

**“THE FLOWRE OF VIRGINS”:  
ELIZABETH I AND THE SUBVERSIVE  
GENDERING OF NATURE**

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“She was as pretty as a rose” and “Mother Nature” are examples of terms planted deep within texts and art for millennia, growing a strongly-rooted association between nature and women. Nature can be beautiful, majestic, and striking, so it seems only natural for poets, lovers, and many others to compare it to women, lauding not only the similarities in beauty but the shared attributes of fertility and fruitfulness. These sayings intentionally draw a line between nature and the feminine, yet the source of these sayings usually stems from men. These, along with a plethora of other sayings, are all genderings of nature using the aspect of the feminine, intertwining nature and women into inseparable entities. Women’s fertility has been strongly connected to nature through phrases like ‘Mother Nature’ as well as through themes of rebirth, of trees blossoming, petals blooming. On the other hand, there exists the more sexualized metaphor of planting seeds in the earth or discovering and conquering a feminized, virginal land. While these comparisons may seem harmless, the associations are too often inextricably tied up with the domination and conquering of both women and nature – the reduction of women’s value to purity and virginity akin to unmarked, new land. In accordance with this occurrence, women’s beauty is often admired through similes to beautiful things found in nature, the writers or artists embossing their similes with connotations of nature as sweet, simple, dutiful. Queen Elizabeth I of England both utilized and subverted these connotations during her long reign, in large part due to her title as the Virgin

Queen and her status as a woman in the highest position of power in the country. Portraiture and poetry surrounding the queen introduce strongly apparent natural imagery planted to bring about associations with virginity and chastity – personal attributes Elizabeth stressed during her reign. In many poems, her beauty is compared to rose buds and pearls, historically associated with both women and their purity. Along with this, Elizabeth crafted the idea of being mother of her nation in a way similar to how Mother Nature is often depicted, emphasizing the ways in which she cared for her land and its people like a mother to her child, as shown in Edmund Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* and paintings of the queen. However, despite relying on virginal natural imagery at the beginning of her rule, Elizabeth later in her rule conversely undercut the gendered language and used it to develop her power as monarch of England. She did not limit herself to the title "Virgin Queen" but rather embraced it, took charge of it, and shed pure femininity for an androgynous power. Instead, Elizabeth refuted the trappings of the virginal natural imagery in favor of depicting herself as a conqueror, a subjugator of countries and new lands alike both in portraits and in the writings of the poets Sir Walter Raleigh and George Chapman. The strange disconnect between the ways in which nature is connected to the feminine and how it can lead to disempowering women will be explored through the literature and art surrounding the queen, delving into the symbolism of her many names: the Virgin Queen, the Diana of England, the mother of a nation, the ocean, and a shepherd. During her reign, Elizabeth both capitalized on the virginal natural imagery surrounding her yet was depicted in the masculine role of dominating the feminized lands of the New World. Whether she intended to or not, Elizabeth I is strongly enmeshed in the gendering of nature: she played a part in perpetuating the feminization of nature while also shaping these identities to her own advantage and defying the restrictions of her gender.

Elizabeth I ascended to the throne in 1558 at the age of twenty-five after many years of oppressive uncertainty, threats to her life, and questions about her legitimacy as an heir. She ruled as queen of England and Ireland from 1558 to 1603, ushering in a forty-four year period of stable leadership after decades of teetering kingships and queenships. During her long rule, arts such as literature and theater flourished, creating what is known as the Elizabethan era – featuring the likes of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe who

contributed extensively to this period, introducing new forms of theatre and poetry. It was characteristic that a large amount of this upsurge of art be dedicated to the queen, whether it was positive or not. As a woman who had “overturned the natural order” wherein kings are the foremost figure of power and queens are accessories, Elizabeth contended with creating an image for herself that appealed to the masses.<sup>1</sup> It was essential for her to gain support from both the nobility in the royal court and the citizens of England, especially after the upheaval her half-sister Mary I caused. The transfer from Mary’s Catholic rule to Elizabeth’s Protestant rule was tumultuous, and thus required tact and appeal to the public. The question of “the principle attribute of a ruler” was their virtue: men’s virtue was grounded in “service and courage” while for women, “chastity was the only virtue necessary”.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the need to emphasize Elizabeth’s virginity became paramount as it would legitimize her right to be queen. She had no male figures of power in her life, no obligation to a husband or a father, and so she instead created an obligation to a different father – her heavenly one. Louis Montrose explains the queen’s predicament, arguing that she defended the flexibility she had as an unmarried queen by maneuvering around the expectations of such an historically masculine role: she placed her loyalty in an unquestionable source, “her heavenly father, the ultimate ground of her sovereignty”.<sup>3</sup> The plausibility of God vouching for Elizabeth would be difficult to refute due to the cultural ideology of divine right, and, by placing herself in the protectorship of God as a chaste virgin, the queen ensured her legitimacy.

Elizabeth was well aware that the embellishment of female virginity using nature terminology or symbolism was a long-standing tradition, and thus focused on imbuing much of her public image with this symbolism. Her title as the “Virgin Queen” did not come about as a mistake but rather by capitalizing on the underlying connections between virginal symbols and language and her proclamation of being a monarchical mother, devoted to her country instead of a

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<sup>1</sup> Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. New York: Harper & Row, 1989. Print, 73.

<sup>2</sup> Frye, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Montrose, Louis Adrian. "The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text." *Literary Theory / Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint, 303-40. Baltimore, 1986, 328.

husband. While Elizabeth was queen first and foremost, to be accepted despite the contended legitimacy of her authority, she had to prove both the motherly care with which she would lead her nation and also her legitimacy as a virgin. These parallels cannot be made without also tying such language to the Virgin Mary as a woman who remained pure, virginal, and devoted while still birthing the son of God. In the same way, Elizabeth constructed an image of herself as a pure and devoted queen who declined to marry because she was caring for her own child: the country of England. Developing the symbols necessary to compare Elizabeth to the Virgin Mary meant employing natural imagery commonly associated with virginal women and chastity, both through animal symbolism as well as more poetic literature. M.C. Merchant in *The Death of Nature* writes that “in both Western and non-Western cultures, nature was traditionally feminine”.<sup>4</sup> Nature was and is personified as female— even the nouns for nature in languages like Latin and Spanish are feminine, and thus Elizabeth could choose from an array of natural symbols of female virginity. While Elizabeth highlighted her status as a virgin, it seemed only natural to pull on symbols that had been, over time, molded to represent virginity. Often, these were already associated with the Virgin Mary. Many scholars have noted the parallels between Elizabeth I and the Virgin in the language and symbols used to describe Elizabeth, alluding to her virginity or her capacity as a mother to her people. Mary Beth Rose explains that Elizabeth often identified herself in both rhetoric and paintings with the “traditional female roles of virgin and mother”.<sup>5</sup> The symbols themselves may seem small, but the repeated use of them as shown in portraits and poetry indicates that nature remains closely tied to feminine virginity and value, and thus in some ways becomes female itself.

As a female ruler, Elizabeth was expected to produce heirs at some point but instead transferred the idea of motherhood onto the idea of herself as mother of her nation. This reflected how the Virgin was idolized as mother of the Catholic church, and this idea developed into the Cult of Elizabeth. This was an especially bold comparison for her to make, Peter McClure explains, due to the fact

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<sup>4</sup> Merchant, 146.

<sup>5</sup> Rose, Mary Beth. "The Gendering of Authority in the Public Speeches of Elizabeth I." *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 115.5 (2000): 1077-082. Web, 1077.

that it was made “in the context of Protestant rejection of Mariolatry”.<sup>6</sup> Mariolatry is the idolization of the Virgin Mary in Catholicism, and Elizabeth had strictly distanced herself from the Catholic Church, as she herself was Protestant. The cult derived itself from the image perpetuated about Elizabeth as a mother to England, an idyllic leader who spoke to the hearts of every one of her people. She emphasized this concept in her progresses and speeches, going so far as to state that “though after my death you may have many stepdames, yet shall you never have a more natural mother than I mean to be unto you all”.<sup>7</sup> This proved an effective manner to combat those who strongly pushed her to marry and have children, those who clung to the idea that “the man should function as the ruling intellectual head, while the woman is the body that assists him”.<sup>8</sup> The traditional arrangement didn’t appeal to Elizabeth, to say the least, and she flitted past suitors and deftly avoided marriage propositions suggested by her advisors. Instead, she focused her efforts on crafting an image of already being a suitable virgin mother, one equipped to love and protect England without having children of her own.

The comparisons of Elizabeth I to the Virgin Mary relied partially on the public understanding the connections themselves, as Elizabeth was a Protestant queen and Mariolatry was of Catholic origin. While Elizabeth was far more forgiving in her policies of religious tolerance than her sister Mary was before her, she still had to maintain a Protestant image to keep the Protestant population (constituting half of England) appeased. Losing support could result in the end of her rule and her life, as she was well aware. Her sister Mary had also used Mariological imagery during her reign and Elizabeth had to be cautious in staying away from direct comparisons between the two women for the beginning of her rule. Helen Hackett explains that Mariological prayers and poems “were suppressed and reiterations of traditional reverence for the Virgin Mary risked being seen as idolatrous”.<sup>9</sup> With this in mind, Elizabeth took the “Mariological

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<sup>6</sup> Peter McClure, and Robin Headlam Wells. "Elizabeth I as a Second Virgin Mary." *Renaissance Studies* 4.1 (1990): 38-70. Web, 39.

<sup>7</sup> Crane, Mary Thomas. "Queen Elizabeth I." *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/queen-elizabeth-i>.

<sup>8</sup> Merchant, 146.

<sup>9</sup> Hackett, Helen. "A New Image of Elizabeth I." *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 77.3 (2014): 225-56. Web, 239.

imagery” and secularized it.<sup>10</sup> She emphasized her own virginity in a forceful and deliberate way to grasp the connotations associated with the Virgin and force them to be associated with herself as well. She and the Catholic Virgin Mary desired to remain in a state of perpetual virginity while also providing motherly love and the idealization of a fruitful woman. However, she couldn’t overtly claim the sanctity of the Virgin for risk of offending her Catholic citizens. Besides, the virginal symbols associated with Mary such as the “rose, lily, star, moon, pearl” did not exclusively belong to the Virgin; in fact, these natural symbols had often been employed in “poetic idolatry of secular mistresses” to idolize the feminine values of “chastity, constancy and wisdom” long before Elizabeth.<sup>11</sup> This allowed Elizabeth to utilize symbols associated with the Virgin along with the Virgin’s reverence while not directly claiming to be a second Virgin Mary, which would be sacrilegious and disruptive. The queen crafted rhetoric balancing her power and femininity in order to plant these associations, starting soon after her reign began. King cites such an account written by William Camden, an English historian during Elizabeth’s rule who wrote one of the first historical accounts of the queen after her death. Camden compiled records of the queen’s speeches, correspondences, and responses, including her response to the House of Commons in 1559. The House had been “urging her to choose a husband” on account of England’s need for an heir and the House’s apparent view of her “repugnant” selfishness to lead a single life”.<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth deflects the demand for her marriage by saying she does not yet have children because “every one of you, and as many are English, are my Children”.<sup>13</sup> The speech ends with the queen firmly expressing that she is so content in her position as mother of England that she wishes the words “Here lyes interr'd ELIZABETH, / A virgin pure until her Death” to be “inscribed upon my Tombe”.<sup>14</sup> In just this speech she applied both the Mariological ideas of her perpetual virginity as well as how much she values the feminine quality of motherhood – but only so long as it pertains to her people.

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<sup>10</sup> King, John N. "Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen." *Renaissance Quarterly* 43.1 (1990): 30-74. Web, 31.

<sup>11</sup> McClure, 39.

<sup>12</sup> King, 33.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

The epitaph, written so early in her reign, seems to presuppose no husband would be in sight for the queen and that her virginity would forever be maintained for God. This led to a steady use of Mariological iconography and symbols, most of which are strongly connected to natural images and purity.

Peter McClure and Robin Wells note the various Virgin Mary symbols that were incorporated into Elizabeth's repertoire and representations. In addition to the symbols McClure detailed, others chosen to represent Elizabeth as a perpetual and pure queen included the "Rose... the Moon, the Phoenix, the Ermine, the Pearl," all of which were already symbols of the Virgin Mary.<sup>15</sup> Many of these continue to be highly feminized natural objects in today's world and others were commonly feminized in the 1500s. We would recognize the rose and the pearl as indicative of the feminine, the pearl especially a depiction of purity due to the archetypal white sheen. The ermine, a small, short-tailed weasel, grows a velvety-soft white coat during the winter that was a highly prized accessory for clothing of the nobility and royalty. It also was, as explained by Mary Hazard, "designed to signify purity" due to its white coat and the value placed on it, similar to how virginity is valued in women.<sup>16</sup> The phoenix is a fantastical bird of legend that crumbles to ash at the end of its life and is reborn, a symbol of chastity in Elizabeth's era as well as of fertility and regeneration. It appears so commonplace to see "women perpetually slipping into the category of "nature"" in the pervasive "tradition of regarding 'nature itself' as female or feminine," and yet so many of these natural symbols continue to be associated exclusively with women and with the purpose of valuing only certain aspects of women.<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth chose natural items like roses, pearls, and animals steeped in feminine myths to define herself for a reason, and that reason lays in the intricate link between women and nature.

*The Pelican Portrait of 1575* by Nicholas Hilliard is where we find Elizabeth embodying an essential motherly aspect of the Virgin and the larger-encompassing name Mother of the Nation. In this portrait, she is bedecked in yards of pearls and jewels, her dress a dark red to match her flaming hair. One hand hovers below a large pendant with

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<sup>15</sup> McClure, 39.

<sup>16</sup> Hazard, Mary E. "The Case for "Case" in Reading Elizabethan Portraits." *Mosaic* (Winnipeg) 23.2 (1990): 61-88. Web, 70.

<sup>17</sup> Scharff, 11.

a mother pelican inside, head bent to peck at her chest in order to sacrifice her own blood for the three newborn pelicans looking up at their mother. A trickle of red blood runs down the mother's breast, immediately drawing the eye to the pendant instead of Elizabeth herself. The mother pelican is a symbol that arose in the Middle Ages: according to myth, the pelican mother would tear into her own breast to draw blood and feed it to her young if they were starving. This symbol runs in accordance with the Mother of the Nation analogy Elizabeth was beginning to shape, creating a narrative where she would give up everything, even her own blood from her breast, to save and protect her nation. Montrose writes that in using the "popular emblem of the life-rendering Pelican," Elizabeth's own breasts become those of a "a selfless and bountiful mother".<sup>18</sup> The emphasis here lies in Elizabeth's apparent willingness to sacrifice herself for the people she is mother to, a characteristic trait of femininity and motherhood, but on a far greater scale. This recalls the aspect of Mother Earth, the personification and feminization of the entire world into a motherly, caring being, one where absolute self-sacrifice is associated distinctly with women. Roach explains the commonality of this metaphor, where because the "environment is certainly life-giving and life-sustaining" it may seem aptly comparable to mothers.<sup>19</sup> Though this specific metaphor of the pelican mother takes the over-expansive metaphor of Mother Earth and distills it to one animal, the implications of selfless mothers in both nature and in humans abounds. The animal's sex is only distinguishable to viewers in specific relation to its act of sacrifice, indicating that women's value is in their ability to become selfless mothers and dedicate all to their children like Elizabeth dedicates herself to her country. The mother pelican myth is also mentioned in a few Elizabethan poems, one of which is "Shall I, Wasting in Despair", by George Wither. He wails about a woman who is beautiful, "fairer than the day / Or the flow'ry meads[meadows] in May...meeker, kinder than / Turtle-dove or pelican".<sup>20</sup> Not only does Wither employ charged gendered natural imagery of the doves, white as snow and delicately small, he also utilizes the pelican symbol. In both of these,

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<sup>18</sup> Montrose, *Elizabethan Subject* 64.

<sup>19</sup> Roach, 29.

<sup>20</sup> Schelling, Felix Emmanuel. *A Book of Elizabethan Lyrics; Selected and Ed. by Felix E. Schelling*. Ginn & Company, 1895, 1895. Web, 168-9.

he constructs an ideal woman who is pure, white as a dove, with all the motherly and self-sacrificing characteristics of a pelican and thus defining the “environment as bountiful female”.<sup>21</sup> He values her love because of her meek, ‘feminine’ nature and also because she, like a mother pelican, will sacrifice anything for him and in that lies her worth.

Perhaps the most common natural item both in paintings and otherwise, pearls are a recurring feature in almost every portrait of Elizabeth and served to imply Elizabeth’s virginity and thus her connection to the ideology of the Virgin Mary. Pearls themselves are naturally occurring due to compressed irritants inside a mollusk, and perfectly formed ones were quite rare, leading to extremely high prices. In paintings of Elizabeth, the pearls are usually fantastically large in size, draped around her neck in bountiful loops, their shimmering white always evident and showcasing her wealth. However, in addition to displaying prestige, the pearls themselves appear often in poetry depicting symbols of virginity and ‘purity’ and as such easily share a parallel to the perpetual virginity of the Virgin herself. As Elizabeth aimed to develop and maintain an image of a virginal queen (though no one was certain she would “remain permanently single” until the 1580s), the use of pearls fulfilled a purpose in demonstrating both her wealth and her purity.<sup>22</sup> All portraits of the queen were carefully planned out to include a myriad of symbols, and color was essential among them-- the color of the dress, the jewelry, the background. Catherine Howey writes that “colors often held symbolic meaning, such as white, which represented virginity, and black, which symbolized constancy”.<sup>23</sup> *The Sieve Portrait of 1583*, painted halfway through her rule by Quentin Metsys the Younger, is one of the more striking uses of pearls in portraits defining the queen. It contrasts the colors black and white, with Elizabeth’s dress a liquid black emphasizing the brilliant whiteness of the pearls she wears, along with her billowing white sleeves and lace collar. The golden sieve she holds is a classical symbol from the “myth of the vestal virgin Tuccia,” according to

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<sup>21</sup> Roach, 30.

<sup>22</sup> Howey, Catherine L. "Dressing a Virgin Queen: Court Women, Dress, and Fashioning the Image of England's Queen Elizabeth I." *Early Modern Women* 4 (2009): 201-08. Web, 202.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Hackett, serving to further add to symbols of virginity.<sup>24</sup> Hazard further explains that the sieve garners meaning from Tuccia's actions, where she used the sieve to "carry water as proof of her chastity" in the "Triumph of Chastity" by Petrarch, an Italian scholar and poet. This portrait is more simplistic and muted in its natural imagery, relegating itself to highlighting the pearls, but the connotations of the portrait are virginal, nonetheless. The column on the left of the portrait contains golden medallions of scenes from Virgil's *Aeneid* about Dido, queen of Carthage, and the Trojan man Aeneas. In the medallions, Aeneas "[resists] the temptation to succumb to Dido," and this alludes to Elizabeth remaining chaste and choosing to persist as an unmarried "mother of her country in response to demands that she marry".<sup>25</sup> Though the portrait focuses more on imagery of Tuccia, this is still a virginal representation alluding to the Virgin Mary figure Elizabeth was trying to encompass through the use of natural imagery. The prevalent use of pearls in Elizabeth's portraits indicates that they hold a strong association with female purity, linking together the two ideas and feminizing nature.

Another symbol that pulls on the ties between the color white and purity is an animal, the ermine. It features in Nicholas Hilliard's painting known as the *Ermine Portrait (1585)* – where the small weasel's desirable white winter coat is pressed delicately against the buoyant black of Elizabeth's sleeve. In it, the "queen captivates the ermine of chastity" which stares up adoringly at the queen "without a tether but with a royal crown about its neck".<sup>26</sup> As the ermine signified chastity, it lent symbolic power to enhancing the queen's image without appearing too obfuscated--the animal's white coat was obvious, but the ideas of motherhood and Elizabeth earning the adoration of the animal are less so. The painting alludes to Elizabeth, a woman, being the same as an ermine due to the shared ideals of purity. The ermine, Elizabeth, and even her clothes mimic purity: exemplified by the dozens of pearls beaded into Elizabeth's dress and extravagant crown. This, therefore, indicates that like the animal, Elizabeth is equally as pure, enacting another case of "women perpetually slipping into the category of "nature"". <sup>27</sup> The concept of

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<sup>24</sup> Hackett, 240.

<sup>25</sup> Hazard, 72.

<sup>26</sup> King, 58-59.

<sup>27</sup> Scharff, 11.

motherhood is also present as the ermine looks to Elizabeth for leadership. Elizabeth is portrayed as an example of womanhood, admired by both the ermine and, implicitly, the citizens of England for her staunchness in maintaining her virginity so long into her reign.

However, another symbol lies in jarring contrast to the ermine in the bottom right corner: a sword hilt, glittering in jewels with the blade barely shown. The connotations of the man-made sword are both masculine in terms of the sexual innuendos as well as the typical display of strength and military power. The sword, pushed mostly out of view, seems to imply that though the queen proudly displays her motherly and virginal qualities, she is always poised to retaliate to threats against her and her people. In this way, the two symbols “carried the cachet of signifying both female chastity and male military might,” Hazard affirms, exhibiting the esteemed “exemplary gender-specific virtues during the Renaissance”.<sup>28</sup> This painting was created around the time that the Cult of Elizabeth started growing, where her virginity became something to be celebrated as everyone saw she would not be marrying and would have no children of her own. Despite this, the symbolism surrounding Elizabeth continued to avoid outright comparisons to the Virgin Mary in terms of an almost goddess-like worship of virginity-- if Elizabeth could not be the venerated second Virgin Mary, she at least could be God’s “earthly agent to advance the true faith” while avoiding offense to the “Catholic cults of saints”.<sup>29</sup> Through the natural and feminized ermine, the virginal pearls, and the implications of the myth of the sieve, Elizabeth could carry on benefiting from implicit comparisons to the Virgin Mary through deflection, identifying with admired classical figures like Tuccia and Diana to “forge a new Protestant iconography that looks secular”.<sup>30</sup> Just as the Virgin Mary is draped in white cloth and covers her head with an undyed hood in many paintings, Elizabeth drapes herself in pearls and claims iconography from both classical goddesses and the Virgin. The sword, however, reminds everyone around her that though she appears to define herself through idealized aspects of a gentle woman, she will not hesitate to use vicious force.

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<sup>28</sup> Hazard, 70

<sup>29</sup> Scharff, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

Though the ermine and the pelican are solely associated with women, the phoenix, featuring in yet another portrait of Elizabeth by Nicholas Hilliard, is a mythical bird that announces power just as much as rebirth. In *The Phoenix Portrait (1575)*, Elizabeth wears a large jewel with a Phoenix emblazoned on it that drapes down her neck to be almost cupped in one palm, grasping the Tudor Rose delicately between her forefinger and thumb. The phoenix stands with wings spread, tendrils of crafted gold flames below it and feathers tinged with red, depicting its mythological power of turning to ash and then rebirthing itself, a cycle of self-regeneration. The phoenix symbolism, Frye explains, was used to “[figure] the Virgin Mary as unique, virginal, and yet fertile”: unique in that the phoenix could essentially procreate self-sufficiently, similar to the Virgin Mary becoming pregnant with Christ without the necessary intercourse, and fertile in that it can repeatedly recreate itself.<sup>31</sup> Its use in defining Elizabeth derived itself from the evident virginal associations, but also added the new idea of a fertile Elizabeth, something logically at odds with the fact that Elizabeth herself had mothered no children. The phoenix is unlike the other natural symbols in its mythological quality, yet is more powerfully virginal in its representation—it is a bird of fire, tenacious and beautiful and very unlike the staid and inanimate natural objects like the rose and the pearl or the submissive ermine. And yet, despite all it can achieve, the phoenix and in turn Elizabeth are reduced to the facet of their physiology that allows them to reproduce. Elizabeth, of course, needed this for the reasons of portraying herself as a suitable leader due to her motherly qualities and also a capable leader for the care she could provide to her people. In casting Elizabeth as a “mother who receives metaphoric children from the city,” the phoenix and other symbols like it may appear to denigrate Elizabeth to “domestic roles that attempt to contain the power and voice of women”.<sup>32</sup> In this portrait, Elizabeth is bedecked in gendered natural imagery as she holds a flower associated for hundreds of years with women representing a delicate but beautiful creation of the earth. Even the way she holds the rose indicates that it is fragile, as if the stem will break at any moment. However, the resolute firmness of the phoenix, even though it is constrained to

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<sup>31</sup> Frye, Susan. *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation*. New York: Oxford UP, 1993. Print, 35.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

certain feminized qualities, still contrasts with the rose. The phoenix takes charge of its destiny and chooses to reproduce solely for and from itself, epitomizing the idea that though “her natural body was inevitably female,” to be “female was to be powerful as procreator, as mother, daughter”.<sup>33</sup> While many of the other symbols aim to reduce women and nature to something desirable and valuable in its purity, Elizabeth chose a symbol that balanced power and femininity. Though maintaining order often meant Elizabeth’s “political body was constructed within a masculinist legal tradition” and she adopted stereotypically masculine qualities to assist this, she did not only portray her femininity in submissive ways.<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth instead took charge of feminine symbols, pearls that are helpless against the tides and roses waiting to be picked, and channeled them into the strength of a phoenix, of a woman who can regenerate and create new life from itself. Without having to engage in intercourse, like the Virgin, and become married, Elizabeth begat England and her own capability from her own body and remained pure while doing so. In this way, Elizabeth is creating life in her nation, showcasing her capacity as leader, and embodying the ideal of mother of her country she consistently professed.

Despite the fact that she never had children, Elizabeth tried to maintain the fertility aspect of her persona both within her image and with the images poets and writers created about her. By the 1560s, Elizabeth’s court began to think she was putting off marriage for too long and so she entertained the idea of marriage with several foreign powers, including King Eric XIV of Sweden, the Archduke Charles of Austria, and two French princes. She took to none of them, despite dragging the marriage discussions on for years for some of the men and the countries they hailed from. By the 1570s she entered into the last marriage proposal she would have for the rest of her rule. From 1579 to 1583, “marriage negotiations between the queen and the final suitor for her hand in marriage, Francois, duc Alencon” commenced.<sup>35</sup> Problems sprouted from the fact that he was Catholic and that England would be joined with France if she died, which many of her advisors and citizens voiced strong opinions against. It was during this time that Edmund Spenser wrote the *Shepherdess Calender* (1579),

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>35</sup> King, 32.

and advanced a shift from Elizabeth as a “nubile virgin” evolving into an acceptance and praise for her as a “perpetual virgin”.<sup>36</sup> Edmund Spenser held the position of unofficial court poet for almost all of Elizabeth’s reign, and is best known for his epic poem *The Faerie Queen*, but he incorporated court politics and both critique and complements concerning Elizabeth into many of his works. *The Shepherdes Calender* is an extended poem composed of eclogues for each month of the year, all of which were pastoral poems with various characters embodying love, critiques of the church, and an adoration for the pastoral. Spenser, as heavily involved in court politics as he was, “evokes the political milieu of the Alencon courtship” in the poem based on the month of April.<sup>37</sup> By this point in time Elizabeth had ruled for over twenty years and had not yet settled on a husband. Her image shifted from a motherly figure who held the possibility of actually becoming a veritable mother to an eternal virgin. This shift replicated itself in the Cult of Elizabeth, where hopes she would marry turned into veneration of her staunch virginity. Spenser seems to fight against this shift in his April eclogue and is “central to the creation of the poetic mythology of the Virgin Queen,” depicting Spenser’s views of a yet-nubile virgin queen through the pastoral setting of nature, further mixing the ideas of virginity and feminized land.<sup>38</sup>

The April poem begins with two shepherds, Hobbinoll and Thenot, discussing Hobbinoll’s distress at losing the affections of his friend Colin, for he has fallen in love with a girl. In order to calm Hobbinoll and make him proud of his own “more excellencie and skill in poetrie,” Thenot asks Hobbinoll to recite a poem.<sup>39</sup> Hobbinoll chooses one of Colin’s poems about the queen, with Spenser stating in an epigraph that the April eclogue is “purposely intended to the honor and prayse of our most gracious souereigne”.<sup>40</sup> He begins

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>38</sup> Coles, Kimberly Anne. "'Perfect Hole': Elizabeth I, Spenser, and Chaste Productions." *English Literary Renaissance* 32.1 (2002): 31-61. Web, 43.

<sup>39</sup> Spenser, Renwick, and Renwick, W. L. *The Shepherd's Calendar*. London: Scholartis, 1930. Print. Spenser, Edmund, 1552-1599. Works; v. 3., 48.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

singing the poem of Elizabeth, referring to her as “fayre Elisa, Queene of shepherdes all”.<sup>41</sup> The specific choice of the month cannot be lost onto the readers: April, when spring has rushed in and everything is in full bloom, is a time of birth and beauty. Though Elizabeth will not have children of her own, April’s title indicates that she is still beautiful and fresh, her influence potent and continuing to spread like the new growth. In just the beginning words, the shepherds give their allegiance to the Queen of Shepherds; she is tied with the land and its animals as a guide and is praised for such worthiness. Hobbinoll then calls to the “dayntye Nymphs”-- mythological human-like women that are connected to some form of the land, such as trees or streams-- who “doe bathe your brest” in the river.<sup>42</sup> He asks them to give “blazing” praise to the queen, and beckons the “Virgins, that on Parnasse dwell” (the daughters of Memory and Apollo) to join their voices in adoration for the woman who “in her sexe doth all excell”.<sup>43</sup> These few lines contain a layered comparison and definition of the queen: she is praised as the best of her sex, esteemed above womankind and practically deified. Her beauty and magnanimity excel the cherished virgins and even the nymphs, known for their alluring temptations.

Despite being deemed better than other virgins and nymphs, Elizabeth is still included with them. Her inclusion in these groups is significant, in large part because nymphs are often depicted as female entities who live in and are part of nature. Indeed, these nymphs are alerted to praise Elizabeth while they bathe in the flowing water, and their image is immediately sexualized by their presumed naked state. Spenser uses such sensual imagery based on the implicit assumptions of what nymphs looked like in order to contrast with the aspect of the Virgins sitting on Parnasse, and Elizabeth herself. This creates a dichotomy of clearly sexualized women placed in a natural setting, with the nymphs already a part of nature and the Virgins basking with them. However, Elizabeth is physically placed above them as Hobbinoll cries “see, where she sits upon the grassie greene,” enveloping this deified Elisa with the green fertility of nature in spring. Elizabeth’s descriptions of where she sits embodies Spenser’s

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<sup>41</sup> Spenser, line 34.

<sup>42</sup> Spenser, lines 37-38.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, lines 41-45.

first allusion to his hopes that Elizabeth would finally marry.<sup>44</sup> According to Coles, the nature-based symbols of fertility “[depict] Elizabeth's virginity as a fruitful condition” and the setting of blooming spring exemplifies.<sup>45</sup> These metaphors further connect female fertility to the natural world, indicating “Western understanding of nature resembling a creative birthing process”.<sup>46</sup> The colors of green in Springtime, the nymphs connected to nature, and Elizabeth above it all intricately tie together metaphors of female fertility as the world in new growth. Roach describes this as the idea of “woman's “natural” fecundity, seen as mimicking or embodying the fecundity of Mother Nature,” and it is only in this mimicry that women can “create new human life”.<sup>47</sup> We later move into flower imagery, where Elizabeth is praised as “the flowre of Virgins, may shee florish long, / In princely plight,” a title imbued with hopes that her reign continues to be successful.<sup>48</sup> The phrase is embedded with sexual and fertile implications with the wish that she “flourish” and finally settle on the Duke of Alencon. Along with Elizabeth's presumed fertility as depicted by the wealthy green and her floral bloom, she remains desirable to suitors for the fact that she is still a virgin “without spotte”.<sup>49</sup> Here, Spenser plays on a “Mariological tag” of an ‘unspotted’ Virgin Mary, unmarred by previous sexual acts, and as such slips in even more allusions that work to enhance her religious purity.<sup>50</sup> Spenser moves on from describing Elizabeth's beauty to the obligatory mention of her goddess-like presence, her god-given rulership accentuated when he writes she is “Of heavenly race, / No mortall blemishe may her blotte”.<sup>51</sup> The language used here was often employed during Elizabeth's reign and for most other monarchs, who still claimed a God-given blessing to rule. It placed her on a pedestal beyond the mortal realm and into the heavenly. Hobbinoll continues

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, line 55.

<sup>45</sup> Coles, 44.

<sup>46</sup> Hyner, and McKenzie Stearns. *Forces of Nature Natural(-izing) Gender and Gender(-ing) Nature in the Discourses of Western Culture*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2009. Web, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Roach, 64.

<sup>48</sup> Spenser, line 48.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., line 50.

<sup>50</sup> King, 53.

<sup>51</sup> Spenser, line 54.

his compliments, and we see a return to symbols of virginity previously discussed in the portraits: the Rose and the Ermine. Elizabeth sits on the green hill wearing a brilliant scarlet dress, her allure and sensuality enhanced by the red color. However, her purity remains signified by the "Ermines white" that she also wears "like a mayden Queene".<sup>52</sup> Her womanly connection to nature presents itself in the beflowered crown she wears, full of "Damaske roses and Daffadilies...And Primroses greene" decorating the queen, so called a "sweete Violet".<sup>53</sup> All such natural imagery, rooted in a thoroughly pastoral setting and overflowing with flowers and nymphs, places this queen's womb in direct connection with nature. Despite the perceived positives of female fertility as nature in spring, the beauty in it is never for the women themselves but for the appeal to men. Her flowering physical body is portrayed as all the more appealing because she balances the fine line between seduction and potency with the red dress and virginity through references to the Virgin.

*The Discovery of Guiana* by Sir Walter Raleigh presents a different, more indirect view of Queen Elizabeth and her virgin image, while employing some evocative and gendered imagery of land itself. This book was written by Raleigh in 1596 after he fell out of favor with Elizabeth when he married one of her own ladies-in-waiting without her permission, and Raleigh "continued in disgrace and away from the court".<sup>54</sup> In an attempt to regain her favor, he decided to travel across the ocean to a region named Guiana (now Venezuela) and claim the land for his queen. He postulates that with this 'discovery', he can regain the Queen's approval by aiding her in expanding her empire and benefiting from the gold supposedly spread everywhere in the location. In his book, however, Raleigh decides to gender the land of Guiana as a woman, "sexed as a virgin female body" and uses visceral and almost shocking analogies of colonization to the loss of female virginity, of a new land as something that must be conquered by the masculine entity of England.<sup>55</sup> In the ending paragraphs of his short book directed at the queen, he states that Guiana "is a country

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., lines 57-58.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., lines 60-63.

<sup>54</sup> Montrose, Louis. "The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery." *Representations* (Berkeley, Calif.) 33 (1991): 1-41. Web, 9.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 12.

that hath yet her maidenhead, never sacked, turned, nor wrought".<sup>56</sup> The striking gendering of land as female cannot go unnoticed, and this sentence is the first of many concerning the 'taking' of a land's virginity, previously unowned by (European) men and therefore ripe for conquest. Louis Montrose in his article "The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery" describes Raleigh's gendering of land as a "protocolonialist ideology with a crude and anxious misogynistic fantasy," one of the most blatant and unmistakable instances of gendering nature as female, but with the added layer of sexualization.<sup>57</sup> Such an act of depicting a newly found land as female began occurring often during this time period, with etchings such as *America* by Theodor Galle (1600), where America reclines on a hammock as a nude woman, surprised but defenseless against the explorer Amerigo Vespucci standing before her in full cloak and armor. The masculine ideal of power and forcing oneself on a new land could only be depicted if the land were feminine, which dually indicates a strong connection in the minds of these writers and artists between conquered nature and a conquered woman.

Raleigh does not stop with crafting an America physically embodied as a woman; he alludes to the penetration of this land by the male explorers. It seems, as Kristen Brookes writes, "the pleasure of colonization" situates itself "in a moment of penetration," the veiled eroticism of a previously virginal land being forcibly changed forever.<sup>58</sup> The appeal for Guiana that Raleigh presents to Elizabeth and the men of England is not just conquest and the wealth of another country, but is coupled with the pleasure of taking it from this feminized land. To continue with the gendered natural language, Raleigh writes that the face of this land "hath not been torn, nor the virtue and salt of the soil spent by manurance," manurance meaning in the ownership of someone previously. She has never been "sacked," or raped, and has never been "entered" by another army. To him, this new land is shockingly similar to an unmarried, virginal woman; it is pure and beautiful but still alluring, conjuring up images

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<sup>56</sup> Raleigh, Sir Walter. "The Discovery of Guiana." *Project Gutenberg*, 7 Feb 2013, [www.gutenberg.org/files/2272/2272-h/2272-h.htm](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2272/2272-h/2272-h.htm).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>58</sup> Brookes, Kristen G. "A Feminine 'Writing That Conquers': Elizabethan Encounters with the New World." *Criticism (Detroit)* 48.2 (2006): 227-62. Web, 230.

of Guiana as “a powerful conjunction of the savage and the feminine”.<sup>59</sup> Guiana’s “graves have not been opened for gold,” her mines have not been pierced by hammers, she is pure and unowned by “any Christian prince”-- except now for Queen Elizabeth.<sup>60</sup> Raleigh emphasizes the tantalizing act of taking the land’s virginity because she presents a challenge: with “impassable mountains” creating a boundary impossible to penetrate, Guiana taunts them with the virgin soil and the prospect of being the first to ‘own’ it.<sup>61</sup> The implications here allude to rape: the land, a woman, has not been forcibly ‘used,’ thus allowing this land to be claimed in the same name as Raleigh’s queen, a Virgin. In fact, Brookes acknowledges much the same, where this history of the conquest of Guiana is a guise for a man taking delight in “in exploring a virginal body of land,” taking “possession of “her” through an act of seizure figured as penetration”.<sup>62</sup> She is correct in noting the strange contrast between the virgin aspect of the land of Guiana, and the act of taking her as an act of rape and “possession”. The fact that she has not been taken before makes her all the more appealing, and because she is defenseless as a pure land, there is nothing she can do to defend against invaders like Raleigh and Elizabeth’s army. This female virginity attributed to a land mass further compounds the strange fantasy of stealing such virginity, with her allure predicated on the idea that she is wild and therefore must be tamed, ‘de-savaged’ and de-natured.

Other records of the discovery of Guiana also demonstrate a similarly sexual nature even in their non-poetic structure, with one of Raleigh’s boatman, Keymis, remarking that the land takes on a sexual nature and ‘prostitutes’ itself before them, laid open for the taking and therefore wholly female to the explorers.<sup>63</sup> Guiana, Keymis writes, opens her fruitful lands to them, easily a metaphor for her legs, and she appears to the explorers like “a faire and beautifull woman, in the pride and floure of desired yeeres”.<sup>64</sup> Both Raleigh and his shipmate feel the compelling impulse to picture the land as a woman, but not just a woman: no, she is stunning in her rolling green hills, they find

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<sup>59</sup> Montrose, *Gender in Discovery* 5.

<sup>60</sup> Raleigh.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Brookes, 227.

<sup>63</sup> Brookes, 232.

<sup>64</sup> Montrose, *Gender in Discovery* 18.

fertility in her fruit-bearing trees. All of these attributes culminate in both the explorers describing Guiana as a desirable woman, exhibiting the pervasive desire to gender nature as female due to the ability of humans, or men, to take it and make it their own. Another layer is added with the idealization of fertility in nature as comparable to female fertility: the ability of trees, crops, the sea to produce food, nutrients, and life is like the womb of a woman, holding the power to create life as well. The muddling of respect for nature's potency and delight at the ability to conquer it, however, stands clear with the key word of prostituting, demonstrating that despite Guiana's beautiful appearance she is still just a body to be taken.

The ending paragraphs of the *Discoverie* seem so dredged in sexual connotations and gendered nature that one almost forgets it is directed towards the monarch of England: a woman. Raleigh continues on with his adulation at finding this new land, ending with his hopes that "this Empire is made known to her Majesty by her own vassal" and that she recognizes his efforts to bring her glory and expand her reign. Raleigh even adds that the name of Elizabeth, the "name of a virgin," will reach the Amazon women, proving with finality that the reach of her power will best these mythically warrior-like women both in how the queen "defends" her own lands and neighbors but also how she "invade[s] and conquer[s]" such "great empires" as them.<sup>65</sup> However, looking closely at the virginal imagery in this poem we see that the aspect of virginity Raleigh attributes to Guiana cannot be the same attributed to Elizabeth and yet it still strives to in some ways. Elizabeth, while still often referred to as the mother of England and the persona of her land, still maintains a powerful and monarchical image: one that is presented in more masculine terms. However, Guiana is a feminized land and yet Raleigh characterizes her as willing to be conquered, her maidenhead in essence taken by a woman. Elizabeth is, in fact, the one taking possession of Guiana if she chooses to do so, and *she* will be the one sending men to penetrate Guiana. This sets up a parallel wherein the Virgin Queen defies the gendered imagery of a female land by being the one to take the land, a typically masculine role. Elizabeth perpetuates the virgin themes of the new land and at the same time affirms her own image by renaming Guiana to 'Virginia'. The historian William Camden recalls that they renamed her "'in honour

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<sup>65</sup> Rayleigh.

of Queen Elizabeth, a virgin," further restructuring the land as both female and valued by her virginity.<sup>66</sup> Brookes observes this as "relationship between two bodies figured as female virgins;" one where Elizabeth is "identical with her island realm" and this "New World" is a "vast expanse of "virgin" terrain".<sup>67</sup> The name 'Virginia' encapsulates this, allowing Elizabeth to extend her reach and her name while it traps Guiana in a cycle of prized purity and changes to dominating conquest.

The dichotomy between the Virgin Queen being both a female virgin and the agent who penetrates Guiana paints itself in bolder strokes in a poem called "De Guiana, carmen Epicum" by George Chapman. The poem, written in 1596 towards the very end of Elizabeth's life, depicts this conundrum even further and with aggressively gendered language. Chapman, known for his masculine plays of conquest, writes the poem as a friend of Raleigh's with the purpose of flattering the queen and placing Raleigh in more positive light as at this point he has failed to regain Elizabeth's approval. "De Guiana, carmen Epicum," in contrast to the *Discoverie of Guiana*, figures the conquest of Guiana at the behest of Elizabeth in masculine terms while Guiana remains female. Its focus flows with obvious addresses to the queen, the language molding the queen into a masculine ruler and accentuating the glory and prestige that comes with Elizabeth becoming a mother and leader to a new land-- one "for all th' world to envy".<sup>68</sup> Brookes describes the change in tone as Chapman expressing dissatisfaction with the image of England as a "chaste female body" as it has shifted into with some of the discourse on the queen.<sup>69</sup> Chapman vies to include masculine descriptions of Elizabeth as conqueror while battling with her feminine side in his poem, but begins by contrasting the war-like nature of finding a new civilization with the sacrificial wounding of Elizabeth. By cutting "[open] most tenderly her aged throat," he writes, the "Eliza-consecrated sword" of Raleigh's discovery enables Elizabeth to regenerate her image and her power.<sup>70</sup> Chapman already depicts the

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<sup>66</sup> Montrose, *Gender in Discovery* 8.

<sup>67</sup> Brookes, 227.

<sup>68</sup> Chapman, George. *The Works of George Chapman*. England: Chatto and Windus, 1875-1892, 1892. Web, line 2.

<sup>69</sup> Brookes, 233.

<sup>70</sup> Chapman, lines 11, 14.

act of conquering a new land in masculine, violent terms—the power necessary to conquer is not compassionate and fair, but rather one that cuts and slices the throat, as if this is the only way to claim a new land. Elizabeth’s body, as one who has never created offspring, has “flesh of brass” and “ribs of steel:” none of the components making up this aged queen’s body are natural, but instead are metals forged by people.<sup>71</sup> However, the power itself must be feminized and legitimized by the blood of the older queen: she offers her final fertility in the act of blessing this new land they claim dominion over through the shedding of her blood. The act of cutting Elizabeth’s throat with a sword also lends to the innuendo of masculine domination, the bloody penetration of a woman by the pointed weapon. The convoluted male-female terminology continues as Chapman employs the use of a masculine nature analogy to describe the act of controlling the monarchy and amassing wealth through a mythological reference—because Elizabeth already shed blood, the conquest itself is bloodless and “like Jove’s eagle,” the monarchy now can rest on Elizabeth’s hand.<sup>72</sup> Jove is the Roman name for the king of the gods, his eagle a messenger of his power and now the symbol of how far the reaches of Elizabeth’s England stretch. Not only is the queen compared to a male god, and the most powerful Roman deity at that, the text introduces the new nature symbol of the eagle. However, the eagle deviates from the typically feminized and ‘pure’ animals Elizabeth has typically been compared to and instead manifests a creature of imposing, war-like potential. Chapman almost seems to be implying in his poem the idea that world powers can only be powerful if they are masculine and conquering a personified female land is one way to achieve it.

The buildup of masculine imagery for Elizabeth turns sharply into beautiful and feminized imagery of Guiana herself, enabling the strong distinction between England and the land it conquers. Guiana is a land whose feet dig deep into the dirt of gold mines, whose delicate forehead taps against the “roof of stars” as she stretches tall and beautiful in front of England and its explorers. In contrast to Raleigh’s Guiana, Chapman’s Guiana presents herself before the country of England as a coquettish young woman, overtly wanting England, and in essence Elizabeth, to come ashore. Instead of

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, line 17.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

passively awaiting her fate, she stands on “her tip-toes at fair England looking,” bows her head over her “mighty” but conquered breast and ultimately demonstrates “every sign of all submission making”.<sup>73</sup> This Guiana is a land begging to be taken, proffering her appealing presence to what Chapman expects to be a world power, and because of this she is seen as all the more alluring.

The conflation between Elizabeth as kingly leader and Elizabeth as mother continues in the poem, describing a queen who churns her brass flesh into life-blood and becomes mother and sister to Guiana. Elizabeth’s failure to produce heirs turns out to no longer be an issue because Guiana offers herself to be the queen’s “sister, and the daughter” of “our most sacred maid,” an heir and offspring not yet known to England under Elizabeth’s reign.<sup>74</sup> Elizabeth, though childless, can take Guiana and shape her, with motherly love, from a land of “savage corruption held / In barbarous chaos” to a newly reformed and docile woman.<sup>75</sup> This displays the tendency of the stereotypical masculinity of ruling to impose itself on conquered lands, especially when they are depicted as feminine and wild. There seems to be a necessity to quell the free nature of women and is evident in the quelling of Guiana in Chapman’s poem. Nature that is not initially gendered is forced into gendered language to satisfy this conquering demand. In the motherly aspect, however, the queen’s staunch refusal to have children and remain a virgin is a blessing. Her “barrenness” sows the “fruit of virtue,” and her limbs reach like trees to blossom with the offspring of Guiana and England.<sup>76</sup> This great queen becomes the tamer of nature whilst also becoming nature herself; she bends the ‘savage’ land to submission through a metaphorical fruitfulness of her womb yielding produce.

The figure of what Elizabeth becomes to Guiana reflects both masculine and feminine sides, depicting what Montrose defined as the “androgynous personal symbolism” often found alongside the queen.<sup>77</sup> In Chapman’s poem, this symbolism is abundant and represents the way in which poets and writers attempted to masculinize the queen’s rule as if to say that a woman, if she is to rule,

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Chapman, line 33.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., lines 39-40.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., lines 34-35.

<sup>77</sup> Montrose, *Gender in Discovery* 14.

must adhere to kingly values and descriptions. Chapman writes that Elizabeth would become Guiana's "father, mother," that Elizabeth would be the womb from which this land is birthed anew but also the stricter, dominating father-figure. The queen blows breath into the sails of a fleet destined to sail towards Guiana, and her "princely fount" flows with promised victory that will eradicate the failed attempts of the Spaniards in the New World.<sup>78</sup> Here, the queen demonstrates military capabilities and what Chapman hopes is a decisive maneuver for global power and to crush the influence of England's long-time enemies, Spain. However, Chapman goes on to describe in metaphorical phrases what natural sources Elizabeth's power is similar to, all coded with male pronouns in stark contrast to Guiana's female pronouns. He begs Elizabeth to be unlike a "violent wind" who "tombs his wasteful bravery" but rather for her to conquer the world like a smooth river, the "further he extends, the greater he grows".<sup>79</sup> While Guiana's golden breasts bow in submission to England, England itself and by consequence its ruler, flood into the world with a purely masculine force. It is unclear why Chapman felt the need to attribute male pronouns to the winds and rivers in this poem, but it suggests the gaping difference in power dynamics between the weaponized country of England and the 'savage' yet sensual Guiana. Elizabeth as a woman comforts Guiana as a motherly stand-in; Elizabeth, as a ruler, spreads forth her powers to subjugate the New World in the position of a father. Chapman even uses masculine sexual terms to describe the moment Chapman envisions of the queen granting Raleigh permission to bring more forces to Guiana. Her "ears and thoughts in steep amaze / erected," she considers the proposition, thus advancing the language of penetration where Elizabeth is masculinized with erect body parts.<sup>80</sup>

The object Chapman instigates Elizabeth to enter is, of course, nature, and while he utilized masculine imagery for the specifics of nature used to depict Elizabeth's political and military power, nature itself remains feminine. When Chapman rolls out the carpets in plaintively asking Elizabeth to extend her hand to Guiana, he claims that Nature desperately needs that hand through the heroic help of Raleigh. "How is nature at her heart corrupted," Chapman asks, now

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<sup>78</sup> Chapman, line 71.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 75-83.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, line 223-224.

that sense has left her, leading nature to “need incitements to her / good” from the explorer himself.<sup>81</sup> The relationship between nature and man shifts from Guiana and the queen’s motherly self to Guiana and Raleigh. The sentences weave sexual connotations throughout, mentioning the untamed lust of the feminized nature and the necessary “gentle applications” the heroic Raleigh must make to both tame nature and smooth over the queen’s ire at him.<sup>82</sup> Guiana’s purity is so valued because it can yet be corrupted, and the queen’s ‘ownership’ over Guiana notwithstanding, Raleigh will continue to desire the conquest of land as woman.

During this period of conquest, England and Elizabeth sent out a number of “‘sea dogs,’ corsairs, and rovers” to explore, or more accurately colonize, various parts of North America including the east and west coasts.<sup>83</sup> To further solidify Elizabeth’s powerful presence expanding over the world, a painting now known as the “Ditchley Portrait” was commissioned to be painted by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger in 1592, about 10 years before her death. The painting is, for once, devoid of naturalistic imagery like ermines or phoenixes and instead features an aged yet regal Elizabeth standing confidently atop a map of England. Her feet are “near Ditchley in the county of Oxfordshire,” the districts divided into different colors with rivers like blue veins running throughout the country.<sup>84</sup> Elizabeth’s dress is pure white with large jewels sewn throughout, and despite the lack of animal representations, the queen still heavily reinforces her virginal imagery while she straddles England, creating a unique dynamic of hyper-feminism within the masculinist tradition of ruling and conquering. Indeed, Elizabeth wears a coronet adorned with pearls, continuing the tradition of pearls as virginal imagery. Ropes of pearls drape the queen’s neck and Labriola notes that she also wears a “virgin-knot of pearls draped at the center” of her stomach,<sup>85</sup> the virgin-knot being one strand of pearls tied into a knot in the middle. The knot is, of course, indicative of Elizabeth’s virginity tightly

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 171, 177-178.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, line 188.

<sup>83</sup> Albert C. Labriola. "Painting and Poetry of the Cult of Elizabeth I: The Ditchley Portrait and Donne's "Elegie: Going to Bed"." *Studies in Philology* 93.1 (1996): 42-63. Web, 42.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

controlled by her own volition, indicating that even so late in her reign, the Virgin Queen is still upholding her initial claims to purity.

However, the virginal imagery in this portrait starts to deviate from previous paintings through forceful imagery of England beneath the queen's feet and the skies splitting into two faces: the left side a sunny day with dappled clouds, and the right side dark, murky storm with lightning and rain coalescing. The sky perhaps is one of the most apt depictions of the contrast between the virginal, pure queen and the idea of a powerful conqueror that Elizabeth started to shift into as she sent England's ships to take over other lands. As her empire expanded, Elizabeth's body transitioned into a "paradoxical notion" where her body was both "self-contained" and feminine while also used to "express...England's imperial ambitions".<sup>86</sup> Her body becomes both impenetrable in her virginity and impenetrable as an embodiment of her nation, the portrait further building what Montrose calls her "androgynous personal symbolism—her kingly rule".<sup>87</sup> There are many small ships sailing along the coast of England or entering its rivers on the map, a "process and progress of discovery" where the queen's godlike body becomes capable of penetrating other nations.<sup>88</sup> In this Ditchley portrait, we observe the tonal shift of Elizabeth into a rather androgynous power, her purity still a strong component of her position as queen but now embellished with the masculine tradition of expansion and power. In fact, the inscription to the right of Elizabeth in the shadowed, stormy half of the painting writes that Elizabeth is "more glorious and powerful than the forces of nature which are pictured: sun, earth, thunder, ocean".<sup>89</sup> Elizabeth, along with tying symbolism of the Virgin Mary back into her portraits also connects her body simultaneously with the land itself—standing over England as its protector and mother—but also as a power of her own. She embodies the aspects of Mother Nature that protect and encourage growth and at the same time the "masculine strength of her body politic—a strength deriving from the love of her people".<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Brooks, 251.

<sup>87</sup> Montrose, *Gender in Discovery* 14.

<sup>88</sup> Labriola, 46.

<sup>89</sup> Hazard, 79.

<sup>90</sup> Montrose, *Elizabethan Subject* 28.

Now Elizabeth is not simply being praised for her virginity as we saw in Spenser's poem or the delicate nature presented in some portraits, no, she can present her gender and her physical nature as a human as mutable, one where she retains her virginity and another where she fuses her body with land to become its protectress, making what was open to invasion due to the simple nature of her physiology into an impossibility. Elizabeth, like the sky in the Ditchley portrait, is splitting herself in two: a feminine or masculine side, a human or naturalistic side. She sends out the ships with magnanimous decision but also becomes the "the celestial body on which explorers direct their compasses," embarking on a new ideology where the nature is de-feminized by the violence of conquest and invasion and yet hyper-feminized by the portrayal of Elizabeth's womanly body as akin to Mother Nature. In this way, Elizabeth flipped the gendering of nature that was typically subdued and pure when associated with women and repurposed a masculine view of conquering feminine nature, creating a new and subversive gendering of nature.

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