Queen Elizabeth I and the *Hampden Portrait*

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Along with royal progresses, Elizabethan tournaments, and literary works, royal portraits and emblematic miscellany collections contain informative displays of religious, political, and moral virtues associated with the reign of England’s preeminent monarch: Elizabeth I. Written almost two decades after Thomas Palmer’s *Two Hundred Poosees* (c. 1564-5), Geffrey Whitney’s *A Choice if Emblemes* (1586), with its praise of English “martial heroes” and members of “an exemplary society,” demonstrates how the emblem tradition could be used to enhance English identity and reputation. The religious, political, and moral virtues praised by Whitney in *A Choice* “sets up before the envious gaze of Europe the image of an England flourishing in peace and prosperity under the auspices of a righteous and merciful sovereign” (Manning 6).1 In the popular emblematic miscellany collections prevalent throughout the Renaissance on the European Continent and in England, the tripartite motto, picture, and verse work collectively together and would have held pointed meanings for early modern audiences. Contemporary theorists, such as Henri Estienne, the author of *The Art of Making Devices* (trans. 1646), defined the emblem as “a sweet and morall symbol which consists of pictures and words, by which some weighty sentence is declared” (qtd. in Raybould 253).

Reading the symbols of the *Hampden Portrait* (c. 1563-4)2 of Elizabeth I in light of the verbal and visual iconography of Palmer’s *Poosees*, among other works, can help recapture meanings previously accessible to Elizabethan contemporaries but perhaps not immediately discernable to modern audiences. The *Hampden Portrait* and Palmer’s *Poosees* provide evidence of the ways in which England, in the early years of the new monarchy, conceptualized its unique dynastic and religious identities so as to replace its Catholic past with a new climate in which a desired consensus could be reached in politics and religion: “The role of the emblem in the visual arts was perhaps even more important than the manuscript collections because its impact was arguably both more direct and pervasive” (Daly and Silcox 203). Interpretive meanings suggested by the elaborate visual and aural displays of these early modern works would have served.

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to reinforce Elizabeth’s iconic status as a monarch with legitimate dynastic and religious credentials.

The *Hampden Portrait*, with its emphasis on elaborate display and the use of symbolic secular and religious iconography, stands as an early declaration of royal position and power that complements its visual display of female fecundity and availability. The *Hampden Portrait*’s symbols promote Elizabeth’s claim to the English throne along with her divinely ordained role as Defender of the Faith. Clark Hulse observes that “Renaissance people were obsessed with the metaphors of self, with the objects, whether verbal or material, that stood for people, collectively and individually” (158). The *Hampden Portrait* participates in this obsession in its conscious display of the Queen’s status as Queen Regnant and Supreme Governor.

Previously attributed to Steven van der Meulen, an Antwerp artist who flourished at the Tudor court throughout the 1560’s, the *Hampden Portrait* has more recently been attributed by Bendor Grosvenor to another artist working in the Anglo-Flemish tradition. Grosvenor places the *Hampden Portrait*’s provenance in the “Anglo-Flemish School, c.1563/4, Attributed to the Dutch artist ‘Steven’” (Grosvenor, “The *Hampden Portrait*”). He emphasizes the existence of another Dutch artist, Steven van Herwijck, working in England and on the Continent, an artist “clearly well regarded and [better] known throughout Europe” than van der Muelen (Grosvenor, “The *Hampden Portrait*”).

For my reading of the *Hampden Portrait*, it is sufficient that Grosvenor places the painting in the Anglo-Flemish School. The northern Flemish style of portraiture constituted a new approach to painting, in which minute attention to detail along with the inclusion of symbols, which possess several readings, combine to create unique artistic meanings. In terms of how to read these works of art, one should consider the unity of the picture. The belief that “visible objects were infused with God” meant for Northern European artists that “virtually every object could carry iconographic (or symbolic) implications” (Benton and DiYanni 72). When analyzing the symbolism of the *Hampden Portrait*’s meticulous attention to detail and visual display, one should keep in mind that early modern Flemish painters worked to create expressive, stylistic meanings in their painting and portraiture.

In the *Hampden Portrait* Elizabeth wears two large framed jewels, with the jewel at the bottom being capped by an armillary sphere. The iconographic symbol of the sphere, as is well documented, appeared regularly throughout Elizabeth’s reign, but its early occurrences in both the *Hampden Portrait* and Palmer’s *Poosées*, as will be seen, connects for a com-