‘WHO IS’T CAN READ A WOMAN?’: REPRESENTATION OF QUEEN ELIZABETH I IN CYMBELINE

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to read Cymbeline (1608-1610), one of Shakespeare’s so-called ‘final plays’ or ‘romances’ as a site of cultural responses to the remaining ‘presence’ of the late Queen Elizabeth I and her cultural associations in the context of the reign of her gender-different successor, King James I. It argues that these responses can be seen in the play’s portrayal of two characters in the play, namely the Wicked Queen and to a lesser extent, Imogen, in which the figure of the late queen is played out and marginalized, and proposes that these representations are ways in which the Jacobean culture deals with and exorcises its anxieties about the late monarch’s sometimes contradictory (self-appointed) role as a militant, powerful and inscrutable ‘woman-on-top’, which disrupted ‘natural’ gender distinction in the political climate of James I’s reign, during which pacifism, transparency and patriarchalism were highly advocated, especially by the king himself and other writers. It is hoped that this article can offer a reading of the play, not by interpreting it as a complete-in-itself and truth-reflecting work of art by a literary genius according to the romantic-humanistic conception of the ‘author’ and

‘literature,’ but rather by taking into accounts political, social and cultural forces that were circulated during the time of composition and reception of the play and with which it interacted.

Introduction

‘He was not of an age but for all time!’, proclaims Ben Jonson in the poem prefixed to the first Folio of William Shakespeare’s plays, published in 1623. Since the eighteenth century, critical acclaim of similar import has been established as more or less the standard reception of this sixteenth-century English dramatist: that he was a literary genius whose power lay in his ability, matched by almost none, to portray ‘universal truths’ about human nature or human life, which cut across time, place, and culture. This romantic view of the ‘author’ as an autonomous thinking subject, whose work is an expression of his — or to a lesser extent, her — wisdom and insights of his/her own, coupled with the humanistic conception of human nature as permanent, universal, and transhistorical, has led to critical models that attempt to locate the meanings of the Bard’s works, which are nothing less than reflections of truths about human life and nature, within the texts themselves, in most cases without taking into consideration immediate social and cultural forces that might participate in the productions and receptions of the texts. Applications of these models, as shown by Terence Hawkes, can be found, for example, in the critical works of Samuel Johnson, Coleridge, and A. C. Bradley, and, we may add, works by many New Critical practitioners. In some cases, such as in the works of E. M. K. Tillyard, even if historical contexts are taken into account, they serve only as remote and static ‘backgrounds’ to literary texts,

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which are still the privileged sites from which meanings should be extracted (Hawkes, 1996:2-7).

However, such humanistic-romantic stances have been challenged by recent critical movements like New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, which regard literary texts as only one kind, among others, of signifying practices that must be read in relation to other material signifying practices in which they are embedded (Hawkes, 1996:7-8). In this light, the 'author' is no more the sole generator of the text's meaning and literary texts cannot be interpreted in isolation from other social and cultural conditions in active interaction with which literary texts are made and mediated. In terms of Shakespearean criticism, as Graham Holderness explains, this amounts to the deconstruction of the 'Shakespeare myth' — 'the myth of Shakespeare as culture hero, as transcendent genius and omniscient seer', 'a universal individual genius creating literary texts that remain a permanently valuable repository of human experience and wisdom' — and in its place, the uncovering of 'a collaborative cultural process in which plays were made by writers, theatrical entrepreneurs, architects and craftsmen, actors and audience', (Holderness, 1988:12-13) which involved people from different classes and their social practices. This demystification opens up his plays to become, in Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicist conceptualization of literary works in general, 'fields of force, places of dissension and shifting interests, occasions for the jostling of orthodox and subversive impulses' (Greenblatt, 1982:6).

It is in this critical context that I would like now to turn to the reading of one of Shakespeare's so-called 'last plays' or

romances, *Cymbeline*, which can be dated approximately to from 1608-1610 (Bevington, 1997:1434). Viewed along the lines of the 'Shakespeare myth,' this play is usually regarded as one of those that make up the final works of the Bard's *oeuvre*, which, being composed in the playwright's more mature years as a veteran artist nearing his retirement from the profession but also a wise and experienced sage, reflect the logical culmination of the playwright's spiritual progression from the probing of life's mysteries in the 'problem plays', through the tempestuous and impassioned years of the tragedies, to the final phase of the romances in which the major themes would move in the direction of spiritual growth, and the serene and mythic dimension of life. This phase, according to G. Wilson Knight, a major advocate of this stance, would conclude triumphantly in *The Tempest*, the play formerly thought to be Shakespeare's last but now with evidence to the contrary, (Bevington, 1559:893) in which he has been assumed to give a farewell to his theatrical profession in the character of Prospero (Knight, 1947: 9-31).

Nevertheless, Knight seems to encounter some difficulties in explaining the play *Cymbeline* according to this outline. In attempting to accommodate the play into this scheme, he appears to single out an element which would make the play 'mystical' or 'transcendental', the Vision of Jupiter descending on to the stage to pacify some discontented characters, and translates it as the playwright's presentation of the relationship between human beings and providential and larger-than-life spirituality. By doing this, he could both present the play as 'organic' and defend it as Shakespearean against criticisms that view this *deus ex machina*

scene as crude and intrusive and thus not belonging to Shakespeare. He dismisses those criticisms as a 'purely personal reaction unaccompanied by the labours of exact investigation *within the art-form itself*' and counsels 'purely literary considerations' in judging whether the passage was authentically written by Shakespeare (Knight, 1947:202).

In spite of that, Knight has to admit that *Cymbeline* is 'indeed, to be regarded mainly as an historical play' to which Shakespeare's interests in the historical Romans and British, 'which meet here for the first time', are central (Knight, 1947: 129, 130) and devotes a considerable portion of his analysis to the discussion of these historical themes. Nevertheless, the 'historical' connections he identifies in the play are those of the safe and distant past, which, according to Knight, show the playwright's tribute to the ideals or virtue of his two 'national faiths' and the 'historic origins of the nation'. Knight mentions as a possibility the interpretation of the play as containing 'national allegory' or immediate historical localization such as a Tudor myth but dismisses it right away as 'enquiries into secondary meanings', which are 'dangerous and of slight value' (Knight, 1947:166-67). However, despite the spell of the Shakespeare myth under which Knight's analysis seems to be, the topicality of the play has stood out to many other critics. Emrys Jones in 'Stuart Cymbeline' points out the importance of a specific localized reading which takes into account who the audience of the play was at the time of its composition, and the fact that the play contributes to the 'Jacobean line' in the understanding of *Cymbeline*'s logic and characterization. As Jones states, the play 'centers on the character and foreign policy of James I' and 'pays

tribute to James's strenuous peace-making policy' (Jones, 1961:89). His localized reading has been seconded and developed by many critics. However, in considering the play as a rich allegory of James's peacemaking policies, critics have come across difficulties in interpreting or locating within the Jacobean context the character of the Queen who advocates militancy and isolation over Cymbeline's politics of peace. Many attempts have been made to explain the existence of the militant queen whose major crime, among others, is her political intervention, which results in the suspension of peace between Rome and Britain.

In my opinion, Leah S. Marcus's observation in *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents* that the Wicked Queen, in her domination over her husband and other men, her political maneuvering involving dark secrets and her rhetoric of British insularity against Roman imperial control can be seen as a demonized or marginalized version of Queen Elizabeth I (Marcus, 1988:128), offers a plausible solution to that puzzle. While, in her topical reading of *Cymbeline*, Marcus focuses more on the Stuart referentiality of the play, I would like to pursue this Elizabethan allusion further. However, I will not limit my discussion only to finding correlations between the Wicked Queen and the real-life Queen Elizabeth, but will consider the play as a site for cultural responses to the remaining 'presence' of the late queen and her cultural associations in the context of the reign of her gender-different successor. Those responses, seen in the play's portrayal of both the characters of the Wicked Queen and, to a lesser extent, Imogen, in which the figure of the late queen is played out and marginalized, are, it will be argued, ways in which the

Jacobean culture deals with and exorcises its anxieties about the late monarch's sometimes contradictory role, assigned by both herself and others, as a militant, powerful and inscrutable 'woman-on-top' that disrupted 'natural' gender distinctions in the political climate of James I's reign, during which pacifism, transparency and patriarchalism were highly advocated, especially by the king himself and other writers.

I

As many critics point out, one of James's favorite roles was that of Peacemaker. His efforts can be seen on both international and national levels. In his 1603 speech to Parliament, James declared that two of the blessings which God bestowed upon his countrymen through his person were 'outward Peace: that is, peace abroad with all forreine neighbours' and 'Peace within', resulting from the union of England and Scotland (McIlwain, 1918:270-1). Emerys Jones suggests that James employed the Tudor-British myth in supporting this role: he was the second Arthur like Henry VII and the second Brute who would unify Britain under a single monarch. His motto was *Beati pacifici* and he loved to be called the second Augustus, the pacific emperor during whose reign Christ was born. He also compared himself to King Solomon, a king of peace, who would establish peace among all neighboring nations (Jones, 1961:90-91). In the 1603 speech, he contrasted the prospect of peace during his reign with the state of war during the previous monarch's time:

I have ever, I praise god, kept
peace and amity with all, which
hath been so far tied to my
person, as at my coming here you
are witnesses I found the state

embarked in a great and tedious
war, and only by my arrival here,
and by the peace in my person, is
now amity kept where war was
before (McIlwain, 1918:270).

James's propensity for peace accounts for a body of panegyrics during his reign, such as Jonson's *Panegyre* (1603), Dekker's *Magnificent Entertainment* (1603), and Middleton's *The Peacemaker* (1618). At the same time, there emerged plays which concerned anti-war campaigns. To be gender-specific, as Linda Woodbridge points out, many Jacobean plays criticize women warriors as threats to society. In *Bonduca*, *The Valiant Welshman*, and *Fuimus Troes, or the True Trojans*, female characters who meddle with the action or military affairs of men are killed off to make way for the masculine British-Roman embraces. Similarly, in *The Iron Age*, the group of women warriors were killed at the end whereas in *The Brazen Age*, a woman hunter, a version of a female warrior, is accorded outrage and contempt by male characters (Woodbridge, 1984:164-67).

It is very likely that Shakespeare, as well as other members and shareholders who made up the King's Men theatrical company, which came under royal patronage in 1603 and performed at court more than any of its rivals (McDonald, 1996:52), should have paid attention to one of his patron's major concerns. Emerys Jones even speculates that the play was presumably acted out before James himself and points out that it was still being acted at court in 1634 before Charles (Jones, 1961:96, 85). As Paul A. Jorgenson posits, traces of Jacobean pacifism can be seen in the way in which Shakespeare marginalizes militaristic characters in his later plays. That is, a philosophical argument for war, or against

peace, that might formerly be assigned to heroic characters like Hamlet, is now given to subordinated or problematic characters like Timon, Coriolanus, or the Volscian servingmen (Jorgenson, 1956:203). In *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare gives a more sustained mirroring of James's peace-making policy, apart from according with James's interests generally such as by using Roman elements. As Warren D. Smith observes, 'About the same time Shakespeare was preparing *Cymbeline* for performance at Blackfriars, James appears to have been bending every effort to effect peace between Spain and the Dutch Republic' (Smith, 1952:188). Alluding to the king's foreign and national peacemaking policies, the play ends in a peaceful alliance between Britain and Rome, the union of Caesar Augustus with Britain's king, Cymbeline, themselves two versions of James. Imogen bears the name of Brute's wife and her union with Posthumus, a supposed representation of the Scotsmen, is yet another allusion to the England-Scotland union. Moreover, the scene most conspicuous — and deemed out-of-place and thus non-Shakespearean by many scholars, — i.e. the Vision of Jupiter scene, in which Jupiter 'descends in thunder and lightning, sitting upon an eagle', as the stage direction has it, to 'pacify' the ghosts of Posthumus's parents and brothers in Act 5 has been interpreted as a contemporary allusion to James's several interventions in Parliament to chide its members for their sluggishness with his project of creating Great Britain through the union of England and Scotland and to announce his continuing protection of his despised countrymen, the Scots. The image of James as Jove swooping down with his thunder became a leitmotif of the parliamentary session and the representation of James I as Jupiter also appeared in the court masque *Hymenaei* (1606) by Ben

Jonson (Marcus, 1988:188-9). In the last scene, Cymbeline proclaims his peace, which as Jonathan Goldberg points out, is the last word of the play (Goldberg, 1983: 240): 'Never was a war did cease, / Ere bloody hands were washed, with such a peace' (5.5.475-84).² Smith also contends that, in favor of James's policy, the play also assigns the political role of advocating war to Cloten, a character deliberately made totally contemptible.

What Smith and likewise Jorgenson do not touch on, however, is the character of the Queen of Cymbeline, another character who advocates war against the Anglo-Roman peace and who is also made grotesque. Her speech before the Roman dignitaries voices a strong patriotic position. Many critics try to explain why Shakespeare assigns this patriotic and grandiose speech, 'one of the great nationalist speeches in Shakespeare', as Jodi Mikalachki puts it (Mikalachki, 1995:305), to a wicked character. Knight views the Queen as a 'type' of 'cruelty incarnate', 'a positive ogre' who '[speaks] out of character' and has to be rejected by Cymbeline (Knight, 1947:130, 132, 137). In a similar way, Emerys Jones sees the Queen, together with Cloten, as a scapegoat made grotesque after a fairytale fashion in order to prevent the audience from finding a real-life analogue in Queen Anne, James's consort (Jones, 1961:97). In more rigorous attempts to identify the character with a historical personage, David M. Bergeron, in '*Cymbeline*: Shakespeare's Last Roman Play', suggests that she is a representation of Augustus's wife Livia

² All the quotations of *Cymbeline* follow the Arden Shakespeare *Cymbeline*, ed. by J. M. Nosworthy (London and New York: Routledge, 1996)

who interfered wickedly with the court of Augustus, whereas Mikalachki considers her as a type of 'savage' ancient British queen to be exorcized by the early modern English nationalism which sought to recover respectable all-male English national origins (Bergeron, 1980:31-41 and Mikalachki, 1995:31-41). Though varying in degree, all critics note the queen's political impact on *Cymbeline*, which is exemplified by the force of this speech. If we situate the play in its Jacobean context, against the backdrop of James's peace-making policy, the Wicked Queen's patriotic speech, which mentions Britain's islanded integrity and isolation, the natural defense, the celebrated conquest over foreign troops by seas, the shame of invasion, brings to mind Queen Elizabeth's speech and her iconography associated with the 1588 Armada defeat, a point which is only hinted at by Knight and Mikalachki (Knight, 1947:135 and Mikalachki, 1995:304). From this analogy, I would like to propose that the Wicked Queen can be seen as a version of Queen Elizabeth I, and her marginalized characterization, which goes in line with other instances of marginalization of women warriors or rulers in many plays from the same period, might then be said to signify traces of cultural anxieties or discontent surrounding Queen Elizabeth, whose (self-) representation as an autonomous woman ruler disrupted 'natural' and 'immutable' gender distinctions.

Although Queen Elizabeth I's tactics in dealing with internal conflicts such as those between Protestants and Catholics have been described as ones of reconciliation or the *via media*, i.e. the middle way (McDonald, 1996:309-12), her international dealings involved wars with different European nations: she sought to regain control of the French port town of Calais and dispatched

money and soldiers to the Netherlands to assist the Dutch in their fights with Spain. However, the event that would capture and epitomize the characteristics and spirit of the queen's international policies was her appearance among the English troops gathered at Tilbury in 1588, just after the defeat of the Spanish Armada, but while England was still under threat of invasion from the duke of Parma, where she is popularly believed to have addressed the soldiers thus:

I have always so behaved my self, that under God I have placed my chief strength, and safeguard in the loyal hearts and good will of my subjects [...] I know I have the bodie, but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and Stomach of a King, and of a King of *England* too, and think foul scorn that *Parma* or *Spain*, or any Prince of Europe should dare to invade the borders of my Realm, to which rather than any dishonor should grow by me, I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your General, Judge, and Rewarder of everie one of your virtues in the field.³

This passage shares with the Wicked Queen's speech a sense of patriotism, islanded isolation, and advocacy of

³ Leonel Sharp to the duke of Buckingham, quoted in Frye (1992:98). Although there have been disputes over the real origin of the speech — whether the queen really said it and did that in this widely circulated form — I would like to regard this as part of the cultural representations of the queen, which reflect the anxieties and perplexities surrounding the figure of Queen Elizabeth I. For an interesting discussion of the issue of Elizabeth's supposedly wearing male attire at Tilbury, of which much evidence seems to point the other way, see Frye (1992).

militancy in settling international conflicts. Moreover, it also brings up another issue related to our analysis, namely the relationship — or as suggested by the passage, the conflict — between the queen's gender and her office as monarch, which she seems to feel anxious to explain away.

In order to understand the anxiety over the gender of the monarch present in this passage, and also in other texts which will be discussed later, I would like first to inquire into the ideals and roles expected of women in general in early modern England. According to Ann Rosalind Jones in *The Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe, 1540-1620*, in response to their increasing involvement in growing city-states during the early modern period, European men in the bourgeois and aristocratic classes tried to justify their neglect of Christian duties by appealing to classical defenses of engagement in the *polis* and displacing the old virtues onto women (Jones, 1990:11). Similarly, in *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*, Ruth Kelso points out that 'The moral ideal for the lady is essentially Christian [...] as that for the gentlemen is essentially pagan. For him the ideal is self-expansion and realization. [...] For the lady the direct opposite is prescribed' (Kelso, 1956:36). In a classical text such as *Art of Rhetoric*, for example, 'masculine' virtue consists of 'justice, courage, self-control, magnificence, magnanimity, liberality, gentleness, practical and speculative wisdom'. The greatest virtues, according to Aristotle, are those which are most useful to others, like justice and courage (qtd. in Kelso, 1982:36). In *The Education of a Christian Prince*, Erasmus emphasizes virtue in the sense of 'good actions' as the first kind of princely nobility (qtd. in Kelso, 1968:36). The meaning of male virtue is thus active and converges with 'service' and 'courage', the qualities

which will 'insure his pre-eminence' and 'enhance his authority', whereas female virtue was conceptualized as primarily passive in European culture. Kelso distinguishes two kinds of virtues for Renaissance women: those necessary in the domestic sphere and those belonging outside the home. The first group, which is the more emphatic of the two, consists of 'chastity, humility, obedience, constancy, patience, piety, temperance, kindness, prudence in household management, and fortitude under affliction', the most important of which is chastity, considered by humanists such as Juan Luis Vives as one of the only virtues necessary for a woman, whereas the second includes humanity, courtesy, liberality, courage, and justice. Although this second group contains virtues which converge with those of men described above, Kelso explains that they 'are not, as they were for the gentleman, the basic stuff of her character' or are emphasized in terms of their domestic use, and many defenders of women do not mention them at all (Kelso, 1956:36). In line with this female ideal, the roles set forth as suitable for women are those of daughters, wives, and mothers under protection of and hence subjection to male control. This idea is common in humanist texts of the sixteenth century such as Vives's *The Office and Duty of an Husband*, which states that nature 'hath geven unto man a noble, a high & a diligent minde to be busye and occupied abroad, to gayne & to bring home to their wives & familie, to rule them and their children, and also their household' and to woman 'a feareful, a covetous, & an humble mind to be subject unto man, & to kepe that he doeth gayne.' Thus, women 'are so feble and weke of nature, that thei nother in mind nor yet with the body can sustaine nor beare that is heavy and greivous' (qtd. in Kelso, 1956:17-18).

Vives, then, clearly envisions two separate realms for men and women, the former belonging to the active world outside the home, the latter to the passive domestic sphere. Significantly, as Kelso points out, unlike men, class did not matter in these notions of expected female passive roles and submission to male authority. That is, a woman's place in the scheme of things, whether that of a high-born or of one belonging to the lower class, was contingent upon her relation with her father's or her husband's, so far as rank, power, and influence were concerned, whereas in a man's case, his worth or nobility was assessed by comparison with one from another class. Thus, Kelso poignantly concludes, the Renaissance lady, or in fact a woman from any class, 'turns out to be merely a wife' (Kelso, 1956:1). In Elizabethan England, this sexual hierarchy within the family, the authority-submission ideal of husband-wife relations, was propounded by sermons and conduct books and provided a model for all relations between women and men (see Fletcher and Stevenson, 1985:117, 196).

With this prevalent idea of woman's place in the scheme of things, the accession to the throne of Queen Elizabeth I thus went against the passive roles generally held as proper for women during the Renaissance period. As Susan Frye points out in her *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation*, attacks on women rulers like John Knox's *The First Blast of Trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women* (1558), which had already been launched in the reign of Mary Tudor served as a pretext for attacks on Elizabeth. Mary's gender became the site of her vulnerability. In order to produce an heir to guarantee succession, Queen Mary's plunge into her Spanish marriage caused public discontent. To avoid such

compromising circumstances, Elizabeth came to develop strategies of self-representation which would redefine the patriarchal conception of femininity to suit her monarchical status. Those strategies included the exploitation of the cult of the Blessed Virgin, the use of the notion of the 'king's two bodies,' and the adaptation of courtly discourses.⁴

In order to free herself from the concepts of passive, wifely virtue and from demeaning situations like those occurring to her predecessor, but without denying that she was female, Elizabeth chose to represent herself as a Virgin Queen. In her 1559 response to Parliament's first concern that she marry, the queen declared that 'in the end this shall be for me sufficient that a marble stone shall declare that a Quene, having reigned such a time lyved and dyed a virgin' (qtd. in Frye, 1993:15). This strategy responded to her need to affirm her virtue, especially her 'chastity' in the public's opinions but at the same time relocate it in a realm void of the structures of marriage, female procreative capability, and male control: a virgin queen had no male possessor and could be allied with traditional anomalous female figures such as Diana, Astrea, the vestal virgins, and the Virgin Mary. The Virgin Queen model thus gave Queen Elizabeth a large measure of autonomy beyond that of ordinary women, i.e. the ability to rule her own body and

⁴ For the accounts of Elizabeth I's life and the interpretation of her representations, I am indebted to Susan Frye's accounts in *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (1993) and in 'The Myth of Elizabeth at Tilbury' (1992); Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare* (1988); and Louis A. Montrose, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream and the Shaping Fantasies of Elizabethan Culture: Gender, Power, Form' (1986).

then to command her subjects (Frye, 1993:15).

Another strategy that Elizabeth used to construct herself as a powerful ruler was to exploit the notion of the 'king's two bodies', a concept that 'recognized both the split and the connection between the physical and political bodies of the monarch'. In employing this doctrine, Elizabeth admitted that her natural body was inevitably female, 'constructed through cultural norms that placed her below men in the cosmic and social hierarchies'. Nevertheless, her political body was constructed within a masculinistic legal tradition and thus was often represented as male (Frye, 1993:12). This can be seen in many of her speeches including the one at Tilbury quoted above. In that speech, which bears similarity in spirit to the Wicked Queen's, Elizabeth admits the womanly frailty of her natural body but asserts the masculine strength of her body politic which is derived from the love of her people, the virtue of her lineage, and the will of her God. More than once, she refers to herself by her masculine body politic as 'king'. Likewise, in her Golden Speech of 1601, the queen mentions her 'sexly weakness' but directs attention to her 'glorious name of a King or royal authority of a Queen' granted by God and her 'heart that yet never [fears] any foreign or home enemy' (qtd. in Neale, 1957:385). As in her Tilbury speech, Queen Elizabeth emphasizes her body politic as the divine agent which would be ruled only by God and thus lives beyond any mortal authority, not to mention male control.

Apart from giving representations of herself to the wider public, she had to manage the power relations between herself and the courtiers and among themselves as well. In this regard, according to Frye, in the 1590s, the queen worked more and more to create

herself as 'powerful, remote, divinely approved and magical'. To that end, the queen adapted the prevalent discourses addressed to her by her courtiers, namely Petrarchism and Neoplatonism. In both discourses, the courtiers used 'love', which was associated with magic, in defining their relationship to the queen as a means to claim a relation to the source of political power. In response to them in her own writings, speeches, and self-representations, Elizabeth adapted their codes to assert her own power and her divine and magical quality by stressing her God-approved chastity (Frye, 1993:111). In addition to that, Elizabeth's tactic was characterized by the habit of playing one courtier against another in her management of power relations (McDonald, 1996:308).

As Montrose states, Elizabeth, as the female ruler of a patriarchal society, 'incarnated a contradiction at the very center of the Elizabethan sex/gender system' (Montrose, 1986:80). Elizabeth's self-representations as self-sufficient, and sometimes androgynous and militant, created a sense of awe and reverence among her subjects, but, at the same time, caused widespread unease among them because these representations disrupted the society's gender distinctions. As Lisa Jardine puts it, Elizabeth is a woman whose representation is 'of national concern and betrays [...] uneasiness about the instrumental power accorded to women in the period' (Jardine, 1989:169). Her self-representations 'threatened male preserves, ambitions, and essentialist definitions of the masculine and the feminine' (Frye, 1993:121) by vaunting 'active' masculine virtues like service, justice, courage, self-control, and subordinating passive feminine virtues like piety, silence, and obedience. Moreover, the virtue considered most necessary for women, chastity, was

redefined by the queen to give herself more self-control.

I agree with Frye that representations of Elizabeth's body served as allegories or 'the most obvious of signs' which base themselves on 'the disruption of signifier and signified'. This gap between signified and signifier is 'a linguistic phenomenon with profound social consequences' because it results in instability of meaning, which means that 'no meaning is ever completely fixed or natural, however it may appear' and thus it enables the struggle for meaning to take place (Frye, 1993:18). While Elizabeth, as a 'discursive agent' engaged, both consciously and unconsciously, in her own representation, she could never own or stabilize the meanings assigned to her body. Hence, poets, courtiers, and influential London dignitaries could appropriate, re-encode, and redefine her iconography to voice their anxieties about her disruption of accustomed gender roles.

In her subjects' eyes, Elizabeth was at times a revered figure but many times she was associated with danger and misrule. As Marcus points out, in Protestant sixteenth-century England, a multiform figure like that of Elizabeth, 'either a young virgin or an aging woman past menopause, who is set apart from the usual female functions and allowed access to otherwise exclusively male activities, who is perceived as androgynous and given hieratic status', might partake of the sacred but at the same time lacked a defined cultural status and could be perceived as merely deviant. This anomalous image of a ruler who dressed like a woman but acted like a man, with the force and leadership of a 'woman-on-top', was associated with riots, festival disorder, and witchcraft (Marcus, 1988:61, 81). Sexual inversion

featured in early modern Europe as the holiday overthrow of normal hierarchy. This festive inversion involved men taking on the role or garb of the unruly woman or grotesque female like Maid Marion, Robin Hood disguised as an old hag, Bessy, or 'Lady Skimmington' (Davis, 1975:124-51; see also Marcus, 1988:61-62). The reverse also caused the same anxieties. As Woodbridge notes, the phenomenal fashion of masculine attire for women in Elizabethan times aroused the same fears' (Woodbridge, 1984:139-51). Phillip Stubbes, a contemporary writer, characterized the fashion as a threat to the immutability of sexual distinctions and considered women who put on men's attire as degenerating 'from godly sober women, in wearing lewd kinde of attire, proper onely to man' (qtd. in Woodbridge, 1984:139). Furthermore, sexual reversal such as female dominance in the Renaissance was sometimes closely associated with witchcraft or demonic possession since witches were 'sexually ambiguous creatures who [...] often used their occult powers to prey upon male strength and sexual potency'. Queen Elizabeth, who at times discursively presented herself as both masculine and feminine, might be said to be associated with the danger and misrule surrounding transvestism and sex-role inversion. She was also associated with witchcraft, especially in the aftermath of the Armada defeat, speculatively attributed to the queen's 'strange' powers. Moreover, the queen was also associated with John Dee, an astrologer and a 'cunning man' (Marcus, 1988:81).

Significantly, it can be said that the queen's Tilbury visit, together with her gender-composite self-representation exemplified in the speech attributed to her discussed earlier, was an important occasion that prompted more intense cultural concerns

about the disruption of 'natural' gender distinction, expressed in many writings from the post-Armada years. James Aske's *Elizabetha Triumphans* (1588), a text that praises Elizabeth's princely courage in the Armada visit, is at the same time one of those texts that show traces of disquietude about the queen's composite sexuality. Inspired by the English troops' 'warlike' march and mock combat before her, she, adopting their prowess for herself,

Most bravely mounted on a stately
steede
With trunchion in her hand (not used
thereto)
And with her none, except her
Liutenant,
Accompanied with the Lord
Chamberlaine,
Came marching towards this her
marching fight.
In nought unlike the Amazonian
Queen,
Who beating amaine the bloodie
Greekes,
Thereby to grapple with Achillis
Stout,
Even at the time when Troy was
sorebesieged (qtd. in Marcus,
1988:63).

As Marcus observes, in this passage, Elizabeth's Amazonian gesture seems to become a threat to the English troops themselves. Her androgynous power is a 'threatening, implacable force that annihilates anything in its way' (Marcus, 1988:63). The menacing overtones of Aske's description suggest suppressed anxiety over the anomalous androgynous image of the queen and hint at the fear of male effeminacy under women's control. Aske's androgynous representation of the queen may serve as a subdued echo of

John Knox's prior view on the rule of women:

A woman sitting in iudgement, or riding frome parliament in the middest of men, hauing the royall crowne vpon her head, the sworde and sceptre borne before her, in signe that the administration of iustice was in her power: I am assuredlie persuaded, I say, that suche a sight shulde so astonishe them, that they shuld iudge the hole worlde to be transformed into Amazones, and that such a metamorphosis and change was made of all the men of that countrie, as poetes do feyn was made of the companyons of Vlisses, or at least, that albeit the outwarde form of men remained, yet shuld they iudge that their hartes were changed frome the wisdom, vnderstanding, and courage of men, to the foolish fondnes and cowardise of women (Knox, 1878:12-13).

Apart from Aske's poem, other popular materials from the immediate post-Armada years also display 'an upsurge of similar fascination with, and horror of,' the Amazonian gender confusion (Marcus, 1988:66). In Spenser's *Fairie Queene*, Arthegall, hero of the Legend of Justice, becomes enslaved to Radigund, 'A Princesse of great powre, and greater pride, / And Queene of Amazons, in Armes well tride, a version of Elizabeth' (5.4.33). Arthegall, after the defeat, must undergo degradation and effeminization. Marcus cites Long Meg of Westminster as another example: 'she dressed in male clothing, fought men and bested them (particularly if they were French or Spanish)'. Her transvestism and warlike character were

likened to the queen's (Marcus, 1988:66). The prevalence of the Amazonian motif in most of these texts reveals cultural anxieties over the rule of women, which was conceptualized as potentially leading to gender/social confusion, male effeminization, and wanton bellicosity associated with women in power.

On the other hand, in the court circles after her death, some of the queen's courtiers reacted against her use of Neoplatonic love discourse to manipulate them. Harington cites Sir Christopher Hatton's remark that the queen fished for men's souls with 'so sweet a baite, that no one coude take delyghte in' (Harington, 1804:358). As Goldberg comments, her baited words were often reversed; her love was a 'snare' (Goldberg, 1983:29). Harington also notes that 'Few knew how to aim their shaft against her cunninge. We did all love hir, for she saide she loved us, and muche wisdom she shewed in thys matter' (Harington, 1930:123-25). A more extensive, though indirect, reaction against Queen Elizabeth's mystifying tactic would appear in her successor's professed advocacy of the 'plain style' in political dealings and literary works, which will be discussed later.

Shakespeare's plays of the 1590s, the time after the Armada defeat, might be said to voice these anxieties over female power and male effeminization. As Marilyn L. Williamson points out, the romantic comedies of the 1590s feature fantasies of the courtship of powerful women who frustrate men's desires (Williamson, 1986:20). *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, contains elements associated with the queen's cultural presence: female pride and power in Amazonian warriors, possessive mothers, unruly wives, transvestite maidens, and willful daughters,

all of whom are however brought under the control of husbands and lords at the end of the play. In a similar way, according to Marcus, Shakespeare's history plays, taken in the order of their composition and performance from *Henry VI* to *Henry V*, continually marginalize the dominant woman, the figure of the woman-on-top, the travesty of Elizabeth (Marcus, 1988:96). *Henry VI*, for instance, offers the Amazonian image of Queen Elizabeth in the figure of Joan of Arc, who, like the queen, is associated with witchcraft and is killed off at the end to precipitate collective release from the Queen's power over men.

Elizabeth's (self-)representation as an autonomous woman ruler who was associated with war and islanded integrity can be contrasted in many ways with the person and policies of her successor, James I, apart from his (self-)authorized peacemaking role and policies, both domestic and international. Although it is true, as Marcus points out, that James presented himself as similar to Elizabeth in some aspects, such as imitating her tactics with Parliament, he more often chose to depart from his predecessor (Marcus, 1988:111). As David M. Bergeron suggests in *Shakespeare's Romances and the Royal Family*, especially when viewed against Elizabeth's self-representation as a self-sufficient, unmarried, childless monarch, what made James appear different in his subjects' eyes was the fact that he brought with him a family, and he made the most out of that fact. His status as the father of his own family served as a metaphor that was to prevail at least in the early part of his reign, i.e. that he was 'father' of the country (Bergeron, 1985:27). James's arrival in London as patriarch of his family and country enhanced and was in turn enhanced by the emerging patriarchal

political theories both of the king himself and other theorists.

As Gordon J. Schochet explains, the family was an established and often employed category in political philosophy even before the seventeenth century. The filial obedience due from the children to their parents required by the obligation to 'Honour thy father and thy mother' from the Fifth Commandment was extended to other hierarchical relationships such as masters and servants, and subjects and kings. Some writers also extended this idea to include the legitimate authority of husbands over wives epitomized in the God-given superiority of Adam over Eve, which corresponded with the passive ideal for Renaissance women discussed above. A prime example of this notion of wives' submission to husbands can be found in John Knox's *The First Blast*. Knox proclaims that no woman could ever rule, for 'the immutable decree of God [...] hath subjected her to one member of the congregation, that is to her husband' and for this reason 'the holie ghost concludeth, that she may never rule nor bear empire above men. For she that is subject to one may never be preferred to many [...]' (qtd. in Schochet, 1975:45). However, the family did not acquire an overtly important status nor was it seriously analyzed as the origin of the state before the Stuart period, when it was incorporated in patriarchal political theory. According to Schochet, patriarchal theory did not develop in England until the reign of James I, with whom the theory and practice of absolutism appeared. For it was only in defense of absolutism that patriarchalism took its full form (Schochet, 1975:54, 86). James contributed, though not directly, to the patriarchal movement in his own writings. He used fatherly images in stating the nature of kingly power and compared the role of the father to, although

he did not identify it with, the head of the family. In his best-known theoretical work, *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (1598), King James used the familial image to demonstrate the duty that subjects owed to their ruler, insisting that as children could not rise up against their fathers, so the subjects could not resist their rulers:

[...] if the children may upon any pretext that can be imagined, lawfully rise up against their Father, cut him off, & choose any other whom they please in his roome; and if the body for the weale of it, may for any infirmitie that can be in the head, strike it off, then I cannot deny that the people may rebell, controll, and displace, or cut off their king at their owne pleasure, and upon respects moving them (qtd. in Schochet, 1975:87).

Although patriarchalism as such did not appear in his own political writings, James was aware of the doctrine and was responsible for spreading the ideology among his people. Many political tracts were issued upon his order or in his favor. As Schochet has shown, patriarchal tracts written during James's reign included Coke's *Post Nati* (1606), Richard Mocket's *God and the King* (1615), John Overall's *Convocation Book of 1606*, Richard Field's *Of the Church* (1606), George Carleton's *Jurisdiction Regall, Episcopall, Papall* (1610), and John Selden's *Titles of Honour* (1614) and *Mare Clausum* (1618). These tracts would culminate in Sir Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha* (1680), the most complete work on patriarchal political theory, which contains citations from James's *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*, James's most explicit patriarchal treatise. Though differing in some details, all these

tracts identify the origin of kingship with paternal authority, sanctioned by the Fifth Commandment and Adam's or Noah's authority (Schochet, 1975:85-98). The identification then demanded the subjects' obedience to the kings who had absolute divine right and, in stressing the authority of the father, marginalized the power of women as rulers, which had been long exemplified by Elizabeth I.

In Jacobean theater, the figure of androgynous heroine can be found in Moll Cutpurse, in Thomas Middleton, and Thomas Dekker's *The Roaring Girl*, albeit in subdued form. In Shakespeare, however, the unruly image of the queen might be said to appear in Lady Macbeth, who dominates male characters, obstructs orderly succession, and nearly destroys a kingdom. As Marcus speculates, the figure of Lady Macbeth in the stage performance at court in 1605 or 1606, might be

a symbolic cancellation of the female dominance which had haunted James throughout his early life, and which he particularly associated with Queen Elizabeth, who had presided over the execution of his mother and had demonstrated her superior political skills to James's humiliation on many occasions (Marcus, 1988:105).

II

Following Shakespeare's tendency to marginalize powerful female characters, we might say that the Queen of *Cymbeline* is yet another version of Queen Elizabeth, to the extent that she is an 'anomalous' woman-on-top, a character added apart

from the sources⁵ in another attempt to appropriate and redefine the late queen's iconography to suit the patriarchal 'Jacobean line' with which the audience, both at court and in public theaters, was directly connected or familiar. Apart from her strongly patriotic speech, which bears resemblance to the address attributed to Queen Elizabeth at Tilbury, this character might be said to be a travesty of Queen Elizabeth's self-representation as an autonomous, self-sufficient ruler, who subordinated passive feminine virtues. Like Elizabeth, Cymbeline's Queen, who is curiously given the suggestive appellation — and no proper name — of 'Queen', meddles with the active worlds of men, that of politics and militarism. It is obvious in the play that Cymbeline is greatly dominated by his queen in terms of political decisions. In the scene of the visitation from the tribute-demanding Roman general Caius Lucius, the Queen, followed by her son, is the first person to answer him on behalf of Britain and even reminds Cymbeline of the dignity inherited from his ancestors and from past victories against foreign invasions. In that scene, Cymbeline seems to become the Queen's obedient follower, receiving her instruction and acting accordingly. Later in Act 4, Scene 3, upon hearing of the impending war and without the Queen and her son, he is confounded and at a loss as to how to act, until the First Lord consoles him and assures him of Britain's readiness for war. Cymbeline's dependency and inability to act without the driving force of his wife and her son, recall the effeminization of men as a result of women's rule imagined by John Knox and other writers mentioned earlier.

⁵ Concerning the possible 'sources' of *Cymbeline* see Nosworthy (1996:xvii-xxviii).

Although her advice, given to Cymbeline, of resistance to Rome, suggests traces of masculine virtues, those of ‘courage’ and ‘good service’, which were oftentimes mentioned in the late Queen Elizabeth’s speeches, these virtues are marginalized as being destructive and hampering the vision of peaceful male unity. As Mikalachki rightly suggests, the ‘Wicked Queen’ might have done many evil deeds to earn this epithet, but she is accorded it by Cymbeline in the context of her opposition to the Roman tribute and her disruption of the ‘masculine kinship, promises, and honor that bind Cymbeline to Rome’ (Mikalachki, 1995:305). Her instigation is in line with the military and political involvements of those ‘female savages’, ‘Amazonian warriors’ in peace-oriented Jacobean plays. Hence all the blame given to her by Cymbeline:

My peace we will begin: and Caius
Lucius,
Although the victor, we submit to
Caesar,
And to the Roman empire;
promising
To pay our wonted tribute, from the
which
We were dissuaded by our wicked
queen (5.5.460-64)

Moreover, like Lady Macbeth and other ‘anomalous’ female characters, the Wicked Queen is characterized as a woman obsessed with ambition, a quality befitting male self-expansion but in this case with a negative motive. She makes explicit her coveted goal of controlling the right to succession after knowing of the disappearance of Imogen:

[...] gone she is,
To death, or to dishonour, and my
end

Can make good use of either. She
being down,
I have the placing of the British
crown. (3.5.63-66)

When she learns that Cymbeline is enraged by the disappearance of his daughter, the Queen also reveals her wish for his death: ‘All the better: may / This night forestall him of the coming day!’ (3.5.69-70). It seems that she is so consumed with her ambitious desire of having her son, generally portrayed in the play as her extension in terms of political advocacy, obtain the crown, that when her plan is thwarted by his absence, she is seized by a ‘fever’ and ‘madness’ (4.3.2; 4.3.3) and meets her end grotesquely, ‘[w]ith horror, madly dying, like her life / which (being cruel to the world) concluded / most cruel to herself’ (5.5.31-33).

It is interesting to compare here Cymbeline’s and the play’s reaction to the Wicked Queen’s qualities in these two aspects, i.e. her patriotism or courage in dealing with the Romans and her political ambition with that given to male characters, who, it might be said, possess the same attributes, or in their cases, virtues. While the queen’s action toward the Romans is condemned as peace-destroying, that of the male characters, who fight the Romans out of similar patriotic sentiment is praised as heroic. Likewise, the queen’s desire for the control of the crown is portrayed as an illegitimate and immoral ambition whereas the princes’ wish to expand themselves beyond the confines of the mountains is commented by Belarius as manifestations of their princely ‘sparks of nature’ (3.3.79). This difference in reactions testifies to the way in which the early modern culture conceptualized separate sets of virtues and roles for men and women, and rendered condemnable, or at least disconcerting, a

person with 'misplaced' virtues, like the Wicked Queen, and by extension, her real-life counterpart.

The character of Cymbeline's queen, moreover, might serve as another critique of Elizabeth's late tactic of mystifying political intent to manipulate and frustrate male courtiers, a tactic which was much in contrast to James's early advocated style. As Marcus points out, early in his reign, James consciously cultivated a 'plain style' in his writings in implicit contrast to Elizabeth's late self-representation as powerful and impenetrable (Marcus, 1988:111). In his 1604 speech before Parliament, James declared that

[...] it becometh a King, in my opinion, to vse no other Eloquence then plainnesse and sinceritie. By plainnesse I meane, that his Speeches should be so cleare and voyd of all ambiguitie, that they may not be throwne, nor rent asunder in contrary scenes like the old Oracles of the Pagan gods. And by sinceritie, I vnderstand the vprightnesse and honestie which ought to be in a Kings whole Speeches and actions: That as farre as a King is in Honour erected aboue any of his Subjects, so farre should he striue in sinceritie to be aboue them all, and that his tongue should be euer the trew Messenger of his heart: and this sort of Eloquence may you euer assuredly looke for at my hands [...] (qtd. in McIlwain, 1918:280)⁶

⁶ However, as Goldberg points out, later on James would turn to present himself in a more

In deliberate attempts to contrast his style of political and literary practices with that of his predecessor, James made determined efforts to make his public policies and writings, many of which were 'authored' by himself, 'clear', 'void of ambiguity' and hence indicative of 'sincerity'. This accounted for the much energy and care he gave to the acts of giving explanations of and editing the texts in his cherished role as a learned 'Author', who had the duty of educating his subjects. His predilection for being an 'authoritative' scholar received much criticism and ridicule from his contemporaries as his works were regarded as belonging to a pedant or a clerk and not '[becoming for] a Prince' (Marcus, 1988:106-16).

Nevertheless, in the official and authorized entertainment such as in court masques, attempts at observing the monarch's advocated 'plain style' still existed (Marcus, 1988:112). In *Cymbeline*, which partakes of some of the elements of the court masque and was possibly performed at court, the issues of 'plain style', 'unambiguity' and 'sincerity' seem to be noticeably invoked in the play, especially in the various acts of 'reading' or 'interpreting'. *Cymbeline* can be said to be a play about reading or interpreting. Characters 'read' or speculate about the true characteristics of one another and other 'signs' almost throughout the play. Jupiter, an allusion to James himself, descends among the discontented ghosts to give 'explanations' for the fortunes of Posthumus. Echoing the advocated practice of King James, Cymbeline demands 'explanations' and elaboration of what has happened saying that: '[this] fierce

opaque way to create *Arcana Imperii* or states secrets. See Goldberg (1983).

abridgement / Hath to it circumstantial branches, which / Distinction should be rich in' (5.5.383-385) and orders that peace be '[published]' (5.5.479). The most obvious and concrete reading/interpreting performance is the almost word-by-word interpretation of the 'tablet' or 'book' (5.4.109, 133) left by Jupiter on Posthumus's chest and connected with that of the soothsayer Philaronus's dream by the latter himself, even with the explanation of the Latin word, which is reminiscent of King James's practice of teaching Latin to his court favorites (Marcus, 1988:115-16).

It is true that, as Marcus has shown in the case of the Vision of Jupiter scene, these allusions to King James's practice of 'plain style' can be interpreted ironically as parodying the monarch's tactics, depending on the direction taken by each production and the 'reading' of the audience (Marcus, 1988:137-48). Nevertheless, these subversive possibilities, in my view, are still much contained in the play, and one of the elements that may contribute to that containment is the marginalization of King James's predecessor's style of self-representation among her courtiers, namely the use of Petrarchan and Neoplatonic love discourses, the act of self-mystification and the habit of playing courtiers against one another, which the king professed as in contrast to his own practice.

In *Cymbeline*, the Wicked Queen, as discussed earlier, is presented as an ambitious woman coveting the control of the crown for her son. Her strategies in achieving her goal, however, are not the use of direct force, as in the case of her tragic counterpart, Lady Macbeth, but mostly by political maneuvering, affectation, and the use of poison, all of which to different degrees bring to mind Queen's Elizabeth's tactics with her courtiers. As earlier

observed, the queen managed the power relations at court by using 'love' in the Petrarchan and Neoplatonic fashion, in which each courtier attempts to vie for her attention, which would be a source for his political power and which, after the queen's death, received much criticism. In *Cymbeline*, the Wicked Queen tries to manage various characters with her dissembling. She acts as a good, caring wife and stepmother toward Cymbeline and Imogen, an innocent experimenter with medicinal drugs toward Cornelius, and a well-wisher to Pisanio in an attempt to draw him to her side. Apart from her own asides, which reveal her real intent of manipulating other characters for her own purpose, analyses of the Wicked Queen, given by several characters, seem to serve as comments on Elizabeth's use of Petrarchan and Neoplatonic love discourses to create a magical aura and to bewilder her subjects. Imogen speaks of the Queen's 'dissembling courtesy', commenting: 'How fine this tyrant / Can tickle where she wounds!' (1.2.15-16). Later, the Second Lord remarks that she is 'a crafty devil', 'a woman that / Bears all down with her brain', 'a mother hourly coining plots' (2.1.51-53, 58). In the last scene, the court doctor, Cornelius, narrates the Queen's dying confession that:

[...] she never lov'd you: only
Affected greatness got by you: not
you:
Married your royalty, was wife to
your place:
Abhorr'd your person. (5.5.37-40)

This prompts Cymbeline, echoing Harington's and Hatton's observations about the late Queen Elizabeth mentioned earlier, to reflect on her deceptiveness and inscrutability: 'O most delicate fiend! /

Who is't can read a woman?' (5.5.46-47)
and on the irresistibility of her strategies:

Mine eyes
Were not in fault, for she was
beautiful:
Mine ears that heard her flattery, nor
my heart
That thought her like her seeming. It
had been vicious
To have mistrusted her. (5.5.62-66)

The Queen's beauty and flattery, her 'sweet baits' are impenetrable for Cymbeline and make him powerless, like Elizabeth's courtiers who were frustrated by her ambiguous manipulations, which were much different, at least on the surface, from the concepts of 'plainnesse', 'sinceritie', and 'honestie' upheld by King James. Moreover, the Wicked Queen's use of drugs and poison also allies her with witchcraft, which is also associated with Elizabeth's 'strange wonders' and magic.

However, unlike Elizabeth whose representations kindled both horror and reverence in her subjects, the Wicked Queen's character is marginalized as demonic from the start. This is because, as Marcus observes, like the character of Joan of Arc in *1 Henry VI*, Cymbeline's Queen lacks an 'essential element of the queen's [Elizabeth's] self-representation, the sacred 'immortal body' of kingship' (76). Furthermore, unlike the real-life Elizabeth, who, by representing herself as a virgin, could redefine the notion of chastity to suit her purpose, the Wicked Queen is ambiguously assigned the role, in the *dramatis personae*, as 'Wife to Cymbeline', who yet has a son by 'a former Husband', and is called by the First Gentleman in the opening scene as 'a widow' (1.1.5), which was regarded in some writings of the period as subject to 'corrupt and disordered

behaviour,' 'so froward, so waspish, and so stubborne' (qtd. in Woodbridge, 1984:86). Thus, from the beginning, we know that, except for Cymbeline, who seems to be the only character in the play who cannot 'read' her, no one at the court thinks highly of her and her son.⁷ From the first scene, almost all the other characters see through her colors and never trust her. The only scene in which her voice is heard as potentially noble and courageous, i.e. the scene of the meeting with the Roman general, seems, however, to be embedded in other scenes and characters which support the concerns to promote the 'Jacobean line' and to exorcise the spell of the previous monarch, Queen Elizabeth I, and is thus rendered out-of-place.

III

As a final note, if we consider the Wicked Queen as a marginalized or demonized version of Queen Elizabeth I, Imogen then might be said to be that 'evil' character's corrective double. As Marcus points out, Imogen too can be considered a kind of Elizabethan figure: she is heir presumptive to the throne, is associated with Phoenix, the 'Arabian Bird', the emblem much employed by Elizabeth, and uses male attire in disguise (Marcus, 1988: 128). Janet Adelman observes in *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays* that Imogen is characterized as a willful woman: 'a wonderfully vivid presence, shrewd, impetuous, passionate, and very much the

⁷ This might possibly be another instance of parodying King James's uninspiring strategy of 'plain style'. As one commentator has it: 'Despite his learning and his philosophical ambitions, it has become permissible and even customary to think of the first Stuart king as something of a fool'. See MacDonald (1996:304).

propriety of her own will' (Adelman, 1992:209). Like Elizabeth, she demonstrates the qualities of self-sufficiency which to a certain extent challenge the roles expected of women in the early modern times: her determination to choose a mate of her own against her father's will, her contempt for Cloten's assaults, her easy penetration of Iachimo's seduction and her initial anger at Posthumus's charges against her. However, Imogen is not so much a subversive force against traditional feminine virtues as one who fulfils them. She is chaste, loyal to her husband, constant, patient, and self-sacrificing. In response to Posthumus's accusation, Imogen comes to submit herself, telling Pisanio: 'When thou see'st him, / A little witness my obedience. Look, / I draw the sword myself' (3.4.66-68) and proclaims herself 'obedient as the scabbard' (3.4.81). Even when she is in male disguise, Imogen, far more than any of Shakespeare's other transvestite women, who are allowed some extent of independence and freedom, will feel her own inadequacy as a man, and remains in the feminine role of 'housewife' (4.2.45) toward Belarius and her brothers, or is described with feminine attributes by the Roman general Lucius (5.5.86-88). At the end of the play, she is, more than before, under male authority within the patriarchal structure, accepting her roles as daughter, wife and sister toward her all-male relations.

In fact, we might say that Imogen's problem is that she is faced with the situation in which she has to choose between her office as an heiress and future sovereign, for which the adoption, in some way or another, of masculine virtues and attributes would be expected from her, as we have seen in the case of Queen Elizabeth, and her role as a wife in which

feminine virtues and characteristics are demanded. However, we do not see any dilemma in her character in the play at all, as she has already decided when the play opens that she will choose the latter, and is willing to give away the former. So, the audience is informed in the first scene that '[she]'s wedded' to 'a poor but worthy gentleman' (1.1.7) and hears her comment that: 'Would I were / A neat-herd's daughter, and my Leonatus / Our neighbour-shepherd's son!' (1.2.79-81). Indeed, as Ann Thompson points out in 'Person and Office: The Case of Imogen, Princess of Britain,' the play insists on 'the rightness, even the desirability, of her dispossession' (Thompson, 1991:79). Since it constantly presents the concerns or uneasiness about this 'unequal' marriage in the words of several characters from the beginning of the play, such as the First Gentleman (1.1.50-54), Posthumus (1.2.50-52; 5.1.2-5.4.22-23), Cymbeline (1.2.72-73), Iachimo (1.5.12-15), Cloten (2.3.112-23), Pisanio (3.2.9-11) and Imogen herself, who, apart from voicing the pastoral fantasy already mentioned, says in an aside when meeting with her real brothers, unknown to her then:

would it had been so, that they
Had been my father's sons, then had
my prize
Been less, and so more equal
ballasting
To thee, Posthumus. (3.7.48-51)

Imogen's political office of heiress, which accounts for the fact that 'she is 'worth more' than her husband', (Thompson, 1991:81) is thus presented as a problem to her and other characters, and has to be set right through her dispossession. Apart from presenting the concerns or uneasiness about the 'unequal' union and Imogen's own willingness to be displaced in her

preference for love as mentioned above, the play also points toward the dispossession of the heroine through its portrayal of the 'true heirs', her lost brothers, as possessing the 'natural, princely qualities' of ambition and courage, asserted by their foster-father Belarius, proved by their heroic deeds in the battle scene and supported by Jupiter's prediction of their restoration to their proper position in the 'tablet' left with Posthumus. This portrayal is in contrast to that of Imogen, who seems to belong more comfortably in the role of wife or housewife, such as in the cave scene in Act 4, than in her political role as princess and heiress at court, from which she is missing when pressing national concerns arise, such as during the Roman visitation (3.1) and upon the news of the impending war (4.3) (Thompson, 1991:79-81). Therefore, in the last scene, in response to Cymbeline's remark that she has 'lost by this a kingdom', Imogen is depicted as answering contentedly that 'I have got two worlds by't' (5.5.374-375) and with this, displays her feminine virtue of selflessness, which is so much a contrast to the Wicked Queen's — and, probably, to Queen Elizabeth's — political ambition, which must have been familiar still to Jacobean theatergoers.

After the Queen, the anomalous figure of powerful womanhood has died, the male characters who have been dependent in some ways on women like Cymbeline or Posthumus, or who have been put in a state of political inactivity like Belarius and the two princes, are restored to prominence and power. Cymbeline becomes again the self-sufficient 'head' of his family, a father who usurps the role of 'a mother to the birth of three', more than whom 'Ne'er mother / Rejoic'd deliverance' (5.5.370-371), and a real 'head' of his country. Without female political intervention, he can now make his own decision to unite his country with the

Roman Empire led by a patriarchal figure, Caesar Augustus. The two princes gain their royal positions and rights to inherit the crown, and their 'issue', according to the soothsayer, will bring Britain 'peace and plenty' (5.5.458-9). Posthumus becomes 'an exemplar of heroic masculinity, upholder of the kingdom, rescuer of the king' (Adelman, 1992:209) while Belarius is restored to his political rank. At the same time, Imogen is reunited with her husband, father, and brothers and happily embraces the roles of wife, daughter and sister. Her character, then, might be said to be another instance of the appropriation of Queen Elizabeth's iconography. In the character of Imogen, who represents some traits of the Queen, the notion of female virtues — which was exploited by Elizabeth in a way that enhanced her power over male control — is 'redressed' and brought back into containment within a patriarchal structure. While the character of the Wicked Queen is a site in which the traits associated with the late Queen Elizabeth are marginalized and exorcised, the character of Imogen provides a space in which the possibility of a woman's rule is put forward only to be rejected in favor of male authority. In these two characters, it can be said, responses to the cultural presence of the late Queen are voiced, and they point in a direction that, as Thompson succinctly puts, '[defines] royal power as male' (Thompson, 1991:86).

'I am Richard II. Know ye not that?' Queen Elizabeth I famously asked about the play which featured the dethronement of a king, in the wake of the Essex coup d'etat which was immediately put down (Greenblatt, 1982:3). What the Queen said attests to the power — and threat — of signification and interpretation. This power, however, resides not so much in the 'meanings' already fixed in the play by the author, waiting to be decoded by the reader, as in the fluid

nature of texts which are subject to appropriation and interpretation. In *Cymbeline*, this can be seen in the way the play text served as a space open to the energy, anxieties and power struggles circulated in the culture in which it was composed, performed and received — specifically to this article, the anxieties over the cultural presence of the late queen, and, also, the living king. Nevertheless, attention to power relations in the interaction between Shakespeare text such as *Cymbeline* and its context, that of Jacobean England, should not obscure us from the rhythm of power relations in our own present process of interpretation. Although as a reader of Shakespeare's texts from another culture, I think it is very much relevant to approach the plays as a repository of 'universally shared human traits' in order to establish a kind of cross-cultural communication of meanings and more importantly, human understanding and love, taking into account the interaction between the *Cymbeline* text and its context has the advantage of reminding me to attend to the process of reading Shakespeare's works in my own cultural and social contexts. What kinds of 'meanings' does 'Shakespeare' connote in Thai social and cultural interpretive contexts and what are the power relations involved in the processes of theatrical productions and critical evaluations of his plays in Thailand? To answer such questions requires a space beyond this present article and must be left to a future project as I end this one.

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