since most people would believe he had killed his wife, even if he had not. And what Cecil wished to prevent was Dudley marrying the Queen" (97). Gregory bases her version of Cecil on the reports that the real Cecil was willing to do whatever it took to keep Robert Dudley out of power.

In *The Virgin's Lover*, Elizabeth says to Cecil after she finds out about Amy's death, "Cecil, what the devil is happening? I told the Spanish ambassador that she was ill, as you told me to do. But this is so sudden. Has [Robert] murdered her? He will claim me as his own and I shall not be able to say no" (Gregory 414). Elizabeth has no idea that the innocent life Cecil told her he'd have to take was that of Amy. I think Gregory purposefully makes Elizabeth seem naïve in this moment in order to make her appear less guilty, but this also makes her come off as a passive character with Cecil having much more agency (he plans Amy's murder, has the plan executed, and Elizabeth is completely oblivious). Elizabeth does not realize Cecil's plan right

away, that she will not be able to marry Robert because of the suspicions that will surround him and herself because of what she said to de Quadra. By portraying Amy's death in this way, Gregory is able to put all of the blame on Cecil, leaving Elizabeth and Robert both blameless in Amy's death, although Elizabeth is somewhat guilty for giving Cecil free reign. This retelling explains the questionable comment Elizabeth made to de Quadra in a way that leaves her seeming less guilty, but also makes her incredibly passive once again, the main events just happening around her and to her. She did not say it because she somehow knew Amy was going to die, but rather because Cecil told her to mention it and assumed he had a good reason for this.

Overall, Gregory depicts Elizabeth as a fairly weak character. Her Elizabeth is indecisive and easily influenced, emotional and naïve. The novel works to feminize Elizabeth in an incredibly heteronormative way, making her a mostly passive character that lets things happen to her rather than doing things herself. Dudley coddles her after she is possibly chased by a potential assassin and sways her opinions on state matters, and Cecil pushes her during Council meetings and breaks off her relationship with Dudley for her. Gregory simply uses Elizabeth as a leading lady in a romance novel rather than depicting her as ruler of a country. I think Gregory attempts to humanize Elizabeth, focusing more on and playing up the parts of her that embody what it means to be a young woman, but in doing this she seems to perpetuate negative stereotypes about young women such as women being overly emotional and irrational. I would argue that the main purpose of the novel (because of its genre) is to be a love story, with the character of Elizabeth taking a backseat to the plot of the novel.

The second Elizabeth that I looked at is the Elizabeth of *Reign*. *Reign* is a television series that premiered in 2013 presented by The CW network. The CW caters to a young adult and teen audience for the most part, often featuring dramas and fantasy television programs.

*Reign* focuses on the life of Mary, Queen of Scots, Elizabeth's first cousin once removed, and the time she spent in France with Francis II. Elizabeth I, played by Canadian actress Rachel Skarsten, does not make an appearance in the show until the very end of season two, and becomes a regular character throughout season three. By season three, the series goes back and forth between Mary and Elizabeth, depicting life at Elizabeth's court, as well as French court, and how the two cousins negotiate power over the other. Even though Elizabeth plays a large role in season three, Mary is still the main focus of the show. Elizabeth acts as Mary's rival, but the show does not necessarily depict her in a villainous way. *Reign* could be described as a historical, fantasy drama, adding many fictitious characters and plotlines (some involving supernatural elements) to create a full story surrounding the young queens. The show is geared toward a young adult audience, the majority of the characters being young adults themselves. Because of the target audience, I believe the creators of *Reign* attempt to make Elizabeth (and Mary as well) relatable while still being a strong and effective ruler. I think they also use Elizabeth as a paradigm of a strong, independent woman. The creators embed within the show an overarching theme of "girl power," with three of the main characters being female monarchs.

The producers of *Reign* also chose to depict Elizabeth as having a physical relationship with Robert Dudley, but not necessarily as a means of making her appear weak and submissive. Unlike in *The Virgin's Lover*, it is not Dudley who is so eager to marry Elizabeth, but rather Elizabeth who tries to get Dudley to marry her. In episode nine of season three ("Wedlock") it is revealed that Elizabeth is pregnant with Dudley's child. Elizabeth entreats him to divorce Amy and marry her in order to prevent the scandal of her having a child out of wedlock. Robert is the one who tries to reason with Elizabeth, telling her that it would be almost impossible for him to get a divorce and then marry her immediately after, most likely the opposite of what Philippa

Gregory's Dudley would have done. Elizabeth spends most of the scene seated while Robert stands, forcing her to look up at him. Even when she stands she is so close to him that he towers over her and she has to tilt her head back to meet his gaze. This positioning emphasizes her imploringness, making Robert her savior. *Reign's* Elizabeth is willing to do what she has to (even be vulnerable) in order to keep her throne. Dudley eventually gives in to her wishes and agrees that he will divorce Amy so that he can marry her. Elizabeth ends up being poisoned which causes her to have a miscarriage soon after Amy's death in the series. While Elizabeth does love Dudley, her main motivation for wanting him to marry her right away is so that her reputation will not be ruined. The Elizabeth of *Reign* is more concerned with pleasing her people and keeping her throne than with doing what makes her happy. After Amy's death, Elizabeth even sends Dudley away because she knows the suspicions surrounding him would tarnish her own reputation.

Amy Dudley's death in *Reign* is depicted as a suicide, making Elizabeth appear much more innocent and removed from the tragedy. Amy learns about Elizabeth and Robert's affair and begins doing whatever she can to get Robert to stay with her, playing up illnesses and telling him how much he is hurting her. The real Amy was reported to have been plagued by chest pains, the cause of which are unknown, though many speculate she had some form of cancer. Alison Weir mentions, "De Feria and de Quadra had both referred at different times to rumours that Amy Dudley was suffering from a 'malady in her breast' that was believed to be terminal" (95). She continues, writing, "This may have been true, but all that we know for certain about her health is that, early in September 1560, she was very depressed. This depression could have been the result of hearing that her husband was only waiting for her to die so that he could marry the Queen, or it could have been caused by the knowledge that she herself was mortally sick" (Weir

95). In *Reign*, once Amy learns that Elizabeth wants Robert to divorce her, she goes slightly mad and decides to kill herself, knowing Robert would be blamed for her death. She trashes her room (which Robert had locked her in) and then in a rage says, “Rot in hell, you and your virgin queen” (“Wedlock”). She hurries to the railing lining the hall, pauses with a crazed smile, and then flings herself over the rail, landing at the foot of the stairs. While Amy’s being upset about Robert and Elizabeth is completely understandable, the series takes it a step further, making her out to be losing her mind because of the affair. By the time Amy kills herself, viewers have seen her go completely insane. Her need for vengeance at the end of her life casts her in a negative light, her last action being a very manipulative one. The scene delegitimizes Amy as a character and in turn reaffirms Elizabeth’s relationship with Robert. The way in which Amy’s death is portrayed makes it easy to dismiss her as crazy at first, which leaves Elizabeth and Robert free from the guilt of her suicide, even though it was their affair that drove her to it.

*Reign* portrays Elizabeth as being confident and strong while in public, more sure of herself than the Elizabeth of *The Virgin’s Lover*, but the show makes a point to mention her vanity. When one of her ambassadors, the fictitious Gideon Blackburn, returns from France, Elizabeth asks him what he thought of Mary, Queen of Scots. She notes that Mary has a reputation for bewitching men and asks, “Did you fall under Mary’s spell?” (“Safe Passage”). As Gideon begins to answer her, intense and ominous music begins playing, increasing the tension of the moment. This rise in intensity implies that Gideon must answer carefully for fear of being punished. Gideon replies, “Honestly? There were times where I could envision falling in love with the Queen of Scots, but not in this life. You are my queen” (“Safe Passage”). This pleases Elizabeth and she rewards him for his loyalty and for stroking her ego. Many accounts of Elizabeth’s personality comment on her vanity and jealousy, especially when it came to her

cousin Mary. She is noted to have asked people whether they thought her cousin was attractive, the majority of the people responding that Elizabeth was more beautiful whether they believed it or not. Alison Plowden writes, “Even in her early twenties, the pale, sharp-featured, red-haired Elizabeth had never been able to compete with her Scottish cousin’s fabled beauty, but she possessed other attributes which were to prove of greater value in the long-drawn-out battle between them” (185). Alison Weir discusses Elizabeth’s desire to meet her cousin in person, saying, “Being inordinately vain, she was curious to see if Mary was as beautiful as reported, and also eager to find that she was not. Elizabeth was jealous of her reputation as the most desirable catch in Europe, and could not bear competition” (129). Weir recounts, “When a German diplomat told her that Mary was reputed to be very lovely, she retorted that that could not be so as ‘she herself was superior to the Queen of Scotland’” (129). *Reign* pulls from these accounts in order to depict Elizabeth as being jealous of Mary.

Along with her vanity, another one of Elizabeth’s shortcomings was her temper. Alison Weir writes, “Her temper was notorious: she was not above boxing the Secretary’s ears, throwing her slipper at Walsingham’s face, or punching others who displeased her, and after flouncing out of a Council meeting in a rage, she would retire to her Privy Chamber and read until she had calmed down, which she invariably did after these outbursts” (227). She also mentions how, “As a young queen, in 1559, Elizabeth rebuked two of her servants so wrathfully that they claimed they would ‘carry it to their graves’” (Weir 227). Elizabeth’s quick temper appears in *Reign* when she meets with Magnus, the Prince of Denmark, who continuously praises Denmark and criticizes England. Elizabeth admits to Lola, one of Mary Stuart’s best friends who has come to English court to help her family, that she is only letting the prince court her so that they might gain some cattle from Denmark for England. Outside of what Denmark could provide



for England, Elizabeth has no interest in the prince and finds him utterly annoying. This reflects how the real Elizabeth often engaged in courtships only for the sake of potentially gaining something for England and prolonged the courtships until the suitors gave up on waiting for her. Alison Weir writes about the French King Charles IX's initial proposal to Elizabeth and how she was against it because of the 17 year age gap between them. However, "Elizabeth still needed to keep the French friendly and prevent them from making a new alliance with the Scots" (Weir 154). Weir continues, "Thus she embarked on her old game of stringing along her suitors with half-promises and hope" (154). In the episode, while they are sitting down for lunch, the prince suggests that Elizabeth would come live with him in Denmark if they were to marry, wanting people to say that "Elizabeth chose Denmark" ("Clans"). Elizabeth excuses herself because of this, and the prince overhears her ranting to Lola, in a rage saying that England should invade Denmark and that "it would take barely any effort to crush their people and their arrogance" ("Clans"). Lola ends up taking the blame, claiming she was the one whom he heard say such things. In this scene, Elizabeth is depicted as being hot-headed and impulsive, needing Lola to step in and fix her mistake. Lola is the hero of the moment, the focus of the scene shifting to her, Mary Stuart's best friend, putting Elizabeth in the background.

*Reign* depicts Lola as having much influence over Elizabeth, acting as a confidant to the queen even though her loyalty lies with Mary Stuart. Lola warns Elizabeth to be careful when she visits Robert Dudley, reminding her that he is one of the most hated men in England. Frequently, Lola is used as a voice for Elizabeth's own thoughts. In one scene, Lola asks Elizabeth if she loves Dudley and tells her that she understands why Elizabeth might be afraid to love anyone. Lola says, "Love is a risk for anyone. But for you, knowing what love did to you mother, how could you not fear it?" ("To the Death"). This reflects some of the speculation

surrounding Elizabeth's reluctance to marry and her commitment to remaining a virgin. Some historians believe that the relationship between Elizabeth's parents and the death of her mother was one of several reasons that Elizabeth resisted marriage. Weir writes, "Some writers have suggested that the events of [Elizabeth's] childhood led her to equate marriage with death, and although there is no evidence to support this theory, there can be little doubt that this was a traumatic time for Elizabeth, with Katherine Howard's execution reviving painful thoughts of what had happened to her mother" (13). Lola acts as a mouthpiece for what people believe Elizabeth could have been thinking when deciding whether to marry or not. This moment, like the scene with the Danish prince, emphasizes Lola's importance by her being the voice of reason and explaining to Elizabeth what Elizabeth is feeling, removing Elizabeth's agency over her own mind altogether. I believe that the creators of *Reign* use Lola as a character to remind the audience that Elizabeth is not necessarily the main protagonist in the show and that that is why they depict Lola as the hero in her scenes with Elizabeth. Elizabeth is made a secondary character next to Lola who is acting as a representative of Mary, Queen of Scots.

The series makes a point to mention Anne Boleyn several times in season three, implying the effect that her execution had on Elizabeth. Along with her conversation with Lola, in episode fourteen ("To the Death"), Elizabeth awakens from a nightmare of her mother's execution, her lady-in-waiting having to comfort her and calm her down. Elizabeth makes the woman swear that she will not tell anyone about her nightmares and how much her mother's death bothers her so that no one can claim she disagrees with her father's ruling. Elizabeth learns that her mother was actually guilty of the charges of adultery and incest against her. Similar to the situation in *The Other Boleyn Girl* (one of Philippa Gregory's other novels about the Tudor royals), Anne attempts to convince her brother George to sleep with her so that she could conceive a child in

order to prevent Henry VIII from leaving her. The siblings do not go through with it, but they had been spotted by a maid who was forced to tell what she saw. In reality, Anne was most likely innocent of all of the charges against her, but Henry VIII and many of his advisors wanted her gone, Henry so he could further pursue Jane Seymour, and his advisors because they felt that Anne was too great of an influence on Henry. Alison Weir writes, “Arrested with five men, one her brother, she was charged with plotting to murder the King and twenty-two counts of adultery – eleven of which have since been proved false, which suggests that the rest, for which there is no corroborative evidence, are equally unlikely” (12). By showing Elizabeth being haunted by her mother’s fate, the series is able to show how Elizabeth has fears and worries, but that she keeps them hidden, not wanting to appear weak and especially appear as though she sympathizes with someone who was executed for treason.

Many scenes throughout the show depict Elizabeth as having to put aside her emotions in order to be an unwavering ruler. One such moment occurs when Lola gets caught up in an assassination plot against Elizabeth, abruptly ending their friendship. Dudley manages to stop the assassin Lola was working with and demands that Lola and the assassin both be arrested. Elizabeth agrees, and Lola is charged and condemned to die. Elizabeth feels betrayed by Lola, telling her that she trusted her. Lola makes the claim that Elizabeth does not trust anyone and that she only truly cares about having power. Elizabeth attends Lola’s execution, looking very upset but also adamant about her decision. She flinches slightly when Lola is beheaded and leaves swiftly after, not wanting to linger. In this moment, Elizabeth is portrayed as being a firm ruler, one who does what she has to in order to keep herself and her country safe. She is not completely heartless though, as shown by her uneasiness at the execution. The execution scene shows how Elizabeth must bury her compassion in order to be viewed as a strong leader like her father.

*Reign* portrays Elizabeth as a young ruler rather than just a young woman. The creators show her shortcomings and weaknesses, but ultimately she is a strong queen with unwavering love for her country, knowing what her part is to play for the public. I think the Elizabeth of *Reign* is meant to act as an example of a strong, independent woman. By portraying Elizabeth's personal flaws (her temper, jealousy, etc.), the creators of *Reign* are able to humanize her, but they balance that with depicting her as a powerful monarch who can make tough decisions. *Reign's* Elizabeth is a much more active character than the Elizabeth of *The Virgin's Lover*. Even though both works target largely female audiences, I would argue that they have almost opposite methods for attracting audiences. *Reign* involves the story of a powerful queen, one subplot being that the queen falls in love, whereas *The Virgin's Lover* involves the story of a woman in love, with a subplot of the woman being a powerful queen. *Reign* uses the character of Elizabeth as a symbol for girl power, someone whom young women might be able to identify with and potentially look up to.

The third Elizabeth that I analyzed comes from *Elizabeth*. *Elizabeth* is a film depiction of the life of Elizabeth I directed by Shekhar Kapur that shows Elizabeth's transformation from young woman to queen. The film was released in 1998 and stars Cate Blanchett as Elizabeth, Joseph Fiennes as Robert Dudley, and Geoffrey Rush as Francis Walsingham. The opening scene of the film shows three Protestant citizens being burned at the stake for heresy under Mary I's reign. Elizabeth is imprisoned in the Tower of London for possibly being a conspirator in the Wyatt Revolt (a rebellion that, if successful, would have deposed Mary I and put Elizabeth on the throne), but is then relocated to Hatfield to live under house arrest. As soon as Mary dies, Elizabeth is made queen and is instantly bombarded with pressure to marry and produce an heir in order to secure her reign. The film focuses on many of the players at court and the plots and

assassination attempts against Elizabeth. Elizabeth learns how to wield her power and is reluctant to let anyone tell her how she is supposed to live and what she is supposed to do. The film ends with Walsingham exposing all of the conspirators against Elizabeth and Elizabeth making the decision to never marry and to remain a virgin for the rest of her life. *Elizabeth* is an independent, biographic film that is artistic, dramatic, and intense. I believe one of the goals of the film, besides telling the story of Elizabeth's early reign, is to show her complete metamorphosis from young woman to queen and the events that led up to it. Unlike *Reign's* and *The Virgin's Lover's* Elizabeths, the Elizabeth of *Elizabeth* is not simultaneously a young woman and a queen. She starts as a young woman but then must abandon that role in order to embody her role as the Virgin Queen.

Much like in *Reign* and *The Virgin's Lover*, *Elizabeth* depicts Elizabeth as being very unsure of her decisions at the beginning of her reign. During the first meeting of her Privy Council, Elizabeth is pressured to make a decision regarding the French troops in Scotland. She is visibly agitated, stalling and asking for something to drink, looking to Dudley and Walsingham for help. The Duke of Norfolk shouts at her to make a decision immediately and she visibly flinches. Her uncertainty is also depicted during a scene where she is preparing for her first meeting with Parliament. She is attempting to craft a speech and gets more and more frustrated as she goes, her face reddening and sweating as she stumbles over choosing the right words. She is visibly concerned with how she needs to present herself to this group of men, making sure she appears strong and unshakable. The members of Parliament are first filmed from a low-angle shot, making them appear as though they are towering and intimidating and ominous in their black robes. At the beginning of the assembly, the men talk over her and dismiss her, but she steels herself and slips into a playful manner, taunting the members of

Parliament. She mocks one of the members who reprimands her for joking about polygamy, calling him out for being married for the third time. These moments demonstrate the insecurities that the real Elizabeth was believed to have had, and then show how she was able to keep those insecurities, for the most part, private. Elizabeth is nervous and restless in front of her maids and Privy Council, but confident in front of the Parliament.

In *Elizabeth*, Elizabeth has an intimate relationship with Robert Dudley, one that pushes the boundaries of propriety at her court and worries her advisors and the ambassadors of her suitors. Elizabeth and Robert dance with each other frequently, and Elizabeth's ladies-in-waiting witness the two sleeping together. William Cecil is especially worried about Elizabeth's attachment to Dudley. There is an intense moment when Cecil exclaims to Elizabeth, "He's already married!" in reference to Dudley. This moment can be interpreted in one of two ways: either Cecil is revealing to Elizabeth that Dudley is married, or Cecil is reminding Elizabeth that Dudley is married. I would argue that the first option seems to be the interpretation the film wants its audience to make. Having Cecil reveal to Elizabeth that Robert is married is an interesting choice made by the creators of the film because it implies that Elizabeth somehow did not know that Dudley was married and that Dudley was lying to Elizabeth for years. Historically, Dudley married Amy Robsart in 1550, and was thus married to her for eight years before Elizabeth even took the throne. The real Elizabeth knew of Amy's existence, purposefully keeping her away from court as she did with the wives of her other courtiers. Weir states, "There is evidence that Amy made at least one visit to court, but it is unlikely that her presence was welcome" (94). She continues, noting that "It was not unusual in those days for the wives of courtiers to remain in the country while their husbands served at court; it was possible for wives to reside at court, but the cost was enormous and the Queen discouraged the practice. She liked

her male courtiers to dance attendance on her, not on their wives” (Weir 94). The second interpretation, that Cecil is reminding Elizabeth that Dudley is married, makes more sense historically, as it would have been almost impossible for Elizabeth to not have known he was married. This interpretation would also imply that Elizabeth was simply trying to ignore Amy’s existence and forget about her, which could have possibly been something the real Elizabeth did as well.

By showing her interactions with multiple suitors, the film depicts Elizabeth’s reluctance to marry and her commitment to being single. One of Elizabeth’s suitors in the film is Henry, Duke of Anjou. When Elizabeth first meets the Duke, he is disguised as a flute player and follows behind one of his courtiers who is posing as the Duke. He reveals himself once Elizabeth stretches her hand out to the courtier to be kissed, and all of the French chuckle along with the Duke at the confused English faces. Elizabeth hesitantly begins to giggle in order to appear unfazed, but then the Duke reaches for her and kisses her twice on the mouth. Elizabeth is visibly indignant, but remains calm and tells him that she is “deeply religious.” Throughout the Duke’s stay, the French ambassador continuously pressures Elizabeth to accept the Duke’s marriage proposal. During a dinner with the ambassador, Elizabeth asks him why the Duke is not present. The ambassador informs her that the Duke is not feeling well, but Elizabeth does not believe him and decides to visit the Duke to see what is going on. When she reaches his chambers, she finds many people lying around half-naked and the Duke wearing an elaborate gown and wig. The assembly sees the queen and everything stops. The musicians stop playing and the crowd stop talking, leaving the scene silent except for the Duke and Elizabeth. When the Duke realizes that Elizabeth is there, he asks, “Do you see something strange?” and attempts to play off his behavior. Elizabeth smiles sweetly at him and he reluctantly kisses her hand. She then announces

that she will not accept his proposal and leaves, attempting to hide the small smirk on her lips. I think the creators of the film chose to have Elizabeth react this way in order to show her reluctance to marry. She is gleeful when she discovers that she has an excuse not to marry the Duke of Anjou, happy to have postponed another marriage plan.

*Elizabeth* also presents another of Elizabeth's suitors, Philip II of Spain (her former brother-in-law), not as a way to show her reluctance to marry, but rather as a way to show the scheming that surrounded Elizabeth's life. The Spanish ambassador, Bishop de Quadra, attempts to convince Robert Dudley to support the Spanish proposal, telling Dudley that he will have the support and friendship of a strong Catholic king if he does. Dudley is willing to work with de Quadra in order to keep Elizabeth safe. Shortly after this scene, there is another which shows the Vatican issuing a papal bull declaring Elizabeth a heretic, giving all of her Catholic subjects permission to sever their allegiance to her. This bull would essentially give any Catholic subject the ability to assassinate the queen with no repercussions from the Catholic Church. Following the issuing of the bull, the film depicts several assassination attempts, first showing a hooded figure stalking toward Elizabeth, and then showing the death of a lady-in-waiting who tried on one of Elizabeth's new gowns, one that had been poisoned and sent to her as a gift. The film emphasizes the danger that Elizabeth was in and the threats against her life because of her position through the scenes with de Quadra and Dudley, the scheming of the Vatican, and the moments portraying assassination attempts.

In the film, Elizabeth takes a significant step forward in her transformation to queen by pushing Robert Dudley away from her. Dudley goes along with de Quadra's request because he believes it is in both his and Elizabeth's best interest. The scene in which Dudley attempts to persuade Elizabeth to marry Philip of Spain depicts another intimate moment between the two.



The camera switches between a high-angle shot over a balcony railing (which creates a fly-on-the-wall feeling implying the two feel unobserved) to close ups of the two, the camera circling them when they are standing right in front of each other (which makes it appear as though they are the only two people in the world). Robert tells Elizabeth that he thinks she should marry Philip of Spain, arguing that it would secure her position and offer her protection against the Catholic Church. He mentions that Philip would spend the majority of his time in Spain, leaving Elizabeth and Dudley alone together most of the time. Elizabeth gets angry and tells Dudley that she does not want to be his mistress. She marches away from him and back to her throne, getting farther away from the camera, and says to him, “You may make whores of my ladies, but you shall not make one of me” (*Elizabeth*). The great distance from the camera reflects the distance she is trying to put between herself and Robert. She knows that he is married and that he slept with Isabel Knollys (Elizabeth’s lady who died from the poisoned dress) and is still angry at him, no longer as smitten as she once was. Dudley is discouraged and gives up hope on being able to keep the queen safe. This scene shows how Elizabeth is becoming more serious about her role as the Virgin Queen, pushing Dudley away and resigning herself to not marrying him or anyone else.

The film depicts Elizabeth fully deciding to complete her transformation from young woman to queen after Dudley ends up being implicated in a plot to put Mary, Queen of Scots, on the English throne. She realizes how much danger she is in and how much of a distraction Dudley has been to her after Walsingham captures a priest from Rome who reveals that there was a plot supported by the Vatican to marry the Duke of Norfolk to Mary Stuart and elevate them to the English throne. The priest discloses the names of the conspirators, one of whom is Robert Dudley. Walsingham has all of the conspirators killed, Norfolk imprisoned (and

eventually beheaded), but leaves Dudley to Elizabeth. When Elizabeth finds Dudley, she tells him that she is going to let him live even after he asks her to kill him. She says she wants him around as a “reminder of how close she came to danger” (*Elizabeth*). She cuts off any personal relationship with him at that point. This plot point is an interesting addition to the story, because the reality is that Dudley was never implicated in such a plot and remained a close friend to Elizabeth until his death.

The final scenes of the film show how Elizabeth has rejected young-womanhood in order to fully be a strong queen. Elizabeth tells her ladies that she “has become a virgin,” further implying that Elizabeth was not actually a virgin in the first place. Elizabeth’s lady Kat Ashley is shown cutting Elizabeth’s hair and crying as she does so. While the cutting of Elizabeth’s hair is done in order to accommodate a wig, I think the moment is highly symbolic as well. I interpret her cutting off all her hair as a sign that she is separating herself from who she once was in order to transform into who she must be: a Virgin Queen. Kat and the other ladies dress her and do her makeup ceremoniously, painting Elizabeth’s face completely white. The scene then cuts to Elizabeth entering a large chamber full of her courtiers and subjects. She enters from a blindingly white background, making it look as though she is actually descending from heaven. She then walks down an aisle to her throne, ignoring Robert Dudley and his intense stare. She stops for a moment at Cecil, announcing to him, “Observe Lord Burleigh, I am married – to England” (*Elizabeth*). Everyone is kneeling, staring in awe, one person even reaching out to grab her skirts and kiss them. She sits on her throne and stares at the crowd, her face a mask. The entire scene depicts the cult that formed around Elizabeth and her embodiment of the Virgin Mary.

*Elizabeth* emphasizes how Elizabeth I had to separate herself from her role as a young woman in order to protect herself. *Elizabeth* focuses primarily on the uncertainties that

surrounded Elizabeth concerning her position and safety. The film pays less attention to the details of Elizabeth's relationship with Robert Dudley and more to the consequences of it, adding elements of betrayal that most likely did not exist between the two. The film revolves around the danger that Elizabeth was constantly in because she would not marry and the danger that came from the conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants. *Elizabeth* even puts Francis Walsingham in the spotlight as Elizabeth's spymaster in a way that is not normally portrayed in adaptations of Elizabeth's life, highlighting all of the scheming that took place at her court. I believe that the film focuses on the turbulence surrounding Elizabeth's rule as a way of forcing the character of Elizabeth into making a firm declaration about her right to rule and rule as a single woman. She changes visually in the final scenes, cutting her hair and painting her face white, showing her transformation from young woman to rightful Queen of England. The film starts with Elizabeth being a young, relatable woman, but as the plots against her increase the film rejects her relatability, signifying that she cannot be both relatable and a queen. She has to become an otherworldly figure.

*The Virgin Queen* is the final depiction of Elizabeth I that I watched. *The Virgin Queen* is a BBC miniseries that was released in 2005 starring Anne-Marie Duff as Elizabeth I. This series is one of the few adaptations that portrays Elizabeth all the way up until her death, showing her in her old age. The miniseries is split into four one-hour long episodes. The first episode shows Elizabeth's time being imprisoned during the reign of her half-sister Mary. The second begins after Elizabeth's coronation has taken place and ends with her contraction and recovery from smallpox. Part three focuses on Elizabeth's courtship with Francis, the Duke of Anjou and the English's dealings with the Spanish armada, introducing the Earl of Essex (Elizabeth's replacement favorite after Robert Dudley dies) at the end of the episode. The final episode shows

Elizabeth in her old age, her dealings with the new, young members of her court, and then her death in 1603. The series first premiered on PBS's *Masterpiece Theater* before it was aired on the BBC's channel. The series is a historical biography that is less concerned with making Elizabeth relatable to a younger audience and more focused on telling her full story. I think *The Virgin Queen* attempts to depict Elizabeth as an actual political figure and ruler while still providing glimpses into her personal life.

*The Virgin Queen* makes a point of subtly depicting Elizabeth's vanities just as *Reign* does. In *The Virgin Queen*, however, Elizabeth's insecurities and concern for her looks come in part from her contraction of smallpox. The real Elizabeth contracted smallpox in 1562 and was deathly ill, even being quoted as saying "Death possessed every joint of me" (Weir 135). Elizabeth fully recovered from her illness and "the Queen's pockmarks eventually faded" (Weir 136). In *The Virgin Queen*, after she recovers from the smallpox, Elizabeth begins wearing layers of white makeup in order to hide the scars that were left on her face. Throughout the series she is concerned with how she looks and the way she presents herself to the public. During a scene in which an artist paints her portrait, Elizabeth gives very particular instructions about how the picture should be painted, directing the artist to make her look younger than she actually is at the time. She tells the artist, "And let there be no shadows on my face and neck for they accentuate age" (Giedroyc and Milne). The light in the scene comes from a window in the room and nowhere else, creating a highly contrasted shot. After giving several more instructions to the artist, Elizabeth looks directly at the window, illuminating her entire face and causing it to appear smooth and blemish free. She says, "Henceforth, when my people think of their queen," and then looks back to the artist before finishing, "this is the image they must see" (Giedroyc and Milne). As she says this, her face is cast into shadow, showing the reality that the painting is

meant to contradict. In *Reign*, Elizabeth's vanity is just a personal shortcoming, while in *The Virgin Queen* her preoccupation with the way she looks comes from her insecurity regarding her scars and the way she is aging. The reason for her wearing makeup differs across versions as well. *The Virgin Queen* puts the purpose of the makeup as a way to cover her scars, while in *Elizabeth* the makeup is meant to primarily be a symbol of youth and virginity.

As with the other adaptations, Elizabeth is depicted as having a very intimate relationship with Robert Dudley, one that is surrounded by rumors and scandal. In episode two, there is a scene that shows Elizabeth and Dudley sleeping together, but it is revealed that the scene is just a dream that Elizabeth is having. Elizabeth and Dudley are not shown as having a physical relationship in *The Virgin Queen* unlike in the other adaptations that I have discussed. Dudley is portrayed as being far less likeable than he is in the other adaptations, showing how much the real Dudley was hated by a large majority of Elizabeth's court. *The Virgin Queen's* Dudley is incredibly forward and improper with the queen. The series even retells the story of a tennis match between Dudley and the Duke of Norfolk in which Dudley yanks Elizabeth's handkerchief from her and uses it to wipe the sweat from his face. Norfolk rebukes him, demanding that the queen punish Dudley for being so improper toward her. The queen just brushes the moment off and demands that the two stop feuding in her presence. In her biography, Alison Weir also recounts this scene, noting, "Dudley, 'being very hot and sweating, took her napkin out of her hand and wiped his face'. Shocked at such disrespect, Norfolk lost his temper, accused Leicester of being 'too saucy and swore that he would lay his racquet upon his face'" (157). The series recognizes that Dudley and Elizabeth had a very close friendship and flirtation, but it upholds that she remained a virgin throughout her life.

*The Virgin Queen* uses the scenes pertaining to Robert Dudley's second marriage to display Elizabeth's notorious temper and jealousy. After Dudley's wife Amy commits suicide and Elizabeth refuses to marry him, Dudley marries Lettice Knollys in secret. When Elizabeth finds out about the marriage she becomes enraged. She screams at Dudley when she sees him and even slaps him. She then goes on to be horrible to Lettice, shouting at her and eventually banishing her from court. Dudley attempts to get back in Elizabeth's good graces by letting her know that he is ill, something the real Dudley was known to do in order to get her to soften towards him. Alison Weir recounts that Elizabeth had received a letter sometime after Dudley and Lettice's wedding saying that Dudley was sick. Weir notes, "If the letter had come from Leicester himself, it was in character for him to feign sickness in order to soften Elizabeth's heart and mitigate her anger" (313). In *The Virgin Queen* Elizabeth resists going to visit him at first, punishing him for marrying Lettice, but then she eventually gives in and forgives him, choosing to forget that Lettice even exists while she can. The inclusion of these scenes highlights both Elizabeth's temper and the jealousy that she felt toward the other women at her court and the wives of her favorites.

*The Virgin Queen* series portrays Elizabeth dealing with political matters much more frequently than the other adaptations discussed. She is very involved with the negotiations surrounding the Spanish and the potential war with Spain. The series shows a scene in which Elizabeth is at an actual battle field, surrounded by troops. She sits atop a white horse (a visual symbol for heroism) and gives a speech to her soldiers in order to encourage them. When the camera is on Elizabeth it is pointed upward at her whereas when it is on her soldiers it tilts down, putting Elizabeth above them and marking her position of power. Her voice is clear and loud, and she even deepens it a little in order to sound more authoritative and masculine. The series

means to show Elizabeth as the strong monarch that she actually was, rather than as a young woman that other young women can identify with. The Elizabeth in *The Virgin Queen* is incredibly different from the Elizabeth in *The Virgin's Lover*, the two being the most unlike each other when looking at all four adaptations together. *The Virgin Queen's* Elizabeth is much more confident as a ruler, and more concerned with the good of England than her own personal happiness.

One of the few moments in *The Virgin Queen* that show Elizabeth wavering in her resolve is when it comes to the matter of Mary, Queen of Scots. The actual Elizabeth was wary of signing Mary's death warrant. She knew that Mary was conspiring against her and that if Mary was left alive she would always be in danger of people trying to assassinate her in order to put a Catholic on the throne. Despite this, Elizabeth was reluctant to set a precedent for killing queens and other rulers. She eventually signed Mary's death warrant and then gave it to William Davison to immediately give to the Lord Chancellor to have the seal of England placed upon it. The day after, however, she changed her mind and told Davison that she did not want the Lord Chancellor to see it right away. Elizabeth later claimed that she told Davison not to show the warrant to anyone. Alison Weir states that, "Davison might have been mistaken, but this is unlikely" (377). Elizabeth was most likely trying to shift the blame for Mary's death onto someone else. Elizabeth's turmoil over the issue of Mary Stuart is manifested in *The Virgin Queen* during a scene where Elizabeth has a nightmare that she is going to be beheaded. The scene itself shows Mary walking toward the block, the room dimly lit, the light from several windows creating a high contrast once again. Mary kneels down at the block and the camera looks away, but when it comes back to the block, it is Elizabeth kneeling. Elizabeth's worry over

Mary's execution shows both her reluctance to kill her own cousin and also her own fear that people might do the same to her eventually.

At the very end of the series, *The Virgin Queen* makes a point to show the impact that Anne Boleyn had on Elizabeth. After Elizabeth passes away, Robert Cecil, William's son, takes the signet ring off of Elizabeth's finger and discovers a clasp that had been put on it. When he opens the ring up, he discovers a miniature portrait of Anne Boleyn inside. Robert announces what is inside, saying, "It is the whore Anne Boleyn. Her mother" (Giedroyc and Milne). The series implies that Elizabeth had the clasp added to the ring sometime after she received it and then had the picture put inside. She always wore the ring, meaning she always kept a portrait of her mother with her, which seems to indicate that she probably thought of her mother very frequently, at least every time she looked at the ring. This is one of the few moments where Anne Boleyn is mentioned in the series, but its placement at the end of the series is significant because of what it reveals: that Elizabeth never forgot her mother or what happened to her, and quite possibly that she did not accept her mother's death nor forgive her father for having her executed.

*The Virgin Queen* is one of the few popular culture depictions of Elizabeth that show her in her old age. In the last episode, Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex and Elizabeth's favorite after Dudley passed away, barges into Elizabeth's chambers before her ladies have finished getting her ready. She is wearing only a thin nightgown, has no makeup on, and is not wearing a wig. Her actual hair is white and so thin it is to the point she is almost bald, she is covered in wrinkles, and most of her teeth are decayed or missing. The Earl is visibly disturbed by her image, and the queen is initially embarrassed at the intrusion, but resigns herself to talk to him, appearing tired and worn out. The fact that the series shows Elizabeth as an elderly woman



demonstrates that they are less concerned with portraying her as a young, beautiful queen, only focusing on the early years of her reign. The series means to show Elizabeth's whole story as accurately as possible, even the not so glamorous moments.

*The Virgin Queen* last shows Elizabeth when she is sick and dying. She reminisces on her life, the scene being superimposed with images of Robert Dudley and Kat Ashley as a way of showing the queen's thoughts. She refuses to sit or lie down and ends up passing away while standing up. This is a diversion from the actual accounts of Elizabeth's death which say that she was persuaded to lie on some cushions and then was eventually moved to her bed where she died. She did stand for a very long time before she was convinced to return to her cushions though. Alison Weir recounts, "Once in that position, by a supreme effort of will and a determination to defy mortality, she remained there unmoving for fifteen hours, watched by her appalled yet helpless courtiers" (482). On March 21, "'What by fair means, what by force', Nottingham persuaded Elizabeth to go to bed," and on March 24, around three in the morning, Elizabeth passed away (Weir 483). The choice of the show's creators to have Elizabeth remain standing until she dies is symbolic. The creators depict her as standing tall and being resilient even in the face of death. As she falls, the music swells and a choir begins singing "Alleluia, alleluia." The series ends with a scene that I believe embodies how Elizabeth is portrayed throughout, as a strong and steadfast ruler.

The creators of *The Virgin Queen* chose historical moments to depict what they felt would best encompass the story of Elizabeth I, capturing both her temperament and the events that occurred during her reign. *The Virgin Queen* is meant to be a biography rather than a teen, fantasy drama like *Reign*, a romance like *The Virgin's Lover*, or a biographical drama like *Elizabeth*. I believe *The Virgin Queen* was created for an audience that wants to be entertained,

but, more importantly, wants to learn about the real Elizabeth in an accessible format that does not require doing hours of research. The series is mostly free from the added dramatics and scandal of the other adaptations, avoiding the rumors that followed Elizabeth and her court for the most part. *The Virgin Queen* depicts Elizabeth as a political figure who reigned for forty-five years, not just as a young queen like the other pop culture adaptations. I would argue that its goal is to educate first, entertain second, the opposite of the other three depictions.

The four creative works that I analyzed all tell the story of Elizabeth I, but they each take a very different approach to telling the story depending on their audiences and genres. *The Virgin's Lover* depicts the young queen as a vulnerable character, focusing on her relationship with Dudley more than anything else about her. *Reign* poses Elizabeth as an exemplary image of what a strong and passionate female ruler should be, but also as a young woman with her fair share of faults. *Elizabeth* claims that Elizabeth was not able to remain a young woman, but had to abandon that aspect of herself in order to secure her reign and become a legitimate queen. And finally, *The Virgin Queen* makes Elizabeth out to be a fierce and determined leader while still providing personal details about her and presenting her as a real human being. I would argue that *Reign*, *Elizabeth*, and *The Virgin Queen* all have similar end goals when it comes to portraying Elizabeth (as a strong and capable queen), but they each appeal to different audiences. *Reign's* Elizabeth reflects her young adult audience by being a relatable young woman herself. The creators of *Elizabeth* made Elizabeth for an adult audience, presenting her as a mature and fairly serious adult woman. *The Virgin Queen* presents Elizabeth as a historical figure for fans of English history to learn about. I believe *The Virgin's Lover* has a different goal: to take the story of Elizabeth and fit it into a standard romance narrative. Each piece tells the story of some part of

Elizabeth's life, but they are all influenced by their genre conventions and the desires of their audiences, resulting in each piece becoming its own unique narrative.

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