

# ELIZABETH I, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

(1533—1603)

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ELIZABETH I, QUEEN of England is well remembered as one of the greatest monarchs ever to rule the British Empire. However, she was not much recognized for her powerful writing and her influence as a patron of the arts in Renaissance England. Publication of editions of her collected works and translations now make it possible to evaluate her literary legacy in the context of her historical roles: extraordinary woman, great monarch, powerful writer, accomplished translator, and influential patron. As a writer, Elizabeth I authored many fine poems, prayers, letters, and speeches. As a multilingual translator, she enjoyed working with Christian texts about faith and classical texts on governance.

## *AN EXTRAORDINARY WOMAN*

By the time she ascended the throne of England at the age of twenty-five, Elizabeth had been shaped by experiences that made her into a truly extraordinary woman. Socially, she was a princess: the privileged daughter of King Henry VIII. However, because her father divorced her mother in highly suspicious and scandalous circumstances, she was declared a bastard. Both her half brother Edward and her half sister Mary ascended to the throne of England before she could, and only their deaths permitted her to become queen. Emotionally and psychologically, Elizabeth was complex. She certainly loved her father, but his decisions marred her life in many ways. Her family, as well as the turbulent times in which she lived, compelled her to endure significant personal loss and suffering.

Intellectually, Elizabeth was a rigorously trained, humanist scholar. It seems that Elizabeth

took refuge from the world and its troubles in the disciplines of learning. She was well versed in the liberal arts, modern European languages, Latin, and Greek, Protestant theology, and works on the art of governing well. Spiritually, Elizabeth was a devout Christian. She was raised as a Protestant, but for a brief period during the reign of her sister Mary, she put on an outward show of Catholicism to preserve her life and keep the peace with her sister, the queen. When Elizabeth herself became queen, and the governor of the Church of England, she wanted conformity from her people: Catholics were not to be persecuted; radical Protestants were not to be encouraged. This position was political for the sake of peace. Spiritually, Elizabeth's Christian faith was both dynamic and profound, as her writings attest, and it seems that her desire was for her people to experience Christianity meaningfully in their souls and social practices, as she did.

In order to understand Elizabeth's social position, it is important to consider her life in the context of a royal family. Elizabeth was born on September 7, 1533. She was an instant disappointment to her parents, King Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, who were hoping for a boy child who could inherit the throne of England. Despite her apparently unfortunate gender, Elizabeth was recognized as princess and heir apparent to the throne—that is, until she was three years old.

When Elizabeth was just beginning to walk and talk and understand a little bit about the world, her mother, Queen Anne, was executed by her father, King Henry, on charges of adultery, incest, and treason. While five men were accused of committing adultery with the queen, including her own brother, only one confessed to it—and

## ELIZABETH I, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

that under severe torture. Meanwhile, King Henry was the one who had engaged in multiple affairs throughout the years of his marriage to Anne, including the affair he was having with Jane Seymour while Anne was locked in the Tower of London. Historians surmise that Anne's multiple miscarriages after the birth of Elizabeth—and thus the inability to produce a living male heir to Henry's throne—further incited Henry's decision to accuse her. Englishmen at the time were appalled and protested the queen's innocence in the face of Henry's obviously dark motives, but she was beheaded with a Spanish sword in the Tower of London on May 19, 1536.

As a result, Elizabeth no longer held a title as princess but rather was declared an illegitimate child of King Henry, who then married Jane Seymour. In this, her father was following a familiar pattern. His first marriage had been to Catherine of Aragon, the mother of his first surviving child, also a daughter, Mary. When Henry divorced Catherine to marry Elizabeth's mother, Anne, he declared Mary illegitimate, too. Henry's third wife, Jane, did give him the son, Edward VI, whom he was hoping for. But Edward was sickly.

When Jane Seymour died shortly after the birth of Edward, Henry married Anne of Cleves. The marriage lasted six months; then it was annulled. Henry then married Catherine Howard, a woman who had been a lady-in-waiting to Anne of Cleves. Henry was thirty years older than Catherine Howard. They were married less than two years, after which Catherine was accused of adultery and beheaded. Henry then married Catherine Parr, who, miraculously, outlived him.

During these tumultuous years in the personal and political life of Henry VIII, Elizabeth was growing up. She turned ten years old soon after her father married Catherine Parr, the last of his wives, on July 12, 1543. Elizabeth had been cared for up to that point by Kat Ashley, her governess and lifelong friend, who also taught Elizabeth to write English, Latin, and Italian.

William Grindal became Elizabeth's tutor at age eleven, and he taught her French and Greek. When Elizabeth was thirteen, Grindal died, and Roger Ascham took his place. Her training with

Ascham was in the seven liberal arts—grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy—as well as additional learning from the secular humanist perspective emanating from Italy.

In addition to language and liberal arts studies, at which she clearly excelled, Elizabeth was accomplished in needlework, intricate figure-dancing, and the playing of the lute (a stringed instrument) and the virginal (a precursor of the modern piano). By the time Elizabeth finished her academic studies and courtly training at age seventeen, her brilliance and accomplishment were undeniable; she was clearly one of the best-educated and most talented women of the Renaissance.

Her studies nonetheless were continually interrupted by tragedy. When she was thirteen years old, Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII, died. Her half brother Edward, at age nine, succeeded to the throne. Edward died from an illness at the age of fifteen. According to his father's will, the next in line to inherit would have been Edward's eldest sister, Mary, and then his next eldest sister, Elizabeth. However, at this time, all of England was in an uproar over religion, which complicated matters.

Essentially, King Henry had separated himself from the Catholic Church and declared himself the supreme head of the Anglican Church when the pope refused to grant an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon and when the pope further refused to acknowledge his marriage to Anne Boleyn. Henry's separation from the Catholic Church had the advantage of unifying the Anglican Church with the English state, which meant that the money (and thus, to some extent, the power) that used to go to Rome now stayed in Canterbury. Furthermore, Henry had dispossessed the monasteries, and their wealth now went to the Crown.

However, this decision created a major division in the country and in Henry's own family. His oldest daughter, Mary, was raised as a Catholic; his younger children, Elizabeth and Edward, were raised as staunch Protestants. When Edward died, a power struggle ensued between the Protestant nobles of Henry's court

## ELIZABETH I, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

and the Catholic supporters of Mary, who was ultimately to take the throne. So Lady Jane Grey took it instead, but only for nine days, after which Mary was crowned queen of England several days after her father's death. Queen Mary worked hard to undo Protestant reforms and restore Catholic power in England, with the result that the country was torn apart by religious infighting.

Once Mary was queen, and married to King Philip of Spain, Elizabeth was relegated to the household of her stepmother, Catherine Parr, who secretly married Thomas Seymour four months after King Henry died. (Thomas was actually the older brother of Jane Seymour, Henry's third wife—which is how Elizabeth's "uncle," the brother of her first stepmother, became her "stepfather," the husband of her last stepmother.) Scandalously, the forty-year-old Thomas Seymour began sexually pursuing the fifteen-year-old Elizabeth in his wife's house—and got caught by that same wife in an "embrace" with Elizabeth. Accusations flew. Elizabeth was sent away from the house. A year later, in 1548, Catherine Parr died. And a year after that, Thomas Seymour was accused of conspiring to overthrow Queen Mary, and his private misbehavior became a matter of public investigation.

Among other things, the government investigated whether Thomas Seymour had sought to marry Elizabeth and whether or not the two of them had shared a sexual relationship. Elizabeth was compelled to write a letter to Edward Seymour, Lord Protector of the Commonwealth, defending herself—and her friend Kat Ashley—against all defamation of her character. She concluded by saying:

there goeth rumors abroad which be greatly against mine honor and honesty, which above all else things I esteem, which be these: that I am in the Tower and with child by my lord admiral [Thomas Seymour]. My lord, these are shameful slanders, for the which besides the great desire I have to see the king's majesty, I shall most heartily desire your lordship that I may come to the court after your first determination, that I may show myself as I am.

*(Elizabeth I: Collected Works, p. 24)*

In other words, Elizabeth was well-prepared to show herself as she was: not pregnant. As it

turned out, Elizabeth was not named a coconspirator in the plot to overthrow Queen Mary, and her life was spared. Thomas Seymour, however, was executed in the Tower of London.

Five years later, in 1554, when Elizabeth was twenty, the Protestants of England rebelled against Mary, but they were not successful. Elizabeth was interrogated at court and then imprisoned in the Tower. It was the same Tower where her own mother had been imprisoned and executed years before and where, only a month before, the Lady Jane Grey had been executed as well after being found guilty of treason for briefly taking the throne when Mary was next in line by Henry's decree. Later in her life, Elizabeth would remember her time in the Tower as the most oppressive and terrifying experience of her life. Queen Mary eventually released Elizabeth, but she was kept under house arrest at Woodstock for the next year.

In 1555, Elizabeth was allowed to return to court. Three years later, in 1558, the childless Queen Mary became ill and died. Elizabeth became queen of England, and she ruled the country for almost forty-five years thereafter.

### *A GREAT MONARCH*

Elizabeth I is remembered as one of the greatest monarchs ever to rule England for many reasons, few of them traditional. She was not ambitious to conquer or control foreign territories, unlike previous English monarchs or contemporary European princes. In fact, when offered the crown of the Netherlands, she declined it, and her military interventions in Europe were primarily defensive of Protestant allies and responsive to threats from the Spanish empire. Nor did she amass great wealth or give birth to heirs to the throne of England. She certainly encouraged positive representations of herself in art, in pageantry, and in literature; she was popular among her people from her youth, and she cultivated that popularity well into her old age. But her legacy consists, in large part, in her great ability to govern her country with a balanced and even hand.

## ELIZABETH I, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

Elizabeth faced many challenges during her reign as queen of England. These challenges were religious, marital, and political in nature. Born into an era of reformation, Elizabeth inherited a country that was religiously divided between Catholics and Protestants. Partially on account of this division, her marriage was always a political question, never merely a personal one. She was continually encouraged by her parliament and her people to marry, particularly advantageously, but marriage alliances proved untenable for her. International political maneuvering shaped her reign as well. One of the greatest crises of her reign was the threat posed to her by Mary, Queen of Scots, a Catholic who claimed the right to England's throne. Another was the planned invasion of England by Spain. Finally, Elizabeth had to contend with the reality that she did not have an heir of her own body to ascend the throne, and so the question of succession caused great anxiety in her government, though perhaps not in Elizabeth herself.

Elizabeth had inherited the religious division in her country from her father, Henry VIII. In 1533, Henry VIII had been excommunicated by the Roman Catholic pope because of Henry's decision to divorce his wife Catherine of Aragon and marry Elizabeth's mother, Anne. The separation of England from Rome was complete by the next year. In 1536, Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries and seized the wealth of the Catholic Church remaining in England. Henry had already declared himself the Supreme Head of the Church of England, thus establishing the Anglican Church as a separate entity from the Catholic Church. On the continent, meanwhile, Protestants began to be persecuted, and by 1543, the first Protestants were burned by the Inquisition.

After Henry's death, when his son assumed the throne of England, Edward had followed in his father's staunchly Protestant footsteps, assuring that Protestant theology was taught by the Anglican Church and that Protestant nobility remained in power in England. However, when Edward died and Mary assumed the throne, her reign was that of a devout Catholic who was determined to restore England to Catholicism and reconcile her people to the pope. When Mary

married another devout Catholic, Philip II of Spain in 1554, she further committed herself and her country to a Catholic course. Indeed, in her zeal for restoration, Mary began burning English Protestants in 1555.

When Elizabeth became queen following the death of her sister Mary, it was therefore imperative that the new queen establish a religious settlement in the country. In 1559, the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity accomplished religious peace in England. This peace was often threatened, both from within the country and from without it, but it endured. Four years later, in 1563, the approval of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion fully articulated the beliefs that would govern the Anglican Church, and in the same year, John Foxe's "Actes and Monuments," also known as the "Book of Martyrs," provided a popular history of Protestants who had suffered for their faith. The cultural shift in England toward religious moderation was felt throughout the country and internationally as well.

For Elizabeth, her government, and her country, the necessity for religious peace in England meanwhile heavily influenced consideration of all potential suitors for the queen's hand in marriage. It was vitally important to the English court and parliament that Elizabeth wed a noble or royal Protestant, a Catholic willing to convert, or, if no one more suitable could be found, a Catholic strongly supportive of the religious settlement in England. As the years went on, however, it became apparent that Elizabeth's people were strongly against any marriage to a foreign Catholic power, and this greatly affected Elizabeth's marriage negotiations over time.

Initially, Elizabeth's advisers and her parliament had urged her to marry, primarily because they wished Elizabeth to bear the heir to the throne and secure the dynastic succession. In addition, there was discomfort with Elizabeth's gender: it was at times difficult for her male subordinates to acknowledge her authority; the fact that Elizabeth was also the governor of the Anglican Church, when Christian bishops of her day believed that women could not serve as priests, further complicated matters. But Elizabeth herself was in no hurry to marry.

## ELIZABETH I, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

Elizabeth's attitude toward marriage appeared to be one of infinite patience. In her reply to a petition from her parliament to marry, Elizabeth affirmed that she was not inclined to marriage, but that God might well direct her to that state, and if she felt so directed, she would choose a husband who had as great a care for the preservation of the realm as she had. However, she also said that if it were up to her, her marble tombstone would declare that she lived and died a virgin queen:

now that the Publick Care of governing the Kingdom is laid upon me, to draw upon me also the Cares of marriage may seem a point of inconsiderate Folly. Yea, to satisfie you, I have already joynd myself in marriage to an Husband, namely, the Kingdom of England ... And to me it shall be a Full satisfaction, both for the memorial of my Name, and for my Glory also, if when I shall let my last breath, it be ingraven upon my Marble Tomb, "Here lieth Elizabeth, which Reigned a Virgin, and died a Virgin."

*(Elizabeth I: Collected Works, pp. 59–60)*

Elizabeth spoke rhetorically of being married to England more than once, expressing her view of England as her true husband and the English people as her children. Nonetheless, she did entertain several marriage proposals, many of them seriously, and she even contracted a marriage alliance late in life, although it was not consummated.

The first marriage proposal that Elizabeth refused came from her brother-in-law, Philip II of Spain, who requested her hand immediately following the death of Queen Mary and Elizabeth's ascension to the English throne. Elizabeth waited a few months to give her answer, however, and the delay enabled her to work on England's diplomatic relationship with France in the interim, since the prospect of an alliance between England and Spain put pressure on France. In the end, she rejected the king on the grounds of his Catholicism and on the basis of his previous marriage to her sister. But this means of using a potential marriage alliance for short-term political gains at home and abroad while withholding the final commitment to a marriage proved to be an important strategy for the queen for the remainder of her reign. From 1563

to 1567, for instance, Elizabeth kept a possible marriage alliance to Charles, the archduke of Austria, in open negotiations. In the end, after four years, Elizabeth rejected him because Charles was Catholic, and if Elizabeth had married him, the marriage would have offended her people and caused division, perhaps even civil war, in her country. Elizabeth's other suitors included James, the earl of Arran, from Scotland; Eric, the king of Sweden; and when she was in her forties, Francis, the duke of Alençon. In 1581, Elizabeth actually signed a marriage contract with Francis, even though he was half her age. Francis, however, died in 1584 of fever in the Netherlands. Francis was the first of her suitors to come in person to woo her, and Elizabeth's extant correspondence with him suggests she had become sincerely fond of him; his death made her grieve. After the death of Alençon, there were no more suitors. But throughout this time, none of Elizabeth's noble or royal wooers was as dear to her as Robert Dudley, her Master of the Horse, whom she created earl of Leicester.

Contemporaries believed that Elizabeth and Robert were born on the same day in the same year. The two knew each other from the time Elizabeth was eight years old, and they became friends in the schoolroom when they were educated together by royal tutors. Robert married Amy Robsart during the reign of Edward VI; both Elizabeth and Edward attended the wedding. During the reign of Elizabeth's sister, Mary, Elizabeth and Robert were both imprisoned in the Tower of London at the same time. Although they were heavily guarded, and it is unlikely that they had much personal interaction, they could certainly see one another on an almost daily basis. After Elizabeth was freed and became queen, she made Robert Master of the Horse. In this role, Robert had rooms in Elizabeth's palace and spent much time in attendance on her. He organized Elizabeth's public appearances, her progresses through the country, and her personal entertainment. In the early years of Elizabeth's reign, this intimacy provoked gossip and scandal.

If Elizabeth's relationship with Robert looked suspicious, even immoral in the eyes of her counselors, her people, and the international

## ELIZABETH I, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

courts of Europe, the situation became even worse when Robert's wife, Amy, was found dead at the foot of the stairs in her house with a broken neck. Scholars have since found it likely that Amy was suffering from breast cancer that weakened her bones, which could have led to a stress fracture and an accidental death. However, many people suspected that Robert had had his wife killed in order to make way for his ambitious desire to marry Elizabeth. Robert himself thought someone had murdered his wife. Had Elizabeth married Robert as she seemed to have been considering, she would have implicated herself in Amy's death, at least in the minds of many people.

Robert Dudley proposed marriage to Elizabeth multiple times over the next several years. She never accepted his proposal, although it is clear that Robert loved her and that, especially in the early years of her reign, she returned that love. When he died, she locked herself in her rooms and would not come out for hours, even days. When she died, her counselors found a letter from Robert, marked "his last letter" in her own script, in her treasure box. Their feelings for each other may have changed over the years from passion to appreciation, but the relationship between Elizabeth and Robert clearly maintained some constancy throughout their lifetimes.

Her decision not to marry her friend had multiple reasons. A marriage to Robert had no political advantage; his only wealth and status came from her. As queen, Elizabeth seems to have felt that she was obligated to marry advantageously for the sake of England if she were to marry at all. Certainly she also realized that the power dynamics in her relationship with Robert would be changed by marriage, since Elizabeth would be in a subordinate position of a wife even if she remained the reigning queen of England. Perhaps Elizabeth was hesitant to marry Robert because of his sexual relationships with other women, including one with Lady Dudley Sheffield, which produced a son named Robert. Indeed, in 1578, when it became apparent that Elizabeth would not marry Robert, Robert married Lettice Devereux, the countess of Essex, and Elizabeth apparently hated her.

But Elizabeth's hesitancy about marriage also certainly had deep roots in her personal history and psychology. Robert said that even from the time she was eight years old, she had insisted she would never marry; she was eight when her stepmother Catherine Howard was sent to the Tower of London and beheaded on charges of adultery. Was it at this time that Elizabeth learned of the manner and causes of her own mother's death? People may have talked in her hearing when Catherine went to the block of how Anne Boleyn had been similarly executed, especially since Catherine was Anne's cousin.

Whatever fear Elizabeth might have felt in learning about the manner of her mother's death at her father's direction and the implications for her own future marital relationship, however, cannot have been the only factor that influenced her. Elizabeth also was a devoted scholar, who, at age twelve, translated a work for her stepmother Catherine Parr, which imagined the human soul as the bride of Christ. Did Elizabeth consider her own soul to be married to Christ? Did she privately consider herself to be already married in this way? Some of her prayers reflect this possibility.

The abusive pursuit she suffered as a young woman of fifteen at the hands of Thomas Seymour might also have left her uninclined toward the sexual aspects of marriage. Seymour's execution, partially for reasons having to do with her, could not have provided her much consolation and may have provoked feelings of undeserved guilt instead. Elizabeth had a lifelong hesitancy about ordering the execution of traitors, which suggests the strength of her personal morality but may also reflect on some of her early life experiences with injustice.

Some scholars have suggested that Elizabeth was afraid of losing her life or her power, either by marrying or bearing children or enduring the machinations of those who would move to strike against her once she acknowledged her heir to the throne. Perhaps all of these inner factors, when thrown together with the outer factors, simply meant that Elizabeth would ultimately decline every proposal of marriage she received—except the last. Certainly she only had to look

## ELIZABETH I, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

north to Scotland in the life of her cousin, Mary Stuart, to see a moral parable unfolding, one with clear implications for her own life and decisions. Indeed, Mary handled her decisions about marriage very differently than Elizabeth did, with unfortunate consequences.

Mary was the daughter of James V, the king of Scotland, and Mary of Guise. After her father's death, she was crowned queen of Scotland at the age of one. Initially, the Scots agreed with Henry VIII that Mary would be the wife of Edward VI. However, Henry's aggression toward Scotland alienated the Scottish nobles, and Mary was sent to France at the age of five, where she was raised and married the dauphin in 1558 at the age of fifteen. When her father-in-law, Henry II, died, she and her husband were crowned queen and king of France.

Only two years later, her husband died of an ear infection, and her mother, who had been acting as regent in Scotland, also died. Mary returned to Scotland as queen of the country. At the age of twenty-two, she hastily married her nineteen-year-old cousin, Lord Darnley. Darnley was not a good man. When Mary was six months pregnant, Darnley and other Scottish nobles dragged Mary's secretary away from her service and murdered him in her sight, possibly intending Mary to miscarry from the shock. By the next year, Lord Darnley himself was murdered, and Mary was hastily wed to James Hepburn, the earl of Bothwell. The Scottish nobles forced Mary to abdicate in favor of her son. She was twenty-four years old. She was imprisoned but managed to escape to England, where she presented a major problem to Elizabeth: Mary had a viable claim to the throne of England, being the granddaughter of Henry VIII's sister, and she was a devout Catholic. Mary's existence was thus a rallying point for those discontent in Elizabeth's kingdom, especially those Catholics who wished to dissolve their allegiance to their Protestant monarch. In consequence of this, Mary lived as a prisoner until she was executed at the age of forty-four, after being charged and convicted of plotting to kill Elizabeth I and usurp her throne.

King Philip II of Spain presented another challenge to Elizabeth's rule. Philip was outraged

at the execution of Mary, his fellow Catholic monarch, and he determined that Elizabeth, a Protestant who had been excommunicated by the pope, should no longer rule in England. Elizabeth and Philip had already experienced military conflict in the Netherlands, and in 1588, Philip's Spanish Armada began to move across the Channel with the intention of invading England. When the Spanish Armada was defeated by a combination of Spanish mismanagement, English maneuvering, and bad weather, many in England took it as a sign of God's divine favor resting on Elizabeth.

In the latter part of her reign, Elizabeth also suffered treachery in the person of Essex, the stepson of Robert Dudley. Essex became one of her favorites, but he was also presumptuous and failed to listen to some of Elizabeth's direct orders, especially her orders about military campaigns in the Netherlands and Ireland. He planned a short-lived rising against the queen, which resulted in his execution in 1601, a final grief to her.

In 1603, Elizabeth died without naming an heir to her throne. The ring signifying her royal authority had to be cut from her hand; it had grown into her flesh. Upon her death, the English government quickly asked Mary's son James to take the crown, which he did, thus becoming the king of both Scotland and England.

### *A POWERFUL WRITER*

Educated, articulate, and elegant, Elizabeth generally shaped her prose to persuasive ends and her verses to commemorative effects. She wrote abundantly in three major prose genres: speeches, letters, and prayers. The first two genres were certainly for a public audience; so was the third, although ostensibly Elizabeth's prayers were first for her private use. Elizabeth also wrote some poetry; her poetry is often occasional, linked to Elizabeth's memories of key experiences in her lifetime.

Elizabeth's earliest surviving poems are associated with her imprisonment at Woodstock between 1554 and 1555. She wrote a ten-line

## ELIZABETH I, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

poem on the subject of fortune, noting how “innocents were enclosed” while “those that death had well deserved” were set free. She reputedly wrote a couplet with a diamond in a glass windowpane: “Much suspected by me, / Nothing proved can be” (*Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, p. 46). The verses were preserved in the books of John Foxe and of the chronicler Raphael Holinshed.

Another short poem, the first line in Latin and the next four lines in English, was an ironic response to Roman Catholic priests who placed her under examination during Mary’s reign. It particularly addressed the theological divide between Protestants and Catholics over the transubstantiation of the Eucharist. Elizabeth’s poem quotes the words of Jesus in Latin: *hoc est corpus meum* (this is my body). The message of the poem thereafter is that Elizabeth believes this to be true, but her belief in Christ’s words does not commit her to a Catholic understanding of transubstantiation.

Elizabeth wrote a four-line poem on the last leaf of her French psalter, perhaps about 1565. In it, Elizabeth says that no outward deformity is half as ugly as the inward deformity of a “suspicious mind.” The poem is signed “your loving mistress, Elizabeth R.” Some scholars have suggested that Elizabeth wrote this about Robert Dudley when she was offended by him. Whether the suspicious mind in question is Elizabeth’s or Robert’s is difficult to discern. As with Elizabeth’s other poems, double and even opposite meanings are made possible by the deliberate obscurity of her phrasing.

Another poem inspired by a troubled relationship is “The Doubt of Future Foes,” written about 1571. When the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots, fled from Scotland into England in 1568, the threat she posed to Elizabeth’s Protestant realm made Elizabeth mark the occasion with this poem, the opening lines of which read: “the dread of future foes / exiles my present joy.” This poem was more frequently included in anthologies than any of Elizabeth’s other verses; it was particularly praised in George Puttenham’s book *The Art of English Poesie* (1589).

Elizabeth also wrote poems in exchange for poems with four men: Sir Thomas Henage, a gentleman of the privy chamber, about 1572; Paul Milissus, the poet laureate of the court of Emperor Maximilian II, about 1577; Sir Walter Raleigh; and King Philip II of Spain in the spring of 1588 when Spain and England were on the verge of war. When Elizabeth and her navy defeated the Spanish Armada in December 1588, she wrote a victory song, which like that of Miriam and Moses when they left Egypt during the Exodus particularly acknowledges God’s intervention and help. The poem, which is made up of three six-line stanzas, invites God to listen and to look down on Elizabeth, the “handmaid” of the lord, and instructs Elizabeth’s own soul to ascend to the holy place. Alluding to the fiery pillar and the cloud that led the Israelites through the wilderness after the Exodus, Elizabeth thanks God for preserving his “turtledove,” a term of loving affection used in the Song of Solomon and used in Elizabeth’s poem to refer to her own spirit.

Six years before the defeat of the Spanish Armada, in 1582, Elizabeth had seen Alençon, the one man to whom she became engaged (but did not in the end marry), for the last time before his death in Europe. About this time, Elizabeth wrote a poem known as “On Monsieur’s Departure,” which, although apparently not exchanged with Alençon in their correspondence, certainly seems to concern him. In three stanzas, the queen expresses frustration in love, especially in these lines: “I love, and yet am forced to seem to hate ... let me live with some more sweet content / or die, and so forget what love e’er meant” (*Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, p. 303).

The frustrated love poem contrasts with the last poem Elizabeth was known to have written, twenty-seven stanzas in French, originally composed around 1590: a meditation on her soul’s salvation. The poem contains Elizabeth’s allegorical reflections on the spiritual struggles of her soul, the help she has received from God, and the roles of imagination, reason, understanding, will, and memory (all internal faculties of the soul) as well as justice and mercy in her soul’s pilgrimage. It is easy to see the influence

## ELIZABETH I, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

of her early translations, such as “The Mirror of the Sinful Soul” (discussed below) on her lifelong meditations on her soul’s relationship to God.

Like her poetry, Elizabeth’s speeches commemorate occasions, but unlike her poetry, her orations were quite public and reached a large audience both at the time she spoke them and at later times when they were copied, printed, and circulated in her court and throughout the country. Some of her speeches were copied by scribal listeners at the time she gave them; others were written in advance or even after the occasion of speaking, which resulted in multiple versions of key speeches. So although it is not always possible to determine what the queen actually said, it is certainly possible to read in the extant speeches what people thought and believed she said. In the case of speeches with more than one version, comparison may reveal Elizabeth’s revisionary thinking.

Two of Elizabeth’s most famous speeches came in the latter part of her reign: her “Speech to the Troops at Tilbury” (the authenticity of which has sometimes been questioned) and her “Golden Speech” to her last parliament. Each of these speeches is clearly situated in a specific historical moment as are others, such as those responding to parliamentary petitions urging her to execute Mary, Queen of Scots. Elizabeth’s speeches clearly demonstrate Elizabeth’s self-fashioning of her own image in her public, historic context.

Elizabeth’s humanist education, which drew on classical Roman tradition and medieval university training, emphasized the power of rhetoric: the art of persuasion. Certainly Elizabeth’s speeches demonstrate her ability to persuade, but they also reveal her inclination to obfuscate when the occasion called for it. A number of her speeches to her early parliaments, for example, are careful negotiations of the nobles’ demands that she marry. Her speeches alternately assert her authority, affirm her willingness to cooperate, and call for a delay of decision or action, or sometimes undertake all these goals at once.

Elizabeth was an effective and well-trained orator whose speeches usually accomplished their

intended effect. When the queen spoke, she typically spoke in English, although she famously addressed learned university Englishmen extemporaneously in Latin on at least one occasion (September 28, 1592), and of course she spoke to her international visitors in their native languages when she wanted to do so on many other occasions.

Her versatility in the art of speaking was well-matched by her versatility in the art of letter writing. Elizabeth wrote over one hundred letters in her lifetime that have been copied and preserved to this day. The letters are of different types, including dedicatory epistles prefacing her translations, such as those to Queen Catherine Parr, King Henry VIII, and her brother, King Edward VI; ostensibly personal but obviously not private correspondence with her family members (for instance, her sister, Queen Mary), her royal servants, and her noble advisors (for example, Robert Dudley, William Cecil, Walter Raleigh), and later the international suitors seeking her hand in marriage; and diplomatic letters exchanged with other sovereigns, such as Mary, Queen of Scots, and King Philip of Spain, and King James of Scotland, negotiating their agreements and disagreements. These letters clearly reveal not only Elizabeth’s rhetorical skill but also the most pressing concerns of her life in relation to others.

Although each of Elizabeth’s letters are typically addressed to one person, her letters had a larger audience than the addressee, since they were often read by her own advisers, by the recipient’s advisers, by the servants who copied them, and even by later generations to whom they were handed down. Elizabeth easily wrote letters not only in English but also in Latin, French, and Italian. When read in chronological order with explanatory notes, the letters constitute an autobiographical record of Elizabeth’s life in the world, her memories of her experiences, and her emotional, intellectual, and spiritual responses to those experiences.

While Elizabeth’s letters give the sense of her outer life, her prayers reveal the nature of her inner life. Certainly Elizabeth composed and articulated some of her prayers for public or

## ELIZABETH I, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

ceremonial occasions, such as the two prayers she prayed when she was imprisoned in the Tower of London, a prayer she prayed at Bristol when a treaty was concluded between England and Spain in 1574, and the prayers she prayed on the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, the sailing of the Cadiz expedition in 1596, and the sailing of the Azores expedition in 1597. But the majority of her prayers survive in her three private prayer books, each known by a separate title: “The Private Prayers of Elizabeth I at Court, 1563”; “Queen Elizabeth I Prayers and Verses, 1569”; and her late “Prayer Book, 1579–1582.”

The “Private Prayers” survive in a small volume that is entirely in Latin and includes both scriptural verses and prayers written by Elizabeth in its first section. Interestingly, the second section of the book is Elizabeth’s commonplace book, while the third section consists of lists of civil and ecclesiastical offices. The whole was published in London in 1563. The first three prayers are designated as collects, the next two as prayers of thanksgiving, and a final prayer as a petition for wisdom in administering the kingdom and the commonwealth of England. Each prayer begins by addressing God by his names and qualities: “sovereign Lord, omnipotent God, Father of mercies, God of all grace,” “most good and most great Savior Jesus Christ, son of the living God,” “eternal God, Creator and accomplisher of all things.” In these direct addresses, readers can hear the echo of the liturgy of the Anglican Church, which was so much a part of Elizabeth’s life of faith.

In 1569, J. Day published a second volume of Elizabeth’s prayers, *Christian Prayers and Meditations in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, and Latin*, which contained eighteen prayers, one poem, and Psalm 101 rendered into stanzas in French by the Protestant poet Clément Marot. One of the most beautiful prayers in the collection is composed in French and known as the “Morning Prayer” and begins: “My God, my Father, and my Savior, as Thou now send us Thy sun upon the earth to give corporeal life to the creatures, and vouchsafe also to illumine my heart and understanding by the heavenly light of Thy Holy Spirit, that I neither think nor say nor

do anything unless to serve and please Thee” (*Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, p. 144). Elizabeth reportedly began most mornings with this prayer, and it is interesting to meditate on how it may have shaped her interior life and her consequent actions of the world.

The multilingual nature of these prayers suggests that Elizabeth maintained her mental flexibility and fluency through a prayer life practiced in the languages of many cultures. Moreover, Elizabeth’s publication of prayers various languages once again demonstrated her learning to her country and to international courts.

The prayers in the 1569 collection not only include the queen’s morning and evening prayers, but also record prayers of thanksgiving, confession, and petition, especially for the ability to administer well the kingdom of England. One Greek prayer was intended to be prayed by the subjects of the queen on her behalf, and it is the only prayer not written in the first person, feminine voice of Elizabeth. The Greek prayer includes this request: “direct Thy handmaid, Elizabeth our queen, and illumine her soul with a light of Thine unbounded wisdom, that she may honor Thy name through her whole life with true service and piety.” The prayer emphasizes the fact that Elizabeth’s sovereignty was contingent upon virtue and on total devotion to the sovereignty of God, it indicates that the people should serve her with zeal and humility, and it requests that God give Elizabeth a long life on earth along with the ability to defend the realm from all enemies. It ends with a request that Elizabeth obtain eternal life “in accordance with Thy boundless mercy, through the blood of Thy only begotten Son, the undefiled Lamb who died upon the cross to redeem us.” Since the prayer was written in Greek, it seems likely that only the learned would be able to pray it on behalf of their sovereign.

The third prayer book of Elizabeth was copied out by her by hand. It was a tiny volume, measuring two inches wide by three inches long, with gold clasps, each inset with a ruby, and containing two miniatures: one of Elizabeth and one of Francis, that is François Hercule de Valois, duc d’Alençon, to whom she was engaged to be

## ELIZABETH I, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

married before his death. (A facsimile exists today, though the original has gone missing.) Elizabeth's third book contained six prayers: the first in English, the second in French, the third in Italian, the fourth in Latin, the fifth in Greek, and the last in English again. At some level, the ordering of the prayers indicates which languages were nearest to Elizabeth's heart: her mother tongue, English; French, the first language of the man to whom she was betrothed; Italian, which she loved; Latin, the language of learning, which she translated so often; and lastly Greek, the language of the new humanist learning and the original language of the New Testament of the Bible. The number of the prayers, six, corresponds to the number of days in the week, minus either the Sabbath or Sunday, when Elizabeth would pray many prayers in church.

In each prayer, Elizabeth emphasizes one of her identities in relationship to God. In the English prayer, she is the handmaid of God. In the French prayer, she twice refers to herself as the mother of the children God has given her in England and from the persecuted Church abroad. In the Italian prayer, she calls "Emperor," "Father," and "Greatest Shepherd"; she is correspondingly his servant, his daughter, and his sheep. The prayer specifically asks God to wash her in the fountain of life and hide her in the shelter of his wings. Indeed, the allusions to the Psalms in her prayers are consistent. For example, she often voices her contrition in the words of Psalm 51: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

In the Latin prayer, Elizabeth identifies herself as queen and asks, like King Solomon, for wisdom to judge God's people in righteousness and his poor in justice. She also asks, in the words of Paul, to be dressed in the full armor of God as, in effect, a spiritual warrior-queen. Her meditation in this prayer on God's word, and her description of the intimate roles it plays in her inner and outward life of faith, is full of beauty and passion. The Greek prayer is shorter than the Latin. In the Greek prayer, Elizabeth first focuses on penitence but then notes the many examples from scripture of sinners who repented and so became God's friends. In this prayer, therefore,

Elizabeth sees herself as a forgiven sinner who becomes the friend of God.

The final English prayer sums up the themes of Elizabeth's prayer life in general, and it includes expressions of thanksgiving, contrition, and petition, but at one point it focuses specifically on the request that God help her to remember God. The prayer concludes with the hope that Elizabeth herself will one day be "translated into immortality" because of the merit of God's son, Jesus Christ. In all, the prayer book is a fascinating study in Elizabeth's life of faith in her later years, a faith nourished not only through her devotional prayers, but also through her many translations.

### AN ACCOMPLISHED TRANSLATOR

As a child and young woman, Elizabeth pursued a humanist program of studies, most likely alongside her brother, Prince Edward, under the tutelage of various educated men, including William Grindal (her Latin tutor), Roger Ascham (her second Latin and first Greek tutor), and Battista Castiglione (her Italian tutor). She may have studied French with Jean Bellemain. She practiced her linguistic skills in a circle of educated women, which included her governess Kat Ashley and her stepmother Catherine Parr, and in various translation projects, which she undertook with the intention of giving the results as gifts.

Her first translation, made in 1544 when she was twelve, was of Marguerite of Navarre's *Le miroir de l'âme pecheresse*. Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn, once owned a copy of the book, which she obtained when she was working in the service of Marguerite in France, and Elizabeth may have made her translation from that edition. When she completed her translation, Elizabeth gave it as a New Year's gift to Queen Catherine Parr.

Elizabeth rendered the original French poem into English prose and called it "A Glass of the Sinful Soul." As Elizabeth wrote in an introductory letter to the queen, the work concerns the soul, who "doth perceive how of herself and of her own strength she can do nothing that is good

## ELIZABETH I, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

or prevaieth for her salvation, unless it be through the grace of God, whose mother, daughter, sister, and wife by the Scriptures she proveth herself to be." The work was a significant early accomplishment, and it was published by John Bale in Germany in 1548. In 1568 and 1570, James Cancellor republished it; in 1582, Thomas Bentley included it in his anthology *Monument of Matrons*.

In 1545, Elizabeth translated Queen Catherine Parr's *Prayers or Meditations*, originally composed in English, into Latin, French, and Italian as a New Year's gift for her father, King Henry VIII, and her stepmother Queen Catherine. Latin and French were two languages Henry used for foreign diplomacy, while Italian was a language Queen Catherine enjoyed. Queen Catherine had originally derived her English meditations from Thomas à Kempis's *De imitatione Christi*, and her changes to the Catholic original reflect her Reformed sentiments.

Elizabeth's translation consisted of a dedicatory letter in Latin to Henry VIII, in which she declared her intentions:

Which work, since it is pious, and by the pious exertion and great diligence of the most illustrious queen has been assembled in English, and on that account may be desired by all and held in greater value by your Majesty: it was thought by me the most suitable thing that this work, which is most worthy because it was indeed an assemblage by a queen as subject matter for her king, be translated into other languages by me, your daughter, who by this means would be indebted to you not only as an imitator of your virtues but also as an inheritor of them.

(*Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, p. 10)

There then follow 183 short thoughts and prayers, a prayer for the king, and a prayer to be said for men who are entering into war. Elizabeth's work certainly demonstrates her proficiency in foreign languages as well as the focus of the meditations of her heart, which clearly concerned the right relationship of her soul to God and her relationship to her parents, especially the king.

Also in 1545, Elizabeth translated the first chapter of John Calvin's *Institution de la religion chrestienne* from French into English. She relied

on the 1541 version, not the later one produced in 1545, when composing her translation. How she obtained a copy of this book is not known. Perhaps Jean Bellemain, then in residence at the court and a correspondent of Calvin's, encouraged Elizabeth to translate part of it. He may have also aided her with the quality of the French.

Elizabeth dedicated the chapter to Queen Catherine. In her dedicatory letter, composed in French, Elizabeth begins by noting that humanity has invented arts and sciences to preserve the memory of things worthy of commemoration, and she argues that the "invention of letters" is the most "spiritual, excellent, and ingenious." She goes on to point out that the scriptures exemplify this truth because "God by his Word and Scripture can be seen, heard, and known for who He is, inasmuch as it is permitted and necessary for our salvation." Elizabeth notes that no image made by a painter, engraver, or sculptor could represent God the way the scriptures do; she thus affirms Reformed, evangelical sentiments even before the major iconoclasm of the Renaissance and Reformation.

Discussing her translation technique in the letter, Elizabeth asserts that she has translated *mot pour mot* or word for word. An analysis of her translation by the editors Janel Mueller and Joshua Scodel shows that her claim is largely accurate. She makes few errors, but she sometimes produces unidiomatic English prose in her faithfulness to the French (e.g., "it must that" for *il faut que*). She also reduces Calvin's emphatic doublets to one powerful word. The translation emphasizes the supremacy of the scriptures as a means of revealing God's truth and God himself. It begins by asserting that wisdom consists of knowing God and knowing oneself; it concludes by admitting that we cannot fully know God, since he does not fully reveal himself to us, unless it be in "the face of his Christ."

In 1547, Elizabeth translated Bernardino Ochino's "Che cosa è Christo," an Italian sermon she rendered into Latin, for her younger brother, Edward, who had by this date become the ten-year-old king of England. Ochino was a Franciscan monk from Siena who later joined the Capuchins in 1534 and became their vicar

## ELIZABETH I, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

general. He was a firm believer in the doctrine of justification by faith. After being summoned to appear before the Inquisition in Rome, he went to Geneva instead and then to England. He became a prebendary of Canterbury Cathedral and received a pension from the young Protestant king Edward VI, a situation that ended when the Catholic Queen Mary ascended the English throne. His sermon very much emphasizes themes similar to those in “The Mirror of the Sinful Soul.”

In her dedicatory letter to Edward, composed in Latin, Elizabeth expresses her desire to offer “the greatest things” to her brother and claims, “although I am surpassed by others in resources, I am outdone by no one in love and goodwill.” She observes that since the subject of the sermon is Christ, the reading of it will be “profitable (*utilis*) and fruitful (*fructuosa*.)” Her letter dates from the end of December, clearly suggesting that this translation was another New Year’s gift.

The sermon is a thematic one (not an explication of the particular Bible passage), and the theme is straightforward: “what Christ is and why he came into the world.” It begins:

If a little sheep did not know at Shepherd, a soldier his captain, a servant his lord; if someone did not recognize his friend, his wife, his brother or his own parent, indeed, none of himself, this would be a crass and pernicious ignorance. But not to know Christ is an ignorance of so much more crass and pernicious in as much as he is to us not only a good Shepherd, best captain, most pious lord, true friend, sweet spouse, loving brother, and dear Father, but, indeed, nearer to us than our own soul.

*(Elizabeth I: Translations, Vol. I, p. 305)*

The sermon takes time to compare and contrast Christ and Moses. It examines Christ’s relationship with people as depicted in the New Testament, such as Mary Magdalene, the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the apostles, and so on. Ochino notes the roles Christ played in each relationship. It describes Christ’s major actions and what motivated them. The sermon concludes with a prayer that Christ will make the listeners “sharers in His true light.”

In 1563, Elizabeth produced her Latin *Sententia*: a collection of 259 brief, wise sayings.

These may have had their origin in a collection of 100 sayings Elizabeth produced earlier and dedicated to her father, as James Montague, the bishop of Winchester, suggested in 1616 (though such a collection of 100 sayings is no longer extant). Elizabeth divides her 259 Latin sentences into six categories: on rule, on justice, on mercy, on counsel, on peace, and on war. Her sources include biblical and classical authors, the Church fathers and medieval ecclesiastics as well as Erasmus. Notably, her first sentence boldly affirms the divine right of kings: “Quae sunt potestates a Deo ordinate. Rom. 13” (“the powers that be are ordained of God”).

The collection was very much a statement of her learning and fitness to rule, a statement made both to the nobility of England and to the international courts of Europe. The sentences show a transition in Elizabeth’s focus as well. As she herself claimed in a speech to her parliament in 1566, she “studied nothing else but divinity” until she became queen, but afterward she concentrated on that which was helpful “for government.” Indeed, Elizabeth’s next three translations were from classical sources and pertained to rule.

In about 1567, the queen translated Seneca’s 107th moral epistle from Latin to English for her godson, John Harington. The letter’s conclusion is particularly robust: “the greatest heart is it that bequeaths to God his part; and he, of base and bastardly mind, that wrestles a pluck with the world’s order, conceives thereof an evil opinion, and seeks rather to amend God than himself” (*Elizabeth I: Translations, 1544–1589*, p. 421). Her choice of a letter with such didactic content relates to her previous work, the *Sententia*, as well as her instructive corpus of translations in general. The internal rhyme, alliteration, and parallelism in the last sentence show Elizabeth’s fine style in translation. The fact that she changed the Roman philosopher Cicero’s plural “gods” to her own English singular “God” shows her willingness to adapt the Latin to her own convictions and purpose.

In about 1579, Elizabeth translated one of Cicero’s letters (the sixth one in his second book from *Epistulae ad familiares*). Its focus on

## ELIZABETH I, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

balancing the requirements of friendship with the requirements of the political realm is obviously pertinent to Elizabeth's relationships to many other people during her reign. Then, in about 1589, Elizabeth translated a choral ode from "Hercules Oetaeus," which was attributed to Seneca during the Renaissance. It is a meditation on the vagaries of Fortune, a theme Elizabeth treats in other letters, prayers, and poems. A few years later, around 1592, Elizabeth translated Cicero's speech "Pro Marcello." This speech expresses Cicero's gratitude to Caesar for his pardon of the Marcellus, a senator who had offended Caesar during the civil war.

In the last decade of her life, Elizabeth made three more significant translations of Latin works. In 1593, she translated all five books of the ancient philosopher Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae* ("Consolation of Philosophy") from Latin into English. In so doing, she followed in the footsteps of two previous English translators of this most famous work of Boethius: King Alfred the Great and Geoffrey Chaucer. Finally, in 1598, she translated two works from Latin into English: Desiderius Erasmus's Latin version of Plutarch's *De curiositate* and lines 1–178 of Horace's *De arte poetica*.

### AN INFLUENTIAL PATRON

Elizabeth I was not only an extraordinary woman, a great monarch, a powerful writer, and an accomplished translator, but she was also an influential patron of the arts. Her patronage was directly responsible for financing or rewarding artists who painted her portrait for her public, composed music for her court, performed plays in her presence, wrote poetry in her honor, and produced books of various kinds commemorating her reign. Her person was indirectly responsible for inspiring an even wider circle of artists who, without direct payment, wrote for or about Elizabeth and thereby helped establish her legacy.

Elizabeth's patronage was fostered in her court culture. The development of this aesthetic court culture began with Elizabeth's progress through London the day before her coronation,

when her people created for her five symbolically rich pageants, including one in which the allegorical virtues of Pure Religion, Love of Subjects, Wisdom, and Justice vanquished Rebellion and Folly. After Elizabeth was crowned, she continued to sponsor the arts. For example, her Master of the Horse, Robert Dudley, was responsible for arranging many complex and expensive entertainments for the queen, especially during her summer progresses through England to visit her nobles. But of course, her patronage extended beyond summer entertainments; it influenced Renaissance painting, music, drama, and literature, among other things, in England throughout her lifetime and afterward.

Elizabeth is justly famous for the many portraits of her that were painted throughout her life by such men as William Scrots, Levina Teerlinc, Federico Zuccaro, William Segar, John Betts the Younger, George Gower, Marcus Gheeraerts the Elder and the Younger, Isaac Oliver, William Rogers, and Nicholas Hilliard and his workshop. Many of the portraits have symbolic and allegorical significance. Elizabeth was also a patron of musicians. Many court composers wrote music for Elizabeth I, who herself was an accomplished musician who enjoyed listening and dancing to music and was appreciative of works both secular and sacred. Her favorite composer was William Byrd (1543–1623), but others whose work she supported included Jane Pickering, Thomas Morley, John Dowland, Richard Allison, Daniel Bachiler, John Tavener, and Thomas Lupo. Music composed for Elizabeth could be either secular or sacred.

Along with painting and music, Elizabeth was a great patron of Renaissance drama in England. Shakespeare's company performed plays for her, including *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Elizabeth may have even inspired some of Shakespeare's characters, including Portia from the *Merchant of Venice* (whose problems with her many suitors look very much like a retrospective commentary in the Jacobean period on Elizabeth's marital challenges only a few short years before). Other Renaissance dramatists working in this period and enjoying the possibilities of the performance

## ELIZABETH I, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

culture Elizabeth fostered included Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson.

Elizabeth's great influence on Renaissance literature is well recognized to this day. Edmund Spenser immortalized his monarch in his long allegorical poem "The Faerie Queene." Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Philip Sidney, and Ben Jonson wrote verses in her honor. Especially later in her life, and after her death when her godson King James ruled, Elizabeth was praised in Renaissance literature as Cynthia, the goddess of the moon, the hunt, and, of course, virginity.

Elizabeth I had such a profound impact on the history, culture, and arts in the England of her day that her time period has come to be known as the Elizabethan Age. In fact, she has more often been viewed as a great queen and patron than as a great writer and translator. But as new editions of her complete works and translations are published, scholars have the opportunity to reevaluate Elizabeth's significant literary contributions in her time. For even into the modern era, Elizabeth I continues to be a felt presence in film, fiction, and historical memory: beloved, controversial, and inspiring.

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