



**Virtue and Virtuality:  
Gender in the Self-Representations of Queen Elizabeth I**

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What I am presenting here are selections from a longer study on the public self-representations of Elizabeth Tudor, Queen Elizabeth I of England. These self-representations occur mostly in speeches she delivered to her (of course, all male) Parliaments across forty-three years of her forty-five-year reign from 1558 to 1603. Scholars have done quite a lot of work on how court poets and dramatists and pamphlet writers and preachers represented the Queen, even work on malicious gossip about her, but proportionately little on how she represented herself.<sup>1</sup> In another medium, her portraits, scholars typically assume that she dictated how she was presented.<sup>2</sup> This could be true, but curiously there is no direct evidence, no contemporary testimony, that confirms this assumption.

So I, as a scholar of English Renaissance and Reformation literature, am doing my part to rectify the imbalance in the scholarship by attending to the Queen's self-representations with a focus on the factor of gender.<sup>3</sup> Quite specifically, I hope to interest you in one dimension of these self-representations where Elizabeth shows uncharacteristic anxiety about her feminine gender. For the most part, she has no anxiety in representing herself as being above and beyond the social and biological mandates that her age attached to womanhood--and we will trace the broad, steady outlines of her self-claimed exceptionalism. But Elizabeth betrays gender anxiety at intermittent points in her reign when the issue is the attribute of courage--whether a woman can possess courage and what it would mean for her to do so. However, an even more basic issue for Elizabeth was her feminine gender as sovereign of England, and this will be the starting point for our considerations here.

### **Elizabeth's "virtual gender"**

In England, masculinity was a nearly unbroken norm for monarchy; until the mid-sixteenth century there had been only the brief, precarious reign of Queen Matilda during a struggle over the crown in the twelfth century.<sup>4</sup> It was intrinsically problematic for Elizabeth that she was a female sovereign.

However, there was also an available justification for a woman's rule within the prevailing belief in so-called divine-right monarchy (God ordains specific persons to rule as his earthly representatives) and the equally prevailing belief in general and particular providence (God directs the courses of nations and of individuals' lives). In sixteenth-century political thought, a woman's rule was justified by appeals to providence and divine right.<sup>5</sup> Another notion that undergirds Elizabeth's self-understanding and self-representation is that of the sovereign's two bodies.<sup>6</sup> The sovereign, like everybody else, has a body natural, marked for gender and for eventual mortality. The sovereign also has a body politic, which is the institution of monarchy and its attendant powers vested in the natural bodies of successive occupants of the English throne. Elizabeth's reign had been immediately preceded by her sister Mary's. Parliament had passed an Act Concerning Regal Power in 1554 to deal with the anomaly of a woman on the English throne. Parliament declared that although "the most ancient statutes of this realm being made by Kings then reigning . . . only attribute and refer all prerogative . . . unto the name of King," nevertheless

the law of this realm is and ever hath been and ought to be understood, that the kingly or regal office of the realm, and all dignities, prerogative royal, power, preeminences, privileges, authorities, and jurisdictions thereunto annexed, united, or belonging, being invested either in male or female, are and be and ought to be as fully, wholly, absolutely, and entirely deemed, judged, accepted, invested, and taken in the one as in the other; so that what and whensoever statute or law doth limit and appoint that the King of this realm may or shall have, execute, and do anything as King, . . . The same the Queen (being supreme Governess, possessor, and inheritor to the imperial Crown of this realm as our said Sovereign Lady the Queen most justly

presently is) may by the same authority and power likewise have, exercise, execute, . . . and do, to all intents, constructions, and purposes, without doubt, ambiguity, scruple, or question.<sup>7</sup>

This Act identically specifies the rights of a legitimate monarch of either sex to authority and power. But its conception of gender is not spelled out, as the historian Carole Levin has noted: "It may mean that politically [a queen] is a man or that she is a woman who can take on male rights. She may be both woman and man in one, both king and queen together, a male body politic in concept while a female body natural in practice."<sup>8</sup> The gender implications are uncertain. A similar point holds for the doctrines of divine right and providentialism that put a queen, by God's will, on the throne. What we get is a definite ascription of sovereignty paired with indefiniteness, unspecificity, regarding the enactment of a female monarch's gender. I call this rather odd thought construct the "virtual gender" of Elizabeth I. "Virtual" here signifies that she has full potentiality to perform feminine roles as a wife and mother but also that it is valid for her, as sovereign, to leave these feminine roles unactualized, concentrating instead on the office, qualities, and roles of a monarch.

I have found "virtual gender" to be a primary component of the rhetoric of Elizabeth's public self-representations. In these speeches her self-representations are repeatedly cast in the form of a stock-taking, a self-accounting.<sup>9</sup> The self-accounting is structured as a set series of questions, clearly implied if not always explicitly posed. Typically the questions run in this fashion: Who was I before I came to rule? How have I come to rule England? What qualities do I need to rule England well? When (or if) I manifest these qualities, what kind of ruler am I? What is my relation to my subjects, and theirs to me?

### **Virgin Queenship in the making**

Elizabeth develops one major line of answers from her earliest Parliamentary speeches onward. This is to argue that, as God put her on the throne, so he will see to the necessities and manner of her rule. She explicitly turns back suggestions that she is obliged to marry and bear an heir to the throne or to

designate a list of successors to her throne--as her Parliaments of 1559, 1563, and 1566 so strongly and repeatedly urged her to do. In her view, her duty was to devote herself entirely to wise, just, moderate "care" (a favorite word of Elizabeth's) for the well-being of her people. Her gender, she holds, is irrelevant to the question of her successful, peaceful rule. Again and again she casts herself and her people in a mutual relationship--she bears them all her "goodwill" (increasingly called her "love," her "care") and they bear her their "service" (increasingly also called their "love," their "care"). This benevolent, affective bond is what Elizabeth seeks to establish as the norm of who she is as sovereign of England, and how she and her subjects relate to each other. This is her grand refrain.

In the seven speeches of which portions or full accounts survive from 1558 to 1566, Elizabeth condescends just once to address the issue of her alleged responsibilities as a female. She does so because pressure on her to marry and bear children had reached a high point in the 1563 Parliament when the Speaker of the House of Commons exhorted her on behalf of all the members to show "most gracious and motherly care" for the realm. He, of course, means "motherly" in a literal sense; this is clear from the context. Elizabeth, however, responds by turning motherhood into a powerful metaphor for her political competence: "I assure you all that though after my death you may have many stepdames, yet you shall never have any a more mother, than I mean to be unto you all."<sup>10</sup>

If Elizabeth shunts aside the social and biological imperatives that Parliament and her Privy Council aim to impose on her, what is the name for the kind of ruler she is? It is easy to see what her own preferences in nomenclature are. She most often styles herself "prince" and her rule or throne "princely" in what, at this period, sustains its gender-neutral sense: the derivation of "prince" from Latin *princeps*, a noun of so-called "common"--or indifferently masculine or feminine--gender.<sup>11</sup> However, her turbulent experiences of the Parliaments of 1559 to 1566--when she was between twenty-five and thirty-four years of age--did not allow her to calmly merge her actual gender and actual status in the figure of virgin queenship. Anger and insecurity flare in these speeches, precisely at points where Elizabeth finds the men of Parliament preempting her actual status, her regal authority, by insisting on the

imperatives, as they conceive them, of her actual gender for her. To the extent that these men try to compel her to wifehood and motherhood, they threaten her sovereignty.

In a fragmentary draft of the opening of her speech of November 5, 1566, in her own handwriting, Elizabeth scolds the Parliamentary delegation who have come "nigh a traitorous trick" in pressing her marriage like "bridleless colts" who "do not know their rider's hand, whom bit of kingly rein did never snaffle yet," punning angrily on "rein" and "reign."<sup>12</sup> In her fuller speech of the same day, she exclaims, "A strange thing that the foot should direct the head in so weighty a cause, which cause hath been so diligently weighed by us, for that it toucheth us far more than them." She pursues her sense of insult reaching nearly to injury: "Was I not born in the realm? Were my parents born in any foreign country? Is there any cause I should alienate myself from being careful over this country? Is not my kingdom here?" But the deepest sense of infringement and insubordination registered in this speech comes, shockingly, as Elizabeth's imagining of her own deposition. In projecting this unspeakable outcome, she reverses her otherwise consistent practice in other speeches of this period by stressing the gender specificity of her self-references: "Though I be a woman, yet I have as good a courage answerable to my place as ever my father [King Henry VIII] had. I am your anointed queen. I will never be by violence constrained to do anything. I thank God I am indeed endowed with such qualities, that if I were turned out of the realm in my petticoat, I were able to live in any place of Christendom."<sup>13</sup>

At this notable point, the speech of November 5, 1566 reveals the incompleteness and the vulnerability of Elizabeth's public project to recede into virtual gender by rendering actual gender irrelevant to her successful exercise of her prerogative. Under what is as yet only rhetorical compulsion from her subjects, she is brought to acknowledge that love is not the only virtue of the heart that a ruler must manifest; courage is also necessary. Her imagined deposition scene singles out courage as the virtue needed when confronting the limits or the forcible termination of one's sovereign authority. Courage emerges as secular, political, and strategic; it is not a theological source of empowerment. It also uniquely elicits gender anxiety from Elizabeth the queen.

She is sure that the legitimacy of her rule consists with her gender: "I am your anointed queen." She is also sure that the courage to assert her authority can consist with her feminine gender: "Though I be a woman, yet I have as good a courage answerable to my place as ever my father had." The gender anxiety attaches to courage that might have to go beyond merely asserting her authority. If Elizabeth fully possesses courage answerable to her place, then why the specter of being turned out of the realm in her petticoat, able to live in any place of Christendom? This seems to be a scenario of usurpation and exile, one spelling her political and military defeat or incapacity. So in an immediate assertion of capacity, she says: "I am indeed endued with such qualities"--a seeming reference to her mastery of several European vernaculars as well as Latin and Greek. But her father had seen to her acquisition of languages as potential accoutrements of statecraft, not of exile.<sup>14</sup>

So questions multiply in and around this passage. Could courage be a feminine trait of Elizabeth's as a monarch, or is it a virile concomitant of the "violence" that she has forsworn as an aspect of her policy--and perhaps could not practice effectually anyway? Under the most perilous circumstances, can a queen exercise sovereignty as successfully as a king? At this juncture the Virgin Queen intimates but does not address these questions. Not until the Armada crisis two decades later will she surmount the gender anxieties which she attaches to the question of maintaining her sovereign authority under the imminent threat of physical violence to her person and office.

In her 1576 and 1585 speeches to Parliament, Elizabeth's lengthening record of dedicated rule and her sense of God's special guidance and protection yield representations of a lofty, gender-neutral identity for herself in her relations with other human beings. Only in relation to God will she actualize her feminine gender, but then she does so for no literal, earthly purpose, rather, to assume a role that invests her virginity with sacredness.<sup>15</sup> Like the Blessed Virgin Mary and a select few other holy women of Scripture, she styles herself God's "handmaid." These are the words of her March 15, 1576 speech at the closing of Parliament:

As for those rare and special benefits which many years have followed and accompanied my happy reign, I attribute them to God alone, the Prince of rule, and count myself no better than His handmaid. . . . If I were a milkmaid with a pail on mine arm, whereby my private person might be little set by, I would not forsake my single state to match myself with the greatest monarch. . . . All these means of leagues, alliances and foreign strength I quite forsook, and gave myself to seek for truth without respect, reposing my assured stay in God's most mighty grace with full assurance. Thus I began, thus did I proceed, and thus I hope to end. These seventeen years and more, God hath both prospered and protected you with good success under my direction. And I nothing doubt but the same maintaining hand will guide you still and bring you to the ripeness of perfection. . . . for your behoof there is no way so difficult that may touch my private [self], which I could not well content myself to take. And in this case as willingly to spoil myself quite of myself, as if I should put off my upper garment when it wearies me, if the present state might not thereby be encumbered.<sup>16</sup>

Here the Queen not only claims virginity but reaffirms her unconditional preference for it, stating in effect that her life would be no Cinderella story even if she were Cinderella. She evokes a counterfactual image of a private female self, one sufficiently lowly to make life choices free of constraint because they are not seen to matter one way or the other:--"a milkmaid with a pail on mine arm, whereby my private person might be little set by." Even if she were the milkmaid that she is not, Elizabeth would remain the Lord's handmaid.<sup>17</sup> But she has not finished her relational self-accounting. This Lord's handmaid is equally and utterly the servant of England's well-being. In her words, "For your behoof there is no way so difficult that may touch my private, which I could not well content myself to take. And in this case as willingly to spoil myself quite of myself, as if I should put off my upper garment when it wearies me, if the present state might not thereby be encumbered."<sup>18</sup> For the good of England, Elizabeth merges into the public weal any personal self she might have, and does so as matter-of-factly as she would take off one of her heavily brocaded and jeweled gowns of state. She in effect works an

innovation in Tudor political theory, producing the Queen's one body, the body politic, which has subsumed all else of her.<sup>19</sup>

This lofty, above-the-fray perspective on her self-representation alters sharply, however, in the two 1586 speeches replying to the Parliamentary petition urging the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, who had been found guilty of capital offenses against Elizabeth's life and crown. (The ever more deadly animosity between the two queens had an eighteen-year prior history. In 1568, after being forcibly ejected from her realm, Mary had sought political asylum in England. Elizabeth's initially well-disposed reception turned into restrictive confinement as Mary plotted with English and Continental Catholics in an unending series of intrigues to put her on the throne of England.) The first of these speeches, which survives in a version with corrections in Elizabeth's handwriting, develops a striking equivalence between herself and Mary, Queen of Scots. Elizabeth has had to confront the fact "that one not different in sex, of like estate and my near kin, should be fallen into so great a crime. . . . My life hath been full dangerously sought, and death contrived." Elizabeth has tried by secret communication to get Mary to confess her wrongs and repent, just as if "we were but as two milkmaids with pails upon our arms, or that there were no more dependency upon us, but mine own life were only in danger, and not the whole estate of your religion and well doings." But Mary as queen has admitted to no more of a milkmaid's private identity than Elizabeth did in 1576 or will do here. That hypothetical private construction proves a failure and an illusion. Both Mary and Elizabeth are defined by their sovereign status, their political and religious opposition, and their mutually exclusionary predicaments: it is the one life or the other. In having to confront the present as, in effect, an ultimatum to her, Elizabeth in her first Parliamentary speech of 1586 develops her second scenario of violent death which, like that of her expulsion from her kingdom in her 1566 speech, unfolds in highly gender-specific terms:

Former remembrances, present feeling, and future expectation of evils, I say, have made me think an evil is much the better the less while it endureth, and . . . taught me to bear with a better mind these treasons than is common to my sex--yea, with a better heart, perhaps, than is in

some men. . . . I thus conceived: that had their purposes taken effect, I should not have found the blow before I had felt it, nor though my peril should have been great, my pain should have been but small and short. Wherein as I would be loath to die so bloody a death, so doubt I not but God would have given me grace to be prepared for such a chance.<sup>20</sup>

### **Elizabeth and the cardinal political virtues**

The judicial imperative of executing Mary, Queen of Scots is the first of two crises that compel Elizabeth to articulate, with gender-specific attributes, her understanding of herself as meriting the throne of England. Her earlier confident pronouncements on the virtuality of her gender, its irrelevance to virtuous and successful rule as she understands it, do not suffice at such a perilous juncture. In the copy of her second speech in answer to the Parliamentary petition for Mary's execution, delivered November 24, 1586 and likewise bearing revisions in her own hand, Elizabeth returns to her earlier mode of self-accounting and pronounces on her philosophy of ethical sovereignty for the first time in her writing. She gives her view of the qualities requisite to a ruler--three out of the four she names are Plato's cardinal political virtues--and she also specifies what she considers to be their linkages with gender:

I was not simply trained up, nor in my youth spent my time altogether idly, and yet when I came to the crown, then entered I first into the school of experience: bethinking my self of those things that best fitted a king--justice, temper[ance], magnanimity, judgment--for I found it most requisite that a prince should be endued with justice, that he should be adorned with temperance, I conceived magnanimity to beseem a royal estate possessed by whatsoever sex, and that it was necessary that such a person should be of judgment. . . . And for the two first this may I truly say: among my subjects I never knew a difference of person where right was one, nor never to my knowledge preferred for fact what I thought not fit for worth. . . . For the two latter I will not boast. . . . But this dare I boldly affirm: my verdict went ever with the truth of my knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

Elizabeth had studied the Greek text of Plato with her tutor Roger Ascham.<sup>22</sup> Here she alludes to Book 4 of the *Republic*, where, at 427e, it is agreed that the state, if rightly founded, will be good in the full sense of the word--that is, wise, courageous, temperate, and just--and where, at 441e-442e, wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice are specified as the attributes of the just man.<sup>23</sup> Significantly, Elizabeth omits courage from her otherwise Platonic quartet of the cardinal political virtues. In its place, she says, she conceived "magnanimity to beseem a royal estate possessed by whatsoever sex." Her substitution seems to bespeak uncertainty whether "a royal estate possessed by whatsoever sex" could attain the virtue of courage. In fact, a look at etymologies that Elizabeth would have known shows that the gender trouble attaching to Greek *andreia*, the term for "courage" in these *Republic* passages, is real. Its root meaning is manliness (from *andros*); its most constant classical association is with a fighting spirit on the battlefield, the steadiness to risk death and kill, even though the word comes to acquire a more general meaning of "courage." A Latin cognate, *virtus* (from *vir*, a man), poses a similar problem in equating "virtue" with "force."<sup>24</sup> Evidently Elizabeth thought that sustaining her claim to be a body fit to govern England would require her, a female, to replace the Platonic cardinal political virtue of courage with "magnanimity."

Elizabeth's substitution is sufficiently drastic to have no Platonic source.<sup>25</sup> Aristotle defines Greek *megalopsychia* (Latin *magnanimitas*) in the *Nicomachean Ethics* at 1123b 6-9. The sense of this virtue is more literally rendered in English as "great-spiritedness" or "great-souledness." Aristotle praises it as "the crowning beauty of the virtues," a lofty pride and self-esteem that reach "moral nobility" through concern for one's honor and dishonor.<sup>26</sup> It testifies to the tenacious hold of gender difference on even the independent and innovative mind of Elizabeth that the virtue she substitutes for the seemingly non-gender-neutral courage also proves to be non-gender-neutral in an important way. The feminine sense of great-souled concern for one's honor is an impeccably respectable sexual reputation. The masculine sense of great-souled concern for one's honor is unblemished public esteem. Elizabeth says that she "conceived magnanimity to beseem a royal estate possessed by whatsoever sex." Consistent

with her earlier claims to virtual gender, Elizabeth as sovereign could well have thought of herself as being great-souled in both a feminine and a masculine sense. Perhaps, indeed, this dually gendered concern for honor as impeccable sexual reputation and unblemished public esteem is what she fundamentally means by virgin queenship.

It also testifies to the residual hold of conventional gender roles on the mind of Elizabeth that, as late as 1586, she can ascribe to a monarch of either sex a lofty pride and self-esteem focused chiefly on honor and dishonor, yet cannot ascribe to a monarch of either sex courage understood as the shedding of an enemy's blood in battle. This second speech of 1586 ends with Elizabeth's "answer answerless" to the question whether she will proceed judicially to Mary's beheading. She entreats the men of Parliament: "Excuse my doubtfulness, and take in good part my answer answerless: wherein I attribute not so much to my own judgment, but that I think . . . if I should say I would not do what you request, it might peradventure be more then I thought, and to say I would do it, might perhaps breed peril of that you labor to preserve"--namely, her own life and crown.<sup>27</sup> In the gender-specific vocabulary to which she is forced at points of greatest threat to her personally, Elizabeth may be in a kingly seat or a kingly estate, but she cannot say of herself that she is a "king" in the full Platonic sense of possessing the four cardinal political virtues. Courage demonstrated in the taking of an enemy's life is not an attribute to which she ever explicitly lays claim in the self-representations of her Parliamentary speeches.

### **"The heart and stomach of a king"**

Elizabeth first unambiguously claims possession of the virtue of courage in her speech to the English troops at Tilbury camp on August 9, 1588, during the period of anxious uncertainty following the storm-racked dispersal of the Armada, the supposedly invincible expeditionary force of Spanish galleons and troops, that had failed in its intended invasion of England on July 27. This speech acknowledges the political connection between Mary's execution and the sending of the Armada as an act of Catholic vengeance on Elizabeth. This speech also traces the moral connection between Platonic courage and Aristotelian magnanimity:

I am come among you at this time . . . , being resolved in the midst and heat of the battle to live and die amongst you all, to lay down for my God and for my kingdom and for my people mine honor and my blood even in the dust. I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too. And take foul scorn that Parma or any prince of Europe should dare to invade the borders of my realm: to the which rather than any dishonor shall grow by me, I myself will venture my royal blood, I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of your virtue in the field.<sup>28</sup>

That she speaks and acts for the first time in an overtly military context alters every element that had long been of defining importance in Elizabeth's self-representations. Her self-expending care that has doubly bound her to God and to her people no longer conforms to the model of Christlike self-sacrifice, but is now that of a warrior risking both life and reputation to repel an enemy aggressor. Her *megalopsychia* or magnanimity appears in her "foul scorn that . . . any prince of Europe should dare to invade the borders of my realm."<sup>29</sup> Her *andreia* or manliness of battle courage appears in her resolve "in the midst and heat of the battle to live and die . . . , to lay down . . . mine honor and my blood even in the dust."

Most significantly, Elizabeth at Tilbury sets aside her former insistence on the irrelevance of gender to good and successful rule. She claims to possess, not a courage as answerable to her place as ever her father had (the analogical formulation in her 1566 Parliamentary speech), but, in a direct self-predication, the heart and stomach of a king of England. The heart was both the seat of courage--hence the English etymology by way of Anglo-French *cor* and *corage*--and the seat of royal identity, commanding special regard to where a monarch's heart was buried. The stomach was the organ for doing violent or distasteful deeds deemed necessary, like bloodshed in certain circumstances.<sup>30</sup> At Tilbury Elizabeth's great-souledness becomes "stomach" because of the crucial convergence, which she registers, of her "heart" to produce courage. What might remain her understanding of the virtuality of

her gender in a long reign of peace--the irrelevance of being a woman to her record as a ruler--must now, in the context of war and its different standards for a ruler's competency, take on an androgynous character.<sup>31</sup> At this point of supreme crisis Elizabeth must and does conflate femininity and masculinity in the Queen's One Body, the body politic centered on her as its heart and head, as she acts as "general, judge, and rewarder of virtues in the field."<sup>32</sup>

### **King, queen, and prince**

A final paradox involving virtue and virtuality waits in the wings, however. Once Elizabeth had represented herself as the entity King-and-Queen and laid claim to the full Platonic quartet of political virtues, then and then only, it appears, could the factor of gender become truly irrelevant--in the sense of indifferent--to her representations of her sovereignty. Among the evidence of gender lability in Elizabeth's late Parliamentary speeches, the celebrated "Golden Speech" of November 30, 1601 offers the richest array of self-references deployed according to a principle of indifferent access, as Elizabeth speaks of herself now as a king, now as a queen, now as a prince. She begins by acknowledging her thankfulness, as "a loving king," to those members of Parliament who have informed her that various appointees of hers have abused her trust and grants of privileges, yet have done so without in any way impugning her prerogative. "They doubt not," she says, "it is lawful for our kingly state to grant gifts of sundry sorts of whom we make election, either for service done, or merit to be deserved, as being for a king to make choice on whom to bestow benefits." She then pursues her self-accounting across a full spectrum of gender references:

You must not beguile yourselves nor wrong us to think that the glosing luster of a glittering glory of a king's title may so extol us, that we think all is lawful what we list, not caring what we do. . . . The vaunting boast of a kingly name may deceive . . . such a prince as cares but for the dignity, nor passes not how the reins be guided, so he rule. . . . But you are cumbered (I dare assure) with no such prince, but such a one as looks how to give account afore another tribunal seat

than this world affords. . . . We think ourselves most fortunately born under such a star as we have been enabled by God's power to have saved you under our reign from foreign foes, from tyrants' rule, and from your own ruin; and do confess that we pass not so much to be a queen, as to be a queen of such subjects, for whom (God is witness, without boast or vaunt) we would willingly lose our life, ere see such to perish. . . . So great is my pride in reigning as she that wisheth no longer to be than best and most would have me so.<sup>33</sup>

I have argued that the early Elizabeth insisted on the virtuality of her gender as the condition of her sovereignty and the competence of her rule. She would not fulfill her responsibility and authority through the social and biological roles of wife and mother, only through the metaphoric yet dynamic roles of her country's mother and God's handmaid. She could amply configure her life and death in those terms, to which gender was immaterial except as a foil to exalt divine providence and power. Yet the prospect and the eventual necessity of shedding the blood of another queen, a kinswoman, a mortal enemy, compounded with the Armada invasion to spur a later Elizabeth to a new species of self-understanding and self-representation in terms of the (somewhat adapted) Platonic quartet of political virtues. This self-understanding, in its key component, was almost impossibly demanding when it required of her the courage to take her enemy's life. As her rhetorical formulations demonstrate, such courage could not remain virtually gendered or gender-neutral for Elizabeth; she could only articulate and claim it as "the heart and stomach of a king."

The gender specificity here is both complicated and clarified by the recognition that it applies to Elizabeth's body politic, not to the natural body that her sovereignty had merged with it. Nevertheless, her masculine courage appears to have been actual enough: she did execute Mary; she came to resist the invading Spanish at Tilbury; she did speedily try and execute the earl of Essex for his treasonous armed uprising against her in 1601. What remains finally significant, I think, about Elizabeth's manipulations of gender in her public self-representations is the creative pressure that the perils and extremities of her experience during her long reign placed upon her. She would seek justification for her

sovereignty in every crucial register of her time and culture because she defined the measure of her rule as omniscience. Having found such justification, secular as well as sacred, masculine as well as feminine, the late Elizabeth could again be indifferent about the factor of gender in relation to her fitness for her royal office.

But this late indifference, which permits her to range through a whole gamut of gender terms in referring to herself, is quite unlike the indifference voiced early in her reign, where all she could do was insist that her sex would not disqualify her from ruling the realm with full dedication and the most loving and most positive intentions. As documented mainly by her Parliamentary speeches, she quite self-cognizantly derived her gendered identity from her royal office as she determined, over time, what its conscientious exercise made her out to be--whether prince or queen, princess or king, but always a consummate sovereign of England's people. These determinations, moreover, are not merely deterministic; Elizabeth's various titles for herself are readable traces of her political and personal desires. We have, perhaps, been slow to recognize her achievement because we ordinarily track the determinants of gender identity at more mundane cultural levels than the one she occupied. Elizabeth I may be the first social constructivist of gender who is on record in her own words, as a principal agent of her own public formation.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Philippa Berry, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen* (New York, 1989); Carole Levin, *"The Heart and Stomach of a King": Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia, 1994), chs. 4, 5, and 7; Helen Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York, 1995); Leah S. Marcus, "Shakespeare's Comic Heroines, Elizabeth I, and the Political Uses of Androgyny," in *Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse, N. Y., 1986), pp. 135-53, and *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents* (Berkeley and Los Angeles,

1988); Louis Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Nanette Salomon, "Positioning Women in Visual Convention: The Case of Elizabeth I," in *Attending to Women in Early Modern England*, ed. Betty S. Travitsky and Adele F. Seeff (London, 1994), pp. 64-95.

<sup>3</sup> Important pioneering accounts of Elizabeth as self-authoring include Allison Heisch, "Queen Elizabeth I: Parliamentary Rhetoric and the Exercise of Power," *Signs* 1 (1975): 31-55; and Frances Teague, "Queen Elizabeth in Her Speeches," in *Gloriana's Face: Women, Public and Private, in the English Renaissance*, ed. S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 63-78. Maria Perry, *The Word of a Prince: A Life of Elizabeth I from Contemporary Documents* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1990), succeeds admirably in writing a biography of Elizabeth in her own words up to the early 1570s, but thereafter relies much more heavily on contemporaries' reports of the Queen's words and actions.

<sup>4</sup> Levin, "*Heart and Stomach of a King*," p. 176, n. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca, 1990), p. 131; cf. p. 202 as well as Jordan's article, "Representing Political Androgyny: More on the Siena Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I," in *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print*, ed. Anne M. Haselkorn and Betty S. Travitsky (Amherst, Mass., 1990), pp. 157-76.

<sup>6</sup> The classic exposition is Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theory* (Princeton, 1957), who stresses the theological derivation of this political conception; see also Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> 1 Mary, st. 3, c. 1, in J. R. Tanner, ed., *Tudor Constitutional Documents, A.D. 1485-1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1930), pp. 123-24; cf. Heisch, "Queen Elizabeth I," p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> Levin, "*Heart and Stomach of a King*," p. 121.

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<sup>9</sup> Laurie J. Shannon identified the centrality of this device in "The Queen's Account" (unpublished paper delivered at the session on "The Writings of Elizabeth I," MLA Convention, Chicago, December 1995).

<sup>10</sup> *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago, 2000), pp. 73, 72, cited hereafter as *CW*.

<sup>11</sup> See *Oxford English Dictionary*, "prince," 1b. She may use the adjective "kingly" in self-reference, as in "princely seat and kingly throne" (January 28, 1563) or "kingly rein" (fragment of November 5, 1566), but she never calls herself a "king" in this period. Carole Levin's failure to register that "prince" can be gender-neutral somewhat lessens the value of her discussion of "Elizabeth as King and Queen" ("*Heart and Stomach of a King*," chap. 5, esp.p. 125).

<sup>12</sup> *CW*, p. 93.

<sup>13</sup> *CW*, pp. 96, 95.

<sup>14</sup> See Elizabeth's public Latin oration at Oxford University, September 5, 1566, as preserved in Bodleian, Rawlinson MS D.273, fol. 111r: "Sanè fateor patrem meum diligenter curavisse ut in bonis litteris recte instituerer, atque quidem in multarum linguarum varietate enim versata sum" (Indeed I confess that my father took most diligent care to have me correctly instructed in good letters, and I was even engaged in the variety of many languages--my translation).

<sup>15</sup> Helen Hackett shows that panegyrists from the late 1570s onward regularly ascribe sacred virginity to Elizabeth (*Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, chaps. 4-5, 7).

<sup>16</sup> *CW*, pp. 169, 170.

<sup>17</sup> Two contemporary sources indicate autobiographical origins for Elizabeth's milkmaid image. In rehearsing the dangers and deprivations of her imprisonment in Woodstock Castle by her sister, Queen Mary, in 1554, John Foxe editorializes: "Thus this worthy lady, oppressed with continual sorrow, could not be permitted to have recourse to any friends she had, but still in the hands of her enemies was left desolate. . . . Whereupon no marvel if she, hearing upon a time, out of her garden at Woodstock, a certain milkmaid singing pleasantly, wished herself to be a milkmaid as she was; saying that her case was better, and life more merry than was hers, in that state as she was" (John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*,

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ed. Stephen Reed Cattley [London, 1837], 8:619; this narrative first appeared in Foxe's 1570 edition). Thomas Platter, a German who traveled in England in 1599, relates a quite similar anecdote told by the guide who showed him Woodstock Castle: "It is said of her, that watching the milkmaids milk the cows upon the meadow, she often declared that nothing would give her greater happiness than to be a milkmaid like those whom she saw out on the field, so miserable and perilous was her captive plight" (*Thomas Platter's Travels in England, 1599*, trans. and ed. Clare Williams [London, 1937], 221).

<sup>18</sup> British Library, Additional MS 33271, fols. 23v, 24r; cf. Hartley, 1:472-73.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Edmund Plowden, "The Case of the Duchy of Lancaster," whose predications lay more stress on the duality-within-unity of the sovereign's bodies: "The King has a Body natural, adorned and invested with the Estate and Dignity royal; and he has not a Body natural distinct and divided by itself from the Office and Dignity royal, but a Body natural and a Body politic together indivisible; and these two Bodies are incorporated in one Person . . . by . . . Consolidation" (quoted in Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 9).

<sup>20</sup> *CW*, pp. 192, 193.

<sup>21</sup> British Library, Lansdowne MS 94, Art. 35B, fol. 87v-88r (spelling and punctuation modernized); cf. *CW*, p. 204.

<sup>22</sup> For testimony on Elizabeth's learning, see Roger Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, ed. Lawrence V. Ryan (Charlottesville, Va., 1967), pp. xvi-xxi, 56, 80-81, 87.

<sup>23</sup> See *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, 1963), pp. 669, 684-85.

<sup>24</sup> For pertinent discussion, see Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984).

<sup>25</sup> Quentin Skinner traces to a passing reference in Cicero's *De officiis* the equation of magnanimity with courage (Latin *fortitudo*) which, I would note, must be the warrant for Elizabeth's substitution here ("Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The Artist as Political Philosopher," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 72 [1986], 28. I owe this reference to my colleague Elissa Weaver.

<sup>26</sup> See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. and trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1975), book IV, chap. 3, sec. 1, lines 16-19; pp. 212-13, 218-19. Also noteworthy is Sir Thomas Elyot's definition of magnanimity, which curiously appears to conflate a masculine quality with a feminine one: "Audacitie with timerositie maketh Magnanimitie" (*The Book of the Governor*, ed. Foster Watson [London, 1907], p. 95).

<sup>27</sup> British Library, Lansdowne MS 94, Art. 35B, fol. 88r (spelling and punctuation modernized).

<sup>28</sup> *CW*, p. 326.

<sup>29</sup> The gender implications of Elizabeth's *megalopsychia* here are, in fact, more intricate still. Since she is defying an act of invasion of her realm in an age when the confines of her body natural would have been associated with the borders of England in the concept of the sovereign's Two Bodies, her masculine concern for her honor on this occasion defends and protects her feminine concern for her honor. An apposite image is offered by the Ditchley portrait of Elizabeth (1592?), attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts the younger, which shows her standing on a map of England, her feet set in Oxfordshire, the hem of her full, deep-folded skirt and cape retracing the watercourses of the Severn and the Thames. I owe this comparison to Meiling Hazelton.

<sup>30</sup> Significantly, the *OED* cites only sixteenth- and seventeenth-century examples for the first subdivision of its eighth (and altogether obsolete) meaning of the noun "stomach": 8a--spirit, courage, valor, bravery.

<sup>31</sup> Judith Butler's "performativity of gender" might at first seem an applicable referent here. In her words, "Performativity is . . . not a singular 'act' ['of the 'assumption' of sex]", for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions [of "a regulatory apparatus of heterosexuality"] of which it is a repetition (*Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* [New York and London, 1993], p. 12). But multiple historical specificities in Elizabeth's situation at Tilbury resist assimilation to the emphases on normativity, reiteration, and heterosexuality that define Butler's concept.

<sup>32</sup> Winfried Schleiner, "Divina virago: Queen Elizabeth as an Amazon," *Studies in Philology* 75 (1978): 163-80, examines the post facto tradition that Elizabeth had appeared at Tilbury as an armed Amazon in full battle dress. He makes it clear that the only report with contemporary credentials, James Aske's poem, *Elizabetha triumphans* (London, 1588), supplies meager physical details--"our princely Sovereigne / . . . / Most bravely mounted on a stately Steede / With Trunchion in her hand (not us'd thereto)"--while drawing a comparison to "the Amazonian Queene" Penthesilea (quotation from 170).

<sup>33</sup> *CW*, pp. 343, 344.