THE QUEEN'S POETS

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During the second half of her reign, Queen Elizabeth I of England used what would, in the current century, be considered modern public relations techniques to promote the Cult of Elizabeth. This cult depicted the queen as virgin goddess, superior to mere mortals in power and beauty, and was designed to support Elizabeth’s choice to rule alone in an age when the prevailing climate of political, religious and cultural thought dictated that her gender made her ineligible to do so. It was also a period when the literary flowering of Renaissance Europe made its belated way to England, creating what is recognized as a Golden Age of Literature. The relationship between the promotion of the queen’s cult and an emergent pool of talented writers available to celebrate it was a symbiotic one, contributing to the success of both.
Acknowledgement

I would like to express my appreciation to my advisor, Dr. Olga Valbuena, whose class introduced me to the flamboyant, fascinating and often dangerous people living in the Age of Elizabeth, and whose advice about a thesis topic created an interest that extends far beyond the completion of this paper.
There are those for whom the reign of England’s Elizabeth I is best considered in terms of the Early Modern Age. For others, it is simply the Age of Elizabeth.

It is an easy assumption that the first approach would, with scholarly hindsight, allow the identification and impersonal analysis of broad trends in politics, religion, finance, commerce and culture. On the other hand, the emphasis on personality of the second, biographical, approach could be expected to paint a more vivid picture of an era at the expense of limiting its scope to the experiences of a single individual. However, setting nomenclature aside, the important fact is that Elizabeth’s long period on the throne, from 1558 to 1603, provided England its (belated) entrance into the turbulent climate of what is traditionally called the Renaissance in western Europe. It was a time of transition to which no easy assumptions can be applied, when reversals of fortune, paradoxes and ironies abounded and long standing social paradigms were no longer applicable. The certainties of an old order crumbled: the foundations of a new order had yet to be completed.

The inflexible beliefs of the Catholic church had for centuries provided a uniform pattern of social expectations, based on the existence of a chain of being in which all life had an assigned place from which it could not depart without upsetting God’s foreordained plan. When, in 14th century Italy, the pattern was first regularly subjected to
the scrutiny of skeptical minds, it was the start of a movement in which men attempted to return to the secular intellectual freedom of the classical period. This was a freedom that would allow rejection of ecclesiastical authority and the feudal socio-political order it supported. But the period was as dangerous to those who ruled without the firm justifications of the preceding era as it was full of exhilarating opportunities for intellectual and political growth within the grasp of those strong enough to survive.

Elizabeth came to the throne with as much power, theoretically, as any monarch since the Norman conquest (Brimacombe 44). By combining such power with the will to exercise it fully and the personality capable of sweeping aside opposition she would emerge as a pre-eminent force behind the events of her era. It is hard to doubt that this was truly the Age of Elizabeth. The strongly marked national character developed during Elizabeth’s reign and under her direction would set England’s dominant course in the emergence of modern Europe that followed, laying the foundations for the eventual development of a world empire.

The short list of others who changed the course of history as she did are given the title “The Great” in posterity’s evaluation. Elizabeth could not wait, however, for commendation after the fact. The power she inherited might be theoretically great, but it was realistically shaky, passed to her at a time when political and religious issues were rocking governments throughout Europe as well as in England. These pressures were substantially increased by the fact that she was a woman and therefore, according to the accepted wisdom of the age, by definition too weak, too unintelligent and too frivolous to handle them (Neale 62-63)). If she were to be given the chance for her abilities to launch her into the rarified atmosphere occupied by history’s Greats, she needed from the start to
establish a reputation advertising their exceptional nature and disarming the inevitable gender driven critics.

The result was the deliberate development of the Cult of Elizabeth, a sophisticated exercise in public relations as skillful as any crafted by its modern practitioners.

“She was a genius at public relations, and understood instinctively how best to use the media of the day. In speeches and writing, public appearances and official ceremonies, dress and comportment, the Queen displayed a hard-headed approach to controlling her own image. With her ministers’ help and the half-knowing connivence of her subjects, she created a monarch who was part real woman and part legendary goddess. Together they crafted and largely sustained a royal image of power, justice, benevolence, Protestant piety, unattainable beauty and firm Tudor resolve. And if at the end of her long reign growing religious dissension and social unrest caused the mask to slip a little, showing snatches of the lonely, tired and increasingly unpopular old woman behind the red wig and extravagant gowns, then poets, artists, and historians took over the enterprise. They preserved for posterity the still familiar persona of a timeless, ever beautiful Gloriana, the Virgin Queen, Good Queen Bess, the greatest of all English monarchs.”

This is the assessment of a nameless public relations expert promoting an exhibition in 2002 at the Huntington Library on the subject “Gloriana, The Golden Legend of Elizabeth I” (Gloriana). It represents the tribute of a professional for an amateur who was a master in a discipline that has become a separate field of study, with its own theory, techniques and skills, only in the last century.
In one respect, however, Elizabeth had an advantage. The publicists in her service were not faceless professionals but literary figures whose names are still known and respected today, men like Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Walter Raleigh and Edmund Spenser. Over the course of her time on the throne, the image they helped to create did in fact shelter her with the suggestion of more than human capacity, extending beyond the limit of mere human greatness. The effectiveness of this superhuman image depended, of course, not as much in the belief and awe it inspired but on the willingness of onlookers to feign such belief. Undoubtedly Elizabeth’s subjects ranged widely from true believers to completely hypocritical and self-seeking flatterers. The point, however, is that the campaign succeeded. Elizabeth got her chance to leave a large imprint on history and prove that she had the superior qualities necessary for greatness.

Manipulating the image of a ruler as part of power management in the Renaissance style was not a technique original to Elizabeth. She merely used it with exceptional effectiveness with the help of the talented men nurtured within the influence of her court.

Politically, the underlying principles were provided in the thinking of Niccolo Machiavelli, whose treatise *The Prince* was the manual for the seizure of absolute power by the de Medici family of Florence. Published in 1498, it was not printed in English until 1640 and was banned for a time in England, where it met with publicly expressed moral outrage. However, manuscript copies were easily available by the time Elizabeth came to the throne (Weir 6). In Machiavelli’s view, expediency unhampered by ethical restraint was the only viable guideline for a ruler, whose first mandate was to establish the security of his realm by any means possible. Deception, equivocation, the breaking of promises and the failure to honor commitments fully or at all, elimination of the
opposition by methods up to and including assassination—any tactics no matter how
despicable in themselves were justified by the need to guarantee this security. Elizabeth
subscribed without too many qualms to this agenda while stopping short of assassination.
(Although she was responsible for the death of her antagonist, Mary Queen of Scots, she
fought the necessity for decades and observed the legal forms necessary to classify the act
as an execution rather than an assassination.) In this she appears more ethical than the
European rulers around her who targeted her throughout her reign. It seems fair to say,
however, that the motto she adopted from her mother—*Semper eadem, Always the Same*
(Weir 236) —referred more to her unalterable willingness to be devious in pursuit of her
immediate goals than it did to an unalterable bedrock of principle underlying her actions.

In order to throw a veil over such ugly political realities, the ancient Romans
distracted and entertained their subjects with circuses, the Renaissance rulers with the
theatrical splendors of their courts. These splendors included fabulously expensive feasts
and entertainments taking place endlessly in sumptuously decorated spaces. But just as
important, they featured the intellectual sophistication of courtiers steeped in the cultural
refinements brought about by the expanded Renaissance mindset. Wit informed
conversation and literature; musical excellence was a given. In Elizabeth’s case, these
splendors were also put on display for the common citizenry during her almost yearly
progresses through the countryside. These large scale migrations of the court involved
accompanying Elizabeth through southern and western England for a multitude of
reasons suggested by historians—so that the unsanitary conditions of her London palaces
could be attended to; so that she could enjoy the hunting she loved; so that those she
honored with a visit could relieve her of the frightful cost of the court for a while, even at
the risk of their own bankruptcy; so that local tradesmen could reap a profit; and so that
she could make personal contact with the subjects to whom the queen claimed to be
wedded.

When Elizabeth came to the throne, England, a small island nation of no particular
significance at the far north of Europe, had been sunk for three quarters of a century in
turmoil surrounding the establishment of the Tudor dynasty to which she belonged. This
turmoil had discouraged the influx of the cultural benefits that other European countries
had experienced (Buxton 13-14), a situation the queen would change quickly. This she
was able to do because her accession to power brought a moment of calm in the turmoil,
if only because people were holding their breath to see how well she could handle the
political and religious disarray inherited along with the putative power grabbed by the
Tudors in their rise to power. The English, so long distanced from the intellectual
revolution, took an enthusiastic advantage of the accumulated body of knowledge now
available to them. The result was an explosion of accomplishment, noticeable especially
in the field of literature. It seemed as if the world was awash in words, and poetry could
be found “not only on paper, but also on rings, food trenchers, on glass windows
(scratched with a pin or diamond), on paintings, on tombstones and monuments, on trees
and even (as graffiti) on London’s Pissing Conduit” (Marotti 2-3).

Undoubtedly this cultural flowering was personally gratifying to Elizabeth, an
educated woman who spoke Latin as well as a number of modern languages, made
translations of the classical authors regularly throughout her life and created a body of
writing to which at least a dozen known poems have been tentatively assigned
(“Elizabeth I”). It was far more important, however, that the queen acquired a vibrantly
sophisticated court giving her the status to deal with rulers of surrounding nations on a more equal footing. The theatrical magnificence of such courts was a triumph of illusion over substance as the governments teetered into and out of bankruptcy, but in England the intellectual progress, at least, possessed a solid reality.

For Elizabeth to manage successfully her place in the world beyond her country’s borders, she needed first to manage the perceptions of the subjects within to produce a trust in her abilities. It was against this background that the Cult of Elizabeth came into being. As Elizabeth herself saw it in theatrical terms, “We princes are set as it were on stage in the sight of and view of all the world” (Weir 225), and her cultic personae were roles she could play to her advantage and for her protection. Underpinning the production of these personae were three factors, two stemming from intelligent manipulation of inherited power and one the gift of a benevolent providence.

The first grew out of the religious upheavals of the period in which Elizabeth’s father, Henry VIII, eliminated a brake to monarchical might when he repudiated the Catholic church and the controls it exercised from Rome. It is generally accepted that his motives for establishing a national Protestant church with himself at its head were twofold— to allow divorce and remarriage in pursuit of a male heir (and perhaps even in pursuit of love), and to remove the restraints and annex the wealth of the church he replaced— rather than arising from religious conviction (Elton 100-158). However, in the brief reign (1547-1554) of his son Edward VI it was strong Protestant doctrinal belief that drove Henry’s moderate Church of England to a more extreme stance. And it was equally strong Catholic reaction that tried to destroy it under the next ruler, Henry’s older daughter Mary (Elton 191).
Elizabeth’s insistence on re-establishing a middle ground in the English church, which gave the growing number of adherents to Protestant sects the separation from Rome they demanded while remaining doctrinally closer to Catholicism than they wished for. The compromises provided a somewhat stable base for containing the doctrinal differences that grew wider and more irreconcilable during her reign. This control was tentative at best, but it blunted the impetus for internal rebellion and also lessened the likelihood that invasions from the powerful Catholic countries surrounding England would succeed with the help of disaffected Englishmen. It is estimated that the majority of Elizabeth’s subjects were still Catholic in their sympathies when the queen chose to perpetuate Henry’s church policy, which stripped from their lives the traditional and comforting worship of the Virgin Mary (Brimacombe 122). From the day of her accession to the throne, Elizabeth built into her public speeches a subtle comparison with Mary, picturing herself variously as a Virgin Queen who was wedded to her people, or a holy mother nurturing her people, or a willing sacrifice who would shed her blood for her people if need be as Mary had faced the sacrifice of her son. Even in lesser ways—the birth of Elizabeth on Sept. 7, one day before the date assigned by the church for Mary’s birth (Holwick)—providence semed to aid the queen in underlining a connection. The divine associations with Holy Virgin—Holy Mother elevated Elizabeth above the perceived inferiority of ordinary femininity in a way that resonated with the rank and file of her subjects. Therefore the substitution of the Virgin Queen of England for the Virgin Queen of Heaven as an object of veneration was a psychological boon to ruled as well as ruler (Weir 223). By the end of her reign, the queen was established in the popular estimation of the English as Good Queen Bess, enhancing the semi-divine aura conferred
by the rituals of the coronation ceremony and lending a spiritual gravitas to a head of the church who was both secular and female. This elevated standing was also reflected in the terms for the queen used in official state documents, which referred to her as Her Majesty in the earlier years of her reign and Her Sacred Majesty by the end of it (Weir 223).

The second contributing factor was fortuitous—a growing sense of Elizabeth’s extraordinary luck that hinted at greater than human attributes in a superstitious age. She managed to survive almost continual assassination attempts (Erickson 356-359). An attack of smallpox, a disease that killed or at least disfigured the majority of its many victims, left her almost unmarked (Erickson 207). Repeatedly tempests drove the country’s enemies from its shores, a significant factor protecting the island kingdom from invasion. Her luck came to be considered a charm inseparable from the well-being of the nation, and she herself the embodiment of its indestructible character. By the end of her reign she was the Renaissance version of the Roman spirit of Britannia as well as the Virgin Queen. This sort of symbolic identification is difficult to imagine if Elizabeth had allowed herself to take a subordinate position as wife and mother.

However, it is the third factor contributing to Elizabeth’s mythic reputation with which this paper is concerned, a marker showing how cultural advancement was used to serve practical politics. The Age of Elizabeth is also called the Golden Age of English Literature and the relation between sovereign and the literary figures of the era was a symbiotic one bearing on the success of both. This relationship provided a secular counterpart, the “Gloriana” of the mythic formulation, to the Elizabeth-Mary connection by equating of the Virgin Queen with the virgin goddesses of antiquity through literary
association. The result was the picture of a woman surpassing mere mortals in intelligence, beauty and of course power, irresistibly desirable but forever out of reach.

By comparison, the connection between Virgin Queen and Virgin Mother seems simple and direct, arising immediately at the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign and designed for the population at large. On the other hand, the literary connection is tailored for and by the aristocracy at court and by extension, the educated men who looked to them for encouragement as they themselves looked to the queen. Furthermore, it dates to the second half of her reign, after Renaissance cultural influences had come ashore, taken root, proliferated and matured. And finally, tracing the connection from its inception in Tudor power plays to its conclusion in the making of creative history requires an appreciation of less immediately apparent influences.

When Elizabeth came to the throne, the perfection of her iconic image in literature was still 20 years in the future. But the hold she had on the court and its literary production was rooted much further back in the past, in the general social rearrangement following the establishment of the Tudor line by Elizabeth’s grandfather, Henry VII, who brought the Lancaster-York dynastic Wars of the Roses to a bloody conclusion. Force plus an old and tenuous connection to the Lancastrian faction gave him the throne: marriage with the niece of Edward III, the last Yorkist king, strengthened the claim to it. However, the major factor in the consolidation of power, continued in the next generation by Elizabeth’s father, Henry VIII, was the brutal elimination of most of the ancient aristocracy—those not eliminated by war itself—with a greater right of inheritance (Elton 21-30).
The feudal principles of vassalage that generated power from the bottom up—with loyalties owed by serf and villein to master, master to lord, and lord to king—were replaced by patronage stemming solely from the monarch and distributed downward from above to a new aristocracy owing its existence to him. The ultimate validating principle remained the same in both cases, asserting that every king served at the will of God, who confirmed the divine right to rule at the actual moment of anointing in the coronation ceremony (“Legitimation”). Henry VIII’s ministers, often originally of modest social standing, locked the nobility further into a dependent position between king and commoner by strengthening (at least in theory) the parliamentary powers of the lower orders at their expense. From that time forward, the crown was the source of position, prestige, privilege, influence, land, profitable perquisites—any and all of the things by which a courtier measured his importance and gathered his wealth (Elton 41).

It is estimated that “two-thirds of the English nobility were part or full-time courtiers during the early part of Elizabeth’s reign, and that another fifty or sixty leading gentry were resident courtiers” (Hadfield 191). These, of course, were the male members of the upper class jockeying for royal attention and the rewards it could bestow. And it is a given that the control of the aristocracy through patronage conferred control of literary endeavor as well because the court was where it originated and where it needed to be to flourish, at least in the minds of the writers who equated creativity with the refinement of spirit identifying and defining nobility (Blaisdell iii). On a more pedestrian level, the court was where the activities took place that provided the material for written works, which were for the most part in the form of poetry.
Poetry was a writer’s usual means of expression because English literature had not separated entirely from its source in this early phase of development. This source was the courtly music tradition stretching back to the medieval troubadours, with words designed for singing and rhythms designed for dancing (Evans 111-122). The material, endlessly fascinating to those outside court circles as well as in them, included everything from grand love affairs and scandals to the minutia of everyday life as lived by the courtiers who were the celebrities of their day. Also popular were the plaints of supposedly world-weary courtiers rejecting the shallowness of their existence and of the court itself. But, not surprisingly, during the second half of her reign a most prominent theme was adulation of Elizabeth in her mythic guise. At this point, both earlier promises of literary excellence were beginning to reach fulfillment and the advantages inherent in an Elizabeth as virgin goddess formulation were beginning to be exploited.

The full emergence of the theme coincides with, or perhaps more accurately was prompted by, the last promotion of a French marriage proposal for the queen in the late 1570s, when she was nearly 50. Those opposing the proposal wanted to stress the advantages of a Virgin Queen uncommitted to a foreign involvement, the immediate benefits of which could easily become detriments in a political climate that was always rapidly changing. After the threat had passed and Elizabeth was beyond the age of childbearing, the cultic images of an unattainable perfection served as a retroactive justification for what had been her consistent resistance to marriage. With her inaccessibility established beyond question, Elizabeth was free to indulge in outrageous favoritism and bask in the seemingly bottomless supply of fulsome flattery her poetry-
writing courtiers generated, enjoying all the benefits of ardent courtship without the risk of compromising her reputation as the Virgin Queen.

Of course, it is possible that simple human vanity could result in a determination to remain supreme in the estimation of her loudly vocal admirers. Certainly no biographer or historian, no champion or critic, has ever denied that her vanity existed. The wild rages following revelation of the secret marriages of her favorites and their resulting exile from court, however temporary, gave ample evidence of it.

Still, it is not likely that vanity and jealousy had a really significant place in Elizabeth’s campaign to control the world’s perception of her. It is likelier that passing pique (and no more) could result as men who were supposedly hopelessly in love with her preferred the comforts of ordinary domesticity. On the other hand, the very real existence of a purpose far more serious than the gratification of feminine vanity can be seen clearly in visual as well as literary depictions of the queen.

A few portraits exist that represent a real woman with a penchant for rich yet not obviously uncomfortable clothing, but these are early ones. Later examples, after 1580, show an icon, a goddess, frozen in positions of immovable and austere stateliness. The faces are young –by this period it had become official government policy to prohibit any representation that hinted at age and mortality (Strong 140)—and masklike in their lack of expression; the clothing is overwhelmingly sumptuous (also impossibly restrictive in cut and the weight of its jeweled embellishment). But it is not the figure that matters, it is the symbols surrounding it. These symbols are of chastity, power and justice, as would be appropriate for a woman both a virgin and a goddess. Chastity is represented in various instances by an ermine and pearls, symbols appearing in the writings of both Sidney and
Spenser. The crescent moon appears in her jewelry, an association with the moon
goddess Diana who was virgin, huntress (Elizabeth loved hunting) and controller of the
tides. The last image appeared extensively in the works of the sea-going favorite Raleigh,
an allusion to the power the queen exerted over his life. Other symbols play on the
Britannia theme. First Elizabeth stands on a map of Britain; then she has behind her the
Pillars of Hercules symbolizing expansion into the opportunities of Atlantic exploration;
next she holds the whole globe in her hands; and finally she has the emblems of the sun
and the rainbow reflecting its light, a considerable leap in importance in a world that still
regards the sun as the center of the universe (Strong 95-147).

Elizabeth’s patronage of an artist brought direct and immediate rewards, both in
payment and enhancement of reputation attracting other patrons. For the poet at court,
however, the equation was more complicated. Writing was still regarded as an avocation,
a natural talent rounding out the others contributing to the making of an aristocrat—
including the martial skills and horsemanship associated with chivalry, the ability to
entertain the court with wit and music, the wisdom to provide informed counsel, the
learning and language skills demonstrating a polished sophistication. Poetic production
alone did not guarantee the queen’s bounty or even her attention; a direct and immediate
quid pro quo could not be expected. Supposedly the value lay in the confirmation that
the courtier had one of the credentials requisite to the position—which, of course, is not
to say that the wise courtier underestimated the immediate value of a literary offering
with Elizabeth herself as the subject and protestations of adoration for her as the object.

An appreciation of the elevated status literature enjoyed in the Elizabethan court can
be deduced from the fact that a book, Baldessare Castiglione’s *The Courtier*, established
the essential nature of the courtier and the pattern of duties his elevated position and
intellectual superiority imposed. Written during the first quarter of the century for the
court at Mantua, the book had been available in an English translation since 1561. It was
the aristocracy’s answer to *The Prince* and suggested ways in which the behavioral
excesses of a ruler with absolute power could be moderated by subtle diplomacy of the
polished courtier (Syfret 13-14).

To be influenced by the printed word was one thing, to contribute to it an entirely
different matter. For work created within court circles to circulate in print was
considered vulgar, subjecting it to the scrutiny of multitudes avid for the connection to
the inner circle but unable to appreciate refinements of quality and not entitled to pry into
the lives of the upper class who served as the subject matter (Marotti 209-211). A wide
circulation among the privileged was assured by the sharing of original manuscripts
passed hand to hand, copied and assembled in scrapbook collections called miscellanies.
Naturally, materials in them eventually reached a much wider and less exalted audience
as they passed from individuals at the source to an extended circle of friends, to families
in the country and institutions like the libraries of the universities and Inns of Court. The
libraries were an especially important point of transmission because it was at the schools
that sons of the gentry seeking an educational gloss mingled with those from the middle
and lower classes seriously working to prepare for a career (Marottti 30). The latter
group were representative of the large and ever growing number encouraged in the desire
for learning by the Protestant insistence on personal study of the Bible as the only source
of religious truth. The result was a literacy rate for London estimated as high as 50 per
cent by the end of the period (stmatthewsguild).
Since copyright laws were far in the future, a printer could reproduce materials from any source in the anthologies that were a popular response to the growing demand for the written word. In addition, aristocrats could choose to pander to their vanity by seeking a wider audience and using a pseudonym or their initials only as signatures. Also represented were those from the newly educated classes deliberately seeking to be known for their writing. It must be understood, however, that those openly advertising their literary abilities were not hoping to establish literary careers as such. Only playwrights aimed at making a living by writing, although they had to accept that it was not one held in high esteem. In fact, association with the theater and its negative reputation was an impediment to the real objective of publication, the attraction of patronage from those with standing at court who could influence the awarding of lucrative positions in government or provide them in their own retinues.

The situation had become one of more aspirants and fewer jobs. The Catholic Church was no longer training and absorbing the intellectually qualified while the Protestant church with its promotion of literacy was creating a glut of candidates for secular administrative positions. As the candidate pool transitioned from clerics to clerks, those in it produced writings to demonstrate the skill with words that was the qualification for the kind of work they sought. And in these writings, importance attached to the skill on display and not the subject. Therefore what they produced was likely to be of a creative nature rather than an exposition of knowledge pertaining to a particular subject.

It needs to be noted that there were also extensive writings available to provide factual information and/or commentary in many fields—science, law, religion, finance, exploration, history—as well as the translations of ancient and earlier Renaissance
writings of continental origin that were now available. These were produced by the upper class, for whom intellectual curiosity was considered as much a requisite as refined literary taste, and by the newly educated commoners as well. Among the second group were those who also competed for patronage from the first, just like their literary counterparts, but the goal was to be recognized in their field, not necessarily to be shortlisted for employment. Furthermore, there was no objection to appearance in print since no upper class sensitivities were endangered.

However, for those whose talents were of a creative nature, the problem of making a reputation was still complicated by the bias against print. The ideal situation was to attract a patron who would actively promote the circulation of handwritten copies into an ever-widening circle of miscellanies through enthusiastic praise and discussion. (A financial contribution might be expected as well, but the polite way to view it was under the heading of appreciation and not of payment.) Even the solicitation of patronage, the official granting of it and the preparation of a dedication could be accomplished in poetry. This secondary versification was included with the work on offer and made its way into the miscellanies as well, providing further proofs of writing ability.

The printed miscellanies at least partially alleviated the problem since source materials had a vague provenance. There was no way to know if they had come from private scrapbooks without the knowledge of the authors or directly from authors seeking self-promotion. The first to appear was Tottel’s Miscellany, published in 1557 and starting a vogue lasting for the next 50 years (Evans 84). Less usual was the single author volume, in which enterprising poets like George Gascoigne braved the odium of print to distinguish themselves from the pack found in the anthologies. In the preface to
his volume *The Poesies of George Gascoigne Esquire*, the author sets out plainly his reasons for making his work available in print. “I was desirous that there might remain in publicke recorde some pledge or token of those giftes wherewith it hath pleased the Almighty to endue me: To that ende that thereby the virtuous might bee incouraged to employ my penne in some exercise which might tende both to my preferment, and to the profite of my Country” (Marotti 304-305).

Whatever the method of distribution, literary endeavor marked the high road to the patronage controlled by the queen as courtiers—like Sidney and Raleigh—sought to please her, and those with talent outside the court—like Spenser, who enjoyed the patronage of both—sought to please the courtiers who could draw them to the attention of the queen. Therefore it is hardly surprising that a major feature of the Golden Age of English Literature is the large number of those contributing to it. One estimate of 233 Elizabethan poets is given only to be rejected immediately as “far short of the total” (Buxton 21). This number is certainly significant considering that the population of London doubled in Elizabeth’s reign and was still less than 200,000 in 1605 (Hall 150).

A second feature of the Golden Age closely related to the first is that a large part of the poetry produced had a predictable monotony, with clichés employed when the intention was to flatter the queen. As for form, there were many new ones in use, or at least ones new to the English as they borrowed from antiquity and from the works of Renaissance writers who had themselves built on antiquity. But run of the mill talents, or even good poets, seeking to conform to the patterns, meant that a typical poem “might have been written by any one of a dozen different authors” (Evans 87). Still, the widespread appreciation of poetic expression during Elizabeth’s reign guaranteed that
those with the God given talent touted by Gascoigne—men like Sidney, Raleigh and Spenser—had an audience capable of recognizing and encouraging them. The first two are among those most frequently featured in manuscript collections (Marotti 126-128); the third has a history inseparable from that of legitimizing the use of print. These men and a few others like them, noticeably visible above the agglomeration of would-be writers, made the Golden Age golden.

Still, from the viewpoint of the 21st century, there would seem to be a gaping hole in this history of literary pre-eminence exploding out of the cultural backwater where Elizabeth came to the throne. For succeeding generations, the reputation of Shakespeare has reflected the most brilliant golden glow; Hall, in his study of cities in civilization, considers the theater a major factor in the emergence of London as a center of cultural development. But Shakespeare’s exclusion from the present consideration of Elizabeth’s poets results from the standards of his age rather than those of succeeding ones. It was not a lack of popularity that prevented proper appreciation—his name and work as a playwright were known from the court to the backstreets, and his audience came from both. In fact, if anything the theater represented the longest and most widespread form of literary accomplishment that the country could claim. The presentation of mystery and morality plays, put on in public by the public, stretched far back into the medieval period, and school production of ancient classics had become a fixture in the Protestant insistence on general education. By contrast, life at a court considered backward by the rest of Europe had produced a scant list of literary luminaries. Chaucer loomed large at the top, Langland was prominent—the names and accomplishments of a few others tend to be relegated to brief notes in literary history. Why then that Shakespeare’s popularity
should militate against the appreciation of his work, coming as it did from the richest vein of prior national accomplishment, is a matter about which a variety of critics have a variety of opinions. Something that accessible couldn’t have the necessary refinement to compete with the work of courtiers and those striving to emulate them. Something meant to be spoken rather than read or sung couldn’t be anything but ephemeral, especially since copying of the parts was discouraged in the effort to prevent pirating by other acting companies. Something in which the words could be changed to suit the abilities of new actors couldn’t have placed much value on the words to begin with. And something produced for financial gain couldn’t escape the taint of vulgarity the aristocracy attached to the commercializing of creativity.

It is a nice Elizabethan paradox that the queen’s influence on courtly literature was primarily that of a catalyst, an influence to be sensed rather than directly perceived. On the other hand, her effect on play production can be openly perceived, but in impersonal regulations of minor importance when compared with the advantages accruing personally to the writers at court. When acting companies congregated in London during the 1570s, in response to the demands of a growing audience, the largely Protestant middle class met them with strong objections. It was argued that the actors were men of doubtful character not anchored in the community, that they depicted scenes repudiating sound religious values, that they lured the working classes from their duties and also placed them at risk of actual physical contagion in a city periodically devastated by the plague. The playwrights themselves were well aware of the debased valuation of their works. Ben Jonson was advised that he should “Come leave the loathed stage” for the sake of his
wider literary reputation (Marotti 168). And Shakespeare writes in his sonnets that, in his theatrical works, he has “sold cheap what is most dear” (Hall 148).

Still, there were advantages to be gained from the place actors held as a source of popular entertainment. At various times, the queen and others from the court gave the companies the support of their patronage and their names—the Queen’s Men, the Earl of Leicester’s Men, the Lord High Admiral’s Men—and thus provided protection from the attacks of citizenry who would have banned them from London otherwise. Furthermore, they were invited to give their plays at the court itself, especially during the extended Yule holiday. The price they paid for courtly backing was that all plays had to registered with the queen and could not make direct representation of the living and of current events, a restriction which affected the choice of plots used to create some semblance of disguise for topical commentary. They could be censored in part or shut down entirely at the dictate of the court official known as the Master of Revels (Hall 129-132). The result of these constraints was that playwrights could not directly present either praise or disparagement of the queen and were not therefore a major factor in the creation of The Cult of Elizabeth.

The genius of Shakespeare and his contemporaries constituted a self-contained historical singularity. It created a standard for the theater that future generations would try to match. The Cult of Elizabeth has a separate place within the Golden Age of Literature, one that is bounded by the court and best studied within those bounds. Like so many of the accomplishments associated with Elizabeth’s influence, the court literature of her time had legitimate claims to excellence in its own right but was even more significant as a foundation upon which future generations could build.
CHAPTER TWO

Elizabeth—Virgin Queen, Virgin Goddess

The structure of this analysis is a simple one. The Who is Elizabeth, as is usual in matters relating to the period she dominated so pervasively. The What is her influence on the development of a Golden Age of Literature with her court at its center and the reciprocal contribution of this development to her enduring reputation. Her influence went beyond the encouragement literary endeavor received in the general cultural ambience the queen created; the desire to contribute to the Cult of Elizabeth insured that the participants were many, the competition fierce and the overall level of production improved as a result. The How is the Tudor patronage system with its extravagant rewards for those who succeeded in pleasing the queen.

Only with the final question, the Why, do the complications multiply. Why did Elizabeth choose to rule as the Virgin Queen, a role defying the religious, social and dynastic conventions of her time and requiring legitimization in the formation of a cult with literary underpinnings. And this is the one hardest to answer because it requires assessing the queen’s inward mental processes in terms of the historical events that affected and were affected by them.

Certainly the word presumptuous comes to mind in attempting the psychological profile of a woman who has been dead for more than 400 years. But the queen lived publicly and dramatically, and her life has been minutely scrutinized in the intervening years. The picture that emerges from this close scrutiny, of formative events in her life
and the actions that depended on the kind of person she became, has one dominant theme. If, after studying the picture, a single word answer has to be given to the question *Why*, it would have to be “fear”—the immediate physical fear of a woman who kept a sword by her at all times at the end of her life (Rowse Eminent Victorians124), the underlying psychological stresses acquired in her childhood, the unending pressure on a ruler with a kingdom to protect from enemies within and without. The motivating pressure of fear and the constant need to keep it at bay by the exhibition of strength do much to illuminate Elizabeth’s choice of the Virgin Queen image.

The “quotable quotes” associated with the queen reflect her ongoing preoccupation with the need to maintain a fearless front. Prominent among them are “A clear and innocent conscience fears nothing”; “Fear not, we are the nature of a lion”, “I have the heart of a man, not a woman, and I am not afraid of anything”; “I am more afraid of making a fault in my Latin than of the kings of Spain, France, Scotland and the whole House of Guise and all their confederates (Poem Hunter).”

The anxieties that haunted Elizabeth’s life began with the day of her birth on Sept. 7, 1533. It was a day that should have brought to a successful conclusion all the ambitious strivings of the upstart Tudors. The omens were unanimous for a male heir who would ensure that the dynasty was now firmly established after the ruthless elimination of other claimants, a process extending back through the previous generation. All the power the kingdom could offer, political and religious, was now waiting for this heir, whose imminent arrival had prompted a final burst of activity to sever ties with the Catholic Church. The break could no longer be avoided because the church still refused, after
seven years, to grant Henry VIII’s divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, a divorce without which there would be no legitimacy for his new family.

Naturally, the fact that Elizabeth was a girl meant a great disappointment for Henry; the failure of a boy to appear next sealed the fate of her mother, Ann Boleyn, within two years. Ann’s beheading was followed in quick time by another marriage, this one also anticipating the imminent birth of a longed-for son. Elizabeth was now cast into the limbo of bastardy with her sister Mary, 17 years her senior. But the younger sister’s case was more dire than that of the older. Mary was declared not legitimate because of a technicality drawn from scripture that had been given as a reason for her mother’s divorce. The illegitimacy of Elizabeth was connected in the popular understanding with the fact that her mother had been declared a whore and a traitor by reason of being unfaithful to the king; the issue of the child’s paternity was actually called into doubt (Erickson 29). The taint of being “that woman’s daughter” meant she was always vulnerable to slurs on her character and doubts about her chastity.

The immediate effect on Elizabeth was that she was suddenly deprived of a large and wealthy household befitting an heir to the throne. With a greatly reduced retinue, she was distanced from the court and, through malice or indifference, provided with inadequate funds for her support. Or, at least, those in whose charge she was given believed so, and complained that there was not even enough money to keep her in decent underclothing (Hibbert 19).

Eventually, her circumstances improved after the arrival of the hoped-for male heir, and at times she and Mary shared a household. Mary even showed signs of a growing fondness for the child who had once displaced her and whom she had bitterly resented
(Neale 8). Both remained bastards by law, but Henry restored them to the succession in his will, which provided that Mary would be next in line for the throne if his son, Edward VI, died without issue, with Elizabeth to follow if Mary had no child. This meant that the girls were still viable as minor pawns in the game of dynastic marriages (Parry 22). Elizabeth’s education was never neglected, and her tutors bragged about her intelligence and excellent progress in Greek, Latin, modern languages and other attainments befitting royalty (Hibbert 25-26). Among them was superior musical performance as a player of the virginals, lute and lyre (Johnson 205). Her accomplishments were such that they would later encourage the development of a court atmosphere conducive to creativity, especially in literature. Although her personal position was not uncomfortable, the execution of Henry’s fifth wife—Katherine Howard, her mother’s cousin—on the same grounds used to dispose of her mother, were a forceful reminder to Elizabeth, at age eight, of the precarious nature of royal marriage.

The death of Henry and the accession in 1547 of the boy Edward, still just nine years of age, brought another, temporary, improvement in Elizabeth’s position. She went to live with Catherine Parr, the last of Henry’s six marital involvements, and a stepmother of whom the girl was fond. Unfortunately, the 14-year-old was about to receive more hard lessons concerning the place of the female and her chastity in a world of dominant males. The story, which figures largely in all biographies of Elizabeth—for example, Perry 51-66, Erickson 69-92, Neale 16-26, Johnson 24-31—begins with Catherine’s marriage, shortly after Henry’s death, to an earlier suitor. This was Thomas Seymour, brother of the king’s mother Jane Seymour, who had died at his birth, and of Edward Seymour, the king’s guardian with the title Lord Protector. But the relationship between
the two brothers was not a model of fraternal goodwill. Thomas was resentful of Edward and his proximity to the ultimate power in the land; his ambitions seemed to have centered on a marriage that would bring him closer to the throne. There is speculation that Elizabeth was his first choice, but this aim was thwarted by those who controlled her future. Therefore his marriage with Catherine could easily be viewed as a ploy to get closer control of his real object.

Soon rumors began to circulate that Thomas was luring Elizabeth into an unacceptably close relationship with sexual overtones, the extent of which varied in the telling. Elizabeth moved out of the household, but she was also subjected to a hostile official interrogation attempting to tie her closely to Thomas and the activities that would eventually get him executed for treason. Already growing adept in her own defense, Elizabeth admitted nothing that could be made to look compromising. Still, the situation put not only the girl but her attendant, Kat Ashley, who was also interrogated in the more intimidating atmosphere of the Tower of London, into real peril. Ashley was probably one of the few people Elizabeth ever loved unconditionally (Erickson 41).

Whether Elizabeth was more attracted or repelled by Thomas is impossible to know. However, his description could be used for the short list of men who benefitted most extravagantly from Elizabeth’s favoritism in the years to come. He was a tall, good-looking, bold, arrogant swaggerer and womanizer, as were the Earl of Leceister, Sir Walter Raleigh and the Earl of Essex. (Height was an important consideration for Elizabeth, who was tall for a woman of her time and needed a suitably built partner for the strenuous dances she enjoyed.) Only in the case of Sir Christopher Hatton is there a
presumption that he actually loved her, and he alone of the group never made a secret marriage (Brimacombe 60).

The peril created by Seymour was not as great as that awaiting her in the next reign, when Elizabeth herself would end up in the Tower under imminent threat of execution. Mary came to the throne with a passionate determination not only to restore Catholicism but to eradicate Protestantism entirely. Historians have not questioned the sincerity of her motives, but the fact that such a restoration would establish the validity of her mother’s marriage and her legitimacy at Elizabeth’s expense must have been a component in her satisfaction. The queen’s single-minded pursuit of this goal led to a bloody and large-scale repression of Protestant dissidents, who were now considered heretics. The result was more than 300 public burnings at the stake and a place in history as Bloody Mary for the woman who approved them (Brimacombe 130). It also led her to marry a prince of Spain who would in a short time claim his throne as Philip II. Sadly for Mary, she is also credited with a second motive for the union—that she was completely besotted with her much younger and merely dutiful husband (Hibbert 54). Henry VII married an Englishwoman, Henry VIII had married only one foreigner in his extensive marital career, and the xenophobic English were outrage at the choice of a Spanish Catholic by his daughter. Furthermore, the queen allowed Philip to draw her country into war with the French, a move that resulted in heavy debt, a depleted navy and army, and the loss of Calais, England’s last continental possession. This loss was more than just a blow to English pride since the city served as the place in which wool, its major commercial commodity, was distributed for manufacture into cloth (Erickson 157-158). Calais had also afforded protection from both sides to English shipping in the channel
and a check on the ability of France to make stealthy preparations for an invasion of England (Ronald 27).

The objections to the Spanish marriage were so great that a rebellion aimed at putting Elizabeth on the throne was raised and defeated in 1553. By now Mary had lost any sisterly feeling she might once have felt for Elizabeth and was in not unnatural fear of her ability to attract the support of armed opposition. The result was repeated interrogation of Elizabeth by those determined to prove her guilty association with the rebels, and a sojourn in the Tower (Brimacombe 7-11).

Her sister’s power to destroy her caused Elizabeth’s fear to be more visible early in Mary’s reign than it was until very late in her turbulent history. She was often sick in body and mind as she contemplated what seemed the likelihood of her execution, and the report of one of the few interviews she managed to wheedle from a stony Mary described her on her knees weeping as she protested her loyalty (Hibbert 56). While Elizabeth’s courage in the face of immediate dangers was acknowledged, it was also true that she could occasionally be struck by sudden panic attacks for trivial, vague or non-existent reasons, and that these would continue to contribute to random incidents of breakdowns in her health (Hibbert 77). Only at the very end of her life, however, would she revert to a fearful despondency like that to which Mary had driven her and deriving from the same source, the imminence of death.

The threat from Mary was at least susceptible to remedy. The historical consensus is that Philip prevented Mary from the ultimate step of ordering her sister’s execution. But, no options were possible for the queen. She was not a healthy woman; false pregnancies
led to her virtual abandonment by Philip and the tumors underlying them caused her
death in late 1557 (Hibbert 39-69).

Elizabeth had now defeated great odds to become queen. Her climb to the pinnacle of
power had been a dangerous one, on which she had come face to face with fear at many
levels and in many guises. Certainly she was on familiar terms with the most basic fear,
the one that comes with the knowledge that devastating reversals of fortune are an ever-
present possibility. And certainly she had encountered specific fears associated with
reversals she had either experienced or witnessed—with the drawbacks of being a
woman, of being judged unchaste, of trusting in the good intentions of an attractive male,
of relying on marriage to protect, of being drawn into foreign entanglements, of
expecting blood relationships to engender loyalty.

Now, with almost absolute power in her grasp, a new fear loomed. There was a legion
of the power-hungry waiting to snatch it from her if she let her grip slip even slightly.
Encouraging the cult of the virgin queen suggests that, like Machiavelli, she believed that
only a ruler acting as nearly alone as possible could achieve the control as nearly absolute
as possible necessary for the protection of her power, herself and her country.

As with any matter to do with Elizabeth, there is debate about the time at which she
decided that the single safe repository of trust was herself, and that marriage was not an
option.

Certainly there is evidence that the decision to remain unmarried came early, a
determination that Leceister claimed the eight-year-old Elizabeth confided to him on the
execution of her father’s fifth wife (Erickson 8). In his account of the 1559 speech
Elizabeth made to parliamentary delegates, her favorite historian, William Camden,
records that she said her coronation ring signified her marriage to her people and that she hoped her tombstone would record her virgin state. Camden, however, was writing considerably after the fact in 1624. Susan Doran is one of the dissenters to the theory that the decision had already been made before this early speech, and she claims the quotation was inserted at such a late date to bolster the cult (38). However, there are any number of references to Elizabeth’s state of mind from other, more contemporary sources. Among them was one from the Spanish ambassador, to whom she made it the basis for refusing the marriage proposal he offered from Philip II (Weir 53).

While Elizabeth may have been laying the ground for her cultic persona in her speech, she was at least outwardly accommodating her ministers in their grand rush to get her married. Either the words were not there for them to hear as Duran suggests, or they dismissed them as rhetorical flourishes. The prevailing climate of thought on women’s ability to rule convinced them that the first order of business was a husband to provide a wiser head for her guidance and a father for the (male) heir who would put the dynasty on a sound footing again. This view had recently been reinforced by the shrill and profoundly misogynistic rants of Protestant preachers, for whom vile Eve figured as the source of original sin, and by Mary’s disastrous showing as sovereign.

The most extreme clerical diatribe had been delivered in the same year as Mary’s death by Scotland’s John Knox in a treatise entitled First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women. The regiment he had in mind consisted of Mary Tudor, the French queen Catherine de Medici, and Marie of Guise. Marie was regent in Scotland for her daughter Mary who had been Queen of Scots since she was a year old and was currently being raised in France in preparation for marriage to the royal heir.
All three, of course, were staunch Catholics. Knox, and John Calvin as well, were left in an uncomfortable position by the rise to power of a woman who was a Protestant and an important prospective ally. Although they had been outspoken and in Knox’s case, outrageously vicious, in their insistence that God had not designed women with the capability to rule, they backtracked by allowing He might, occasionally, make a onetime exception for a particular purpose (Erickson 176). But these second thoughts were less than convincing since Knox had already argued that a woman ruler could only be God’s punishment for a country given over entirely to evil.

Elizabeth welcomed with apparent sincerity ambassadors of eligible royalty from throughout Europe. They came with large and glittering retinues, extravagant presents and flattering assurances that their masters were enraptured with reports of her beauty and intelligence. With a country for her dowry, although not perhaps one as yet in the first rank of importance, she was the biggest matrimonial prize on offer, and in the fall of 1559, there were ambassadors in attendance from 10 or 12 different suitors (Perry 151). The queen’s court was being brought up to standards of Renaissance magnificence to provide the appropriate background for the proceedings, and Elizabeth was quickly becoming adept at the theatrical flourishes and splendid illusions required (Zeigler 75). The importance of enhancing appearances through the manipulation of suggestion was the same public relations principle that would operate in manufacturing the Cult of Elizabeth, and she demonstrated her early mastery of it, although the reality was that Mary had left the kingdom broke and her own predilection was for stinginess.

Architecturally, the queen had any number of impressive choices for advertising her stature—forts, palaces, castles, town mansions and country manors—where she could
lodge visiting diplomats and favored courtiers, stage hunts and present entertainments. Unfortunately they had become crown property during the dynastic wars and church confiscations of preceding reigns and most were suffering an advanced case of dilapidation. Elizabeth did basic renovations on those along the Thames she could reach easily by water, creating in them comfortable apartments for herself and the important visitors to her court. The cost of updating others she transferred to the favorites who received them as loans or grants and were responsible for their refurbishment. Although she usually lent them the necessary money, she had every intention of collecting the debt and benefitted doubly in that they were tied even tighter to her patronage while improving her possessions without ultimate cost to herself (Johnson 74-80). Less useful and more distant possessions she simply allowed to fall apart.

Otherwise, Elizabeth’s willingness to resort to illusion when she couldn’t avoid personal expense is demonstrated in her provision of banqueting hall at her principal residence of Whitehall. Meant for a special occasion only, it was created by the sketchy enclosure of a tilting ground. It had no more real substance than a stage set, but remained in continuous use for years, with cold winds often whistling around the shoulders of the diners. Appropriately, it did double duty as a theater (Johnson 259).

Illusion served the same purpose in furnishing magnificence for the interiors. There was, for example, the oversized conference table required for a particular meeting. The only one available had a badly damaged top. But, instead of receiving necessary repairs, it was covered with a tapestry—hiding evidence of dilapidation as well as showing a nonchalant attitude toward the use of costly possessions (Johnson 79).
Also decorating the court was the lavish clothing and jewelry of its occupants. Elizabeth exhibited sartorial splendor of a high order and required it of her courtiers (Hibbert 254). Her own wardrobe she kept at the requisite level of gem-encrusted richness with presents received during the long Yule holiday season, presents her courtiers soon learned she expected of them.

In addition to enriching the court with sartorial opulence, Elizabeth enlivened it with the flamboyance of her personality—the third element, with power and will, in the pattern of control she created. And in it lies another of the era’s paradoxes. She chose to figure as a Virgin Queen, without assuming the spirituality of a religious figure or, as her cult developed later, the godlike austerity proper to an Olympian of either sex. However, in one respect she did demand the awe and worship to which an Olympian would feel entitled. This was in her assertion of the right to power tolerating no questions and observing no boundaries. Perhaps as a counter to the perception of female character weakness, perhaps merely because the real Elizabeth was emerging from behind the demure and repressed figure she had presented, of necessity, at Mary’s court, she appeared more in the persona of a king, specifically of the king her father had been. According to a catalogue of attributes assembled from her biographers, she often talked loudly and incessantly, walked with a swagger, was vulgar when it suited her, swore and blasphemed (Erickson 231), broke into sudden rages, struck her attendants (Johnson 113) and brooked no open challenges to her authority (Brigden 215). As described by her godson Sir John Harington, she could “put forth such alterations when obedience was lacking as left no doubt whose daughter she was” (Johnson 412). She rode and hunted enthusiastically and often, and enjoyed bear baiting enough to maintain a pit for it near
her main residence of Whitehall (Johnson78) despite her stingy attitude to building in
general. In short, she presented the picture of absolute arrogance in what is usually
considered the masculine mold and from there it required only a short step to claim
godlike attributes when the opportunity for upgrading her status arose. On the other
hand, and also on the authority of Harington, she can be seen as a person of great charm,
wit, and natural kindness. “When she smiles, it was pure sunshine that everyone chose to
bask in if they could (Hibbert 117).”

Music, dancing, hunting, theatrical entertainment, tumblers and acrobats, enlivened
the court. But most important was the intellectual stimulation of Renaissance thought.
The publication of *Tottel’s Miscellany* in the year of Mary’s death signaled that the
Renaissance had come at last to stay in England. The book contained sonnets written by
Sir Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey almost a generation earlier. Their inspiration
was the 14th century Florentine Petrarch, whose works were seminal to the new age of
literature. If Ann Boleyn had not been discarded as a whore, the Renaissance might have
made greater inroads in England at an earlier date. The doomed queen had lived for three
years at the French court where she had been exposed to the new cultural influences, and
she as well as Henry prided themselves on the intellectual and musical ambience of their
court. Wyatt, a one-time suitor of Ann’s, had traveled extensively as an ambassador for
the king. He brought back the sonnet form among the evidences of his sophistication to
enrich the circle surrounded Ann, a number of whom lost their heads as a result of the
association with her. Wyatt was among those imprisoned, but he was released and
returned to Henry’s service. However, his taste had turned from Italianate love poetry to
the translation of psalms and satire by the time his ordeal had ended. The younger Earl of
Surrey was also a sonnet writer—perhaps of greater skill but lesser substance (Evans 78)—who continued the pioneering work until 1547, when he too ran afoul of Henrician paranoia. Unluckier than Wyatt, he ended up on the scaffold (Evans 61-82). A second legacy of Ann’s waiting to be tapped was the largest of the early scrapbook collections, called the Devonshire miscellany, which she and her ladies in waiting began and which continued to grow after her death (Marotti 38).

Elizabeth was creating a court in which she could impress foreign ambassadors, but there was also the possibility that she might choose an Englishman to share the throne. Indeed, it seemed by her behavior that there was one who would have been her first preference except for the unfortunate fact that he was married. Robert Dudley was the son of John, first Duke of Northumberland, who had acquired the major influence over Edward VI in the last years before his death. Northumberland had married his eldest son to Lady Jane Grey, and an attempt to place the Protestant couple on the throne after Edward died led to Mary’s execution of Jane’s husband, then the Duke, and finally Jane herself while the younger Dudley sons were committed to the Tower. If Elizabeth and Robert met often or at all at the court of Edward or during the time both were incarcerated by Mary is yet another topic for debate, but certainly after her accession they became close companions, close enough to rouse the most virulent kind of gossip about “that woman’s daughter.” The death of Dudley’s wife added fuel to flames because he was suspected of causing it; there were murmurs about Elizabeth’s possible involvement as well. Although a coroner’s jury exonerated him, the result was that a royal marriage was now less rather than more likely. The poisonous speculations had spread all across Europe: Nicholas Throckmorton, England’s ambassador to France, wrote home about
“dishonourable and naughty reaportes” circulating at the court there. “One laugheth at us, an other threateneth, an other revileth her Majestie and some let not to say what sort of religion is this, that a subject shall kill his wife, and the prince not onely beare withal but marry with him (Walker 44).” Elizabeth withdrew herself from the more obvious appearances of close personal attachment, but Dudley, later the Earl of Leicester, would remain a leading member of her cabinet for the rest of his life and would receive vast rewards in wealth and prestige. It has been a fundamental assumption of those writing Elizabethan romance that he was the true love of her life.

However, the Dudley saga does nothing to resolve the issue of whether the queen ever really contemplated marriage for reasons dynastic or romantic. He seems to have been slow to abandon the hope of it, but she never reverted to the possibility in later years. Scandal faded to a background murmur; his position of influence close to the throne was acknowledged not just in England but throughout Europe. Yet Elizabeth preferred to enact the role of Virgin Queen with the list of favorites who filled the position that had originally been his in the first heady days of her reign.

As big a question mark remains over the speculations about the queen’s right to the title. Biographer Carolly Erikson takes it for granted that Elizabeth was sexually active with her favorites, perhaps from the time of Seymour on (181). Firmly in the opposite camp are historian Paul Johnson, who insists that “there is absolutely no proof whatever of her unchastity” (115) and biographer Alison Weir, who founds her opinion on the necessity of maintaining it as a matter of state policy (50-51). Elizabeth herself merely remarked that she never lived her life hidden in a corner, making clandestine love affairs an unlikely possibility (Hibbert 80). Of course, actualities are not particularly relevant
to the process of myth-making, and the cult of the virgin queen would have taken the same form whether it embodied truth or fiction. However, it is a topic of speculative interest, if only as a minor digression, to debate whether Elizabeth’s public relations campaign was an exercise in advertising truth or covering it up.

In hindsight, the evidence of her intentions seems clear enough in relation to the possibility of a foreign marriage. There was always some reason that negotiations stalled until they died of old age—the candidate wouldn’t meet Elizabeth’s requirement of appearing in person at her court, he wouldn’t modify his religion or accept the very strict limits on the power he would be allowed as her consort, he wasn’t of high enough status to be a suitable consort for a crowned queen. Elizabeth was adept enough at this game that she managed to keep alive the possibility of a foreign match throughout the first twenty years of her reign.

Perhaps the best measure of the depth of her resistance to marriage can be seen in its continuance even after her recovery from a near fatal bout of smallpox in 1561, when pressure to chose a consort or at least name a successor rose to its highest level.

By appearing to play the marriage game, the queen kept her advisors and her subjects in check as they pushed for what they considered the most important role a female ruler could play. In the meantime, Elizabeth was free to invest her energies in establishing the role she considered most important, that of unfettered autocrat.

After her coronation, she began immediately and with vigor to address the major problems that beset her battered kingdom, and the wisdom of these measures can be judged by their ability to provide immediate stability leading to future greatness. And, they all ultimately aided in Elizabeth’s consolidation of the personal power encapsulated
in the Virgin Queen persona and eventually, in the still more elevated Goddess identification present in the Cult of Elizabeth.

To analyze Elizabeth’s court is to see how the psychological forces operating there provided the material for cultic images, and also how the literary talent flourishing there gave the images substance. However, to see how the process was set in motion, it is necessary to give some attention to the specifics of Elizabeth’s historical activities.

Even before her coronation, she began the creation of the governing structure which would serve her throughout her reign, based on a small council of twelve men, loyal, powerful and dependent on her largesse for titles, lands and profitable commercial monopolies. At their head she placed William Cecil, later Lord Burghley, who had maneuvered through the factional quagmires of the previous reigns both unscathed and with his devotion to her service undiminished (Erickson 171). Around him would gather the party of conservatives with a preference for peace. Leicester would come to be the center of the opposition, who could be counted on to take a more radical stand—especially in matters of Protestant vs. Catholic, and on the advisability of aggressive military action whenever the question arose. Eventually they would be joined by Francis Walsingham, spymaster and foreign relations authority, and finally Hatton, the voice of reasonable compromise. These men were at the core of Elizabeth’s government until death began to remove them in the late 1580s (Brimacombe 51-69).

The queen’s strategy for dealing with her Privy Council was not to attend their sessions but afterward to meet with the members separately, listen to their advice with all its conflicts and make her own decision (Brimacombe 58). By removing herself from the debates and acting outside the setting of the council, Elizabeth established herself as the
final and unquestionable authority. But, even when she had apparently committed to a course of action, she would procrastinate, prevaricate, equivocate, revise and rescind until the last possible minute before the need for action became urgent (Hibbert 115). This strategy guaranteed that the cabinet was always off-balance in their dealings with the queen.

As for the parliament which had increased its power under Henry VIII, Elizabeth summoned only ten times in her 43-year reign—when she was forced to by the need for financial subsidies it alone could grant. When, in return for their cooperation, members tried to pressure her into action on the subject of marriage or the choosing of a successor, she treated them as she had the ambassadors from her suitors. She sent them home with the assurance of vague promises and if that didn’t work, she prorogued the session and sent them home anyway (Erickson 253-256).

All these maneuvers could, of course, be interpreted as the indecisiveness of a constantly beleaguered and fearful woman who was in over her head in the masculine business of governing. Certainly, this was the first reaction of advisers she dealt with. Even Burghley made the early mistake of trying to keep a matter from her he considered too demanding for her female comprehension (Erickson 176). Then and today, the debate continues about whether the queen was more weak woman or Machiavellian intriguer who was not worried by the occasional need to cloak a strong mind and will in seemingly flighty behavior. If the latter is a reasonable assumption, it contains a paradox in which the strategy for controlling fear at the deepest level depended on feigning a fear-filled confusion at a superficial one.
Within four months of her accession, Elizabeth’s government had generated three documents with far-reaching influence on national policy and involving the major issues that would occupy her throughout her reign. These issues were the country’s religious stance, the development of maritime martial and commercial infrastructure, and survival in the morass of international politics. And, of course, added to these was the problem of the succession which was always lingering like a phantom in the background.

*The Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity* re-established the Church of England, a decision of wide implication that seems almost inevitable for Elizabeth. Mary had enforced Catholicism by the use of tyrannical tactics in circumstances associated with foreign intervention and the smell of burning human flesh. These were not associations likely to appeal to the naturally independent and xenophobic inhabitants of an island nation. Furthermore, Elizabeth was herself the product of an excellent Calvinist education as were others of the nobility Henry had created. Also included among those with greater sympathy to the reformed church were the growing number of entrepreneurs seeking wealth and social standing, embracing the Protestant work ethic, and rejecting the rigid restraints of the old guild system. Adventurers, explorers, traders—these joined the ranks of the young and energetic, mostly urban subjects for whom Catholicism seemed an unattractive option.

Elizabeth was choosing the future when she chose to re-establish the Church of England. But of more immediate importance was her desire to create a moderate political solution where both sides could find a comfortable compromise. As she said, she didn’t want “to open a window” into men’s hearts and secrets (Johnson 88). Let men cherish
their private beliefs as long as they conformed to the requirements of support for a state church and loyalty to its head.

Of course, the added advantage of such a decision meant that none of the personal power accruing to Elizabeth, the head in question, had to be ceded to Rome or to the separate hierarchy of church officials desired by the more extreme Puritan groups.

Unfortunately, doctrinal extremists brought pressure to bear on the religious solution from the first, no matter how hard Elizabeth tried to broker a compromise. Protestants had the advantage after the Catholic supremacy was rejected; they demanded changes in the service having to do with everything from candles, crucifixes, altars, and incense to the importance of preaching rather than ritual. And, they wanted to make more profound changes in the very structure of the church hierarchy. They felt they had the right to challenge the queen’s decisions publicly from the smug assumption of a moral high ground. Elizabeth’s reacted to the rudeness of these extremists with distaste, ridding the Privy Council of the ecclesiastical members it had once included and even, on one occasion, depriving an archbishop of the right to function in his office (Erickson 311).

The result of increasing Protestant demands was that embattled Catholics became more hardened in their opposition to the state church and to Elizabeth. In growing numbers they refused to meet the attendance requirements designed to show their nominal acceptance, incurring larger and larger recusancy fines and other penalties that could include incarceration. Still, there was only the one organized revolt, in 1569, by the Catholic lords of the north who were members of the ancient nobility. It was a short sorry thing with little chance of success. What the situation did invite was the formation of small conspiracies aimed at the person of Elizabeth herself. These were centered on
priests from continental universities set up specifically for the training of English dissidents. Beginning in 1574, they would be smuggled into the country to preach at clandestine services in the night and hidden in “priest holes” during the day. However, saying mass was not enough. Because the pope had excommunicated Elizabeth in 1570 and elevated her assassination to a blessed act, the queen was placed in daily danger to which she of necessity had to react. There were captures, tortures and executions, but the charge was always the secular one of treason rather than the ecclesiastical one of heresy as it had been under Mary (Johnson 347). Through all this, however, the church continued to strengthen its foundations, and it was able to rise again after the revolt of puritan extremists who temporarily destroyed it, along with monarchical rule, in the middle of the next century.

Weighing as immediately on the future of the country as the decisions concerning religion were dangers inherent in its weakened military and commercial situations. The need to address these with dispatch resulted in production of a second important document. This was the Book of Sea Causes, England’s first inventory of naval vessels and supplies. It pointed the way for Elizabeth to form a maritime policy shifting expense from government to private enterprise, with immense benefits for both. Not content with exposing the sorry state of the navy—listing 34 vessels of all sizes, of which 12 were not ranked sea worthy—the compilers had extended their mandate to assess commercial vessels. There were 45 of these in good enough shape to be requisitioned for navy use, with 20 more that could serve for victuallers (Ronald 33). Obviously, an intensive build-up of the navy necessary for defense would be of prohibitive expense for a nearly bankrupt exchequer. On the other hand encouragement of commercial operations would
expand the number of ships available for military requisitioning in times of need, and
increase the country’s revenue base for the fiscally sound expansion of the navy over
time. The concentration on commercial expansion was in itself immediately desirable
because of the integral place Calais had in the production of woolen cloth that was
England’s single major industry. A shift to the financial centers in the Netherlands
proved to be ultimately unworkable because they were a part of Philip’s empire, and
Philip loomed larger every day as England’s would-be nemesis.

Susan Ronald’s book *The Pirate Queen* studies the maritime policy that grew to meet
the country’s needs, following its implementation from inception to the position of naval
strength that established England as a political entity to reckoned with—one which had in
fact laid the foundation for what would eventually be a world-spanning empire founded
on sea power. The first step was the greater tolerance, even covert encouragement, of
southern England’s piratical sea-goers. They were the inheritors of a long tradition that
was none-the-less illegal and had invited prosecution at the demand of injured foreign
trading interests. The small beginning was made by Captain John Hawkins, who sailed to
prey on the slave trade between Africa and the New World, hitherto an Iberian monopoly.
The results were so rewarding that Hawkins and a young relative, Francis Drake,
expanded their activities to any ships with any potentially valuable cargo that came their
way. As they grew bolder and were joined by others attracted by the quick profit, the
heavily guarded ships bringing Spanish treasure from the New World were included
among the targets. Next came the land depots where the treasure was accumulated.
These increasingly daring operations were made possible by changes in the design of
ships built to suit the hit and run tactics of marauders, changes making them smaller, faster, more maneuverable and capable of bearing greater fire power.

The next step was to make the proceedings more legally defensible as Elizabeth issued “letters of mark” or reprisal to “privateers” empowering English captains to target ships flying the flags of countries with which England had a dispute. The dispute didn’t have to be with declared enemies—it could arise from the mistreatment of English sailors, the carrying of cargo for the aid and comfort of declared enemies, the desire for revenge resulting from previous encounters, the reaction to moves that appeared to be somewhat suspicious—in short, for whatever excuse might work if a court of enquiry looked into the matter. This kind of venture attracted pirates seeking legitimacy, adventurous younger sons, in fact anybody with a desire for a better source of income than agrarian England had provided. And of course that anybody came to include almost everybody among the ambitious aristocracy vying at court, the country gentry vying for entrance to the court, the growing number of businessmen vying for eminence in the city. To be Elizabethan was to be ambitious. And to be Elizabeth was to increase her power, both as a major investor from the time of Hawkins first voyages and as the person from whom letters of mark must be obtained.

Then increasing English presence on the seas also encouraged the growth of trading companies that did business of a more traditional type. The first, the Moscovy Company established just before Elizabeth took the throne, was followed by the Levant Company and then the East India Company just before her death. And, there were adventurers with other agendas, seeking to match the advantages the sea-going Iberians had already obtained and were fighting to keep. They hoped to find wealth like that of the New World
which had funded Philip’s hold on power; they sought to establish colonies, as the
Spanish had, for territorial dominance, they sought new northern passages to the Far East
to tap the trading opportunities secured by the Iberian ships that been the first to venture
southwest around Cape Horn and southeast around the Cape of Good Hope. And of
course, all of these aims might be encompassed in a single sea going venture.

The proof of the maritime policy’s success came in the mid-1570’s, when Francis
Drake made his way to the west coast of meso-America, raided Spanish treasure supplies
there and kept on going around the world, a two and a half year trip that yielded a huge
profit on goods traded or seized. Even more important, Drake had broken the Iberian
monopoly on Pacific commerce in the spices, textiles, gems and other expensive goods so
dear to the hearts of luxury-loving Elizabethans.

The third important document produced in the first months of Elizabeth’s reign, a
treaty ending its involvement in France, was an immediate necessity but also a hard
object lesson. England had been dragged into the conflict as an ally of Spain, which then
made a separate peace while the English continued to pay the price in a drained
exchequer as well as a depleted army and navy and the loss of Calais, its last piece of
territory in continental Europe. Elizabeth resolved that her policy in foreign relations
would be to keep her troops out of other sovereign’s conflicts and countries, and to keep
their troops out of her country at all costs. This resolve was recognition of a basic reality
about the role her small country was equipped to play in the European politics of that
time.

The conflict just ended had been the most recent outbreak in the continuing war
between France and Spain, the two great powers in Europe. They fought in their home
countries, they fought in their Italian territories. Treaties didn’t resolve the basic antagonism, they merely provided time-outs as the rulers regrouped from bankruptcy and the exhaustion of their forces. As dedicated as they were to war, Elizabeth at first had to be dedicated to peace because her country was not big enough, important enough or rich enough to take on the main participants. England in the early years of her reign might be of use to them as a pawn, but it could not checkmate a king on its own. On the other hand, the country was at risk from attack by both sides because it was a valuable auxiliary prize in its own right, because a take-over would eliminate the possibility of its use by the major opposition, and because its defeat would be a triumph for Catholicism.

Elizabeth’s policy of aggressively waging peace had as its object the placing of England as a counter balance between the greater powers. She did not wish either to win or lose decisively, nor did she want them to come to a peaceful and binding settlement because both scenarios could allow a shift of focus that would make England the next prime target.

The tactics Elizabeth used for maintaining the position she had chosen is another venture into the paradoxes of the Renaissance world.

Dealing with France meant dealing with the recently widowed queen mother, Catherine de Medici, who as well as being the niece of two popes was the daughter of the man to whom Machiavelli’s *The Prince* had been dedicated. Her country was constantly wracked by religious warfare, with occasional treaties that were breathing spells only. Of course, her religious orientation was Catholic, but her real interest was in the Machiavellian maneuvers needed to keep the powerful and ultra Catholic Guise family and the French Protestants, or Huegenots, of the Bourbon family—both with close claims
on the throne—from destroying the country and the Valois dynasty over which she
presided (“Catherine de’ Medici”).

The Valois family under Catherine’s protection was a study in dysfunction, its
members marked by unimpressive physiques, poor health and sexual ambiguity.
Especially notable among their peculiar characteristics was a propensity for active
rebellion against the dictates of their mother. First was the undersized, delicate, and
impotent Francois II who ruled less than a year before he died (Frieda 125-26). Next
was Charles IX, who was frail, had little interest in women, and was, unfortunately, mad.
His personality was such that he was called “the brat king” (175). His death was probably
due to syphilis (Weir 292). His successor, Henri III, was perhaps the most sickly and
unpleasant of the lot and had no interest in women (176). Finally came the Duke of
Anjou and Alencon—only a little taller than the court dwarves, he was made extremely
ugly by pock marked skin and a bulbous nose more fitting for clown than prince; in fact,
he was called “one of the ugliest men imaginable” (Frieda 177). He was also a bisexual
cross dresser (Weir 216).

Dealing with Spain meant dealing with Philip, who had control of western Europe’s
largest empire as the result of a marriage between his grandfather, an Austrian Hapsburg,
and a Spanish princess. Philip’s empire was also supported by the fabulous wealth of the
New World acquired by Spanish conquistadores. Yet religious fanaticism influenced his
decisions far more than the political realities that should have absorbed his attention as
the secular leader of an empire. As he said, he would rather lose all his realms than
compromise his religion (Kamen 233), and among the heretics he would not tolerate,
Elizabeth had grown to be his heretic in chief.
The paradox lay in the fact that Elizabeth’s best hope for combating the worldly Catherine was to exploit their religious differences; her only hope of surviving the enmity of the fanatical Philip was to protect herself with all the worldly skills and weapons at her disposal until her country was strong enough for the inevitable confrontation.

When Catherine and the Guises were in surface harmony, Elizabeth kept the internal pressure on by aiding the Huguenots. Sometimes she merely failed to notice the bands of private volunteers who slipped across the channel, sometimes she openly funded contingents of English army regulars. When Catherine was tolerating if not completely accepting the Huguenots, Elizabeth was free to establish an alliance against Philip through the most open and acceptable diplomatic path, the royal marriage. (Or, considering her track record in that department, she was free to pretend to seek an alliance.) Each of Catherine’s three unappealing younger sons was offered up in turn until Elizabeth, nearly 50, reached the last possible stretch of childbearing age.

The queen’s first round in her contest with Philip also began in the arena of royal match-making. The Spanish king was among the first to offer for her hand, and seemed to take for granted that he would encounter no real competition. After all, he was the head of Europe’s largest political entity and he had saved her life, even if the action had in fact been done in anticipation of Elizabeth’s ascent to the throne (Weir 16). What he had failed to achieve with his first marriage, the bloodless annexation of England to the Hapsburg dynasty’s field of influence, should be easy with the second one (Erickson 750). What he had failed to realize was the depth of aversion she and her subjects had for him, the foreign Catholic who had dragged England into a quarrel abroad and whose naval officers subjected captured English sailors to the rigors of the Spanish inquisition.
Elizabeth kept Philip waiting for an answer as long as she could; when he realized his was a lost cause, he supported the suit of his nephew, an Austrian archduke—a diplomatic dance that continued for another eight years.

Meanwhile, it had become apparent that England’s maritime development was the best weapon in her arsenal. Philip’s trade was everywhere under attack and the arrival of the western treasure essential to the support of his territories and his constant wars was no longer to be relied upon.

On the other hand, Philip did not have to fear that Elizabeth would turn religious ideology against him as she had with Catherine. The Inquisition controlled dissent too efficiently in Spain, and, while it raged in his Low Country territories, the queen appeared reluctant to take advantage of it. This reluctance persisted even though there were several practical considerations that could have weighed with her—among them, the consequences to the cloth industry of Philip’s anti-Protestant campaigns and the threat the area presented as the closest possible staging ground for an invasion of England. Although she was the acknowledged leader of the Protestant presence in Europe, Elizabeth turned down the offer of sovereignty over the Netherland states rebelling against Philip (Erickson 343). Perhaps it was merely her adherence to the principle of attending to the wellbeing of those within her borders rather than salvation of men’s souls. Or perhaps she was even more constrained by the reluctance of an anointed sovereign to deprive another one, sanctioned by God, of his rightful possessions. Vulnerable as she was to criticism of her rule on the basis of gender, morality, religion and questions about the legitimacy of her succession, she was haunted with the fear that that the fundamental doctrinal basis of royal power could also be called into question.
While Elizabeth was polishing her strategies for thwarting Philip and Catherine, it can be taken for granted that, from the first, they were equally interested in disrupting her rule internally. And, unlike Elizabeth, their ambitions reached much higher than political containment. Both wanted her kingdom; both were willing to condone assassination and, the English feared, they were also just as willing to launch a full-scale invasions on short notice and little provocation. Even when peaceful diplomatic relations were being pursued on the surface, darker plots might be working simultaneously underneath. Philip, for instance, was always ready to supply funds and troops to the rebel Irish Catholics, who couldn’t be converted and couldn’t be pacified by diplomacy or force for any length of time. Despite the lengthy negotiations to join England and France openly through marriage, Catherine was assumed to be involved in an ongoing ploy to bring England into the French orbit through the agency her daughter-in-law, Mary Queen of Scots.

The story of Mary was complicated by most of the major issues of Elizabeth’s reign, incorporating as it did religion, foreign relationships and the succession.

Mary, a queen in her own right and the granddaughter of Henry the VIII’s sister, was undoubtedly closest to Elizabeth, by blood and royal standing, in consideration for the succession, but she was also undoubtedly a Catholic. And she was a Catholic connected not just with the ancient enemy France but with the Guises, the most religiously radical of the French. As far as most of the English were concerned, that was enough to cast doubt on the desirability of establishing her as Elizabeth’s heir. But worse was the possibility that she might not be satisfied to be an heir when, according to the logic of Catholics who considered Elizabeth and her church illegitimate, she was entitled to seize the throne from
Elizabeth immediately. When Mary and her young husband insisted on quartering England’s arms with their own, the fears were confirmed and residents in the north of England became vigilant in their watch for French forces expected to gather in Scotland for an invasion meant to dethrone their queen.

The fears continued even after Mary was widowed and returned to Scotland, although the chance had lessened that Catherine de Medici would be as likely to interest herself in the proceedings if it meant the advancement of Guise rather than Valois interests. However, Mary was of an unstable type capable of adding further, bizarre, complications to the invasion scenario. Back in her own country, Mary faced strong Protestant opposition to her rule, which she tried to counter with marriage to a cousin also a Catholic and also the descendant of a sister of Henry the VIII. They had a son, with a double claim to the throne of England as well as Scotland. But Mary’s consort proved to be so despicable that he was murdered within a year. Mary was blamed for conniving at the death, especially after she married the prime suspect for the actual deed. The Scottish Protestants deposed her and named her infant son king. Mary fled to England and suddenly Elizabeth had the proverbial tiger by the tail. Now she faced the possibility of war on Mary’s behalf raised from within by English Catholics or war from without raised by any or all of the European Catholic nations. Actually, she ended up with both.

Elizabeth’s preference would have been to marry her Scottish cousin to a responsible English Protestant who would keep her in bounds and return her to her homeland until the question of the succession arose again in the fullness of time. Her surprising choice for the bridegroom was Leicester, to whom she awarded his title as a means of increasing
his worthiness for such a position. Neither member of the perspective couple was enthusiastic—Leicester because he may still have cherished hopes of marrying Elizabeth and Mary because she was offended by the suggestion that she would be paired with the man who had been Elizabeth’s master of horse. However, the idea of an English bridegroom took root among the ancient Catholic nobility in the north of the country; their more sinister aim was for Mary to occupy the thrones of both England and Scotland following the marriage. Their uprising failed, but the plan still lingered on and the prospective marital candidate survived with his ambitions intact. An Italian banker name Ridolfi schemed to bring the marriage about with an invasion financed by France, Spain and the Pope. However, in the end such a collaboration received only lukewarm support because Catherine de Medici was still wary of encouraging Guise ambition, and Philip was unenthusiastic about encouraging either the French or the Pope, whom he disliked. Besides, after due consideration he had decided that he was actually as entitled to the English throne as the Tudors because of ancient royal kinships similar to the ones that had put Henry VII in power.

The upshot was that the plot was discovered, the hapless English candidate for bridegroom was beheaded and Mary remained a captive of the queen for almost two more uneasy decades in which she continued to foment sedition.

Finally, at the end of the 1570’s, all these historical threads were about to be woven together for Elizabeth. Drake’s circumnavigation of the world proved the success of her maritime program, and England gained a reputation as a rising European power. On the other hand, Philip was reaching the zenith of his strength. He had recently claimed the throne of Portugal, with all its maritime eminence, and was seeing great military
advances in the Netherlands under the direction of his nephew, the Duke of Parma. The king was ready to pursue the dream he called the Enterprise of England, which translated as its invasion from the sea.

With confrontation looming, Elizabeth was coming to appreciate the importance of the Netherlands. Its embattled Protestants persuaded the Duke of Anjou to assume military and political power as their situation approached crisis: suddenly, and probably for the first time, the queen had a really cogent reason to consider a French marriage. A French-English-Lowlands alliance might weaken Philip’s abilities to launch an attack from the area. And, Elizabeth didn’t want to risk the chance that rebel successes would merely substitute a French threat for a Spanish one if Anjou were not attached to her interests.

In England, Leicester’s party was ready to try any means to discourage the match so opposed to his personal interests and to his faction’s war agenda, which did not include alliance with France. One of these means was the almost accidental instigation and promotion of the Cult of Elizabeth, Virgin Queen and Goddess. The image had been suggested in a pageant written by Leicester’s nephew, Sir Phillip Sidney, as an entertainment for the court on one of Elizabeth’s progresses. Its propaganda value in opposing ideas of marital delights were obvious, and the literary cognoscenti of the court were quick to compete in use of the new convention. The cult flourished; the marriage plans, as usual, did not.

By the end of the 1580s, however, it appeared that Elizabeth could lay the worst of her fears to rest. Philip’s preparations for the Armada had become known well in advance, spurring Mary Queen of Scots to renewed efforts that would position her to take
Elizabeth’s throne, and in 1587 the queen finally had to accept the necessity for Mary’s execution. Then came the defeat of the Armada, which earned even greater respect for England and its queen, and the Cult of Elizabeth was turning respect to adulation. And, it seemed as well that the queen was already carving out a niche among history’s greats. She was, for the moment, “the most respected monarch in Christendom.” Pope Sixtus V was an admiring enemy who said “she certainly is a great queen” and jested that their children would have ruled the world if only they could have married, and even the Ottoman sultan joined in the chorus of praise (Weir 399).

But from the top of the heap the only direction is down. Within the year after the defeat of the Armada, Leiscester was dead, and others among her councilors would follow quickly (Neale 310). Burghley would be the last to go, but only after he had reached advanced and fragile age and passed his influence to his second son, Robert Cecil. Cecil matched his father in competence but not in loyalty, and began wooing the queen’s most likely successor, James VI of Scotland, far in advance of her death. Leicester’s death was an emotional as well as a political blow, and she kept his last letter by her bed for the rest of her life (Weir 397). The role of favorite was filled for the last time by his stepson, the Earl of Essex. Less than half her age, tremendously egotistical, he was unwilling to fulfill his assigned role of devotee in the Cult of Elizabeth with the expected humility. In his eyes, their relationship was one in which he conferred honor on the queen by his participation. His growing defiance to her expectations of his subservience turned him into a traitor and cost him his head three years before she died. And his death cost Elizabeth a great deal of her popularity because he had been not only her favorite but the favorite of the people as well.
The queen had found that her first burst of high reputation was not yet set in stone; something more was needed to assure her place among the greats of history. While the defeat of the Armada had given the country new status, it had also placed England in the position of open war with Spain that the queen had always sought to avoid. War increased the strain on an exchequer already battered by a series of bad harvests and diverted ships from profitable trading and privateering. While raids on Spanish interests remained the same, they ceased to be as efficient under the direction of leaders squabbling for power as government functionaries rather than entrepreneurs with a profit to make. Furthermore, the war was being waged on land as well as at sea because Elizabeth had broken her own rule about full-scale participation in other people’s conflicts. She sided with the Protestant King Henri of Navarre in his fight to establish his right of succession to the French throne, which was being contested by a coalition of the Guises and Philip. Like Mary before her, she found herself abandoned by her ally. Henri had decided that “Paris was worth a Mass” (Brimacombe 202) and increased his chances of victory by abandoning his faith. In the last decade of her life, all the fears Elizabeth had faced down were returning to haunt her. Essex had not only put her actual physical danger, he had deliberately resurrected the doubts about a woman’s fitness to rule—saying that “the court labored under two things, delay and inconstancy, which proceeded chiefly from the sex of the queen” (Erickson 388). The woman who once told Leicester she would have no master (Brimacombe 170) said concerning Essex, “By God’s son, I am no Queen, that man is above me” (Parry 308). There was no final resolution to the problems posed by Spain and France or the conflicts in the Church of England that were a growing threat to the realm.
However, there was a bright spot in this dreary picture. Paradoxically, The Golden Age of English Literature was approaching its zenith as the woman whose cult had helped promote it sank into decline. It was inevitable, of course, that a cult claiming immortal attributes for a mortal woman would suffer as she aged. Certainly the queen’s looks could no longer lend it creditability as she approached the state described by the French ambassador in 1597. For their audience, she wore a dressing gown revealing the whole of her bosom and a bespangled high red wig. Her face was “very aged” and she was missing a great many teeth while those remaining were “very yellow and unequal” (Erickson 38—40). However, a twist in the course of literary development, the legitimatization of print—associated with the works of Sidney (albeit after his death) and Spenser particularly—would help offset the negative effects reality was generating. Printed miscellanies appeared in growing numbers, keeping panygerics from the hey-day of the Cult of Elizabeth fresh in memory and appreciation. Also, England was increasingly finding its heroes among the men who went adventuring on land and sea, tougher men than those who played the chivalrous knight or the devotee of a goddess at court. These men valued the queen as Britannia, the almost sexless embodiment of the spirit of England, a cultic personification far more durable than the personal image of an irresistible but unattainable female goddess. Raleigh made some small contribution to this switch in cultic emphasis with his first general work for print publication, *The Report of the Truth of the Fight about the Isles of the Azores*. This is a dramatic account of a sea battle in which a lone English captain holds off a large Spanish fleet, destroying his ship to the waterline, leaving his deck awash with blood and forfeiting his own life, for the
sake of his country and a queen who was its national symbol rather than its personally alluring female ruler.

Ironically, the growth in printed works that expanded literature’s golden age during the 1590s was also a factor ensuring it could not continue in its original form—the trend was a democratizing one that would weaken its domination by the court.

Literature might be experiencing a metamorphosis beneath an exterior still dominated by the court, a metamorphosis that would free it for new development in a wider social setting, but Elizabeth was simply and obviously approaching the end of her time upon the stage. “All the fabric of my reign, little by little, is beginning to fail,” she wrote to Henri of Navarre, and the coronation ring symbolizing her marriage to her subjects had to be sawn from her swollen finger (Weir 280). And it was an end that found her again lost and fearful. Harington described her in the last years of her reign as keeping a sword beside her, for the evil plots and designs against her life had become so commonplace that she never felt safe. “She stamps with her feet at ill news,” he said, and “thrusts her rusty sword at times into the arras in great rage” (Erickson 395). On a visit during the queen’s last Christmas, her godson found her “in most pitiable state” and tried to cheer her by reading some of his comic verse. She stopped him because, “When thou dost feel creeping time at thy gate, these fooleries will please thee less (Weir 477).” Both life and literary pleasure had lost their charm for the queen, and a golden age was dying with her.
CHAPTER THREE

Sir Philip Sidney—Model of Chivalry

Sir Philip Sidney was the acknowledged model of Renaissance chivalry and the universal gentleman not only in England but throughout Europe, and a seminal figure in the Golden Age of English Literature. As such, he should have been much appreciated by Queen Elizabeth as she worked to advertise the sophistication of her court and to make the personal claims found in a cult image with a literary basis. His early death occasioned national mourning for a hero and a funeral in the best tradition of Renaissance theatrical magnificence, but Elizabeth did not choose to attend (Johnson 272). Obviously then, some hidden obstacles—the usual ironies and paradoxes—could complicate the relation between queen, courtier and the making of her reputation through literary means. An examination of both Sidney’s life and writings can highlight these problems, but what is revealed has relevance only to his own particular relationship with the queen. Therefore, a basic lesson to be learned is that the connection between her cult and Golden Age literature might have produced a generally standardized oeuvre of praise, but the best-known works it produced grew out of highly individual circumstances.

It can be acknowledged that Sidney had both the God given gift touted by Gascoigne and the courtier’s wish to please the queen, for the sake of directing her in righteous paths as Castiglione advocated as well as for the sake of his own advancement. But what he didn’t have was the same desire as other courtiers to make a direct connection between
the two. It was the reputation for chivalry and honor, not literature, that he valued, as he revealed in correspondence with his sister; it was the well phrased praise, not the advice of an earnest young man with an outsized Protestant conscience, that Elizabeth probably would have preferred.

Philip Sidney was from birth positioned to prepare for an important role at court. He was born in the fall of 1554 in Penshurst Castle, a 13th century landmark in Kent near the Welsh border, that had been acquired in the Tudor sweep of the old aristocracy. Sidney’s grandfather had been an active servant to the crown in the time of Henry VIII, and his father had been a tutor and chamberlain to Edward VI. The grant of the castle to the Sidneys was a recent occurrence, and the Tudor favor it evidenced might have come to a sudden end in the reign of Mary. Not only were the Sidneys firm Protestants, but Philip’s mother was the daughter of the Dudley who had lost his head in the conspiracy centered on Lady Jane Grey; the cloud of treason could easily have spread to engulf the daughter’s family. But such were the older Sidney’s diplomatic skills that the family evaded the potential pitfall and served at Mary’s court. In fact, they must have served well because, ironically, the baby became the godson and namesake of Philip II of Spain, Mary’s husband and the focus of Sidney’s life-long opposition to Catholicism (Stewart 9-14).

Sidney’s father continued to serve Elizabeth, as President of Wales and three times Lord Deputy of Ireland, a difficult and distasteful post in view of the Irish penchant for anti-English lawlessness, and his mother was one of Elizabeth’s ladies at court. This dutiful service left Philip at home to receive the usual excellent Calvinist education from tutors. Then, at the age of 10, he was sent to the Shrewsbury School, newly founded to
promote the same high religiously based educational standards (Stewart 42). Here he met Fulke Greville, a boy of his own age who became his life-long friend, most ardent admirer and biographer. Despite a distinguished literary and governmental career of his own, Greville would demonstrate the depth of this admiration by using “friend to Philip Sydney” as his epitaph (Greville iii).

At the age of 14 Sidney went on to Christ Church college at Oxford, where the chancellor was his uncle Robert, Earl of Leicester. Here the young man made such an impression on the dean of the college that he too would be moved to adulation by epitaph, recording on his tombstone that he was “preceptor of Philip Sydney, that most noble Knight” (Addleshaw 49). Sidney didn’t take a degree, probably because of an outbreak of one of the deadly diseases periodically wracking Elizabethan society (Stewart 66), but he was ready to move on to the Grand Tour, the European travel experience considered to provide the final educational polish for gentlemen. Elizabeth alone could grant permission for travel abroad in those troubled times, but as Leicester’s nephew he had the necessary recommendation. He went with the warning only that he should avoid the contaminating company of Catholics in general and Italians in particular, and that he must return within two years (Stewart 70). The start of his journey coincided with one of Catherine de Medici’s periodic attempts to broker peace among the Catholics and Huegenots of her kingdom by marrying her daughter to the Protestant Henri of Navarre. Philip was attached for the first phase of the journey to the delegation attending the wedding and also conducting negotiations for Elizabeth’s proposed marriage to the next in line of Catherine de Medici’s sons. Probably to the puzzlement of everyone, mad King Charles decided to ennable this lowly member of the diplomatic party. Irony piled on
irony, the paragon of Protestantism was now a French baron as well as the godson of the Spanish king.

Catherine’s handling of the peace-making opportunity was inept. She still secretly feared the influence of the leading Hugenot on the volatile king, and thought she could take advantage of the festive gathering to engineer the assassination of this one man. But things got wildly out of hand, and what became known as the St. Bartholomew’s massacre resulted in the deaths of thousands of Protestants throughout France and the end of another possibility for a French-English alliance through marriage. Sidney and other English Protestants took refuge from the slaughter in his country’s embassy, from which he was smuggled out to continue his journey.

When he reached Frankfurt he joined Hugh Languet, scholar, employee of the Elector of Saxony and a spider at the center of the web of Protestant activists throughout Europe. With Sidney trailing behind, Languet visited powerful Protestants, rulers and opposition to rulers, on the route to Vienna where he had business for his employer. Sidney made an unauthorized side trip to Hungary, and then broke free to visit Venice, the very sink of Catholic heresy and worldly iniquity he had been warned of at home. He also studied in Padua before returning to Vienna and the exacting teaching of Languet in languages ancient and modern, philosophy and theology. He relieved the arduous work schedule by attending the famous Spanish riding school, where he attained the superior degree of horsemanship necessary for a premier figure of chivalry. Languet required of Philip that he write letters to him in Latin, which he did at any time they were apart until Languet’s death in 1581, and the tone of these letters may indicate why Philip regarded the friendship as an occasional burden despite a deep respect for his mentor. Languet felt
free to harangue, scold, advise and criticize, but he also wrote at times uncomfortably like a practitioner of smother love and with the fawning fatuousness of a coy lover at others (Berry 28-48). Emotionally wearing as it might be, the association with Languet confirmed his student in a passionate and life-long devotion to the Protestant movement at an international level. Added to the horrors of the St. Batholomew’s massacre, the intensity of this devotion might go a long way to explain the generally anti-Catholic tenor of Golden Age literature connected so closely with Sidney.

When Philip overstayed his trip a year beyond the time that had been granted him, he began receiving letters of another sort, this time from Walsingham, summoning him home. Word of his willingness to consort with Catholics in Venice and elsewhere was beginning to raise anxieties about the steadfastness of his loyalty (Fox Bourne 84-85). Nonetheless, when Philip returned to England in 1575, he expected to be called to important service. As one devoted to the ideal of chivalry, he would have preferred a military position, but Elizabeth’s aggressively peaceful policy precluded opportunity in that direction. Alternately, he was available for the diplomacy his contacts and growing reputation warranted. He was sent on one diplomatic mission in 1577, to offer England’s condolences at the death of the Holy Roman Emperor and congratulations to his successor, with secret discussions of a possible league among Protestants as the hidden agenda. But the eastern situation was too volatile, Elizabeth too limited to a concern for protecting her own borders for the plan to be feasible (Fox Bourne 111-127). Elizabeth extended the mission by sending him on the way back to congratulate William of Orange, leader of the Protestants in the Netherlands, on the birth of a son, and Philip’s charm beguiled William, known for plain speaking and plain dressing, as it had figures at
Europe’s most extravagant courts. William later sent word to Elizabeth that “her majesty had one of the ripest and gravest councilors of Estate in Sydney” and suggested a marriage with one of his daughters (Buxton 92). But Philip also scored the admiration of the Catholic opposition in the Low Countries. Don Juan of Austria—Philip of Spain’s illegitimate half brother, defeater of the Turks, noted for womanizing, extravagance and general aristocratic excess—gave “more honour and respect to this hopeful young gentleman than to the Embassadors of mighty princes.” At his death, a Spanish ambassador would comment that, despite Philip’s enmity to his master, he could not but lament to see Christendom deprived of so rare a light” (Addleshaw 49). Certainly more was involved in the making of his reputation than what was probably the original desire to curry favor with a young member of the Leicester faction, which was generally believed in Europe to exercise a dominant influence over the queen. Except for this single diplomatic mission, during which no policies were set, and no visible alliances cemented, Philip was left idle at court, without work and therefore also without income. He once wrote to his brother Robert that the queen didn’t have much interest in his financial needs, assuming that if she saw him in a silk doublet he could afford to come to court (Stewart 225).

Thwarted in his career ambitions, Philip took refuge in the secondary, for him, consolation of literary interests with results of great importance for the making of a Golden Age. He and Greville formed a group they called the Areopagus for the purpose of refining English language to the rules of usage established in classical writing. Participating in this endeavor were pedant-poet Gabriel Harvey and Sir Edward Dyer, an older courtier with literary achievements already to his credit. Their efforts were not
notably successful; the language had its rhythms and rhymes derived from its own musical heritage and did not lend itself to unrhymed classical models with different methods of establishing meter more appropriate for inflected languages—among these the use of hexameters as opposed to the English preference for pentameter. But the deliberate focus on literary issues and conscious study of the mechanics of writing were creating an atmosphere which would, in time, allow the development of writing as a profession in its own right. This was certainly not the intention of the group because Sidney was among the most convinced believers that writing was exclusively the domain of the amateur elite (Berry 6). He did, however, believe somewhat contradictorily in the duty of the elite to encourage talent through patronage, and he was fast becoming the Maecenas of his time despite his lack of Maecenas’ wealth.

He lent his name to a vast number of written works—literary, scientific, historical, theological, practical—by continental as well as English writers. His reputation had to be the main attraction for those requesting his patronage because his fortune was limited (Buxton 1). While his uncle Leicester was the recipient of the amazing bounty Elizabeth showered on her favorites, the Sidney side of the family suffered from her parsimonious attitude to so many of the faithful servants who had more loyalty than glamour. Elizabeth owed much to Philip’s father, who complained his services in Ireland were so poorly paid that he actually lost money performing them. Yet Elizabeth was more likely to criticize publicly than to reward even as she reappointed him to the post (Fox Bourne 31-36). In 1571, she finally offered him the title that had been so long withheld, but the honor was declined on the grounds that it would involve expenses too great for him to support. To Philip’s mother, Elizabeth owed what could not be paid in money, but only in gratitude
that was not conspicuously forthcoming. When the queen almost died of smallpox, it was Lady Sidney who nursed her through the disease and, catching it from her, ended up badly disfigured (Addleshaw 180-181).

Among those attracting Sidney’s patronage was Edmund Spenser, who held a master’s degree from Cambridge, had produced some religiously oriented works and had somehow come to the attention of Leicester. He lived at Leicester House and would have been known to the Areopagus—how much he would have been included in the discussions and for how long is debated by historians, but the usual estimate is a period not longer than a few months. In any case, in 1579 he published The Shepheardes Calendar anonymously, but with his dedication to Sidney prominent. As Tottel’s Miscellany had marked the beginning of the English literary Renaissance, this collection of eclogues is considered the fanfare for its coming of age (Evans 84). The twelve sections cover love, poetry itself and a great deal of lightly disguised commentary on church politics, but the April entry is a panegyric of Elizabeth. Although extravagant flattery of the queen always figured prominently in Spenser’s work, in this one she has not yet achieved full goddess status. In the meantime it was Sidney himself who would establish the total goddess identification necessary for the flowering of the Cult of Elizabeth. Sidney’s public role at this time was only as a participant in the knightly jousts his uncle Leicester promoted to revitalize the old chivalric principles, and in the queen’s summer pilgrimages. The first at least allowed him to design impresa, (heraldic decoration for shields with symbolic meanings) that delighted him and to exhibit his equestrian skills. Both tournament and progresses gave Sidney a chance to display his writing ability in the associated pageants for the entertainment of the queen.
It was in 1578 or 79 that he wrote an entertainment called *The Lady of May*, which features Elizabeth in full pastoral goddess persona and as an active participant called on to help a young woman decide between suitors (Norbrook 82). But it was also in 1579 that Sidney found himself in Elizabeth’s bad graces after Elizabeth began her active and highly visible promotion of negotiations for the marriage with Anjou. On reason for her anger was directly tied to Philip’s way with words since the Leicester party relied on a forceful letter written by Philip to state their opposition. He compounded her displeasure by letting the Earl of Oxford bully him into issuing the challenge for a duel, a move designed as a demonstration of that crypto-Catholic’s support for the marriage. The queen stopped the duel and reprimanded Sidney sharply—not for any religious and political nuances tangled in the situation, but for forgetting what he as a commoner owed to the superior consequence of the aristocrat. Philip escaped the strained atmosphere at court by retreating to the country home of his recently married sister, the Countess of Pembroke (Berry 56). This exile was a slight penance when compared with the one suffered by a pamphleteer who printed a similar objection to the marriage (one expressed in much earthier terms than the letter) and who had his hand hacked off for the offense (Erickson 306-313).

Languet, who had been pushing Philip in their correspondence to quit wasting his time in idle court pursuits and to press the queen aggressively for action in the Protestant cause, now appeared to panic and asked him to consider leaving the county for his safety (Addleshaw 131). Always encapsulated in deadly serious religious intrigue, Languet wouldn’t have understood the more worldly circumstances directing events. While Elizabeth would probably, in any case, have been annoyed at the presumption of a minor
court figure, even one acting as mouthpiece for the influential Leicester faction, court scandal had as much to do with her reaction as the deeper ones Languet assumed to exist. Simier, the French ambassador handling negotiations for the marriage, had countered the faction’s objections by revealing to the queen what most of the courtiers already knew—Leicester had carried out a clandestine marriage ceremony, an injury compounded by the fact that the bride, the recent widow of the Earl of Essex, was one of Elizabeth’s cousins. This was Lettice Knollys, who some thought to be an illegitimate daughter of Henry VIII (Weir 347). However closely related to the queen—cousin or half sister—Lettice’s marked resemblance to her appears in a portrait by George Gower (Brimacombe 167). But she had an especially galling advantage—that she was always the younger-looking by seven years. Philip’s connection with Leicester would have earned the queen’s wrath, making rustication away from court advisable, but he was never in the danger Languet feared.

During the two years over which the negotiations stretched, Anjou would make a supposedly secret visit to Elizabeth, followed by an official sojourn at her court, and during both she acted the part of a love-struck school girl—kissing, exchanging love tokens and showing her favor in an exhibitionistic fashion. This uncharacteristic behavior may have been prompted by her desire to put Leicester in his place. Still, the negotiations bogged down in her usual unacceptable demands and were no nearer to conclusion when she finally got rid of Anjou, who was reluctant to leave until the bargain was complete. The sincerity of the charade may be calculated from her question about how much of an increase she could expect in the marriage settlement to compensate for his ugliness (Strickland 330). His destiny was to be failure against the Spanish; sickness,
perhaps tuberculosis caught in the dampness of the Netherlands; and death within three
years. Elizabeth demonstrated her supposedly damaged heart by writing a poem about
his departure (Erickson 329) and setting aside business for a time to weep in public at his
death (Erickson 344).

In any case, when the original scandal broke, Sidney took refuge in the country with
his sister—where he stayed for a period variously estimated at three months to a year.
While there he might have worked on one or all of the three major literary projects of his
life. One was a treatise called the *Art of Poesie* (or sometimes the *Defense of Poesie* or
*Apology for Poesie*, a term which he used to cover all imaginative literature whether
metric or prose). The second was a sonnet sequence recounting a courtly love affair, and
the third a prose pastoral that was still undergoing revision when he died. The last is
sometimes seen as a forerunner of the modern novel (Fox Bourne 2610).

*The Art of Poesie* was not the first or last dissection of literary theory from the period,
merely, according to his admirers, the best (Sidney Major Works x). In it, Sidney sounds
the patriotic note that was also surfacing with greater force and regularity as Elizabeth’s
reign grew longer; he insisted that, despite its recent arid showing, the English language
had the capability of producing literature equal to that of the ancients or any of the
modern day Europeans. The gist of his argument justifying writing based in imagination
is its ability to promote moral stature and that the method for attracting the reader to
virtue is to present it in a way that delights. Literature is better equipped to handle such
an imperative than history or philosophy, he wrote, because it is able to make a whole, if
imaginative, world for showcasing principle in action. This, in turn, leads to actualization
of the ideal in the real. There is commendation for all levels of poetic expressions—from
the simple songs and eclogues of peasants through the lyrics celebrating love and sorrow
to the epics with the grandeur of their themes at the top of the list—and an appreciation
of the decorum, or forms and choice of words, appropriate to each. Also included are a
mild disparagement of the stage and a strong statement on the vulgarity of printed
publication for what should be exclusively an aristocratic accomplishment.

The sonnet sequence, called *Astrophel and Stella*, was a first in English literature, an
expansion of the use of Petrarch’s form to a length capable of story telling, and it started
a vogue lasting through the rest of Elizabeth’s reign. However, while Petrarch had
glorified ideal love, Sidney tells of the course of real love in a real setting, which begins
with the proper worshipful attitude toward the (married) lady, moves through developing
lust to the hope of an actual affair (signified by a stolen kiss and vague thoughts of rape),
and ending with his rejection by the lady. Called *Astrophel and Stella*, it is generally
accepted that the poem reflects Sidney’s attraction to Penelope Devereaux, later Lady
Rich, who was Essex’s sister and Leicester’s stepdaughter.

The poem demonstrates the theory of *The Art of Poesie* in action and provides a fair
sample of the type of generic love poetry marking the Golden Age of Literature in
general and the Cult of Elizabeth in particular, although in this case without being
dedicated to the queen. At the end of the introductory verse, the poet admonishes
himself, “Fool,” said my muse to me; “look in thy heart, and write (Sidney *Major Works*
153).” However, from a modern viewpoint, he doesn’t. “A literature of this kind is very
different from our own, and the Renaissance had very little interest in originality as it is
understood and prized today (Evans 28). Or, it might be added, in emotionality. What
Sidney does instead is set out to demonstrate a total technical mastery of metrical forms,
metaphors, and rhetorical devices found in literatures of the past, proving his thesis the
English language is more than adequate to handle them. The writer stands outside his
work to admire the fluency he has achieved; the artificial refinements implied in the word
art are more to be appreciated as an accomplishment in themselves than as a means of
conveying heart-felt emotion.

It takes the poet a hundred and eight sonnet stanzas interspersed with eleven songs to
recite the history of his attraction to his lady. Except for a brief passage in which the lady
admits her love for him, only his emotions are available for study. And study seems to
be the proper word for a work in which an outstanding feature is the number of different
ways (more than fifty) in which the metaphor for emotional response—both pleasure and
pain—concerns Cupid and his darts. The sonnets contain refined and sophisticated effects
and poetic skill to admire, but even the final parting of the lovers falls short of high
emotional intensity; she rejects him despite her love because of the possible social
consequences the scandal of an affair might bring.

Stanza 74 does well enough to show Sidney’s preoccupation with metaphor and form
and his pride in the fluency he has achieved as a poet:

“I never drank of Agranippe well
Nor ever did in shade of Tempe sit;
And muses scorn with vulgar brains to dwell;
Poor layman I, for sacred rites unfit.

Some do I hear of poet’s fury tell
But (God wot) wot not what they mean of it.
And this I swear, by blackest brook of hell,
I am no pick-purse of another’s wit.

How falls it then, that with so smooth an ease
My thoughts I speak and what I speak doth flow
In verse, and that my verse best wits doth please?
Guess we the cause: ‘What, is it thus?’ Fie, no;
‘Or so?’ Much less. How then?’ Sure, thus it is:
My lips are sweet, inspired with Stella’s kiss (Sidney Major Works 184).”
Sidney’s pride in craftsmanship is so great, however, that it overcomes his own rules of decorum to turn one of the eclogues dropped among the sonnets into an extraordinarily complex rhyming form called a double sestina despite being of a “kind” with claims to simplicity.

In his poetry, Sidney’s easy competence is the result of mastering rules until they are thoroughly under his control. He also claims a certain easy flow in the working practices that produce the prose of the Arcadia, writing to his sister that “You yourself can best witness the manner, being done in loose sheets of paper, most of it in your presence, the rest by sheets sent unto you as fast as they were done” (Sidney Old Arcadia 3). This reference to the ease of expression could be self-deprecation or pride masked by self-deprecation. But, in any case, his facile dealing with a new prose form leaves him open to the charge that too much “fluency”, without rules to constrain it, can lead to excess. A page chosen at random, number 295 in The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia edition used here, has only three sentences on it, each of more than one hundred words and each occupying a paragraph of its own.

It is in the Arcadia, a sweeping pastoral romance turned epic, that Sidney puts into practice his belief in didactic story telling. Through the complex plot he expounds moral theory on love and sexuality’s place in love, on sound government, social hierarchy, justice and duty. In the process, he also reveals his attitude toward governance by women in general and, by inference, Elizabeth in particular. Because the Arcadia’s history is also complex, it is possible to see attitudes in the process of change and development.
The pastoral form and light romance had been a match made in ancient Greece, had in Rome been associated with Ovid and had regained popularity in the works of Italian Renaissance writers such as Sannazaro, whose own *Arcadia* was a principle model for Sidney’s (Stewart 226). Romance flourished as lords and ladies in the guise of shepherds and shepherdesses weathered storms, shipwrecks and attacks by creatures of the woods; suffered through crises of mistaken identity as well as deliberate attempts to mislead and seduce; and were at risk of kidnap and rape—all within the bounds of an idyllic rural world. But in the end, misconceptions were corrected, terrible situations overcome by the hero and heroine, and true love allowed to triumph. It was precisely this kind of story Sidney wanted for the light entertainment of his sister at Wilton, the Countess’s country mansion. However, pastoral also lent itself as a cover for commentary on the prevailing state of affairs in a country where it was against the law to use real names and events (Hadfield 7), and it would have been impossible for a Protestant moralist like Sidney to ignore either his own in religious convictions or his belief in literature’s serious mission as he crafted his tale.

The heroes of the story are Pyrocles of Macedon and Musidorus of Thessaly, cousins raised together since Pyrocles was six. His father, Euarchus, had sent him away when foreign invasion threatened their country, and ten years later, had summoned his return. Inseparable companions by now, the cousins set out together, have many heroic adventures and face many perils on the journey. It is almost completed when they stop in Arcadia, a country famous for its peace, plenty and poetic accomplishment.

Sidney was himself only about 25, not that much older than the very young heroes, when he went to Wilton. The obvious identification is of the cousins with himself and
Greville, although other characters are more likely to be composites than direct representations.

Arcadia is, unfortunately, in crisis. The duke, Basilius, has received a prophecy from the Delphic oracle that seems to foretell disaster and even death within the year, all tied somehow to marriage plans of his two daughters—Pamela, his heir, and Philoclea. He retires with his wife Gynecia and his daughters to the country, to live simply in two lodges, one for the parents and Philoclea, the second for Pamela and a rustic family of shepherds to guard her. Here they cut themselves off from the rest of the Arcadians.

Pyrocles sees a picture of Philoclea that causes him to fall desperately in love with her and he resolves to disguise himself as an Amazon. Dressed as a woman, he hopes that he can find a way into the trust of the isolated royal family and into the heart of the princess. Musidorus, the more emotionally controlled and intellectual of the two, tells Pyrocles in effect that he is acting like an idiot in a speech which includes a scathing estimate of women’s abilities. Then he encounters Pamela, falls in love himself and dresses as a shepherd to attach himself to the family guarding her.

Basilius and Philoclea fail to penetrate Pyrocles’ disguise and both fall in love with him/her—the duke at the expense of his previously faithful devotion to his wife and his status as a wise elder, and his daughter to her confusion about why she is attracted to a woman. Gynecia, much smarter than her husband, does recognize that Pyrocles is male and falls in love with him, giving way to a jealousy of her daughter that becomes hatred. Meanwhile, Musidorus manages to win Pamela’s heart even though their only hope is to run away together from Arcadia, but they are caught during the attempt. Eventually, Philoclea realizes Pyrocles is a man and they too are caught together. In a plot gone
astray to be with Pyrocles, Gynecia gives Basilius a sleeping potion that appears to kill him instead. Both young couples and duchess are brought before an Arcadian court on charges ranging from kidnap to rape and murder. At this juncture, Euarchus arrives in hopes of achieving an alliance with Arcadia and is drafted to serve as judge. Feeling that he must uphold the laws of Arcadia strictly, he sentences all to lifelong confinement or death, even when he comes to realize that the men involved are his son and nephew. Fortunately, at this point Basilius wakes up. He admits his own foolishness, takes his wife back and the story ends with marriages instead of executions.

This skeletal outline of a well-padded plot sums up what is called the Old Arcadia, the story as it was begun at Wilton and finished not long thereafter. In a letter to his sister when it is completed, Sidney calls it an “idle work” to be “read in idle times” and “a trifle, and that triflingly handled” (Sidney Old Arcadia 3). Nonetheless, it runs to more than three hundred pages, in a dramatic prose form borrowed from Terence—five books or “acts” with long philosophic speeches, internal examples of poetry and four sets of eclogues between sections. It stretches considerably the pastoral category Sydney himself has defined as it manages to examine seriously all the social issues of the day as well as expounding Protestant doctrine on redemption under cover of a romance set in pagan ancient Greece.

Looking specifically at the issue of Elizabeth’s rule, the whole plot would seem to rebuke her attitude to the French marriage, containing as it does a ruler who has capriciously abandoned his duties and his country despite the advice of wise councilors. Added to the example of Basilius is that of Gynecia, a woman who is actually described as the more intelligent ruler but allows herself to be led astray by passion. Finally there
is Pamela, who promises to become as excellent in governance as her mother but is persuaded to run away from her duties and abandon her country.

While the *Old Arcadia* was circulating in manuscript form to what Sidney professed to hope would be the restricted circle of his sister’s friends, he began extensive revision. The work in progress at his death included the redoing of the first two and a half books, ending in the middle of a sentence. The story has been turned into an epic with a bewildering cast of what seems to be thousands and an appropriately deeper and darker significance. The emphasis is now on Amphialus, a nephew of Basilius who, under the influence of his irredeemably depraved mother, Cecropia, is trying to steal the throne. Amphialus has the same potential for outstanding character development as Pyrocles and Musidorus, but he has conceived a love for Philoclea that allows his mother to subvert his will from goodness. The pair kidnap the princesses, the son because he hopes to marry his way to the throne with Philoclea, the mother because she is just as willing to murder them as she is to encourage a marriage as long as she can obtain power through her son. The action comes to its abrupt end while their castle is under siege, Amphialus is terribly wounded and Cecropia has fallen to her death from a great height. This symbolically satisfying end comes about as she retreating from her son, who has just found out about the tortures to which the princesses have been subjected in his mother’s campaign to bring about their acquiescence to a marriage. (Cecropia may well be a look at female misrule as exemplified by Catherine de Medici, whom Sidney considered a modern Jezebel after the Paris massacre.)

All of the new plot material in the revisions acts to develop more fully a statement of Protestant doctrine about original sin, which can only be redeemed by a benevolent
Providence acting on character refined through the subduing of egotistical will. Despite the new religious emphasis, there is added material in the revised *Arcadia* which may, depending on how much imaginative speculation is permitted, shed further light on Sidney’s view of Elizabeth. The first books are given over to extensive accounts of the princes’ adventures on their way to Arcadia, during which they meet a variety of women rulers. The one most generally considered to represent the queen is Helen of Corinth, on the whole a positive character but one who is “esteeming myself born to rule and thinking foul scorn willingly to submit myself to be ruled.” In keeping with the Cult of Elizabeth that has been gaining ground during this rewrite period, she is a “Diana appareled in the clothes of Venus” and a beauty “whose rule is no less beautiful to men’s judgment.” On the other hand, Sidney may be exercising some subversive resistance to the extravagances of the cult in his description of the villainess Andromana of Palestine, a nymphomaniac with “exceedingly red hair and small eyes,” or the Queen of Laconia—“she was a queen and therefore beautiful” (Lawry 193).

The abundance of women rulers in the *Arcadia* recognizes a basic historical fact about Sidney’s time. There were and had been recently a large number of them—Elizabeth, Catherine de Medici, Marie of Guise, the Scottish and English Marys, plus those put in positions of power by Philip II—his aunt, Margaret of Parma, as his regent in the Netherlands, and his sister and daughter as regents at various times in Spain. Sidney accepted the principle of female rule with much more ease than many of his Protestant contemporaries, regarding a specific monarch such as Elizabeth with the same kind of personal tolerance that allowed him, an ardent anti-Catholic, to enjoy the company of individual Catholics on his travels. Greville, who had once loftily suggested to Sidney...
that the queen was “descended from us” by reason of her gender, gets his come-uppance in the person of a smitten Musidorus who has to recant his unkind opinion of womankind.

The period in which the revisions were made offered little more in the way of rewards at court than Sidney had received before his retreat to Wilton. He was knighted in 1583 only so that he could have the necessary rank to act as proxy in a minor diplomatic ceremony for a foreign dignitary. He married Walsingham’s daughter the same year and his father-in-law paid his substantial debts; the couple shared a home with her family to save money. He received a minor position at the Ordinance office and he served in a Parliamentary session during which anti-Catholic measures were tightened and recusancy fines raised substantially. Elizabeth allowed him some of the income resulting from the fines. Sidney was in no financial position to refuse, but the cost to his principles was high since his religious intolerance was theoretical rather than personal. As he wrote to Leicester, “I think my fortune very hard that my reward must be built on other men’s punishmentes” (Buxton 54).

By 1585, the situation in the Netherlands had disintegrated to the point that Elizabeth could not refuse a request for Leicester’s military services, and his plan was for Sidney to accompany him as governor of the city of Flushing and the captain of military forces there. Leicester received permission to go: permission for his nephew was denied. One theory is that Elizabeth had no desire to see the aristocracy diminished although she had no desire to expand it, and she refused permission for scions of the aristocracy to assume dangerous duties until they had produced an heir (Rowse Eminent Elizabethans 76). Commoner though he still was, Sidney stood to inherit the titles of his childless uncles, the earls of Leicester and Warwick and his only child was a daughter. In any case,
Sidney had been thwarted in his ambitions one time too many. He and Greville sneaked away to join Drake, who was departing on a new privateering-colonizing venture, but the queen had them sent back like youthful runaways. She did, however, relent and let Sidney take the post in Flushing (Stewart 265).

There he found corruption and mismanagement of the war effort that left the soldiers unpaid and poorly provisioned while Calvinist and Lutheran factions wrangled among themselves and with the English. He won a small battle but was wounded in the thigh during a skirmish to cut the Spanish supply lines. The wound turned gangrenous and within three weeks he was dead—not, however, before adding two new items to his reputation for chivalry. The claim was made that he was not wearing thigh armor because he had removed it as a gesture to a subordinate who had none, or had actually lent his own to the man. He also, so the legend goes, refused to satisfy his thirst while he lay wounded so that water could be given to a dying man (Greville 143-145).

In any case, for more than two months after his death, Walsingham worked to arrange a funeral for his son-in-law in Westminster Abbey, the first allowed for a commoner-hero and an extravaganza of great cost. The cost was so great, in fact, that there was no money for Walsingham’s own funeral in 1590 (he was consistently forced to use his own funds to pay his widespread spy network), and he was buried secretly and at night in Sidney’s vault (Fox Bourne 352-358). Whether Sidney’s magnificent farewell was a spontaneous tribute to a hero or a propaganda event promoted by Leicester to distract attention from the dismal showing in the Low Countries, there was no official sponsorship or monetary contribution from Elizabeth and her government. She said, temperately, that she was “much afflicted with sorrow for the loss of her dear friend” but seemed less impressed
than irritated by the choices that led up to his death (Weir 370-371). These had caused him to be one of only two members of the aristocracy who died in battle during her reign. As a result he was, in her opinion, “that inconsiderate fellow” (Weir 402).

Sidney’s reputation for chivalry was now safely established for the ages. But his literary reputation was just beginning the ascent to its heights as a golden talent in a golden age. He had left his revised Arcadia with Greville, but asked at one time during his last illness that it be destroyed. Although Greville always considered it one of Sidney’s lesser accomplishments, he hadn’t complied, and even rushed it into the print Sidney so despised within months of his death. This unprecedented action was needed to forestall a printer planning to publish the work as originally completed and circulated in manuscript. (At this time, the original sank into an obscurity which would last until its rediscovery in 1911.) Then Sidney’s sister joined the revisions to the unrevised second half of the original to publish a second edition, and another followed in which an author was chosen to bridge the awkward gap between old and new sections with additional material (Sidney Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia 10-13). The dam had broken; by 1594, all of Sidney’s works were in print—and, paradoxically, one of the major tenets of courtly poetry, its unpublished limitation to the court circle, had been broken as well to make known accurately the work of one of its major contributors.

It was as well that the canon of Sidney’s work had been established on these already completed works. Renaissance literary history might otherwise have been quite different if he had lived. Except for the Arcadia revisions, he had been working on translations of the Psalms, with his sister, and treatises by continental Protestant theologians. He might have turned his back on his earlier worldly writings and destroyed his epic work as he
had considered asking Greville to do. Or, he might have abandoned literature entirely and even his exclusive allegiance to queen and country. He had been asked to consider taking on the political leadership for the Netherlands himself (Stewart 6), after it had been offered and accepted for a time by Leicester to Elizabeth’s absolute fury. It would be in keeping with the Calvinist view of female monarchy for Elizabeth’s part in Protestant history to be passing (Fox Bourne 328), and perhaps for Sidney’s goal of defeating Catholicism on the European stage to outweigh his national loyalty no matter how strong it was. He was, after all, a very serious man as well as a somewhat reluctant author.

The question of “what might have been” Sidney’s literature future is unanswerable. Almost as speculative is the answer to the question of what created his elusive charm. It wasn’t the sort of wit that makes conversation sparkle—history usually keeps some record of that as it did in collections of quotations for Raleigh and Elizabeth. The only vague recollection of his conversation concerns the absence of wolves in England (Stewart 105), which could have been factual commentary (Buxton 89) or some metaphorical reference to the Catholic menace, depending on which of many biographers is to be believed. The humor reflected in his writing was of the subtle kind deserving the name “amused irony” except for some rather crude mocking of rustics. According to Greville, he had been as serious as a man even in childhood “with such staiedness of mind, lovely and familiar gravity as carried grace, and reverence above greater years. His talk ever of knowledge, and his very play tending to enrich his mind” (7). One biographer, otherwise an admirer of the paragon, decides he was probably a “prig” (Addleshaw 1).
Why this elusive charm apparently failed to impress Elizabeth as much as others is a matter for speculation. Part of the trouble may lie with the fact that Sidney can be equated with Pyrocles, a beardless and beautiful youth who could get away with impersonating a woman. In a description produced a century later by John Aubrey, an antiquarian gathering research on 16th and 17th century notables, his face was “extremely beautiful….If I were to find a fault in it, methinks ‘tis not masculine enough” (Stewart 127). Aubrey also supplied accounts of Philip stopping in the midst of a hunt to jot down an inspiration and riding randomly across a field immersed in the toils of composition (Fox Bourne 215). The picture of an effeminate looking aesthete dreamily absorbed in writings meant to please a sister would not be likely to please an Elizabeth whose taste in favorites was very much to the contrary. More important, there was apparently reason to mistrust Sidney’s complete devotion to her and to her cultic standing. Although he initiated the cult, his only moderately phrased contributions were *The Lady of May* and a poem prefacing it. Moreover, his accounts of various rebellions erupting in *Arcadia* reflected a Protestant belief in a social order with a contractual basis rather than one depending on the divine right of kings. (These contracts were, of course, designed to put power in the hands of a wise aristocracy who could curb or even overthrow absolutist rulers while also preventing the anarchy resulting from power-seeking in the lower classes.) She was also made uneasy, Sidney was sure, about his standing with other European leaders. “Princes love not,” he said, “that foreign powers should have extraordinary interest in their subjects” (Stewart 7).
In the social and literary history of the English Renaissance, Sir Philip Sidney shares iconic status with Sir Walter Raleigh. The careers of these two polar opposites illuminate the dramatic contrasts their fluid transitional world was capable of encompassing.

After devoting much attention to Sidney, it is a temptation to say of Raleigh only that everything the other man was, he wasn’t. However, this description has negative connotations that are in no way applicable to a personality so bold, strong, confident, energetic, intelligent, gifted, charismatic—the list goes on. It was also of an arrogance so overweening that offended contemporaries did indeed see in him the dark reverse of Sydney’s shining example. In a popular ballad he figured as “Damnable fiend of hell/Mischievous Machiavel” (Bradbrook 16). He was also “that great Lucifer,” and according to one Sir Anthony Bagot, writing to Edward Dyer, Raleigh was “the best -hated man in the world; in Court, city and country” (Irwin 30). This was a distinction held by Leicester before Raleigh’s arrival on the scene and for much the same reasons, that he was an acknowledged favorite of Elizabeth and the recipient of her unstinting largesse. However, historical perspective strips away the prejudicial effects of strong personality and the jealous reaction to it, revealing England’s best candidate for the title of Renaissance Man, an image to which the modern entrepreneurial world is more in sympathy than that of a Model of Chivalry. Raleigh foreshadowed the future, Sidney represented a romantic ideal that was already anachronistic even as he was hailed as its finest example. The knights of the Renaissance were a theatrical creation that,
unlike their medieval predecessors, rarely fought in battle and presented tournaments as pageantry rather than the actual death-inviting events of the previous period.

The differences between the two men can be traced from birth. Sidney was born in a recently acquired English great home to an upwardly mobile family. Raleigh, the same age, came into the world in a rented manorial farmhouse that was closer to a cottage than a castle. The circumstances represented the fallen state of an ancient family which had been prominent in Devon since the conquest. However, they had become staunch Protestants who had suffered financially as a result of their choice (Rowse Sir Walter 129). He was the son of his father’s third marriage and his mother’s second, and as a result he liked to claim that he could count on the support of “more than a hundred gentlemen of my kindred” (Trevelyan 1). More important was the fact that they included all the great maritime adventurers—Hawkins, Drake, Gilbert, Grenville—whose outlook was tough, practical and more naturally piratical than chivalrous. In short, expediency played a larger role than ethics in their ambition, which was to bring down their enemies (Spanish, Catholic) on the high seas, for their own profit first but also for the sake of patriotic one—upmanship (Rowse Sir Walter 129-130). This background gave Raleigh the same sort of moral flexibility as Elizabeth, allowing him to lie easily, to threaten suicide theatrically and even to feign madness when it seemed that a situation could be manipulated to his advantage by such behavior.

Although they had been reduced to the fringes of the aristocracy, the Raleighs were still bound to that tight little world, inbred as it was to a point just short of incest. Even though he arrived at court as an outsider, Raleigh would more likely find himself with six degrees of connection to other courtiers rather than the six degrees of separation on which
modern explorations of human interrelationship are founded. A small sample from his diverse family circle includes Elizabeth’s well-loved governess Kat Ashley and Barbara Gamadge, wife of Robert Sidney and patron of Jonson (Trevelyan 4, 161) and a cousin or two can usually be found in an account of any of his exploits.

While still in his teens, Raleigh set out for Oxford and the educational course prescribed for a Protestant gentleman of however straitened circumstances. There his intellectual quickness made him “the ornament of the juniors” (Buchan 6), his boisterous nature a problem for the authorities (Irwin 16). But at some time in the period, he also set out for France with a cousin’s band of volunteers to give unofficial aid the Huguenots. He might have been in Paris at the time of the St. Bartholomew Massacre, perhaps taking refuge with Sidney in the embassy, and he may also have soldiered for a time in the Low Countries (Chidsey 8-10). In 1574 he was in London where he lodged but apparently did not study at the Inns of Court, and also showed the first evidences of literary talent in a prefatory verse (printed, signed Walter Rawley of the Middle Temple) for a work of Gascoigne’s (Kingsley 11).

He is next found at sea in 1578 on a voyage of exploration and ultimately unprofitable privateering with a Gilbert half-brother, already known for his maritime adventuring, followed by service as a professional soldier in Ireland during the 1579 uprising led by the Earl of Desmond. In 1580 he oversaw the massacre at the captured fort of Smerwick, with a total of several hundred men, women and children killed. The rationale, that he had orders and most of those executed were foreign combatants supplied by Spanish money (Chidsey 22-24), would have been sufficient to excuse him in the view of a society that saw the heads of the executed routinely exhibited on public
buildings and bridges. Although he was a lowly captain and a commoner, Raleigh took
exception to the handling of the Irish situation and went in person to Elizabeth’s Privy
Council to air his views. His superiors were outraged and Elizabeth was delighted with
his arguments, his personality and his person. Fond as she was of nicknames, she called
him her “oracle” and set him on a meteoric rise to fame and fortune resented by the
established elite (Caulfield 85). For them, his credentials as a gentleman were not good
enough, and the arrogant attitude that was his defense to their dislike added fuel to the
fire. In one regard, however, he was undeniably well suited for the role. His flair for the
theatrical manifested itself from the start in sumptuous clothing. In particular, two
anecdotes concerning cloaks are connected with his reputation for foppery. One is the
famous claim that he sacrificed a particularly fine example by spreading it over a mud
puddle to protect Elizabeth’s shoes and focus her attention on his gallantry. The second
is that he had a cloak completely ornamented with pearls, a symbol of chastity
particularly favored by Elizabeth. The smallest and lowest were loosely sewn to drop off
at the feet of other courtiers, who might or might not demean themselves by scrambling
for them (Irwin 27). Neither story is grounded in historical evidence, but both still serve
to illuminate the flamboyant character of the man about whom they could be believed.
There was also a documented set of silver armor (Chidsey 73), and it was said he could
wear the worth of the cargo from a plundered ship on his back.

The aggregate compilation of a life story for Raleigh shows that, at various times in
their relationship, the queen showed her favor by awarding him monopolies in cloth,
wine and tobacco (which he popularized but did not introduce into England); naming him
Warden of the Stanneries; entrusting to him various properties liberated from the loudly
protesting ecclesiastical establishment; gifting him with thousands of acres in Ireland and the right to a large stretch of the eastern seaboard in North America. She knighted him in 1584 and in 1587, she appointed him as her Captain of the Guard, a post which further incensed his detractors at court because it allowed him a great deal of personal access to her.

But Raleigh also shed his frivolous courtly persona frequently and adventurously. He backed a Gilbert half brother in 1584 for a second maritime venture, and this time he designed and supplied a ship. He was prominent among those whose promotion of smaller, faster and better–armed vessels gave English ships the ultimate advantage in the competition for control of the seas. It was one of his vessels, the Arc Ralegh, which would be renamed the Arc Royal to serve as the flagship of the fleet sent against the Armada. He continued to back trading/colonizing/privateering schemes even after Elizabeth decided he was too important to risk his life sailing in them. His aims were large, constantly promoted and never abandoned—to make money, of course, but also to realize patriotic dreams of expanding England’s territorial boundaries and financial/commercial clout. His hopes needn’t be considered any less visionary for featuring himself as the patriotic hero who would bring them to pass and reap the benefits in fortune and prestige. The most significant of the colonizing efforts would be the two attempts to plant a colony in the area he named Virginia in honor of the queen. Despite the importance they had for the eventual opening up of North America, their immediate failure was a serious blow to his own finances— in fact, his obsession with colonization absorbed much of the bounty he received from the queen and earned from seagoing ventures. He also was one of the few active administrators of Irish lands that had been
redistributed to the English for treatment as “plantations” or colonies—these were usually too difficult to work in the face of Irish resistance. In the process he added to his fortune by cornering the market in timber for barrel staves, and he revolutionized the Irish domestic economy by introducing the potato, another New World product he popularized but did not discover.

Raleigh also achieved the distinction of being the only member of Parliament who represented three different districts at different times. He took his duties seriously and was credited with beneficial service to his constituents—especially for the miners from his home territory—as well as the country as a whole (Buchan 43-45). In his leisure time, whenever that might have been, he met with a wide variety of people who interested him—controversial theologians, scientists with whom he studied and experimented (especially those who could shed light on the astronomical and mapmaking issues of interest to a sailor) and, in the 1590s, with those disreputable outcasts from the literary world who wrote and acted in plays. He is credited with founding what would become the Mermaid Club, a literary group which would eventually claim among its members Ben Jonson, Inigo Jones, Thomas Campion, Michael Drayton, John Donne, Beaumont and Fletcher, and perhaps, on occasion, Shakespeare (Hall 125). It would be the disreputable Jonson, not a respectable clergyman or scholar, he would choose as the companion for his son’s Grand Tour (Rowse Sir Walter 325).

And of course, in addition to his other interests, he read and he wrote constantly. He slept only four hours a night to make time for his reading and carried a trunk of books with him every time he went to sea (Aubrey 263), drawing on a personal library of notable size. As for his writings, some of his works were serious non-fiction designed for
print—treatises on ship design, travel descriptions and promotion of colonial projects, and when he was sentenced to the Tower for life in the reign of James I, Elizabeth’s successor, he began a *History of the World* that got no further than 169 BC in about a million words and served as a political indictment of rulers like the king. These were usually published to popular and financial success. But he also wrote as Castiglione would have wished, producing with apparent amateur insouciance the type of poetry that enlivened court life. How little or much he wrote is unknown; his attitude to publication was indifferent rather than hostile but did preclude a full record of his work. He preserved a few pieces for polishing and his tributes to Sidney after his death are among the best known of all the literary outpourings resulting from it. (Sidney might have been pleased with the knowledge that Raleigh confessed to an admiration “by envy suppressed” in the tribute) (Brooks-Davis 137). Even his trifles, however, were considered worth preserving in the handwritten miscellanies and made it occasionally, with or without his permission, into print. The subject ranged from a lady’s bad tempered dog through the usual obligatory paeans to Elizabeth, to warnings about worldly perils for his son. Later, when a change in Elizabeth’s attitude toward him darkened his view of the world, he broadened his repertoire with scathing denunciations of the court in particular and society in general, repinings about his situation and finally, reflections on universal questions that transcended all lesser considerations.

In this same period when Raleigh was making his spectacular impression at court, Sidney, the unquestioned possessor of better aristocratic and diplomatic credentials, was making little or none. Perhaps the most painful fact for Sidney to accept would have been that the newcomer was everything he had wanted to be—soldier, sailor, adventurer,
man of action, councilor to the mighty. Specifically, Raleigh was rewarded for his opinions on the Irish situation, Sidney was punished for his on the French marriage proposal. And even after he was forgiven, he could not at one point return to court for lack of money to make the necessary well-dressed showing. Raleigh had a commendable Parliamentary career, Sidney’s caused him a troubled conscience. Raleigh had adventures at sea, Sidney was not allowed to leave port. It might have been some solace to him that, ironically, the maritime hero was subject to seasickness (Trevelyan 297), so much so that, according to Aubrey, he preferred walking to reach London Bridge rather than taking a wherry across the river (268). Sidney finally got a taste of the chivalric deeds he thought he was meant for, had his romantic ideals disillusioned and died as the result of an insignificant skirmish. Raleigh the realist was imperiled, with some frequency, on sea and land but had only a limp to show for it at the end of his life. Sidney wanted to defeat the forces of Philip II and the Catholic cause with diplomacy that failed, Raleigh built ships and promoted ventures that contributed to the improvement of the English position in regard to the Spanish and helped to develop a naval supremacy leading eventually to world empire.

Raleigh was to reach the pinnacle of his success at court after Sidney and Leicester died within two years of each other. But it was to be a short-lived supremacy. His position was being challenged by the Earl of Essex within weeks of the younger man’s reappearance at court soon after the Armada victory. An earlier appearance under Leicester’s sponsorship had ended poorly when the hot-headed Essex stomped out without the queen’s permission. He went to the Low Countries to fight and was with Sidney on the raid that caused his death. Now it was Raleigh’s turn for voluntary exile to
avoid Essex, whose attitude was immediately adversarial. Still, on his return from a time spent on his Irish holdings, Raleigh was in the better position. Essex was experiencing the usual royal wrath for a secret marriage with Sidney’s widow. Raleigh, on the other hand, had brought back with him Edmund Spenser and the first three books of the *Faerie Queen*, the ultimate expression of the Cult of Elizabeth and a major work of the English literary Renaissance. From the association of the title, through lavish praise in the dedication, to multiple identifications in the allegory with figures extolling single aspects of the royal character, the book was rich fare for royal vanity. Furthermore, the queen had granted Raleigh permission, at last, for him to go back to sea with Drake on a Spanish-baiting venture and had blackmailed ecclesiastical authorities into releasing to him the use of a property that had caught his fancy. Raleigh had almost made it to too far from shore to be within range of the queen’s towering wrath when it shook his world and brought the sky down on his head. She had discovered that he, too, recently made a secret marriage, with a lady in waiting also named Elizabeth. Even though Raleigh lied boldly to Cecil about the existence of such a marriage, the truth was ferreted out and both partners consigned to the Tower. There is no way to know how long it would have taken for the queen to forgive the affront because a still greater consideration than a bruise ego intervened. Money. Raleigh’s privateering venture, in which Elizabeth was an investor, had netted the greatest of all catches in the ongoing trolling of Philip II’s fleets, a Portuguese treasure ship called the Madre de Dios. It had been sent back to Dartmouth, where it was being systematically looted for lack of control by an authority the sailors would respect. Cecil pulled Raleigh out of prison and they rushed to the coast, where the lawlessness was quelled as the result of what Cecil described as Raleigh’s extraordinary
capacity for hard work and popularity with the sailors. The queen took about 50 per cent of the profits, Raleigh complained that he reaped none, and the magnitude of his resentment is explained by the fact that worth of the cargo is estimated variously at between 100,000 and 1 million pounds in 16th century terms. Raleigh’s wife, who had been Bess Throckmorton, remained in confinement several months more—perhaps because of a personal animosity arising from the fact that she was the daughter of the ambassador to France who had castigated Elizabeth so thoroughly for the early Leicester involvement and had then shown unseemly sympathy for Mary Queen of Scots.

Anyway, Bess was never accepted back at court, her husband was left in limbo for five years before he returned, a respected adviser but not a pampered favorite.

The disgraced favorite had a much more active retirement than Sidney had. He moved to his newly acquired property, a place called Sherborne with easy access to the major London-Devon route, designed and replaced the old manor house with a new brick structure, engineered an elaborate system of ornamental waterworks for the grounds, and was sent back to Parliament as an active representative for a second constituency. He also injured his reputation further by consorting with people as suspect as he was for giving free rein to inquiring minds—the confessed atheist and playwright Christopher Marlowe for one. There were scientists and mathematicians whose interest in experiments, formulas and occult-looking symbols aroused suspicions of witchcraft; among them were Thomas Herriot, who had participated in the Virginia ventures and was a pioneer in the field of algebra, and the Earl of Westmoreland—called the Mad Earl and the Wizard Earl—with his ill reputed home laboratory. Raleigh was a man whose written works showed liberal acknowledgement of God (although seldom Christ) and
devoted chapter three in his *History* to speculation about a physical location for the Garden of Eden. But he also enjoyed debates about doctrinal issues such as the nature of the soul, for which he faced charges of atheism that eventually were allowed to lapse. The charges were dismissed by reasonable men such as Harington, who said “In religion he hath shown in private talk great depths and good reading, as I once experienced in my own house before many learned men” (Bradbrook 22). It is argued that the discussions of this group, labeled the School of Atheism by Raleigh’s detractors, were mocked by Shakespeare in his satirical depiction of it as the School of Night in *Love’s Labour Lost* (Bradbrook 22-24). Eventually Raleigh grew restless with this life, inactive by his standards. By dangling the prospect of wealth to equal Philip II’s before Elizabeth, he put together a venture for traveling up the Orinoco to seek Eldorado, a City of Gold the existence of which was doing the rounds on the rumor circuit. The 1595 expedition produced a few tantalizing suggestions of gold deposits, but was confounded by the unexpected power of the river that, in flood tide, could appear over the tops of mountain and wash the terrified adventurers far back toward the sea (Irwin103). Elizabeth and other investors were disgusted by the outcome; Raleigh on the other hand, was excited by the prospect of colonization in a region easily defended geographically, amazingly fertile, unpopulated by Christians and beautiful to behold. His bestselling *Discovery of Guiana* was designed to showcase this enthusiasm as much as it was to explain the project’s financial failure.

In these years when Raleigh wasn’t able to defend his old position at court, Essex had become the unchallenged favorite. Perhaps Elizabeth’s reasons for linking herself to a man 25 years her junior were simply personal and emotional. As Leicester’s step-son,
he may have represented a connection with the past or even a surrogate for the child they never had together ((Weir 385). Or, it may have seemed to the queen that he could fill a crack beginning to yawn in the façade of her cult. A goddess forever young and beautiful should never lose the ability to attract equally favored young devotees. Raleigh, 38 when the decade began, was middle-aged by the standards of the time and no longer provided the proof of her undiminished attraction for a rising generation.

Unfortunately, there is no way to keep time from mocking the presumption of a mortal claiming the timeless youth and beauty of an immortal goddess. Elizabeth’s cultic image and her actual appearance were growing tattered together, but she was irrevocably committed to the role it dictated. Not only was it too well established, but there was no substitute available that offered the same secular equivalent to the claims established theologically in the divine right of kings. Essex, on the other hand, refused to play the part of acolyte in her drama and introduced a new round of role-playing. As his subsequent actions showed he proposed himself as the protagonist, the chivalrous knight dominating and defending national power in the person of the queen, who was relegated to a secondary role by reason of her gender. This was precisely the situation she had feared all her life. Inevitably, Essex decided to rewrite the last act, proposing to dispense with the aged and marginalized queen entirely. His failed rebellion, sputtering out in a few street skirmishes, led to his execution in 1601.

Considering that increasing years decreased the queen’s ability to project the goddess aura, literary history might have taken a much different turn if Essex’ talent for his chosen role had been any greater. He demanded to be allowed to fight with the Huguenots and Henri IV; the outcome of his contribution did nothing for his reputation as
a soldier or the Huguenot cause (Weir 409). He demanded to go to sea as leader, not a subordinate, in attacks on Cadiz and the Azores designed to discourage Philip’s preparations for another Armada, a tactic that had worked for Drake before the first one (Weir 421). The Cadiz action was successful because Raleigh had returned from the New World and was again taking an active role in prosecution of the war against Spain; he had substituted his own plan of action for that of Essex. However, Essex none the less got the credit and a healthy share in prizes while Raleigh, prominently exposing himself in his silver armor and answering every cannon blast from land with a trumpet blast from his ship (Trevalyan 276), went home with nothing to show for his participation but a leg wound which left him partially crippled for the rest of his life. The Azores affair did nothing for Essex’ reputation as a sea commander but gave him an opportunity to blame Raleigh for his own failure to accomplish what he set out to do. Finally, Essex demanded to lead troops into Ireland when the Earl of Tyrone fomented rebellion with Spanish backing. He failed to follow the queen’s orders for an aggressive attack, made a truce with Tyrone and returned to England without permission. His behavior, which included bursting unannounced into the queen’s bedchamber, led to the revocation of all the rewards he had accumulated as favorite and the confinement in his home that triggered the ill-advised attempt at rebellion (Weir 439-469). Unfortunately, Essex did have one talent, for winning personal approval, a talent enhanced by the wholesale creation of knights at both Cadiz and in Ireland in direction contradiction of Elizabeth’s policy for managing the growth of the upper classes.

Although the dating is a matter of debate, the consensus is that the lengthy poem in which Raleigh memorializes his part in the drama was probably produced or at least
begun while he was in the Tower. Called Ocean to Cynthia and running more than 500 lines, it purports to be the last book of twenty-one, plus the beginning of a twenty-second book, a fragment just over 20 lines. It is a singular contribution to court literature, or perhaps more accurately a departure from the expectations for it in its implied criticism of the queen. The conventional mythological references are in place, but are surprising few in number aside from the title. Perhaps he had used them all up in his first lament to Cecil after his incarceration—in it he describes Elizabeth as riding like Alexander, hunting like Diana, walking like Venus; cult hyperbole at its most unattractive (Greenblatt 24). The situation of the poem is familiar enough. A lover is deserted by the goddess to whom he could never really aspire and is suffering in consequence. The world has been left bleak and lifeless as a result of the withdrawal, the usual pastoral setting for a cult celebration of the goddess turned to desolation. However the suffering is too real, and the reason for it is outside the court canon as well. It isn’t love that has failed, but the expectations of a man who recognized his role and played it out, with the tacit acceptance of the pretence required, only to have it eliminated from the play.

The point of being a faithful follower in a cult is to access the power of the deity in return for devotion; here the implied bargain has been broken. A feeling of outrage and anger simmers beneath the despair at abandonment. “Twelve years entire I wasted in this war/But I in them and they now wasted are” (Brooks-Davis 153). His emotions move “from woe to wrath” (152). As for the goddess, there are intimations that the perfection of her façade is slipping—“So doth it please her virtue to deface” (155) is the reaction to her lack of compassion. There is even the hint that immortal beauty may not be so immortal after all, but one that “can easily deceive /The arrest of years/ and creeping age
outclimb” (155). But, at another time when he was indulging in plain speaking rather than poetic license, Raleigh admitted that Elizabeth was “a lady whom time hath surprised” (Irwin 149). Furthermore, the icon of interest here resembles Britannia more than Cynthia. What the poet offered as proof of his participation in the cult was patriotic rather than personal—“To seek new worlds for gold, for praise, for glory” (152). What the poet doesn’t offer is a convincing declaration of unqualified love, which is an emotion he reserved for his wife. As he wrote to her later when he was expecting die, he was the one who “chose you and loved you in his happiest times (Trevelyan 396).” Bess obviously returned his feelings since she kept his embalmed head with her in a bag until her death (Trevelyan 552).

The poet uses strong monosyllables, variations in line length and simple verse forms—“She is lost, she is gone/She is found, she is ever fair.” These are the tools of one who chose to write in the austere style of Seneca when he was not producing standard cultic fare, like that of a miscellany favorite “Praised be Diana’s fair and harmless light.” Elizabeth herself had a taste for Seneca, whose work she translated (Zeigler 25) and liked to read in quiet morning hours to sooth her ruffled temper (Johnson 198).

As for the claims that these are fragments of a true epic, the content doesn’t support them. Here may be epic despair but not epic figures involved in epic deeds. How a single emotional state, no matter how strong, could maintain itself as the justification for a longer work is hard to imagine. The same disordered state can be seen in Raleigh’s behavior after he was put under arrest by the queen. At the sight of Elizabeth passing in a barge, he tried to fight his way past his jailors and then, apparently, made theatrical gestures that were interpreted as suicidal.
The history of the written document is suggestive in itself. The fragments were not found until the 1870s in Cecil’s Hatfield House. It is possible they may have been part of a monumental work, such as those of Sidney and Spenser—perhaps Raleigh was really trying to match their accomplishment. Spenser seems to believe that some sort of large work about the difficult relationships of Ocean and Cynthia was already underway during the Irish sojourn of 1589. Or, perhaps, Raleigh the practiced deceiver merely trying to create the impression that he had authored an epic to achieve the reputation without the effort. Epic writing was certainly a fashion that was coming into its own. Even Harington, a clever writer with a talent for satiric epigrams and risqué translation, would write a comic epic about the need for water closets, a subject about which he was actually quite serious (Rowse Eminent Victorians 116). But length in poetry was never a feature Raleigh had aspired to before or one that suited his economical style. There is also the question—did Raleigh really go to the trouble of writing to relieve his overwrought feelings and deliberately suppress the result, committing it to Cecil’s eyes only, or did he trust Cecil to bring it and his emotional plight to the queen’s attention? Cecil, valued by Raleigh as a friend, was much the better disciple of Machiavelli and would betray Raleigh many times over and with devastating results in the next reign. He was quite capable of seeing that a poem meant for the queen’s attention never received it. And if it had indeed been a long work produced over a period of time, why had none of it surfaced in the usual functioning of court circulation? The single monograph copy from Hatfield was the only one ever found.

This copy, incidentally, reveals another difference between Raleigh and Sidney. It is written in his most careful calligraphy, as if in its final form (Greenblatt 79). But there
are still additions, changes and emendations indicating that Raleigh, despite his reputation for proper aristocratic indifference, lacked Sidney’s effortless flow. He also lacked the other poet’s regard for rules and regulations that could come between him and the most forceful expressions of his feelings. His line and stanza lengths wander at will; his metaphors proceed from streams that become as standing puddles to Ocean’s tempestuous waves to a newly harvested field in seven lines (Brooks-Davies 269-276).

Raleigh returned to a trusted place in Elizabeth’s regard, if not to the favored position he had when the cult was functioning at its best. He was named governor of the channel island of Jersey, the defenses of which he reorganized efficiently, and represented yet another constituency in Parliament. Unlike Essex, his honors and monopolies had never been cancelled and he was not in financial distress while Elizabeth lived. This was a fair reward for a man who had given her loyalty if not love. He had not, like Leicester, offered to deliver the whole country to Philip as converts to Catholicism in return for the king’s support of his ambitions to marry the queen (Erickson 198), and he also had not, like Leicester, accepted the right to rule independently in the Netherlands. Nor had he turned his back on her, started to pull his sword in anger or question her judgment openly as Essex had before he committed the final act of treason (Weir 434). Furthermore, she had benefitted financially from his business ventures just as he benefitted from her largesse; he had always been as much investment as an indulgence. But the inspiration and inclination for court poetry of the cult pattern was missing after his return to court. His later poems, with contemptus mundi and spiritual themes (The Lie, The Pilgrimmage) were fewer in number but also among the most popular in the miscellanies as recorded by Marotti. Only once did he revise an older courtly work in the next reign to seek the
approval of Queen Ann (Brooks-Davies 174-175), and an old verse with two new lines, found in his Bible after his execution, served to show that he had left the court far behind as he began his last voyage.

Epitaph by Sir Walter Raleigh

Even such is time, that takes in trust
Our youth, our joys, and all we have
And pays us but with age and dust,
Who in the dark and silent grave
When we have wandered all our ways
Shuts up the story of our days.
And from which earth, and grave, and dust
The Lord will raise me up I trust (Brooks-Davies 177).
CHAPTER FIVE

*Edmund Spenser—Prince of Poets*

Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queen* is ranked among the greatest achievements belonging to the English literary renaissance—and is certainly the best known example of works promoting the cult of Elizabeth—and it earned for him the title Prince of Poets. This is the epitaph carved on his memorial in Westminster Abbey (Freeman 5), where he was buried at the expense of the Earl of Essex (Church 178). Gathered at his funeral in 1599 were other poets who showed their recognition of his supremacy by throwing poetic tributes and the pens with which they had been written into the grave (Jones 36). This appreciation of literary talent not evidenced by a Model of Chivalry or Renaissance Man indicated that Spenser’s contribution to the golden age of literature was more than its embodiment in a single work or even a body of works. He had elevated writing to professional status in its own right, worthy of consideration as a legitimate and self-sufficient goal for a talented man. Furthermore, he had conferred on it a mainstream that had been lacking when writers trying to earn a living with words were usually playwrights or balladeers or producers of the broadsides, often crude and scurrilous, that flooded the streets of London. The profession was still a long way from financial independence, but the queen had awarded Spenser a yearly stipend of fifty pounds after Spenser presented portions of *The Faerie Queen* to her at court (Dodge xx). While not munificent this sum represented steady pay for literary work instead of the widely varying honorariums patrons bestowed for writings submitted to them on speculation. In
Ireland, where Spenser lived, it was enough to maintain as good a home as a Londoner could for 200 pounds (Hadfield 31).

Still, Spenser’s newfound popularity was not enough to lift him from the personal anonymity that was the usual condition outside the court. There was no reason to be curious about the background of a writer lacking the glamour generated by nobility and attached to the court only in a marginal position. Tantalizing and elusive clues to his early background have been found by determined researchers in official and school records, but most are not conclusive contributions to a biographical timeline and they provide no clues to personality or character. What can’t be derived from historical fact must be deduced from his own writings and the commentary they elicited.

Records for 1552 show that an Edmund Spenser was born in East Smithfield, London, the son of a journeyman cloth maker named John who was a member of the Merchant Taylor’s guild. The name is right, the year is suggested by a faint chronological clue lurking in one of his sonnets from the Amoretti sequence describing the courtship of the woman he married. More certain is the information that the poet attended Merchant Taylor’s School, a Calvinist institution founded in 1560 to serve the needs of working classes, and then went in 1565 as a student supported by a work grant to Pembroke College, Cambridge. He received a BA in 1571, ranking eleventh in a class of 120, and an MA in 1573, although he was now fourth from the last in a class of 70. There he studied with Gabriel Harvey, who was in the process of becoming a fixture at Cambridge known for pedantry, vanity, and scurrilous quarrels with other literary figures. The queen herself had inadvertently given a boost to his extensive ego. Harvey made a welcoming address for Elizabeth at a stop on the pilgrimage of 1578, during which she
complimented him on is Italianate good looks; he cultivated what he considered an Italian air for the rest of his life. Spenser, however, did not try to follow in Harvey’s footsteps as an academic. He took employment first with a bishop and then in some capacity with Leicester, although his close ties with Harvey continued. It may have been through Harvey, who had some nebulous early association with Leicester, that Spenser came to the earl’s notice (Hadfield 18-19).

The biggest drawback resulting from the friendship of the two Cambridge men was Harvey’s insistence on recasting English poetry in classical meters for which he later determined it had no affinity. His “refinements” were eventually abandoned as unworkable affectations, but not before they had for a time infected the interests of Sidney’s Areopagus members, with whom Spenser would have become acquainted while living at Leicester House. (Dodge xiv). The result of the association was the dedication of Shepheardes Calendar to Sidney and the formation of the nexus among poets and patrons that would tie together the literature centered on Elizabeth’s cult image.

Like the Arcadia, sections of Spenser’s eclogues can be read as a protest against the French marriage. January tells of the rejection of Colin Clout, the author’s shepherd persona, by Rosalind. With Rosalind read as Elizabeth and Colin as her subjects this story becomes a lament for the queen’s willingness to abandon her duties in a marriage with Anjou. Aprill features a panygeric of the queen, a subject that Spenser never abandons and usually takes to even more extravagant heights than he can allow in the simplicity of a supposedly bucolic poem. The poem is considered the first classical panygeric ode in English (Bayley 42). Elizabeth is celebrated as “the Mayden Queen”, the daughter of Syrinx and Pan, and is allowed to be worthy of joining the graces. These
identifications assign her the position of a nymph, whose beauty abashes the major goddesses such as Cynthia (Diana), but she is not yet given the status of goddess herself. The poem harps on virginity and is more easily read than *January* as an anti-marriage argument.

The *Calendar* was the first step toward Spenser’s mature work in *The Faerie Queen*, and established the themes to which he adhered throughout his career. With Sidney, he took on the patriotic mission of proving that English was capable of producing world class literature, and he contributed new meters, new forms and new vocabulary to the project. His work was more overtly “British” than Sidney’s, and he harkened back to the native Chaucer for his inspiration as well as to the classical and continental sources his excellent education had provided. The result was the combining of archaic words, obsolete or almost obsolete words, and made up words that had an historical flavor with rustic diction and rustic characters at one extreme, and the most complex upper class refinements at the other. Colin’s poetry is praised for its excellence while in Sidney’s work pseudo shepherds, aristocratic knights errant in thin pastoral disguise, are always able to best the real thing in poetic contests. Sidney takes exception in *the Defense of Poesie* to what he considers Spenser’s vulgarizing linguistic tendency, but it contributes to the peculiarly English character that will be one reason Spenser emerges as the Prince of the writer’s fellowhood. In addition, the work advertises itself as the writer’s first step in the progression through successive levels to the ultimate achievement of epic writing.

The *Calendar* allies itself not only in its technical preoccupations but in those of its subject matter to the principles enunciated by the Areopagus on the serious purposes of literature as teacher and reformer, and the underlying religious conviction are the ones
shared by Spenser and the Leicester faction. These are usually described as more radical than those of the Church of England and less extreme than the convictions of the puritans (Dodge 2). (It is worth noting that the Calendar was printed by Hugh Singleton, the militant Protestant who had published the work that caused its writer to lose his hand.) Integral to reading of the text are extensive glosses, provided by an E.K, who many have debated is Spenser himself, and who awards the author the title of “the new poet” (Hart 22).

Whether or not Spenser was E.K., diffidence wasn’t one of his notable characteristics. He and Harvey published at this time a series of their letters which included praise for each other’s work. It is obvious from the correspondence that Spenser has already made a commitment to writing as a vocation, despite the limited opportunities it provided. Harvey became his sounding post about various projects, including the Faerie Queen and nine comedies, which would at least have placed him in one field where writing and profit were being combined. Harvey, however, was ignored when he opted for concentration on the plays—he was less than enthusiastic about the epic and Spenser’s claimed ability to “overwrite” the Italian Ariosto, creator of Orlando Furioso. Spenser also shared some verses he boasts were “perfect” examples of the type of artificial form Harvey espoused (Hadfield 20).

While Spenser was convinced of his own talent and its worth, he still had the problem of a living to consider, and the October eclogue of the Calendar criticized the appreciation or lack of it that English patrons showed for poetry. He insisted, in fact, that patrons are as in need of poets as poets are of them and in a dedication of The Faerie Queen to Elizabeth, he stressed that he had consecrated his labors to live with the eternity
of her fame (Dodge 131). A Cambridge editor of his works, R. E. Neill Dodge, considered that the attack in the Calendar also underscored contempt and arrogance that he would like to believe was merely youthful, holding as it did a “complaint of universal vulgarity, a cry that Ignorance and Barbarism have quite laid waste the fair realm of the Muses.” While Gascoigne had outlined the prevailing paradigm, where poetry is written to attract a patron for the sake of finding a job, Spenser wanted poetry to attract a patron to provide a job that allowed the leisure for the production of more poetry.

Harvey wrote to Spenser about the success of the Calendar, perhaps a little enviously, that the talented Master Colin Clout may be the one who break out of the restrictions on advancement imposed by the current state of court dominated literature, “purchasing great lands and lordships” with the profit the work has and will afford him (Church 50). Spenser was more realistic about the practical need for a poet to seek patronage, and bragged to Harvey that he was “in use of some familiarity” with Sidney and Dyer, and “they have drawn me into their faction” (Dodge xiii). However, the reality may have fallen somewhat short of the intimacy he wished for or pretended to. Sidney described his relationship with the aristocrats Dyer and Greville in a short poem ending “Join hearts and hands, so let it be;/Make but one mind in bodies three” (Addleshaw 250). There was no place in the inner circle for men who don’t really meet the courtly requirements his view of literature prescribed. Finally, the best opportunity the Leicester-Sidney connection could provide in 1580 was the secretaryship to Lord Grey, the new Lord Deputy for Ireland.

Ireland meant exile from London, the court and the benefits that Spenser hoped to come from the outstanding way with words he could marshal to promote the emerging
Cult of Elizabeth. When Lord Grey’s methods for dealing with the conspiracy—both exceptionally repressive and exceptionally unsuccessful—led to his recall within two years, Spenser stayed behind in middle management administrative positions for the next ten years. Ironically, the masterwork from this formative period of English literature would not be written in England itself. Although Spenser had achieved some success as a writer, the Calendar had been published anonymously, perhaps in deference to Sidney’s prejudices about the rules for literary production and perhaps in fear that the Calendar’s satires on the ecclesiastical situation would attract punishment.

Ireland was a land of constant violence and pervasive poverty, even to the point of frequent famine, and Sydney’s introduction to it may have been the Smerwick massacre in company with Grey and Raleigh. But it was also a land of dreaming landscapes clothed in beauty. For ten years he wrote without recognition or the attempt to seek it—and wrote and wrote—finishing a variety of poetic works as well as the first fourth of the epic Faerie Queen. This was a monumental work that combined pastoral elements with medieval allegory and romance, all of it encompassed within a structure celebrating Elizabeth as the goddess of the title and in several allegorical personae. It also contributed a new pattern of rhyme arrangement to an established form in what became known as the Spenserian sonnet.

The author told a group of his fellow civil servants that he could not meet their request to tutor them in moral philosophy, as he was well qualified to do by education, because he was working on The Faerie Queen. This poem, he said, would cover everything he knew of the subject. He would set forth “all the moral vertues, assigning to every vertue a knight to be the patron and defender of the same, in whose actions and
feates of arms and chivalry the operations of that vertue whereof he is to be the protector, are to be expressed, and the vices and unruly appetites that oppose themselves against the same, to be beaten down and overcome ” (Church 84). The conversation was recorded sometime in 1582 and seems to be the only evidence remaining of both his intellectual and social occupations during the ten-year period (Dodge 130).

For more than four hundred years Spenser’s major work has elicited critical analysis in political, religious and philosophical terms directed at untangling its dense allegorical meaning, analysis that has produced no unified answers. However, critics do agree that the poet’s imagination was vast, enabling him to envision an unparalleled fantasy world, and that it was matched by an ability with language allowing him to recreate it in images of startling beauty or horror. Furthermore, the language was supple enough to suggest both an underlying reality and an over-arching abstract existence in a single allegorical figure. Duessa, for instance, could represent Mary, Queen of Scots, the Catholic Church itself and what Spenser considered the universal evils of its doctrines, and this could all be suggested in the context of Arthurian romance. Still, the relevance to historical reality was too obvious to be missed, and James VI of Scotland demanded that Elizabeth punish Spenser severely for the depiction of his mother (Spenser xii).

Spenser had been given 3,000 acres in the redistributions following the Desmond rebellion as well as a small castle called Kilcolman, described as cramped, dark, and situated in a dreary landscape (Church 79). It happened to be near the more than 40,000 acres Raleigh had been assigned and to which he retreated after unpleasant encounters with Essex. The two men were thrown in each other’s company at least once, perhaps many times, in the period of between three and nine months estimated by various
historians for Raleigh’s stay during 1589. At the end of it, the would-be professional poet and the out-of-favor favorite returned to London together to try their fortunes. Unlike the impersonal patronage of Sidney, with its social barriers that weren’t to be crossed, Raleigh offered access to the queen and the court and probably to the assortment of actors, adventurers and mad earls whom he included among his friends. When Spenser read some of his major work to the queen his success was immediate (Hadfield 30-31). The first three books of the poem, out of twelve proposed, were prepared for publication in 1590, at which time he explained its structure, as he had to his Irish friends but at greater length, in the form of an introductory letter addressed to Raleigh. It was only in this way that he could make clear the relation of the Faerie Queen and Elizabeth since the poem begins, as all epics must, in the middle of the action. An explanation of the Faerie Queen’s celebration at which Prince Arthur and his the knights are sent out to do their virtuous duty is to come at the end of work that Spenser leaves half unfinished at his death. (The use of the English hero Arthur is an indication of the poet’s particular dedication to his country’s literary heritage; it is also seen as an allusion to be associated with his patron Leicester, whom Arthur was taken to represent as the Faerie Queen represented Elizabeth.) Spenser was granted his stipend, and it would appear that his professional success brought with it a certain amount of social recognition as well; the three daughters of the powerful Lord Spencer of Althorpe acknowledged a family connection despite the difference in spelling of the name (Church 6).

The stipend is a clear indication that Elizabeth was well pleased with Spenser’s work because she was not a patron like others. Too many people sought her sponsorship, the most important the court could offer. Of the several hundred submissions she is estimated
to have received each year, many were refused, many more relegated to her library and forgotten (Zeigler 21-23). Money was not usually an option with a stingy queen who valued the use of her name as reward enough.

Christopher Hibbert questions whether Elizabeth was truly a begetter or only a patron in literature and in other aspects of English Renaissance development (264). However, the distinction between the terms seems artificial. The queen’s influence was too interwoven in the cultural matrix to be called into question, and in the field of literature she actually “begat” more through the Cult of Elizabeth than she awarded in specific acts of patronage. According to Harington, she also encouraged the writers at court, or his at least, which “I did so much cultivate on her command” (Rowse Eminent Elizabethans120).

As for Raleigh, “few books were dedicated to him and scarcely any poet took his poetry as a model.” His memorial is “rather in the enrichment his legendary personality gave to the imagination of the poets of his time” (Buxton 223). However, there was value in the poetic tributes he used to call attention to those he admired. His poem that compares Spenser and Petrarch to Petrarch’s disadvantage is in itself a favorite from the period. He also contributed the description “gentle Spenser” to his protégé’s reputation and the poet’s talent for enchanting and enchanted language has helped to promote the image. However, there were other, darker, sides discernible in Spenser’s character as well. Perhaps the stipend was less than he felt his talents should command and his longed-for association with the court a disappointment. In any case, by the end of 1590 he had made a second collection of works old and new to go to print, including social satires and criticisms of corruption among the elite. Among them was an animal fable
that caricatured Lord Burghley, in the form of a fox, with particular severity—the
councilor had done what he could to sabotage the payment of Spenser’s stipend because
he didn’t approved of wasting a substantial sum of money on a poem (Church 98). But
the full force of Spenser’s venom was reserved for the Irish, and his treatise the *Vueu of
the Present State of Ireland* recommended their extermination through starvation.

Spenser returned to Ireland without the permanent position he had hoped for, to
describe his London experience in the poem *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*—“a unique
use of pastoral for a combination of autobiographical, eulogistic and satirical purposes”
(Bayley 18). Colin marks another appearance of the shepherd’s persona Spenser had
created for himself in the *Calendar*, except that now the character is free to set forth an
identity rather than hide one. The shepherd is seen meeting with the friends he left to go
abroad, and receives high praise for his talents that have been so sorely missed (“how
great a losse had all the shepheards’ nation by thy lack!” (Bayley 687). Colin proceeds to
tell the group of his encounter with Raleigh that prompted the trip, an episode that
demonstrates Spenser’s ability to transform the everyday—a meeting between two
gentlemen sharing literary interests—into a pastoral fantasy world peopled with
(exceptionally talented) rustics.

‘One day,’ quoth he, “I sat (as was my trade)
Under the foot of Mole, that mountain hore,
Keeping my sheepe amongst the cooly shade
Of the greene aldersby the Mullaes shore.
There a straunge shepheard chaunst to find me out,
Whether allured with my pipes delight,
Whose pleasing sound yshrilled far about,
Or thither led by chaunce, I know not right;
Whom when I asked from what place he came,
And how he hight, himself he did yclepe
The Shepheard of the Ocean by name,
And said he came far from the main-sea deepe (Dodge 687).
The stranger is “full greatly pleased” with Colin’s music, and in turn he demonstrates that he is “Himselfe as skilfull in that art as any.” Spenser emphasizes the equality of his work and Raleigh’s—“Neither envying other, nor envied, So piped we, until we both were weary” (Dodge 688).

Then Spenser says Raleigh’s poetical contribution to the exchange was a “lamentable lay” complaining of the treatment he had received from his goddess (Bayley 689), a reference that has been taken as proof of an early date for the beginning of Ocean to Cynthia (Dodge 689).

The poem follows the two back to a court presented in pastoral terms where Colin exhibits his skills for Cynthia and is well received. Although Colin says “her greatness I cannot compare to ought” (Bayley 689), he proceeds to do so at length in lines 337 to 351, going on to lavish praise of other women (also possible patrons) and other poets before returning to more praise of Cynthia. (Perhaps it was his outlook as Dean of St. Paul’s that caused R. W. Church to say so censoriously of Spenser, whom he generally admired, that the poet had caught the trick of flattery “in a degree almost inconceivable to us’’(98). But after Spenser extends his message of praise in many guises, he launches into a scathing description of court corruption. In this work, written in response to the personal contact with the queen he had so ardently sought, Spenser revealed an ambivalence underlying too extravagant devotion to the Cult of Elizabeth and the flattery it required. The queen might be a goddess, but her realm has much to be despised. He extends the same attitude to the contrast of England, the orderly land where his hopes and ambitions are centered, and Ireland, the land of violence lurking in physical beauty, but the place where Colin finds himself at home. The poem ends with the story of his love
for a nymph who is obviously of local origin despite all the praise Colin has lavished on those across the sea.

Spenser returned to Ireland, married the woman he loved, prepared the next three books of the fairy queen and other works for publication and went back to London in 1595. His presence there attracted less attention than on his first visit since Raleigh by this time was out of favor and out of the country in South America, and Spenser again received no position at court to reward his efforts. However, he is promised the position of Sheriff of Cork, a post of some importance that might indicate patronage working in his favor (Guy 238). But the Tyrone rebellion led to the destruction of his home and he and his family were forced to flee. According to Jonson, the burning of Kilcolman also took the life of an infant child (and perhaps destroyed a manuscript of further books of The Faerie Queen) but Jonson was after all a dramatist and prosaic evidence of these claims hasn’t been forthcoming. Spenser made a final trip to London in late 1598 to deliver dispatches about the rebellion and was dead by January of 1599. Jonson also claimed that the poet had died penniless, perhaps even starving (which would have been a sad irony considering his recommendations for the Irish), but his funeral in Westminister Abbey, paid for by Essex, would suggest differently (Church 177-178)
For a time, Elizabeth had successfully controlled the projection of her image through recognizable public relations techniques, but the cultic depictions could not withstand reality as she grew older and they had already lost their ability to persuade by the time of her death. However, history would subject the queen and the men who had helped to shape the world’s perception of her to the harder evaluations of critics in the 400 years to come, a process more powerful than deliberate attempts at reputation building could ever be. And the efforts that had gone into manufacturing a cult had become an influence on literary development more important than the details of the cult itself.

At the end of Elizabeth’s reign, the time of transition to a discernibly modern world was also coming to an end. Both the country and its literature had acquired a firm foundation and a national character on which future accomplishments would be built. The study and practices of literature were now recognized as a separate and reputable branch of learning, fit for the attention of professionals as well as court amateurs. Material for such a study had been accumulated from the classical world and Renaissance Europe, including types of literature, subject matter, tone, technical considerations to do with meter, stanza arrangements and rhetorical choices. The vocabulary for expressing
all the new possibilities had expanded from the 4,000 words at Chaucer’s disposal to 24,000 (Brimacombe 184).

A conscious focus on the study of form and language had given intellectual depth and poetic beauty to the diverse works of Sidney, who strove to infuse a classical pastoral landscape with reality, and Spenser, who turned to medieval romance made more exotic by fantasy. But their preferences had also imposed on their works a degree of impersonality. Sidney compounded the effect by creating such characters as a princess who reacts to torture with a dispute on atheism instead of an expression of pain. Spenser’s fantasy kingdom was populated with allegorical figures who had attributes rather than personalities. The *Faerie Queen* marked the high point in Renaissance court literature celebrating Elizabeth, but by the same token closed out this avenue of development. Both pastoral and medieval romance would become less popular forms in the immediate future. The emotional distance and preoccupation with refinement of style was counterbalanced by Raleigh, whose poetry in what C. S. Lewis called “plain style” was less technically self conscious, more emotionally committed and introspective—“lofty, insolent and passionate” as his contemporary George Puttenham called it (Trevelyan 52). His work foreshadowed the next phase of English literary history in the work of Donne and the Metaphysical poets.

If no other proof were available, the King James Bible translation of 1611 would demonstrate that literature had attained a new confidence and maturity.

It is strange to consider that, of the three men who had figured so largely in a “golden age” of literary development, one was ashamed or felt he ought to be ashamed of having “slipped into this title of poet,” which for him was “an unelected vocation” (Berry 149).
The second was apparently more indifferent to the imaginative than the non-fictional portion of his work. The third ended up with some ambivalence about the court as a focus worthy of the attention he had always given it. Two had major works in progress that had grown out of bounds to the point that finishing them would have been almost impossible. The third may have written a work that was never intended to be finished.

Some element of disappointment was also inevitably involved in the relationship between each writer, his writing and the queen. Sidney’s contribution to the development of his country’s literary standing came only after he was thwarted in his personal ambition for a political career. His powers of persuasion also failed to win from Elizabeth the commitment of the country to achieving pan-European Protestant aims. Raleigh won her personal favor, partly as a result of his ability to enliven the court with his talent, only to lose it again. He even had Elizabeth’s backing for his visionary New World colonization schemes, but not to the extent that would have been necessary for their success. Spenser achieved recognition for his talent, but not as much as he thought he deserved, and his wish for an all-out effort English push to eliminate or at least completely subjugate the Irish was never within the bounds of possibility.

At least Sidney and Spenser had gone to their graves with imperishable reputations for their contributions to English Renaissance history and culture—their names if not always their works commanding unassailable esteem in the centuries to come. By contrast, before she died the queen had suffered some diminution of her standing as the result of the Essex affair and of social upheavals involving war, plague and poor harvests. However, her reputation was on the mend as the result of her last speech, her Golden Speech, to members of Parliament. They had actually grown ugly in their mutterings
when she appeared to ask for a subsidy needed to keep up the military pressure on Spain. The main source of contention was the monopolies granted to favorites and the economic burden they placed on buyers of products covered by them. Elizabeth finally gave in gracefully, cancelled the monopolies and told the delegates “this I count for the glory of my Crown, that I have reigned with your loves” (Parry 311). Elizabeth was again Good Queen Bess. Furthermore, it didn’t take much of James I’s rule for her people to wish her back again. As the Bishop of Gloucester remarked, “When we had had experience of the Scottish government, the Queen did seem to revive” (Weir 488).

Raleigh, on the other hand, had never possessed a good reputation to revive. Thanks to backroom dealings by Cecil, he sunk to a new low, accused of treasonous plotting with the Spanish aimed at keeping James off the throne. The unlikelihood of the charges against a man who had spent his time in the occupation Drake called “singeing the King of Spain’s beard” (Trevelyan 114) and his own eloquence began to change the way he was perceived. “Never has a man been so hated and so popular in such a short time” was one reaction to his trial appearance. Another observer swore that “whereas, when he saw Sir Walter Raleigh first, he was so led by the common hatred that he would have gone a hundred miles to see him hanged, but would, ere they had parted, have gone a thousand to save his life” (Greenblatt 1). Raleigh ended up in the Tower to stay, but his existence was not unbearable. He began his History of the World, conducted experiments with the mad earl, who was also imprisoned, and was able to have visitors. Among them was his wife, with whom he had a second son, and James’ heir Henry, who said that only his father “would keep such a bird in a cage” (Irwin 217). But Henry died and with him Raleigh’s hopes for the possibility of better things in the next reign. He became restless
for one last voyage and convinced James to let him return to Guiana. The trip cost him his older son, who was killed in a skirmish with the Spanish, and finally his life—James accused him on his return of crimes against the Spain but, instead of a new trial, condemned him to die on the old charges of conspiring with Spain. The farcical nature of the proceedings and an impressively noble performance on the scaffold completed the transformation of Raleigh’s reputation. In death he came to be recognized as “the last splendid embodiment” of the “greatest age England had ever known” (Irwin 307).

Belonging to the Elizabethan age rather than that of the succeeding Stuart dynasty was enough to make both Raleigh and the queen heroes to the Protestant extremists who beheaded James’ son Charles and established their short-lived commonwealth—even though she had disliked Puritans and he had been considered an atheist. The next strange twist in the perception of Raleigh came in the 18th century with his depiction as a devoted family man. He had pretended screaming, raving, floor-rolling madness for three days as he was being escorted from the coast to the tower after the failed Guiana expedition. He defended the ploy as one he had borrowed from the biblical King David so that he could have time to prepare a written justification of the expedition’s events (Irwin 296).

However, playwright George Sewell interpreted it in terms of family values so dear to the heart of the Georgian sovereigns. His play of 1719, The Tragedy of Sir Walter Raleigh, depicts Raleigh as a man who would use any means to try to deflect his fate in order to save his estate for his wife and remaining son (Lawson Peebles). Global exploration and the growth of the British empire in the 19th century enhanced his standing as explorer and empire builder, while men of varied accomplishment saw in him the virtues they themselves aspired to. For Henry David Thoreau, he embodied Roman standards of
patriotism (24). For churchman Charles Kingsley he was the flawed hero of whom nine hundred ninety nine men out of a thousand may say “I have done worse deeds than he: but I have never done as good” (3).

This enthusiasm dimmed somewhat after World War I, when militant patriotism came to equate with jingoism, exploration and colonialism with exploitation. Sidney and Spenser had also been subjected to a fading of their glory. Their reputations for innovation were still intact, their achievements still recognized, but recognition is not the same as appreciation. And literary figures themselves were the ones who were prepared to honor but not to read. The composite Arcadia had gone through fourteen editions during the 17th and early 18th centuries, by which time there was a swelling undercurrent of criticism (Sidney Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia 9). Arcadia editor Katherine Duncan-Jones begins the list of them with Horace Walpole, who called it in 1768 “a tedious, lamentable, pedantic, pastoral romance, which the patience of young virgin in love cannot now wade through.” In 1830 Hazlitt named it “one of the greatest monuments of the abuse of intellectual power on record,” and its author “one of the ablest men and worst writers of the age of Elizabeth.” There was more to come in the early part of the last century. For Virginia Woolf Arcadia was one of those “half forgotten and deserted places we pause over” before returning it to the bottom shelf. T. S. Eliot kept it brief—Arcadia was “a monument of dulnes” (Sidney x). Spenser fared somewhat better in the appreciation of his influence on the Romantic poets, but a source of influence and an absorbing read are not the same thing. By the middle of the century, however, the pendulum was swinging back again. Sidney scholar Joan Rees wrote in 1991 that “the scholarly and critical work devoted to the sixteenth century since the last war” has caused
Sidney’s writing to be “now estimated more highly than at any time since his own day” (15). Still, according to critic Maurice Evans, it has “become the centre of a thriving industry for academics, but very far removed from its original intent as a piece of literature” (Sidney Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia 10). One assumes that Spenser is also the recipient of such academic focus. Unfortunately, sometimes it feels as if the real focus is on critical theories as opposed to the writers. Undoubtedly, modern research techniques are going to open up new perspectives and ways of thought, but the road to publication about these so often seems to lead through negative territory.

Professor Steven May, for example, casts doubt on the Elizabethan aversion to print publication. However, he makes his claim without distinguishing between the imaginative works produced for the court and non-fiction meant for instructive purposes and directed to the population at large. He also fails to distinguish between Elizabethan and Stuart writing despite the developments differentiating the two. One of these is the attitude toward print itself. The publication of both Spenser and Sidney in the early 1590s created an atmosphere of literary abundance marking the golden age and encouraged others to follow suit. But print was, at the same time, directing literature into new channels. The buyer of the book became, in effect, its patron, and support for the writer was achieved through a direct financial transaction. The preoccupation with pleasing the court would gradually change into a preoccupation with those ideas of interest to a much wider reading public. And it was a time when even the king ventured into writing for publication, a factor that was bound to help eradicate a stigma.

Relegating literature even further to the category of source material rather than primary reading material is the trend to analyze it in terms of critical theory. Feminism,
Freudianism, new historicity, structuralism, deconstructionism—these constructs can become more important than the works that are used to illustrate them. Sometimes, however, negativity seems to be in vogue simply for its own sake, as if everything positive that could be said has been said, and a new voice feels the need to say “no” to be heard.

This general critical trend to disavow and contradict received wisdom is observable in modern historical re-evaluations as well, and *Dissing Elizabeth* is a book title that sells. However, a fashion for critical carping in the 21st century mirrors in reverse the fashion for words that flattered, wrapping the queen in the aura of a goddess in her own time. It was an image that, for a mortal, could not withstand the onslaught of time. Yet when the aura faded, the woman revealed had the real accomplishments that elevated her to the level of history’s greats, a position she has held for more than 400 years. In 2002, a BBC poll showed that she was considered by the British people to be not simply a “great”, but the best known and most admired of their monarchs (Doran), proving that the secure basis of her reputation—as she would have wished—rests, not on her talent for self promotion, but on the enduring admiration of her people.
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