The *Virgin* and the *Whore*:

Queen Elizabeth I and Catherine the Great,

A Study in Respect and Power

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated in memory of my beloved grandmother, Rose Ann Mlecsko, who encouraged my love of reading and learning, and who introduced me to Elizabeth.

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Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

The focus of this thesis is to study the portrayal of Elizabeth I and Catherine the Great through the medium of film, particularly how the films portray how Elizabeth and Catherine each dealt with the difficulties they faced as female rulers. Each of these women struggled to reconcile her position in power with traditional expectations for her gender. To be an independent woman was contemptible in a patriarchal society; the idea of a strong, independent female ruler was absurd. As one scholar notes, "female rule stands condemned by the presumed weakness of women and their propensity to fall under the domination of powerful lovers and advisers."[1] Elizabeth and Catherine have been judged throughout history through the bias of gender and not on their accomplishments alone. Additionally, their sex lives have garnered attention from historians and filmmakers alike, which has helped to perpetuate the stereotypes of the virgin and the whore that have become synonymous with Elizabeth and Catherine respectively.

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[1] Brenda Meehan-Waters, "Catherine the Great and the Problem of Female Rule" *Russian Review*, Vol. 34, No.3 (Jul. 1975), 298.

I have chosen the study of movies and documentaries in this thesis to illustrate how Hollywood[2] has reduced the impressive accomplishments of these two monarchs to trivial clichés about women, their weakness and sexuality, and to test the stereotypes of Elizabeth as the 'virgin' and Catherine as the 'whore' against scholarly research and more modern views about women. The sources for this thesis will include movies (both popular and documentary), books, articles from scholarly journals and popular magazines, memoirs, correspondence, diaries, and official documents. Care will also be taken to point out historical inaccuracies that lend themselves to the perpetuation of the myths surrounding each ruler.

Elizabeth and Catherine are two of the most recognizable female monarchs in history. Scholars have published volumes of works that document their political and personal lives, which proves how even hundreds of years after their deaths, they still have the power to captivate an audience. This is clearly illustrated by the many films and documentaries that focus on these fascinating women. Since both Elizabeth and Catherine used various methods of propaganda throughout their reigns, at times exploiting female

[2] The term *Hollywood* is used broadly and is meant to include all major motion pictures and documentaries regardless of where they were produced.

stereotypes to buttress their power, it is only fitting that they would continue to exert their influence and reach a worldwide audience through the universal language of film.

Hollywood has added to the myths and legends surrounding them both. Although many films about Elizabeth and Catherine claim to be 'historical,' there is often little actual history portrayed on the big screen. Many filmmakers tend to be "unencumbered by any reference to the real history"[3] of the two monarchs' reigns; instead, they build upon myths and legends. The myth surrounding Elizabeth and her virginity, or lack thereof, is a favorite in Hollywood. Moreover, Catherine's legendary sexual appetite is another Hollywood staple when portraying her on screen.

Elizabeth and Catherine influenced how they have been perceived and documented throughout history. Elizabeth took great care to protect and build her iconic, virginal status while she was queen, whereas Catherine had a total disregard for societal norms and expectations in regards to her personal reputation. Elizabeth maintained a tight grip on the manipulation of her public image, while Catherine had a laissez faire approach to hers, which allowed others to take hold of her image and distort it to their own purpose. Enthralled with Elizabeth and Catherine, biographers, popular writers,

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[3] Susan Doran and Thomas Freeman, eds. *The Myth of Elizabeth* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 246.

historians and filmmakers continue to perpetuate the virgin and whore public image that has long been associated with the two monarchs. Unfortunately, the myths and legends surrounding these two are better known to the public than are their amazing accomplishments and contributions to society.

Chapter II
Elizabeth: Becoming the Virgin Queen

Background

Elizabeth I, 1558-1603, was not the first queen of England, but she was the first successful one. She ascended to the throne in 1558, during a time when a woman was expected to take care of the hearth and home and was under the authority of her husband. Elizabeth fought daily to overcome the doubts her subjects, councilors, and royal peers had in her ability to rule. She proved repeatedly that she was a capable ruler despite being a woman. However, Elizabeth did not fight for every woman to have more power or responsibility; she made herself out to be the exception, a special woman not bound by the established rules for women. Elizabeth frequently referred to herself in masculine form and sought to downplay her femininity when it was most advantageous. Moreover, she shunned the traditional female role of wife and mother; instead, she embraced her nation and people as her surrogate family and devoted her life to them throughout her rule. By holding on to her sole rule as queen and refusing to take a husband

and produce a male heir, she opened herself to attacks from those who opposed her policies and those who did not want a female ruler. Carole Levin examines the problems, criticisms, and rumors about her sexuality that Elizabeth faced as an unwed queen. According to Levin, "for Elizabeth ... presenting herself as a courageous leader and a religious figure were as important as the way she dealt with questions surrounding her sexuality. In both these areas gender played a significant role in how Elizabeth both presented herself to, and was perceived by, her people."[4] There were numerous problems caused by Elizabeth's refusal to marry; the most troubling for her subjects was that if she remained unwed she would remain childless and that meant no obvious successor to the throne. Moreover, Elizabeth knew that she needed to protect her reputation in order to maintain stability throughout the realm, and Parliament agreed as it passed an act in 1559 that made gossiping about the queen an act of treason.[5] Because of her unique position as a powerful female ruler in a male dominated society, some historians and popular writers have judged Elizabeth's reign on the basis of her gender and not on the merits of her rule alone. Elizabeth was the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. She was Henry's second daughter, and some believe a great disappointment to

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[4] Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: Univ. Penn. Press, c1994), 66.
[5] Ibid., 66-68.

him, as he wanted a male heir to the throne.[6] Although there was no law to the contrary, a female ruler was "undesirable," especially during this time of male dominance in the sphere of politics.[7] The general belief of the day was that "a woman might rule her own kitchen, but surely not her own kingdom; outside the kitchen, she should be under the authority of a man, because she was physically, intellectually, and emotionally inferior to men." [8]

Elizabeth's childhood and adolescence was full of political maneuverings and risks, which was especially true after Henry VIII had Anne Boleyn beheaded, in part for failing to produce a male heir. After her mother was beheaded, Elizabeth was declared illegitimate by her father and removed of the line of succession to the throne through a ruling by Parliament. Henry VIII married again several times and eventually produced a long awaited male heir, Edward, who, upon the death of Henry VIII in 1547, ascended to the throne. Four years earlier, Parliament had restored Elizabeth and her half-
sister Mary to the line of succession, so now Elizabeth was second in line to the throne.[9] Edward died in 1553, and Mary became queen; since Edward died without an heir and Mary had no children of her own, Elizabeth was the next in line to the throne.

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[6] Ibid., 5.
[7] *The Life and Times of Queen Elizabeth I;* available from http://www.elizabethi.org; Internet: accessed on 23 March 2004.
[8] Christopher Haigh, *Elizabeth I* (New York: Longman Publishing, 1998), 12.
[9] Levin, 7.

As a Catholic, Mary was not popular with the Protestant citizens of England, and was suspicious of her Protestant half-sister, Elizabeth. Relations between the two deteriorated further when Mary's councilors suspected that Elizabeth played a role in the Wyatt rebellion of 1554, which tried to overthrow Mary and put Elizabeth in her place. Although Elizabeth protested her innocence, she was nevertheless arrested for treason and sent to the Tower of London as a prisoner. Elizabeth was held in the Tower for two months before being moved to Woodstock Manor in Oxfordshire where she stayed ten months before being summoned to Mary's court. [10] After this unsettling incident regarding the Wyatt rebellion and her imprisonment, "Elizabeth learned quickly the danger of slander and rumors."[11] She remained out of the spotlight and stayed behind the scenes until Mary's death in 1558.

When Elizabeth ascended to the throne on November 17, 1558, "It was a moment of supreme triumph for the unwanted daughter who had spent her life in the shadow of the court, cast aside and forgotten."[12] It cannot be said, however, that she was entirely neglected. According to one biographer, Elizabeth had a very impressive education, was taught by famous scholars such as William Grindal and Roger Asham, and

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[10] *The Life and Times of Queen Elizabeth I;* available from http://www.elizabethi.org; Internet: accessed on 23 March 2004.
[11] Levin, 7.
[12] *The Life and Times of Queen Elizabeth I;* available from http://www.elizabethi.org; Internet: accessed on 23 March 2004.

from an early age it was clear that she was remarkably gifted." Elizabeth was an exceptional student and mastered five languages by adulthood. [13] It would be this education upon which she relied throughout her reign. In fact, it was her intelligence that captivated Giovanni Michiel, the Venetian ambassador, in 1557, who wrote to the Italian Senate, "Her intellect and understanding are wonderful, ... at first sight understands everything ... in a way to strike you with astonishment."[14] Historian William Neville also comments on Elizabeth's learning and intellect.

> Elizabeth loved learning for its own sake and retained to her death the scholar's habit of translating and annotating. Moreover, her fluency in Latin, French, and Italian enabled her as queen to speak to foreign envoys and read letters from abroad without the need for interpreters.[15]

Although Elizabeth took great pride in her education and used it to her advantage numerous times, she never suggested that all women were capable of such learning. Elizabeth believed that she was special and wanted to remain apart from the other women at court. She was a female ruler in a male dominated political hierarchy and wished to be viewed as the head of the country, not as a placeholder for the next king. Flattery from a courtier notwithstanding, Elizabeth was the

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[13] *The Life and Times of Queen Elizabeth I;* available from http://www.elizabethi.org; Internet: accessed on 23 March 2004.
[14] Alison Plowden, *The House of Tudor* (New York: Stein and Day, 1976), 191-192.
[15] Neville Williams, *The Life and Times of Elizabeth I* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 21.

recipient of a very fine education during a time when young women were not educated beyond having the ability to run a household.

Elizabeth's concern for her position in a male dominated world did not extend to other women, however. Perhaps Elizabeth's reluctance to include other women within the sphere of her influence was due to her desire to not be seen as a woman, but as a ruler anointed by God. This belief in her own uniqueness is clearly pointed out by Haigh:

> Elizabeth was a special woman, never a 'mere' woman. She determinedly contrasted herself with the rest of her sex, stressing their frailty but claiming to be an exception because she was queen. In 1563, she told the Commons that, 'being a woman, wanting both wit and memory', perhaps she should be silent, 'but yet the princely seat and kingly throne wherein God (though unworthy) hath constituted me' gave her confidence. She was a monarch, chosen by God and endowed by him with all the skills she needed.[16]

Elizabeth's success as regent depended on her ability to be seen not as a woman, but as a strong and capable ruler. Elizabeth was aided in this by an act of Parliament in 1554 during Mary's reign, which stated "a woman as queen has the same rights as a male monarch. The same all regal power, dignity, honour, authority, prerogative ... belong unto her Highness ... in as full, large, and ample manner as it hath done heretofore to any other her most noble progenitors, kings of this

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[16] Haigh, 25.

realm."[17] According to Levin, "the Act of 1554 may be suggesting that when a woman is on the throne she is both king and queen."[18] The rule of a woman was undesirable and went against traditional roles held by men and women, but by deflecting attention away from her gender, Elizabeth cultivated both her male and female persona and circumvented the constraints placed on women.

Although Elizabeth was very adept at expressing her love for her people and at fostering their love for her, she could not always control the way they reacted to her. Levin points out that, "together with the love and respect she inspired, one discovers expressions of hostility towards her as an unmarried female ruler whose position transcended the traditional role allotted to women in English Renaissance society. This hostility was expressed in the many rumors that circulated about Elizabeth."[19] Elizabeth relied on Parliament to help suppress the spread of rumors. In 1559, Parliament passed a law that made it treason to question the queen's authority and right to rule. Moreover, the act was bolstered by Parliament with the passage of the treason act of 1571.[20] It was very easy for rumors to spread, "especially when the ruler was a young unmarried woman who refused to follow advice."[21]

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[17] Levin, 121-122.
[18] Ibid., 122.
[19] Ibid., 68.
[20] Ibid., 68-69. The treason act of 1571 backed up the definition of treason in the act of 1559, which stated that even having the opinion that Elizabeth should not be queen was treason.
[21] Ibid., 69.

Elizabeth used the male persona bestowed upon her as the ruler of England to further enhance her power and to maintain that power in a political sphere still dominated by males. Elizabeth in a sense was given two bodies, one was her natural female body, and the other was a "body politic," which was tied to the throne and her sovereignty.[22] According to Levin, the construct of having two bodies,

> was current in the later Middle Ages and lawyers and theologians gave it new meaning in the reign of Elizabeth. The idea grew out of the difficulty of separating the body politic from the person of the monarch. While individual kings died, the crown survived. With a woman on the throne, the importance of separating the individual sovereign from the ideal of king became more difficult and more crucial.[23]

Elizabeth was very shrewd and used the dual role assigned to her to the utmost; she "recognized herself as having two bodies, that of a woman and that of a queen. Elizabeth often referred to herself as *prince* rather than as *queen*, perhaps to downplay her private...body in favor of her public (masculine) body."[24] While she may have been the queen, she was still a woman and therefore subject to male prejudices about her gender. Elizabeth needed to distance herself from her sex; she therefore took advantage of every opportunity to put forth her princely persona.

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[22] Ibid., 122.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 140-148.

As Haigh relates, Elizabeth felt that she had been made as good as any man, as she stated in 1581:

> I have the heart of a man, not of a woman, and I am not afraid of anything. By 1586, indeed, she was better than some men: her career had 'taught me to bear with a better mind these treasons, than is common to my sex – yea, with a better heart perhaps than in some men!' Elizabeth was a woman with masculine courage- indeed, with courage greater than ordinary men. In her famous speech to the assembled troops at Tilbury in 1588, her claim to superiority was made ringingly clear: 'I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too!' Elizabeth was a political hermaphrodite, not only a queen, but a king as well.[25]

It was this overwhelming need, and desire, to have her authority legitimized and adhered to that led Elizabeth to distance herself from other women.

However, just because Elizabeth did not take an active role in advocating the education of women does not mean that she had no influence in this area. Elizabeth valued her education and relied upon it heavily during her reign. Education for the gentry and aristocrats flourished during the Elizabethan age, due in part to the influence of Elizabeth and her court. As an Elizabethan scholar relates, "It is not too much to say that the age had a genuine enthusiasm for education, from the Queen –herself one of the best educated persons in the

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[25] Haigh, 25. Elizabeth's words are in quotes, although the entire quote is from Haigh's book.

country—downwards."[26] Elizabeth went as far as to issue Royal Injunctions that included provisions for the education of her subjects, mainly the nobility. The Injunctions were comprehensive, they included provisions related to the objective the schools, curriculum, schoolmasters, and financing for the students. For example, the Injunctions indicated its goal as, "the advancement of the true honour of Almighty God, the suppression of superstition throughout all her highness's realms and dominions, and to plant true religion to the extirpation of all hypocrisie, enormities, and abuses."[27] In these Injunctions, Elizabeth set forth protocols for the hiring of schoolmasters and dictated what should be taught in schools. For example, item XXXIX declared that "every schoolmaster and teacher shall teach the Grammar set forth by Henry VIII of noble memory ... and none other."[28] Clearly, Elizabeth cared deeply about the education of her subjects, but she was shrewd enough to know that to champion the higher education of women would undermine her own unique status as an educated woman and the male characteristics attributed to her.

Elizabeth reigned during the Reformation, which was a time of chaos not only for religion, but for education as well. Prior to the Reformation, education was the responsibility of the Catholic Church

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[26] A.L. Rowse, *The England of Elizabeth* (Madison: Univ. Wisconsin Press, 1978), 490.
[27] Walter Howard Frere, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation, Vol. III, 1559-1575* (London: Longmans, Green & Company, 1910), 8.
[28] Frere, 21.

but with the advent of the Church of England, most of the Catholic run schools were closed. Elizabeth and her initiatives did much to help improve the education system during her reign. The previous regimes of Henry VIII and Edward IV laid the groundwork for reestablishing the Catholic run schools as secular schools, but it was Elizabeth who stabilized the system, which allowed it to flourish. According to Rowse, "Elizabeth's government carried on this good work; the stability and prosperity of the reign gave it such an impetus that by the end there were as many grammar schools as there had ever been, and for the most part established on a surer and more effective foundation."[29] The number of grammar schools is estimated to have been three hundred and sixty, which breaks down to "one such school for every 13,000 of the population."[30] According to another Elizabethan scholar:

> One indication of the concern of adults for better education in the explosion of school foundations in the mid-century, leading to an 'educational revolution' between about 1560 and 1580. ...Literacy rates improved sharply for people who were children early in Elizabeth's reign. University enrolments jumped too. Cambridge matriculated about 160 students a year in the 1550s; by the 1570s the number vaulted to 340 a year. It was an era of educational vitality with sharp increases of literacy. This enthusiasm for learning to read ...created an audience that could appreciate the literary

[29] Rowse, 490.
[30] Ibid., 496.

> achievements of authors of their generation, like Shakespeare.[31]

While the system became stabilized and education became widely available throughout the kingdom, women, for the most part, were still excluded from higher education but did receive instruction in elementary schools and grammar preparatory schools or tutors.

Leaders in government and society acknowledged the importance of education; they "realized that it was necessary to be educated to cope with the modern world and the country's new situation, its opportunities opening out on every side."[32] While it was not customary for women to be formally educated beyond the basics, it was not completely unknown. Elizabeth is a fine example of this, even if she did not necessarily support this same freedom for all women. An earlier example of educated women is that of Sir Thomas Mores' daughters Margaret, Cecilia, and Elizabeth. Sir Thomas served as Chancellor during the reign of Henry VIII, and was greatly influenced by the Humanist movement during the English renaissance.[33] According to Cannon, More wholeheartedly believed that women should be accorded the same educational opportunities as men:

> When the future chancellor established his own household (1505) the coming of his three daughters

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[31] Norman Jones, *The Birth of the Elizabethan Age* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 170.
[32] Rowse, 490.
[33] Mary Agnes Cannon, *The Education of Women During the Renaissance* (Washington, D.C.: National Capital Press, Inc, 1916), 98-99.

> strengthened more and more his desire to see reflected in the women of England the perfections of their noble Queen (Catherine of Aragon), and so wisely and lovingly did he educate Margaret and Cecilia and Elizabeth ... that the mere mention of their names could serve the English humanists as a powerful argument in favor of the Renaissance ideal of women's education.[34]

More was not alone in advocating the education of women; many nobles and wealthy businessmen felt that educating their daughters was beneficial. However, the education these privileged women received was not always strictly scholarly. It should be noted that, "humanist scholars, notably Erasmus, but others such as ...the influential Juan Luis Vives, recommended learning as a way of keeping noble women virtuous."[35] Lerner supports this description:

> We can generalize that up until the later 17th century a woman's chances for acquiring any education at all were best if she were the daughter of wealth or rank; a daughter in a family without sons; and if her father were enlightened on the subject of women's educability. Because women were viewed as helpmates, they received education designed to prepare them for that role. Instruction in reading prepared women to read the Bible, to interpret its message, and then to summarize major truths for children and servants. Other education prepared women for their domestic roles.[36]

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[34] Cannon, 98-99.
[35] Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1996), 426.
[36] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 28.

The education of women in the traditional roles of womanhood such as needlepoint, childrearing, household management, and etiquette was the norm, whereas the education that the daughters of Sir Thomas More received was the exception.

Elizabeth preferred to be portrayed in her more masculine form as opposed to her feminine form. She also controlled the actions and behavior of the women of her court, so as to project the image of womanhood that she preferred. Elizabeth took great pains to control her image among her subjects and court. As Haigh illustrates:

> To her own courtiers and to foreign dignitaries, Elizabeth showed herself off both as queen and as a woman. She played both parts, and she played them for all she was worth. ... The ritual and celebrations of the Court were built around a cult of Elizabeth in the two roles; she was both *above* the Court, as a sovereign claiming the fealty of her knights, and *of* the Court, as the virgin lady for whose honour the knights fought at the tilt. [37]

Elizabeth used her personal relationships with her councilors to manipulate them. Elizabeth's insistence on being the center of attention at court put pressure on her ladies-in-waiting and the wives of her councilors and other members of court. Elizabeth kept a tight reign over her ladies and could at times be ruthless in her treatment of them. According to Haigh, "Elizabeth's projection of herself as the desired object of all her courtiers, and

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[37] Haigh, 90.

the devoted lover of some, put the ladies of the Court in a difficult and vulnerable position." [38] Elizabeth would fly into a rage if one of her maids married secretly and was known to become physically abusive towards them.[39]

While this treatment of her ladies was harsh, it should not be taken to mean that Elizabeth hated women and did not sympathize with them. She was however a very shrewd politician and, "above all, she wished to prevent the women about her becoming to pawns of male politicians and place-seekers. She wished to preserve her women's principal loyalty for herself."[40] Although this was Elizabeth's intent, it did not always turn out that way in practice, although more commonly women were used by favor-seekers rather than for political motives. As Haigh points out the "role of the ladies of the Chamber in the distribution of patronage was especially clear."[41] These women had close ties to the queen and were able to use this to their advantage when approached by a male member of the Court. This practice was nothing new to the Elizabethan Court. As one scholar noted:

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[38] Ibid., 100.
[39] Alison Wall, "For Love, Money, or Politics? A Clandestine Marriage and the Elizabethan Court of Arches," *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Sept. 1995): 518.
[40] Haigh, 101.
[41] Ibid., 102.

> Individual great women of England had long exercised political influence well beyond the formal prescriptions of female roles. The significance of high-ranking Tudor women as religious patrons and through their intervention in political processes, both in court and in oppositional roles, could be considerable. [42]

The women of the Court had much more influence than Elizabeth had wanted them to have, but this was a unique opportunity for women to play a larger role in the government, albeit in a clandestine sort of way. While there had always been women at the Court during any reign, the reign of Elizabeth provided women greater access to the ruler; as a woman Elizabeth was compelled to have women in her private chamber, since it would be inappropriate and possibly harmful to her chaste reputation to have men in her privy chamber. Despite Elizabeth's attempts to distance herself from her sex and to strictly control the actions and behaviors of the women around her, the women of her Court were granted more access to education and important information and the men around them recognized their value.

Elizabeth was successful in overcoming the obstacle of her gender to become one of history's greatest monarchs. Women of the Elizabethan era and beyond were also successful in overcoming the barriers that had kept them from gainful employment and higher education, thanks in part to the example of Elizabeth. Furthermore, it

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[42] Judith Richards, "To Promote a Woman to Beare Rule: Talking of Queens in Mid-Tudor England," *Sixteenth Century Journal, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Spring, 1997)*: 102.

should be noted that noblemen began to allow their daughters to pursue a higher level education, "with Elizabeth being on the throne, this was encouraged, as men did not want their daughters to look dim in the presence of their very intelligent and highly educated queen."[43] It was through this indirect influence that Elizabeth opened the way for women to achieve higher status and education. The number of women writers sharply increased during and after Elizabeth's reign, more elementary and grammar schools were opened, noble women were allowed to practice informal medicine, and the women of Elizabeth's Court influenced politics and patronage. Clearly, Elizabeth faced her own struggles as a female monarch and was more concerned with increasing and maintaining her tenuous hold on power than she was with aligning herself with other women and casting off old stereotypes and prejudices that held back all women. Elizabeth did manage to distance herself in the minds of the men around her from the fact that she was a woman, and caused them to see her in her masculine form as their sovereign. By doing so, Elizabeth proved that a woman could be strong, independent, intelligent, and not weak and feebleminded as commonly believed and promoted. This had a tremendous, albeit a gradual, effect on the status of women in the minds of Elizabethan era

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[43] *The Life and Times of Queen Elizabeth I;* available from http://www.elizabethi.org; Internet: accessed on 23 March 2004.

men that continued into the seventeenth and eighteenth century, which saw the rise in appreciation of women's abilities and intelligence.

Control of Image

Throughout her reign, Elizabeth struggled within the male dominated hierarchy of economics, politics, and literature for control over her image. Some scholars, such as Susan Frye, contend that Elizabeth did not have complete control of her image and that she participated, to an extent, in the manipulation of her image by outside forces. Frye first looks at Elizabeth's coronation in 1559 and the pageants sponsored by the London merchants. Frye contends that since Elizabeth wanted to distance herself from her half-sister Queen Mary and to secure a good working relationship with the merchants, she purposely allowed them to mold her image into that of the wife and mother of England; roles that she would later capitalize on to quiet the calls from her critics for her to marry. Frye states that the merchants "depended on the Crown's help in granting trade licenses, thereby creating a stable political climate in which trade could flourish after the depressed years of Mary's reign," whereas Elizabeth benefited from the relationship with the merchants through their "validating her

succession to the throne, in borrowing money and establishing her credit rating abroad, ... and in generally supporting the Crown's institutions."[44] It was this mutually beneficial manipulation of Elizabeth's image that Frye argues was the beginning of the competition over control of the queen's image. However, it would seem that Elizabeth benefited the most from the competition and managed to retain control of her image for the next two decades. The pageants and their allegorization of Elizabeth

> provided a wealth of images that she would later restructure in an attempt to authorize her power. For example, the entry's presentation of Elizabeth as a dutiful daughter became subsumed in more potent images. Her metaphoric motherhood was eventually turned more to her advantage by recasting her subjects as her dependents. ... The entry's implication that she was the wife of the city she turned into a political metaphor of her marriage with her kingdom in the manner of the doge of Venice and Mary Tudor before her.[45]

Elizabeth, Frye asserts, built upon the iconography that grew around her persona and tried to control her image, yet she remained "vulnerable...to images of herself that required male support," which in turn lead to the clash between Elizabeth and the Earl of Leicester during the Kenilworth entertainments.[46]

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[44] Frye, 54.
[45] Ibid., 54-55.
[46] Ibid., 55.

In 1575, the Earl of Leicester, Robert Dudley, invited Elizabeth and her court to his estate at Kenilworth to take part in a series of entertainments. Dudley's reason for hosting Elizabeth at his estate was to secure her favor in allowing him to lead a force into the Netherlands, so that he might increase his political and military standing at home and abroad. Elizabeth was firmly set against interfering in the Netherlands and harassing William of Orange. Nevertheless, Dudley was intent on impressing Elizabeth and gaining her approval for his military and political aspirations. Therefore, he staged "entertainments whose extravagance submerged his dependence on her while elevating his eagerness for more responsibility. ...[for] As long as his prestige derived entirely from his personal relations with Elizabeth, he could never act independently."[47] For the most part, the festivities went rather well and were enjoyed by Elizabeth. There were two types of entertainments, the ones showcasing Dudley's interests and those of Elizabeth's, "the Dudley entertainments, included the queen's welcome, a dialogue between a wild man and Echo, and a bride dael—the mock-marriage of an aging, 'ill-smelling' bride that forms an unflattering paraphrase of Elizabeth as an unmarried middle-aged woman."[48]

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[47] Ibid., 58.
[48] Ibid., 62.

As the entertainments went on, Elizabeth took it upon herself to make some changes to Dudley's line up of performances. Elizabeth ordered two of the performances to be cancelled, which centered around Dudley being a sort of protector of Elizabeth, and on the marriage question surrounding Elizabeth. In their place were two performances centered on Elizabeth which included

> an elaborate allegorical device featuring Elizabeth's rescue of the Lady of the Lake that rewrote the chivalric narrative of the imprisoned female, the unusual spectacle of her knighting several supporters of her non-interventionist policy, and the application of the royal touch as a potent reminder of Elizabeth's place between God and her subjects in the hierarchy.[49]

Clearly, Elizabeth was not willing to allow others to control her likeness in ways that she did not approve, and still retained a certain amount of control over her public image. Frye states that "Elizabeth did not care to see herself displayed as a guest on property that she owned, as an observer of her subordinate's gallant actions, or as a woman in need of a husband or protector."[50] As Frye demonstrates, Elizabeth was still very much in control of her persona at this point and was not willing to allow anyone, even a most highly favored friend, to usurp it in a way that was detrimental.

According to Frye, "as Queen Elizabeth I entered her sixties, she remained both physically vigorous and articulate in the defense of her

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[49] Ibid., 62.
[50] Ibid., 61.

right to make her own decisions."[51] The aging Elizabeth knew that her death was widely anticipated, but even that did not dissuade her from presenting a youthful image at every opportunity. For instance, two widely known portraits of Elizabeth that were commissioned in the late 1590's or early 1600's, the "coronation" and "rainbow" portraits, both portray Elizabeth as youthful and virginal.[52] Furthermore, to preserve her hold over her royal persona Elizabeth became increasingly inaccessible to anyone other than her Privy Council, so that when she did make a public appearance or grant an audience it was all the more meaningful.[53] However, Frye contends the practice of remoteness and of portraying an image of youthfulness and chastity allowed for criticism of Elizabeth in the form of Spenser's Book III of *The Faerie Queene.* Frye states that "Spenser's response to Elizabeth's chastity is to redefine it according to the patriarchal definition of chastity as 'purity from unlawful intercourse', which assumes that a 'chaste' woman acquiesces to the roles first of virginal daughter and then of wife and mother." [54] Elizabeth molded her motherly persona in a similar fashion, but substituted her kingdom and her subjects as her husband and children. Moreover, Frye contends that Spenser tried to undermine Elizabeth in *The Faerie Queene* by portraying an Elizabeth "that is

[51] Ibid., 98.
[52] Ibid., 101.
[53] Ibid.,107.
[54] Ibid., 114.

simultaneously imprisoned, entertained with spectacle and poetry, and raped."[55] Despite Spenser's writings, Elizabeth's image remained intact and her strategy unchanged.

Elizabeth was very concerned with her royal visage and the manner in which she was presented to her people. Most notably, Elizabeth maintained tight control over her likeness, especially in the form of portraits. Coupled with the high demand for her portraits and her concern over how she was perceived by her subjects, Elizabeth "acknowledged the importance of [a] life-like image" and agreed to sit for a skilled artist in order that a suitable image could be produced."[56] It was not until 1572 that Elizabeth found an artist with whom she was comfortable to paint an official likeness. That image, Nicholas Hilliard's Darnley Portrait, was thereafter used as the model for all subsequent portraits.[57] Elizabeth was not a young woman at this time, was sensitive about her aging face, and insisted that Hilliard paint her in open light with no shadows so that she was painted in the best possible conditions and to minimize the effects aging had on her face. It was not unusual for Elizabeth to be concerned with her appearance, for in "Tudor times, the royal image was all-important,... for magnificence

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[55] Ibid.,116.
[56] Erna Auerbach, "Portraits of Elizabeth I," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 95, No. 603 (Jun., 1953): 198.
[57] Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 238.

was regarded as being synonymous with power and greatness."[58] By controlling what royal representation was put on display, Elizabeth was able to perpetuate her youthful image and virginal persona, even into her old age.

The Royal Progresses

Historian Mary Hill Cole asserts that there was a pattern to the queen's progresses that were carefully laid out in order to propagate her image as the people's sovereign. The royal progresses during Elizabeth's reign, according to Cole, "provided the settings in which Elizabeth crafted her royal authority... reflecting the strengths and limitations of Elizabeth's personal monarchy."[59] Elizabeth used the progresses to her greatest advantage to solidify her control over her government and to maintain her popularity that would carry her through four decades of rule. Cole states that there were several factors that went into the itineraries of the progresses. In the early years of her reign, Elizabeth used the progresses to explore her kingdom, but remained relatively close to London.[60] In later years, as Elizabeth grew more comfortable with her sovereignty she expanded her progresses and turned them into extravagant affairs in the 1570's. Cole writes, "from 1572 to 1578 ...,

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[58] Ibid., 234.
[59] Mary Hill Cole, *The Portable Queen: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Ceremony* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 1.
[60] Cole, 33.

the queen went relatively far afield for months at a time ..., where many pageants and ceremonies reiterated her popularity and symbolic significance."[61] In later years, Elizabeth was forced to curtail her trips due to political troubles from within and outside of England and to her advancing age. For Elizabeth, the progresses meant far more than just a royal vacation or diversions from matters of State. Instead, the progresses were carefully orchestrated events that bolstered her popularity and allowed her to conduct business on her own terms.

There were many difficulties of moving the entire court during the royal excursions. According to Cole, "had each progress been put to a vote, the Elizabethan court would never have moved beyond the royal palaces on the Thames."[62] Elizabeth was alone in the enjoyment of her progresses. The hardships faced by the staff in charge of setting up the visits were great. Packing and unpacking, finding food and lodgings for the entire court, and travelling across the countryside drained the staff and the treasury. Moreover, these long journeys from court also took a toll on the governing of the country. Elizabeth's ministers often complained about the undue hardships the progresses caused the government. Cole states that, "these statesmen believed that the progresses impeded the daily governance of England. And they were right. Given the complicated tasks and household expense for any

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[61] Ibid., 34.
[62] Ibid., 35.

progress, the impact of travel on her court was significant."[63] Nevertheless, Elizabeth was determined to run her court and her government in the way she felt best suited her. Cole summarizes the reasons behind Elizabeth's insistence on the progresses:

> The court moved or stayed, according to her word; some towns she entered, others she chose to pass; all her movements engendered crowds and entertainments focused on her presence. The face before the crowds, of course, was that of a woman, their queen, the daughter of Henry VIII, who was reminding her hosts of the stability of her queenly rule through her kingly actions. ... Elizabeth was willing to pay for the benefits that came to her from the much criticized, expensive, chaotic progresses.[64]

Many who hosted Elizabeth's progresses were members of her Privy Council, Parliament, and other members of her court. Although there were great expenses and inconvenience related to hosting Elizabeth, there were also great benefits. Many of the hosts would approach Elizabeth for favors during her stay. More often than not, these favors were granted, which more than compensated the hosts for the trouble and expense of entertaining the queen. Elizabeth also used her progresses to engage with the local population of the town or county she was visiting; "civic visits formed an important part of Elizabeth's progresses: they occurred regularly in the progress itineraries, they allowed larger concentrations of the populace to see the monarch, and

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[63] Ibid., 35.
[64] Ibid., 62.

they provided a public arena for shaping royal and civic reputations."[65] While it was Elizabeth's intent to strengthen and maintain her popularity among her subjects through her progresses, the "popularity of progresses with her hosts mirrored the vitality of Elizabeth's government."[66] During the early and middle part of her reign, Elizabeth enjoyed a growing popularity among her subjects, but in the latter part of her reign with her advancing age her subjects began to look towards the next ruler and offers of hosting Elizabeth's progresses diminished.

The heart of Elizabeth's progresses was her public image and the propagation of her personal monarchy. Elizabeth used these excursions as part of her "strategy of rule."[67] In the early years of her reign, Elizabeth used the progresses to promote the national church and to help ease tensions surrounding the church. As scholars have noted, "Elizabeth maintained her primacy in a church inclusive of the vast majority of her Protestant and Catholic subjects. The progresses gave the queen a natural platform from which to speak on religious matters."[68] On matters of her personal diplomacy, Elizabeth used the progresses to "manipulate her suitors and play diplomatic games. The progresses created both the personal contact on which her monarchy

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[65] Ibid., 97.
[66] Ibid., 63.
[67] Ibid., 135.
[68] Ibid., 136.

depended and the chaos and flexibility that typified her approach to decision making."[69]

The progresses for Elizabeth were an "expression of her will."[70] As a female ruler in a male dominated society and social structure, Elizabeth found a way to assert her dominion over her subjects and her government. Cole remarks of the progresses that, "through their turmoil and constant change, they gave her a freedom to maneuver, to delay or avoid decisions, to forge and independent course of action."[71] They served as a cornerstone of her power and political prowess that allowed her to remain queen for over four decades despite repeated attempts to undermine and overthrow her rule.

Love Life

Elizabeth's personal life also has been the subject of much speculation throughout the years. Beginning with the scandal surrounding her parent's marriage to the subsequent beheading of her mother and the rumors of her own illicit love affairs, Elizabeth's love life has come under much scrutiny and has been a breeding ground for myths and legends. The focus of films about Elizabeth is that of her love life. In the three films examined in this thesis, the plots involve a love

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[69] Ibid., 154.
[70] Ibid., 172.
[71] Ibid., 172.

affair of some sort. Whether between Elizabeth and Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester or Sir Walter Raleigh, each film spends a good portion of the movie following highly fictionalized versions of the relationship between Elizabeth and these two men. The fascination with Elizabeth's personal life is nothing new; however, from her ascension to the throne and even unto her death, the question of marriage and producing an heir was heatedly debated and closely followed.

From the moment of her birth and the disappointment she brought at having been born a girl, Elizabeth had to fight to be seen as more than just a vessel to produce a suitable male heir to the Tudor dynasty. Even during her childhood, the then Princess Elizabeth was the subject of possible political marriage arrangements. After ascending to the throne there were numerous suitors lined up as a potential spouse for the new queen. With these suitors came questions concerning her chastity and ability to bear children. Elizabeth's relationship with Robert Dudley was also a matter of interest for potential suitors, since he was very close to the queen and was rumored to be her lover. Elizabeth and Dudley had known each other from childhood and were later reunited after they were both released from the Tower of London, both having been held under suspicion of treason towards Queen Mary. Dudley had been placed in the Tower on suspicion of treason after his father, the Duke of Northumberland, and

his brother, Guildford Dudley, were implicated in the plot to place Lady Jane Grey on the throne in 1553.[72] Although rumors persisted concerning a love affair between the two, nothing was ever proven, and despite their genuine affection for each other, a marriage between them was impossible for many reasons. Dudley was already married to Amy Robsart; Elizabeth had attended their wedding. Moreover, Elizabeth would not marry one of her subjects, "predicting that to do so would cause dangerous rivalries at court and in the country."[73] This is not to say, however, that Elizabeth never entertained the idea of marrying Dudley. Susan Doran notes that at one point Elizabeth had drawn up a "patent for ennobling him, a promotion that was a prerequisite for any marriage, but when it was ready for her signature she slashed the document with a knife in some distress."[74] Whatever her intentions regarding Dudley may have been, marriage became impossible after his wife Amy was found dead at the foot of a staircase. Although an inquest found no evidence of foul play, rumors swirled that Dudley, and some said even Elizabeth, played a role in Amy's death. Considering the suspicious circumstances surrounding Amy's death, marriage between Elizabeth and Dudley was out of the question. Nevertheless, they remained very close friends until his death in 1588. Elizabeth was

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[72] Levin, 71-72.
[73] Weir, 45.
[74] Susan Doran, *Queen Elizabeth I* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 74.

devastated when Dudley died soon after the defeat of the Spanish Armada. According to one historian, "Elizabeth became so overwhelmed with grief that she locked herself in her room, refusing to see anyone until, it is said, some of her Councillors risked ordering the door to be broken in."[75]

Rumors persisted late into Elizabeth's reign; there was talk of an improper relationship between Elizabeth and Dudley's stepson Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex. Moreover, while Essex certainly was a favorite of Elizabeth, there was no sexual relationship between the two. In the opinion of Weir, Elizabeth "seems to have regarded him as the son she never had rather than as a lover or a suitor."[76] However, unlike the relationship between Dudley and Elizabeth that was based on genuine affection, Essex was "driven by ambition; he desired to be the leader of the swordsmen, the gallant young bucks of the court."[77] Essex eventually fell out of favor with Elizabeth, which is not surprising given his egotistical behavior towards her. Essex was very willful and stubborn and "would not allow any woman, even the Queen herself, to rule him; in fact he was to an alarming degree hostile towards, and contemptuous of, her authority, and detested his servile role."[78] Essex

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[75] Williams, *The Life and Times of Elizabeth I*, 187.
[76] Weir, 385.
[77] Ibid., 385.
[78] Ibid., 387.

was executed for treason in 1601 following an attempted coup to overthrow Elizabeth in favor of James IV of Scotland.

Elizabeth had been inundated with marriage proposals, many of which she entertained if only for political reasons. One particular proposal went farther into negotiations than any other. Elizabeth engaged in negotiations with the Duke of Alençon, later known as the Duke d'Anjou, brother to the king of France. According to one historian, "the last great flurry of excitement over Elizabeth's professed desire to marry began in 1579, when Alençon arrived in England to court her during the final interval when she was still remotely capable of bearing an heir." [79] All evidence indicates that the queen was fully prepared to marry the duke, despite her own reservations about marriage and the concerns of powerful Protestant nobles who feared the threat of a foreign and, even worse, Catholic heir.

Despite Elizabeth's apparent willingness to marry the duke, there were lingering doubts as to her sincerity. Weir points out that Elizabeth had been "anticipating that the French King would refuse the terms submitted for his approval by her envoys, thus releasing her from her promise. If he did not, she would make additional, even more impossible, demands. And if that did not work, she could be certain

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[79] John King, "Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen," *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 43, no.1 (Spring, 1990): 48.

that Parliament would veto the marriage."[80] Elizabeth's tactics worked and the French king rejected her demands and she was released from her promise to marry the duke. Nevertheless, the two remained close and seemed to have had a genuine affection towards each other. When the duke died suddenly a few years later, Elizabeth, and her court, went into mourning for the duke. Elizabeth even wrote a letter to the duke's mother Catherine de' Medici expressing her condolences and her own grief over his death.[81]

Elizabeth was also rumored to have had a relationship with Sir Walter Raleigh. Although Raleigh was a favorite of Elizabeth's, and she gave him the nickname 'Shepherd of the Ocean', the relationship never became physical and yet was very personal in nature. Raleigh served Elizabeth in many capacities; he was Lord Warden of the Stannaries, Captain of the Bodyguard, and explorer of the New World. Raleigh claimed land in the New World and dedicated it to Elizabeth by calling it Virginia. One scholar notes that while the relationship may have been platonic, it did not stop Raleigh from aggressively pursuing Elizabeth. For instance, Raleigh wrote several amorous poems that were based on his feelings for Elizabeth.[82] Raleigh's feelings for Elizabeth notwithstanding, there eventually came a time when feelings were no

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[80] Weir, 340.
[81] Ibid., 350.
[82] Neville Williams, *All the Queen's Men: Elizabeth and her Courtiers* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1972), 184. Two such poems are found in this book.

longer enough to sustain him and after ten years of "harbouring a strange passion that could not be reciprocated," he found comfort in another woman's arms, oddly enough the other woman was Bess Throckmorton, one of Elizabeth's ladies-in-waiting. Despite his long relationship with Elizabeth, it was not enough to save him from banishment from her court and imprisonment in the Tower. Elizabeth, who only allowed her ladies-in-waiting to marry with her consent, was furious when she became aware of the secret marriage and banished both Raleigh and Throckmorton from court. Although both were later to come back into Elizabeth's good graces, the bond between them never fully healed.

With the collapse of marriage negotiations and the death of the Duke d'Anjou, so too came the end of marriage prospects for Elizabeth. According to one historian, "it was not until after the failure of this last effort at marriage, one third of the way through Elizabeth's reign, that the patriotic cult of an unmarried virgin queen who would remain ever wedded to her nation took hold in officially-sponsored propaganda, in poetry of praise generated outside of the royal court, and in the popular imagination."[83] From the outset of her reign, Elizabeth had been slowly cultivating the image of a virgin queen for herself. In one of her first speeches to Parliament in 1559 Elizabeth is said to have made it clear

[83] King, 51.

that she would prefer to remain single and that she considered herself to already be married to England and that her people were her children. Elizabeth stated, "I am already bound unto a husband, which is the kingdom of England. As for children, Everyone of you, and as many as are Englishmen, are children and kinsmen to me."[84] Elizabeth was steadfast in her desire to remain unmarried and therefore avoided what she felt were pitfalls that could dampen her reign. Levin notes that:

> Unmarried, Elizabeth avoided the role of wife and the risk of being perceived as the inferior partner in the marriage relationship. Also, she need worry neither about lack of fertility and subsequent embarrassment, such as dogged her sister Mary, nor about the risks of dying of disease related to childbirth...Certainly there were costs as well to this choice, both personal and political, but it was a choice that was also keeping with Elizabeth's own wishes. With Elizabeth as Virgin Queen, unmarried and ruling alone, England had but 'one mistress and *no* master.'[85]

From the outset of her reign, Elizabeth dealt with the question of marriage, succession, and chastity. One historian has argued, "the stuff of Elizabethan politics for most of those forty-five years had been how to find an acceptable path back to normality in the shape of a male successor, virile and virtuous in the Protestant sense. A female ruler was almost a contradiction in terms, an aged female ruler even more

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[84] Weir, 44.
[85] Levin, 65.

so."[86] Nevertheless, Elizabeth managed to outlive many of her critics and the problems that plagued her reign. There are some scholars who believe that Elizabeth overcame the obstacle of being an unmarried, and therefore, weak queen, by citing that she had sacrificed her own interests for the sake of her people through a massive propaganda campaign.

> Her maidenly chastity was therefore interpreted not as a sign of political or social deficiency, but rather as a paradoxical symbol of the power of a woman who survived to govern despite illegitimization, subordination of female to male in the order of primogeniture, patriarchy, and masculine supremacy, and who remained unwed at a time when official sermons favored marriage and attacked the monastic vow of celibacy and veneration of the Virgin Mary. It seems, then, that from the accession of Elizabeth in 1558, at the age of twenty-five, celebration of her virginity was a synchronic phenomenon.[87]

Historians and biographers alike have varied opinions regarding Elizabeth and her personal character and life. However, it is widely accepted that she remained a virgin throughout her reign. Despite all of the rumors regarding her sexuality and her many courtiers and favorites, Elizabeth cherished her power and the love of her people above all and would not risk losing either for the love of one man. Moreover, historians seem to agree that in the "management of public

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[86] Patrick Collinson, "Elizabeth I and the Verdicts of History," *Historical Research*, Vol. 76, no. 194 (Nov. 2003): 480.
[87] King, 30.

affairs she was a woman of extraordinary talent and sagacity, combining, in a very remarkable degree, a certain cautious good sense and prudence with the most determined resolution and energy."[88] Elizabeth managed to overcome the doubts of her people, councilors and peers to become one of the most revered monarchs in history, despite being just a mere woman.

Hollywood Treatment of Elizabeth

Just as historians and biographers have varying views on Elizabeth and her reign, filmmakers also portray Elizabeth in various roles: virgin, warrior, monarch and woman. Elizabeth and her reign provide a wealth of material for filmmakers to work their particular brand of magic and create a visual spectacle that transports audiences back in time to the court of the great queen. Elizabeth, and her father Henry VIII, have been the subject of numerous Hollywood filmmakers, so much so that one scholar commented that, "Hollywood has stamped the images of Henry and Elizabeth into the consciousness of millions of people who would have difficulty finding England on a map."[89] Elizabeth remains a popular character in films due to her uniqueness as a strong female monarch who successfully ruled in a male dominated

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[88] Frederick Chamberlin, *The Private Character of Queen Elizabeth* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1922), 149.
[89] Doran, *The Myth of Elizabeth*, 2.

society. Moreover, she is also associated with being a warrior queen due in large part to the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and her awe-inspiring speech to the troops at Tilbury.[90] Elizabeth, to filmmakers, is warrior and virgin, monarch and woman, feminist and sexist, and a whole host of other characters, all of which are suitable to produce a mesmerizing, if not historically accurate, movie about one of the most well known and beloved monarchs of all time. The following chapter will examine the treatment of Elizabeth by Hollywood in three films, *Elizabeth: Virgin Queen (1998)* and *Elizabeth: The Golden Age (2007)*, both directed by Shekhar Kapur and *Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen (2005)*, produced by Masterpiece Theatre.[91] Although all three movies are centered on Elizabeth, they each focus on different aspects of her character and personality, with varying degrees of success and historical accuracy.

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[90] Elizabeth's speech at Tilbury will be further discussed in the chapter dealing with the Elizabeth movies.
[91] Michael Hirst, *Elizabeth: Virgin Queen,* DVD. Directed by Shekhar Kapur (Los Angeles: Polygram Filmed Entertainment, 1998). -- Michael Hirst and William Nicholson, *Elizabeth: Golden Age,* DVD. Directed by Shekhar Kapur, (Los Angeles: Polygram Filmed Entertainment, 2008). -- Paula Milne, *Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen*, DVD. Directed by Coky Giedroyc (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 2005).Due to the similarity of the names of the films, I will refer to them as follows: *Elizabeth: Virgin Queen* as **Virgin Queen**; *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* as **Golden Age**; and *Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen* as the **Masterpiece production**.

Chapter 3
Elizabeth: Hollywood Style

Elizabeth has long held the fascination of the general population. From the outset of her reign, it seemed that her life would be forever remembered for better or for worse; in fact Elizabeth's Archbishop Matthew Parker worried that she would be "strangely chronicled," and indeed his fears did come true. From her earliest biographers to modern day filmmakers, Elizabeth has been portrayed variously as a weak and indecisive ruler, or as a powerful queen responsible for one of the greatest ages in history. Moreover, she has also been portrayed as a 'remade' virgin done so for political reasons, to a true virgin who lived her life for her country and her people. However, one constant remains in all of her portrayals, one that is inescapable, that of her womanhood. Elizabeth was a rarity as a powerful female ruler in Europe during the sixteenth century. Elizabeth was more than just an ordinary woman, but it was also her gender and the obstacles she faced as a woman that led to her forever being remembered as a great and powerful queen.

Elizabeth's tale is complex and is not easily retold within the framework of a major motion picture. Nonetheless, historical accuracy

should be the objective of films made about historical figures. As with any historical film there are bound to be inaccuracies for the sake of entertainment value. As one reviewer noted, "of course these things are riddled with errors, conflations, dodgy chronology and invented scenes. That is the cost of producing visual medium that lasts under two hours. Historical accuracy inevitably has to be sacrificed, for reasons of drama, simplicity and narrative drive."[92] However, more often than not, real events that were full of drama and intrigue are passed over in favor of fiction. Such is the case with the two films by Shekhar Kapur, *Elizabeth: The Virgin Queen* and *Elizabeth: The Golden Age,* both of which star Cate Blanchett as Elizabeth. The first film was released in 1998 and the second in 2007. *Virgin Queen* focuses on Elizabeth's ascension to the throne and her transformation into the iconic virgin queen, while *Golden Age* focuses on the latter part of her reign, leading up to the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. While both films are entertaining and well worth watching, they are both filled with inaccuracies and portray Elizabeth as a weak and insecure ruler, instead of the headstrong and willful queen that she was. However, the third film being reviewed in this chapter, Masterpiece Theatre's *Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen*, stays very close to the historical record in its depiction of Elizabeth. The film stars Anne-Marie Duff as Elizabeth

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[92] Michael Morrogh, "Hollywood Blockbuster and Historical Reality," *History Review* (Sep2008 Issue 61): 47.

and covers Elizabeth from the beginning to the end of her reign. The Masterpiece production sticks close to the historical events in Elizabeth's reign and is a very enjoyable film; it does a wonderful job in balancing history and drama without sacrificing either.

The *Virgin Queen,* which is limited in its scope, begins in 1554 during Mary Tudor's reign and Elizabeth's imprisonment in the Tower of London following the Wyatt Rebellion and ends with Elizabeth's transformation into the virgin queen. The first scenes featuring Elizabeth are fraught with inaccuracies. In these scenes, Elizabeth is seen with Robert Dudley, which would not seem too unbelievable since they were childhood friends; however, during this time Dudley was a prisoner in the Tower under the suspicion of treason due to his and his brother's involvement in the Lady Jane Grey affair.[93] Elizabeth and Dudley reunited while they were both imprisoned in the Tower, not earlier as the film suggests. Furthermore, the close relationship and genuine love between Dudley and Elizabeth that is widely accepted by historians is transformed in this film into a sexual relationship. Many historians have debated this over the years and there is a consensus that although the two were very close friends, there was no sexual relationship between them. Alison Weir points out that much of the court gossip concerning a sexual relationship between Elizabeth and

[93] Doran, *Queen Elizabeth I,* 60.

Dudley was "unfounded, because she was attended round the clock by her ladies and maids-of-honour. Court etiquette was such that she was hardly ever alone, and there would have been very few opportunities for her to carry on a sexual relationship with Dudley without other people finding out."[94] Historical research and no evidence of a sexual relationship notwithstanding, in one very explicit scene Elizabeth and Dudley are shown having sexual relations while her ladies-in-waiting watch from behind a wall. Just prior to this scene Sir William Cecil tells the ladies-in-waiting that he wants to inspect Elizabeth's sheets every morning so that he may "know all her proper functions...[since] her Majesty's body and person are no longer her own property, it belongs to the State."[95] Moreover, there were spies everywhere at court and had there been any inappropriate behavior in the private bedchamber, Elizabeth and Dudley would have been exposed and the information used against them immediately by their enemies.

Historical inaccuracy aside, there is a far more troubling aspect to the love scenes between Elizabeth and Dudley; they imply Elizabeth's relationships are the driving force behind her political decisions. As one scholar notes:

> although the sex scenes between Elizabeth and Dudley are not troubling in themselves, they become so when

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[94] Weir, 71-72.
[95] Michael Hirst, *Elizabeth: Virgin Queen,* DVD. Directed by Shekhar Kapur (Los Angeles: Polygram Filmed Entertainment, 1998).

> we realize that they form the basis of the queen's most important political decisions. Elizabeth's policies become a mere barometer of her changing relationship with Dudley. For example, rather than showing Elizabeth's calculation of the impact that foreign alliance through marriage would have on England's destiny as a Protestant nation, the film implies that the queen's attachment to Dudley is the only reason for her rejection of foreign suitors. Consequently, when the queen does agree to a visitation with the duc d'Anjou, her decision is represented as a petulant response to learning that Dudley is already married[96]. More disturbing is that even as Elizabeth's "body natural" belongs less and less to Lord Robert, her "body politic" increasingly belongs to Walsingham.[97]

Further instances of inaccuracies regarding the relationship between Elizabeth and Dudley include his total absence in *Golden Age*. Dudley's absence from the film is surprising since he was the commander of the land forces during the Spanish Armada, the focal point of *Golden Age*. It would seem that the director of these films had a total disregard for historical facts when it came to Elizabeth's relationship with Dudley. In fact, the director acknowledged in an interview that he had only a cursory knowledge of Elizabeth before embarking on the film. Kapur explained how he came to direct the movie:

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[96] Elizabeth was well aware of the fact that Dudley was married when she was courted by the duc d'Anjou, for Dudley had married Amy Robsart in 1550, well before Elizabeth took the throne. In fact, it is very probable that Elizabeth attended the wedding. It was his marriage to Lettice Knolly in 1578 of which Elizabeth was unaware and caused a rift between the long time friends.

[97] Courtney Lehmann, "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Agenda: How Shakespeare and the Renaissance are Taking the Rage out of Feminism" *Shakespeare Quarterly* Vol. 53, No. 2, *Screen Shakespeare* (Summer, 2002): 264. *special edition focusing on films

> I was sitting in a hotel in Los Angeles and [the producer] Tim Bevan came to me and said, 'Would you make Elizabeth?' And I thought what an adventurous idea, what an adventurous producer, because I had no knowledge of history. All I knew about her was that she was the Renaissance Queen, the Virgin Queen. I found myself saying yes just for the adventure of it.[98]

In a later entry on his blog concerning the making of *Golden Age*, the director again brings up the issue of history and stated, "History ? My producer, my writers, my researcher are all historians with top honours either from Cambridge or Oxford. They dominated the script. Surely the film cannot have gone that far away from history ?????"[99] Yet there are many historical inaccuracies in both films. Instead of following the pair in *Golden Age*, Kapur chooses to highlight, and fictionalize, the relationship between Elizabeth and Sir Walter Raleigh. Although Raleigh was an advisor to Elizabeth and she bestowed many gifts and honors upon him, there is no evidence of a romantic relationship. Moreover, Raleigh's portrayal as a leading figure in the fight against the Spanish armada is overblown and inaccurate. Sir Francis Drake was the commander in charge of the English fleet, while Raleigh's role was helping to organize the land forces.[100] The filmmaker would rather the audience believe that Elizabeth lived vicariously through her lady-in-

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[98] Shekhar Kapur, Sharing Creativity-Sharing Vision, Blog "Trainspotting and Elizabeth" entry; available from http://www.shekharkapur.com/blog/archives/2008/06/trainspotting_a.htm. Internet; last accessed 05 March 2009.

[99] Shekhar Kapur blog; http://www.shekharkapur.com/blog/archives/2007/11/golden_agedivin.htm

[100] E.A. Benians, "Raleigh: Died 29 October 1618" *The Geographical Journal* Vol. 52, No.5 (Nov.,1918): 277.

waiting Bess, who became enamored with and eventually married the swash-buckling Raleigh, than to focus on Elizabeth as a warrior queen leading her people during one of the most crucial moments of her reign.

Elizabeth was a very confident and capable ruler, however, the filmmaker portrays her as naïve and unsure of herself. In *Virgin Queen*, she is shown preparing to speak to Parliament, quite nervous and seems unsure of herself. During the speech, however, she is confident and strong, and the director and actor portraying Elizabeth bring out her quick and biting wit with an exchange with the House of Lords. Nevertheless, there is still an illusion of weakness and frailty in the scene. The fact that Elizabeth had been brought up in the court of Henry VIII and knew how to maneuver at court has been written about by many prominent historians. Elizabeth did not ascend to the throne as an outsider to the intrigue and workings of the court; she knew how to wield her image to gain power and support. Christopher Haigh demystifies Elizabeth and her reign; he states, "the monarchy of Elizabeth was founded upon illusion, ... (and) images which have misled historians for four centuries."[101] Haigh also makes no apologies for Elizabeth; she was a woman in a man's world, she knew what she had to do in order to survive, and she did it. Elizabeth immediately set out to distance herself from previous regimes and "carefully orchestrated [a]

[101] Haigh, 10.

series of pageants and tableaux" in order to establish her reign.[102] In the films, the director does manage to capture Elizabeth's careful manipulation of her image; most notably in a scene from *Virgin Queen* where Elizabeth presents herself to her court in a dazzling white gown as the newly formed virgin queen.

One of the ways that Elizabeth established herself among her people was to appropriate the image of the Virgin Mary. Carole Levin proposes that, "Elizabeth and her Councillors deliberately appropriated the symbolism and prestige of the suppressed Marian cult in order to foster the cult of the Virgin Queen. This proved a powerful resource for Elizabeth in dealing with the political problems of her regime."[103] In the film *Elizabeth*, the cult of the Virgin Queen is shown to have evolved in the early years of Elizabeth's reign. However, Elizabeth was not associated with the Virgin Mary until the mid-1570's. This is not to say that Elizabeth did not invoke the virgin image prior to the 1570's. In her first speech to Parliament after her coronation, she planted the seed of being a virgin queen when she ended the speech by saying that "in the end this shall be for me sufficient that a marble stone shall declare that a Queen, having reigned such a time lived and died a virgin."[104] Moreover, the symbols that had been used to represent Elizabeth

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[102] Ibid., 10.
[103] Levin, 27.
[104] Frye, 15.

throughout her reign, "the Rose, the Star, the Moon, the Phoenix, the Ermine, and the Pearl—were also symbols that had been used previously to represent the Virgin Mary."[105] In *Virgin Queen*, although less so in *Golden Age*, the focus on Elizabeth's virginity is less political than it is a personal choice. Elizabeth is shown to have made the transformation into a virgin after a betrayal by Dudley and fretting over how to come to grips with being a female ruler who is not taken seriously.[106] In one scene, Elizabeth is kneeling next to a statue of the Virgin Mary and Walsingham is encouraging her to take on a more "divine role;" he states, "All men need something greater than themselves to look up to and worship. They must be able to touch the divine here on earth."[107] Soon after, the "last scene when Elizabeth cuts her hair, puts on the wig and white make-up, and becomes the unchanging poster monarch for the next 30 years is particularly effective, even if it never happened in that single, decisive way."[108]

Elizabeth was well aware of the hurdles she faced as queen. The problem of succession was not lost on Elizabeth who had been alternately declared a bastard and next in line to the throne. She also had to deal with the fact that she was a woman in power, a rarity in sixteenth century politics. Her womanhood would be a hindrance to

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[105] Levin, 28.
[106] In the movie, Dudley is implicated, along with Norfolk, in a plot to overthrow Elizabeth. This never happened; Dudley remained loyal to Elizabeth until his death in 1588.
[107] Hirst, *Elizabeth: Virgin Queen,* DVD.
[108] Morrogh, 47.

overcome throughout her reign. Haigh declares that, Elizabeth was dogged by the fact that she was 'only' a woman. The men she worked with saw her in terms of the stereotype female, flawed, and ineffective.[109] The difficulty of reconciling her power and her gender was not confined to the ruling class; the commoners also had a hard time accepting that the queen was a woman. In a telling passage, Haigh relates the reaction of a London woman who, when she saw Elizabeth for the first time, exclaimed, "Oh Lord, the queen is a woman!"[110] This is not to say that Elizabeth was ineffective, as the stereotype would imply; in fact, she would at times use her gender to her advantage. Elizabeth argued that while she was a woman, she was just not any woman; she had a special place in God's divine plan and was an "exception from the rules binding ordinary females."[111] A stunning example of Elizabeth's ability to entwine her feminine and masculine personas is her famous speech at Tilbury during the height of the battle against the Spanish Armada, or what one reviewer of the film said was that "superb Churchillian oration by the Queen to her subjects," is shockingly absent in *Golden Age.*[112] In her speech to the assembled troops at Tilbury, Elizabeth exclaims, "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of

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[109] Haigh, 12.
[110] Ibid., 13.
[111] Ibid., 13-14.
[112] Morrogh, 49.

a king, and King of England too." The film does a disservice to Elizabeth, and the viewer, by substituting a different speech. The director and screenwriter failed to deliver on one of the most important moments in Elizabeth's reign. One disappointed reviewer wrote,

> [sure] Blanchett cavorts on a horse, with her long red hair flowing, waving a sword and in full armour, very much the Joan of Arc, and she gives a speech all right - except that it is not the spine tingling actual version, only a poor substitution. Presumably Kapur and Hirst felt that the original was too much of a cliché, though such delicacy never worries them elsewhere.[113]

Instead of showing Elizabeth in her full glory, they chose a watered down version. If the premise of *Golden Age* was that Elizabeth helped to usher in that great era in history, then why downplay some of the more momentous occasions of her reign? Elizabeth's speech is considered to be one of her most compelling and courageous; it is widely accepted as the following:

> My loving people ... Let tyrants fear; I have always so behaved myself that, under God, I have placed my chiefest strength and safeguard in the loyal hearts and good will of my subjects. And therefore I am come amongst you at this time... being resolved, in the midst and heat of the battle, to live or die amongst you all; to lay down, for my God, and for my kingdom, and for my people, my honor and my blood, even the dust. I know I have but the body of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart of a king, and of a king of England, too; and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any prince of Europe, should dare to invade the borders of my realms: to which, rather

[113] Ibid., 49.

> than any dishonor should grow by me, I myself will take up arms; I myself will be your General.[114]

Whereas her movie counterpart recites the following, less compelling, and historically inaccurate, speech:

> My loving people. We see the sails of the enemy approaching. We hear the Spanish guns over the water. Soon now, we will meet them face-to-face. I am resolved, in the midst and heat of the battle, to live or die amongst you all. While we stand together no invader shall pass. Let them come with the armies of Hell; they will not pass! And when this day of battle is ended, we meet again in heaven or on the field of victory.[115]

If the purpose of the movie was to show Elizabeth as a strong warrior queen, the director failed miserably by leaving out Elizabeth's most oft quoted speech and one that is pointed to as proof of her love for her people and her resolve to be a ruler worthy of their love and respect.

In the *Virgin Queen*, there is a scene with Elizabeth and Sir William Cecil after the murder of Mary of Guise where he is advising her to apologize to Spain for any part she may have played in the assassination. Elizabeth refuses and states that she wants to follow her own policies since she does not want England to become a puppet of Spain or France, to which Cecil replies "but you are just a woman" which angers Elizabeth who retorts "if I choose I have the heart of a man, I am my father's daughter and I am not afraid of anything."

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[114] Levin, 144.

[115] Michael Hirst and William Nicholson, *Elizabeth: Golden Age*, DVD. Directed by Shekhar Kapur, (Los Angeles: Polygram Filmed Entertainment, 2008). (author's note: I must admit that I was sorely disappointed when I saw the film and this speech was given by Elizabeth. When I watched the film again on DVD, I replayed this part just to make sure I did not miss the "heart of a king" part.)

Elizabeth worked very hard her entire reign to distance herself from being looked upon as an ordinary woman and when her authority was challenged in any way, she responded harshly. As noted by Huczynski and Buchanan in their study of management styles as portrayed in popular movies:

> She is well educated, but women are regarded as inferior. When she asserts her authority, one of her advisers, Sir William Cecil (Richard Attenborough) remarks, "Excuse me, madam, but you are only a woman". Sir William finds himself pensioned quickly into retirement. By the end of her reign (1603), England has a strong currency, is politically and religiously stable, has defeated the invading Armada force of Philip of Spain in 1588, has regained its standing in the international community, and has a thriving culture of literature, theatre, and music. Shakespeare's first play, *The Comedy of Errors*, is performed in 1590, and he writes 23 other plays during Elizabeth's reign. Not only does she transform the country's social, economic, and cultural fortune, she created an age, the Elizabethan age.[116]

Another instance of Elizabeth's portrayal as a weak and insecure monarch in *Virgin Queen* is during a scene where her councilors are urging her to make war against Mary of Guise in Scotland:

> More usual than outright invention is the omission of inconvenient consequences. The English intervention in Scotland, initially resisted by Elizabeth is portrayed as a disaster, with a bloody defeat at the

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[116] Andrzej Huczynski and David Buchanan. "Theory from Fiction: A Narrative Process Perspective on the Pedagogical Use of Feature Film," *Journal of Management Education*. Vol. 28 No. 6, (Dec. 2004): 718. (Also, it should be noted that Elizabeth did not retire Sir William Cecil at this point. In fact he went on to serve Elizabeth faithfully until his death in 1598, five years before her own death.)

> hands of French troops. If only Elizabeth had listened to her inner caution (and the counsel of Walsingham, who appears as a semi detached member of the Privy Council) then all might have been well. In fact, although there was a small reverse at Leith, Cecil's action was justified ultimately, with the Treaty of Edinburgh in 1560 whereby all French (and English) troops had to leave Scotland - more of an advantage to the English than French.[117]

Despite successfully overcoming obstacles due to her gender, Elizabeth has been variously portrayed as weak, unsure and naïve in modern films. In a tense moment in *Golden Age* where the Spanish Ambassador is taunting Elizabeth with the recently discovered plot to overthrow her and replace her with Mary Queen of Scots, Elizabeth tells the ambassador to take a message to King Phillip: "Tell Philip I fear neither him, nor his priests, nor his armies. Tell him if he wants to shake his little fist at us, we're ready to give him such a bite he'll wish he'd kept his hands in his pockets! I, too, can command the wind, sir! I have a hurricane in me that will strip Spain bare if you dare to try me!"[118] It is a very rousing and formidable scene, which unfortunately is ruined when Elizabeth's lower lip begins to tremble and she runs off crying and throwing insults at her councilors.

Haigh also looks at another problem caused by Elizabeth and her gender. As a woman, she was expected to marry, but Elizabeth felt this would cause more problems than it would solve. As was socially

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[117] Morrogh, 47.
[118] Hirst, *Elizabeth: Golden Age.* DVD.

accepted, and expected, at the time a woman was controlled by her husband, and if Elizabeth were to marry, she too then would be at the mercy of her husbands' will. Elizabeth liked being not only the ruler of her country, but of her own thoughts and deeds. Marriage would undermine the power Elizabeth fought so hard for and would put her in a secondary position to an outsider from her realm. A foreign king could also cause problems with alliances and obligations to his home country, which is something neither Elizabeth nor the government wanted. Haigh puts it bluntly, "A woman who spent her adult life struggling against the conventional ideal of womanhood presumably found it difficult to do the most conventional womanly thing of all ... Elizabeth had refused to be a mere woman, and was not going to be a mere wife."[119] In *Virgin Queen* there are scenes dealing with suitors and marriage negotiations between Elizabeth and the French Duke d'Anjou, which again show a lack of historical accuracy. Although in fairness, the situation surrounding the Duke d'Anjou and his brother the Duke d'Alençon can be very confusing, as the latter was later known as the former. Confusion over who was called by what title at what time in history notwithstanding, the portrayal of the Duke was grossly inaccurate. The filmmaker would have the audience believe that the Duke was a cross-dressing homosexual who lacked social grace and

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[119] Haigh, 19.

was extremely uncouth, whereas in reality, he was a "mature and attractive man, whose pitted skin did not detract from his dark hair and eyes and witty gallantry."[120] The director relies on a cheap and lazy stereotype of the French as effeminate and foppish, which is in stark contrast with the truth. Moreover, according to one reviewer, "the movie goes out of its way to shock the audience with outrageous behavior that never would have happened. In one scene the Duke D'Anjou, as a suitor for the hand of the Queen of England, speaks in an outrageously sexual way to her. No man would speak to the Queen that way ...and no Queen would tolerate it."[121] Once again, instead of portraying Elizabeth as a strong and confident queen, she is shown as naïve and unsure of how to react in the situation. In the scene, Elizabeth slaps the Duke and looks to her councilors for help; instead, they look at her and shrug, making no attempt to stand up for the queen's honor.

Elizabeth's reputation and honor were held in very high esteem and provided a cornerstone to her reign. Throughout her reign, European royalty who were carefully vetted before any serious offer was made for her hand in marriage courted Elizabeth. On many occasions, the suitors would have members of their court visit England and Elizabeth's court to confirm her status as a virgin. Once such instance

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[120] Weir, 324.

[121] Kathryn Gillett, "Elizabeth: Too Much Fiction in this 'Historical' Tale" http://www.britannia.com/history/reviews/elizreview.html.

that has been documented is that of the suit of King Erick of Sweden. The king sent his Chancellor, Nils Gyllenstjerna, or Nicholas Guilderstern, to visit with Elizabeth and report back to him. In his report to the king, the Chancellor wrote, "I saw no signs of an immodest life, but I did see many signs of chastity, of virginity, and of true modesty; so that I would stake my life itself that she is most chaste."[122] This is in direct contradiction with Elizabeth's portrayal in *Virgin Queen* where Elizabeth is portrayed as having been sexually active with Dudley. Moreover, there was great interest in Elizabeth's ability to bear children and provide an heir to the throne. Therefore, her "ability to conceive was naturally the subject of intense, discreet diplomatic speculation and inquiry, and because of her reluctance to marry rumours abounded."[123] In *Golden Age,* Elizabeth has a physician brought in to verify her ability to conceive in order to placate her advisors and a potential suitor, the Archduke Charles. Despite having declared that she would prefer to remain unmarried, Elizabeth knew that diplomacy dictated that she entertain suitors to maintain good relations with the rest of Europe.

Despite their shortcomings concerning historical accuracy, both films endeavored to, but unfortunately miss the mark, when attempting to highlight what made Elizabeth a great ruler. She was willful and

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[122] Chamberlin, 264.
[123] Weir, 47.

stubborn, courageous and fierce, highly intelligent and passionate, and although the two films aspire to show those characteristics of Elizabeth, they did not fully explore the depths of her character and focused too much on her personal relationships. Although too much time was wasted on her fictionalized love life, it must be conceded that her personal life holds the greatest fascination with the general population and historians alike. Hundreds of books and dozens of movies have been written and produced about Elizabeth and as long as the fascination remains, there will be many more to follow.

Masterpiece Theatre's *Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen*, follows Elizabeth from her time in the tower of London as a prisoner under her sister Queen Mary, through her tumultuous relationship with Robert Dudley, and through the apex of her reign—the defeat of the Spanish Armada, and finally into the last days of her reign. The film was produced for Masterpiece Theatre and aired on PBS in 2005, and again in 2007. The film does a wonderful job of exploring the reign of Elizabeth within the context of the balancing act she performed between her personal yearnings and her concern for her country and her people. Elizabeth is shown as prioritizing her country over her own personal wants and desires yearning. Although, there are a few inaccuracies and jumbled timelines, the movie made a genuine effort to follow the historical life and reign of Elizabeth.

Although the film does place emphasis on Elizabeth's personal relationships it also incorporates the palace intrigues and struggles with gender issues that Elizabeth faced over the course of her reign. For instance, Elizabeth's Privy Council, believing that because she was a female she was not capable of ruling, sought to sway her decisions. In the film, Elizabeth learns to overcome her overbearing councilors and becomes comfortable with her new role as sovereign. The director accomplishes this without making Elizabeth seem coquettish, instead showing Elizabeth's intellectual prowess as a skillful manipulator. Moreover, Elizabeth is shown to be a strong and independent woman, refusing to kowtow to her male councilors who want to force her into a political marriage. Elizabeth also rejects overtures of marriage by Dudley, presumably the one man who she would want to marry. In a touching scene where Dudley is imploring Elizabeth to consider marrying him, Dudley chides her for refusing to break a vow she made as a child to never marry and Elizabeth replies that she would find no comfort in marriage or bearing a child for fear that power would corrupt a husband or a child as heir to the throne. Dudley continues to press Elizabeth to reconsider and she replies, "But a woman ruler is not as other women, is she? Like the coin that bears her image there are two sides to her. On the one, she embodies the feminine frailty of her sex, and on the other she is the body politic ordained by God." to which

Dudley replies, "Well, then, it is to the frail and feminine one I must appeal."[124] The writer and director allow the conflict Elizabeth felt with being a woman and a monarch develop and in doing so brings out a more accessible and humanized version of Elizabeth. Furthermore, this scene is the summation of Elizabeth's reign, it highlights the struggle she faced being a female monarch: that of being seen as a weak and frail woman who has the burden of proving that she is up to the God given task of ruling her nation. Instead of making Elizabeth seem like a fickle woman who runs away crying at every difficulty that comes her way, as seen in the other movies, she is shown as a strong, confident ruler who places her duty to her country above her own personal desires.

Another aspect of the film that sets it apart from the other films that were reviewed is the scope of the movie. Instead of focusing on a small portion of Elizabeth's life and reign, the film encompasses all of Elizabeth's adulthood, from just prior to her ascendency to the throne on through to her deathbed. It was a risky move on the part of the writer and director, but it also allowed them to develop Elizabeth more fully than a typical length feature. The audience follows Elizabeth through her ordeal in the Tower, uncertain of her fate and not knowing whether she would survive her next meeting with the queen, through

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[124] Paula Milne, *Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen*, DVD. Directed by Coky Giedroyc (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 2005).

her ascension to the throne and the almost immediate calls for her to marry and produce and heir; all the while watching her mature into the steadfast queen who inspired her troops at Tilbury and defeated the Spanish armada. The film continues to follow Elizabeth through the trials of losing her closest advisors to the grave and being left standing alone to fend off young and ambitious courtiers looking to take advantage of the aging queen.

The Elizabeth of this film is courageous and skillful from the outset. In the opening scenes, Elizabeth is shown preparing for a meeting with her sister the queen so that she might plead her case against the charge of treason brought upon her. Elizabeth picks out a very modest gown to wear and makes a show of praying with her rosaries when the queen's messengers come for her. When the messengers burst into the room Elizabeth remained composed and chastised them for forgetting that she too was a king's daughter. Although frightened, Elizabeth keeps her wits about her and maintains her composure when she is told she is being taken to the Tower instead of meeting with the queen. Elizabeth also takes the time to write a letter to the queen begging for an audience so that she may prove her innocence, by doing so Elizabeth delayed the barge that was to take her to the Tower. Now, she would have to wait for the next favorable tide, which was during the day and not at night as the queen had wished.

For Queen Mary was concerned that a rescue attempt might be made to free Elizabeth, and that her imprisonment would bolster her support among the Protestants of England. The film does an excellent job in portraying a very nervous Mary and an equally brave and levelheaded Elizabeth in these scenes.

A strong and resilient Elizabeth is the driving force of the film. There is a balance struck between portraying her as a woman and a monarch with the burden of ruling a country. Elizabeth faced many dilemmas during her reign, ranging from the problem of religion, to the pressure to align with another European monarchy through marriage, and the attempted invasion by Spain through the glorious defeat of the Spanish Armada. Although the film did at times show Elizabeth's indecisiveness, it did so without making her seem like a fickle woman who could not make up her mind. Instead, the film brings out the inner struggle and torment that Elizabeth went through while making those sometimes very difficult decisions. One scene in particular where this is played out is when Elizabeth must sign the death warrant for Mary, Queen of Scots. As she sits amongst her councilors, Elizabeth struggles with condemning a fellow queen to death, fearing that doing so would bring the condemnation of God upon her, not to mention the threat of war brought on by Catholic European nations in revenge for Mary's death. Still undecided as to what course of action she will take against

Mary, Elizabeth speaks with Dudley in private where he convinces her to sign the death warrant after telling her by not doing so she would be proving that as a female she is not up to the task of ruling. Dudley points out that Mary rules with her heart and is led by passion, not politics and if Elizabeth does not resolve to deal with Mary's treason by executing her, she risks being perceived as being a weak female who is ruled by her passions and is not fit to lead her country. Elizabeth signs the death warrant and Mary, Queen of Scots is executed; however, Elizabeth is shown to still be struggling with the decision and has a nightmare about her own execution. Upon waking from this nightmare, Elizabeth falls to her knees and prays for forgiveness. Although there is the element of indecisiveness and questioning of her decisions, Elizabeth is not made to seem weak. Instead, Elizabeth's human side is shown to peer out from beneath her body politic, as she struggles with condemning another queen to death. Elizabeth had also been faced with possible execution at the hand of her sister and survived, and the guilt she felt at being spared while someone in a similar situation was fated to die, tore at her conscience and is portrayed remarkably well in those scenes.

Elizabeth's desire to maintain a tight hold on her representation is another well-played characteristic brought out in the film. In one scene, Elizabeth is shown with an artist sketching her royal portrait

dictating to him exactly how she wants the portrait to look. She tells him to make "the jewels of my dress be like a thousand eyes, so that however distant, my subjects know that I am always watching over them," she goes on to say that the painting must portray her as virginal and divine and gives him specific instructions on how she is to be painted. By the end of the scene, Elizabeth says, "henceforth, when my people think of their queen, this is the image they must see."[125] Again, Elizabeth is revealed as confident and manipulative without seeming desperate.

Despite attempts to adhere to the historical record, the film does stray at times, most notably in the depiction of the death of Dudley's wife, Amy Robsart. In the film, Amy commits suicide, whereas the official investigation into her death ruled her death an accident, and modern scholarship theorizes that Amy may have suffered a spontaneous fracture of her spine due to breast cancer.[126] Although incorrect, the misrepresentation does not noticeably detract from the film. Another historical flub that was done for dramatic effect, was the supposed meeting between Lettice Knolly, second wife to Dudley and mother of the Earl of Essex, and Elizabeth. Elizabeth and Dudley's relationship cooled for a time after Elizabeth found out about their secret marriage and she never forgave Lettice, who was also her cousin.

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[125] Milne, *Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen*, DVD.
[126] Weir,106.

While a meeting was scheduled between the two, Elizabeth did not show up to the meeting in an effort to snub Lettice, whom she hated. The Earl of Essex, Robert Devereux, who had a relationship with Elizabeth in the late part of her reign, had arranged the meeting. A few other minor inaccuracies notwithstanding, the film manages to stay true to the historical record of Elizabeth's life and reign and produce a very enjoyable and intriguing film.

The Masterpiece production thrived where the other two films failed, by proving that an entertaining and yet still historically accurate film could be produced. The director was able to show that a strong, willful, confident and even indecisive Elizabeth could be portrayed without having to create events and take too much dramatic license with history. Elizabeth's life and reign was filled with enough drama, intrigue, love and pain to fill countless volumes of works by scholars, why then does Hollywood feel the need to distort history? Unfortunately, Hollywood tends to rely on sexual tension to add drama to it's movies, and so by creating love triangles and insinuating Elizabeth was not a virgin, many writers and directors let the real Elizabeth, a strong female character, fall by the way side in favor of a more alluring, tempting one.

Chapter 4
Catherine: Becoming "The Great"

Background

Sophia Augusta Frederica, the future Empress Catherine II (1762-1796), was born in 1729 to a noble, but poor, Prussian family. Her parents were Prince Christian August of Anhalt-Zerbst and Princess Johanna Elizabeth of Holstein-Gottorp, which made Sophia a princess by birthright. In 1744, Sophia was sent to Russia as the prospective bride of Peter III, who was the grandson of Peter the Great and the heir to the Russian throne.[127] Sophia and Peter married in 1745 and Sophia officially took the name Ekaterina, or Catherine. By all accounts, their marriage was an unhappy one and yet served the purpose of producing a male heir to the throne, the future Tsar Paul I. However, Catherine did not indulge in self pity, instead, she immersed herself in learning as much as she could about her adopted homeland. She quickly mastered the language and adopted the customs. Catherine very much wanted to become Russian and noted in her memoirs that she "sought with the

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[127] Isabel de Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: A Short History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 1.

greatest earnestness the public's affection."[128] Catherine took great pride in her new country and endeavored to prepare herself for the responsibility of ruling Russia alongside her husband, who was heir to the throne.

Catherine was very self-assured and confident in her ability to rule. This was evident in Catherine even during her first year in Russia. She noted in her memoir around the time her impending marriage was announced, "as this day approached, I grew more deeply melancholic. My heart did not foresee great happiness, ambition alone sustained me. At the bottom of my soul I had something, I know not what, that never for a single moment let me doubt that sooner or later I would succeed in becoming the sovereign Empress of Russia in my own right."[129] Catherine did ascend to the throne when her husband Peter III was crowned Tsar in January of 1762, and Catherine became Empress Consort of Russia. Catherine did not remain Consort for long, since, within just a few months time Catherine was declared Empress of Russia in her own right through a coup d'état led by the Orlov brothers and other members of the royal guard in June of 1762.

Although she did not have a hereditary claim to the throne, Catherine did not let that, or the fact that she was a woman, stand in

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[128] Mark Cruse and Hilde Hoogenboom, eds., *The Memoirs of Catherine the Great* (New York: Modern Library, 2005), 26.
[129] Ibid., 31-32.

her way. Interestingly, there was not much opposition to Catherine as a female ruler within Russia, but rather the consternation arose from outside its borders. Brenda Meehan-Waters states "power is a magnet, alternately attracting and repelling people. When power is held by a woman, the ambivalence and complexities become heightened."[130] Unlike Elizabeth, Catherine did not place much emphasis on creating a male persona in order to justify or solidify her rule. Instead, she relied upon her political prowess and ability to manipulate those around her in order to achieve her goals. Although Catherine may not have stressed her masculine traits, there were those who did; according to Meehan-Waters, "foreign contemporaries of Catherine, describes positive characteristics as masculine ones. For example, 'Catherine's spirit was firm, masculine and truly heroic.' On the other hand, her negative traits become characteristic of her sex."[131] Additionally, she employed a male persona at the very outset of her new reign. During the coup that overthrew her husband Peter III, she created an image of herself, in the same manner as Peter the Great, as a fearless leader who took what she wanted. One scholar notes that the "campaign against Peterhof cast Catherine in a new role with scant precedent in Russia: a woman sovereign as commander-in-chief."[132] After Catherine had secured the

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[130] Meehan-Waters, 293.
[131] Ibid., 296.
[132] John Alexander, *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 9.

loyalty of most of the armed forces in the capital of St. Petersburg, she set off for Peterhof to confront her husband. One historian describes the scene this way:

> Catherine reveled in her military role. An expert horsewoman, she bestrode the white stallion, saber in hand, dressed in the green uniform of a colonel of the Preobrazhenskii Guards—the same rank Peter the Great had taken. As the platoons of Guards filed past in the twilight of the white night, they lustily cheered their new sovereign, who personally commanded the rearguard.[133]

Catherine was not the first female ruler of Russia, but she was its most successful, and is still revered today in her adopted homeland of Russia. It is notable to mention that although the "voluminous literature on Catherine the Great contains gratuitous remarks and asides on the nature of women and the problem of female rule, ...these occur more frequently in the works of Western European writers than of Russians."[134] Catherine's love life is referenced by historians, popular writers and filmmakers more often than her many sweeping reforms and advancements in Russia during the Enlightenment. The false and sordid rumor of her death involving intercourse with a horse still lingers today, and is often one of the only details people know about her. It was difficult for Catherine to overcome the prejudices towards women, and she is still judged by her personal life and not on the merits of her

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[133] Ibid., 9-10.
[134] Meehan-Waters, 293.

distinguished rule. This has been the case since the beginning of her reign and persists today in popular books and movies.

For over two hundred years, there has been debate over whether Catherine the Great of Russia was an enlightened monarch. Her critics would argue that she failed to live up to enlightenment ideals by not fully implementing many of her initiatives and for not doing more to improve the condition of the serfs or to emancipate them. Nevertheless, Catherine has her champions, as well, who point to her many reforms, such as her attempt at revamping Russia's code of laws, her widespread educational reform, her policies on public health and welfare and her support of the fine arts.

Catherine took great pride in her relationship with the leading Enlightenment figures of her time, including the *philosophes* Voltaire and Diderot with whom she corresponded regularly. Both modern and contemporary critics argue that she only associated with these men in order to bolster a false image of being enlightened and did not have a genuine interest in reform. However, there is compelling evidence to the contrary, much of which exists in the form of lengthy and thoughtful personal letters written by Catherine and the leading *philosophes*. That is not to say that there was always a consensus among the *philosophes* as to whether Catherine was doing all that she could. For instance, Diderot wrote of Catherine's *Nakaz*:

> I see in Her Imperial Majesty's *Instruction* a plan for an excellent code of laws; but not a word on how to ensure the maintenance of this code. I see the name of despot renounced, but the essence retained, and despotism called monarchy. I see no proposal for the enfranchisement of the mass of the nation. Now without enfranchisement or liberty, there is no property; without property there is no agriculture; without agriculture there is no strength, greatness, riches, or prosperity. But the Empress has magnanimity, penetration, intelligence, enormous talent, justice, goodness, patience and firmness. And to use her own words, the tree which she cannot throw down by wrestling with it, she can cause to fall by cutting away at its roots little by little.[135]

While he was quick to praise Catherine for her legal reforms, he also pointed out that she still had not freed the serfs and was thereby holding her empire back from becoming a truly enlightened society and reaping the accompanying benefits. Moreover, while Catherine respected Diderot she did not follow his advice blindly and took him to task when she commented, "you forget, in all your plans for reform, the difference in our two positions: you work only on paper, which will put up with anything: it is all of a piece, pliable and places no restriction on your imagination or your pen; while I, poor Empress, have to work on human skin, which is irritable and ticklish to quite a different degree."[136] Catherine argued in the *Nakaz* that it would not be prudent to "suddenly and through a general law create a large number of free

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[135] A. Lentin, ed., *Enlightened Absolutism (1760-1790): A Documentary Sourcebook* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England: Avero Publications Ltd., 1985), 38.
[136] Lentin, *Enlightened Absolutism,* 257.

men... [however] the laws can favor giving personal property to slaves."[137] Catherine realized that the strength and wealth of her empire rested on the backs of the serfs and state peasants; to free them would mean the loss of revenue and would create a backlash from nobles and other landowners who would stand to lose the most if the serfs were freed. In effect, her hands were tied; nevertheless, she did acknowledge that she had a responsibility to see that the serfs were treated fairly and to avoid enslaving a person just for the personal benefit of having a slave. In the *Nakaz* she wrote,

> we are bound to avoid reducing men to a state of slavery unless absolute necessity requires it, and if we do so, it is not for our own gain, but for the benefit of the State. ... it is also necessary to remove the causes which have so often led to revolts of serfs against their masters; for unless we recognize these causes, it is impossible to prevent such occurrences by law.[138]

Clearly, Catherine paid more than just lip service to the ideals of the Enlightenment, even though it was beyond her power to fully implement many of her progressive ideas.

Nevertheless, Catherine was dedicated to initiate reform in Russia in order to increase Russia's standing among other European powers. In her first years on the throne, she set out to revamp the Code of Laws that had not been revised since its inception. This was a massive

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[137] Ibid., 75.
[138] Ibid.,75.

undertaking. Catherine sent out a call for members for a new Legislative Committee comprised of nobles, townsmen, free peasants, members of non-Russian tribes, Cossacks, Church officials and members of government offices. [139] Upon their arrival in Moscow in 1767, the elected officials were given Catherine's *Instruction,* or *Nakaz,* that she had written herself over a period of two years. According to Isabel de Madariaga, it was "certainly unusual at the time for a ruling monarch to expound his or her views on how a government should be organized."[140] Catherine was determined to solidify her position on the throne, and to establish Russia as a power player in European politics, which is evident when she unequivocally stated in the opening of the *Nakaz,* "Russia is a European power."[141] Furthermore, in what can be interpreted as effort to forestall her critics who stated her autocratic rule was a contradiction to her enlightened views, Catherine justified her rule by stating that an autocratic government was needed in such a vast country as Russia. It is far better to obey the laws of one master than of many and the purpose of an autocracy is "not to deprive people of their natural freedom, but to guide their actions so as to attain the maximum good...the intention and the aim of autocracies is the glory of

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[139] Madariaga, 25- 26.
[140] Ibid., 27
[141] George Vernadsky, ed., *A Source Book for Russian History from Early Times to 1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 403.

the citizens, the state, and the sovereign."[142] In defense of Catherine, modern scholars have stated that her dedication to the writing of the *Nakaz* is a clear indication of her genuine enlightened views.

Furthermore, it is quite clear that Catherine was heavily influenced by the writings of the *philosophes* such as Montesquieu, Beccaria and Baron Bielfeld as many of the passages of the *Nakaz* are taken directly from of the writings of these authors. In her *Nakaz*, Catherine lays out her thoughts on subjects ranging from religious tolerance to crime and punishment; her attention to detail highlights her genuine concern for the future of Russia, and not just her reign. However, the influence of the Enlightenment is most evident in Catherine's articles on crime, punishment and justice. In these articles concerning crimes and punishments. Catherine wrote a very detailed analysis of crimes and punishments, for example, she wrote that crimes against "religion and manners, ...should be punished by ...depriving the offender of the benefits of religion, or by public humiliation; crimes against peace or public security, ...would deserve imprisonment, corporal punishment or, in the case of murder, death; and crimes against property, ...should be dealt with by fines."[143] The influence of such enlightened writers as Montesquieu and Beccaria is unmistakable in Catherine's thoughts on torture, as is seen in article one hundred

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[142] Ibid., 403.
[143] Madariaga, 30.

twenty three, "the use of torture is repugnant to a healthy and natural mind. Humanity itself cries out against it and demands that it be totally abolished."[144] As for critics of Catherine's motives in drafting the *Nakaz* as a way to inflate her standing among the *philosophes*, Madariaga points out Catherine's sincerity in her commitment to enlightened ideals, such as evenhandedness in the law.[145] This commitment and thoughtfulness are evidence of the validity of Catherine being labeled an enlightened monarch.

There are other examples of Catherine's commitment to enlightened ideals, such as her reform of the educational system in Russia. As Madariaga points out, the belief that society would benefit immensely by making education more widely available was one of the pillars of the Enlightenment, "Catherine II was no exception in attaching great importance to education."[146] Not only do modern historians remark upon Catherine's dedication to the improvement of Russia's educational system, but also Madame Vigée Lebrun, a foreign visitor, who wrote of Catherine's' many accomplishments in her memoirs, that "[Catherine] founded schools in all the towns and country districts."[147] That this undertaking was commented upon in a memoir published well after Catherine's death, shows the strong impression

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[144] Vernadsky, 403.
[145] Madariaga, 30.
[146] Ibid., 104.
[147] Lionel Strachey, ed., *Memoirs of Madame Vigée Lebrun* (New York: G. Braziller, 1989), 112.

that was made among her contemporaries from better-educated European countries. Catherine sought to set up both public and private institutions of learning across Russia; she first started with Foundling Homes that were attached to lying-in hospitals for poor mothers, which took in abandoned and illegitimate babies.[148] Next, Catherine established schools for noble girls, which according to Madariaga was a "major departure in the educational field in Russia."[149]

Perhaps Catherine's motivation for educating young Russian women was in part due to her friendship with well-educated, young Princess Ekaterina Dashkova. Princess Dashkova was a highly intelligent woman who became very close to Catherine after she assisted in Catherine's palace coup in 1762. She was later rewarded handsomely with estates, and was even installed as the Director of the Petersburg Academy and was President of the Russian Academy.[150] Dashkova describes her own education by her uncle this way, "my uncle spared nothing to give us the best masters, and according to the ideas of the time we received the very best education; for we had a perfect knowledge of four languages. ... Everyone had to agree that our education left nothing to be desired."[151] Dashkova's accomplishments and abilities proved that women could learn just as well, if not better,

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[148] Madariaga, 105.
[149] Ibid., 106.
[150] Kyril Fitzlyon, ed., *The Memoirs of Princess Dashkova* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 3.
[151] Ibid., 32.

than men and that given the right opportunities they could achieve greatness. While Catherine's goals in educating women may not have been that lofty, it can be noted, "she wished them to be women of the world, with a knowledge of etiquette, polite behavior and languages."[152]

Furthermore, Catherine wished for all of Russia to at the very least, benefit from a basic education. In 1786, the Statute of National Schools was issued that provided for the "establishment of a high school in each provincial capital and a primary school in each district town;"[153] moreover, the schools were to be funded by the government and therefore free to anyone who wished to attend. The reform of Russia's educational system was a huge undertaking that was also the foundation upon which Alexander I would later build his educational reforms; "in the course of fourteen years [during Catherine's reign],..., over 400 new teachers were trained; by the end of the century, there were 315 schools, with 790 teachers, and nearly 20,000 pupils of whom some 2,000 were girls."[154] Modern critics who point to the fact that while education was free it was not compulsory, should also realize that in an empire the size of Russia it would be impossible to enforce such measures and would create hardships for rural families who would have had to send their children some distance to a town with a school and

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[152] Madariaga, 107.
[153] Ibid., 110.
[154] Ibid., 111.

therefore lose the benefit of the child's labor.[155] Nevertheless, Catherine's steadfast commitment to education is yet another indicator of her enlightened views.

In a letter to Voltaire in 1768, Catherine, in a sort of off-handed way, remarked on her incredibly bold and pioneering decision to have first herself and then her son the Grand Duke Paul inoculated against smallpox. She gave the reasoning behind her decision as a way to thank Voltaire for sending her a set of his works, she states, "a badly scrawled note, full of bad French, is a poor way of thanking such a man. ...In the end, I thought the best thing to do would be for me to set a personal example which might be of use to people."[156] As it turns out, her example was to be the first person in Russia to be inoculated against smallpox, at very great risk to her own health. This noble act gave rise to the widespread practice of inoculation for smallpox throughout Russia, not only among the nobility but also for the serfs and peasants. In Catherine's Statute of 1775, provisions for boards of welfare and medical services were established. Catherine was deeply concerned for the well-being of her subjects, as can be seen in her efforts to reform health care throughout Russia through the establishment of hospitals and local social welfare boards.

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[155] Madariaga, 117.
[156] A. Lentin, ed., *Voltaire and Catherine the Great. Selected Correspondence* (Cambridge: Oriental Research Partners, 1974), 52-53.

While Catherine spent much time on reforming the Russian government and implementing new social policies, she also played a role in cultivating the fine arts in Russia. Catherine loved to write and it showed in her prolific writings throughout her life and reign. Catherine not only wrote her *Nakaz*, but a great many other works, both personal and political. Over the course of her lifetime, she would write on:

> Politics, Russian history, education economics, and linguistics; she wrote thousands of letters, more than two dozen plays and operas, the first Russian children's literature, memoirs, and journalism. Fluent in Russian, French, and German, she published a good deal in Russia and abroad, in French and in translations, often 'anonymously'. In this way, Catherine promoted an enlightened Russia and its monarch together, and defended them against their many foreign critics, on a European historical, political, social, cultural, and intellectual stage.[157]

Furthermore, Catherine encouraged the operation of private printing presses in Russia that helped to spark a marked increase in publishing and gave rise to Russian literature in its own right. In 1783, Catherine sent forth a decree that "allowed anyone, anywhere, of any social estate, to set up a printing press providing only that it was registered with the local chief of police."[158] Moreover, during part of Catherine's reign censorship was lax and only rarely enforced when a particular writing was considered subversive or damaging to Russia. However, in

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[157] Cruse, xx.
[158] Madariaga, 97.

Catherine's later years, especially during the French Revolution, censorship was more widely enforced. [159]

Catherine was interested in promoting the study of language as well and in a bold move, she emphasized her enlightened view that women could just as easily lead as men with her appointment of Princess Dashkova as the President of the newly established Academy of Language in 1783. This was a very wise choice indeed for Catherine, since Dashkova proved to be a worthy candidate to further promote the growth of Russian literature; as noted by Madariaga, "she [Dashkova] set about organizing the setting down of the rules of Russian grammar and spelling, and she co-opted the leading Russian writers of the day to work with her in preparing the first dictionary of the Russian language, which began to appear in 1788."[160]

In addition to her promotion of literature and language, Catherine also encouraged and supported ballets and operas. However, Catherine may be even better known for her love of collecting art, especially paintings. Catherine's passion for collecting fine art soon outgrew her existing palaces, so she had an addition that she called the Hermitage built to house her ever-growing collection. Catherine used her art collection to elevate her prestige and influence in Europe, she was well

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[159] Ibid., 94-98.
[160] Ibid., 99.

aware that art equaled power, especially Western art.[161] In her memoirs, Baroness Elizabeth Dimsdale describes the art collection that Catherine housed in her newly built and still expanding Hermitage: she writes, "I likewise saw the Empress's Collection of Pictures, which are numerous and of the best Masters, among them were the whole of the Orford Collection, they are at present placed in a Gallery in the uppermost Story of the Palace, ...but a magnificent Gallery is building for them to which when finished they will be removed."[162] Catherine's acquisition of collections caused quite a stir in Europe among collectors who balked at the idea of artworks by the great Masters going to a backwards country like Russia.[163] Catherine also patronized sculpture. The most famous of which she had commissioned was that of a huge statute of Peter the Great, which inspired the poem *The Bronze Horseman* by Alexander Pushkin. While some scholars may argue that Catherine collected artworks out of vanity, it must also be acknowledged that she brought prestige, and inspiration, to Russia and transformed its capital, at least visually, into a modern European city.

Although today critics will argue that Catherine did not do as much as she could have to turn Russia around and bring it more fully into Western ways of governing, it must be acknowledged that she only

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[161] Rod Macleish, *The Hermitage - A Russian Odyssey: Catherine the Great, A Lust for Art,* VHS. Directed by John Baehrend, (Public Media Home Vision, 1994).
[162] Anthony Cross, ed., *An English Lady at the Court of Catherine the Great: The Journal of Baroness Elizabeth Dimsdale* (Cambridge: Crest Publications, 1989), 42.
[163] MacLeish, *The Hermitage - A Russian Odyssey: Catherine the Great, A Lust for Art.*

had so much power to wield and that she was on some level protecting her own place on the throne. Simon Dixon includes an appropriate quote in his book attributed to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu who stated, "I never knew any person who had it [power] who did not lament the load, tho' I confess (so infirm is human nature) they have all endeavored to retain it, at the same time they complained of it."[164] The same could certainly be said of Catherine; she knew her hold on power was tenuous in her early years and sought to solidify her claim to the throne by attempting, and for the most part succeeding, to improve Russia through her many reforms. However, Catherine great though she may have been, was only one woman and since all of the power of government rested in her hands, once she was gone, so too were the results of that power. Once the Grand Duke Paul became Tsar Paul I upon his mother's death, he set out to undo many of the reforms Catherine had worked for so long to implement. Dixon writes of the transformation that took place almost immediately upon the ascension of Paul I to the throne: "the new tsar's impact was immediate. On the day after Catherine's death, A.S. Shishkov arrived at the palace to learn from [Dr. John] Rogerson that 'tout est fini'. 'The change was so great', Shishkov later recalled of the scene that greeted him, 'that it looked like

[164] Simon Dixon, *Catherine the Great* (New York: Pearson Education Ltd., 2001), 178. Brackets are not in original quote.

nothing other than an enemy invasion'."[165] Catherine was gone, and so were her reforms; nevertheless, her impact on Russian history was enormous and would forever change Russia. Madariaga sums it up best, "Catherine was not a revolutionary like Peter I, who forced his policies on a reluctant society without counting the human cost. She paid attention to public opinion; ...her absolute authority rested, as she well knew, on her sensitivity to the possible."[166] Catherine knew what was possible and what was not; she forged ahead in her reforms despite how unconventional it was for a monarch to do so, and for that effort deserves to be called a truly enlightened monarch.

Love Life

Catherine's political acumen and motivations were not the only aspects of her reign that have been scrutinized. Her love life has become a popular subject of scholars and filmmakers, as well. It is quite clear that there was no love lost between Catherine and her husband Paul, and that Catherine did have several intense love affairs over the course of her life. Her first affair with Sergei Saltykov, which oddly enough was sanctioned by the empress Elizabeth in the hopes of providing a male heir to the throne, began in 1752. It is generally believed that Saltykov was the father of her son Paul, who was born in 1754, although for

[165] Ibid., 179.
[166] Madariaga, 218.

political reasons Peter was officially declared the boy's father.[167] Soon after the birth of Paul, the affair ended when Saltykov was sent to Sweden by the empress Elizabeth.[168] Not long afterwards, Catherine began a new one with Count Stanislaw Poniatowski, who would later become a king of Poland. Just as her first affair had been formally ignored by the empress Elizabeth and the court, a blind eye was also turned to the affair with Poniatowski. Catherine wrote in her memoir about an episode in which it was revealed that she and Poniatowski were having an affair and how nonchalantly the whole issue was handled. Apparently, Catherine had been given a dog by one of her courtiers, Count Horn, who noticed how affectionate the dog was towards Poniatowski and remarked that it must not have been the first time the dog had seen him and added, "Fear not. You are dealing with a discreet man."[169] This union also produced a child, Anna Petrovna.

While Catherine may have enjoyed her affairs with Saltykov and Poniatowski, it would be her affairs with Grigori Orlov and Grigori Potemkin that would prove the most beneficial and rewarding. Catherine began her affair with Orlov around 1760, and bore him a son, Alexei Bobrinskoy, in 1762. However, it was not their child that kept Catherine and Orlov close; instead, it was their working together to

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[167] Cruse, xv, 117.
[168] Ibid., 147.
[169] Ibid., 156.

bring Catherine to the throne. Orlov was instrumental in organizing the coup that overthrew Peter, and was complicit in Peter's subsequent death.[170] Orlov and his brothers "occupied strategic positions in the armed forces", and helped Catherine gain support among the troops.[171] Catherine and Orlov were lovers for approximately twelve years, and during that time, she had granted him important government positions, consulted him on matters of State and assigned him to special commissions to act on her behalf.[172] Their close bonds were not enough to keep the couple together, however, and in 1772 Catherine dismissed Orlov as her lover, allowing him to retain some of his positions within her court.[173]

It did not take Catherine long to find a replacement for Orlov. Catherine's greatest love was Grigory Potemkin, a handsome and highly intelligent soldier who became her most trusted advisor and confidant. Their relationship began in 1773 and lasted until Potemkin's death in 1791. Potemkin was ten years younger than Catherine and was a "bold, enterprising, imaginative, moody, arrogant, witty and intelligent man."[174] Potemkin, although described as being handsome, had lost

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[170] Dixon, 2.
[171] Madariaga, 3.
[172] Alexander, 98.
[173] Ibid., 135-137.
[174] Madariaga, 209.

sight in one eye due to an accident, "and not, as rumour-mongers liked to assert, because Grigory Orlov had punched him in the face."[175]

Over the course of their relationship, Catherine wrote volumes of letters to Potemkin, some playful and flirty and others in a more serious political tone. Catherine's letters are important as historical documents since they provide an intimate look into the life of one of the most powerful rulers in the eighteenth century. The letters are also important because they shed light on Catherine as a female ruler, and help dispel some of the ugly rumors and theories revolving around her love life that circulated even before her death. Her letters show her keen mind in matters regarding both political and military matters, and reveal a very passionate woman in both her private and public roles. She gushes like a schoolgirl in her letters to Potemkin, especially in the early years. For example, in letters written in 1775, she addresses Potemkin as "Grishenka, sweetie, and Lordikins", and writes "may I come see you and when? I'm dying, I want to see you."[176] In later letters, there is still playfulness but there is much more discussion of political strategy and military matters; she writes with authority and confidence: "As for the other side, matters there have become critical, as you'll see from the official papers. If we had a corps of some twenty-

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[175] Virginia Rounding, *Catherine the Great: Love, Sex and Power* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007), 271.

[176] Douglas Smith, ed., *Love and Conquest: Personal Correspondence of Catherine the Great and Prince Grigory Potemkin* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 52.

thousand in Livonia, then everything would be safe. Moreover, the change in Poland would speed up."[177] Catherine was very focused and passionate over all aspects of her life as can be seen in her letters.[178] The correspondence between Catherine and Potemkin focused more on matters of policy and war than on their personal relationship during the Turkish War. Although most of their letters opened or ended in personal greetings, inquiry into health, and accolades, for the most part the letters contained questions and answers in regards to battle updates, strategy and negotiations to end the war. While the tone of their earlier letters was mostly romantic in nature, these later letters show a more maternal side of Catherine and a real reliance on each other for strength during crisis. For example, Catherine writes to Potemkin, "Please notify me in writing how many vessels you lost last autumn so that I might distinguish the universal lies from the truth, and in what condition is the Sevastpol and Dneiper squadron now? God grant you health amid such great troubles."[179] Catherine was at once playing the role of commander-in-chief and caregiver to Potemkin.

Sometime around 1776, their relationship changed; but while they were no longer in a physical relationship their friendship and reliance upon each other was not diminished. Catherine and Potemkin

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[177] Ibid., 342-343.
[178] Ibid., 52, 342-343.
[179] Ibid., 227.

"continued to enjoy a unique relationship...he was now her consort, friend, advisor, and de facto chief minister."[180] Although no longer a couple, the playfulness that was prevalent in her earlier letters was still present in these later letters. For instance, Catherine wrote, "In a short while I shall have the honor of telling you, my parakeet, that I love you with all my heart."[181] It has been speculated that Catherine and Potemkin were secretly married, which would account for the lasting relationship and the very intimate nature of their letters even up to the very end of Potemkin's life. Of all her lovers, Potemkin was to remain close to her until his death in 1791. Catherine was devastated by Potemkin's death; upon hearing the news she collapsed and wept for days.[182] One scholar noted that:

> With the death of Potemkin, Catherine lost her closest adviser and Russia, arguably, its greatest statesman. ... Potemkin had been her rescuing knight, her confidant, ablest administrator, and warlord. Catherine had been his beloved sovereign, his protector, and the benefactress from whom all his blessings flowed. They had been lovers and most likely husband and wife. They were one of the most uncommon royal couples in history. To quote Potemkin's biographer, "their love affair and political alliance was unequalled in history by Antony and Cleopatra, Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, Napoleon and Josephine, because it was as remarkable for its achievements as its romance, as endearing for its humanity as for its power.[183]

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[180] Ibid., 89.
[181] Ibid., 97.
[182] Alexander, 292.
[183] Smith, xiv.

Verdicts of History

Catherine's love life has been the source of fascination, and rumors, since the beginning of her reign. Even over two hundred years after her death, her legacy is haunted by myths and rumors surrounding her private life, and she has been labeled everything from a "mariticidal nymphomaniac"[184] to a common whore. Although she did have a long list of lovers and favorites, it would be an "injustice to attribute her conduct to sensuality alone."[185] Catherine, like any human, felt the need to love and to be loved; that she was "mated to a repulsive buffoon was not her fault, and the emotional vacuum cried aloud to be filled."[186] Catherine even admitted that her "heart was loath to remain even one hour without love."[187] Although wanting to earn the love of her adopted homeland, Catherine, never hid her private loves, especially since the "moral standard of her contemporaries was so low that few could throw stones."[188] However, as historian Simon Dixon points out,

> Unlike her male contemporaries on the thrones of Europe, Catherine was vulnerable to the stereotypical charges of unnatural, irrational behaviour that have dogged powerful women for the past 2000 years. Since history has known little ground between the prevailing notion of 'legitimate' female power—the

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[184] Ibid., xliii.
[185] George Gooch, *Catherine the Great and Other Studies* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1954), 38.
[186] Ibid., 38.
[187] Rounding, 272.
[188] Gooch, 37.

> 'first lady image' characterized by benevolence, piety and chastity—and its unacceptable antithesis marked by selfishness, impurity and promiscuity, the extraordinary procession through Catherine's apartments of at least twelve lovers was more than enough to convict her of flaunting the unacceptable face of female rule.[189]

Had Catherine been a man, her exploits would have been considered part of being a monarch, but, as a woman, she was subjected to a double standard. However, there were exceptions to that double standard. Most notably, "Diderot was willing to exempt Catherine from the double standard of morality, distinguishing between *the decencies and virtues, the worn-out rags of your sex*, and the *large views and masculine and patriotic designs, which are the proper concern of monarchs.*"[190]

Nevertheless, contemporaries viewed her dependence on her lovers as political advisors as typical feminine weakness and proof that she needed a man to help her rule. Robespierre, a member of the French Estates General, made the comment that "the truth is ...that under the old empress, as under all women who hold the sceptre [sic], it is men who govern."[191] Unfortunately for Catherine, no matter how well she governed Russia, regardless of all of her political and cultural achievements, "it made little difference what Catherine did, or how well

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[189] Dixon, 53.
[190] Meehan-Waters, 294. (italics were added to show Diderot's own words which were quoted in the original passage.)
[191] Dixon, 54.

her critics knew her: the stereotypes of female rule were too rigid to yield to individual variation."[192] Additionally, Catherine's contemporaries complained about her vanity, calling it "that unfortunate rock so fatal to every female. ...Her reign will ever bear this distinguishing characteristic of her sex."[193]

Historians, biographers and filmmakers all have their opinions of Catherine and have portrayed her accordingly. While most historians and biographers present a balanced view of Catherine and her reign, filmmakers have tended to focus on her personal life and her many affairs of the heart. Historian John Alexander captures the essence of the problem surrounding the characterization of Catherine's reign as such, "the woman who became known as Catherine the Great led a life so full of varied activities in such exotic settings, amid so many dramatic events and memorable personalities, that it took on all the trappings of legend."[194] Catherine the legend is more appealing to the general public than is the Catherine who ruled with a firm hand and sharp mind. However, it is largely due to the legend or myth of Catherine that she is so widely known today. It is notable that, "almost two centuries after her death, she still enjoys immense recognition as celebrity, superstar, and sex symbol—reputations that show no signs of

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[192] Ibid., 55.
[193] Meehan-Waters, 294.
[194] Alexander, vii.

flagging. Both the culturally literate and the ordinary public know her name and sense her fame or notoriety."[195] While modern scholars tend to take a balanced view of Catherine as a female ruler, the same cannot be said of her contemporaries:

> The wide range of West European attitudes and opinions cannot be forced into a single mold, but the idea of a woman ruler clearly threatened many contemporaries, who responded in two ways. Some denied that the problem existed by denying that Catherine actually exercised power. For them, the question of favorites and the domination of Potemkin became a central theme. Others faced Catherine's power squarely, exaggerated it, and emphasized her ambitious, manipulative characteristics and her depravity, i.e., difference from the norm in all aspects. In the first instance, Catherine, fell short as a ruler; in the second, as a woman.[196]

Even during the Enlightenment, such prejudicial views reigned and impinged upon Catherine's reputation as a competent and great ruler.

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[195] Ibid., vii.
[196] Meehan-Waters, 299-300.

Chapter 5
Catherine: Hollywood Style

Queen Elizabeth I is not alone in being a powerful female ruler who faced down prejudices based on her gender. The Empress Catherine II of Russia faced similar difficulties. Catherine the Great is a much-maligned figure in history; this has carried over into her portrayal by Hollywood and documentary makers. Despite evidence to the contrary, various filmmakers have chosen to show Catherine as an evil despot and the ruler over a backwards and barbaric empire, while completely ignoring historical facts. However, a few films try to bring justice to Catherine and portray her in a favorable light while not completely ignoring her faults. Unfortunately, sex sells in Hollywood and the seductress Catherine plays better on the big screen than does a benevolent and enlightened one.

Even the titles of the movies attempt to belittle Catherine or imply that she was no more than a power-monger. For example, *The Scarlet Empress*, and *Catherine the Great: A Lust for Art* allude to the rumors and myths surrounding Catherine's personal life, whereas other titles such as *Catherine: Empress of Ambition* point towards her role as a usurper of the Russian throne. Despite the contentious titles, some of

the films do an adequate job of examining Catherine's life, both political and personal.

The movies analyzed here include, *Catherine: Empress of Ambition; The Scarlett Empress; Catherine the Great; Catherine the Great: A Lust for Art, and Catherine the Great: Empress of Russia.*[197] Some are documentaries produced by distinguished companies such as the National Geographic Channel and PBS, while others are more mainstream Hollywood productions. However, just because a reputable filmmaker or producer produced a movie, does not mean it does not have flaws and inaccuracies.

The National Geographic Channel's documentary *Catherine: Empress of Ambition,* was made in 2006, directed by Don Campbell and written by Don Campbell and Doug Shultz. The film opens with a glaring historical inaccuracy involving the death of Peter III; the narrator states that as Peter III is being strangled in his palace, Catherine is being rushed to another palace to be declared Empress of

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[197] Doug Shultz, Don Campbell, *Catherine: Empress of Ambition*, DVD. Directed by Doug Shultz. (Washington: D.C.: National Geographic, 2007). Eleanor McGeary, screenwriter, and Manuel Komroff, arranger, *The Scarlet Empress*, DVD. Directed by Josef von Sternberg. (Hollywood: Paramount Pictures, 1934). John Goldsmith and Frank Tudisco, *Catherine the Great*, DVD. Directed by Marvin J. Chomsky and John Goldsmith. (A&E Home Video, 2001). PBS, *The Hermitage - A Russian Odyssey: Catherine the Great, A Lust for Art*, VHS. Directed by John Baehrend, ((Public Media Home Vision, 1994). Paul Burgess and John Paul Davidson, *Catherine the Great: Empress of Russia*, DVD. Directed by Paul Burgess and John Paul Davidson, (Hollywood: Paramount Home Entertainment, 2006).

Russia. Actually, Peter died three days after the coup of alleged complications of hemorrhoids, although it is widely believed that he died at the hands of Alexei Orlov. Later in the movie the circumstances surrounding the coup and Peter's death were dealt with in a more accurate manner; nevertheless, the opening scenes are very misleading. Unfortunately, inaccuracies continue throughout the film; for example, when the actors portraying Catherine and others at court speak it is in Russian instead of the language of the court, which was French. In this particular film, the actors are acting out scenes in the story being told by the narrator and have no real lines of their own, which is off-putting, especially when the same background is re-used repeatedly throughout the film. Furthermore, the scenes with the actors are sometimes shot with a *VH1 Behind the Music* feel to them. There are screen shots of the actors portraying Catherine and Peter III hovering over the deathbed of the Empress Elizabeth and staring into the camera once she has died. The editing and repetitive narration detract from what could have been a good documentary; instead it seems cheaply done and does little to dispel myths about Catherine or to show exactly what made her great. Throughout the film, there are snippets of comments by Russian scholars in an attempt to add credibility to the project but even this does nothing to improve the feel of the film or add any real substance to the study of Catherine's reign. However, the film does try to redeem

itself in Catherine's later years by extolling her success in expunging the Pugachev rebellion, also the gains she and Potemkin made near the Black Sea, and the initiating of her reforms and re-writing of the law, but still fell short of properly addressing the issues of Catherine's reforms.

Another movie that did Catherine absolutely no justice was *The Scarlet Empress*. Released in 1934 and starring Marlene Dietrich, the film was directed by Josef von Sternberg, whose films have been described as among the most visionary ever made in Hollywood, but in spite of their visual sumptuousness, contemporary audiences found them "dramatically inert."[198] This film portrayed Catherine as a charming and happy child-bride who was thrown into a loveless marriage and forced to adapt to a barbaric society. Contrary to this depiction of Catherine, the "historical Catherine was nothing like the kittenish, pouting, vamping heroine played by Marlene Dietrich, and the real Catherine's early life was not a romp through a fantastic Russian pleasure garden but a trail of tears."[199] While the beginning of the film attempts to build sympathy for Catherine, the second half of the movie portrays her as a manipulative seductress who relies fully on her womanly charms to maintain her hold on power. Historical accuracy

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[198] IMDB. The Internet Movie Database. http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0903049/bio last accessed 03/17/2009.

[199] Mark Carnes, ed., *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies* (New York: Holt, 1996), 86.

was *not* the focus of this film. The filmmakers seemed intent on showing Russia in the worst possible light and used dreary gothic style backgrounds to convey to the viewer that Russia was a backwards and barbaric nation full of savages and half-wits. Moreover, in the very beginning of the movie Catherine is portrayed as an innocent child, dress all in white as a symbol of her purity, whereas Russia is shown as very gothic—dark and dreary and draped all in black. Although Russia was not truly a European country, it was not as barbaric as the filmmakers would have the audience believe. On the contrary, Russia was full of beautiful art and architecture. One historian notes that during Catherine's introduction to Russia she was awestruck at the magnificence of the Church of the Assumption in Kiev, "in which all the holy pictures were covered with gold, silver and jewels."[200] Moreover, the palaces of Russia were not grim and dirty as portrayed in the film, they were actually quite colorful and well appointed. In fact, "the most immediate difference between buildings in Russia and their European equivalents at that time was that the former were painted vivid colours, to give them some life during the long snow-bound winter."[201] Furthermore, the nobility of Russia were very well mannered and did not act like animals at the dinner table as depicted in one scene. Peter

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[200] Vincent Cronin, *Catherine, Empress of all the Russias* (New York: William Morrow and Comp. Inc., 1978), 55.
[201] Ibid., 236.

the Great had taken great pains to westernize the Russian nobility, and ripping and tearing at food like animals would never have been permitted during his reign nor that of Empress Elizabeth. Grand dinners were often held during Catherine's engagement to Peter, filled with music and sumptuous dinners served with champagne and golden Tokay.[202]

One reviewer comments on the director's use of gothic and over-the-top scenery in the film, "Von Sternberg's fetishism is in full flower here as he catalogs a shadowy array of blatantly sadomasochistic tableaux: bodies spilling out of iron maidens; nude women being burnt at the stake; a man strapped to a whirling wheel; and the piece de resistance, a bound, upside-down man used as a clapper in a gigantic bell."[203] In another scene involving the dinner table, Empress Elizabeth is handed a turkey leg instead of her scepter. All of these images are used to represent Russia as backward and uncultured, leading the audience to sympathize with Catherine as the helpless damsel being married off to a crazy half-wit.

One of the few details the director and screenwriter got right was the behavior of Peter III. Many historians concede that Catherine's depictions of Peter III in her memoirs are accurate, even allowing for

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[202] Ibid., 60.

[203] Gary Morris, "Mother Russia! Von Sternberg's The Scarlet Empress" *Bright Lights Film Journal.* Iss. 33 (July 2001): http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/33/index.html.

some embellishments. Catherine portrayed Peter III as a "man-boy," although he had reached the age of majority and had the responsibility of governing his Duchy of Holstein he still played with toys and acted as if he were still a child. He had no common sense and as Catherine stated he "was naturally as discreet as a cannon blast."[204] Soon after Peter was crowned Tsar, he began to alienate many powerful groups throughout Russia. One of Catherine's biographers states that Peter, "withdrew from the war against Prussia and signed a peace treaty in April 1762, abandoning all Russian conquests, ... He alienated the Orthodox hierarchy by setting in motion again the taking over of Church lands by the state. ... Most of his policies were so unpopular at court, so lacking in judgment, that several groups started plotting to dethrone him."[205]

In addition to the inaccuracies of Catherine's surroundings, there are many that relate to Catherine's ascension to power. Catherine is portrayed as gaining her power through seduction and manipulation and very little is shown of her political acumen and diplomatic shrewdness. Although in the movie, there are a few scenes that allude to Catherine's political savvy, although still focusing on her female charms, "Catherine succeeds in deposing Peter by winning over the two forces that have traditionally ruled empires: the church and the army.

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[204] Cruse, 25.
[205] Madariaga, 2-3.

She secures the church's loyalty by stripping off her jewels and handing them to the priest for the poor; she captivates the army by flirting with and bedding them, in the tradition of her predecessor."[206] Moreover, the sequence of events that led up to Catherine's coup can hardly be described as historical. As one critic noted, "Catherine is shown sleeping her way to the top, relying on her beauty to make men fall at her feet and the throne into her lap."[207] For instance, in the movie, Catherine charges up a flight of stairs, on horseback no less, to ring the bell proclaiming her triumph over Peter, while her lover in the army, Grigory Orlov, strangles poor Peter to death. There is one detail they got right; during the coup, Catherine did wear an army uniform when she was presented to the Preobrazhensky guard. However, much like the National Geographic documentary, the timing of Peter's death is misrepresented since he died a few days after the coup. The film only covered the period of Catherine's arrival in Russia up to her coup and declaration as Empress of Russia, which only helps to perpetuate the myths and rumors regarding Catherine's personal life and ignores her contributions to Russian and European politics during her long reign.

Another poorly done movie is the A&E production *Catherine the Great,* starring Catherine Zeta-Jones, which was released in 1995, directed by Marvin Chomsky and John Goldsmith, and written by John

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[206] Morris. (no page numbers since this is an internet article)
[207] Carnes, 88.

Goldsmith and Frank Tudisco. In the film, Catherine is portrayed in her early years as naïve and eager for love and companionship, while the Grand Duke Peter's horrid behavior towards Catherine is completely ignored. Moreover, the director does not adequately examine the reasons why Catherine felt the need to seize power, such as Peter III's ineptitude, gross misconduct and flagrant abuses of the military, nobility and the Church. After Catherine ascends to the throne, she is portrayed as a self-centered, pompous, seductress who, bizarrely enough also wanted to free the serfs. The movie barely touches on Catherine's reforms and when they are mentioned it is done so in a voice over at the end. The only reform mentioned with some detail was her theoretical idea of emancipating the serfs, but the film exaggerates how far Catherine was willing to go and how deeply the issue affected her; according to the film she was emotionally linked to the struggle and it hurt her deeply that her hands were tied and there was nothing she could do for the peasants. Furthermore, the Pugachev rebellion is grossly misrepresented, as is Catherine's personal involvement in its suppression. The filmmakers would have the viewer believe that Pugachev had an audience with Catherine before the rebellion and again while imprisoned during which he and Catherine had an emotional and philosophically deep discussion concerning the emancipation of the serfs. While Catherine was an enlightened ruler,

she was not a revolutionary and would never have risked her throne to implement such drastic reforms. Moreover, there is no evidence that she and Pugachev ever had a conversation, much less a philosophical discussion. The movie glosses over Catherine's rise to power and portrays her as an indecisive ruler who relied on others to help her achieve and maintain power.

Nevertheless, there are a few movies that correctly highlight Catherine's political ability and her commitment to enlightened ideals. In the documentary *Catherine the Great: A Lust for Art*, Catherine's dedication to promoting and supporting the fine arts is the focal point. The filmmakers shine the spotlight on Catherine's love of art and of collecting art that inspired her to fill her palaces with a vast array of masterpieces. Catherine's love of writing is also highlighted and mention is made about her prolific writings and her influence over Russian literature. The film also takes aim at Catherine's use of her art collection to strengthen her political stature in Europe; many Europeans were angry that art produced by their masters was being sent to Russia, which they felt was a backwater empire and, as such, an insult to their own culture. Catherine knew, according to the filmmaker, that art equaled power, especially European art, and she loved to surround herself in splendor, which was a showcase for her power and a little self-indulgent. Nevertheless, the film did a respectable

job of showing Catherine's dedication to the Arts and proving that she was driven by a genuine love of the fine arts and was not just paying lip service to influential Enlightenment figures of the time.

The most historically accurate portrayal of Catherine on film is the PBS documentary *Catherine the Great: Empress of Russia,* which was produced by PBS Educational Programs in 2005. The filmmakers drew heavily from Catherine's own memoirs and Isabel de Madariaga's books on Catherine. Catherine was portrayed as a shrewd politician even in her youth, as shown in her dealings with the English Ambassador Hanbury-Williams. The movie also depicts Peter III as an immature, ugly, foppish man-boy who never outgrew his toys, a portrayal that most historians would accept as accurate, whereas other movies tend to gloss over his immature behavior or ignore it altogether. The film's portrayal of Catherine's early life at court very closely resembles the descriptions in her memoirs, such as Peter's behavior, and her abandonment by Peter III and the Empress Elizabeth after the birth of her son, the Grand Duke Paul. The filmmakers also used commentary from noted scholars such as Madariaga and Simon Sebag Montefiore, which added to the credibility of the film and allowed for a deeper discussion of Catherine. In general, Catherine is well represented on both her qualities and her faults in this particular documentary.

Unfortunately, most filmmakers would rather tell the more sordid tales surrounding Catherine than to portray her as one of the most powerful women in history. The tales of her sexual promiscuity and appetite still hound Catherine over two hundred years after her death and there are still those who are willing to tarnish the image and profit from the belittling of one of Europe's greatest monarchs. As Carnes points out,

> Hollywood mythmaking reduces Catherine's life—and an important era in Russian history—to a dark fairy tale in which a charming innocent, forced to marry a troll and pitted against a wicked court, uses her beauty and wiles to overturn the forces of evil. But the factual story of Catherine's life was more compelling than any myth, its flawed heroine all the more admirable for enduring and ultimately transcending the sordid cruelties of the Russian court.[208]

Despite this unfortunate trend in Hollywood, there are still filmmakers out there who are genuinely interested in bringing the true, or a close as possible, tale of Catherine to the screen in order to help dispel some of the more outrageous myths and to bring to light the accomplishments of a woman who was clearly ahead of her time in her commitment to the ideals of the Enlightenment and her reforms that helped define Russia as a major power player in European politics. The lingering fascination with Catherine is linked inextricably to her being a

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[208] Ibid., 89.

"legend in her own time."[209] Catherine lived her life to the fullest and in full view of the public, she hid nothing nor was she ashamed of herself.

[209] Alexander, 329.

Chapter 6
CONCLUSION

Filmmakers have been, and seemingly always will be, fascinated with history. People and events from history have provided inspiration for many Hollywood blockbusters. The drama and intrigue of historically based films capture the imagination of the audience and transport them back in time to witness spectacular feats of heroism or somber moments of defeat. Although historically based, the events in these films sometimes stray from the historical record or get creative with timelines in order to tell their version of history. One might argue that, "Hollywood History is different. It fills irritating gaps in the historical record and polishes dulling ambiguities and complexities. The final product gleams, and it sears the imagination."[210] Even though a historical account behind Elizabeth's rise to power or Catherine's role in the coup that placed her on the throne would be fascinating and compelling, it is difficult to pack that much history into two hours of film. Audiences of 'historically based films' should be aware that movies do not "provide a substitute for history," instead, they should be regarded as an "invitation for further exploration."[211]

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[210] Carnes, 9.
[211] Ibid., 9-10.

Elizabeth and Catherine, though separated by two hundred years, had much in common. Both were female rulers during a period of male dominance in politics, they both had issues to overcome in regards to the way they succeeded to the throne, and they continue to enjoy a large measure of popularity today. However, there are many differences between the two monarchs. Elizabeth, although she loved Dudley, chose her country and her people over satisfying personal pleasures. Whereas Catherine, "could not function effectively as Empress whenever these emotional and physical needs were not being satisfied."[212] Elizabeth's image as the Virgin Queen thrives today, just as it did during her lifetime. She worked very hard to maintain her virginal persona and took great pride in her commitment to her people. Catherine, on the other hand, was no "Virgin Empress,"[213] and instead chose to live out her personal life as she saw fit, regardless of what others may have thought. That is not to say that she was not concerned about her adopted country or her people. In fact, in an epitaph she composed for herself, she wrote that upon taking the throne she, "desired its good and sought to procure for her subjects happiness, liberty and propriety."[214] Both women cared deeply for and made sacrifices for their countries and their people, and each have been celebrated throughout

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[212] Rounding, 509.
[213] Ibid., 509.
[214] Ibid., 505.

history for their achievements. Despite the accolades for their accomplishments, however, their gender remains an annoyance that mars their legacies. Elizabeth's virginity and Catherine's long list of lovers were topics of speculation and gossip during their lifetimes and continue to be the focus of many historians and filmmakers. Had they been born males, their private sexual predilections would have been footnotes to their reigns, and not the measuring stick by which their reigns are judged today. Throughout history, strong female rulers have had the extra burden of overcoming prejudices to their genders; either they had to be a "successful queen but flawed woman... [or] hopeless ruler but real woman."[215] In other words, a successful queen may rule alone but is considered a failure at being a woman if she has no king to help guide her; or she could relinquish all of the political aspects of ruling a kingdom to her king and be content to fulfill the role of royal baby-maker and produce an heir to the throne. Elizabeth and Catherine were two successful monarchs who chose what was right for them and for their countries. Moreover, "history has shown that rulers are either distinguished by their conquests or by their concern for their subjects. ... Catherine's [and Elizabeth's] strength consists in her balance between these two styles of rulership."[216]

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[215] Doran, *The Myth of Elizabeth*, 247.
[216] Meehan-Waters, 296.

The ongoing fascination of the public with Elizabeth and Catherine brings Hollywood, and its enthrallment with these two powerful and charismatic women, into focus. The power of the legends that surround Elizabeth and Catherine will continue to provide inspiration to new generations of filmmakers and historians alike, to create their own versions of these two great monarchs. Despite the tendency of Hollywood to skirt around the real events in history, which helps to perpetuate the myths surrounding Elizabeth and Catherine, "perhaps the truth is that the persistence of Elizabeth's [and Catherine's] iconic status is a testament to the power of the myth, the extent to which we, historians and filmmakers, are still under [their] spell."[217]

[217] Ibid., 248.

Appendix A

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Virgin Queen

Since the advent of cinematography there have been a number of films made on the life of the Virgin Queen. The story of the unwanted girl who grew up to be one of the world's best loved monarchs continues to capture the hearts and imaginations of each new generation. Her life was a life of triumph, of success, and yet behind the glory there was also a life of loneliness and loss. Her complicated, glittering, yet always inspiring, life, provides a wealth of material from which writers and actors can draw, and the enigma that was Elizabeth means that no two portrayals of her are ever the same. The dramatic fascination with the life of Queen Elizabeth I began very soon after her death. Perhaps the first mention of her in a dramatic play was the christening of Princess Elizabeth in Shakespeare's *Henry VIII.* Over the course of the next three centuries, Elizabeth continued to be dramatically represented in a

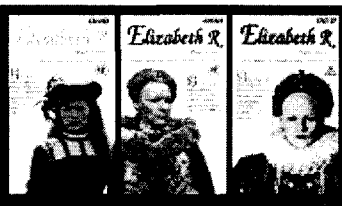
number of works. Below are some of the actresses who have played the great Queen over the last century, some now legends themselves. Unfortunately, not all films made on the life of Elizabeth I are available for purchase today.

The first screen portrayal of the Tudor Queen was made by the legendary Victorian actress **Sarah Bernhardt** in the silent film of 1911 known by both the titles ***The Loves of Queen Elizabeth***, or simply ***Queen Elizabeth***. It tells the story of Queen Elizabeth's relationship with Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex. It was originally a French production known as *Elisabeth, Reine d'Angleterre,* and was the most successful film of Bernhardt's career.

It is also the only Bernhardt film available on video today, although obtaining it can be difficult. The online company **Grapevine** supply the film for $16.95.

Bette Davis also played the Tudor Queen twice. She played her first in the film ***The Private Lives of Elizabeth Essex*** (1939). Errol Flynn once again plays the courtier, this time Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, whose love for the Queen is not enough to prevent him seeking power. A convincing portrayal of Elizabeth from this great actress and the real life tension between Flynn and Davis adds chemistry to their on screen performances.

Bette Davis played the Queen secondly in ***The Virgin Queen*** (1955), which is the story of Sir Walter Raleigh, played by Richard Rodd. A young Joan Collins stars as Raleigh's wife, Bess Throckmorton.



Glenda Jackson perhaps proves herself the greatest of the screen queens in the six part BBC series on the life of Elizabeth, ***Elizabeth R*** (1971). Her performance is powerful, and captures all the facets of Elizabeth's complex personality. Strong performances also from Robert Hardy as Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, Ronald Hines as William Cecil, and Robert Ellis as Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex. To play the part of Elizabeth, Glenda Jackson not only learnt how to play the virginals, but also shaved her head to mirror Elizabeth's high forehead. The series also excels in costume and settings, and is the only production that accurately recreates the Elizabethan age. Glenda Jackson repeated her performance as Elizabeth in the film *Mary Queen of Scots* (1971), which stars Vanessa Redgrave in the title role. Not as historically accurate, but well acted and produced.

When **Elizabeth R** was first broadcast the scripts were published in a single volume, edited by J. C. Trewin,
Plays of the year special, Elizabeth R. It is now out of print, but copies are sometimes available from used books shops.

Australian **Cate Blanchett** played Queen Elizabeth in a feature film based on her extraordinary life. She played the young Elizabeth in the 1998 film, simply titled ***Elizabeth,*** which follows Elizabeth from her troubled time in the reign of Mary, to her accession of the throne and establishing of her regime. The film is well produced and acted, but as with the earlier films on the Queen's life, lacks historical accuracy. Joseph Fiennes plays the young Robert Dudley, Geoffrey Rush plays Francis Walsingham, and Richard Attenborough stars as William Cecil.

Cate Blanchett recently reprised her role as the Queen in the sequel to Elizabeth (1998): ***Elizabeth: The Golden Age***

Helen Mirren starred as the Queen, alongside Jeremy Irons as Robert Dudley, in the award-winning **Elizabeth I**. This production looks at the Queen's personal life in the later years of her reign, focussing on her relationship with Dudley and his step-son, Robert Devreux, Earl of Essex. Mirren gives a strong and convincing performance.

Quentin Crispen stars as the Queen in ***Orlando*** (1992) based on the novel by Virginia Wolf.

Dame Josephine Barstow starred as Queen Elizabeth in a BBC production of Benjamin Britten's ***Gloriana***, which once again tells the story of Elizabeth's tragic last favorite, Robert Deverex, Earl of Essex. Unfortunately this particular production has not been released on video or as a soundtrack.

There is another version of Gloriana starring **Sarah Walker.**

The role was adopted by Flora Robson in two films, Fire Over England (1937) and The Sea Hawk (1940) .
Fire Over England
This film has an impressive cast, including Vivien Leigh as a maid of honor and Laurence Olivier as the hero, Michael Ingolby, who is sent by the Queen on a voyage to Spain. A fictitious tale, but entertaining.*NTSC
The Sea Hawk is the fictitious tale of a Captain Geoffrey Thorpe, a gallant adventurer, who engages in a mission to destroy Spainsh resources at Panama in the hope of delaying the Armada. It was adapted from the book by Rafael Sabatini. An entertaining swashbuckler that has a strong cast including Errol Flynn and Claude Reins. The film

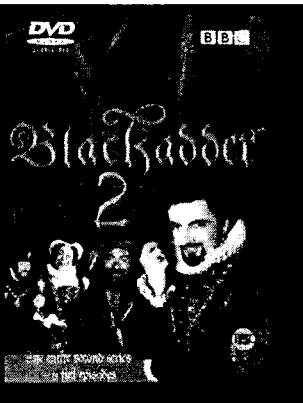
won 3 Oscar Nominations.
More information on The Sea Hawk
Elizabeth I Shop

Jean Simmons stars as the teenage Elizabeth in Young Bess (1953), adapted from the novel of the same name by Margaret Irwin. Her husband, Stewart Granger, stars as the impetuous Thomas Seymour, Lord High Admiral, and Deborah Kerr as Catherine Parr. Jean Simmons plays a feisty young Elizabeth in an unashamedly romantic interpretation of the controversial relationship between Elizabeth and Seymour.

Dame Judi Dench excelled as Elizabeth in the oscar winning film Shakespeare in Love. Set in the 1590's, the comedy tells the tale of how life may well have been for the young William Shakespeare struggling to make a name for himself in the theatrical world. Joseph Fiennes stars as Shakespeare, Gwyneth Paltrow as his muse, and Colin Firth as her husband to be, the dastardly Earl of Wessex. Soundtrack and book also available.

Anne Marie Duff starred as Queen Elizabeth in the highly acclaimed Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen television drama. Follows Elizabeth's life from the troubled years before her accession to her death, and is a far more faithful presentation of the Queen's life than many other productions. Duff is considered by many to be a serious rival to Glenda Jackson (Elizabeth R) as the greatest Screen Queen.

Ellen Compton played Elizabeth in the 1923 silent movie
Fay Compton playing the ill-fated Scottish Queen.
Florence Eldridge played Elizabeth opposite Katherine Hepburn's Mary Queen of Scots in Mary of Scotland (1936). As the film looks favorably on Mary, the character of Elizabeth suffers substantially, and is more of a caricature than a convincing portrayal of the Queen.
Athene Seyler played Elizabeth in the 1935 film, Drake of England. Matheson Lang played Sir Francis Drake.
Irene Worth played Elizabeth in Seven Seas to Calais (1962), a not so well known film set in the Armada years. The main character is Rod Taylor as Sir Francis Drake, who not only succeeds in conquering the seas, but winning the heart of the Virgin Queen herself. Also known as Dominatore dei sette mari, Il
Among other actresses to play Queen Elizabeth, either on film or on television, are:
Judith Anderson in the American series Elizabeth The Queen (1968).
Imogen Slaughter in the recent Channel 4 seriesElizabeth.
Helen Baxendale in the documentary In Suspicious Circumstances which looked at the mystery surrounding Amy Robsart's death.



Miranda Richardson starred as Elizabeth in the superb comedy Blackadder (1986). Series II is set in Elizabethan England

There is also a biography of the Queen available on DVD/Video : Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen

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