# ELIZABETH I IN CONTEMPORARY HISTORICAL FICTION

# ELIZABETH I IN CONTEMPORARY HISTORICAL FICTION: GENDER AND AGENCY IN FOUR NOVELS.

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# LAY ABSTRACT

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, authors depicted Elizabeth I as an extraordinary ruler appointed by God and an extraordinarily chaste woman. Such authors acknowledge Elizabeth's flawed, natural body, as mortal and female, but praise her incomparable chastity as surpassing other women and ensuring a strong political body or government. While contemporary fiction authors also assess a separation between the political and private, they prioritize individual interiority and female capability as they construct Elizabeth's navigation of a patriarchal court as a woman in power. This thesis investigates historical fiction, in four novels, as a valuable space for authors to rewrite the agency of Elizabeth I through narratives in which she demonstrates her own decision making and emotional complexity. In this thesis, I assess agency in Robin Maxwell's *Virgin: Prelude to the Throne* (2001), Alison Weir's *The Marriage Game* (2014), Susan Kay's *Legacy*, and Anne Clinard Barnhill's *Queen Elizabeth's Daughter* (2014).

ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I analyse four historical fiction novels as recharacterizations of Elizabeth I's agency, to argue for the merit of fictionalized narratives of history. These narratives address the conflict between Elizabeth's political and natural bodies, which I investigate in view of Ernst Kantorowicz's concept of kingship, while emphasizing her learned experience and perseverance as responsible for her success. In doing so, historical fiction novels represent the motivations of the contemporary author and reader while also asserting the agency and capability of female rulers like Elizabeth, retroactively. In her own time, Elizabeth's female body was a point of contention in patriarchal England, and early modern authors highlighted her chastity to represent the queen as beyond the rest of humanity, particularly women. In this thesis, I assess how contemporary authors respond to such history, to represent Elizabeth as a fallible woman in a novel way. Elizabeth's fallibility in these texts represents the capabilities of women in power, credited to their female experience rather than the supernatural status or divine appointment of the early modern ruler. While there is a breadth of research available pertaining to historical depictions of Elizabeth, fewer critics focus upon contemporary accounts. Elizabeth's legacy in film is represented in such research, but few critics have analysed her presence in historical fiction, though she is a popular heroine of the genre. This thesis examines the prioritization of Elizabeth's female body in her youth in Robin Maxwell's *Virgin: Prelude to the Throne* (2001), her experiences as an unwed queen in Alison Weir's *The Marriage Game* (2014) and Susan Kay's *Legacy* (1985), and her role as a mother figure in Anne Clinard-Barnhill's *Queen Elizabeth's Daughter* (2014). These authors assert Elizabeth's agency and demonstrate the value of historical fiction as a genre, rewriting history to reflect female experience as an asset.

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# DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

I, Melissa Lidstone, declare that this work is my own, developed under the supervision of my thesis committee.

# Introduction

In 1588, Elizabeth I delivered the "Tilbury Speech" to her troops facing invasion. In the speech, she assures her subjects, "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" (Tudor, 326). Here, she constructs a duality between her feminine and personal body, and her masculine and political body. The "weak and feeble" body she describes stands in contrast to the strength and courage proposed as necessary for kingship. The combination of these bodies within Elizabeth created conflict, and sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century authors used this dichotomy to address concerns surrounding female rule. As noted by Katherine Eggert, however, Elizabeth's unique position as a sixteenth-century female monarch also created the impetus for innovation in literature during her reign (Eggert 6-7) and, I suggest, innovation in twentieth-and twenty-first-century novels grounded in historical events and characters. This thesis responds to Eggert's assertion by examining contemporary fiction, written within the past fifty years and based on Elizabeth's life, in order to analyze how and why twentieth- and twenty-first-century authors appropriate Elizabeth's life story.[1]

For Elizabeth and those around her, the medieval concept of the king's two bodies – a political body and a natural body – was intensified to a political body that was distinct from her natural, feminine (and therefore "weak" and "feeble') body. Her natural body was, nevertheless depicted as superior to those of other women. These divisions within a single being were useful for maintaining order and authority in sixteenth century patriarchal England (Frye 8-10). The historical authors I discuss depict Elizabeth, a woman in the office of both king and supreme

[1] Throughout my thesis, I will be reserving the term "historical" for characterizations of Elizabeth written in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and "contemporary" for texts written in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

governor of the Church of England, as extraordinary for her gender. Such depictions of Elizabeth deflect authority from her as an individual, toward God, and emphasize Elizabeth's chastity and infallible virtue to legitimize her power (Frye 15). These characterizations diminish Elizabeth's agency and identity as a woman, suggesting femininity is only acceptable when controlled by the virtues of chastity and overruled by political demands.

Contemporary fiction writers, on the other hand, recharacterize this duality to show Elizabeth as a woman, a daughter, a lover, or a mother, as well as a ruler, and as a result twenty-first-century readers and writers remain interested in narratives of Elizabeth's life and reign. These contemporary authors construct an interiority for Elizabeth not found in historical assessments; I argue that contemporary authors present Elizabeth the adept politician as indebted to the experiences of Elizabeth the woman. The restructuring of Elizabeth's relationship to power in these novels focuses on individual subjectivity and contemporary values. The attention to Elizabeth's sexuality is a common thread in both historical and contemporary works, but authors' perspectives on Elizabeth's physical, feminine body are much less restrictive in contemporary novels. While these authors continue to place Elizabeth in a patriarchal context where it is dangerous to be a woman, they focus on Elizabeth's natural body and lived female experience as an asset, rather than a hindrance, to her political success. Further, I argue that contemporary novelists depicting Elizabeth are concerned with agency and Elizabeth's capability to persevere and adapt in a patriarchal court. In the introduction to their collection on historical fiction, Katherine Cooper and Emma Short suggest that contemporary authors of historical fiction, in general, demonstrate a desire to restore the female perspective in history (Cooper and Short 14). Cooper and Short describe the "redistributing of narrative power" (14) in these texts as well as the significance of recharacterizing female historical figures:

> Many of these fictional reimaginings seek not only to reinterpret the roles of women like Schumann and Boleyn in wider historical discourse, but they also represent an interjection into previous portrayals. Those female figures who have received significant attention in both factual and fictional historical accounts have frequently been misrepresented, or often simply misunderstood (3)

Applying the assertions of Cooper and Short's collection, I posit that contemporary historical novelists' reconstructions of Elizabeth's well-known life highlight her interiority and function as reclamations of her agency, body, and femininity. The novels I discuss, Robin Maxwell's *Virgin: Prelude to the Throne* (2001), Susan Kay's *Legacy* (1985), Alison Weir's *The Marriage Game* (2015), and Anne Clinard-Barnhill's *Queen Elizabeth's Daughter* (2014), retain Elizabeth's adept mind for politics, but provide the queen with valuable, private experience beyond virtuous behaviour. My interest lies in the malleability of Elizabeth as a character, and specifically, the space utilized by historical fiction authors to reflect contemporary conditions and priorities in their retrospective accounts of history. These accounts are at odds with constructions of Elizabeth as infallible and an extraordinary ruler chosen by God because they depict Elizabeth as responsible for her own emotional growth and decisions. In this way, these contemporary authors demonstrate an interest in engaging with Elizabeth's natural body and the early modern conditions and accounts which limited her agency and emotional complexity. Throughout my discussions, I also use subjectivity as a descriptor of agency and Elizabeth's capability to act as a subject rather than an object for divine will, as well as her ability to learn from experience, and defy historical notions of female passivity (Scholz 10-11).

Ernst Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (1957) is a framework for my use of the terms "political" and "natural" bodies, as well as the theory's novel application under a female ruler. The theory of "the king's two bodies" figures heavily in historical writings about Elizabeth. Kantorowicz's work demonstrates the usefulness

of the separation of the monarch's body into public and private entities, building upon Edmund Plowden's initial terminology for these distinct bodies in *The Commentaries or Reports of Edmund Plowden* (1779).[2] Plowden defines the natural body as the physical, mortal body, and the political body as the government of the commonwealth which is unaffected by illness, age, and death (534). Further, Plowden specifies that "what the king does in his body politic cannot be invalidated or frustrated by any disability in his body natural" (534). Kantorowicz's concern with this theory, applied to various contexts besides Plowden's sixteenth-century accounts, is the spirituality in this separation wherein the body politic "has been raised to angelic heights" (8-9).[3] For both Plowden and Kantorowicz, the king's political body possesses spiritual importance and can survive the death of the ruler's body. The natural body is described in these accounts as inferior because it is mortal and susceptible to injury or illness. By elevating the political body as immortal and angelic, the duality of a monarch's body operates as a means of isolating and repairing human defects (and thus justifying the divine right of rulers). More specifically, though, the early modern authors I discuss in my Introduction elevate Elizabeth in both the public and private realms. Writers interested in Elizabeth as a unique case study for Kantorowicz's concepts have concluded that historical representations of Elizabeth used this separation in attempts to repair the femaleness of her body alongside the humanness of her

[2] Plowden's text was first published in legal French in 1571. I use the 1779 English translation for my discussions.

[3] Though the theory originally appeared in Plowden's work, I work from Kantorowicz's assessments to discuss the elevated, spiritual nature of the political body, and at times, Elizabeth's natural body. While Kantorowicz wrote his work in 1957 and has received some criticism, his explanation of the theory of the king's two bodies is still referenced by historians and critics. I begin with his work as a starting point for early modern sentiments surrounding rulers, and how this widely known theory manifests differently in historical and contemporary texts.

body.[4]. The elevation of Elizabeth's virtue, in particular her chastity, in historical texts compensates for her mortal and female body (Frye 14-15). As authors such as Suzanne Scholz and Louis Montrose note in writing on Elizabeth's female body, her chastity and virginity even came to represent the wellbeing of the commonwealth (Scholz 9, Montrose 120). In their representations of Elizabeth, historical authors praise Elizabeth's chastity with hyperbole, to emphasize what Scholz calls the "inviolability" of her natural body (9). Whereas historical authors such as those I discuss in my Introduction express anxiety about a female body in the seat of a king, the contemporary authors of the novels that I consider in my chapters highlight the value of the experience of living within a female body in a patriarchal context. They explore the individualistic sensibilities of contemporary writers and readers of historical fiction (Cooper and Short 6). I am therefore working from the theory of the kings' two bodies as explained by Kantorowicz, relevant historical portrayals of Elizabeth's two bodies, and studies on contemporary historical novels to acknowledge the lack of subjectivity granted to Elizabeth in past narratives, and to explore the opportunity for new characterizations to present the value of Elizabeth's female body and her experiences as a woman in authority in a patriarchal court.

Recent scholarship on Kantorowicz's work in relation to Elizabeth I focuses upon the displacement of agency away from Elizabeth as a woman. The divine right of monarchs, and the medieval and early modern connection between spiritual and political power, credited divine providence over individual capacity and wisdom. For Elizabeth, individual agency was further reduced by the necessity for the political body to repair both her mortal body and her female body. While Leah Marcus and Rayne Allinson agree that a clear delineation between Elizabeth's

[4] See, for example, Allinson, "Conversations on Kingship" 132; Bronfen and Straumann 258-259; Eggert 4-5; Frye 15; Müller 239; and Scholz 5.

public and private life would not have been accurate historically (Marcus 210, Allinson, "Conversations on Kingship" 141), Susan Frye notes that constructions of the queen as possessing two bodies were effective for elevating her political adeptness and chaste virtue at the expense of her private life (15). While these critics argue that Elizabeth and those around her may not have understood her body in duality literally, I discuss historical narratives which create this distinction in their work and elevate Elizabeth above others, specifically other women. The difference between historical and contemporary depictions of Elizabeth, I argue, is not that this separation becomes any more or less defined in recent writing, but rather that contemporary authors of historical fiction alter the relationship between public and private to provide Elizabeth with subjectivity and elevate the significance of her private life. In my consideration of the role of gender and sexuality in this regard, I refer to Frye's argument for Elizabeth "engendering" her self-representation rather than "re-gendering," in that Elizabeth used both masculine and feminine characteristics and virtues to maintain the support of her subjects, as can be seen in her Tilbury speech (109). Frye discusses Elizabeth's need to work beyond the constraints of gender and the dual-bodied separation: "As a representational strategy, the queen's two bodies was useful but did not fully meet the need to validate her virtue" (15). Frye concludes that Elizabeth used these separate representations of her natural and political bodies, often creating two public bodies to carve out a role for a female ruler, but ultimately, she relied on God to surpass this kind of categorization (15). Though Frye focuses on Elizabeth's self-representation, her work supports my assertion that Elizabeth's image became superhuman. Like Elizabeth, those authoring her highlight her chastity but also the omnipotent will of God and her representation as a divinely appointed intermediary. Frye's notion that even the separation of the natural and political bodies could not be enough to validate Elizabeth's power historically highlights my

distinction that contemporary fiction represents Elizabeth embodied and empowered in her femininity, not despite it.

In historical narratives focusing upon Elizabeth's femininity, authors prioritize Elizabeth's chastity in her natural, physical body to also represent stability. Scholz has argued that the vulnerability of the monarch's body represented vulnerability or weakness within the wider society (10). The connection between the body of the monarch and the body of the commonwealth suggests that Elizabeth's purity held microcosmic significance in proving she could protect and lead England effectively (10). Scholz describes how Elizabeth's projected chastity, her "inviolability," ameliorated the disconnect between her masculine position as monarch and female passivity (9). In my discussions of Elizabeth's political and public bodies, I include Scholz's work on the historical significance of inviolability, both literally, as virginity or impenetrability, and in the sense of Elizabeth's emotional stability and steadfastness against hardship. Scholz's discussion of the semiotics of Elizabeth's body incorporates both the utility of dual-bodied representation, and also the historical need to surpass "disability" (Plowden 534) in the natural body through reparations beyond the political body's power.

The historical texts depict Elizabeth as preternatural and are significantly different from the validation of female experience and knowledge written into contemporary characterizations of the queen. In terms of these historical characterizations, Frye notes that Elizabeth's priorities would not have included the experiences or social conditions of women more generally (21). In her work *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, Helen Hackett argues a similar point in her description of John Aylmer's praise of Elizabeth, "Here again is evidence of the 'exceptional woman' motif, whereby Elizabeth's miraculous gift of rule actually denies the ability of women in general" (50). I am interested in these recent studies of Elizabeth's historical portrayals and the

application of Kantorowicz's concepts, for this distinction between the treatment of Elizabeth as a woman in power, and the value of the female body and relevant experience. I argue that Elizabeth's infallible chastity may have been necessary for historical accounts, and more palatable for those under her power, but such historical authors denigrate female agency and the female body.

The separation of Elizabeth's bodies, and the rehabilitation of her femininity, was necessitated by anxieties surrounding a woman in power, spiritually and politically. In his work *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558), John Knox communicates his fears surrounding female monarchy. Although Knox wrote at the end of Mary Tudor's reign, his criticisms remained relevant in view of Elizabeth's ascension the same year. Melanie Hansen, in her assessment of Knox's text, argues that Knox interpreted Mary Tudor as representative of feminine passivity, as she necessarily relinquished power through her marriage (21). Knox outlines such flaws of women:

> Nature I say, doth paynt them furthe to be weake, fraile, impacient, feble and foolishe: and experience hath declared them to be vnconstant, variable, cruell and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment. And these notable faultes haue men in all ages espied in that kinde, for the whiche not onlie they haue remoued women from rule and authoritie, but also some haue thoght that men subiect to the counsel or empire of their wyues were vn worthie of all publike office. (10)

These criticisms from Knox and Hansen's explication of them demonstrate the significance of the female body as passive and inferior to the power of men. Knox points to what he believes is a natural weakness and foolishness in women, and he criticizes women as well as the men who allow their wives too much power. For both Mary and Elizabeth, under these prescriptions their ascent to the throne involved rule over their superiors, an upheaval of inherent power structures. This is also an issue of spiritual authority, as Knox discusses the basis of female inferiority within scripture:

> And therfore yet againe I repete that, whiche before I haue affirmed: to witt, that a woman promoted to sit in the seate of God, that is, to teache, to iudge or to reigne aboue man, is a monstre in nature, contumelie to God, and a thing most repugnāt to his will ād ordināce. For he hath depriued them as before is proued, of speakinge in the congregation, and hath expreslie forbidden them to vsurpe any kinde of authoritie aboue man. (17)

Knox represents the ability to rule as inherently gendered but also as a spiritual agency, related to the ability to speak in congregation and hold religious power. Although Elizabeth, and those around her, may have endorsed the divine right of her rule, Knox's interpretation of scripture contradicts the notion that women could rule above men in any sense.

Knox's arguments demonstrate the overlap between religious authority and political authority in the period. Writing on Elizabeth's political body, Thomas Freeman and Susan Doran discuss the concerns surrounding Elizabeth's ascent to being supreme governor of the church, in addition to that of the state. They note: "Elizabeth's gender posed theoretical difficulties for her spiritual leadership of the Church of England. It was anomalous for a woman to preside over what was otherwise an exclusively male preserve" (11). Freeman and Doran's description of Elizabeth's anomalous position of worldly power clarifies the necessity for Elizabeth's anomalous virtue. Knox highlights that all women are unfit for rule, "Because in the nature of all women, lurketh suche vices" (25). Elizabeth, as a legitimate ruler with divine right, must therefore be unlike other women: if God appointed Elizabeth but also decreed that women cannot rule, Elizabeth must be more than a woman. Moreover, as Hansen's explication of Mary Tudor's marriage and loss of power indicates (Hansen 21), Elizabeth could not marry and retain power, politically or spiritually. Elizabeth's anomalous position therefore also necessitated a different approach to marriage than the marriages of male rulers whose wives were naturally inferior. Knox's criticisms position female subjectivity as a pollutant threatening the monarchy and the church, as well as the individual men of the realm (Hansen 20). Returning to Scholz's work, this

anxiety could be described as an issue of figurative and literal violability, wherein femininity is passive and therefore is not conducive to political or religious strength or stability (Scholz 10-11). Facing concerns of this kind of pollution to the commonwealth, the Elizabeth presented historically could not have the desires and emotions illustrated within contemporary fiction.

While Knox's critical assessment of female monarchy highlights anxieties surrounding the body of the monarch, texts written in praise of Elizabeth also exhibit these concerns. In *The Faerie Queene* (1590), Edmund Spenser elevates Elizabeth's capabilities and chastity through the allegorical characters, Gloriana and Belphoebe. However, even such representations of Elizabeth as laudable in both her political and natural body represent her precarious role. Spenser's text demonstrates the contradictory expectations for a commendable ruler and a commendable woman. Writing on popular perceptions of Elizabeth in the early modern period, Sara Mendelson asks:

> Because early modern notions about the requisite traits for effective leadership were in conflict with the ideals of virtuous womanhood, contemporaries had great difficulty reconciling the image of a 'good ruler' with that of a 'good woman'. If Elizabeth displayed the exemplary female virtues, was she constrained to be a weak or ineffectual monarch? Conversely, if the queen performed well as a strong political leader, was she to be disparaged as a wicked virago? (197)

Throughout *The Faerie Queene*, Edmund Spenser compartmentalizes his praise for Elizabeth through various female, allegorical figures. For the scope of my discussion, I focus on Spenser's constructions of Gloriana and Belphoebe as representations of, respectively, Elizabeth's public, political body and natural, feminine body. Although both characters are virtuous, Spenser's text highlights the competition between these roles. In his letter to Walter Raleigh, Spenser explains this decision to figure Elizabeth as both Gloriana and Belphoebe:

> *In that Faery Queene I meane glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceiue the most excellent and glorious person of our soueraine the Queene, and her kingdome in Faery land. And yet in some places els, I doe otherwise shadow her. For*

> *considering she beareth two persons, the one of a most royall Queene or Empresse, the other of a most vertuous and beautifull Lady, this latter part in some places I doe expresse in Belphoebe, fashioning her name according to your owne excellent conceipt of Cynthia, (Phoebe and Cynthia being both names of Diana.)* (Spenser 716, emphasis in original)

Each of these characters is virtuous in her respective role. Spenser, like the other historical authors I discuss, elevates Elizabeth's chastity and leadership as extraordinary. Although Belphoebe's virtue may be praiseworthy, Andrew Hadfield notes the frustration caused to Timias because of her inability to recognize his desires (62). Further, Hadfield argues that Spenser's epic criticizes Elizabeth's virginity more generally as a failure to protect the succession of the crown. He argues that Arthur's dream of intimacy with Gloriana in Book I depicts this criticism:

> Spenser represents an abandoned alternative sexual history of the queen. Arthur's dream remains a dream, by implication one that articulate subjects such as Spenser wished had happened. If so, then Merlin's fears [of an insecure future] might not have been realized and the legacy of Elizabeth's reign could have been more successfully preserved and defended, especially if, it goes without saying, she had been able to produce a male heir. This longing for a powerful, sexualised queen complicates our understanding of the politics – and sexual politics – of the poem. (Hadfield 61-62)

The discord between praise for Elizabeth's chastity and her responsibility to create an heir is also of significance for Frye, who describes how Elizabeth's incomparable virtue, though a strong political statement, does little to protect the succession or the social and spiritual importance of marriage (Frye 116). Hadfield's discussion of Belphoebe and Gloriana as critical of Elizabeth supports Mendelson's and Frye's descriptions of Elizabeth's competing responsibilities more generally. I suggest Spenser's work is an example of this incompatibility, where elevated chastity may reinforce Elizabeth's stability in the sense of impenetrability, but it does not satisfy the need for a successor. Spenser's characterizations demonstrate the significance of chastity and safeguarding feminine virtue, but he also questions how Elizabeth will ensure the safety of her realm and lineage. In Gloriana, Elizabeth is a "most excellent and glorious person" (Spenser 716)

and in Belphoebe her "chastitie, none living may compayre:" (Spenser 340). While Elizabeth can excel in these roles separately, her natural body cannot be both female and fit to rule. Spenser's dual characterization of Elizabeth demonstrates the efficacy of elevating these bodies separately, but the text also illustrates a fundamental contradiction between the power of virginity and the security provided by reproduction.

Whereas Spenser depicts Gloriana and Belphoebe as reflections of Elizabeth's numerous roles and virtues, John Davies writes of Elizabeth as the Greek goddess of justice, Astraea. Davies's work elevates Elizabeth through his use of metaphor, aligning her with classical myth. Davies's Elizabeth thrives in both her political and natural bodies; however, he combines these roles as outside of the laws of nature and time. Davies's work praises Elizabeth, as does Spenser's poem, but his descriptions ignore expectations of reality or pragmatism. In his *Hymnes of Astraea* (1599), Davies praises Elizabeth through acrostic verses in which the first letter of each line contributes to his spelling of "ELISA BETHA REGINA." He combines Elizabeth's stability as a monarch and a woman through recurring descriptions of a classical golden age under her rule. In *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century*, Francis Yates characterizes this, explaining Davies's use of seasonal motifs. Yates argues that Davies uses Virgo, an autumnal sign, to represent the success of Elizabeth's reign through an immutable springtime (67). Though this seems counterintuitive, Yates parses Davies' third hymn "To the Spring":

> It is, however, the conflation of Virgo the sign of autumn with Astraea the virgin of the golden age which brings about this seeming anomaly, for in the eternal spring of the golden age flowers and fruits grew together at the same time. … Astraea's spring is not the ordinary season but the eternal spring of her golden age. (Yates 67)

Yates highlights how Davies uses the classical Astraea to praise Elizabeth as creating a peacetime for England; Elizabeth's nation thrives in a period which Yates describes as outside of

time, where the laws of nature can be defied, and flowers and fruit can grow together. Similarly, Mary Erler notes Davies's "supernatural spring" (Erler 48) within the hymn and Davies's Elizabeth as possessing a "state … of transcendent elevation" (48). For Davies, Elizabeth's reign is extraordinary, and her exceptionality creates success for all of England. She is deified in her capabilities, and as Erler notes, Davies portrays Elizabeth as a connection between earth, sea, and sky (Erler 48). In this way, Elizabeth encompasses these natural elements, but also surpasses the limits of nature. Davies's praise for Elizabeth extends to both public and private virtue and he outlines such characteristics as being responsible for this everlasting spring. For instance, in describing Elizabeth's mind, Davies writes, "Her cleare sweete *Spirit* which is refind, / Aboue Humane *Creation* (emphasis in original)" (Davies 13). Davies focuses here on the divine nature of Elizabeth's mind, as incomparable to the rest of humanity. His emphasis on "spirit" and "creation" connects Elizabeth's power to God, and Davies includes that his praise is only possible through angelic favour (Davies 13). In Hymne XX, "Of the Passions of her Heart," he describes Elizabeth's chastity:

> B ut since she hath a hart, we know
> E uer some passions thence do flow,
> T hough euer rul'd with Honor;
> H er Iudgement raignes, they waite below,
> A nd fixe their eyes vpon her. (Davies 20)

Focusing each verse on a facet of Elizabeth's excellence, Davies lauds both her spirit, in terms of her mind for politics and religious observance, as well as her more private integrity. In this stanza, Davies acknowledges that Elizabeth must have desire as a human woman, but quickly praises her judgement as impervious to passions, which are personified by Davies as watchful. Here, Davies suggests an impenetrability and though he recognizes Elizabeth's passionate heart, she will not falter. In this sense, Elizabeth's chastity provides the figurative stability described by

Scholz, while her incorruptible judgement separates her from fallibility. Davies elevates Elizabeth, therefore, in both her political and private bodies, as delivering a golden age. In his hymns, Davies outlines Elizabeth's spirit and her stability in terms of both her keen judgment and her strength against desire. Davies's Elizabeth is immortal and her successes exist in this eternal golden age, unaffected by time or the laws of nature.

In her memorial text praising Elizabeth, *A Chaine of Pearle. Or A Memoriall of the Peerles Graces, and Heroick Vertues of Queene Elizabeth, of Glorious Memory* (1630), Diana Primrose commends Elizabeth's virtues in a manner comparable to Spenser's allegory. Primrose's text praises Elizabeth's politics and chastity, but Lisa Gim argues that Primrose departs from other historical authors in her insistence that other women can follow Elizabeth's example. Primrose elevates Elizabeth as a politician and a chaste woman but also encourages her reader to follow Elizabeth's lead (Gim 190). Though Elizabeth remains superior to others in Primrose's account, her virtue is not untouchable nor superhuman. Beginning with religion, Primrose establishes the spiritual significance of the monarch's political body. She chronicles Elizabeth's prowess in defending England against the religious threat of Catholicism and invasion from Spain (Primrose 2-3). Not only does Primrose credit Elizabeth and her counsellors, but she also aligns this security, this inviolability as described by Scholz, with England as a nation (Primrose 3). Primrose also demonstrates the significance of God in the discussion of her ninth pearl, patience, "By many Crosses thus Shee got the Crowne; / To Englands Glory, and her great Renowne" (11). In these lines, Primrose commends Elizabeth's perseverance and her description of hardships as "crosses" invokes the will of God. As crosses to bear for the greater good of the country, Elizabeth's experiences are instrumental in forming her leadership. However, Primrose's language credits God in orchestrating these sacrifices for

England’s benefit. Primrose further describes Elizabeth’s capabilities as a monarch in subsequent verses or “pearls” including prudence, clemency, justice, fortitude, science (i.e., knowledge), and bounty. Pertaining to Elizabeth’s natural body, Primrose’s second pearl depicts Elizabeth as an incomparably chaste woman, “And though for Beauty SHEE an Angell was, / And all our Sex did therein farre surpasse” (3). Primrose’s description of Elizabeth as both steadfast against threat and beautiful demonstrates Elizabeth to be superior to other women. The Elizabeth that Primrose describes is not only unwavering against desire, but in the fourth pearl on temperance, moderate in her emotions and passions. She is, “Not fond to love, nor too prone to hate:” (Primrose 6). Though this line characterizes Elizabeth as in control of her desire, comparable to Davies’s praise of Elizabeth’s judgement, Primrose’s lines suggest she does experience love and hate, just not in excess. In this sense, Gim’s arguments regarding the text are helpful in establishing how Primrose’s text elevates Elizabeth’s natural body but does so differently than other historical authors. Gim highlights this distinction, “Even though occasionally Primrose may echo the notion that some of the queen's virtues are unsurpassed, she insistently portrays Elizabeth as the model that her sex can and should follow” (Gim 190). Gim insists Primrose’s work is a didactic one for women, wherein Elizabeth may be extraordinary, but she is not removed from the rest of humanity, and her legacy does not negatively affect her gender. In discussing chastity, Primrose constructs an inclusionary definition, allowing for married women to be considered chaste alongside virgins (Primrose 4). In this way, Gim notes, Primrose emphasizes that Elizabeth is a woman and represents the capability and autonomy of women (Gim 192-93). Gim elaborates upon the particular motivations of the female, early modern writer:

> Fixing upon her [Elizabeth’s] gender in relation to her real and intellectual power, depictions by women writers disregard the patriarchal trope of the queen's "two bodies"

> (Axton) which sought to portray the queen as an anomaly—sovereign first, woman last—and instead evoke Elizabeth as a proven, historical model of both female authority and authorship. For seventeenth-century women in particular, she serves as an alternative to female passivity. (Gim 193-94)

Gim's discussion articulates a different relationship between the female author and monarch than the more familiar one between the male author and monarch. Primrose's text, I argue, elevates Elizabeth in the usual way for her careful politics and chastity, but her inclusive definition of chastity, centered around autonomy as explained by Gim, redefines the relationship between the political body and femininity. Primrose's descriptions of Elizabeth do not demonstrate the need to elevate her chastity in response to anxiety surrounding female rule. Nonetheless, this restructured relationship between political power and gender requires an altered definition of chastity. Moreover, Primrose's work exists against a canon of male authors penning contradictory definitions of chastity, femininity, and the perceived dangers of female rule.

The myth surrounding Elizabeth as extraordinary and superhuman still continues to affect depictions of the queen. Though Gim refers to Primrose's work as "protofeminist" (190), the extraordinary narratives surrounding Elizabeth persist. Roy Strong, describing the narratives of visual depictions of Elizabeth, describes the speed with which her image became a symbol of triumph (Strong 9). Strong compares an earlier representation of Elizabeth to the Ditchley portrait in which she appears as "a visionary figure towering above her realm of England, an image of almost cosmic power" (Strong 9). Strong's articulation of "cosmic power" aligns with Kantorowicz's description of the "angellic heights" of the political body (Kantorowicz 8-9). In the introduction to their collection of essays dedicated to perceptions of Elizabeth, both historical and contemporary, Thomas Freeman and Susan Doran describe the appeal of archetypal depictions of Elizabeth as the virgin or the undistracted politician (9). Incorporating Strong's commentary on Elizabeth's historical imagery (Freeman and Doran 4), they describe her

enduring prominence in media and popular culture as largely due to film representations which utilized Elizabeth's existing fame to attract viewers (Freeman and Doran 2). Effectively, this myth of Elizabeth the extraordinary monarch or unnaturally chaste woman permeates contemporary media (Freeman and Doran 16). Freeman and Doran note,

> The mythical version of Elizabeth is a simplified version of the historical Elizabeth, who was at once more and less than the myth…Fundamentally, every age reconstructs the past on the basis of its own preconceptions and preoccupations. In the current era, for example, religious and even nationalist concerns about Elizabeth have weakened while gender has become an overriding preoccupation (19).

As identified in Freeman and Doran's work, the current preoccupation with gender studies translates into assessments of historical figures like Elizabeth. This preoccupation, I argue, is demonstrated by contemporary authors within the novels I discuss. The legacy of Elizabeth's exceptionality also persists, I argue, because of what Elisabeth Bronfen and Barbara Straumann refer to as an "Elizabethan effect." Bronfen and Straumann initially outline this effect in their discussion of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), which features Elizabeth:

> This text installs the queen as the privileged signifier for what one might call an Elizabethan effect, a result, an influence, an impression, an intention, but also a property. Negotiated at her body is a notion of cultural vitality, the constant production of something new, because this body is resilient enough to withstand a plethora of ever-shifting meanings, indeed because its survival as a cultural myth consists in, and is conditioned by, this transference (Bronfen and Straumann 267)

This effect, more generally, explains how the myth surrounding Elizabeth and reconstructions of the queen create a conversation of evolving meanings. Elizabeth as a "property" allows creators to impose their own motivations and interact with the characterizations of others. Regarding more recent depictions of Elizabeth, Kate Chedgzoy, for example, posits that the feminist movements in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and the consequent investigation into socio-cultural limitations on the agency of women affect the perspectives of contemporary writers and readers approaching historical narratives (4). In their collection, *The Female Figure*

*in Contemporary Historical Fiction*, Cooper and Short echo Chedgzoy in their discussion of postmodern understandings of literature, history, and the self, in which any account of history will be coloured by the author (Cooper and Short 6). As reimaginings of Elizabeth continue into the twenty-first century, they reflect a much different socio-political climate in which perspectives on female agency and capabilities have evolved. Primrose may have approached the myth of Elizabeth advocating that women can and should follow Elizabeth's example, but contemporary authors do not need to retain Primrose's elevated praise or redefine chastity to preserve the legitimacy of Elizabeth's power.

Since I am discussing historical fiction in particular, changes in not only perspective but also genre and style carry consequences for changes in descriptions of Elizabeth. Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker have brought together scholarship about biographical writing on historical figures in their collection, *Writing Lives.* Although biographical accounts and historical fiction cannot be conflated, discussions surrounding biography provide support for my assessment of how contemporary novelists relate to Elizabeth I as a historical queen and woman. Moreover, historical fiction authors, in their novels, reconcile historical fact with artistic or entertainment-based liberties. Specifically, the authors I discuss express an attentiveness to retaining a notable amount of historical authenticity. In her chapter for Cooper and Short's collection, Diana Wallace emphasizes the value of historical fiction as reflections on history. Wallace highlights the gaps in research pertaining to historical fiction and the general perception of the genre as insignificant entertainment (217). Wallace implores her readers to consider historical fiction as deserving serious inquiry as a genre with distinct motivations, serving as an outlet for forgotten perspectives in history (212). Wallace's discussion of the genre as a meaningful perspective on

history also supports the connection I draw to biography, with historical fiction writers recharacterizing historical lives with new values:

> The recognition that history, if it is not precisely 'fiction,' is a form of narrative which has much in common with fiction, has been extremely liberating for women and postcolonial writers over the past couple of decades. Having been left out of traditional historical accounts, fiction has allowed them to re-insert themselves into history in a variety of ways, and in doing so they have also reshaped our sense of history itself. This recognition is not something new, however, and tracing the continuities in women's historical fiction can help us recognize this. (Wallace 212).

Historical fiction thus represents an opportunity for intersections between history, the voices of women marginalized by "traditional historical accounts," and the impact of contemporary circumstance. By extension, biography, as a historical account centered on an individual, is also relevant to characterizations of Elizabeth and their evolution. Sharpe and Zwicker have discussed the history of early modern life writing, the motivations of historical writers, and the various generic conventions of the period, and they note that these differ significantly from biography as practiced by contemporary authors (16-17). Biography, for the early modern writer and reader, functioned as a guide for virtuous practice (Sharpe and Zwicker 13), whereas modern biography has been influenced by the history of the novel and late seventeenth-century changes in writing (Sharpe and Zwicker 14). They credit the Restoration as a period of broadening opportunity for female authorship and representation (Sharpe and Zwicker 14). In addition, they also identify the development of modern theories of psychology as having a deep impact on selfhood and literature (Sharpe and Zwicker 15). Although writers of historical fiction are not solely concerned with constructing an accurate account of history, the genre retains a relationship to history. Why do historical fiction authors write narratives, often re-constructions of biography, surrounding the life of Elizabeth I? In my assessment of four such novels, I analyse the significance of Elizabeth as a character in these texts and as a representation of contemporary

perspectives on femininity. Through their projections of Elizabeth and the preconceptions tied to her historical representations, these authors rewrite the agency of the queen and emphasize the value of feminine experience.

Contemporary writers of historical fiction, mediating concerns for both historical authenticity and marketability, have motivations distinct from other fiction writers. Wallace notes the balancing act that such authors must perform, “In reading any historical novel we are engaging with at least three different historical moments. There is the period in which the novel is set, the period in which is it written, and the period in which we are reading it” (211). Here, Wallace explains the complex concerns of the historical fiction author; their work must remain somewhere between historical fact and narrative palatable for contemporary readers. For instance, the novels I discuss position Elizabeth as a contemporary in her subjectivity and interiority, but she remains within the realm of early modern, patriarchal politics which govern her emotions and body. Susan Sellers, a historical fiction author, has reflected upon her own writing process and echoes Wallace’s concern for the insignificance of women’s narratives in history: “I grew up through feminism and still see the world in gendered terms. It feels natural to me to root out women’s stories, particularly in historical contexts where women’s experiences are so often ignored” (Thompson and Sellers 234). Sellers’s perspective exemplifies the need for this co-existence between the historical and contemporary moments, such that an author can be influenced through movements or discourses like feminism. Further, Sellers’s reflection adds credence to the sense that historical fiction can be a space for reclaiming the voices of historical women. Similarly, Hilary Locke focuses on Alison Weir’s work and these concerns in her article, ‘“Go Too Far on Tudor-Speak, All Hey-Nonny-Nonny, [and] You'll Alienate Your Readers': Alison Weir, Historical Fiction, and the Representation of Tudor History.” Locke’s

title captures the responsibility of the author to portray historical narrative in a recognizable way while avoiding the alienation of the reader. Locke notes that narrative holds significant power in terms of providing the reader with a sense of historical life: "What is usually claimed of historical fiction is that it can use fictional strategies such as narrative, focalization, characterization, and world building to demonstrate what it was 'really like'" (158). These elements, particular to fiction, fill gaps pertaining to perspective and lived experience. In Locke's view, historical fiction, as a genre, is concerned with these missing pieces of history. Not only is interiority important within the genre, but Wallace's arguments also support the merit of filling these gaps. Historical fiction authors create interpretations of history which reflect these "three different historical moments" (Wallace 211) and, in doing so, their work represents the concerns of the historian, the novelist, and the reader. Thomas Betteridge, in his work on Elizabeth's enduring appeal in film, elucidates the role of authenticity in such visual representations of Elizabeth. Betteridge defines the "myth of Elizabeth" as an entertaining perspective on the triumph of Protestantism and refers to it as the priority for film representation of Elizabeth, above historical accuracy (258). While film depictions of Elizabeth are a separate discussion, Betteridge's point does highlight the discretion of the creator to interpret, rather than relay, historical fact. If film representations are concerned with religious triumph, how are literary accounts of Elizabeth in the twentieth and twenty-first century similarly informed by the discretion of the author? My concern with authenticity is not whether it is good practice for writers to prioritize historical accuracy; I am interested in the motivations for differing characterizations of Elizabeth in different periods. How does the "myth of Elizabeth" serve a distinct purpose for contemporary historical fiction authors? If historical authors were inclined to

praise Elizabeth as extraordinary and incomparable, why might contemporary assessments of Elizabeth focus on the interiority of Elizabeth the woman?

In this project, I analyse four contemporary narratives in three chapters, each dedicated to a distinct role or period within Elizabeth's life. For historical authors, the duality of the female ruler's body allowed for praise of Elizabeth and the divine providence of her succession despite her natural, inferior female body (Frye 8-10). In historical texts Elizabeth is extraordinary for her attention to the good of the commonwealth, and those writing about her reserve their praise for her success as a ruler, her chastity, her virtues, and her maternal protection of England, without the complex, personal emotions required of the individual fulfilling these roles. What, then, do the writers of historical novels retain and revise for their versions of Elizabeth? In my first chapter, I focus on Elizabeth's youth as represented in Robin Maxwell's *Virgin: Prelude to the Throne* (2001). Maxwell's novel considers Elizabeth's early, familial relationships as formative for her political and private sensibilities. While Elizabeth's parentage creates conflict between political strength and familial love, her romantic relationship with her stepfather Thomas Seymour presents manipulation, and confused desire. Maxwell portrays young Elizabeth as entirely human in the complex experiences and emotions which shape her political sensibilities. My second chapter, focused upon Elizabeth's romantic relationships during her reign, includes Alison Weir's *The Marriage Game* (2014) and Susan Kay's *Legacy* (1985). Both novels demonstrate the connection between Elizabeth's political position and the difficulties within her private relationships. Rather than an extraordinary, chaste woman, Weir and Kay present Elizabeth as jaded and fearful of her own sexuality. For Weir, Elizabeth the woman informs Elizabeth the politician as she is unable to commit to romantic or political attachments yet does not remain chaste. Kay similarly outlines a connection between love and death through

Elizabeth's political and romantic relationships; her anxieties surrounding love and intimacy make for a careful, politically minded queen. Through these representations, Weir and Kay reclaim Elizabeth's narrative through subjectivity and complexity rather than extraordinary virtue or divine intervention (Frye 15) as she navigates romantic and political alliances. Finally, in chapter three I discuss Elizabeth's maternal role in Anne Clinard Barnhill's *Queen Elizabeth's Daughter* (2014). In this text, Barnhill explores Elizabeth's emotions surrounding motherhood as relating to both her country and her ward and adoptive child Mary Shelton. Like the three other novels, Barnhill's text frames Elizabeth's interiority, her complex affections, and her emotions as primary influences on her political work. Through her affections for both her country and chosen family, Elizabeth is not a mother figure because it is virtuous or divinely ordained; rather she loves those around her as a result of political and private experience.

## Chapter 1: The Value of Feminine Experience in *Virgin: Prelude to the Throne*

The first of the novels I discuss, Robin Maxwell's *Virgin: Prelude to the Throne*, describes Elizabeth's experiences in girlhood and adolescence, focusing on Thomas Seymour's manipulation of Elizabeth. In her notes that accompany the novel, Maxwell points to the scarcity of research available surrounding this period of Elizabeth's I's life, a relative gap in history which interests Maxwell (Maxwell 239).[5] I have chosen to include Maxwell's novel, though it is set prior to Elizabeth's ascent to the throne, for the characterization of the early relationships and experiences which shape Elizabeth's understanding of herself and her circumstances. In my assessment of these works of historical fiction, I aim to cover various events in Elizabeth's life as contemporary authors tell them, to demonstrate the malleability of her life story and Elizabeth as a character. These accounts illustrate an interest in historical fact, but more importantly a sustained interest in Elizabeth as a contemporary heroine and a reclamation of the historical queen's subjectivity (Cooper and Short 10). For Maxwell, Elizabeth I was extraordinary in her ability to overcome difficulty and avoid persecution for her relationship with her stepfather. However, in this narrative Elizabeth makes missteps and navigates her own desires; in comparison to historical texts, this is a departure from authors who celebrate her public masculine body and reserve their praise for her extraordinary virtue and chastity in the private realm. Maxwell centers her narrative on Elizabeth's complex emotions and feminine body as the key features of the experiences which define her. Maxwell's progression of Elizabeth's sense of self in response to danger echoes accounts of the historical queen (Mueller 27), but Maxwell's novel diverts responsibility to Elizabeth and legitimizes her female body. Therefore, in my

[5] For clarity, in the rest of my thesis I use "Elizabeth I" to refer to the historical queen, and "Elizabeth" as the fictional character(s).

discussions of Maxwell's work, I argue that Elizabeth's learned wisdom is distinctly female, representing the challenges faced by women in power.

Maxwell, as an author of historical fiction, uses Elizabeth as a vehicle for reclaiming the subjectivity and value of the women before her, having lost their own agency, as well as her own capability to persevere. Maxwell's focus remains on Elizabeth's feminine body, as her experiences with her brother Edward, her mother Anne Boleyn, stepmother Katherine Parr, and Thomas Seymour are shaped through female perspectives. In this way, Elizabeth is not perfectly chaste, and her survival is indebted to other women, not separate from them. Elizabeth's subjectivity and her ability to control her own fate represent emotional growth and individual agency not depicted by historical authors. In this account, like others of the genre, Elizabeth is a contemporary heroine in a dangerous and limiting historical period. In the novel, Elizabeth learns from her own mistakes and female experience. For Maxwell, the natural, female body and the treatment Elizabeth receives as a young woman are integral for shaping her subjectivity.

In her subjectivity, Maxwell's Elizabeth is the "woman of the future" discussed by Frances Dolan (136). This re-imagination of Elizabeth I provides the contemporary author with the space to recognize the myth surrounding Elizabeth I as extraordinary and credit Elizabeth the woman rather than creating a superhuman figure. I begin with Maxwell's construction of Elizabeth's public role and the conflict she faces between her royal lineage and feminine body, even at an early age. Through Elizabeth's care for her brother Edward, Maxwell determines that Elizabeth's potential for greatness is marred by her female body. Elizabeth experiences puberty, and Maxwell's attention to these physical changes represents the princess's awareness of how she is perceived for her female body, as well as the lack of control Elizabeth feels over her own body. Moreover, Elizabeth must understand the experiences of the women preceding her, Anne

Boleyn and Catherine Parr, as she grapples with her circumstance as a woman in power. Boleyn and Parr, having lost their physical or psychological subjectivity (Crane 83), model for Elizabeth the significance of cautious maneuvering in a dangerous court. These dangers affect Elizabeth directly through manipulation and humiliation from her stepfather. Elizabeth's interactions with Seymour demonstrate the princess's susceptibility to desire and the significance of intelligence above perfect virtue. Elizabeth's growth, as Maxwell establishes that she is not infallible but adaptable, also involves her understanding of gender presentation. I discuss Maxwell's descriptions of cross-dressing in the novel in view of Frye's concept of the historical queen as "engendered" (Frye 109) to argue for Elizabeth's self-awareness and the value of female experience in fictional retellings of history. Further, I compare Elizabeth's sense of self in the novel to historical accounts of the queen as demonstrative of the merit of Elizabeth I's own capabilities and lived experiences rather than religious devotion and the will of God.

Maxwell establishes Elizabeth's political role through her familial connections. It is her personal affections and Elizabeth's female body which initially separate her from greatness in Maxwell's work, though by the end of the novel these attributes and experiences work to her advantage. I begin with Elizabeth's political position, the public or more masculine sphere as discussed by Kantorowicz, to consider Maxwell's account of the relationship between the public and private spheres of Elizabeth's life and her construction of Elizabeth's relationship to power. She learns from a young age that her life will be volatile, and she must exercise tact, "She could at any time, by the King's whim and pleasure, be cast off, accused of treachery — even 'disposed of'… She became adept at the abundant obeisances that must needs be shown her great father on the few occasions she'd been called into his presence" (Maxwell 12). In one of Elizabeth's earliest relationships, with her father, Maxwell emphasizes her ability to adapt and

learn from the circumstances of others. In these lines, she describes Elizabeth as having to figure out her situation rather than being perfectly poised; her survival depends on learned "obeisances" and discretion rather than her royal bloodline.

Maxwell begins the novel with a loving Elizabeth comforting Edward, both grieving for Henry's death. In these exchanges, Maxwell constructs Edward's potential as a foil for Elizabeth's own capabilities, with the difference in their natural bodies dictating their fates. While Edward is "the son he had changed the world to have" (2), Henry "had been unendurably cruel to his younger daughter" (2). Elizabeth, despite mourning his death, can remind Edward of the importance of his post, a position which she herself failed to fulfill because of her gender and maternal lineage. She consoles her brother, "'Much … was sacrificed so that you could be born.' A fleeting image of her mother kneeling at the block, and knowledge that the day following her execution Henry had betrothed himself to Edward's mother, caused Elizabeth to shudder. 'You were *everything* to him, brother.'" (Maxwell 4, emphasis in original). Here, Elizabeth describes the insignificance of her own mother, and thereby her own birth, in Henry's pursuit of an heir. In this exchange she justifies Henry's quick betrothal in recognition of Edward's importance. Elizabeth is therefore aware, from such a young age, that despite her clear headedness in crisis and grief, her extensive education, and her attention to impressing Henry, her gender and her mother's infamy keep her from the position her young brother holds.

In her construction of Elizabeth's awareness, Maxwell echoes history, where Elizabeth I's extensive education and displays of intelligence were significant for overshadowing her feminine body (Hosington 16). Carole Levin outlines how the historical siblings did mourn for Henry's death together and describes how "stalwart" Elizabeth I "met the news with fortitude" (Levin 77). Maxwell's choice to include these events, maintaining historical authenticity,

followed by Elizabeth's assertion of her own insignificance, constructs an intelligent and precocious princess. However, Maxwell's deviation from historical accounts is also significant. In these events, Maxwell provides greater insight into the difficulty Elizabeth experiences internally, despite her "stalwart" appearance. In historical accounts, for instance Primrose's praise of Elizabeth I after the queen's death, temperance is a laudable trait. Maxwell's Elizabeth exemplifies this ability to control her own emotion, but she is not exempt from emotion. In fact, Elizabeth's emotions in the novel overwhelm her and she sobs alongside her brother in the chapter's conclusion (Maxwell 4).

While the historical princess may have learned emotional temperance and poise through such experiences, Maxwell's attention to emotional growth is markedly contemporary. Cooper and Short outline the complexity of female characters in historical fiction in their introduction:

> These texts seek to add to and build on existing understandings of the historical female figure, re-distributing narrative power and providing detailed and complex portrayals of her, at odds with her accustomed place as a one-dimensional, supporting character in *his*tory. (14, emphasis in original)

Cooper and Short suggest that such interiority in writing historical characters acts as a rebellion against historical accounts where emotion is insignificant and the personalities of women are auxiliary to patriarchal history (14). Though Elizabeth I, as a long-reigning queen of England, is more than a "supporting" character in history, I apply Cooper and Short's argument here to demonstrate how authors like Maxwell utilize such emotional interiority to revisit Elizabeth's subjectivity. Maxwell's presentation of Elizabeth's political responsibilities, to put the good of the realm above her own grief, highlights an individualistic, introspective learning process in which Elizabeth must navigate her emotions, not eliminate them. Furthermore, Maxwell's focus on Elizabeth's emotions legitimates her shortcomings. Here, she does not demonstrate Primrose's praise that she is "not fond to love" (Primrose 6), and her emotional complexity

stands in contrast to Knox's experience of women as "unconstant, variable" (Knox 10). Maxwell's Elizabeth possesses a depth and interiority not evident in Knox's descriptions of women. I argue that, for Maxwell, the adversities resulting from the social incongruence of Elizabeth's political responsibilities and feminine body become her triumph; Elizabeth learns the value of feminine experience, emotion, and agency in a role in which female independence is limited. As a female, Elizabeth is initially deprived of the success Edward experiences, despite his own emotional responses. However, the difficulties she experiences, her variability and growth, create a stronger sense of self, wit, and strategy.

At odds with her political responsibilities in *Virgin: Prelude* is Elizabeth's attention to her own physical growth and puberty. While Elizabeth I was "stalwart" in her mind for politics (Levin 77), Maxwell describes Elizabeth's experiences with her teenage body as awkward and confusing. Her politics are dictated by how she experiences life as an adolescent female. As Elizabeth recognizes her own sexuality and how it is viewed by others, she learns that feminine experience is valuable. Nevertheless, the awkwardness of Elizabeth's sense of self presents a construction of Elizabeth's private body as flawed and, as she interacts with Thomas Seymour, unchaste. Maxwell marks a change in Elizabeth in an interaction with her stepmother and her tutor, "Lately, though, she had had to overcome shyness in the presence of men, even her beloved Grindal, for her small breasts had begun to bud" (15). In this exchange, Elizabeth is discussing her education, but Maxwell reminds the reader of Elizabeth's physical body. She is unsure in her femininity, and having reached puberty, Elizabeth recognizes she must interact with men differently. This Elizabeth, barely mature and uncertain of herself, is a departure from historical accounts which often praised Elizabeth I's virtue over her physicality. Moreover, Elizabeth experiences her physical body with abjection: "Talk of the physical made Elizabeth

suddenly squeamish. It reminded her of her gangly body's recent surprises — the budding breasts, the red-gold hair sprouting under her arms and between her legs. She'd recently begun her monthly courses, and the female rituals that accompanied them" (Maxwell 33).

In her steadfast response to the crisis of her father's death, Elizabeth exhibits extraordinary tact in a time of grief, but her female body and her connection to her infamous mother interfere with the legitimacy of her claim, and Elizabeth internalizes the expectations of womanhood. Puberty comes as a surprise, and yet she is aware of the need to act differently under the gaze of men. Though Scholz's comparison between the health of the monarch's body and the health of the realm applies to Elizabeth I as a female ruler, I revisit Scholz's concepts in my discussion of Maxwell's work. Through these physical changes in adolescence, Elizabeth becomes hyper-aware of how she is perceived by men. Elizabeth's body is awkward and unpredictable, and she is not the steady, chaste monarch Scholz describes (Scholz 10). For the historical Elizabeth I, it was difficult to assert credibility and stability as a female, the object of male agency (Scholz 11). The myth surrounding the queen, and what Scholz describes as the "inviolability" (Scholz 9) of the physical body, mitigated this lack of subjectivity. In Maxwell's novel, Elizabeth understands she will be treated differently post-puberty, but she is not in control of the physical changes affecting her. Her body is unstable, and yet Elizabeth develops her confidence. Elizabeth's desires culminate most notably later in the novel as Seymour pursues her, but Maxwell's discussion of puberty signals an ordinariness to Elizabeth's experiences, the "female rituals," and the change in how Elizabeth will be treated by the men around her. Maxwell's attention to the physical signals Elizabeth's young age, but more importantly a sense of interiority as she navigates having a female body in a patriarchal sphere. Elizabeth's female body is not problematized by Maxwell in the same way that historical authors focused upon it.

Sentiments like Knox's, for instance, express an inherent sexual difference, positioning women as naturally weak (Knox 10). Authors like Maxwell do not illustrate an inherent and behavioural difference connected to gender, but instead a history of differential treatment (Wallace 216-217). Rather than Elizabeth being elevated to superhuman levels, she is recognizably human. For the contemporary reader, Elizabeth's body can be ordinarily gangly and unpredictable without affecting her agency and her intelligence. While the historical Elizabeth I may have believed herself superior to other women (Frye 21), Maxwell spends much of her narrative establishing the humanness of Elizabeth's body and, subsequently, the commonality of the abuse experienced by women.

In the novel, Elizabeth learns how to negotiate between her public responsibilities, female body, and emotional interiority through the examples of women around her. Just as Cooper and Short suggest in their discussion of historical fiction in general (16), *Virgin Prelude* reclaims Elizabeth's subjectivity as a woman with power, rather than a woman extraordinary for her gender. Elizabeth's relationship to her mother, Anne Boleyn, demonstrates this divide between Elizabeth's public and private affairs. She takes pride in resembling her father more noticeably than her siblings (Maxwell 12) and recoils at the mention of her mother in conversation (Maxwell 18). Elizabeth reacts to mention of her mother with anguish, comparable to the abjection she exhibits as she experiences puberty and recognizes changes in how the men around her will perceive her. Maxwell's Elizabeth, like other accounts of the queen in historical novels, is affected by her mother's death and reputation, both politically and emotionally. Maxwell describes Boleyn's "humiliating downfall" caused by allegations of adultery, and mirrors Elizabeth's discomfort towards womanhood with discomfort towards her mother, the "goggle-eyed whore" (10). Historically, Elizabeth I was cautious in her public recognition of her mother

(Cole 2-3) and early modern authors do not represent her parental relationships emotionally. While Alan Haynes characterizes Elizabeth I's historical sentiments toward her parents as "indifference" (31), Susan Bassnett points to Elizabeth's love of bear baiting and the executions she sanctioned while in power as evidence that she would have been unaffected by the manner of her mother's death (5). Despite this precedent in history, Maxwell chooses to construct Elizabeth as shuddering at the thought of her mother's execution, even if Henry's remarriage allowed for the birth of her brother (Maxwell 4). Maxwell's focus on Elizabeth's connection to her mother indicates an interiority and a value in feminine experience not present in historical accounts. Not only does Maxwell characterize Elizabeth's connection to her mother's infamy as political, with Elizabeth in exile until Catherine Parr "rescues" her (Maxwell 3), but Elizabeth is also affected emotionally. Maxwell demonstrates the value of Boleyn's experience, robbed of her agency because of, in Parr's description in the novel, her choice not to share her power with the women around her (Maxwell 18). Her mother's missteps in her navigation of patriarchy and power provide Elizabeth with a cautionary tale as she learns to mediate her own power and female body. In a conversation with Elizabeth, Parr recounts her memory of Boleyn to a hesitant Elizabeth:

> Perhaps your mother's greatest folly was due not to arrogance or ambition but to a dearth of experience. Perhaps she did not understand your father nearly as well as she supposed she did…. I've told you of the mistakes Anne made, and how I learned from her poorly chosen methods, but more important were her contributions. In ways, she and I were sisters under the skin. (Maxwell 18)

This account from Parr, stating the good and the bad, demonstrates that Elizabeth can learn from her mother's strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, Parr's assessment suggests that Boleyn's death was due to carelessness or misjudgement in a volatile society, rather than true guilt for her supposed crimes. Through Parr's words, Maxwell demonstrates the merit of matrilineal

experience for the fiction writer and subject, a concept discussed by Julie Crane (86). Crane positions Elizabeth in comparison to her mother and points to the opportunities in fiction for Elizabeth to "re-make herself" and exercise the agency her mother could not (86). Maxwell's novel demonstrates this role for Elizabeth, and I suggest that Maxwell's Elizabeth "re-makes" herself through her mother's mistakes, not despite them. While Parr sees Boleyn as a sister "under the skin," indicating a camaraderie beyond social and political attachment, she learns from Anne's mistakes that it is essential to appease Henry. Parr does not separate herself from Boleyn; rather, she recognizes how precarious the position is for a woman in power and passes that wisdom on to Elizabeth. Where Maxwell's depiction departs from historical characterizations is the reader's experience of the learning curve Elizabeth must undergo to survive physically and socially. Elizabeth learns from such "sisters under the skin," (18) through their interiority and individual decision making. Maxwell's Elizabeth is indebted to other women for her survival, not superior to them.

If the novel's Boleyn, the "goggle eyed whore" (Maxwell 10), teaches Elizabeth the importance of managing desire, or the necessity of experience, Parr shows the princess the potential dangers of surviving long enough to lose social and psychological wit and subjectivity. Elizabeth's success, as she escapes punishment for her involvement with Seymour, is due to the women around her who demonstrate the universality of misogyny and abuse. While Elizabeth's mother is executed prior to the events of the novel for this "dearth of experience" (Maxwell 18), her stepmother is present throughout the narrative. Parr's transition, from a doting mother figure to a figure engaged in delusion and even complicity in Seymour's abuse of Elizabeth, models that the manipulation of ambitious men can drive a woman mad. I posit that, like Elizabeth's connection to her mother, Elizabeth's survival of Seymour, both physically and in terms of her

reputation, acts as a reclamation for these women who did not experience love and marriage unscathed (Crane 86). In this characterization of Elizabeth, Maxwell also restructures Elizabeth's subjectivity within her own life story. For Maxwell, Elizabeth does not succeed because she is unlike other monarchs; she succeeds because she learns the danger of her relationship to power, and she adapts in response to the mistakes made by the women around her. In the beginning of the novel, Parr is "Kind and generous in the extreme" (Maxwell 3) in her care for Elizabeth and Edward, and she "had miraculously rescued Henry's two bastardized daughters from poverty and obscurity, bringing them back from exile into the Tudor family fold" (3). Parr's nurturing of Elizabeth, her education, and her social standing is starkly distinct from her treatment of Elizabeth further into the novel. Maxwell describes this change in Parr: "Catherine, Elizabeth had come to realize, loved Thomas too fervently, was sick with loving him. The woman had to know he did not return that affection in kind, and she must know, too, that he felt an unholy lust for his stepdaughter" (Maxwell 98). For Elizabeth, Parr's inability to see Seymour's manipulation of her represents a misstep similar to that of her mother. Dolan's assessments of contemporary characterizations of Anne Boleyn are also applicable to Parr in this sense:

> Yet novels about Anne also appeal to readers by saying that even Anne is more like most women than unlike them. In venturing some sympathy for Anne, novels simultaneously associate the constraints of marriage with the past, and with the unusual circumstances of marrying a king, and associate self-assertion with the woman of the future. (Dolan 136)

Like Boleyn's, Parr's circumstances are constraining and unusual, but they are shared by powerful women around her, including Elizabeth. Boleyn and, in this instance, Parr represent women who are unable to assert themselves, to learn from their mistakes and those of others, because navigating the Tudor court as a woman is so challenging. Parr claims that Seymour, her husband who was attentive to young Elizabeth and not his pregnant wife, "has no defenses

against such a nubile young virgin, a virgin with the heart of a whore!" (Maxwell 97). In these insults to Elizabeth, Parr fails to see that Seymour's divided attention, and the scandal caused in his pursuit of the princess, is his fault. Unrequited affection and the stress of pregnancy cause Parr to lose control over her relationships and her own sense of dignity. Maxwell describes the alteration in Parr: "It was not just the extreme radiance of the Dowager Queen's face nor the spring in her normally dignified gait. *The very soul of her had somehow changed*" (21, emphasis in original). Elizabeth's stepmother represents an additional lesson in the dangers of failing to recognize the desires of men and the manipulation they may employ. In these experiences, Elizabeth must navigate her own subjectivity against the backdrop of patriarchy and ambition; she must evade her father's ire, gather the experience her mother could not, and avoid the lovesickness and blindness Parr illustrates. Further into the novel, Parr exemplifies this denial as she speaks to her deceased mother and the spirit assures her that Seymour truly loves her. Like Spenser's Belphoebe, unaffected by Timias' lust, Parr is oblivious to the truth of Seymour's desire. Elizabeth, however, must learn to hedge the sexual desires and ambitions of men, not because she is oblivious or infallible as Belphoebe, but because the women around her demonstrate the danger of a loss of control over their own actions and reputations.

Elizabeth's ability to effectively navigate her femininity and subjectivity within this context is not a skill she immediately develops. In the novel, Elizabeth reciprocates Seymour's affections, though she pursues an idealized version of her stepfather that she meets in her dreams (Maxwell 67-68). Their physical relationship begins with unexpected visits from Seymour, rough-housing and tickling Elizabeth while she is alone in the mornings. Though Elizabeth harbors a crush for Seymour, Maxwell portrays the one sidedness of these visits and Seymour's enjoyment of the power they grant him. Maxwell outlines these interactions, "The greater her

surprise, he'd discovered in the last weeks of these early morning visits, the greater his own arousal. It had become something of a game, he conceiving ever more shocking strategies to take Elizabeth by storm in her bedchamber, she attempting to outwit him by her own devices" (Maxwell 64). Maxwell describes Seymour's arousal as connected to the power he holds over Elizabeth, and his ability to "take Elizabeth by storm." Later in the work, Maxwell describes Elizabeth as "harassed by these early morning romps" (95). In addition to this description of Elizabeth as overwhelmed and surprised by Seymour, his tactics involve humiliating the princess and stripping off her clothes while she is restrained (101-102). Maxwell constructs a notable disconnect between Thomas Seymour and the man of Elizabeth's dreams. Elizabeth imagines his "touch so soft" as she envisions Seymour kneeling before her naked body (59) and dreams of the encounter, "She swooned with the loveliness, not merely the sensation of flesh on flesh, but the thought of a man's utter worship of herself" (59). Maxwell juxtaposes these passages, detailing Elizabeth's desire for pleasure, power, and validation, against Seymour's desire to overpower and humiliate her. Following her dream, Elizabeth experiences both excitement and shame as she realizes she cannot have the relations she dreamed of with her stepfather. Her shame and the complexity of these emotions demonstrate that Elizabeth is neither chaste nor exempt from sexual desire. Later, Elizabeth blames her mother for her "wanton Boleyn blood" (98), suggesting a naiveté about the reality of misogyny and female vulnerability which Maxwell portrays.

Maxwell depicts Elizabeth's growth in understanding the relationship between herself as a woman in a female body and her power as a royal; it is not that she must surpass her gender as the historical Elizabeth I did, but that she must tread carefully because she is the same as other women – fallible, emotional, a victim of desire. Elizabeth sneaks out of her room to meet with

Seymour and upon meeting him he attempts to rape her. She describes this as a departure from the man she idealized:

> The enormity of this man's betrayal, and the horror of her predicament and fate, descended fully upon the Princess. She might have been smothered, incapacitated by it, but for the great up-welling of rage that suddenly took hold of her — anger not for Thomas Seymour's heinous actions but for her own fatal stupidity. (Maxwell 181)

Although Maxwell credits the interruption which allows for Elizabeth's escape to "a lucky star," (188) her work illustrates a life in which luck is not enough. In this moment, Elizabeth recognizes her own culpability in believing in Seymour and she blames herself for her predicament. I posit that Maxwell's references to fate suggest a volatility of fortune more than a complete lack of agency. Elizabeth proves that she can and must protect herself where possible and is able to evade further interrogation and punishment for her affair with Seymour. In writing to the Lord Protector in an attempt to clear her name, she feels "as if the very act of writing, decisively and boldly, had returned to her a small measure of control over her destiny" (215). Elizabeth may be lucky, but Maxwell takes care to demonstrate to her reader that Elizabeth meets her circumstances with intelligence and adaptability. Even in times of poor luck, as she is apprehended for her affair with Seymour, she recovers her dignity and exercises agency. The women around Elizabeth, namely her mother and stepmother, may not have had such a stroke of luck, but Maxwell suggests that luck is fleeting, even for Elizabeth. More importantly, Elizabeth must learn to effectively inhabit her public body through emotional and feminine experience. This Elizabeth sustains her subjectivity through manipulation from powerful men, because she understands that she is a woman navigating patriarchal ambition.

Maxwell illustrates Elizabeth's necessary "engendering," through Elizabeth's reflections on gender. Frye coined this term to explain how the historical queen presented herself as occupying both genders to create a new role for herself, rather than attempting to atone for her

female body (Frye 109). Cross-dressing becomes an outlet for Elizabeth to imagine her experience and her agency through both her public and private bodies. Following his departure, Seymour writes to Elizabeth to propose a meeting. Elizabeth disguises herself as a boy to escape her chambers and meet him in secret. She questions her choice in disguise, "Would [Seymour] be repulsed at the sight of her? Perhaps she should have disguised herself as a scullery maid or laundress. What had possessed her to pose as a boy?" (Maxwell 173). After this meeting, Elizabeth has a dream of Parr, dressed as a man, embroidering a moving tapestry depicting St. George. She relates this dream to her own cross-dressing, but then uses the experience to reflect upon her agency as it relates to her gender and circumstance:

> *A man embroidering! But no, 'twas not a man at all but a* <u>*woman in men's clothing*</u>*. 'Twas Catherine Parr, and Elizabeth's heart swelled immediately with joy and love for her, shocked though she was to see the Queen Dowager so attired." Indeed, Elizabeth addressed her then, saying, "You make a fine man, Your Majesty*." (216, emphasis in original)

In this dream, Parr's tapestry illustrates a battle as St. George slays a dragon. Elizabeth remarks that her stepmother, literally weaving English history, makes a "fine man" and therefore illustrates that Parr has the necessary public body to succeed. This vision demonstrates that Elizabeth sees her stepmother as a successful, capable man; however, her circumstance as a woman in power limited the agency she could exercise. Parr creates myth and history and passes down a sense of purpose and wisdom to Elizabeth. This understanding comes to Elizabeth through Parr's feminine experience, as the novel's events and this dream are Elizabeth's way of comprehending her own circumstance. These are not real events in the novel; the reader cannot know whether Parr would have fared differently as a man. Instead, the significance of this dream is the insight Maxwell provides the reader into Elizabeth and how she must make sense of the women around her falling short of success because of their gender. How can Elizabeth, having

made her own mistakes and fallen for Seymour as Parr had, ensure that her fate is different? Elizabeth analyses the dream, "Was Elizabeth the dragon's slayer, meant to stand strong against these ruthless enemies of the State? Become the hero who would save her family, save England?" (224) Elizabeth "re-makes" herself and those before her (Crane 86) as she places herself as St George and the savior of the Tudor succession. Though Elizabeth would succeed her brother, her desire to save her family is notable as Edward still reigns at this point in the novel. Thus, Elizabeth has learned from experience, and through hardship she sees herself as extraordinary.

Because of her dream and the repetition of the words "no harm done" throughout, Elizabeth comes to the realization that her mistakes, even though she faces interrogation, are not serious enough to warrant a treason charge. Consequently, Elizabeth finds purpose in rescuing her bloodline and seeking forgiveness from the women within her dream. In this way, Elizabeth "engenders" her perception of herself as she recognizes the limits of her power, but also finds ways in which she can and must honor her own subjectivity. In Frye's conception of the historical queen, her extraordinary status is a "fallacy" (Frye 8), but this narrative protects the legitimacy of the historical queen (15). Maxwell's construction of Elizabeth also takes issue with Elizabeth as exceptional. Though Maxwell's princess learns to "engender" herself for this survival, it is not at the cost of her own subjectivity. As Crane explains, historical fiction can be a safer space, in comparison to historical contexts, for women's subjectivity and fallibility to be acknowledged (Crane 83). Through Seymour's manipulation, Elizabeth gains insight into the fact that Parr, and women like her, have the capabilities of men but the vulnerability of women. Without these female perspectives, these "sisters below the skin," (18) Elizabeth might not have grown to understand the importance of her subjectivity and vigilance against the ambitions of

others. She devises a way to avoid charges of treason, as her mother could not, and unlike Parr, does not allow her lovesickness or guilt to take over. Elizabeth's dream and the "no harm done" sentiment shows a camaraderie between women and the necessity for Elizabeth to be unlike other women, not because they are reprehensible, but because she provides the reader with a reclamation for their histories as well as her own, as articulated by Cooper and Short and Dolan.

This realization and Elizabeth's interpersonal growth represent a subjectivity not comparable to that of the historical queen. Frye notes, of the historical queen, a deference of agency to God as omnipotent, as a means of ameliorating the conflict between her female body and political position (15). In contrast, Maxwell's Elizabeth experiences religious turmoil unseen in historical accounts of the queen. In Elizabeth's spiritual and emotional complexity, Maxwell provides a subjectivity for her in which she is motivated by her religion and morality, but her success is indebted to her own capabilities and adaptability. Cooper and Short, discussing historical fiction as a vehicle for feminist retellings of history and a reflection of their pertinence to contemporary values, argue, "In these fictional reconstructions, authors not only reintroduce the female figure into contemporary historical discourse, but they also carefully and knowingly reconstruct her as a subject in her own right" (16). Cooper and Short's work, applied to such characterizations of Elizabeth, highlights this movement away from God, indicative of contemporary individualism. In the novel, Elizabeth's natural body is not overshadowed by God's providence and her divine right to power. Elizabeth survives the Seymour affair because she learns to navigate bad luck, manipulation from men, and the difficult examples set by the women around her. Maxwell writes of Elizabeth, "Elizabeth had, truthfully, never been devout — nothing like her sister Mary or even Jane Grey. Prayers for her heart's guidance had gone unanswered and there seemed to be no help coming from God." (109). Although Maxwell

presents a young Elizabeth, the princess's devotion is far less resolute than historical accounts portray for Elizabeth I. Her confidence wavers and Elizabeth moves through acceptance that her love for Seymour cannot be sinful, doubt that her actions can ever be forgiven, and finally a sense that there was "no harm done" and she can still change her future. These are hardships, like the crosses Primrose describes the historical queen bearing (Primrose 11), but Elizabeth's wellbeing is not decided by God in Maxwell's novel. Though Maxwell notes the role of fate intermittently, she emphasizes Elizabeth's agency and experience as responsible for her survival. Elizabeth worries that she is sinful and dreams of Jesus (109), but her spirituality is not the decider of her fate. Further, she credits her female guardians, Kat Ashley and Catherine Parr, with her ability to avoid charges for her affair with Seymour, "My teachers, my saviors, were Kat and Queen Catherine…. 'They gave me wisdom and encouragement.' Tears glittered in her eyes at the memory. 'They gave me strength.'" (231). Whereas historical accounts of Elizabeth point to God as Elizabeth's source of strength, and divine will as negating her natural body, Maxwell crafts feminine experience as necessary for Elizabeth's cunning. Elizabeth may accept God and find herself guided by faith by the end of the novel, but it is her experiences within a feminine body in possession of power, and the experiences of those around her, which teach her how to exercise agency and the importance of preparedness. Moreover, it is Elizabeth's dream of Parr, and not of Jesus, which motivates her plan to evade charges. Elizabeth may position herself as St. George in this revelatory dream, but God is absent.

In her assessment of Elizabeth I's historical response to accusations of treason in her relationship with Seymour, Janel Mueller notes that the princess emphasized the damage to her selfhood caused by these accusations (Mueller 16). Mueller posits that Elizabeth I was motivated by these interrogations to "[serve] notice that she is taking charge of herself, assuming agency

and accountability, and articulating what she will and will not allow others to make of who she is" (16). Mueller's argument for the charisma Elizabeth I developed through the Seymour affair highlights this subjectivity. However, historical accounts of Elizabeth do not describe this interiority, and I include Mueller's argument as support for my assertion that Maxwell's novel is also concerned with subjectivity, but with more emotional and unchaste detail. Maxwell's princess, in her learned sense of self, fills in the gaps of the historical princess's ability to escape punishment. Though Mueller's work indicates an authenticity within Maxwell's account, I discuss *Virgin: Prelude to the Throne* as an opportunity to highlight Elizabeth's growth and legitimize female knowledge. Wallace's work, arguing that historical fiction is underestimated in academic discourse, corroborates the notion that such recharacterizations of historical women may describe untold perspectives (Wallace 216-217). Maxwell's restructuring of the princess accounts for how she gains a greater sense of her own subjectivity through complex, human experience.

In Maxwell's novel, the Princess Elizabeth utilizes the wealth of experiences that come with having a female body in a patriarchal society to protect her reputation and navigate her survival. Elizabeth pens her confession, an account of the events as far less treasonous than the charges against her assume, and "outsmarts" her interrogator Lord Tyrwhitt (231). In her conclusion to the novel, Maxwell illustrates the power of Elizabeth's speech and action. Elizabeth's capabilities are informed by women like Anne Boleyn, whose actions, speech, and authorship of their own stories were historically silenced (Crane 83). For the contemporary reader, Elizabeth's capability represents a need to retell the story of the historical queen as a woman and not superhuman and to include a perspective that has been ignored in historical perspectives and scholarship surrounding the queen (Wallace 217). For Maxwell, female

characters in power will never escape the hardships of being women in a man's office. Political power and public office do not outweigh the ruler's body as they did in early modern notions of kingship, outlined by Kantorowicz. Maxwell does not present an infallible princess destined for greatness. Elizabeth, through the violence resulting from the patriarchal manipulation at court, learns from her lived female experience that good luck will run out and she must be her own savior. Though Elizabeth is called to action as St. George ready to slay the dragon, she is empowered in her female body. Maxwell does not rely on fate or God to dictate Elizabeth's success.

## Chapter 2: Elizabeth's Conflation of Love and Death in *The Marriage Game* and *Legacy*

In this chapter's discussion of Elizabeth's reign as queen, I focus on Alison Weir's *The Marriage Game* and Susan Kay's *Legacy*, as each author assesses Elizabeth's vulnerability as a female monarch. Both Weir and Kay demonstrate Elizabeth's dedication to her country, as well as the concurrent danger of her position. Further, both authors assert that Elizabeth is a successful monarch because she must negotiate between her public body and the appearance of infallibility, on the one hand, and personal satisfaction, on the other. This choice is necessary for Elizabeth as a woman to prevent loss of political authority or even death. Consequently, Weir and Kay alike posit that Elizabeth's vulnerability and learned experience through gender-based violence create a cautious, attentive monarch. These authors do not glamorize Elizabeth's vulnerability in suggesting that such experiences are an asset, but they emphasize a fundamental fact of Elizabeth's position: fear and violence, particularly targeting women, are effective means to achieve political ends. In discussing Weir's text, I focus upon Elizabeth's learned connection between love and death, and the significance of Elizabeth's sexuality. Weir constructs Elizabeth as motivated by fear, a consequence of a lifetime of witnessing and experiencing violence. In each of these themes, Weir negates the narrative that Elizabeth is extraordinarily virtuous and instead represents Elizabeth as an individual with human desire. In Kay's *Legacy*, Elizabeth must sacrifice for her own protection, but like the Elizabeth of Weir's *The Marriage Game*, she wants to improve England. Kay's Elizabeth, surrounded by manipulative men, is more violent as she is haunted by her mother's death and is determined to kill a lover in retribution. For each author, Elizabeth's emotions and grief manifest differently, but the novels complement one another in their demonstration of Elizabeth's interiority. Because fiction writers have the space to characterize Elizabeth's most intimate thoughts, these texts provide insight into the individuals,

not the figures of history, while also representing historical and contemporary experiences of anxiety pertaining to female authority (Dolan 24-25).

In *The Marriage Game*, Weir develops Elizabeth's relationship to her cousin, Mary Stuart, to demonstrate Elizabeth's necessary caution and her recognition of her own vulnerability. Weir attends to authenticity while also recognizing that, as a female monarch, Elizabeth I needed novel strategies to legitimize her power, even beyond her divine right. Weir constructs Elizabeth's emotional deliberation and consequently posits Mary as a cautionary tale about the dangers of ill-informed unions and the willingness of men to deceive and kill for their own ambitions. Through comparison of the characters, Weir reflects upon the difficulties of each woman's approach to marriage; as demonstrated in Elizabeth's chastity and Mary's marriages, a queen regnant cannot have both personal and political satisfaction. Elizabeth expresses great jealousy at Mary's pregnancy: "Mary was with child. Pretty, brainless, imprudent Mary had achieved—despite her marriage having fallen to ruin—the one important thing that Elizabeth had not" (Weir 227). Yet in the lines following this admission Elizabeth makes clear that she fears having a successor, as it would motivate support for the end of her reign (227). Weir recognizes that neither woman can fulfill the competing demands of succession, on the one hand, and chaste virtue, on the other, similar to Spenser's allegorical critiques of Elizabeth. The distinction Weir makes, however, is that these fundamental anxieties surrounding women in power create a context in which marriage and procreation, and physical safety and political success, are mutually exclusive. If historical authors like Spenser are concerned with maintaining authority and God's omnipotence through the uniqueness of a virgin queen, Weir fills in these psychological gaps to posit that Elizabeth never was extraordinary, just adaptive within a role where she was susceptible to manipulation and harm. This manipulation is evident throughout

Elizabeth's life, but also plays a significant role in Mary's death as Elizabeth's courtiers inflate rumours and proceed with the execution without Elizabeth's knowledge (Weir 392). Mary's imprudent marriage may have started her downfall, but it is the deceitfulness of men in the novel which causes her death. Thus, Elizabeth must make a choice, not because she is chosen or virtuous, but because the navigation of politics is perilous, especially for a woman whose natural body threatens male selfhood, as described by Scholz (74). Even as she resigns herself to killing Mary, she plans to do so privately and discreetly to protect her reputation, exclaiming "we must strive for the highest good" (Weir 394). In the choice between personal relationships or the maintenance of authority, Elizabeth chooses the good of her commonwealth above her longing for a child and her distaste for her cousin. Therefore, I argue that her experience as a woman in the position of a king makes Elizabeth an attentive monarch, but only because the danger of female authority in such a context necessitates this vigilance. Writing on the historical queen, Alison Findlay outlines similarities between Mary and Elizabeth I:

> By 1587, Mary Queen of Scots had become the sacrificial, scapegoat queen, executed on 17 February in order to preserve the unity and perpetuity of the Protestant kingdom and its elevated monarch….Each [queen] resembled the other in asserting the legitimacy of female rule and claiming a transcendent identity, appointed by God. Each relied upon her title and the rituals of monarchy to assert her authority. (118-119)

Weir recreates this historical circumstance but she utilizes Elizabeth's interiority to emphasize the importance of caution. Weir highlights that Mary's guilt is based on gossip, an uprising against Elizabeth which "*almost certainly* involved the Queen of Scots" (Weir 392, emphasis in original). In sentencing Mary to die in the novel, Elizabeth risks retaliation and undermining her own legitimacy because "Mary, like herself, had been hallowed by God; her person was sacred" (Weir 383). Elizabeth's deliberation here is comparable to Findlay's assessment of the historical queen as recognizing the authority and significance of her cousin as a female ruler; however,

Weir provides emotional insights throughout the novel which negate the notion that Elizabeth is extraordinary, and Weir asserts that she must be more thoughtful than a male monarch. If the divine appointment of Elizabeth's "sister monarch" (Weir 383) is not sufficient protection against rumours and "almost" certainties, how can Elizabeth avoid the same fate?

Though she experiences sexual desire, Elizabeth's romantic relationships are also motivated by fear. Like Elizabeth I, Weir's Elizabeth is careful about these desires, but not because she is "euer rul'd with Honor" (Davies 20). While I agree with Cooper and Short's argument that historical novels provide a space for reclaiming the humanity and the individual agency of historical figures, Weir's and Kay's novels also illustrate the volatility of sixteenth-century England. Weir constructs Elizabeth's persona as the virgin queen as born out of necessity, akin to the young princess in Maxwell's novel. While this is also the case in historical accounts, where Elizabeth I's chastity separates her from other women, Weir highlights that Elizabeth must be careful because she is like other women. Weir's characterization of Elizabeth, consequently, turns the historical elevations of the queen into a protective fiction. In Weir's novel, chastity is purely pragmatic as Elizabeth seeks sexual pleasure:

> At night she and Robin were lovers in all but the final consummation, sleeping spent in each other's arms after increasingly inventive acts of passion. With a little imagination, there was no end to the things one could do to give and receive pleasure. (141).

In these interactions, Weir establishes that Elizabeth is interested in "inventive acts of passion," and she describes Elizabeth as relishing such acts for the power she feels, "It pleased—and aroused—her to be in command of a man in that way" (Weir 76). In *The Marriage Game*, Elizabeth enjoys authority, politically and sexually, and thus subverts Knox's descriptions of women as inherently weak or subordinate to men. In this narrative, Elizabeth's natural body is a means of manipulating men, in a context where ceding authority to men is both necessary and

dangerous, as exemplified in Mary Stuart's marriage and abdication. Elizabeth's virginity, comparable to early modern descriptions of the queen, protects her body in the novel, but it cannot provide an heir, and Weir demonstrates that Elizabeth cannot be satisfied emotionally. Weir's focus on Elizabeth's sexuality provides the queen with interiority and the fallibility associated with the human body.

Considering this interest in Elizabeth's sexuality, I suggest Cooper and Short's discussion of Amy Burge's work on medieval "bodice-ripper" historical fiction is applicable to such accounts of Elizabeth. Though Weir and the other authors I discuss are not solely focused upon sexuality, they characterize much of Elizabeth's prudence as related to her romantic experiences. Despite the historical myth surrounding the virgin queen, contemporary authors consistently portray Elizabeth as having such an interest in sexual intimacy, regardless of the risks involved. Cooper and Short write of the motivations of such narratives:

> These books, and their position in society as something of a guilty pleasure for those who read them, perpetuate the idea of explicit female sexuality as base and illicit, while at the same time celebrating and revealing such sexuality through their popularity. The barely repressed female (hetero-)sexuality embedded within the storylines of the bodice-ripper has captivated audiences for centuries, and has relied on the escapist element of historical fiction to do so. These novels, and, more broadly, female-centred historical fictions themselves, provide a much needed interrogation of the portrayal of female sexuality previously depicted as by turns criminal, insane, and only acceptable when subject to male demand. The fictional and real-life female figures within these texts therefore become a lens through which authors can examine the issues surrounding female sexuality. (11)

Weir's inclusion of Elizabeth's sexual experiences is significant as a means of demonstrating the queen to be an effective monarch while also celebrating her sexuality. Moreover, Weir locates danger as based within the court and misogynistic perspectives, rather than within female sexuality. In the novel, Elizabeth's chaste persona serves the same function as it did historically, but Weir's character is human in more than just her mortality. *The Marriage Game* demonstrates

Elizabeth to be emotional and at times empowered in her sexuality, and though she experiences violence and harm because of her gender, Weir posits that female agency is not, and was not, the issue.

Weir reflects on such violence throughout Elizabeth's life and establishes that Elizabeth conflates love and death, recognizing that almost everyone close to her has died tragically. She reflects as Dudley's advances bring up memories,

> In a flash there came to mind the corpse-white dead faces of those who had loved and died for it: her mother, Katherine Howard, and Thomas Seymour, their necks all bloody, their headless bodies crumpled below them; Jane Seymour and Katherine Parr, faces twisted out of recognition with the pain of fatal childbirth; and Amy Dudley, who had known this very same flesh that was now assailing hers, lying broken and lifeless on the floor of Cumnor Place – Amy, whose lips were rotting in the rictus of decay, whose only caress now was from worms. (Weir 131)

Elizabeth concludes that her stepfather died for love; though Weir does not narrate Seymour's death, in historical record he was not charged for love but ambition and treason. In listing Seymour amongst others, Elizabeth blames him for loving recklessly, but not for his actions in trying to gain political power. Elizabeth acknowledges the psychological effects of the Seymour affair as the novel continues, and she learns that she must be careful because she is not exceptional. Nonetheless, Weir's list of the deceased is overwhelmingly female, and Elizabeth recalls their deaths, even those she did not witness, in graphic detail. In this passage, Weir amasses the names of prominent women who died for their affections, alongside the name of one misplaced man. As Elizabeth learns to navigate the relationship between her female body and her power, she recognizes the truth of her fears surrounding intimacy. Elizabeth and Dudley try for a "final consummation" (Weir 141), but she is stopped by her memories of her time with Seymour (131), rather than by moral or religious guilt regarding chastity as a virtue. During one of their

visits, Dudley brings a linen condom to alleviate Elizabeth's fears of pregnancy, but Elizabeth cannot reassure herself:

> It would not be as it had been with the admiral, nor would it end as it had for her father and mother. The heavens would not fall, the executioner was not about to hone his ax, and there would be no blood shed on account of this night. But still she shrank from giving herself. (Weir 192)

In this exchange, Weir reveals that Elizabeth's fears run much deeper than childbirth or losing power to a successor. The haunting images of her dead relatives demonstrate the glaring distinction: the men in these relationships, Seymour included, never died for love, or relinquished power for love. Elizabeth, regardless of her cautiousness against scandal, pregnancy, or uprisings, cannot escape that she is fundamentally unable to be an effective monarch and a fulfilled individual simultaneously. Cooper and Short argue that historical fiction, set in a distant period, can provide enough distance between the historical period and the contemporary reader to explore contemporary sexuality and relevant anxieties (10). Similarly, Dolan suggests the role of this distancing (146), but she also highlights the conflict between love and duty as a common theme throughout historical fiction and argues for a "presentist" reading of these works (17). Dolan suggests these novels illustrate the subordination of women in early modern marriage, while their popularity with contemporary readers indicates that power imbalances survive into twenty-first-century marriages (24). Dolan outlines the importance of recognizing social perspectives from the early modern period:

> In novel after novel, the heroine assumes that marriage will annihilate her or lead her to destroy her husband. By associating women's subordination or even erasure through marriage with the early modern period, these stories suggest that time will resolve the conflict between spirited heroines and marriage. Yet the enduring appeal of such stories proves that this conflict remains unresolved in part because we do not yet understand our legacy from the very period they depict. (24-25)

In view of Dolan's work, I suggest that Weir's characterization of Elizabeth also exhibits a need to highlight this legacy. The prevalence of such narratives which humanize Elizabeth demonstrates that these anxieties and forms of subordination continue outside of fiction.

Weir's account of Elizabeth's death demonstrates a recognition that her position meant a choice between chastity and political safety, or love, marriage, and death. At the end of her life, Elizabeth accepts that her choice has improved England, though she has not married. Only in death does Elizabeth's marriage game truly end, "But soon, soon, if God was good—and she had no reason to think that He would be lacking in mercy—they would be reunited in that Heaven in which there was, praise be, no giving or taking in marriage" (Weir 415). In her final moments, Elizabeth thinks of her reunion with Dudley, free from having to remain vigilant. Weir's description echoes Dolan's discussions of the power dynamics of early modern marriage where agreeing to marriage meant agreeing to a loss of selfhood (Dolan 3-4). However, the vulnerability that Weir paints for Elizabeth does not negate the subjectivity which she provides the queen. Weir describes a volatile life for Elizabeth, but her ability to adapt, survive, and thrive as a successful monarch is not something Weir attributes to other characters.

The construction of Elizabeth as caught between personal and political satisfaction is popular across contemporary depictions of the queen. Barbara Hodgdon's discussion of the film *Elizabeth* (1998) demonstrates this narrative while also showing where historical novels like Weir's depart from other media:

> The film's trajectory is modeled around the idea that history is about the choices one makes— in Elizabeth's case, her choice between personal life and a career—a terrain that takes comic form in television's *Ally McBeal* or *Sex and the City* and is synchronous with the dilemma of self-compartmentalization facing present day professional women. But stressing Elizabeth's extreme vulnerability and further emphasizing the influences exerted on her by four men…. her history becomes a story of male politics, a postmodern fairy tale of Beauty and the Beasts. (181)

Hodgdon's evaluation of *Elizabeth* reflects Dolan's assertion that these films and narratives are popular because they are relatable for audiences and readers. Anxieties surrounding women with power, whether political or professional, have not ceased. However, my assessment deviates from Hodgdon's in that historical fiction authors like Weir utilize their narrative space, rather than a visual medium, to accentuate the emotional, thoughtful individual behind the successful queen. In doing so, Weir creates an interiority for Elizabeth more complex than a decisive choice between public and private fulfillment. Though Elizabeth is extremely vulnerable in the novel, Weir's focus is not the politics of men but the intelligence and perseverance of Elizabeth in surviving their manipulation. In addition, Weir uses Elizabeth's consistent introspection to provide the reader with an understanding that although her position is dangerous and emotionally taxing, Elizabeth loves her subjects. Elizabeth is cautious as a tactic of survival, but she follows the "highest good" because she cares about the impact of her rule on England. Despite her thoughts of Dudley, Elizabeth accepts her death because she decides it is the right choice for her subjects:

> It was not her desire to live or reign longer than was good for her subjects. It was the greatest measure of her love for them, the love she had carefully nurtured and cherished since youth. They might have mightier and wiser princes reigning over them, but she was certain they would never have any who loved them better than she did. (Weir 415)

Weir builds Elizabeth's history as being about these choices. As a female monarch, Elizabeth could have marriage and personal fulfilment, or safety and political authority. Weir's depiction of Elizabeth demonstrates that she learned this distinction out of necessity, but she also notes Elizabeth's love for her role. Weir, in her characterization of Elizabeth, creates complex motivations for Elizabeth's decisions; in doing so, Weir acknowledges the perilousness of Elizabeth's position, while also honouring Elizabeth's ability to grow through her emotions and experiences in a female body.

In her novel L*egacy*, Susan Kay also reflects these incompatibilities between marriage and power, described by Dolan in terms of unions founded on subordination, or ending in annihilation of the self (Dolan 24-25). Like Weir, Kay illustrates the dangerous, often violent, actions of the patriarchal court and the men around Elizabeth. Though *Legacy,* for example, traces William Cecil's loyalty to Elizabeth through her adolescence until his death, Elizabeth's relationship with her "Spirit," is largely performative. Kay creates two sides to Cecil and Elizabeth's relationship. At times Cecil is implicitly compared to a spouse or lover, but at other times Cecil is manipulative and more interested in political success than care for Elizabeth as an individual. For instance, Kay's Cecil has Amy Dudley killed in order to implicate Elizabeth's beloved Robert Dudley in her death:

> As he [Cecil] left, it occurred to him that it was rather a pity his hand in this remained unseen. It was the triumph of a lifetime that surely ought to be accorded the honour of verse.
>
> Some years after his death, the playwright, John Webster, unwittingly obliged him: "*The surest way to chain a woman's tongue is break her neck; a politician did it*."
>
> Short and to the point, it would have pleased his fastidious taste in epitaphs. (Kay 312, emphasis in original)

Cecil maintains a rivalry with Robert Dudley throughout the novel, viewing it as part of his role of protecting Elizabeth's reputation and advising her in political affairs, including marriage. Kay's descriptions of Cecil and his motivations, however, reveal that even the men closest to Elizabeth will act out of their own best interest. Kay includes this excerpt from Webster, which succinctly reflects that Cecil is not concerned with Elizabeth's vulnerability as a woman; he is interested in praise, even for murder, and realizing his own goals. Kay's suggestion that Cecil would appreciate such sentiments highlights a misogynistic perspective which fails to consider Elizabeth. I suggest that Kay includes this passage as particularly jarring for the contemporary reader, and the theme of violent silencing is significant throughout the novel. In this reflection on

Cecil, Kay poses an implicit question: is Elizabeth different from other women whose tongues need chaining, or do the men around her maintain loyalty to her simply because she happens to be queen? In my discussions of these historical novels about Elizabeth, I argue the latter. More importantly, these narratives prioritize Elizabeth's motivations and the interiority of the woman behind the queen's decisions. Though Elizabeth must navigate the perspectives and desires of men around her, Kay highlights that Elizabeth remains in control of her affairs and image.

For this reason, I return to Frye's work and contrast her definition of agency regarding the historical queen, with agency as represented in Kay's novel:

> Part of the problem has been a reluctance to consider the issue of [the historical] Elizabeth's "agency" because the term appears to assume the existence of the queen as a self-determined subject who was to a large extent in conscious control of the effects she created. …To a large degree, the extent of her power was determined by her willingness to engage and restructure the discourses current in her culture that naturalized gender identity. It is this performance or construction of herself that I term her *agency*" (Frye 7, emphasis in original)

In view of Frye's definition, I posit that Kay's Elizabeth does exhibit this self-determined agency. As Frye suggests of the historical queen, Kay's Elizabeth must be cautious and function within the culture in which she rules, as exemplified by Cecil's pride and violence. Elizabeth is certainly affected by the actions of her advisors, especially Cecil. Where Kay, like other contemporary novelists, departs from Frye's definition is in the deliberation and emotional processing her Elizabeth possesses. Even more, while Kay provides this perspective of violent subordination, of silencing women, her Elizabeth reciprocates Cecil's deceit as she lies about her relationship with Dudley to suit the circumstances. Kay's Elizabeth is not above lying, just like the men around her, because she understands that she is no different from Amy Dudley. Kay's focus on Elizabeth's emotional state and thought processes portrays a fallible individual in a position where learning from experience and the examples of others is an invaluable skill.

Both Kay and Weir demonstrate the vulnerability of Elizabeth as a female monarch in a patriarchal court while simultaneously highlighting Elizabeth's agency through the choices she makes. Kay and Weir, like Maxwell, position their depictions of Elizabeth as reclamations of the individual agency and experiences of women that have been eliminated from the early modern historical accounts which elevate Elizabeth I. However, Kay's novel is distinct for Elizabeth's explicit motivation of avenging her mother and the injuries she herself has suffered throughout the events of *Legacy*. For Kay, Elizabeth navigates the prevalent violence around her and the deaths of those close to her through the manifestation of a shadow version of the queen. Kay contains Elizabeth's anger and despair within this darker side of her personality, but also connects Elizabeth's dissociated persona with her mother:

> All her life with slow and fatalistic tread had led her to this moment. The time had come for her to cut off the head of the one she loved and to do it almost without hesitation, cold-bloodedly, self-righteously atoning for Anne's death, as Anne's spirit relentlessly demanded (Kay 626).

Not only does Kay create Elizabeth as a "re-making" of her mother (Crane 86), but she presents Elizabeth as psychologically altered because of the past. This establishes Elizabeth, I suggest, as an opportunity to rewrite historical narratives and address the misrepresent noted by Cooper and Short (3). Moreover, Kay's Elizabeth meets violence with violence, proving herself to be fallible and not the merciful or temperate monarch described by historical authors. This characterization of Elizabeth is not Primrose's model of Elizabeth I for women to follow on account of her virtues; rather, Kay's queen is violent because she has learned to be. While she purports to love Dudley and, to a lesser extent, the Earl of Essex, the events of *Legacy* have taught Elizabeth that no man can be trusted. Even Cecil, having supported Elizabeth for years, will exploit the vulnerability of women and create scandal if necessary. Further, Kay creates Anne's spirit to be an extension of Elizabeth. For example, as Elizabeth signs Essex's death warrant, Kay describes

how "She seemed to stand apart from that other self, grimly fascinated, and watch a black-haired, black-eyed woman scrawl the flamboyant signature of Elizabeth of England in letters two inches high at the head of the warrant" (Kay 626). Though Kay suggests Anne's spirit is a manifestation of Elizabeth's trauma, her language merges Anne as part of Elizabeth. Regardless of whether this "other self" is a spirit or merely a projection of Elizabeth's emotions, Elizabeth understands her role through this shadow self. Elizabeth's decisions are imperfect and often immoral in *Legacy,* by early modern or contemporary standards of morality. Nevertheless, Elizabeth is an effective monarch because she sacrifices personal fulfilment for her responsibilities as ruler. I do not suggest that Elizabeth is commendable; her caution and frustration create violence. Kay illustrates, however, that Elizabeth's position mandates these choices, and it is the volatile context and perspectives surrounding women which necessitate this. Moreover, the myth of Elizabeth as extraordinary exacerbates these perspectives, because it fails to recognize not only the dangers of Elizabeth's court but, as Dolan explains, the current between the historical denigration of women and still rampant anxieties surrounding women in power (Dolan 24-25). Dolan describes Elizabeth's connection to her mother in *Legacy* as a limitation on Elizabeth's agency, a spectre chaining her to the past (143). Conversely, I read Kay's work as an example of Wallace's conception that these narratives provide a space for female perspectives in history (Wallace 212). Kay reflects on Elizabeth's subjectivity and emphasizes that Elizabeth's decisions make her an effective queen, but she achieves this success through physical and emotional hardship. In her image of Elizabeth, Kay counters the belief that Elizabeth was exceptional or separate from other women and emphasizes the lived terror of women at the time, even a great monarch. In my assessment, the past does not constrain Elizabeth but remains a legacy which requires further examination.

Despite her distinctly violent characterization of Elizabeth, Kay also reflects upon Elizabeth's choice to pursue her love for her subjects and her political position above her longing for personal fulfilment. Like Weir, Kay portrays Elizabeth as a better ruler than her male contemporaries because of this dedication, while also criticizing the institutions and attitudes which force her to decide which to sacrifice. Kay makes this choice explicit in the novel: "She stood at the crossroads of her life and stared at the deep forking of the ways. Down one lay the ultimate fulfilment of a woman; down the other the fulfilment of a queen" (Kay 314). Through these moments of introspection, Kay emphasizes the distinct persona Elizabeth employs in public, while she grieves and deliberates privately. When Raleigh feels deceived by the queen, he exclaims, "England was her lover…The rest of us were shadows—mirror images—even Leicester!" (632). This choice, the same commitment Hodgdon perceives in the film *Elizabeth*, causes Elizabeth to find it necessary to prioritize either the personal or the public because she is a woman, and her authority depends on extreme caution. This is a choice Elizabeth has made, not only because she is vulnerable, but because she is determined to "rebuild a nation which was spiritually and financially bankrupt. She would cultivate this country till it bloomed like a fine rose" (Kay 314). Elizabeth's dedication to her country in *Legacy* allows her to become a more adaptable, careful monarch. However, Kay's approach, and that of the historical fiction author more generally, highlights that Elizabeth, as a successful female ruler, is not necessarily enviable. In this re-assessment of history, Kay considers the lesser-known side of Elizabeth and demonstrates that Raleigh and the spiteful men around her fundamentally misunderstand Elizabeth. Compared to film, as analyzed by Hodgdon, historical fiction provides the reader with a great deal of intimacy; Kay for instance, demonstrates that Elizabeth loves her courtiers, her subjects, and her authority, but she is constrained by both her vulnerability and her dedication to

improving England, into compromise. Kay's novel, therefore, does not reduce Elizabeth's narrative to the politics of the men around her, but highlights the anxieties surrounding femininity:

> Like Elizabeth herself, these novels insist that status should be more important than gender, and a queen should not subordinate herself to any man. They depict a queen who spurns lovers who aspire to share or usurp her power, threatens those who presume upon her favor, and banishes or executes upstarts. Perhaps, they suggest, it could be good to be queen. But the pleasures and privileges assigned to Elizabeth remain those imaginable within an economy of scarcity; they are the pleasures of killing rather than being killed, of being the king and not the consort. Novels about Elizabeth suggest that women can have power or marriage but cannot have both. (Dolan 148)

To return to Frye's definition of the agency of the historical queen – able to work within the available discourses but not free to control her image (Frye 7) – Kay's Elizabeth is consciously aware of the effects of her image. The agency she exhibits is closer to Cooper and Short's articulation of agency in historical fiction: "In these fictional reconstructions, authors not only reintroduce the female figure into contemporary historical discourse, but they also carefully and knowingly reconstruct her as a subject in her own right" (Cooper and Short 16). Kay's Elizabeth chooses to protect herself through maintaining a public, chaste persona, but she also chooses to improve England. The interiority which Kay creates for Elizabeth negates any separation of the queen from the women around her as subjected to violence and manipulation. Kay also honours Elizabeth's political dedication and her emotional complexity. As Cooper and Short assert, Kay's focus on this complexity interrogates depictions of Elizabeth I as one dimensional: was she God's infallible appointee, or a heartless manipulator as Raleigh describes her in the novel? Kay's explicit reflection on the path Elizabeth must choose recognizes Elizabeth's interiority, while also addressing contemporary anxieties.

I am interested in historical fiction for this breadth of representation and the complexity authors employ in representing Elizabeth's life. Both *The Marriage Game and Legacy* recognize

that Elizabeth's position, though she is queen, is not enviable to the reader (Dolan 148). Both authors focus upon the discord between personal desire and political caution in their demonstration of the psychological, emotional, and physical sacrifices Elizabeth makes. Like historical authors depicting Elizabeth I, contemporary novelists exploit Elizabeth as a character within their works to address particular needs. For the early modern author, Elizabeth I's chastity and superhuman virtue created a sense of inviolability (Scholz 9) and infallibility, and asserted her divine right to rule. Contemporary authors also demonstrate an interest in legitimizing Elizabeth. Authors like Weir and Kay, however, assert the significance of Elizabeth's individuality and the value of her experience as a woman who must strive to appear impenetrable. These authors do not cater to the misogynistic perspectives which limit women to choosing personal or professional fulfillment out of fear of losing credibility. Such writers present Elizabeth as a successful ruler because of this compensation for her femininity, but they also emphasize the violence and fear which underlay Elizabeth's experience as monarch. As these themes prevail across fiction, film and television, I concur with Dolan's assessment that historical fiction represents the survival of these anxieties surrounding female authority in contemporary relationships. Weir, Kay, and the other authors writing within this niche genre effectively redefine Elizabeth's agency: she is both dedicated and fearful, a complex individual rather than the exception to the women around her. In doing so, they demonstrate Cooper, Short, and Wallace's argument that historical fiction can be an outlet for representing the experience of historical women more thoroughly than traditional history (Wallace 212) and can also provide a space for readers to reflect on their own experiences and perspectives on gendered power.

In these historical novels, authors create a more complete, human characterization of Elizabeth and in so doing support Cooper and Short's defense of the genre: this "project of

rewriting the historical female figure and her liberation from the patriarchal discourse that has for so long dominated historical and cultural narratives forms part of the ongoing project of feminism" (Cooper and Short 14). Echoing Dolan, Cooper and Short argue that historical fiction is not merely a vehicle for altering narratives of history but that this representation of female subjectivity can change the traditional legacies of historical women to illustrate that they were individuals, often facing abuse and manipulation (Dolan 148, Cooper and Short 14). In his assessment of film depictions of Elizabeth, Betteridge highlights the value of these complex representations:

> However, it is perhaps the myth of Elizabeth that these films reproduce and not the facts of her reign. Indeed cinema has tended to reproduce many of the tropes found in Elizabethan apologists for, and critics of, Elizabeth Tudor. This suggests that either they were very forward looking, which seems unlikely, or that our culture's ways of making sense of strong women have not moved on much from the sixteenth century. Bette Davis's, Cate Blanchette's and Flora Robson's Elizabeths are all nothing like the real Queen Elizabeth — but then, is this not also true of Foxe's, Camden's and Aylmer's Elizabeths? (258)

Historical fiction, allowing authors to communicate Elizabeth's emotions, thoughts, and deliberations, provides the fuller account Betteridge describes. Of course, Betteridge, like other critics, also notes that authors portray history through biased perspectives. I do not contest that contemporary authors continue to characterize Elizabeth for their own means. The humanized, complex presentations of Elizabeth in these novels recognize the facts of her reign, both favourable and horrific. Consequently, these works include more thorough perspectives on the female experience in history, and thus also acknowledge that women, in view of Dolan's "presentist" arguments (Dolan 17), face these anxieties and difficult choices in contemporary society.

## Chapter 3: Recharacterizing History as a Reflection on Motherhood in *Queen Elizabeth's Daughter*

In *Queen Elizabeth's Daughter* (2014) Anne Clinard Barnhill characterizes Elizabeth as a mother figure for her ward, Mary Shelton. In this relationship, I argue, Barnhill analogizes the fragility of Elizabeth's representation as mother to England, while also assigning Elizabeth family-oriented desires. Barnhill acknowledges the narrative surrounding Elizabeth as unnatural or extraordinary, as perpetuated in her time and continued through contemporary media. Like Maxwell, Weir, and Kay, Barnhill humanizes Elizabeth, but goes even further to emphasize this interiority through chapters completely dedicated to Elizabeth's private thoughts and emotions. In this characterization, Barnhill posits that Elizabeth is not extraordinary, and she does not need chastity or divine providence to be a successful leader as she navigates her experiences as a woman in power. Through Mary Shelton, a character loosely based upon Elizabeth I's historical maid, Mary Shelton Scudamore, Barnhill exposes her reader to Elizabeth's concealed emotions of fear, indecision, and frustration with the sacrifices she must make. As mother to England, Elizabeth maintains a protective persona in the novel and, through Mary, Barnhill assesses Elizabeth as learning from her emotions and functioning as a strong monarch because she chooses her country and stability over a conventional family.

Throughout this chapter, I compare *Queen Elizabeth's Daughter* to the historical queen's demonstrations of monarchical motherhood to demonstrate how Barnhill utilizes historical fact to reshape Elizabeth I's legacy, while also taking narrative liberties to reflect contemporary perspectives surrounding female agency. Barnhill's Elizabeth exhibits freedom and desire not present in historical accounts or, as critics argue, not possible for the historical queen. In this way, Barnhill's novel re-inserts female agency and perspective into history, as Cooper, Short and Wallace have argued historical novels do (Cooper and Short 15-16, Wallace 212). Further,

though Barnhill reflects contemporary values, she also represents surviving anxieties surrounding women in power, in this case a maternal figure with ambition. I also extend Dolan's arguments, as outlined in the previous chapter regarding marriage and gendered power in historical fiction, to suggest that Barnhill validates Elizabeth's agency through her dedication to her country. In Barnhill's work, this manifests as Elizabeth's desire for several forms of motherhood, even though her circumstances are limited. Barnhill simultaneously vouches for the validity of Elizabeth's natural body, an example of Cooper and Short's characterization of historical fiction as part of "the ongoing project of feminism" (Cooper and Short 14), while also presenting anxieties surrounding motherhood, power, and individuality which continue into the twenty-first century.

In a private reflection on her relationship to Mary Shelton, Elizabeth describes her maternal love for her cousin: "*Men may think me monstrous, as I show no desire for a husband or children. But they do not know Mary is mine own little lamb—she is the child of my heart*" (Barnhill 58, emphasis in original). Like others authoring Elizabeth, Barnhill recognizes a distinction between Elizabeth's public persona, and Elizabeth the individual who is motivated to maintain her authority. In this sense, Elizabeth's description emphasizes that while she may not outwardly show desire for a conventional family, she experiences these feelings privately. Further, Barnhill's language in these lines recalls Knox's "monstrous" women overturning social and religious order. Effectively, Barnhill utilizes this relationship with Mary to redefine Elizabeth's role in maintaining a public persona; for Barnhill, this remains only a partial image of Elizabeth the individual as those around her, mainly men, misunderstand her policies surrounding marriage and family. Barnhill posits that Elizabeth is not exceptional, but she must navigate an exceptional position: "*it is a hard thing to be a woman and be queen*" (256,

emphasis in original). Barnhill's work, therefore, converses with historical accounts of Elizabeth, and the legacy of her apparent unnaturalness more generally, to reconsider Elizabeth the woman foregoing a family because it is a safer, more fruitful choice, not because she is exempt from the same desires as those around her. Elizabeth explains this relationship as if Mary were her biological daughter, even having a special nickname for her, Fawn: "*I have loved Fawn since that first time when you brought her to me and she called me her 'shining lady.' I think I knew, somewhere in my heart, I would never have a child of my own. Whatever there is of the mother in me, those feelings have gone to Fawn*" (Barnhill 58, emphasis in original). Elizabeth's language naturalizes her relationship with her ward, and she acknowledges that although she does have maternal affections, she will not birth her own children. Elizabeth warns Mary against the potentially fatal consequences of childbirth (Barnhill 34), and her guardianship of Mary allows her to circumvent the dangers of both pregnancy and naming her successor. Christine Coch, writing on Elizabeth I's place in early modern family culture, argues that even if Elizabeth did have children, her political responsibilities would appropriate the time she could devote to an affectionate relationship with her children (444). Coch's assessment highlights that Barnhill's depiction of this relationship is anachronistic:

> Since any child of Elizabeth's would likely have been raised similarly distanced from its royal parents, there is no reason to believe that even her own biological motherhood would have resulted in intimacy between "natural" mother and child.
>
> Aristocratic conventions for raising adolescents would have supported this prediction. As children grew into their teenage years these practices further attenuated relations between a mother and her off-spring. (Coch 439)

If historical circumstances do not support Elizabeth's maternal relationship to Mary, what do Barnhill and her readers gain from such an investigation into Elizabeth as a mother? In the novel, Elizabeth loves Mary, her teenage ward, as her own, and the two enjoy picnics and evenings together. Barnhill's compromise, wherein Mary can be Elizabeth's maid and a daughter figure,

allows her to investigate this relationship without altering Elizabeth's image as the virgin queen, described throughout history as both monstrous and extraordinary. Thus, Barnhill reflects upon Elizabeth's position as childless while also creating a character who is completely capable of rule, despite possessing maternal affections beyond her love for her subjects.

Though Barnhill employs the historical relationship between Elizabeth and Mary Shelton Scudamore,[6] the alterations she makes to historical fact demonstrate the significance of this mother-daughter dynamic for the novel. While each of the novelists I have discussed works to fill in the gaps of history identified by Locke (Locke 157-158), Barnhill's characterization of Mary Shelton highlights the significance of Elizabeth's maternal persona; in the balance between historical authenticity and narrative development, Barnhill intervenes in Elizabeth's life story to characterize the queen as more ordinary in her longing for family than extraordinary in her position. Barnhill explains her mediation of historical fact and narrative function in her author's note, where she provides the reader with biographical details of Mary Shelton Scudamore's life (369). Barnhill constructs the relationship between Elizabeth and Mary to be much more affectionate than historical records indicate. Rayne Allinson's entry for Mary Shelton Scudamore in *A Biographical Encyclopedia of Early Modern Englishwomen* outlines Mary's historical role as Elizabeth I's cousin, maid, and master of robes, as well as her secret marriage to John Scudamore. In Barnhill's novel, Elizabeth does employ Mary until a disagreement over Mary's unauthorized marriage to John Skydemore causes a rift in their relationship (Allinson, "Mary Shelton Scudamore" 521). Though Barnhill retains the larger biographical facts of Mary's life, she redefines the queen's emotional relationship with her young cousin, utilizing Mary as a

[6] Spelling of Scudamore varies, as Barnhill explains in her author's note (370). In the novel, Barnhill uses the spelling "Skydemore," which I have adopted in my discussions of Barnhill's work.

figure for Elizabeth's maternal desires. For instance, Barnhill reconstructs a historical event in which Elizabeth breaks Mary's finger in a disagreement. While Barnhill often describes Mary as Elizabeth's "fawn" and "child of her heart" (58), making the violent incident unusual, Alan Haynes describes the historical queen's perpetual jealousy towards her maids: "Every aspect of aging exasperated [Elizabeth], indeed made her a termagant, so a maid like pretty, saucy Mary Shelton, felt her hand — 'blows and evil words'" (46). In these biographical accounts, neither Haynes nor Allinson describes their relationship to be as close as Barnhill describes. Barnhill demonstrates an attention to authenticity, outlining these facts in her author's note, but she also explains her intention to create Elizabeth's sentiments as notably maternal, altering Mary's age to better reflect this dynamic:

> I changed Mary's age when she was orphaned, making her three years old, rather than eight. I thought a three-year-old would appeal to Elizabeth's maternal instincts more strongly, with the child's need for care being greater. Although Mary would have been a little older than Elizabeth was when she lost her own mother to the executioner's sword, perhaps Mary's bereft state would have touched Elizabeth's sympathies. A younger child would also allow the attachment between them to have been stronger, more like a mother/daughter relationship. (Barnhill 369-370)

Though Barnhill changes Mary's age by only five years, the intent behind the alteration was to intensify Elizabeth's relationship to her ward and connect the relationship to Elizabeth's own mother. Barnhill focuses her account as a glimpse into Elizabeth's private life and in doing so, she also explores Elizabeth's historical presentation as mother to England. While Barnhill's account of Mary Shelton takes liberties with historical fact, her insight into Elizabeth's emotional state and familial affections speculates upon parts of Elizabeth's life which are relatively unknown. In my assessment of the novel, I am not concerned with whether Barnhill's narrative reconstructs historical truth; rather, I argue that Barnhill alters this relationship to represent Elizabeth the woman and to return agency to Elizabeth as a woman.

Elizabeth's relationship with her ward in the novel also functions as a reflection upon her position as mother to England. Not only does Barnhill use this relationship to demonstrate that Elizabeth is not unnatural or extraordinary, but she also presents Mary's frustration towards Elizabeth as reflective of the concerns of Elizabeth's subjects. Mary highlights the hypocrisy of Elizabeth's advice on chastity while the queen maintains a less than discreet sexual relationship with Dudley:

> I only do what the queen herself has done. I have danced with Tom and met him secretly in the gardens. We have kissed a little and pledged our love. He has had me in his arms, but not nearly so often as Sweet Robin has held the queen thus. And Tom has never touched my dugs, as I have seen Robin do with the queen…. I have never done such with Tom- so how is it she [Elizabeth] can tell me to keep my honor when she besmirches her own? (Barnhill 22-23)

Mary's concerns demonstrate the fragility of Elizabeth's virginal public persona. How can Elizabeth fulfill her personal desires while safeguarding her virginity, succession, and reputation? Barnhill questions the limits of Elizabeth's personal satisfaction as "the single state is safest for a woman" (132), while also recognizing the contradictory social dangers of her commitment to singledom. Barnhill reflects upon the challenges Elizabeth faces as a woman in power, a mother to Mary Shelton, and a mother figure for her subjects. In an exchange with Mary, Elizabeth states her responsibility to her country: "'And you, Majesty, are the kindest mother I could have,' said Mary. 'I am Mother to all of England—not only you—to all these maids!' said the queen" (Barnhill 43). Elizabeth is aware that her affections within her private life cannot be allowed to overwhelm her responsibilities within the public body. In this regard, Barnhill demonstrates a recognition of the position of the historical queen. Like Mendelson's descriptions of perceptions of Elizabeth I in her time, Barnhill's Elizabeth navigates the space between appearing as a weak monarch, or conversely, as an unnatural virago (Mendelson 197). Coch also discusses the function of Elizabeth I's maternal persona in the sixteenth century as

redefining her role as outside of traditional constructions of monarchy or motherhood, to avoid both labels Mendelson describes. Coch notes the efficacy of Elizabeth I's maternal depiction and describes her ability to combine her divine right with her position as a motherly protector to her people:

> The humanist/Protestant maternal model not only allowed but required this intimate involvement of the mother/ queen with her child/country, naturalizing the anomalous control of a female sovereign. So, too, the model reinforced the hierarchy of divine prince and mundane subjects by analogizing it to the relative positions of parent and child. As the immediate instrument of God's will, Elizabeth belonged to a superior order of being, possessing unique rights and absolute authority. Like children showing deference to their parents, her people were to accept the limitations of their subordinate status with perfect submission. (446)

As Coch explains, Elizabeth's maternal persona situated her "anomalous" role within a familiar framework. Returning to Frye's concept of "engendering" (Frye 109), Elizabeth I could embody favourable feminine virtues, as a merciful and attentive parent, while this framework also placed Elizabeth I outside of the traditional expectations of motherhood. This hierarchy elevated Elizabeth I above others, as Coch (446) and Frye (109) explain, and therefore presented Elizabeth as more than a woman. Like her chastity, Elizabeth I's motherly role for her country positioned her in comparison to familiar social structures, but at the same time functioned to prove how Elizabeth exceeded such conventions. Barnhill interacts with this historical legacy, but her insistence that Elizabeth must sacrifice for the good of her country suggests that she is a woman capable of success and prioritizing her affections, rather than a figure outside of the female experience. Comparably to other authors depicting Elizabeth, Barnhill highlights this distinction between Elizabeth's individuality and the persona she utilizes publicly. She illustrates that Elizabeth's success is due to her discretion and her commitment to her people, rather than divine vocation. Barnhill, therefore, validates Elizabeth's emotions and her desire for children,

not chastity, while noting the issues inherent within a social structure in which motherhood is so dangerous.

In their disagreements, Mary recognizes that Elizabeth may be mother to England, but she is not exempt from human desire and emotional impulse. Throughout the novel, Mary criticizes Elizabeth, and through these exchanges, Barnhill highlights areas of vulnerability in the queen's authority. Barnhill focuses on Elizabeth the individual as human and fallible, to represent the fragility of Elizabeth's position, as well as her agency in the decisions she makes. Barnhill's Elizabeth is not chaste, and her actions do not always align with the virtues she teaches Mary or models for her subjects. Elizabeth worries that her visits with Dudley have been reckless, as Mary grows angry with her for enjoying intimacy while chastising her young ward for the same acts. Elizabeth reflects on their dispute, "*Oh Parry, what is she to think, but that I am a hypocrite? I tell my ladies to guard their virtue, and yet Fawn has discovered I do not guard my own*" (140, emphasis in original). As the novel progresses, Mary accepts that her adoptive mother is "not quite as royal, not quite as elevated as Mary had thought her" (141). In this sense, Elizabeth is fallible; she is not the example of virtue that is depicted in Spenser's Belphoebe, or that Primrose insists women follow. Elizabeth's hypocrisy establishes that she does not surpass other women, and she does not need chastity to be a successful leader. Hackett, describing the historical Elizabeth I, notes that this maternal persona was effective against the kinds of sexual scandal Mary witnesses in *Queen Elizabeth's Daughter*: "Refutation of such scandal [rumours of Elizabeth's promiscuity] was one motive for representation of Elizabeth as a chaste and loving matron, dedicated to the care of her nation" (Hackett 77). Providing an insider's perspective, Mary shows Barnhill's readers the frailty of Elizabeth's chaste persona. Though effective, Elizabeth's actions do not align with those she preaches. Through her novel,

Barnhill suggests Elizabeth is not an intermediary between God and her subjects, but a woman with the same desires and errancies of others. Though Elizabeth accepts a sense of vocation from God, her judgement is, at times, coloured by her personal affairs. Rather than chastity or divine justice, she must rely on careful maneuvering in her decisions. Barnhill presents Elizabeth as an attentive mother to England, but she is more emotional and fallible than Coch's description of the historical queen, "the immediate instrument of God's will," (446) entails. In the novel, for example, Elizabeth seeks punishment for John Skydemore's rumoured involvement in a plot against her: "Dear Lord, as Your representative on this earth, it is my queenly duty to bring him to task for his misdeeds" (Barnhill 330). While Elizabeth describes herself as God's representative, Barnhill clarifies her motivations for punishing "misdeeds" in a conversation with Dudley. Dudley defends Skydemore, suspecting Elizabeth is punishing him in order to return Mary to court: "I cannot believe you do not see this as well. Your queenly judgment is usually so keen" (353). In this instance, Elizabeth's judgement waivers and she does not execute divine will but uses her absolute authority for her own private ends. While Elizabeth's "queenly judgement" is not always keen, Barnhill shows her learning to mediate her personal affections for her ward with her responsibilities to her subjects. She reflects on her mistakes and, like the Elizabeth of other novels, demonstrates the importance of learned caution. As Mary learns of Elizabeth's fallibility, so too does Barnhill's reader. Consequently, Barnhill suggests that neither chastity nor piety is the difference between a successful monarch and a weak leader.

Barnhill frames the novel's events with monologues delivered by Elizabeth as she reveals concealed emotions to her maid, Blanche Parry. Barnhill's Elizabeth struggles with the decisions she must make, and she attributes her fear to the weakness of her female body: "*Such panic shows me to be womanly, when I must rule with the confidence of a king! By the holy cross, this*

*is the shaking fear that stalks me by day and paralyzes me by night"* (198 emphasis in original). Barnhill creates clear distinctions between Elizabeth's kingly confidence and shaking fear through chapters dedicated to these personal reflections. In such passages, Elizabeth frets over the personal and political alike, and she exhibits herself as far from the "superior order" (Coch 446) or "cosmic power" (Strong 9) attributed to the historical queen. In a similar monologue to Parry, Elizabeth expresses her frustration with Mary's decisions: "*If only she knew the torment my unmarried state gives me! If only she could realize the sacrifices Elizabeth, the woman, has made for Elizabeth, the queen! How can I demand her obedience when now she sees me as a vessel for sin*?" (Barnhill 140, emphasis in original). Unlike others authoring Elizabeth, Barnhill incorporates another personal layer, Elizabeth's explicit desire to have children, to emphasize that she is not satisfied. Bassnett describes this sense of disappointment as common in fiction and biographical narratives of Elizabeth I, attributing her characterized discontent as a symptom of an anachronistic perspective (Bassnett 11). Bassnett responds to the notion that singledom may have caused Elizabeth I to be vain and unfulfilled:

> Certainly if she had had twentieth-century sensibilities, she would have found such a lifestyle unbearable, but if we take an imaginative leap backwards into the Elizabethan age it is easier to come to terms with some of the apparent contradictions of Elizabeth's life. I find it hard to accept that a decision *not* to have children and *not* to marry necessarily affects a woman negatively, and in Elizabeth's case, living at a time when for the majority of nobly born women marriage was certainly not made in heaven, her choice was prudent and not so unusual as some biographers have made out. (11, emphasis in original).

In her articulation of this "imaginative leap," Bassnett discusses a vital point for my analysis of Elizabeth in historical fiction, especially as a mother figure. *Queen Elizabeth's Daughter* focuses on Elizabeth's maternal love, suggesting that she cannot find fulfillment without the love of her ward and the love of her subjects. Barnhill explores these as competing priorities, since Mary's choices do not align with Elizabeth's ideals, and emphasizes Elizabeth's emotional state in these

passages, imagining Elizabeth's lifestyle to be unbearable. Historical conditions suggest that Elizabeth I's childlessness was a positive state to Elizabeth I herself, as outlined by Bassnett. As Coch argues (446), even if she did have children, she would not maintain a close relationship to them; yet, Barnhill depicts Elizabeth as emotional, and particularly invested in her ability to parent Mary and create a family. Although Elizabeth refers to her female body as a source of weakness, indicating a belief that her femininity is a flaw, Barnhill provides Elizabeth with contemporary values in terms of her desires. Bassnett, like Frye (21) and Hackett (50), notes that historically Elizabeth I would have believed in the inferiority of women and separately gendered roles (Bassnett 5). Barnhill's Elizabeth, however, exhibits an assumption of freedom such that she could desire political success, monarchical authority, and control over personal relationships. In the novel, Barnhill presents this through Elizabeth's dedication to maintaining stability in her chosen family. Following Mary Shelton's departure, Elizabeth believes she can maintain her political security while also finding this personal fulfilment if she can orchestrate Mary's return to court "*And we shall continue as before, she and Rob and myself—my own little family*" (Barnhill 330, emphasis in original). Barnhill's narrative asserts that a woman can and should want it all; while historically, Elizabeth I was praised for her resilience, historical accounts also depict the queen as outside the scope of such human needs.

Like Elizabeth's choice between romantic love and political success in *The Marriage Game* and *Legacy*, the theme of choice and control over vulnerability is also significant throughout *Queen Elizabeth's Daughter.* For Elizabeth's political success, Barnhill credits the individual who chooses her subjects over marriage and pregnancy, rather than divine providence. Through her characterization of Elizabeth, Barnhill reclaims the agency of the historical queen (Cooper and Short 15-16), as desiring and pursuing political success and personal fulfilment, yet

Barnhill also demonstrates Elizabeth's agency as a matter of control and stability. In the novel, Elizabeth chooses to forgo a conventional marriage or family, choosing instead her "own little family" (Barnhill 330) in Mary and Dudley, to ensure the safety of her authority. Moreover, in her self-fashioning as "Mother to all of England" (43), Barnhill's Elizabeth maintains a sense of control not afforded by traditional motherhood. Coch elaborates upon the historical queen's employment of figurative motherhood:

> Whereas biological mothers may utterly lose control of the sons they have irrevocably borne, Elizabeth retains the ability to disown and disempower her children/subjects. Unlike physical conception, the creative function of metaphorical maternity rests entirely in her control. (Coch 448)

Like the historical queen, Barnhill's Elizabeth chooses the form of motherhood which offers her the most agency. In Mary Shelton, and the modifications Barnhill makes to historical fact, Elizabeth retains control of figurative motherhood while also displaying human desire and maternal affections. The "creative function of metaphorical maternity" as articulated by Coch (448) applies to Elizabeth's subjects in the novels, but also to her relationship with Mary Shelton. Nevertheless, while Elizabeth may have the ability to sever these relationships and disempower her metaphorical children, her emotional connection to Mary Shelton complicates her authority over her circumstances. Barnhill maintains historical accuracy in positioning Elizabeth as mother to England, but she innovates new challenges for Elizabeth as desiring children beyond her subjects. For Elizabeth to function as a mother to Mary, although still a compromise to traditional motherhood, Barnhill's narrative ventures outside of historical circumstances in which Elizabeth I did not have this dynamic with her cousin. In this way, Barnhill's characterization of Elizabeth is distinct from other reimaginings of her. This Elizabeth is contemporary in her desires for personal and political freedom but remains in the sixteenth century context which necessitates sacrifice and careful bids for control. The novel suggests that

the historical queen could not have been satisfied with figurative motherhood, though it allowed her more command over her circumstance. Dolan argues that historical fiction is reflective of gender-based anxieties surviving into contemporary marriage: "Focusing on queens thus enables identification and distancing" (Dolan 146). In view of Barnhill's work, I argue that Elizabeth also represents extant anxieties surrounding a loss of control or selfhood in traditional motherhood. Barnhill's continued focus on Elizabeth's desire for children, and her perpetual struggle for balance, posits a difficult relationship between authority and motherhood. For Barnhill's reader, the patriarchy and volatility of Elizabeth's court may seem distant, but the marketability of such narratives (Dolan 146), of struggle between power and parenthood, also demonstrates a degree of resonance with Elizabeth's challenges.

# Conclusion

While historical authors separated Elizabeth I from the women who lived around her, contemporary historical fiction writers focus upon Elizabeth the young girl, the lover, and the mother to reclaim the validity of Elizabeth's humanness: her desires, emotional complexity, and missteps. Unlike early modern authors, who focus on Elizabeth I's chastity as proof of her transcendent virtue, the more recent authors I discuss credit Elizabeth's skills as a monarch to her emotional growth and the sacrifices she makes. Maxwell, Weir, Kay, and Barnhill interact with the myth surrounding Elizabeth I, to illustrate that Elizabeth is a capable woman because she recognizes her own vulnerability. Why does Elizabeth I appear so frequently within historical fiction, and what do authors achieve in appropriating her life story? As Bronfen and Straumann argue (Bronfen and Straumann 267), Elizabeth I's image remains malleable enough for recharacterization, and yet, the myth of Elizabeth I and her perceived "cosmic power" (Strong 9) suggests that a woman in the seat of a king can be successful despite her vulnerability. Texts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries depict Elizabeth's female body as an issue to be ignored or remedied through accounts of perfect chastity. In contrast, historical fiction authors use the novel's increased emphasis on interiority to represent the value of Elizabeth's lived experience as a woman and the ways in which she must be cautious and thus more attentive because of the perceived defects in her natural body. These authors recognize that Elizabeth's femininity, in addition to her mortality, necessitates further compensation than just the theory of "the king's two bodies." At the same time, however, the Elizabeth they depict is consistently emotional, unchaste, and fallible. In these novels, Elizabeth learns the efficacy of maintaining a public persona, and by filling in the psychological gaps of the historical queen's life, historical

fiction authors criticize the men around Elizabeth and the patriarchal institutions which denigrate femininity.

Instead of removing Elizabeth from the rest of humanity, contemporary fiction authors show her to be imperfect, and their work interacts with this myth of Elizabeth I to retroactively assert her own agency in her success (Cooper and Short 15-16) and to voice the perspectives of historical women (Wallace 212), like Elizabeth I or her mother, Anne Boleyn, in more complete, individualized ways. In Robin Maxwell's *Virgin: Prelude to the Throne*, the young Princess Elizabeth learns the vulnerability of the female, royal body, and her survival is dependent upon her own adaptability and cautiousness. The novels I discuss which depict Elizabeth as a queen, Alison Weir's *The Marriage Game* and Susan Kay's *Legacy,* emphasize that Elizabeth grows into an effective ruler because she learns to be wary of the men around her and to promote the needs of her people. Both authors criticize Elizabeth's actions as the manifestations of her traumatic experiences. Weir's construction of Elizabeth as fearful highlights the violence and manipulation surrounding Elizabeth, while Kay's queen is determined to punish men for their misdeeds. For Weir and Kay, Elizabeth can be a woman and a successful monarch, but the circumstances of Elizabeth's life are volatile, causing the queen to learn perfect discretion rather than perfect chastity. Anne Clinard Barnhill humanizes Elizabeth in a similar manner, emphasizing her maternal affections to articulate Elizabeth's interiority and necessary sacrifices. While these authors revisit the myth of Elizabeth to demonstrate that she was not distinct from other women, experiencing the same manipulation and violence, these narratives also highlight the survival of societal perspectives that are fearful of women in power. This fear is a concept Dolan outlines in her study of historical fiction accounts of marriage, arguing that contemporary marriage remains an inequitable institution for women (Dolan 24-25). What these authors gain

from Elizabeth I is her legacy of success and untold suffering and sacrifice as a vehicle for contemporary perspectives on the validity of female experience.

The myth of Elizabeth I not only survives into contemporary media, but historical fiction novelists acknowledge and alter this myth through their characterizations. As Crane suggests in her discussion of fictionalized assessments of Anne Boleyn, the construction of this myth is both necessary and open ended:

> And yet we are forever communing with the past, reading it in the light of our own needs. It is not that we neglect our historical intelligence, even momentarily. Rather, to invite a sympathetic and complex alignment of knowledge and imaginative speculation is a vital mode of continuance, for both human history and the reading and writing of fictions. (Crane 88)

Crane asserts that fiction and historical intelligence can co-exist. Like Wallace's assessment that historical fiction provides a different space than historical accounts (212), Crane's work suggests the value of fiction as representative of the writer's and reader's connection to the past. In their work on Elizabeth I, Bronfen and Straumann describe the queen in terms of the celebrity body, "More than any other king or queen, thus our wager, she is *the* sovereign body we have come to see — owing to her posthumous celebrity — as embodying the modern idea of the nation" (256-257, emphasis in original). As Bronfen and Straumann note, Elizabeth I's legacy in pop culture and media remains a matter of national identity and political success. Historical fiction authors capitalize on this fame, the notion that Elizabeth I's body is the sovereign body, to investigate Elizabeth I's life more closely. The sovereign body, in Elizabeth I, is more than the political body and its power over the natural body, theorized by Plowden and Kantorowicz. In these works, authors contend with a history of the female body as a pollutant to political authority or stability. Therefore, in their "communing with the past" (Crane 88) historical fiction novelists can supplement understandings of Elizabeth as the sovereign body, and as a female ruler living

in a highly patriarchal time. If Elizabeth I is conflated with sovereignty and national success, authors can utilize fiction as a space to legitimize Elizabeth as a woman, reclaiming the capability she did not have in historical portrayals because of her natural body, and retain her successes as a human individual, not a divine appointee. Whereas authors like Knox problematize Elizabeth I's natural body as incompatible with authority, contemporary authors interact with this history and locate the issue in the misogyny surrounding women in power. At the same time, returning to Dolan's arguments, the popularity and variety of historical fiction novels featuring Elizabeth must represent the continued survival of beliefs which limit or circumscribe female authority (Dolan 24-25). Elizabeth's body is both a place to amend historical narrative in support of female capability, and a space for addressing these anxieties as still affecting women today (Cooper and Short 10-11). In her discussion of historical authors grappling with representing a female sovereign, Katherine Eggert describes the novelty of Elizabeth's position as a source for new genres of writing (7). Authors continue to describe Elizabeth in new ways, suggesting that there is more to be said regarding Elizabeth's life, and further opportunities to employ Elizabeth as an instrument for addressing the intersection of gender and power, historically and at present.

Historical fiction is a significant space and specialized genre for such investigations. The novels I have discussed adapt Elizabeth I's posthumous celebrity, provide the psychological insights that Sharpe and Zwicker describe as essential to modern biography (15), and allow for the simultaneous "identification and distancing" Dolan regards as indispensable to historical fiction (146). Locke, writing on Alison Weir, addresses the amalgamation of history and narrative in historical fiction, highlighting its unique position. Although Weir, who is also a

nonfiction historian, prioritizes accuracy, Locke also considers the role of postmodernism in Weir's novels:

> These novels also demonstrate the impact of postmodernism on historical fiction and the way Weir positions the texts in relation to historical authority. Postmodernism posits whether truthfulness can actually exist, in this context it asks the question about whether a distinction between historically acknowledged truths is any different from fictional history; the boundaries between established truth and interpretation become more fluid simply because the presentation of history as the written word inevitably make facts unreliable, or at least contestable (Locke 157).

Locke's description of postmodernism is relevant to my discussion as a manner of reading historical fiction, not for historical truth, but as a means of filling the gaps highlighted by Locke (152). As Wallace asserts, historical fiction includes perspectives that have been marginalized by traditional history (Wallace 212). Therefore, like Wallace, I posit the value of the genre as its own space with distinct motivations. In this sense, I apply postmodernist thought to suggest that historical fiction is both a more thorough assessment of history, and a reflection on the interests and concerns of contemporary readers. In "Writing Historical Fiction: Thoughts from Two Practitioners," author Susan Sellers describes historical fiction as a combination of the disciplines of her own creative writing and scholarly exploration: "My scholarly research was an impetus for other reasons. As so often happens, the more I read the more questions I had. Many of these are not addressed by the available historical materials" (Thompson and Sellers 224). Similarly, in her author's note, Maxwell explains, "Please forgive this author her indulgences and flights of fancy, but conjecture extrapolated from fact is, after all, the very heart of historical fiction" (Maxwell 243).[7] Those interested in non-fiction accounts of Elizabeth I's reign have

[7] For another perspective on Maxwell's author's note, see Mackay's chapter (274). In the chapter, Mackay describes female novelists' motivations to function as historians, establishing their own sense of authenticity as they narrate history. Though Mackay discusses historical fiction featuring Elizabeth specifically, I focus on the motivations of the contemporary author to restore the female perspective within traditional history rather than to adopt the role of historian.

ample sources available, though facts about her personal life remain less certain. Historical fiction, with a focus on interiority and captivating descriptiveness, remains a valuable space for such conjecture; though not a replacement for history, these texts perform a unique role as investigations into gendered power. If history is always subject to interpretation, as Locke suggests, then there is value in varied perspectives.

Historical fiction also functions as an exploratory space for contemporary anxieties about power structures. Wallace's work emphasizes how little research is available regarding the genre:

> What we need, then, are ways of reading women's historical fictions that will allow us to recognize their difference from what has traditionally been regarded as 'proper history' and the 'classical historical novel,' and to value that difference rather than dismissing them as 'tosh.' However, we also need frameworks that will allow us to make connections both within and across historical periods, and within and across the categories of 'literary' and 'popular' fiction, on a much wider scale than has happened as yet. (217).

Wallace asserts here the role historical fiction can fulfill if further frameworks are developed for understanding the genre. My work, therefore, suggests that the value of these novels is not their contributions to history, but what they demonstrate about the writer's relationship to Elizabeth and her female experience, and the opportunity she provides for this conjecture. In her discussions of fictional representations of Elizabeth I, Bassnett posits, "In the four hundred years since [Elizabeth I's] death, perceptions have changed so completely that we can only with great difficulty imagine how the Renaissance mind worked" (5). Reading these novels for historical accuracy is irrelevant to my study; rather, the choices fiction authors make from Elizabeth I's life, whether departures from historical fact or commitments to authenticity, and even their initial decision to incorporate Elizabeth into their chosen narrative, reflect largely marginalized perspectives on both the sixteenth and twenty-first centuries. The intersection of Elizabeth I's

legacy as an extraordinary woman and the unique function of historical fiction indicates changes in perspectives on femininity and authority. Elizabeth's role in these novels exhibits that these contemporary perspectives are not fully removed from early modern history, and women continue to identify with disenfranchisement (Dolan 17). These twenty-first-century anxieties are important for future studies of the genre and appearances of Elizabeth specifically. Further frameworks are necessary in the study of historical fiction, but depictions of Elizabeth acquire unique meaning. Compared to Anne Boleyn and the women around her, Elizabeth I's image survives as an embodiment of sovereignty, virginity, and success against hardship. The historical diminishment of Elizabeth I's humanity, however, provides the opportunity for authors to recharacterize her capabilities as a woman and re-assert this success as indebted to individual intelligence and perseverance.

While historical fiction does provide space for marginalized perspectives (Wallace 212), the novels I discuss limit their exploration to white, heteronormative histories as reflective of surviving white, heteronormative anxieties. Dolan expresses the impact of the early modern period in terms of contemporary marriage and fictional depictions of love and union:

> This early modern legacy shapes representations and conceptualizations of white, middle class, heterosexual marriage; persistent figurations of what a couple is; political debates about who can or should marry; and the assumptions about the kind of marriage that needs to be defended. (Dolan 14)

Dolan traces these debates to the early modern period, and in view of her work I suggest that while valuable, such narratives centered on Elizabeth I have not achieved comprehensive inclusivity. As research continues into historical fiction, and Elizabeth's role as exemplary of female capability, these frameworks need to also consider the intersectionality of the historical female experience. Novels which reframe Elizabeth I's exceptionality and reclaim her agency are valuable sources for addressing the contemporary author's relationship to the period, and Cooper

and Short include assessments of historical fiction's movement towards queer, historical narratives (Cooper and Short 11-12). Fictional accounts of Elizabeth largely remain an untapped source for exploring the marginalization of intersectional femininity more thoroughly. Considering the success of the novels this thesis has discussed at writing contemporary issues into history, I look forward to finding historical fiction that expands Elizabeth's story into such an exploration

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