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Introduction

When studying the English language, combined with English literature, one cannot fail to notice the importance of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in the history of England. Elizabethan England simply should not be missed by somebody interested in English culture. A 'cultured person' of today would, for instance, inevitably be familiar with some of the works of Shakespeare¹ and Marlowe, who lived during this period. Because English has established itself as a global *lingua franca*, the fact that people all over the world are somehow familiar with Elizabethan England could also be described as a global phenomenon. Another phenomenon is the spreading of English and American films all over the planet, probably connected with the hegemony of the English language. That English is so dominant can be traced back to the discovery and settling of the New World, which falls under the period of the sixteenth century. The English speaking world thus celebrates that era as the so called "Golden Age".

It is therefore not surprising, that the time and its monarch have become a widely explored topic in film. I was astonished to find out that the 'screen career' of the Queen started as early as 1912. She then reappeared within the time span of one or two decades and nowadays, thanks to television, all the more in TV series. This research paper tries to analyze the phenomenon of the Queen on screen. Why is the Queen such a popular icon in film? How is she portrayed? Does the portrayal attempt to recreate the monarch and her period or does she serve as a mere icon for films that attribute completely new meanings to her? The films analyzed in depth are *Les amours de la reine Élisabeth* (1912) by Louis Mercanton and Henri Desfontaines, *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* (1939)

¹ The merchandizing of the works of Shakespeare has been referred to as "Bardbiz," a term coined by Terence Hawkes, as explored in Hodgdon and reviewed by Maurer (277).

by Michael Curtiz, *The Virgin Queen* (1955) by Henry Koster, and finally *Elizabeth* (1998) and *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007) by Shekhar Kapur.

As the Queen is a cultural icon in film, it was clear that this research would belong to the field of cultural studies. One essential problem of cultural studies is that the data analyzed is constructed and serves specific functions which are intended to influence its audience. Later generations, however, try to draw conclusions about a specific period through looking at these artifacts, without a clear knowledge of their original intention and purpose. Therefore the analysis of earlier periods cannot but depend on certain assumptions. I like to quote Jonathan Culler, who described this essential problem.

Cultural studies dwells in the tension between the analyst's desire to analyze culture as a set of codes and practices that alienates people from their interests and creates the desires that they come to have and, on the other hand, the analyst's wish to find in popular culture an authentic expression of value. (Culler 45)

Film is always a product of its respective time, created by people that are influenced by the world they live in and its prevailing values and attitudes. Directors make assumptions about past periods in their portrayal of the Queen, attributing new meanings to her. The films rely on sources like portraits of the Queen and her period in order to be able to create the appropriate mise-en-scène, an important aspect of this research. These portraits are not 'mere images' of the Queen, but have intended meanings to be explored in this paper. That is why my research draws on the theoretical findings of the study of meaning, called semiotics. To begin with, I want to explore the system that lying behind the cultural signifier Queen Elizabeth I in regards to cultural identity for the English nation.

A) Why Elizabeth? – The System of Culture and the Construction of National Identity

One crucial event in the history of England was the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. At that time Spain was considered to be the most powerful nation in the Western hemisphere, especially due to its naval force and linked to that its economic power, resulting from colonizing and exploiting the natural resources of South America. The Spanish King, Philipp II, a devout Catholic, was faithful to the Pope and thus dissatisfied with the fact that the island north of Spain was ruled by a Protestant monarch. The Catholic hopes rested with the Scottish Queen Mary Stuart, descended also from the French Royal house of Guise, through Mary's mother. After the execution of Mary, Philipp felt bound to take action and thus started his great "Enterprise of England," which failed and thus led to England's succession as an important naval power and colonizer of the New World, which led to economic prosperity. The Protestant monarch during whose era England managed to gain and establish its independence from the continent was the Tudor Queen Elizabeth I. During her reign English creativity flourished especially in literature, thanks to geniuses like Christopher Marlowe, Edward Spenser, and of course William Shakespeare. The era is thus often referred to as a Golden Age in England's history and celebrated when it comes to boosting national pride. It is therefore not surprising that representations of the Virgin Queen reappear throughout English history as the person symbolizing the beginnings of England's powerful position in world politics. The cultural artifact is therefore cultivated in twentieth as well as twenty-first century film.

In *Theories of Performance*, Elizabeth Bell (116) approaches the question what culture actually means by pointing to the word's Latin origin "cultura", which corresponds to the English "cultivation" or "tending," primarily designating agricultural practices. The metaphorical image of tending a field by practicing certain fixed rituals that have been passed on from generation to generation is very similar to what happens when passing on

cultural heritage in the form of history education and tradition. The knowledge about technical procedures of the cultivation of crops is replaced by the knowledge of certain historic events and personae, as is the case in the tradition of creating and transforming English history by remembering crucial historic personae like Queen Elizabeth I, William Shakespeare, and events of that time such as the English fending off the attack of the Spanish Armada. Similar to agriculture, cultural heritage is subject to changes, either through technological inventions and/or through alterations in tradition and expansion as well as the reduction of knowledge; for instance, the true nature of a living person cannot be fully represented, and the historic *Zeitgeist* might become less comprehensible over time, the representation and interpretation of events and personae get altered over time. In Bell's words culture is both "traditional" and "creative" (116).

On the basis of Clifford Geertz², Bell points to the semiotic approach to culture. She argues in accordance with Geertz:

Systems of meaning, signification, and symbol use are central to both patterned conduct and individual frames of mind. Culture is a symbolic system unique to humans in which meanings are publicly shared and the collective property of a group. (Bell 117)

The importance of the Renaissance period for the construction of English identity can be described as being part of a system of meaning behind the preservation of English heritage, which is present in the mind of the individual just as much as it is used in public display as, for example, in mass media like popular film. Approaching culture structurally, one searches for patterns and rules. It can be seen as a rule of English heritage to be familiar with certain events and people that occurred and lived during and after the reign of Elizabeth I, such as the defeat of the Armada (1588) and the life and creative period of William Shakespeare (1556-1616). Such collective properties of culture are then

² Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

institutionalized³ in that they are preserved as cultural artifacts via books and oral lecture in cultural locations of preservation like universities and museums, also in the media and modern film.

Like Bell, Doris Teske describes one approach to analyzing culture via identifying a “System von homologenen Strukturen” (22), which started with Tylor in 1871.

It is with the discovery of patterns of a characteristic kind that any useful cultural analysis begins, and it is with the relationships between these patterns, which sometimes reveal unexpected identities and correspondences in hitherto separately considered activities, sometimes again reveal discontinuities of an unexpected kind, that general cultural analysis is concerned. (Williams quoted in Teske 22)

In the depiction of the Queen on screen it can already be seen as a pattern that the Queen regularly reappears as a topic in popular film. Furthermore, there are many similarities in what concerns the themes within these films, which can be attributed to intermediality. In this research it is, for example, the topic of the aging woman or the triangle relationship that is present in the version of Henry Koster (1955) and reused by Shekhar Kapur in 2007. A definitely reoccurring motive is the treatment of “love in the context of power”⁴, and the inability to combine these two for the woman in power in the films analyzed in this paper. It would be an interesting comparison if that were also a topic in biopics of male monarchs, which I invite researchers to look at. The situation of a woman being the head of state is something rather uncommon in the course of history and might therefore be one of the reasons why the Queen reappears so often on screen.

This leads to an interesting aspect of the role of gender. In 16th century England, it was supposed to be the first son, who was to inherit the crown of his father. A fact that heavily plagued Elizabeth’s father Henry VIII, was

³ In Chapter 5: “Performing Culture”, Elizabeth Bell [a]pproaches Studying Culture by identifying a subjective, a structural, an institutional and a dialectical approach (117-118).

⁴ description used by Shekhar Kapur on the Bonus-material interview in *The Golden Age* DVD

that he suffered from not producing a male heir and therefore tried to get rid of his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, to marry a younger woman, Anne Boleyn, still capable of bearing children. When that did not work out, he ordered her decapitation and married her lady-in-waiting Jane Seymour instead. Although dying with the belief of leaving his kingdom to his son Edward VI, the latter reigned only for six years and died of tuberculosis which left the Tudor throne vacant to Edward's half sisters Mary and Elizabeth (with a short intermezzo of nine days by Lady Jane Grey) and thus in the hands of women. It seems somewhat ironic that the Tudor throne was finally inherited by women after the entire struggle Henry VIII underwent in splitting with Rome and marrying six times, all motivated by securing the succession that could only be guaranteed through a male heir. Gender does play a role when talking about a female monarch and cannot be neglected here when talking about the Queens on screen, as it led to an important motivation for self-propaganda, as the Queen tried to rectify and popularize her right as God's anointed Queen, despite the fact that this right was usually granted only to men. It also explains the need for new imagery, which the unmarried Queen created by promoting herself as Virgin Queen, a fact that helped her both in keeping royal suitors at bay as well as justifying her image as Protestant monarch set apart through the symbol of virginity that had already been greatly cultivated by Catholicism in worshipping the Virgin Mary, mother of Christ. The signifier was already there and thus refilled with a new signified. The Queen, instead of getting married and producing heirs, which used to be the "job description" of a Queen at the time, remained single and fashioned herself as mother of England instead.

1. Royalty and Identity

In *Cultural Studies: Great Britain*, Doris Teske devotes a whole chapter⁵ to Queen Elizabeth I as an example of monarchy contributing to identity feelings within a nation. She sees the monarchy as being the key institution to unite the former kingdoms of England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland to the United Kingdom of Great Britain. This unified identity feeling she believes to be acquired from a common writing of history, in which the monarchy and the Royal families (houses) play a crucial role. She describes the annual Christmas speech of the present Queen Elizabeth II as being the “symbolic manifestation” (Teske 87) of this sovereignty. She finds it important to note that today, in contrast to the sixteenth century, the monarchy occupies primarily a symbolic rather than political function.

Through the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 this British identity has been widely acknowledged, as Teske argues, first of all by the unity of the nation as highlighted by pointing to common rather than local or regional heritage. Secondly, a major focus is given to the heart of the monarchy in Southeastern England. Furthermore, the hierarchical and patrimonial principles are highlighted. The continuity of the British political system is stressed and certain institutions are supposed to be legalized through their age. Finally, in what concerns foreign policy, the British monarchy serves as a symbol of differentiation to the continent. (cf. Teske 87/88)

The functions of the monarchy can be traced back to the early modern age, in particular the Tudor dynasty and the reign of Elizabeth I, as Teske suggests. She claims that historians regard the political system of the Tudor monarchs and their ways of securing power as essential to the further development of Great Britain. In the general perception of history,

⁵ page 86 ff

Teske sees the Tudor monarchy being viewed as the unifying period of the British nation and thus important for the National identity:

Diese Geschichtstradition ist eng mit der Selbstdarstellung der Tudor-Dynastie und mit der Nutzung des Tudor-Mythos durch nachfolgende politische Eliten verbunden. Schließlich etabliert sich mit der Selbstinszenierung der Tudor-Monarchen ein (metaphorischer) Raum, in dem die Kontinuität einer Nationalkultur konstruiert wird. (Teske 88)

The Tudor Myth simplifies history in order to fit into an ideology intended to create national unity. Henry Tudor (VII) ended the War of the Roses by marrying Elizabeth of York, thereby uniting the two rivaling houses (Lancaster and York). After the death of their oldest son, the Prince of Wales, Arthur, the second son, Henry, married his brother's widow Catherine of Aragon and ascended the throne as Henry VIII. Henry VIII is often described as the embodiment of a Renaissance prince (cf. Teske 88). Both Henrys, father and son, followed the medieval idea that the king represents the State and thus promoted the representation of their persona through iconic portraits, the son famously set in scene by Hans Holbein the Younger.

Teske states an interesting observation in that the Reformation changed the common belief that oblate and wine would not be transformed literally into the body and blood of Christ, but rather remain symbols thereof. This reformed belief had a major impact on the perception of the monarch who had formally been viewed as literal embodiment of the body of State and was now regarded as (just) symbolizing the nation (cf. Teske 89). The representational importance of the monarch is evident in the numerous representations of the Queen in portraits.

As symbol for the emerging Tudor propaganda, Henry VII introduced the Tudor rose⁶, a unification of the White Rose of York, thanks to his marriage to Elizabeth of York, after whom his granddaughter was named, and the Red Rose of Lancaster from where the Tudors were supposed to

⁶ cf. Langenscheidts Enzyklopädisches Wörterbuch der englischen und deutschen Sprache 1545

descend. The rose still features in the emblem of the Royal Coat of Arms of the United Kingdom and the Coat of Arms of Canada and is commonly used to represent England. It is furthermore a major element in the depiction of the Queen in portraits, as she herself is represented as the impersonate version of the red and white Tudor rose in the famous Ditchley portrait as symbolized through her red wig and white complexion. So it was the body itself that became the screen for representations of the "Fairie Queen".

Prescribed rites around the monarch were staged publicly and intended as counterparts to church ceremonies after processions were abolished in 1547 and Miracle Plays came out of fashion. Representations of the monarch were promoted on woodcarvings, coins and so called *broadsheets* (cf. Teske 90). Furthermore, music and literature helped to popularize the monarch.

Teske finds reasons for the striking importance of the Elizabethan image-cultivation in the insecurity in what concerns Elizabeth's succession.

Both historical and dramatic writing, however, to say nothing of parliamentary debate, reveal that, since succession to the throne was for a long time not established, there was a deep sense of the dangers of dynastic insecurity, occasioned in part by the fact that a woman sat on the throne. (Pocock 1985: 289 quoted in Teske 90)

This threat to the throne was not just immanent from within the country but also by threats from outside, as is proved by the attack of the Spanish Armada in 1588.

Teske, too, sees the popularity of screening the Queen in contemporary film partially as a result of the excessive self-representation of the Queen during her reign. The Queen travelled a lot through the land, also to financially ruin potential rivals who according to social convention had to host her with feasts and great celebration. Annual tournaments were held to celebrate the Queen's accession: The ACCESSION DAY (November 17th):

In Erwartung von Gunstbeweisen entwarfen und präsentierten die Teilnehmer zu Beginn des Turniers zu Gefallen der Königin

verschiedene Sinnbilder für und von Elizabeth: In jährlich wechselnden Kostümen, mit sinnbildlichen Namen und passenden Wappen wurde die Königin als Herrin des Turniers gefeiert. (Teske 92)

The Queen was praised in medieval chivalries and allegorical names like “Tuchia, Diana, Selene, Cynthia, Belphoebe, Astraea, Gloriana” were attributed to her. She was rendered immortal in Renaissance literature through Sidney’s *The New Arcadia* and Spenser’s *The Faerie Queen* (1590-96), a national epic poem in which the Queen is referred to via allegorical figures like Belphoebe and Una drawn from the classics, similar to what happens in the portraits depicting the Queen, discussed below, as they draw on associations with classical figures as well as medieval imagery, for example, the virgin Tuchia and the mythical bird Phoenix.

2. Portraits – Iconic portrayal of the Queen during the Renaissance

Doris Teske states that portraits were either partially commissioned by the state or were gifts to the Queen from her favorites, which date around 1580-1590. Furthermore, it is important to note that portraits portraying the fifty to sixty year old monarch are not intended to be realistic but very abstracted, rather following an ideal of geometry in portraiture. There is a tendency of idealization of the aged Queen by making her look young and immortal, thereby creating a mask for the afterworld. This could be compared to what is practiced today in alterations of photos through Photoshop to create idealized images of older stars like Madonna in popular culture, for instance. It is thematically taken up also in film as the Queen is contemplating her advancing age in three of the films analyzed in this paper.

Portraiture occupied a central role in the creation and dissemination of royal imagery as practiced by the Habsburgs, Tudor, and Valois rulers during the second half of the sixteenth century. (Dalton 178)

After Henry VIII's break with the Catholic Church in Rome, religious imagery was on the decline and increased the importance of iconic depiction of the monarchs. The Queen's images appeared on medallions, awarded to deserving subjects. An example thereof would be the famous Drake Jewel. This jewel was a gift to Sir Francis Drake for his achievements in the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. A similar token was rewarded to Sir Francis Walsingham, as the Queen liked to thank those that had rendered special services to England. The medallion includes the Queen's portrait painted by Nicholas Hilliard and is prominently displayed in portraits of Sir Francis Drake, proving his loyalty to his Queen. Daron C. C. Dalton suggests an interesting analysis of the Drake Jewel, which I want to explore in this paper in order to show how important the mythology of the antiquity were in the construction of Elizabeth's status as national icon and why she becomes associated with the Golden Age.

The front of the jewel shows two heads in profile. The one in front is a black emperor, and the one behind it depicts a white woman. Dalton believes that the black emperor represents Saturn and the woman behind him the virgin Astraea.

Of all the symbols deployed by the artists and writers who portrayed Elizabeth, the one that identified her most cogently as the incarnation of the renovation was the just, imperial virgin Astraea. With Astraea the Virgin returns the reign of Saturn, eternal peace, purified religion, and endless well-being and wealth for her subjects. In portraits after 1579 [, it is] coupled with the world globe, another symbol of Elizabeth's imperial aspirations. (Dalton 186)

In Roman mythology, Saturn is the father of the gods, the equivalent of Kronos in Greek mythology. Saturn was dethroned by his son Jupiter, i.e. Zeus in Greek, who then became king of the Gods. Saturn, eventually, escaped to Italy and his reign came to be known as the 'Golden Age'.

The symbolism of Roman mythology was connected with the science of alchemy which Dalton supposes, Elizabeth was well familiar with because of her affinity with Dr. Dee, a prominent alchemist of her time. His persona is represented in modern film. Dr. Dee appears as an important advisor

before the defeat of the Spanish Armada in Kapur's *The Golden Age*. The science of alchemy was partly concerned with the possibility of normal metal being transformed into silver and gold. The basis of this transformation was the discovery of the Philosopher's Stone. Dalton refers to a manuscript from the 14th century which suggests the appearance of the Philosopher's Stone simultaneously with the Resurrection of Christ. The same manuscript mentions the return of the Golden Age with Saturn's reign in Italy.

Alchemists discerned in the cycle of Saturn consuming, retaining, and regurgitating his children a parallel to the stages of the alchemical process. (Dalton 199)

The first stage they identified was the time of blackness, associated with Saturn, the *nigredo*:

i.e., the time when hermetic matter, having been placed the vessel, becomes melted pitch. [...] The blackness is a result of dissolution [...]. During the blackness or the reign of Saturn, according to the Philosophers, the soul of gold unites with mercury. Consequently, they call this Saturn the King's tomb or the Sun's tomb. This is when the reign of the Gods begins because Saturn is considered the father of the gods. This is in effect the Golden Age since the matter which became black contains within it the aurific principle and the gold of the Sages. (Dalton 199)⁷

The second very important stage was associated with white and called the *albedo*. During this stage, simpler metal would be transformed into silver. Silver was the metal associated with the virgin goddess Diana. This image served Elizabeth, who came to be known as the Virgin Queen. In what concerns the Drake Jewel, Dalton suggests that the white phase is symbolized through the Virgin Astraea, the white head behind the black head of Saturn. In film, silver is the dominant color that Kapur uses in his final depiction of Elizabeth in *Elizabeth* of 1998. Elizabeth transforms herself into the divine icon of the Virgin Queen, inspired by the Virgin

⁷ Antoine-Joseph Pernety, *Les fables égyptiennes et grecques dévoilées et réduites au même principe, avec une explication des hieroglyphes et de la guerre de Troie* (Paris, 1786) vol. I, p. 570, quoted in Lennep, *Alchimie*, p. 305; (Dalton's translation)

Mary. It is probably no coincidence that her final appearance at the film's end is dominated by white and silver.

The third stage is known as the red phase, called *rubedo*. In this phase red elixir transmutes metals into gold. Dalton believes that the phoenix, illustrated on the back of the Drake Jewel represents this third phase of alchemy.

The **phoenix** gets special attention in Elizabethan imagery because it is a mythological bird that rises back to life from its own ashes every five hundred years. In Christianity it became to symbolize the resurrection of Christ. It "personified both things cyclical and recurrent and things eternal" (Dalton 184). It therefore occupies a prominent position in the famous Phoenix portrait, depicting Elizabeth with a jewel in shape of a phoenix, painted by Nicholas Hilliard.

Another important symbol in the construction of Elizabethan iconicity was the **pelican**. The mythological pelican was supposed to have plucked its own breast in order to protect its offspring. Again a portrait by Nicholas Hilliard shows the Queen with a prominent pelican at the center of her dress. Both symbols, pelican and phoenix, are important imageries in association with the Queen:

[The pelican] was a symbol of redemption and charity, plucking its own breast to shed blood to save its young [...]. [T]he phoenix identifies her as a ruler by divine right and affirms her validity of her dynastic claims, while the pelican emphasizes her relationship to her subjects. (Dalton 184).

All the above-mentioned aspects in the portrayal of the Queen serve one major purpose, to render her image aspects of divinity and confirm her divine entitlement to reign. It becomes especially prominent when the Queen gets displayed above or in association with the world globe, as is the case in the Ditchley portrait of 1592, depicting the Queen standing above a map of England⁸. Teske describes the painting as portraying the

⁸ The map shows a County Atlas that has been introduced by Christopher Saxton in 1579.

Queen as an ageless, godlike person with no perceptible facial expressions, a bright dress that is composed of a mix of the Tudor-Rose and the Queen's own symbol the eglantine decorated by pearls on dress, head, and fan, which symbolize virginity and purity. Teske finds this portrayal functions as depicting Elizabeth as a "Queen of light" under whose order the thunderstorm, depicted above, dissolves (cf. Teske 90). Teske's observation is especially striking as similar impressions must have inspired Shekhar Kapur's 2007 *The Golden Age* as he too portrays the Queen as a white spirit that according to his own explanation on the Bonus Material wills the storm and the waves that help to destroy the Spanish Armada.



"Ditchley portrait" by Marcus Gheeraerts the younger,

c. 1592

The Golden Age ends with Cate Blanchett as Elizabeth standing above a map of the world after the Armada battle, thus pointing to the accomplished expansion of power and territory. The defeat of the Spanish Armada set the basis for English hegemony in the Western hemisphere as England from then on replaced Spain as the dominant naval power. George Gower captured the Queen's naval triumph in a painting called "The Armada Portrait". In this portrait Elizabeth's fingers rest on a miniature globe, pointing to America. Next to her face rests an imperial crown, and at the back two large windows depict different scenes of the battle. The window on the left shows the Armada fleet still floating, whereas on the right it is already drowning. The whole image suggests "England's dominion of the seas and plans for imperialist expansion in the New World" (Barber qtd in Dalton 193).

The last image I want to discuss is the Sieve portrait⁹ of 1579, painted by Quentin Metsys the Younger. This image again draws on Roman mythology, and is thus representational of Renaissance portrayal of the iconic monarch. The sieve is a reference to the virgin Tuccia who, falsely accused of unchasteness, fetched water from the river Tiber in a sieve and managed to transport it to the temple without spilling a single drop, thus proving her innocence. Elizabeth used this image to support her own mystical image of chastity. Dalton suggests that the "Sieve Portrait" was used as statement against all possible marriage offers, especially that of the Duke of Anjou. Dalton finds support for her theory through the portrait's inscription: "TUTTO VEDO & MOLTO MANCHA" (i.e.: "I see everything, but much is missing")¹⁰, which might emphasize Elizabeth's intention to expand her territory through the colonization of the new world rather than marriage.

3. The Iconic Mode

The lack of arbitrariness of portraits falls under the iconic mode certain signs belong to. Peirce describes the major characteristic of this mode as *perceived resemblance*. This perceived resemblance is acquired through a great similarity between the object and the sign through which it is represented, constituting low arbitrariness. In Peirce's own words: "[I]t is like that thing and used as a sign of it" (Peirce qtd in Chandler 40). According to Chandler the icon's characteristic is that it has "qualities which 'resemble' those of the objects they represent, and they 'excite analogous sensations in the mind' (Peirce qtd in Chandler 40). Despite the great similarity between the object and its representation, however, one would never confuse the sign with the 'real thing'. One would not confuse

⁹ Cf Belsey 15

¹⁰ Cf. Dalton 186-188

a portrait with a real person, no matter how close the resemblance between the two. The materiality of the sign stays in mind, although it is imaginable that a portrait of a person could evoke feelings in the spectator, reminded of the one represented. The reason for us to be able to perceive an iconic sign as pointing towards a certain person is done via codes, described in the following chapters.

B) The Queen as Signifier

A 'floating' or 'empty' signifier, by Chandler's definition, leans on postmodernist theorists, "variously defined as a signifier with a vague, highly variable, unspecific or non-existent signified" (78). Its variable signified can thus be interpreted freely. The term "floating signifier" perfectly fits the various representations of the Renaissance Queen Elizabeth I, be it through portraits or modern film, as further analysis shows that the representations of the Queen are quite varied. Still, all versions are based on the same signifier, the national icon Elizabeth I of England.

1. A world of SIGNS

This paper attempts to analyze the underlying sign systems that can be detected behind visual and audiovisual representations, i.e. portraits and films, of the historic Queen Elizabeth I. In *Semiotics: The Basics*, David Chandler assumes that anything can be a sign, as long as someone interprets it as such (cf. 13). This proposition is the quintessence of his above-mentioned introduction on semiotics, a discipline also known as *study of signs*.

The two major approaches to the study of signs are Ferdinand de Saussure's dyadic and Alexander Peirce's triadic system. Chandler (13) refers to these two approaches as possible "models of the sign", which are explored in this paper in order to found a theoretical basis for the analysis of the Queen as floating signifier.

Langer (qtd. in Chandler 17), explains that "[s]ymbols are not proxy for their objects but are vehicles for the conception of objects" and explains this with the example of someone talking about "Napoleon," which would not make anybody react (or "bow") to the long dead emperor, but simply stimulate one's mind to think of the man. Similarly, when mentioning the Queen Elizabeth I, it is not the real Queen that is suddenly present, but rather mental conceptions of the Queen are evoked. To recapitulate the above, Saussure's notion of the linguistic sign is totally non-material as it refers to mental concepts rather than 'real things'.

A sign is thus the combination of the two: signifier and signified. 'Signifiers' must be filled with a certain meaning and 'signifieds' need to take a certain shape or form, which Saussure's linguistic model ascribes primarily to sound patterns. The interaction of the two constitutes what Saussure describes as "two sides of a page," which are "intimately linked" and only "distinguished for analytical purposes," which accounts also for the subsequent analysis throughout this paper (Chandler 17).

In the Saussurean model, signs only make sense when brought into relation with each other, which means that the emphasis lies on the structures or relations within the system, rather than the reference between signs and things. A sign, according to Saussure, refers to another sign rather than to a material thing. An example given in Chandler is that the word 'tree' derives its meaning primarily by being brought into relation with other words like 'bush'. In the case of this topic, the Queen would thus be seen primarily in relation to other monarchs and the meaning of her representation is derived only when being brought into relation with other depictions. It is important to note that in this theory the system lies parallel to reality rather than referring to it.

In my further analysis in part II, I will concentrate on the dyadic character of the sign, its signifiers or form, and the associated signifieds. I regard the 'real Queen' that once lived and reigned in England as the model or referent that these various signifiers refer to and try to reconstruct but never actually capture, like the 'object' as the content of the box that Chandler's student Munday¹¹ described. The representation gains, however, new signifieds, which in regards to Eco's 'unlimited semiosis' reproduce infinite interpretants or signifieds, as the examples below will demonstrate. Now I will show that the concepts described are appropriate for any sign system, not just the system of language.

2. Not just language

Generally speaking, semiotics tries to analyze sign systems. In particular, semioticians attempt to describe and explain the sign system of language. Considering the Russian structuralist Jakobson's argument that "language is the central and most important among all human semiotic systems" (qtd in Chandler 5), it is not surprising that the employment of semiotic categories to sign systems other than language is highly controversial. Susanne Langer, for instance, argues that although the components of

¹¹ "The three elements that make up a sign function like a label on an opaque box that contains an object. At first the mere fact that there is a box with a label on it suggests that we discover what that something is. The process of semiosis, or decoding the sign, is as follows. The first thing that is noticed (the *representamen*) is the box and the label; this prompts the realization that something is inside the box (the *object*). This realization, as well as the knowledge of what the box contains, is provided by the *interpretant*. 'Reading the label' is actually just a metaphor for the process of decoding the sign. The important point to be aware of here is that the object of a sign is always hidden. We cannot actually open the box and inspect it directly. The reason for this is simple: **if the object could be known directly, there would be no need of a sign to represent it.** We only know about the object from noticing the label and the box and then 'reading the label' and forming a mental picture of the object in our mind. Therefore the hidden object of a sign is only brought to realization through the interaction of the representamen, the object and the interpretant." (from a personal correspondence between Chandler and Munday, 14/4/2005 quoted in Chandler 31)

“visual media such as photography, painting and drawing” are freely combinatory, “they have no vocabulary of units with independent meanings” (Langer qtd in Chandler 7). She furthermore argues that

It is impossible to find the smallest independent symbol, and recognize its identity when the same unit is met in other contexts [...] [T]here are no items that might be called, metaphorically the ‘words’ of portraiture. (Langer qtd in Chandler 7)

Langer deviates from Saussure in suggesting that linguistic models should not be applied to other signs besides linguistic because “[t]reating them in linguistic terms leads [one] to ‘misconceive’ them: they resist ‘translation’ (ibid.)”.

I agree with Langer in that it would be wrong to regard other sign systems exactly like the complex and fully arbitrary system of language. As the notion ‘other sign systems’ already implies there are signs outside the field of linguistics. Saussure interpreted linguistics as simply being one branch of the more general field of semiology, the general study of signs. This means that other systems, such as architecture, cuisine and dress for example, can be interpreted with his semiotic model.

I suggest that portraits do have a certain vocabulary that is readable for its respective audience in its specific historic era. The symbolism of color was and is clearly associated with certain values and attributes, and it seems that this implied knowledge is heavily made use of in modern film. The costume designers for Henry Koster and Kapur’s versions of the Queen on screen, for example, applied this in their films. The importance of the color white, for instance, which stands for purity as well as divinity, a fact that is retraceable when looking at the representations of antique Gods dressed in white as well as when inspecting the festive garment of the popes till today the only cleric allowed to wear white on all festive occasions, thus pointing to his high close-to-divine status in the Catholic hierarchy.

This symbolic character of white is also present in the representation of the Queen in the famous Ditchley portrait, where Gloriana appears in a strikingly white dress, accompanied by a shiningly pale skin tone and fairy-style decorated ruffs with elaborate laces. This image of the Queen as a

divine figure is reused in film by Shekhar Kapur, who clearly points out in an interview on the bonus material to *The Golden Age*, that what inspired him most was the Queen's Renaissance image creation being regarded as divine. The key scene of this rendering the Queen's image divine and thus immortal shows her standing on a rock watching the waves of a supposedly close-by battle between her fleet and the Spanish Armada. The fairy-like night gown, the 'Fairie Queen' is wearing is of course shinningly white.

Furthermore, in Kapur's version, dress color seems to be linked with mood. In Henry Koster's version 1955, the dominance of violet could be seen as to that color's traditional association with old spinsters.

Although portraits, for instance, are highly iconic, and thus lack language's full arbitrariness, there are obvious similarities in what concerns the function of written language and paintings. First of all, portraits are always some sort of representation of a person, which makes them stand for or point to their referent as illustrated with the example of the box and the label above. In that sense, both language and portraits function as cultural artifacts in that they record and thereby preserve certain aspects of the immediate present for the afterworld. Portraits preserve and create images of people of a particular time. Through studying these images, later generations cannot just imagine what a particular historic persona approximately looked like, but also what the fashion and the cultural practices of the particular time were. Fashion and the garment system will be another area that is subject of this analysis, as "any garment responds to definitely utilitarian requirements and at the same time exhibits various semiotic properties." (Jakobson qtd in Chandler 5).

A picture only becomes a picture when its material status is neglected. When reading a text, few people pay attention to how it was written but rather what it supposedly tells them. When looking at a picture, one does not necessarily concentrate on the material used to create it (unless one happens to be a student of applied arts), but rather attempts to "read" the picture, by decoding its message. Similar to written texts, paintings have a

message intended by their creators and at the same time get deciphered by the observers, who attribute their own interpretations thereof. The materiality, which makes them a sign, is largely left out of consideration.

Furthermore, portraits of the Queen in the Renaissance period would not just try to imitate the look of the monarch, but would function as a certain political propaganda and thus furnish symbols that were supposed to be read and understood by the spectators. Such symbols are for instance the depiction of the Queen with a necklace featuring the form of a Phoenix, symbolizing the resurrection of Christ and thus attributing a divine aura to the Queen, an aspect that is retraced in a filmic representation in Shekar Kapur's *The Golden Age*. This message of the Phoenix that overcomes death, for instance, is lost on an audience that is so-to-speak 'illiterate' concerning the symbolic meaning of allegorical figures¹². An audience today would not be able to read this portrait in the same way as an Elizabethan audience must have, which means that the ability to decipher a symbol and interpret it is very much connected to its particular time period; it is moreover legitimate to say that there is a certain history of symbolic systems.

3. Semiotic structure in film

The central concern for semioticians confronted with sign systems is analyzing the structure that lies behind them. Chandler (83) declares that "structural analysis" looks at "structural relations which are functional in the signifying system at a particular moment [...]". In order to be able to do so, analysts have to consider three aspects. First of all, it is essential to identify the constituent units in a text or socio-cultural practice. Secondly,

¹² In the Middle Ages it was accepted scholarly knowledge to be familiar with the collected work of animal fables, mixed with biblical interpretations, namely "The Physiologus". This was still true for the Renaissance period.

one has to bring these constituents into structural relations to each other. The third aspect is the relation of the parts to the whole.

Saussure declared that meaning is derived from the differences between signifiers in a sign system. These differences form horizontal and vertical axes, namely syntagmatic and paradigmatic. Syntagmatic relations are concerned with positioning of constituents to each other. Paradigmatic determination involves substitution, which in Jakobson's terminology appears as "associative relation". Paradigms in film, for example, function as changing shots like cut, fade, dissolve and wipe. Syntagms, on the other hand, constitute an "orderly combination" (Chandler 85) within a specific picture, for example a screen shot.

"A printed advertisement is a syntagm of visual signifiers," as Chandler (85) explains in his introduction to semiotics. The differentiation within this "syntagmatic dimension" is primarily through "spatial relations," "sequential relations," and "structural reduction". Spatial syntagmatic relations refer to the positioning of constituents within a frame, as above/below, front/back, close/distant, left/right, north/south/east/west as well as centre/periphery (cf. Chandler 111). This can be applied in the analysis of the positioning of the individual elements of a screen shot. Sequential syntagmatic relation is a more temporal aspect in looking at before and after oppositions.

Syntagmatic transformations are made by addition and deletion, whereas paradigmatic transformations would be methods of substitution and transposition (cf. Chandler 90).

Chandler subdivides filmic syntagms into either being temporal like a montage, i.e. "the sequencing of shots" or spatial as is the case in mise-en-scène which he calls "the composition of individual frames" (86). This composition of the individual frames will be analyzed when looking at particular screen shots of the Queen on screen. The particular sequencing of shots will be relevant in the comparison of similar scenes appearing in various films such as the "Council Scene" and the "Puddle Scene," which falls under the category of Intertextuality, as discussed below.

4. Barthes's garment system

Also relevant for this paper is Barthes' finding that paradigmatic and syntagmatic constituents can be used to describe the 'garment system' (Barthes qtd. in Chandler 85). Barthes identified the ensemble of clothes worn at the same time as being in a syntagmatic relation to each other. For example, this would be a combination of a skirt, a matching shirt, shoes and a hat worn together. The substitution of a particular garment worn on a particular part of the body through another at a different time and occasion can be seen as a paradigmatic transformation. For instance, one could substitute a bonnet with a cap, flip-flops with ballerina flats, a skirt with Bermuda shorts, and the shirt with a blouse. In the case of portraits of the Queen, the syntagmatic combination would be the wig, a particular dress with a certain ruff and shoes. The paradigmatic transformation would be another dress with a different kind of ruff, a differently styled wig and different shoes.

The interesting observation in comparing Renaissance royal fashion to Barthes' analysis of modern fashion magazines is that the Renaissance garment's paradigmatic transformations are rather slight. There is no radical variation by a substitution of a dress through shorts and a blouse, as the dress seems to be an invariable constituent. The only variability there is achieved through a change in color and design, analyzed below under **Costume Design**.

5. Codes

The essential observation in the analysis of sign systems is that signs function within codes. "[A] code is a set of practices familiar to users of the medium operating within a broad cultural framework" (Chandler 148). In order to understand a code, one must be acquainted with the particular

culture that uses it. Recognizing the individual figure in a portrait or the character on screen as a representation of the Renaissance Queen Elizabeth I is done via perception of codes. When one is able to read these codes, it suggests that one is somehow familiar with English heritage and English history. Thus the perception of this particular cultural code is essential in the analysis of the 'Queen on screen', the reasons for which have been explored in the first chapter, namely the Queen's status as a national icon for the British.

In what concerns perceptual codes, Chandler leans on the theories of Gestalt psychologists who declare that "[p]erception depends on coding the world into iconic signs that can represent it within our mind" (Chandler 151; derived from Nichols). This supports my observation of the Queen's-on-screen iconic codification that renders the image recognizable for audiences. The assumption that it is primarily the silhouette of the Queen that makes her image so highly familiar finds support in Chandler:

Confronted by a visual image, we seem to need to separate a dominant shape (a 'figure' with a definite contour) from what our current concerns relegate to 'background' (or 'ground'). (151)

According to Gestalt psychologists, this phenomenon could be described as part of "universal features in human visual perception which in semiotic terms can be seen as constituting a perceptual code" (ibid.). This innate feature helps to create what psychologists call 'perceptual constancy,' which means that "relative shifts in the apparent shapes and sizes of people and objects in the world around us," (ibid.) cannot impede our perception of them. In regards to this paper, it means that the various modifications of the iconic versions of the Queen do not hinder the audience's perception of the depicted character as the historic Queen.

The identification of the genre falls nicely under the category of textual codes in context of the topic with this paper. As all films in question broach a part of British history and thus cultural heritage, they can be seen as belonging to the genre of Heritage Cinema. That furthermore suggests that they are subject to particular conventions of structure and style that constitute this particular genre. In Heritage Cinema, this is especially the

setting in English landscape and the rich decorum aimed at attracting presumably female audiences, discussed in more detail under elements of the Costume Drama in Chapter three of Part II in the film analysis below. Chandler (159) identifies “a familiar stock of images and motifs, the connotations of which become fixed, [such as] décor, costume and objects and certain ‘typecast’ performers (some of whom may have become ‘icons’), familiar patterns of dialogue, characteristic music and sounds, as well as appropriate physical topography;” as **iconography**. In the case of the Queen on screen ‘familiar patterns’ are more than obvious.

Part II

C) The Queen in film

This following chapter is the applied part of this paper. The above theory is the basis of what is now analyzed in more detail.

1. Introducing the Films

Before inspecting the entrance scenes of the particular films and analyzing the costumes, I want to give a short introductory summary of the films' plots. Furthermore, Richard Barsam declares that "[w]e are people watchers by nature, necessity and desire" and therefore "[...] constantly analyzing behavior" (229). That is why this paper lays a special focus on the actresses that have impersonated the Queen throughout the history of film, starting from Bette Davis up to Cate Blanchett, thereby looking at the evolution of acting in the second part of this chapter.

1.1 Short analytic summaries of the films

The film *Les amours de la Reine Élisabeth* dating from 1912 evolves from the legendary love story between the Queen and the Earl of Essex. The film is constituted of several tableaux. It starts with the return of Drake and Essex and continues with a stage production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* that Essex, the Queen and several Lords and Ladies of the court are watching. What follows is the introduction of another subplot, the secret relationship between Essex and the Countess of Nottingham. The Earl of Nottingham finds out about it and together with Bacon plans to catch Essex through a

trap. They write an anonymous letter accusing Essex of treason and place it on the Queen's desk. In the meantime the Queen, in a love embrace with Essex, offers him a ring with the promise that on its return she would forgive him whatever atrocities he might have committed. When she finds the anonymous letter on her desk, she disregards the content as irrelevant nonsense. After dropping in on a snuggling scene between the Countess and Essex, however, she believes the letter. Essex is arrested and thrown into the Tower. The Queen urges the Countess to convince Essex to return her the earlier mentioned ring to her. The Countess succeeds but is found out by her husband, who forces her to throw it into the River Thames. Now Essex is lost. After his execution the Queen visits Essex's body and discovers that the ring is missing. Thereupon she is supposed to continue an unhappy life until her death soon after. The last scene shows her dying and finally dead.

Similar to *Les amours*, the plot of *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* (1939) centers on the love relation between Queen Elizabeth I and the significantly younger Earl of Essex. The film opens with Essex's successful return from Cadiz, which is greatly celebrated in the streets of London. The Queen's welcome is more reserved towards his military successes as she fears his rising popularity as a threat to her position as Queen. She still receives him with love. Essex, insulted by the scolding for not capturing the Spanish treasure fleet instead of the expected tribute for conquering Cadiz, leaves London for his estates. Although desperately longing for him, the Queen is too proud to apologize and call him back. When the situation for the English soldiers in Ireland gets tense, the Queen has a good reason for asking Essex to come back to court. The councilors, jealous of Essex's influence on the Queen, trap him into accepting going to Ireland to suppress the Earl of Tyrone's rebellion, a rather hopeless effort. Nevertheless, Essex is quite successful and in need of more troops and ammunition, which he does not receive as his letters to the Queen and hers to him are intercepted by Penelope, a lady-in-waiting infatuated with Essex. Tyrone manages to beat the English. He congratulates Essex for having been his most dangerous opponent and a real threat had he had the appropriate support. Enraged, Essex summons his own little army and marches on London. The Queen,

almost taken prisoner, traps Essex and makes him her prisoner as she cannot accept Essex's wish to reign conjointly. When Essex is in the Tower awaiting his execution, a ring that the Queen has offered becomes the center of the story. She hopes Essex would return it to her as a symbol of submission, which would save him from the block. He realizes, though, that he would always be a threat to her and thus accepts death through the axe. The Queen desperately cries after him: "Take England, take my throne!" and the film tragically ends this way.

The *Virgin Queen* dating from 1955 describes a sort of triangle relationship between the Queen, court ambitious Raleigh, and Elizabeth Throckmorton. Raleigh, at first an unknown soldier just returned from the war in Ireland, occasionally becomes acquainted with the Earl of Leicester. After helping the Earl free his coach out of the mud near a secluded country inn, Raleigh repulses the bag of gold coins offered as reward and asks for an introduction at court instead. The Earl consents and Raleigh immediately causes attention at court for wearing an exquisite French coat that he tricked the tailor into lending him. He gets acquainted with Elizabeth Throckmorton and soon attracts the attention of the Queen. Raleigh wins the Queen's favor through exhibiting a bold, impudent behavior that the Queen finds as having formerly lacked at court. His court ambitions are, however, motivated by the endeavor to receive financial support for a voyage across the Atlantic. The Queen appoints her new favorite captain of her guard instead, to have him close by. This development is sarcastically commented on by Elizabeth Throckmorton who has already predicted this kind of scenario to happen, namely Raleigh's plans getting out of sight due to court engagements. Jealous of his favor, other courtiers plot against him. Raleigh then secretly starts to prepare a ship while getting romantically involved with Throckmorton. The affair leads to a pregnancy and a secret marriage. Finding this out, the Queen demands their persecution and arrest. During their flight, Raleigh's Irish friend is murdered by an English soldier. Lured by Raleigh's talk of the New World and the treasures to be gained there, the Queen releases Raleigh as she would only want the best to sail her ships and she cannot bear the thought of Raleigh's orphaned child crying, as it appeared in her dreams. The film ends with the

Queen occupied with business as usual when she sees a ship sailing by her window with Mr. and Mrs. Raleigh on board bound for the New World. Passing the palace they hoist the English flag, the Queen reflecting on the pregnancy. Then the film ends.

Elizabeth (1998) stands out as the film that tells a less known chapter of Elizabeth I's life, the time before she becomes Queen of England. The costume drama starts with the burning of Protestants on the stake under Elizabeth's Catholic half-sister Mary. The young princess, meanwhile, lives a carefree life in the countryside with her lover Robert Dudley. Their idyll is suddenly interrupted by a delegation of the court coming to arrest Elizabeth, accusing her of plotting to murder her sister. When invited to see Mary while in the Tower, she convinces her cancer-weakened sister of her innocence and is proclaimed Queen of England after Mary's death. She accepts with the joyful words: "This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes." The young Queen has to face several challenges. A Catholic conspiracy arises around the Duke of Norfolk and Mary of Guise, reigning in Scotland. She successfully holds a speech to pass the Act of Uniformity for a single Church of England in front of Parliament, thanks to Walsingham's cutting off some of the voters. Walsingham furthermore assassinates Mary of Guise and reveals the plot around Norfolk, who too will be assassinated. Another problem for the young Queen is chief advisor William Cecil's urging for marriage. The Duke of Anjou, later King of France, is invited as possible suitor. He disqualifies himself, however, after secretly celebrating an orgy and thereby dressing up as the Queen, so does Robert Dudley after Elizabeth finds out he is already married. In the end it turns out lover Dudley is even involved in a conspiracy against her, but he is not killed like the other conspirators in order to remind her of how close she had been to danger. To avoid the issue of marriage and because the people of England are in need of a new icon after Catholicism connected with the Madonna cult are on the decline, the final scene depicts Elizabeth's transformation into the iconic Virgin Queen and she tells Lord Burghley (Cecil) that she is married to England.

In 2007 *Elizabeth – The Golden Age*, an almost identical cast of the film above, tried a sequel on the later life period of Queen Elizabeth I. The film's

story centers on the well-known historical incidents of the decapitation of Mary Stuart and the attack of the Spanish Armada. The film introduces a self-confident, experienced monarch. The greatest rival is the king of Spain, Philipp II, who feels threatened by English pirates who rob Spanish ships bringing treasures from the New World. The Queen maintains a close friendship with one of her ladies-in-waiting, the young Elizabeth Throckmorton, which gets all the more attention with the appearance of Walther Raleigh at court. Raleigh brings news and products from the Americas and thrills the Queen with his adventures at sea. Throckmorton, at the beginning sent as a messenger, gets romantically involved with Raleigh, which provokes the Queen's jealousy as she develops romantic feelings for bold Raleigh herself. Instead of granting him money for his voyage, she makes him captain of her guard and knights him. Meanwhile, the Queen's imprisoned cousin Mary Stuart is accused of treason for writing secret letters to Elizabeth's opponents. After a thwarted assassination attempt on the Queen, Mary is sentenced to death. Walsingham contritely discovers that he was made to believe that Mary was committing treason so that through her death Philipp would find a reason to attack England. When the Queen finds out about Throckmorton's and Raleigh's secret marriage triggered by the discovery of the pregnancy, both are imprisoned but released when the Armada attacks. The film presents the defeat of the Armada as being owed to Raleigh's clever war skills and the Queen's motivating speech before the soldiers as well as her powerful spirit that wills the storm. In the end England is saved, the protagonists reconciled and the Queen holds Raleigh's and Throckmorton's little son in her arms, thereby speaking a final monologue of how she is content with her situation.

1.2 Film Reviews

In this following chapter I will look at film reviews published soon after the films' releases, thereby showing a contemporary reaction to them, starting with the oldest.

It is a thing of sheer beauty and grace throughout – spiritual as well as physical – and whatever comes in the future, it must always remain as one of the greatest works brought within the compass of the film. (Bioscope 547)

Reading the overtly positive critique issued in *The Bioscope* on August 22, 1912 on Louis Mercanton's film *Les amours de la reine Élisabeth*, one cannot help but get the impression that the author is a great admirer of Mme. Sarah Bernhardt. The critique begins and ends by praising the actress.

Apart from its sensational value as a living record of the art of the world's greatest actress, and apart from its historical interest, this wonderful play, which has been adapted to the conditions of the camera with remarkable success, may be set down at once as a notable triumph. [...] Bernhardt is, indeed, supreme. To praise her is superfluous, and to point out her greatness redundant, when she herself is here to give it its most perfect expression. "Queen Bess" [as the film is called in the English review] is a film which deserves to live for ever, because it is a casket which enshrines the heart of the most wonderful actress in the world. (ibid.)

The power that is attributed to cinema is remarkable as the author suggests it would be able to live "for ever", disregarding the limited durability of celluloid, for instance. The suggested ability of film to "enshrine[] the heart of the [...] actress" is striking to modern readers. He particularly laments the loss of Bernhardt's voice, which back then could not be recorded with film. The film is referred to as "film play" as, for example, in "it moves us, as few film plays have been able to move us". The label definitely fits this form of early cinema that is still highly reminiscent of plays staged in the theater. Moreover, he highlights the film's "historical interest", thereby pointing out the "[essential difference] in fundamental characteristics" between Bernhardt and the historic Queen, who is "painted in warmer colours than history perhaps". According to the critique this is especially true of the character of Essex as "one is made to feel rather more sympathy for Essex in the film than one has

for him in history". He goes even further in suggesting that "as a matter of fact, he was a thorough-paced, treacherous villain and fully deserved his fate". He makes obvious judgments on the historic Essex and doubts that the historic Queen would ever have felt any affection for him. Despite the "inaccuracies" concerning the plot, the critique praises the film's historic value in recreating historic "costume" and "setting". He thereby confirms the film's status as being an early version of costume drama. He criticizes that "[p]ainted scenery is employed to a larger extent than seems, perhaps, quite necessary in a film play" and points to the "introduction of a photograph of an original letter actually addressed by Essex to the Queen" (Bioscope 547).

A re-issue from *The Cinema*, March 13, 1940 in *To-Day's Cinema* calls *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* an "[i]ntriguing version of Maxwell Anderson's play about Queen Elizabeth's love for the ambitious Essex". (J.G.W. 6)

The Monthly Film Bulletin published a critique on *Private Lives* in March 1940.

As a spectacle this film has seldom been matched. The Technicolor is admirable, and Court scenes in Elizabethan dress lend themselves to representation in this medium. There is also some magnificent pageantry – e.g. the return of Essex from Cadiz, some eerie sequences in Ireland; and some beautiful backgrounds, e.g. the closing scene at the Tower and a lovely picture of hawk-flying. Dramatically, the story fails. It is not quite big enough to be really tragic. This is partly due to casting. Errol Flynn is a fine figure of a man, with a Robin Hood-like charm but – compared with Bette Davis – he is no actor. She is in her element. No other star can so effectively portray neurotic and fierce hatred and passionate love. She storms, rages, is icily bitter, and yet pathetic in her longing for affection. She is not only a lonely woman, but a queen with the brain of a statesman, and a shrewd and wide knowledge of men and affairs. (E.P. 42)

Terry Ramsaye in the "Showmen's Review"- section of *Motion Picture Herald* on September 30th, 1939 calls the film a "Romance with Historical Background":

To the great and dominant majority of the box office customers here is a plushly deluxe picture of Bette Davis and Errol Flynn, on the ornate and historically glamorous scene for 102 minutes. It is somewhat incidental that they are in the roles of Elizabeth, the authentically

redheaded and reputedly virgin queen of England, and the role of the Earl of Essex, authentically handsome and somewhat more than merely reputedly a man of parts and power in that England of then. (38)

The page-filling review includes striking sentences like: "The telling of this version is, however, so plausible that one might fancy that both Elizabeth and Essex, if cognizant, would wish that they had done it by the Warner script than the way they did" (ibid.). Furthermore, the date of publication, September 30th, 1939 is striking in falling just after the beginning of the Second World War, as mentioned by the author.

It is entirely accidental that a story so very British in its connotations should just now in the early weeks of a world war come off the assembly line. There has been in the picture, however, not a little of political consciousness. There is under it all that which bespeaks the spirit of the Britain that was to become an empire. (ibid.)

A two-page, detailed description of the film in the *Picturegoer* from May 4th focuses on the dresses.

Notwithstanding, nowhere among the women at court was the sumptuous appearance which characterized Henry VIII's daughter. Upon her the full sleeved, tight waisted gown sat as upon no other figure. To the neck ruff of the period, she frequently added the dignity of the Medici collar, opening in front to reveal ropes of pearls, caught and held by a massive brooch. Colour she adored and understood its use. If, in deference to her hair, auburn and elaborately curled, the gown was subdued in shade, dark green or deep cream, then the fan would provide a vivid touch, viridian or copper. Or the flower, set in priceless lace near the throat, would intrigue by its warmth of tone. [...] [f]or [...] her first public appearance [...] she had chosen an overdress of pale gold, revealing an underskirt of wine colour which was repeated in the folds of a divided cape. (Williams 15)

The "Reviews for Showmen"-section in *Kinematograph Weekly* on September 22, 1935 comments on *The Virgin Queen's* production as follows:

The picture does not stick closely to fact – for example, Sir Christopher Hatton was neither conniving nor evil – but it is, nevertheless, arresting theatre, strongly buttressed by "woman scorned" sentiment – Bette Davis, brilliantly made up, acts with immense gusto, yet subtly reveals the real woman behind the irascible façade and makes her presence felt even when she is absent from the screen as Queen Elizabeth. Richard Todd, equally at home in fancy dress, is an ingratiating and dashing Raleigh, and Joan Collins pleases as Beth. [...] The interiors and exteriors are magnificent and, together with spectacular sword

play and forthright dialogue, effectively round off the thrilling Cinema Scope-cum-Technicolor portrait. Points of appeal. – Human and actionful tale, superb performance by Bette Davis, realistic highlights, graceful climax and box-office star and title. (Billings 16)

The Film Daily titles “Outstanding historical costume drama sparked by Miss Davis’ award contending performance” which “may very well pave the way for [her] third “Oscar” on July 27th, 1955:

She is at her very best as the tyrannical Queen Elizabeth whose moods and fancies dictated her reign, sometimes wisely, sometimes foolishly, but always erratically. [...] The story, authored by Harry Brown and Mindret Lord, and based on historical fact, concerns England 1581, when Sir Walter Raleigh schemed to get the Queen’s ear for ships to sail the New World. [...]. (Film Daily)

The *Monthly Film Bulletin*, October 1955, calls

the script of *The Virgin Queen* [...], on the whole, on the level of an inferior swashbuckler, and the actual swashbuckling is tamely done. Everything is subordinated to Bette Davis’s remarkable portrayal of Elizabeth I, known (through no fault of her own, apparently) as the Virgin Queen. [...] For all the rant, the character is arresting and in a sketchy way interesting, in its glimpses of Elizabeth’s muddled sexual frustrations, unsatisfied by her intellectual successes and the assertion of her unquestionable superiority to the men who surround her. The supporting roles can only be subsidiary to this one; but the British cast which fills them – Richard Todd [...] Joan Collins [...] – are entirely competent to the task. The costuming and staging appear surprisingly parsimonious. (D.R. 150-151)

In *Motion Picture Herald* (Product Digest Section), on July 30, 1955, the film is commented on as follows:

[C]ritics will be remembering – and cheering an extraordinary performance by a master of her art. Bette Davis’ portrayal of Elizabeth I, Queen of England, France and Ireland [...] known to history but not to historians as the Virgin Queen, is one of consummate skill and artistry. Sumptuously mounted and photographed to the production depicts Elizabethan England – and its dominating character – in believable and dramatic terms. But it is Bette Davis’ performance which gives it the breath of life. [...] The facts of history are largely embedded in this story but they are telescoped and reshuffled for purposes of dramatic unity. As a matter of fact much of the credit for the impact of the picture goes to Harry Brown and Mindret Lord, who fashioned the screenplay, not only for the artful reconstruction of history but for the dialogue with which Miss Davis does so much. In this department also Charles Brackett, the producer, and Henry

Koster, who directed, are to be credited with an outstanding production. (Ivers 537)

In *Variety*, July 27, 1955 Bette Davis is again praised, but the language used in the film does not please the author:

[She is referred to as] a natural for the role of Queen Elizabeth [...]. In this edition, Miss Davis depicts a more mature queen, who loves and loses Sir Walter Raleigh to one of her maids-in-waiting. Miss Davis gives a bitter portrayal, but one that is a bulwark of strength since it buttresses what is essentially a weak script. Some of the language used by the royal person is shocking to the more genteel ears of modern-day filmgoers, but there's little doubt that it will help the boxoffice. This handsomely mounted CinemaScoper may cause some controversy over the choice of words used in portraying one of the lustiest periods in English history when Britain expanded her empire. However, there's sufficient historical and dramatical justification for Miss Davis' deliver of these lines. (Jose)

Given the negative portrayal of the French in *Elizabeth*, 1998, it is not surprising that Erwan Higuinen finds few positive aspects of the film in his critique in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, dating from November 1998. Besides hinting at the ridiculed depiction of the duc d'Anjou ("Vincent Cassel [...] outrageusement folle," 80), he calls the film dreadfully boring like most ordinary British productions: "*Elizabeth* est aussi assommant que l'ordinaire de la qualité britannique" (80). He criticizes that story and mise-en-scène do not come together: "Le récit et la mise en scène semblent suivre chacun leur chemin sans trop se soucier de l'autre" (ibid.). He especially mentions the "défilé de guest stars" (ibid.) from Fanny Ardant to Kathy Burke and particularly comments on the appearance of former French football player Eric Cantona in the film. He finds the latter is occupying the movie screen with a similar physical presence and form of expression as he used to occupy the football field.

In the opening in the December 1998 issue of *Positif*, Pierre Berthomieu draws a positive picture of the film:

Le choix d'un cinéaste indien pour réaliser cette biographie d'une grande figure britannique traduit bien la démarche des producteurs: traiter l'histoire avec respect, mais sans servilité. Au contraire, Kapur s'emploie à apporter une esthétique moderne, accessible, à cette tragédie passée. (50)

Crediting the Queen with being a great figure of British history, he finds the film treats the subject with enough respect in spite of its modern approach. Berthomieu also remarks on the film's similarities with "la saga du *Parrain*, (50)" *The Godfather* trilogy, that Kapur names as source of inspiration. Despite the initial praise, he finds many negative aspects about the film, which he regards as a mixture of good and bad episodes, containing several parts that do not come together:

[...] pourtant le film ne fonctionne pas. Le pire y voisine avec le meilleur. Les parties ne forment pas un tout: le scénario, le choix d'un décor quasi unique ne donnent pas au film la respiration nécessaire. (51)

The negative depiction of the French court is again taken as an offence.

Et que dire des épisodes avec les membres de la cour de France? Acteurs mal dirigés? Scénario déficient? Les pitreries du duc d'Anjou et de son envoyé sombre dans un grotesque quelquefois involontaire (la conversation sur l'amour dans la gondole). (51)

The conclusion of this critique is thus that, despite some good aspects, the film can more or less be considered a flop: "Elizabeth trouve parfois un ton assez personnel, mais n'en demeure pas moins, malgré ses qualités, un étrange échec" (Berthomieu 51).

A German critic, Josef Nagel, in *Film-dienst*, Volume LI on October 27th, 1998, feels less offended by the film, which leads to a more positive reception. In the beginning of his review stands a long description of the historical parts of the plot, including a mistake about the Queen's age at accession, making her "15" instead of twenty-five. A special focus is accorded to the film's attempt to turn the title character into an icon:

Sie ist intelligent, entschieden, unnahbar – und doch faszinierend. Die später als „Elisabethanisches Zeitalter“ nostalgisch verklärte Epoche wird durch Filme wie diesen retrospektiv noch einmal überhöht. Der indische Regisseur Shekhar Kapur [...] stilisiert die Figur der Elizabeth zur „Eisernen Lady“, so überaus drastisch, vital und rhythmisch legt er sein historisches Drama als wilden Thriller an. (21)

Nagel quotes a translated Blanchett quote to demonstrate the film's supposed perspective:

Als die Geschichte einer Frau, „die in Zeiten, als die Frauen nichts zählten, zwischen Liebe und Pflicht segeln mußte, und die Heirat verweigerte, um niemandem verpflichtet zu sein und allein regieren zu können“, definiert die australische Hauptdarstellerin Cate Blanchett die Perspektive von „Elizabeth“. (ibid.)

Calling the film an overall success, Nagel rhapsodizes that the film celebrates unconsciously-conscious a history lesson in the cathedrals of power: “unbewußt-bewußt ein Geschichtslektion in den Kathedralen der Macht.“ He finds stylistic similarities to Dreyer’s *Jeanne d’Arc* (1928):

Bereits die in der Exposition mit einer rasanten Kamerafahrt auf die religiöse Diskussion einstimmende Scheiterhaufensequenz – Dreyers „Die Passion der Jeanne d’Arc“ [...] nachempfunden – führt den Zuschauer elegant und wie beiläufig an die nötigsten zeitgenössischen Informationen und politischen Zusammenhänge heran. (ibid.)

Nagel’s conclusion again highlights the iconic status of the Queen regarding British national history and links the myth-making to Christian tradition and religious practice. He furthermore feels reminded of Branagh’s *Henry V* (1989) concerning the boosting of national pride through an iconic figure.

Die königliche Heldin wird zur Märtyrerin verklärt, zur Heiligenfigur. Sie unterstützt am Ende das hehre Pathos eines Lobliedes auf die englische Tudor-Dynastie, die Englands Glanz und Gloria ermöglichte – dank der Stärke und des persönlichen Verzichts einer Frau. Eine vergleichbare nationale Einigungsfigur zeichnete zuletzt Kenneth Branagh in „Henry V.“[...], indem er das hohe Lied auf die Geschlossenheit und den Willen zur Macht sang. (ibid.)

Stella Bruzzi published an essay on the film in November 1998 in *Sight & Sound*, which contrasts greatly with the German critique above concerning the film’s patriotism:

Elizabeth is not a celebration of Englishness. Instead, it is marked by its distance from rather than veneration for its subject, a standpoint no doubt informed by its director’s origins (born on the Indian sub-continent, he is the director of *Bandit Queen* and several other Indian films). (47-48)

Bruzzi points out the importance of portraits as a source of inspiration for the film:

Occasionally Kapur seems to fall back on research in order to reassert the historical basis of the story, simplistically using famous portraits

and miniatures as the basis for the costumes and compositions. (For example, Hillyard's allegorical portrait *Man in Flames* seems to be the inspiration for one framing of Elizabeth's lover Dudley.) (48)

She finds the film's visual style striking. "Kapur's sensuous visual style is fascinated with and fetishises the extremes of this sixteenth-century court life" (48).

Bruzzi's conclusion is as follows:

The film's sumptuous freneticism can be draining and some of the intrigues and plotting are too sketchily dealt with, but *Elizabeth* is bold and moving. A far cry from the sterility of British heritage movies, its acting and characters are refreshingly unlike the cardboard stereotypes of *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* (1939) or the BBC's 70's series *Elizabeth R*. Rather than being a place of hierarchy, privilege and clipped tones, Elizabeth's court is a dark hive of imminent danger, where even her loyal adviser Walsingham is a slippery machinator. The ending is disappointing – Elizabeth's renunciation of youth and sexuality (scything her hair and painting her face white) and her declaration, "I am married to England," are rather perfunctorily dealt with and are immediately followed by a bizarre and patronizing list of trivial facts. But what Kapur does capture is the age's intensity and oddity. In short, its otherness from us as well as him. (48)

Nicholas Nicastro's essay on monarchy in film, "The Full Monarchy", published in *Film Comment* 1999 is not just a review on *Elizabeth* but comments on several Heritage Films with royal protagonists. He especially points out the fact that despite the female protagonist the film is far from being feminist.

By turns lover, career girl, and perpetual bride, Kapur's Elizabeth suggests princesses really can have it all. But the film's feminism is thinner than skin deep. Young Liz draws strength of inspiration from not mother Anne Boleyn but father Henry VIII; she leans hard on her lover, Sir Robert Dudley [...], for mental serenity as she awaits her ascension, and would have been deposed easily without the strong arm of [...] Sir Francis Walsingham [...]. (62)

Nicastro provocatively writes that the film makes one feel "like the run-up to the debutante's ball" and asks: "Whom will Liz dance with first – swarthy, conniving Spain or bleary, lewd France?" (Nicastro 63).

A *Positif* review of *The Golden Age* is striking by calling "Cate, la divine", thereby obviously drawing a reference to a former Queen incarnate, "la

divine” Sarah Bernhardt. The critic Christian Viviani believes that the success of the former *Elizabeth*, 1998, in both public reception and in terms of prestige, has triggered this sequel: “On s’attend à un film patrimonial soigné et majestueux, genre que le cinéma britannique a hissé au rang de tradition à laquelle la précédente *Elizabeth* se soumettait” (54).

He understands the film as being in the tradition of cultural heritage cinema, popular in Britain, as was the case with its antecedent in 1998. Viviani focuses particularly on the performance of Cate Blanchett. He finds similarities with the portrayal of Jeanne d’Arc in armored metal and the iconography that promoted the Queen’s image during her life time: “[...] une Elizabeth blafarde et rousse, comme le disent la légende et les tableaux” (54), i.e. a pale and red icon. Furthermore, Viviani detects the director’s Bollywood origins in the screenplay, which due to elaborate costumes and decorative mise-en-scène he calls a “chatoyant spectacle bollywoodien”. He states that the former colonized has now reversed the cinematographic tradition of the former colonizer: “Les dernières 45 minutes ne permettent plus le doute: l’ancien colonisé a définitivement détourné la tradition cinématographique du colon (ibid.)”. He accepts the spectacle, however, under the spell of Cate Blanchett’s irresistible charm, again praising the actress.

Geoffrey Macnab sees world politics reflected in *The Golden Age*, in his critique published in *Sight & Sound*, December 2007.

[...] *The Golden Age* arrives nearly a decade after [...] *Elizabeth*, and is set 15 years after the film ended. Obviously, there have been seismic changes in world politics since Cate Blanchett first played the Virgin Queen for Kapur, and the new film is determined to reflect them. Philip II of Spain is portrayed as a religious fundamentalist who wants to make the whole world – and England in particular – Catholic. And Sir Francis Walsingham [...] is a spymaster with a distinctly modern sensibility, who runs his prisons along Guantanamo lines. (60)

He adds that “[t]hankfully, Kapur doesn’t belabour the parallels between the post-9/11 west and Elizabethan England too crudely”. He believes the film to be drawing on “clichés of children’s history books” as, for example, when Raleigh introduces potatoes and tobacco at court. The fact that everybody knows that the Armada is going to sink weakens the suspense in Macnab’s

opinion; nor does the film qualify as “epic romance” either: “Without distorting history even further than producers Working Title are prepared to, is it possible to provide the unmarried Elizabeth with a romantic life?” (60).

Macnab answers his question by stating that the love story has been transferred from the protagonist to her lady-in-waiting Bess, an attempt which he regards as “a little clumsy and contrived”. Despite these weaknesses in story, he finds the film’s mise-en-scène highly accomplished.

Blanchett’s hairstyle¹³ and costume change in practically every scene. In the Armada sequences she looks, with her armour and flowing tresses, like Joan of Arc as painted by a pre-Raphaelite. At other moments, with her ruffles and jewels and blanched face, she is coldly elaborate, like a figure from one of the many formal 16th-century portraits of the queen. (60)

Macnab also finds praise for the actors, especially Blanchett, who “brings depth and subtlety to the role”, and Samantha Morton, who conveys psychological insights to the character of Mary Stuart “in just a handful [...] scenes”. Nevertheless he is left with the impression that

[d]espite Blanchett’s continuing excellence, *The Golden Age* only fitfully gleams. For all the richness of characterization and visuals, there still feels something forced about the film: a sense that the producers made a sequel because the original was so successful, rather than because they had any burning desire to continue Elizabeth’s story. (ibid.)

As seen above, despite many weaknesses especially in story, most critiques find praise for the actresses. This leads to the next chapter, which will focus on the Queen-impersonators.

¹³ A picture of Cate as Queen, showing her with a great coiffure, is entitled “Hair majesty”, making a pun on “her”.

1.3 The evolution of acting: from Sarah Bernhardt to Cate Blanchett

[F]ilm character achieves complexity by its emphasis on incomplete knowledge, by its conscious play with the limits a physical, external medium imposes upon it. The visible body is our only evidence for the invisible mind. (Braudy 184)

To support my assumption that the Queen is sort of a patriotic British artifact, celebrated and cultivated to boost feelings of national belonging and pride, I want to show how the actresses concerned are well rewarded for their ambitions on stage, which might heighten the importance of her preservation. One striking similarity when comparing the biographies of Queen Elizabeth I impersonators is the fact that incarnating this role seems to be connected with high prestige in the field of acting. Sarah Bernhardt, known as “La Divine” and “La voix d’or” was respected and appreciated for her acting both on theatre stages and in early film. Flora McKenzie Robson is the first British woman to incarnate the Queen and was later “awarded [the title of] Dame Commander of the British Empire in 1960 for her contributions and services to drama [and] the CBE (Commander of the Order of the British Empire) in 1952 for her services to drama” (imdb.com). Ruth Elizabeth Davis, alias Bette Davis, was the first woman to become president of the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 1941, after she had won the Academy Award for Best Actress in 1935 (*Dangerous*) and in 1938 (*Jezebel*) and was voted 10th greatest movie star of all times by Entertainment Weekly¹⁴. Florence McKechnie, alias Florence Eldridge, played the Queen as a supporting role in *Mary of Scotland* (1936), starring Katherine Hepburn as Mary, directed by John Ford. The next English actress, Dame Judith Olivia Dench was nominated as Best Supporting Actress for her appearance in 2008’s *Shakespeare in Love* playing the Queen and is a five times BAFTA award winner. Similar to Dame Judy, Glenda May Jackson has been honored by the British nation with a CBE (Commander of the Order of the British Empire) for “her services to drama” (cf. imdb.com). Illiana Lydia Petrovna Mironova, better known as Helen Mirren, is an Academy Award winner in the

¹⁴ cf. imdb.com/Bette Davis trivia

prestigious Best Actress category for her performance of Queen Elizabeth II in *The Queen* (2006). Catherine Elise Blanchett won an Oscar for Best Supporting Actress playing Katherine Hepburn in *The Aviator* (2004) and was nominated for Best Actress for her performance in *Elizabeth* (1998), which makes her a five times nominee and one time winner up to this point in history. It seems as though playing the Queen is either a role that is likely to be offered only to very serious actresses or it is the role that adds to being considered as serious. Especially outstanding is that actresses playing the Queen are seen as having rendered special services to the British nation.

Incarnating the not necessarily attractive Virgin Queen might symbolize that an actress is unpretentious, which is seen as a prerogative for a good actress. Nowadays attractive actresses are likely to be awarded with Oscars when deliberately degrading their appearance for the screen, as for instance Charlize Theron did in *Monster*, as if that was the only way to prove that behind the pretty face hides an actually serious actress. Performances of the Queen on screen that are deliberately “ugly” are that of Flora Robson, Florence Eldridge, and Bette Davis. It is not true for the performance of Jean Simmons in *Young Bess* (1953) and Cate Blanchet’s appearance especially when playing the young Elizabeth, which again signifies the importance of age for actresses. So impersonating an “ugly” Queen cannot be the only reason for the high number of awards. Above all, impersonating the Queen equals incarnating a symbol for the British heritage and might thus be treated with the necessary care in order to preserve this memory in a serious and respectful way. This is achieved, for instance, by choosing actors and actresses who are recognized professionals in their *métier*. Two other Queen performers to mention here are Denis Charles Pratt, alias Quentin Crisp, who incarnated the Queen in 2004 in *Orlando*, the only film directed by a woman, Sally Potter, and the only time the Queen was incarnated by a man. Finally, Elspet Gray played the Queen in the 1983 popular comedy series *The Black Adder* as well as Miranda Richardson in *Blackadder II*. In Derek Jarman’s *Jubilee* (1977), the title is a reference to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the accession of Queen Elizabeth II. Jenny Runacre plays both the time-travelling Queen Elizabeth I and the men murdering character Bod.

Especially Jarman's version underlines the symbolic importance of the Queen for the national heritage cult as his version makes fun of just that, most pointedly by employing a character called Elizabeth I.

In *Looking at Movies*, Richard Barsam distinguishes between four types of actors, i.e. primarily the personality actors who act according to their established persona, secondly the acting against a persona attributed earlier, thirdly the chameleon actors whose roles do not suggest any similarities and finally non-professional actors who have achieved fame in areas other than acting, as for example sports and music. (cf. Barsam 198). The last category obviously applies to Eric Cantona's appearance in Kapur's 1998 *Elizabeth*. The former football star is supposed to bring "verisimilitude" (Barsam 198) to the period drama and probably also to motivate a male audience to go see a genre that is more likely to attract a female audience. Concerning an actor's persona, Barsam suggests that it is "usually (but not always) rooted in [the actor's] natural behavior, personality and physicality" (198), a quote that leaves much controversy. The imdb.com, however, helps to support this assumption by supposedly stating personal quotes of Glenda Jackson, for instance, reading "If I'm too strong for some people, that's their problem." Judi Dench's trademark is described as "known for often playing dignified, strong willed women in positions of authority who are sometimes opposed or criticised by those under her". Helen Mirren is the granddaughter of a Russian aristocrat, won an Oscar for playing Queen Elizabeth II, and according to imdb.com played a Queen six times throughout her career: *The Queen* (2006), *Elizabeth I* (2005), *The Prince of Egypt* (1998), *The Snow Queen* (1995), *The Madness of King George* (1994), and for the first time in *Caligula* (1979). Cate Blanchett is described, in contrast, as "playing many different roles with multifarious personalities", such as the young sensible English Queen Elizabeth in *Elizabeth* (1998), the rude, hustling wife in *The Shipping News* (2001), and the dangerous Russian villain in *Indiana Jones & the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2007) (Imdb.com). Her most recent filmic appearance is that of Lady Marian in *Robin Hood* (2010), which draws on her image as fighting "Jeanne d'Arc"-esque lady on horseback that Kapur has already made use of in *The Golden Age*.

In 1908, the Société Film d'Art was founded for "the purpose of creating a serious artistic cinema that would attract equally serious people who ordinarily preferred the theater" (Barsam 201), and one of its prominent members was the by then popular French theater actress Sarah Bernhardt¹⁵. This film society was convinced that film could succeed theater in becoming a similar "temple of expression"¹⁶ as the theater, probably primarily by winning experienced and talented theater people to cooperate in their film productions. That might be one of the major reasons why early acting greatly resembled what was usually seen on nineteenth century theater stages. The other is that there was no experience available about how acting would work on screen and also the technical possibilities of cinema were yet to be developed, for instance, sound and color. As two of the most famous works of the SFA, Barsam names André Calmette's and Charles Le Bargy's *The Assassination of the Duke of Guise* (1908) as well as *Queen Elizabeth*, starring Sarah, the Divine, and dating from 1912, thus also being the first film of interest for this paper. The latter was, according to Barsam, able to attract audiences interested in serious drama. The SFA was finally successful in making "cinema socially and intellectually respectable" (Barsam 202). Sarah Bernhardt's filming experience is highly linked to the beginnings of acting in film. As a stage actress, she started her career in small Parisian theatres, before accepting some roles in film. Her theater experience is noticeable in her films.

In early film productions the space for the actors on screen occupies basically the same space as would a theater stage, which is due to the fixed position of the camera. The actors thus walk on and off the screen, like they would on a stage. The actors adopted their "exaggerated facial expressions [and] strained gestures," as it demanded the theater to make the action perceivable onto the last corner (Barsam 202). This, according to Barsam, is

¹⁵ 1912 kaufte Zukor den französischen Kunstfilm „*La Reine Elisabeth*“ (Königin Elisabeth) mit Sarah Bernhardt, inszeniert von Mercanton. Er gab die enorme Summe von 20 000 Dollar dafür aus. Aber er verdiente das Dreifache, indem er den Film nicht in den Nickel-Odeons zeigte, sondern in Theatern, wobei eine geschickte Reklame den Anschein erweckte, Sarah Bernhardt trete persönlich auf. Damit war die Jahrmarkt-Periode des amerikanischen Films zu Ende. (Sadoul 109)

¹⁶ Barsam attributes this label to 16th century theater and onwards.

“wrong for the comparative intimacy between spectator and screen” (ibid) and thus leads to a perception of ‘over-acting’ when looking at films from that era. One could, however, also call this distance between “spectator and screen” as something that is lacking in films of today.

D.W. Griffith understood this form of intimacy and thus developed a more appropriate acting style, e.g. *Broken Blossoms* (1919) starring Lillian Gish¹⁷, still during the era of silent film. The change here is especially noticeable in the introduction of the close-up, as Gish’s facial expressions get highly perceptible. Bernhardt in 1912 had to act with the whole body, as she was always fully visible on screen, which explains the extreme gesticulating with her arms. Next is the introduction of sound, which changed film acting yet once more as now actors would not just have to control their gestures but also their voice. When describing and contrasting screen acting to acting on the theater stage, Richard Barsam points out that the differences are most obvious in voice projection, as stage actors must be heard from the most remote corner in the theater and thus speak loud and clearly, whereas screen actors can use voice in a lot more varied shades of volume and color. Voice projection played a major role in the beginnings of Bette Davis’s career. Her education was that of a theater actress as Martin Shingler elaborates in “Bette Davis and the Process of Acquiring Her Voice”. As she had been a rather soft speaker, this was the area she had to work on the most. Shingler describes the process of how a former weakness becomes Davis’s strongest asset as she learned to use her voice in a very effective way throughout her long career on the movie screen.

Simultaneously with the introduction of sound comes the establishment of the Classical Studio Era. The stars of this era embodied an image created by the studio and were given respective roles to feed this image. Barsam points out that the huge salaries paid indicate that a star was paid largely not just for the performance on screen and thereby hints that they are paid also for their

¹⁷ cf. Barsam 203.

yellow press presentations on another screen, the media, a well familiar habit up till today.

That the star also reflects the social and cultural history of the period in which that image was created helps explain the often rapid rise and fall of star's careers (Barsam 205)

Stars are commodities for the studio and the contracts transformed a star into "studio's chattel" (Barsam 206). One of the stars that lived through the ups and downs of this era was Bette Davis.

Bette Davis is described as being a "star of another sort" as she was "leading [a] principled and spirited fight against [the] studio's invasion into private life" (Barsam 208). Her career stretches from 1931 to a second start in the fifties until 1989. In the "Mid 1930s she walked out of Warner Brothers demanding better roles" whereupon the "studio successfully sued her for breach of contract" (ibid.). Although she did receive a better contract as well as better roles, her "career sagged after World War II" (ibid.). In her early forties she was considered too old for the business, but then finally managed to reappear in the film *All About Eve* (1950) by playing just that, an aging actress with difficulties to find employment due to her advanced age. The film is still viewed as being the best of her career¹⁸. Richard Barsam quotes Davis whose roles had usually been picked out for her by the studio: "[...] I have never played a part which I did not feel was a person very different from myself" (218).

Today, actors are supposedly often typecast¹⁹. In the case of the screen performers of the Queen it seemed to be a goal to find a naturally red haired woman, somebody whose complexion is acceptably matching a bright red wig. So it is all about the right appearance. Sarah Bernhardt's version does not show much of the 'iconic image' of the Virgin Queen, compared to looking at later versions of Helen Mirren, Glenda Jackson and Cate Blanchett.

¹⁸ cf. Richard Barsam 208.

¹⁹ cf. Barsam 210.

One observation by Barsam is that the “average movie is a comedy; mass-marketed to [an] under-thirty audience” (211). That is an interesting aspect considering that aging is a big issue in the second film with Cate Blanchett and that for an under-thirty audience forty-year-old Cate can indeed be considered as old(er).

Cate Blanchett could also be described as belonging to the group of “extremely versatile actors” that Barsam (211) claims, are able to gain a great amount of money for a single film, as their quality acting is so highly recognized. Among these Barsam mentions Julianne Moore and Leonardo Di Caprio; Cate would definitely fit into this category as her trademark on imdb.com is described as being able to be cast for “multifarious personalities”.

During the time of the studio system, castings were organized by a specific department within each studio, which also meant that actors were most likely to work for their studio. Bette Davis, for instance, was a possible candidate for the character of Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*. The studio, Warner Brothers, would, however, only have accepted if that would have included Errol Flynn as Rhett Butler, which even Davis thought to be an impossible choice (cf. imdb.com mini-biography).

One major change in casting habits according to Barsam is the fact that nowadays actors constitute a wider range concerning ethnicity and race as “[f]or decades, movie producers intentionally contradicted social reality by casting actors who are not of a certain race or ethnicity to portray that race or ethnicity”. Another discrimination that has remained unchanged, however, is the fact that the movie industry tends to neglect women older than forty-five, a fact that Barsam finds lacking when it comes to the British (named in Barsam: Judi Dench, Joan Plowright, Vanessa Redgrave, Maggie Smith “generally work as long as they can”). In any case, a portrayal of the Renaissance Queen of England, who lived up to her seventies and reigned until her death, could be impersonated by an actress older than forty or fifty. Interestingly enough, most actresses chosen for the role are in their early forties. It seems as though this would be the appropriate “Queen age”.

Younger actresses can age through make-up, which is also the case with interpreters of the Queen, e.g. Cate Blanchett and Glenda Jackson. And it is true that British actresses are booked as Queen despite their age or even because of it like Helen Mirren and Judy Dench. According to Barsam, “the apparent bias against older female actors remains a box-office fact and thus a reality of casting in Hollywood” (216). Barsam thereby finds a cultural stereotype concerning an American audience, who accepts aging as long as it happens to someone else. This is, however, only true for women, as men are allowed to age on screen in Hollywood productions. The Aging Queen is also a topic within the films analyzed and discussed below and might be a result of the film industry’s self-consciousness regarding this topic.

2. Enter the Queen

The 1912 film *Les amours* starts with a ‘before-the-play’ introduction of the actors. The actors playing the principal characters are introduced through a pretext. Sarah Bernhardt, for instance, is wearing a little crown and bows several times to the audience before the actual plot is introduced. As the camera is rather fixed, there is no great camera movement. It is the actors who move through the screen in a well-choreographed style. Background characters are performing a choreography like a *corps de ballet* at the Opera. The first text that introduces the first tableau reads:

The Queen, anxiously awaiting news of the Spanish Armada, is struck by the enthusiasm and noble bearing of Earl Essex, who alone is confident of success. Drake arrives and announces the total defeat of the Spaniards. (inserted in-between text in film)

At first we see Essex in the foreground, discussing maps and documents with surrounding male courtiers, while some ladies chat in the back. The Queen only arrives later and draws the attention of each of the little groups onto her persona, which means that we suddenly have one focus of action in comparison to the earlier two. The character Francis Drake arrives at the end

of this tableau and announces his victory (over the Spanish Armada). He stands out of the court crowd by his less noble attire. His appearance is one of a seafarer or pirate rather than a courtier, which distinguishes him greatly from the character Essex. He is welcomed by the Queen and celebrated by the crowd. Then Essex and Drake hold Elizabeth up on a stretcher (chair) and the crowd cheers her on. Then comes the second tableau, introduced by another in-between-text.

The introduction of the Queen is especially prominent in 1939 in ***Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex***. After a triumphant victory entrance of Essex in the streets of London, the story advances to inside the castle. A medium long shot shows the character of Francis Bacon in the front on the left, in the middle ground behind him stands a room divider behind which the Queen is being dressed by her ladies. She moves a little which makes her silhouette perceivable, that shows her looping dress, her extravagant wig and especially the ruff that has become a trademark for the time and its monarch. What she is holding in her hands is a hand mirror handed to her by her ladies, in order to let her inspect the result of their efforts transforming her into the presentable and thus reproduced iconic self. Remarkable in this film opening is that the introduction of the Queen starts only in minute four, and after a long introduction of the male lead, Essex. At Essex's arrival, the ladies at court gossip at how great it must be to be a man, and what's even more, a hero. Furthermore, Lady Penelope suggests that it is easy for the Queen to have his love as she has the power to command it, thereby hinting at the love relationship between the protagonists. Here again comes the introduction of the Queen, who looks quite small and ridiculous in shape, hiding behind a screen. The mirror she is looking at will later be reintroduced in another mirror-destruction scene, in which the Queen has been reminded of her aging appearance that is unlikely to attract a young lover like Essex. The only part that becomes visible is her foot that she points at her dresser in order to get a shoe put on. It indicates both the helplessness of the Queen, as well as her getting depicted as a ridiculed character. The only part of her body that is revealed is a small waving foot, not a very flattering portrayal of a person. Also her foot is bare and helpless as it dangles in the air.

During the dressing scene, a triumphant march of Essex towards the palace is supposed to take place. The courtiers salute him with trumpets that are decorated with the royal coat of arms of England. The camera moves on to show the crowd, and then especially captures a group of ladies standing on a terrace, waving their handkerchiefs, languishing for the triumphant hero. Then the setting changes to inside the palace again. The next scene shows a huge coat of arms in the center that has the emblem of England with three golden lilies on blue background, the lilies had been introduced by Edward III to support his claim to the French throne, quartered by two depictions of the three lions against a red background that have been introduced by Richard I (the Lionhearted). This emblem has been adapted by Queen Elizabeth I in that she uses three lilies instead of more as was the case in Edward's archetype and is equivalent to the emblem of Anjou. The coat of arms is flanked by two heraldries, a lion on the left and a dragon on the right. The dragon probably stands for Saint George, patron saint of England, whereas the lion might stand for the British monarchy as such. A ring around the emblem is decorated with the saying of the Order of the Garter: "Honi soit qui mal y pense" and underneath the "footnote" reads: "Dieu est mon droit". Below the whole ensemble one can read 1558, the year the Queen ascended to the throne. Then the camera moves further away from the coat, revealing that it is placed above the giant entrance door, leading to the throne room. Two guards stand on its sides and further emblems decorate the wall. The door that Essex is about to enter is opened by two brightly dressed courtiers from inside and the whole crowd of men is seen bowing from behind towards a massive purple throne in the back. In this entrance scene we are seemingly put into Essex's view. The whole scene is accompanied by majestically triumphant music. There is a short image where the bowing courtiers move to the side and reveal the image of the Queen, sitting on her throne. This image is especially interesting as it is obviously staged in a way to create a lot of depth, which supposedly renders it all the more majestic. We still see the two guards, dressed in silver armor, on both sides in the very front. On the next level just behind them but a bit further inside the image the two door openers have kept their position. They are clearly distinguishable from the two guards in silver armor by their colorful attire, thereby creating the image that the

castle is toughly protected towards the outside world, but warming up the further one gets inside. It becomes clear that the aging Queen has shut herself in, lost touch with the outside world, to her people. So they choose Essex. Now as Essex (and with him the camera) is entering the palace, the center of the whole image becomes the Queen. She is seen in the far back of the setting, motionless on her throne, expecting the arrival. The image creates the feeling that this room is extremely large. One can see the ceiling as well as the marble ground that is so greatly polished that it reflects the setting above it, which enhances the feeling of enormousness and thus supports the deepness and vastness of this interior setting. Then comes a cut to the announcer that has already been introduced by three knocks against the floor, somehow seeming to wake us up from the dream we have just be led into. He announces "Robert Devereux, by her grace Lord of Essex", and suddenly the point of view changes from Essex, to what should now be the Queen's point of view, an exact reversal of the whole setting earlier. We see Essex march in with a whole group of followers behind. We see the same door, only now it is revealed to us from the other side, opening to the room before the throne room that the camera had been situated in earlier. This side of the door is also greatly decorated with flags and even more emblems in bright colors are disposed. As Essex enters in full armor, the camera suddenly moves in on Lady Penelope's face which shows a shy enthusiastic smile triggered by the sight of Essex, as this form of editing intrigues the audience. The announcer proclaims that he is also general of the horse and knight of the garter, another factor that could be triggering Penelope's smiling, admiration. Through this form of editing we are invited to share Penelope's admiration for the principal character.

The cooperation of Olivia de Havilland (Lady Penelope) and Errol Flynn (Earl of Essex) is of course one that is due to the studio system. Both were testimonials for Warner Brothers, so was Bette Davis. The appearance of the two as a couple was a well established legend, as had been seen earlier in, for instance, the screening of the filmic 'floating signifier' Robin Hood in *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938). It might add to the signifier of Errol Flynn's face with a British national hero that precedes Flynn's portrayal of Essex.

Flynn and de Havilland had earlier worked together in *Captain Blood*, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, as well as *They Died with Their Boots On*. The audience of 1939 must have had a certain expectation or image of the two as a couple and was thus expecting this also for this new film starring them both. That these two characters will not end up as a couple is definitely a surprise for the otherwise conditioned film audience of the time.

After Essex, Charles, Baron Howard of Effingham, Lord High Admiral of England and Walter Raleigh, knight, vice admiral of the fleets, and warden of the stannary get introduced and enter the room. There is a camera perspective switch from the entrance door that was showing the coming in characters in a full shot, to another long shot from behind the green, gold colored throne where we perceive the Queen sitting. The group of actors who has just entered, choreographed like a *corps de ballet*, has well spread within the room and synchronously kneels, Essex starting a bit ahead in fact, the others following. By now we have been shown the whole setting of this throne room from three different angles.

The striking importance of the introduction of the coat-of-arms before the actual appearance of the monarch proves the significant role of symbolism when it comes to National identity and, linked with it, monarchy. It also suggests that the majority of the intended audience of the film was well familiar with, and thus able to read, these codes and symbols. Even more so I suggest that the long screening of the coat-of-arms was intended to boost the national pride and patriotic feelings of the English audience in 1939, about to face a war against Nazi-Germany.

Then there is another cut to an extreme close-up of the Queen's foot on the left, resting on a huge purple cushion that has a golden lily at its center, and framed by a golden velvet braid. The lily stands for virginity, and is also the symbol for France. Here again we see her foot, which seems like catching up on the earlier scene in which the Queen was basically hiding behind the screen, only her shadow and foot revealed. This second introduction of the character of the Queen again starts with her foot. Another interesting observation is the use of color. The cushion with the emblem is in a bright

purple with bright yellowish gold. The Queen's dress and shoe match this cushion with a slightly darker version of lilac and some green that we have earlier seen as being the color of the throne she is sitting on. Then the camera moves up from the foot to show the seated person in medium close shot. The same colors are repeated. The green is the basic color of the chair, as well used in laces of the dress and especially the color of an immense feather fan the Queen is holding in her left hand. The gold is repeated as framing of the throne that is even decorated with golden fringes. Also the dress is decorated with golden necklaces and the numerous rings are gold. All parts that point to the center of the Queen are of gold, whereas the "edges" of her dress are decorated with white laces. The ruff is white as well as the sleeves and they repeat each other's patterns. The central golden collar chains (or necklaces, although they really look like chains in size) are framed by huge white pearl necklaces. The pearls are repeated on her head as hair accessories and mark a sharp contrast to the bright red of the well fringed hair. An even brighter red is used on the Queen's lips. The purple color of dress on cushion is again repeated in the background curtain, although in a much lighter and less outstanding nuance. The dominating colors of dress as well as of the surroundings are purple, green and gold. Purple is a color that especially as crimson is highly associated with royalty and so is gold. Purple is, however, also a color that is associated with autumn and aging femininity. It was used as color for unmarried women, no matter of what age and thus became associated with the signifier of the old spinster. This latter association might have triggered the use of purple as principal color in the depiction of the Queen, as she is an unmarried virgin, well advanced in age.

Although the title of ***The Virgin Queen*** (1955) suggests that this film would have one protagonist, the Queen herself, in contrast to the 1939 version of *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex*, it takes up to almost thirteen minutes of the film until the Queen is finally introduced. It soon becomes clear that the Queen is actually almost a side character. It is her time and court that are primarily on display. The beginning of the film shows how the character of Walter Raleigh gets in contact with some courtiers, one of them

the Earl of Leicester, and after defending the Queen's name in a pub brawl, Raleigh shows ambitions of making a career at court. This ambition gets highlighted when he refuses to take the bag of gold coins offered as a reward for freeing the royal carriage out of the mud. He replies that his goals would be higher. Also the noteworthy tailor scene comes before the first appearance of the Virgin Queen. One could say that the delay and great preparation before the first encounter between Raleigh and the Queen increases suspense. It seems that as audience, we are urged to take character Raleigh's point of view. It is therefore legitimate to ask why the name of this film should not be something like "The ambitions of young Sir Walter Raleigh" or "Raleigh and the Queen" or at least feature his name in some way. That the film is called *Virgin Queen* mirrors the importance of royalty and Renaissance England within the heritage culture.

The entrance of the Queen is rather dramatic. Many people are gathered in a huge hall. In this room, some French men discover Raleigh's coat being French tailoring which is due to the frock actually having been assigned to the French ambassador. Ambitious Raleigh aims for the best, which in tailoring is supposedly French couture. The inquiry of a courtier about how he acquired this fine cloak, Raleigh fends off by threatening the questioner in suggesting that he stabbed the former owner who touched him without permission, which could happen also to the one asking who is also touching his coat to feel the fine fabric. Witnesses of the former scene are some ladies including Elizabeth Throckmorton, who will, as is clearly suggested, become Raleigh's love interest. Aroused by his crude and reckless speech, she introduces herself to him, although teased by the other ladies of not being bold enough to do so. She approaches Raleigh by greeting him as 'Master Stranger', to which he responds by saluting her with 'Mistress Curiosity'. This already implies the heavy emphasis on sassy word games and the notion that the two protagonists Raleigh and Throckmorton are behaving like young foolish rascals. The Queen enters exactly at the most inappropriate moment for the two protagonists of course, namely when Throckmorton tears her pearl necklace apart that she has been using like a rosary to enumerate the court rules to Raleigh. She does so exactly after introducing rule number

three, which is that whoever would like to make a career at court should not be seen engaged in conversations with someone like herself. Of course the Queen enters exactly at that moment, her entrance being introduced by three knocks against the floor as background sound. This is a parallel to the earlier screening of the Queen in 1939, where the knocking would also be used as a sign of introduction, only that time as introducing Essex and others to the Queen and not the other way round. The knocking is perceived by Lady Throckmorton who immediately bows, not, however, by the inexperienced Raleigh, still engaged in picking up the spilled out pearls, which causes the Queen to ask: "Mistress Throckmorton, is this your pet swine? You have cast pearls before him," thereby adapting a famous proverb. The gravity of the situation and the sudden entrance is supported by thrilling music. Raleigh shockingly tilts his head and after dropping the formerly picked-up pearls again, perceived only in sound, bows obediently.

The Queen holds a fan of feathers in her right hand, similar to the introduction scene in the version of 1939, only this time it is white. She is, however, standing up and it is she that enters the room as opposed to the courtiers being introduced to her, which has been the case in the earlier production. The fan of feathers' whiteness matches the dress that has a mix of white and moss green patterns on its skirt and sleeves and is fully moss green on its bodice. Purely white are the collars, one enormous version standing off the edges of the dress and a ruff around the neck, and the pearl necklaces that form a certain pattern in that they seem attached to a line of buttons on the bodice. Furthermore, the hair is similarly bright red to the film interpretation of thirty-nine and pearls are used as hair accessories.

When the Queen appears on screen, the camera tilts from the floor, to which the bottom of the Queen's dress is perceptible as she has walked into the camera's sight, towards revealing the Queen's upper body and face. The composition of the following frame is this: the Queen is clearly put at its center, shown in medium close shot, portraying her from the hips upwards. In the front of the frame stand Raleigh and Throckmorton who have both turned away from the camera and towards the Queen. Raleigh on the left is slowly lifting himself up from his attempt to pick up the pearls, an action

synchronized with the camera movement. Throckmorton, on the right, now faces the Queen. Behind the Queen stands the character of Sir Christopher Hatton, the Queen's present favorite as Elizabeth Throckmorton had already told Raleigh in the previous scene, and thereby also informed us. All these principal characters are filmed from the hip upwards, in a medium close shot. Additionally a crowd of people fills up the rest of the space in the back. The whole room seems focused on the Queen, thus adding to the impression of the absolute importance and power of this character. The Queen is also the smallest of the principal characters, but clearly their center because stressed through her elaborate make-up of ruffs and pearls and the strikingly red hair. From the right enters another character, the Earl of Leicester, introduced earlier as Raleigh's protégée. In this scene he introduces Raleigh to the Queen as a returned soldier from Ireland. The Queen immediately shows some favor and wards off all kinds of attempts to discredit Raleigh by throwing ins of the character of Hatton about the Queen's usual aversions of Ireland. Raleigh's charm immediately overwhelms her. At the sight of a little creek in the courtyard, Raleigh throws his exquisite coat on the ground so the Queen can cross it without getting wet. This "puddle-scene" is reused in many other versions of the Queen on screen and thus analyzed in more detail under 'intermediality' in the next chapter.

The protagonist character in *Elizabeth (1998)* first appears on screen in minute seven. Before her appearance we are led into a very dark and cruel world that is supposedly the reality of half-sister Mary's reign. We see three people getting burned on the stake and then are led into the court of 'Bloody Mary', which is dark and sinister, full of conspiracies and sexual intrigues, around the character of the Duke of Norfolk. In minute seven we are suddenly relieved from this sinister environment of the court and the English towns and led to a sunny flourishing countryside, where young ladies are joyfully dancing outside in colorful dresses. The whole scene appears to us like a dream. The first glimpse into this new setting is shown in diffused light accompanied by soft laughter of young girls as background sound. On the DVD's menu, the scene can be selected under the title "Dudley, the lover".

The dark colors of the prior scenes are now contrasted with warm colors of red and orange-yellow.

The scene starts with a long shot, which is characteristic of an establishing shot that is either a long or an extremely long shot. The first image brings the grass in the foreground into focus, whereas the group of female dancers, all wearing dresses, is blurred. Then the focus changes towards blurring the grass in bringing the six dancers clearly into sight. Elizabeth is the second from the right, clearly sticking out through her long red hair. She wears a dark green dress, mirrored by another lady further back who wears a light green dress. In addition to the green, perfectly matching her hair, she has a bright red scarf that she is wearing around the arms. The green obviously symbolizes the hope incorporated in this character that is supposed to lead this presently dark England into light again. The combination of dress and cape is also reminiscent of the depiction of the Madonna, usually seen wearing a dress and cloak. The cloak reaches from the left shoulder to the right arm, where it seems to be attached to a finger and enhances the dancing movements. It is also worn in different colors by two other ladies of the group. The three cloak wearers form some sort of triangle. The dresses of the dancers are as a whole very colorful though not extremely bright, except for the cloaks that are bright red, orange, and the one furthest behind in a more settled red. The cloaks obviously display certain variations and shades of red in order to match the principal character's bright red. Moreover, shades of green are repeated also in two other dresses. Green is also the dominating color of the fore- and background. The grass that still occupies the frontal lower third of the image is bright green. Behind the dancers the grass continues and blends into the stronger green of the deciduous trees behind them. The green obviously portrays the hope implicated in this scene. The red shown on Elizabeth and repeated also in two other dresses, in more modest shades, might forecast the love relationship that is the topic of this scene. Then there is a cut towards the horse that approaches with Dudley. The giggling of the girls is undercut by the sounds of the riding horse. Dudley rides on a white horse. Behind him the background is very scenic, showing green hills and trees. When Dudley lifts the young lady from the horse, he is

seen in bright red lighting, his white shirt slightly open as to reveal his chest. He is clearly fetishized as the love interest that most Costume Dramas typically feature.

The dress of the girl who is litted off the horse is also green, although lighter in shade than that of Elizabeth. The character Elizabeth continues her dancing alone, as the other dancers have been occupied by the interruption. She is now seen in a full shot, as the camera has moved in closer. This full shot reveals the brightness of her red hair and the ribbon she is wearing at her back that is now also detectable as forming a giant lace on the left shoulder. In the foreground stands a young boy who has turned his back to the camera. His dress too is green and he wears a black hat. He plays the instrument that gives the rhythm to the dancing. Suddenly the nostrils of the white horse enter into the frame and then there is a cut to Dudley on horseback whose face reveals that he has an obvious goal, the lonesome dancer that we have seen in the image before. He jumps vigorously off the horse, another cut to the group of ladies, lit into dark red light which portrays some sort of evening sun image as well as foreshadowing the love theme. In their center is the young girl that has been accompanying Dudley on his ride. She brags about her adventure. The three girls on the left look as though they are excitedly listening to her story, her back turned to the camera, which also reveals an elaborate ribbon. The two other ladies on the left are gleaming towards the left end of the frame to where Dudley seems to be. Then we see Dudley from behind, approaching the dancer. A cut to a medium close shot of Dudley's face comes next. The head of the horse is still perceivable in the left-hand back, silhouettes of two of the ladies behind his right shoulder. His romantic glance, combined with the half opened shirt, enhance the interpretation of this scene to fulfill the heritage fetish for the male lead. His lips are brightly red and the scene is lit with back lighting. Furthermore, his shirt is highly decorated with vent holes that dispose even more of his naked skin. His bare neck and chest are decorated with a necklace.

Elizabeth is now also shown in close shot, drowned in back lighting. The long hair is knotted at both sides, the knots decorated with three little white pearls.

Her look is highly romantic. A long pearl earring decorates her ear above a necklace full of little white pearls. This is reminiscent of other portrayals of the Queen earlier, although this time the pearls are applied more modestly, only perceivable in this close shot. The hand of the Princess is decorated with one ring on her right ring finger only, as opposed to the ring stuffed fingers in Bette Davis's versions of the Queen on screen. Then starts the Costume Drama's imminent obligatory romantic theme with Dudley questioning: "May I join you My Lady?" to which romantic music sets in. The dancing Elizabeth turns and there is another cut to Dudley's face, now still lit with backlighting that seems brighter than before, being set into a red tone. The young princess starts smiling, her head gleaming thanks to the backlighting. She answers smilingly: "If it pleases you, Sir" and then starts the dance of the two lovers, only in the next scene the background is that of an interior setting, romantically lit by some light that seems to come out of a chimney on the left hand side of the frame. They continue dancing in front of a fireplace and the princess is cheerfully laughing, which is not heard, only seen, triggered by kisses on the hand by the lover-dancer Dudley. Another image portrays Dudley's hand on the skirt of the dress that has already been described. Her hand then also touches his face and the whole scene becomes an introductory scene as the missing names of the respective actors of this film are blended in below. In the back we see the diffused close-ups of the dancing, combined with medium close shots. The whole scene is plunged into a dark red filtered light, even redder than before. The dancing is then interrupted by a seemingly distressed girl running on the fields outside, trying to warn the lovers of the approaching horsemen. The first man of the approaching group is dressed in a black cloak, with bright red insides, portraying some sort of devilish colors. He proclaims that Princess Elizabeth is to be arrested, and what comes next are darker settings again.

Elizabeth – The Golden Age (2007) stands out in comparison to the prior films in that the image of the Queen appears already in the beginning. The introduction is done via enormous glass window paintings, which tell the story of the antagonists Philipp II of Spain and Elizabeth I of England. What follows is an introduction of the Spanish court that is all engaged in Catholic

ceremonies and obsessed with the liberation of England from the “Protestant bastard Queen”. Philipp is shown instructing his daughter Isabella that he intends to usurp the English Queen. Standing on a balcony, they are then waving to the crowd in front of ‘El Escorial’, whereupon the camera tilts down revealing the object the little girl is holding in her hands in a close up. It is a cloth doll that obviously resembles the image of the Virgin Queen. It has bright red hair that is highly decorated with white pearls, white pearl earrings, a very white face that blends in with the white ruff below and a blue Renaissance dress.

The image then quickly dissolves into a completely new setting, a glass window comprising the colors red, yellow and orange. Behind the thick glass we can perceive the blurred image of the white face, white ruff and red hair of the Queen. Only one eye is perceptible as the other is covered up behind the wooden panel of the window. The yellow, red and orange colorings of the window plates match the red hair of the Queen. Following the rules of the golden section, the Queen occupies two thirds of the right side of the image. The camera moves horizontally around the window while the figure behind it, the Queen, turns her head and is then perceptible in profile and also moved towards the center of the image.

Then there is a cut to the councilors whose voices were already accompanying the prior images. Their clothes are black with golden embroideries and the whole room seems to be plunged in a gold-filtered lighting, implicating the title’s promise of this being a golden age. Another cut to who seems to be the chairman of the council, Walsingham, eagerly listening to what the men in the council have to say. Cut to the corner where the Queen is standing. She is for the first time seen clearly instead of blurred through glass window. She wears a fully red dress with rich embroideries, a giant ruff and two big red feathers on her head. Her hair is braided up into buns and she wears a necklace, no pearls this time, but the symbol of a figure almost like a jester that seems to be the symbol of the noble Order of the Garter for Kapur’s version of the Queen. To her right stands a younger man who seems to have handed her the sealed document she is presently reading. He is bowing and his attire is composed of grayish golden colors. He

blends almost into the background of the grey stone walls drowned in golden light from the yellow floral decoration of the stained glass windows in the background. These are the same glass windows that had previously shown the silhouette of the Queen's head in a close-up. Now the scene is filmed in full shot and the Queen and her companion again occupy the left-hand side of the picture, whereas the right third space of the frame is left empty, which seems to be following the rules of the golden section. Then a cut towards a position that finally reveals the whole room of action from the bird's eye view. The whole image is framed by the rich decorum of the gothic stone gate. It is repeated in another door on the other side of the room, which gives the image of a diagonal axe and thus a lot of depth. The center of this axis is occupied by a vacant throne, lit in gold and red and standing in front of a black background, somehow elevated from the floor. It seems to be standing in a smaller room attached to the major room of action, which has a long table at its center, positioned in the same way so as to enhance the image of the diagonal axis leading towards the throne. We see the red figure of the Queen on the right and the majority of the council men, all dressed in black or dark grey, on the left hand side, or seated at the table. The Queen's dress is brightly lit through the glass door windows, which make it gleaming, the pattern of the glass window being mirrored as shadows on her dress. The whole image is again plunged into a warm light of orange, red and gold. The floor of the room is a giant map, which will play a more important role in later images of the film.

A close-up of the Queen's face is enhanced by red lighting and her facial expression could be described as decisive. Now the ruff is greatly perceptible in that it is only white on its edges and pinkish red in the center. The figure on the necklace looks like a harlequin and the curled up hair is decorated greatly with five golden sticks that combined with the lighting create the feeling of rendering the Queen some sort of halo. The graveness of her words is accompanied by majestic music and the camera moves a little towards the right as to reveal the throne again, creating the strong image of the Queen on the left front and the shining gold throne gleaming behind her on the right side of the image. Then another cut to show her back as she sits down on

the chair on which she has been resting her hands earlier. She is thereby aided by one of the men from the back, supposedly a servant.

The Queen ends her speech to the council with the grave words that she is sure that the people of England love their Queen and that her constant endeavor is to earn that love. Then a cut to a completely different setting, a very random outside setting of black and blue that is indicated as being “Fotheringhay Castle – Mary Queen of Scots’s prison” through a subtitle below, which ends this long introduction sequence.

3. Fashioning the Queen

Most of the films around the Queen are categorized as belonging to the drama, history and romance genre. Because of the importance of costume in films that depict earlier historic periods, these films are also known as costume dramas. Only the latter two of the films discussed in this paper take the credit of being considered as biopics. The films concerned make little effort in depicting the life and character of the Renaissance Queen and are more interested in showing elaborate costumes and complicated love relationships, within the setting of the Elizabethan court. The chapter below will show that these are typical ingredients of the genre. Costume is an important element of this genre, as suggested by the popular label ‘costume drama’. It is not surprising that many of these films were honored with an Academy Award. That is why I will look at the film’s costumes in more detail.

3.1 Elements of the Costume Drama

In this chapter I want to show that the films discussed here fit the term “costume drama” which also falls under the category of heritage industry. Therefore, I will explore the phenomenon of the heritage cinema.

In *British historical cinema*, Claire Monk describes the characteristics of the heritage film, to which costume drama belongs, as follows:

The films named as heritage films were typically set in an English, southern-, middle- or upper-class past. They were usually period fictions rather than ‘historical’ films, and were frequently adapted from ‘classic’ literary sources [...]. In terms of aesthetics [...] heritage films were said to ‘operate primarily as middle-class quality products’ [...]. (178)

All discussed versions of the Queen on screen employ a fictional story around a historic persona. In their aesthetics, costume dramas and heritage films are frequently described as primarily conservative resulting from a “static pictorialism rather than making the fullest use of the moving image” (ibid.). When comparing this to the elaborate description of the first scenes, it becomes clear that one setting stays in frame for a long time, hinting at the importance of the decorum for this genre. James Leggott finds the genre as strikingly significant within the British film industry.

[...] British cinema has been dominated by films that offer some kind of recreation of the past, whether based on historical events, literary sources or entirely imagined. [It] could be said that their historical emphasis is one of the defining characteristics of British film culture. (75)

In Leggott’s opinion it can either be seen as the conservativeness of British cinema or simply as contributing to nation-building and national identity.

[This] can be taken as verification of the role played by cultural history – shared stories, landscapes and artistic traditions – within definitions of Britain and Britishness. (Leggott 76)

Leggott’s proposition exhibits striking similarities with the importance of royalty and identity to enhance national unity that Doris Teske describes, as stated in the first part of this paper. The Queen as topic for heritage film contributes to national identity feelings all the more in portraying a national

hero, a historic monarch and thereby showing landscapes as well as historic buildings of Britain. The films thus function also as tourism advertisements and tours of the film's settings are offered for fans²⁰.

Both Claire Monk and James Leggott trace the term 'heritage cinema' back to Charles Barr in the 1980s, using the term not for his own decade's productions, but for British films of the 40s²¹. Interestingly enough, Monk declares that some of these films were "officially-sponsored propaganda," (Monk 187) to boost national pride during WWII. Within this era falls also *Private Lives* (1939).

Similar findings are also detectable in Andrew Higson, to whom both Leggott and Monk frequently refer.

3.2 Costume

Queen Elizabeth I is a widely explored icon for British culture. As explained above, her reign was marked by large expansions of the British territory linked with the colonization of the New World and is generally associated with the high time of English literature. It is this golden age of English history that is highly exploited in the celebration of 'Britishness' even today. The popular designer Vivienne Westwood, for instance, uses the image of the Queen to create what she calls "nostalgia for the future". In exploring the English Renaissance, Westwood attempts to create an "idealized aristocracy of the past". It is no coincidence that she draws upon the image of the Virgin Queen in order to present British power and culture. Queen Elizabeth herself was well aware of the importance of iconic portrayal of her own persona, as proven by the portraits of the Queen. Elizabeth was a fashion icon of her time, which makes the costumes in film all the more interesting.

²⁰ e.g. "Jane Austen tours" in Bath

²¹ Films that Barr referred to were *This England* (David MacDonald, 1941) and *Henry V* (Laurence Olivier, 1944) (cf. Monk 187).

Before looking at the films, I want to start with what was fashionable during the English Renaissance period, as this must have been the starting point for the respective costume designers.

3.3 Renaissance Fashion

According to “Das Große Bilderlexikon der Mode”, Spain was the dominant culture in Europe from 1550 onwards, which was evident in the spreading of Spanish fashion all over the continent and the British Isles. Spain’s hegemony peaked around the reign of Charles V (1519 – 1585).

Die gestärkte, steife, unbequeme und dunkle Kleidung war das charakteristische Spiegelbild dieser Zeit. Der hohe spanische Kragen vertrug keine lebhafte Bewegung und kein natürliches Lachen. (Kybalová 380)

Spanish fashion is notorious for hiding the natural form of the body by covering it under a certain rectangular shape. In film, this Spanish fashion is, however, contrasted to that of Elizabeth’s in that her half-sister Mary’s reign is dominated by this stiff darkness. The Spanish fashion is used to reflect Mary’s affinities with Spain, eminently motivated by her descent from a Spanish mother, Catherine of Aragon, and her being married to Philipp of Spain, a devout Catholic. The historic characteristics of the fashion support the sinister tone of Mary’s reign. Due to her violent persecution of the growing group of Protestants, she was attributed the epithet “Bloody Mary”. With Elizabeth, however, color seems to reflect the fashion at court. The portrayals of the Queen on screen through Davis and Blanchett are marked by a rich variety of colors in the dresses. Historic portraits of the Queen show her in more settled colors than these interpretations on screen. Nevertheless, Elizabeth does like to present herself in shades of royal red and virginal white, besides black.

The **male fashion** of the time can be explored when looking at portraits of Henry VIII, Sir Robert Dudley and Sir Walter Raleigh. These show the male

genitals with the characteristic codpiece. In the films analyzed, however, this significant detail of male fashion is completely omitted. Actually, the codpiece was on its way out towards the second half of the sixteenth century.

Generally speaking, male fashion was marked through the wearing of a doublet, accompanied by separated sleeves that were tied on to the doublet. Underneath the doublet the gentlemen wore breeches. The short breeches were supplemented by a nether-stock that was usually tied with a canon (i.e.: wide ribbon)²². The shorter version of breeches came to be known as “trunk-hose” which was stuffed with all kinds of material, like rags and horsehair, to increase its “resembling a giant pumpkin in contour” (Brooke 88). A later development in Renaissance fashion was the peasecod-belly, reaching its “most exaggerated and ridiculous form during the late 80’s” (Brooke 89).

The central part of **women’s fashion** consisted of the bodice or stomacher surrounded by puffed shoulders which could either be supplemented by narrow or bombasted and slashed sleeves. Brooke points out that the French farthingale was introduced during the late 70s which replaced the bell-shaped skirt characteristic of the Spanish farthingale. The French farthingale

consisted of a hoop, several feet in diameter, fixed to the waist with a series of tapes, the whole tilted down in the front. [...] The skirt worn over this was of necessity exceedingly full, the gathers radiating from the waist of the stomacher, like the sun’s rays. (Brooke 81)

Together with the pointed bodice, this French farthingale is characteristic of Elizabeth’s image in the ‘Ditchley portrait’. In film, the horizontality of the hoop is not quite reached.

A striking aspect of female as well as male fashion was the application of ruffs. Due to the introduction of starch in 1564, the styles of ruffles would be varied. Elizabeth herself is depicted as alternately wearing pleated or upstanding ruffs. Loschek in Reclam’s “Kostümlexikon” remarks that in later periods laced ruffles came to be known as “Betsie or Betsy”, after Elizabeth

²² Cf. Loschek 42

123. In film, especially in *The Private Lives* much emphasis is given to the Queen's ruffs. She is sometimes even wearing a combination of two at the same time.

When looking at the Queen as fashion icon, one cannot fail to notice the special focus given to **hairstyle**. In *A History of English Costume*, Iris Brooke remarks that from 1580 onwards, "the hair received more attention than it had since the twelfth century" (78). Instead of covering the hair with hats, women started to wear their front hair fuzzed and curled and dyed it preferably in red or saffron²⁴. Also wigs became a fashionable accessory and it was not exceptional that a fashionable lady would wear a different colored wig every other event. Elizabeth herself is known to have owned several hundred wigs. In film all four versions of Elizabeth wear a dark red wig, highly characteristic of the Virgin Queen. In Kapur's *Elizabeth*, the Queen's transformation to the iconic Virgin Queen is mainly achieved through cutting her hair to furthermore replace the natural hair by a red wig. In *The Golden Age*, a dressing room scene is included which exposes a number of similar-shaped red wig, besides dresses.

Brooke adds that pearls and brooches that would not find any application in dress would simply be added to one's hair, thus leading to a high decoration of the hair-do. This is emphasized in the portrayals of the Queen on screen, hair being richly decorated with pearls, especially in Bette Davis's incarnation, described in *Enter the Queen*, chapter two.

²³ Cf. Loschek 323

²⁴ Cf. Brooke 77 ff

3.4 Costume Design

This chapter intends to explore how costume designers approach their subject in order to achieve what we as audience are able to perceive on screen.

Costume design for motion pictures is about creating mythic images, revealing character, and illustrating drama using the principles of art (especially drawing and painting, and their rules of composition, proportion, and color) and symbolism as applied to physical clothing. When clothing is used as a means of artistic expression and for dramatic insight, not as an end in itself, but as a descriptive representation in cloth for the character who wears it, it becomes a "costume". A costume designer is thus an illustrator. (La Motte 71-72)

In *Costume Design 101*, Richard La Motte explores "two very different styles of costuming" (47). The first version he calls "documentary", which means that a costume designer studies the period of the time the film intends to portray and tries to copy exactly this fashion. The second version he describes is called "Kabuki", named after the Japanese theatre of the absurd. This approach suggests that since the author has invented something fictional, the designer can create something new as well. Instead of copying the past, the designer attempts to create a "new reality" (La Motte 47). The most advisable approach, in La Motte's opinion, is to find a middle way between the two styles. This seems to be attempted in most versions of the Queen on screen.

La Motte explains that most directors ask the designer to make the costumes look as real as possible, thereby meaning that they should be "ACCEPTABLE as real" (48). The most important aspect, La Motte argues, is to keep it "true to character, but not always true to life" (ibid). La Motte finds it more important that designers develop their own style than looking for historic accuracy. In what regards the representation of a historic period, it is essential to achieve recognition of the time's silhouettes.

Iconic Silhouette of Queen Elizabeth I:



The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex,

Scene iii

The iconic silhouette of Elizabeth is highlighted in the initial presentation of the Queen in *The Private Lives*, 1939. At first we only hear the Queen's voice, herself hidden behind a screen, getting dressed by her ladies. Then finally appears the shadow of her unmistakable silhouette, imposing an immense impression on the audience. It proves the iconicity of this historical character that she is so easily recognizable merely by her silhouette, working as code. It is this iconic appearance of Elizabeth that becomes the climax of Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth* in 1998, in which she finally presents herself in what could be seen as shaping her iconic silhouette.

La Motte concludes his description of costume design by summing up with

[t]he cut [being] historical and reflect[ing] the period; the fabric [being] textural and reflect[ing] the status; the color [being] emotional and reflect[ing] the mood. (54)²⁵

Representations of the Queen on screen tend to fulfill this advice by capturing the period in cut and representing her in shiny fabrics, which LaMotte suggests to be a symbol for higher status. The representation of 1939 even exaggerates the aspect of shiny material by an overuse of artificial fabric in the Queen's dresses. Heavy use of rayon renders the image of the Queen highly superficial. Rayon is a discovery of the twentieth century, a fabric definitely not in use during the Renaissance in England and thus moving the costumes further away from authenticity.

²⁵ Similar description by Burger 68 ff

As discussed above, the Queen's iconicity in film is greatly achieved through her iconic appearance, thus demanding of **costume designers** to achieve this recognizable image of her in film. Therefore, it is not astonishing that much emphasis was given to costume design and that directors carefully chose their designers.

The designer of the 1939 version of the Queen is Orry Kelly²⁶, 1897-1964. The Australian costume designer won three Oscars in his life and is known for his legendary partnership with Bette Davis, linked to the era of the studio system of the thirties²⁷. La Motte remarks that these designers were trying to create a "fantasy image" rather than being "real," which is what modern designers today would aim at. The shining fabric of the Queen's dresses in this production might enhance the fantasy image.

Charles Le Maire and Mary Willis are responsible for Bette Davis's costumes in the 1955 production and prominent Hollywood designers. Charles is winner of three, Mary of one Oscar.

Alexandra Byrnes tried to create a new version of the Queen in the years 1998 and 2007, the later attempt was rewarded with an Oscar. Byrnes herself states on the homepage to *The Golden Age* that Elizabeth I's being a fashion icon of her time was the "big leap" for her to work on this project. Furthermore, biographical research of the film's director, Shekar Kapur, reveals that he started his filming career in Bollywood. He states that since only forty percent of the audience would speak the language, i.e. Hindi, a Bollywood film is produced in such a manner that everything else in the film has to speak, which lays a great emphasis on costumes²⁸. Considering the varied application of costume and the importance of color in Kapur's films, the Bollywood influence is detectable in his works on the British Queen also.

²⁶ Cf. imdb.com

²⁷ Cf. La Motte 62

²⁸ Cf. Raymond 126

3.5 Mise-en-scene: Costume in Film

In the analysis of films one method is to look at mise-en-scène. An important aspect of mise-en-scène²⁹ is the use of clothing to help interpret the films intended meanings. In the following chapter, I will look at the significance of clothes in supporting the story of the films that are under close watch in this paper.

Reading *Private Lives* of 1939, directed by Michael Curtis, from a feminist perspective, clothing gains an immense importance in the construction of the protagonist, as proved by the following scene.

Elizabeth: You dare turn your back on Elizabeth of England? You dare?

Essex: I would not have taken that from the king, your father. Much less will I accept it from a king in petticoats.

(The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex, scene iii)

The film's plot circles around the love story of the star-crossed lovers Queen Elizabeth I and the Earl of Essex. A major strain on their romance seems to be triggered by the fact that the Queen is the woman in charge and thus Essex's boss. She has the power to promote him to the military status he longs for. Furthermore, he depends on her financial support in order to be able to achieve military successes. Their relationship is thus apart from romantic also professional, the peculiarity the for that time unusual combination of the woman being the one in power. Her position is usually occupied by men and this factor is a threat to the security of her status as Queen. The greatest threat to this power is impersonated by her lover Essex himself. He aspires to be equaled to her in status, justifying his claim by his great popularity among the people, thanks to military successes in Calais. Right in the beginning of their encounter on screen, the Queen dismisses Essex's achievements in order to diminish his increasing popularity. He, in return, challenges her confidence as a ruler by pointing to her sex, calling her

²⁹ cf. for instance Lacey 5

a “king in petticoats” (Scene iii). The time in which the film is set shows a great distinction between male and female regarding dress codes. Essex’s verbal reference to Elizabeth’s clothing establishes the interrelation between clothes and gender, proving the assumed inferiority of a woman in an otherwise male position. The petticoat as a symbol of femininity is the essential threat to Elizabeth’s maintenance of her power as Queen. It is this struggle that she is head of state and a woman that strains the love affair of the film. The Queen, although occupying a male position, maintains a female appearance, constituted through the wearing of female fashion. As “king in petticoats”, she is attributed female vulnerability. This vulnerability is explored throughout the film, expressed by her emotional attachment to the heroic male of the story, Essex. The petticoat could thus be seen as the symbolic code for female inferiority and the source of her insecurity. The petticoat becomes the point of weakness, which Essex aims to assault in order to replace her as head of state.

Clothes and accessories get an important emphasis also in the 1955 version of the Queen, again starring Bette Davis. In *Virgin Queen*, they point less to gender roles but to social status of the wearer, especially significant in the construction of the central character Raleigh whose ambitions trigger a change in appearance.

In the beginning of the film Raleigh, claiming to be an honest man, refuses financial support by the Earl of Leicester in order to upgrade his appearance when going to court. Intending to attract the Queen’s attention, he is, however, aware of the importance of conspicuous clothing. Before his first appearance at court, he goes to see a tailor, despite his illiquidity. The following scene proves Raleigh’s ambitious and unconventional character, given that he just refused financial support to upgrade his wardrobe.

- | | |
|----------|--|
| Tailor: | Well, here is a cloak of Flemish velvet – satin-lined, exquisitely embroidered. Value only eight sovereigns. |
| Raleigh: | Look, you, Master Tailor, these are cloaks for ordinary men. |
| Tailor: | I have a cloak fit for an emperor, tailored as you have never seen a cloak tailored before. A very god amongst |

cloaks. Such cut, such workmanship. Such imagination of design. [...] (Raleigh is fascinated by another blue cloak hanging next to the one described and tries it on)

Tailor: No. That is tailored for ... Gently, sir, gently! This is tailored for a most important man. [...] I fear to touch it, lest I harm the thread. Please, I beg you, sir. The French ambassador will never forgive me.

Raleigh: The French ambassador? It is for him you are making this? Does it not matter that when you deliver this cloak you will betray every tailor in London? Do you think he will wear this cloak as it stands, when he has sworn to discredit the tailoring trade of London?

Tailor: The French ambassador?

Raleigh: Ambassadors –what are they? Paid spies. Do you know what he will do? He'll set the tailor he keeps with him in secret to work. One shoulder will drop. The hemline will drag. There'll be a tarnishing of the gold. He'll say: "Here is English tailoring."



The Virgin Queen, scene iv

At the tailor's, Raleigh aims directly at the most exquisite of all possible cloaks. The cloak is of the latest French fashion, reminiscent of the hegemony of the French when it comes to exquisiteness and design in fashion, so called *haute couture*, in the Renaissance as well as in 1955.

When entering the reception at court, Raleigh immediately raises attention especially among the French guests. They discuss whether he can be identified as a Frenchman as they are able to identify his cloak as being of the latest French fashion. Raleigh's comportment, however, reveals to them that he could not be French. One of them approaches Raleigh, touching his cloak and admiringly complementing him on it being the finest in craftsmanship and fabric. Raleigh, not at all gentleman, brusquely suggests that he had stabbed the former owner. To the question of where the bloodstains would be, Raleigh replies that the owner must have been a

bloodless fool like the one asking. Despite or because of Raleigh's brusque comportment, he raises the interest of the ladies at court, especially that of Elizabeth Throckmorton. She rips off her pearl necklace, casting pearls in front of Raleigh just when the Queen enters. This coincidence leads to the Queen's scoffing entrance line: "Is this your pet swine, Mistress Throckmorton? Because you cast pearls before him?" (scene vi). The spilled pearls, another accessory, are thus serving as a comic relief for the film's story and point at the later relation between Mistress Throckmorton and Raleigh.

The cloak becomes center of attention once more, when Raleigh throws it over a puddle the Queen would have to step through. Raleigh offers the Queen his hand in order to gallant her safely over the puddle. He then mocks her favorite Sir Christopher by offering him his hand also, which the latter furiously refuses. The Queen finds such behavior as having formerly been lacking at court. In order to raise his sympathy with the Queen, Sir Christopher offers the Queen his own cloak to keep herself warm. She accepts and remarks it being made of the finest sable, Sir Christopher adding that there exists no finer fur, thereby showing off his nobility represented through exquisite fashion. She then states that it would be too fine to waste on a mere Queen, throwing it to the floor. With the rise of Raleigh's popularity with the Queen, Sir Christopher's star is falling as the latter is portrayed as being more concerned about his own rather than the Queen's well-being. Bold Raleigh, in contrast, sacrifices a cloak that he is not even likely to be able to repay. His generous act of throwing it over the puddle could lead to great trouble with the tailor, seen before, which is, however, omitted in the further development of the plot.

The battle of cloaks, one could suggest, proves the Queen's change in preference towards the new, personified through the adventurous, brusque Raleigh, against the old, incarnated by the conventional nobleman Sir Christopher. The cloak scene manifests Raleigh's adventurous spirit, which is refreshing to the Queen who is bored of being surrounded by stiff old courtiers like Sir Christopher.

The Queen never alludes to the fact that Raleigh's adornment is highly exaggerated and totally out of context. It simply echoes his ambitious character, immediately revealing that he aims very high. His intention is to attract the Queen's attention. He wears French fashion because he recognizes it as the most outstanding and modern. Unlike the other courtiers', his adornment shows no reference to his nationality or position. Raleigh is thus a modern man, 'a man from another age' as Elizabeth suggests. For him, fashion seems to underline personality rather than status. He overcomes medieval clothing conventions that included prescriptive clothing according to once social status.

Raleigh's motivation for coming to court is to receive financial support from the Queen to be able to undertake a voyage to the New World. He intends to ask her to grant him three ships that he would navigate to the New World, confident to return with great wealth. He is so convinced of the necessity and success of his venture that he does not hesitate to play with high stakes. The highly praised cloak the tailor was so cautious about is generously sacrificed by Raleigh in order to promote his persona with the Queen. When Throckmorton returns the cloak to Raleigh after the puddle scene, it is covered with mud. She affirms that despite the fact that the exquisite garment is now ruined, it made him famous, which was worth the sacrifice. This new approach to fashion suggests Raleigh's spirit as one associated with the self-made man, a spirit inhabiting the New World. This attitude is clearly contrasted to the conventional courtly approach to fashion in the European sense. Through his exaggerated garment, Raleigh forecasts his becoming this 'new self-made man'. Courtly fashion is no longer just worn by those born into a certain position, like Sir Christopher, but also by those who aim to achieve something as a result of ambitious character, like Raleigh.

The first interpretation of the Queen from Shekhar Kapur shows ***Elizabeth***, the film's title, as a young woman in the process of becoming the iconic Queen. It is almost like a coming-of-age story. In the beginning of the film, Elizabeth is shown to live an easygoing life at her house in Hatfield. She is introduced by dancing the volta together with her ladies and freely living out her teenage romance with Robert Dudley. The scenes introducing the young

Elizabeth are shot outside in nature and her clothes reflect the vivid colors of her surroundings. She is seen dancing in a rather plain green dress, decorated with a pink ribbon. The pink and light green of the dress flatter her magnificent red-blond hair that is slightly held back by pearl-shaped pins. Her flowing hair and the vivid colors of her dress support her youthful appearance. This is highly contrasted to the presentation of her half-sister Queen Mary, who is presented only with dark lighting and in black dresses, always filmed in inside locations. Besides Mary, the whole royal household is presented in black, reflecting the negative mood of the regency as discussed earlier.

When the young Princess Elizabeth is taken to the Tower, arrested for treason, she is wearing a very modest purely white gown and a simple crown-shaped ribbon. The crown-shape seems to point to her royal status as Princess and the white dress suggests her innocence.

When presented to the Queen, she wears a very modest grayish green dress, signifying both her subjection to the Queen and her hope to be able to save her life. The only accessories remain her pearl earrings and a cross. The question of religion is what supposedly divides the sisters and could lead to Elizabeth's execution. Wearing the cross could be interpreted as an admonition for her sister, reminding her that they are both subjects to the Christian faith.

When receiving the news that she is now Queen, after Mary's death, Elizabeth again wears a white-green dress, this time, shiny and magnificent. In contrast to her first dresses, this dress underlines the growing self-confidence of the newly ascended Queen. Her hair is pinned up completely for the first time in the film. The new appearance suggests a transformation from the former girl that could lead the life of a carefree princess to that of a woman who wants to become a responsible Queen.

During the coronation scene, Elizabeth wears a golden dress combined with a golden robe, decorated with ermine. Gold remains the dominant color during the celebration at court. Even Elizabeth's ladies in waiting are dressed in robes decorated with golden ornaments. The same location that was

formerly shown as dark and shadowy when inhabited by Queen Mary is now shown in bright gold and reddish colors. Through the succession of Elizabeth, Whitehall Palace seems to become transformed into a place of light, reflected also in clothing.

In her first council meeting, Elizabeth still wears her hair down and fuzzy at front, symbolizing her inexperience and insecurity as head of state. Intercut with a war scene from Scotland, Elizabeth is shown in a dressing scene, positioned centrally, she is getting undressed by her ladies. The scene reflects Elizabeth's passivity and powerlessness in regard to the killings going on in front of Mary de Guise's castles. The color of her undergarment is white, contrasted to the colorful dresses of her ladies. The whiteness again stands for her innocence in regard to that war that she did not really want but was talked into by the council.

After the defeat in Scotland, the bishops demand her removal. On that occasion Elizabeth wears a dark red overdress that seems to feign her confidence as ruler at least on the surface. When kneeling down in front of a portrait of Henry VIII, her father, a dark green skirt appears underneath the overdress. Green symbolizes that now is hope is needed more than ever. She hopes that she will be able to secure her power against all her opponents who wish to usurp her.

In her white undergarments she is shown rehearsing her speech to the bishops. This speech should move them to pass the act of uniformity. By showing her in such basic attire, Elizabeth is brought closer to the audience, who is meant to be able to relate to the insecurities of a young woman who has just inherited the throne of England and is confronted with influential enemies. Kapur presents the insecure human side of the young Queen. The rehearsal scene is undercut with the actual voting scene with Elizabeth surrounded by the bishops. Elizabeth, now dressed in royal red, wearing her crown and sitting on her throne, is still echoing the girl that was presented before in the rehearsal scene, thus proving to the audience that what lies underneath that royal appearance is the insecure young woman.

In the river scene, Robert Dudley proposes to Elizabeth who had formerly accepted to agree to marriage negotiations with the Duke of Anjou, the younger brother of Henry IV of France. In this scene, Elizabeth and Robert are alone on a boat. Elizabeth's hair is highly decorated with leaves and flowers. Her image recalls that of a fairy, simulated to presentations of Titania, the Fairie Queen in a *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Dudley's recital of Philipp Sydney's "My true love has my heart and I have [sic] hers" supports the scene's allusion to the creative output that was produced during Elizabeth's reign.

One of Elizabeth's dresses receives special attention. Isabel, a lady-in-waiting cannot resist the temptation to try it on, although it is the Queen's robe. It is white and made of exquisite French silk. During a secret love scene with Robert Dudley, the Queen's lover, the dress reveals its poisonous nature, killing the wearer. Elizabeth is shocked when finding out that the dress was a gift for her. Isabel's wearing the Queen's dress fuels Dudley's fantasy of having sex with the Queen herself instead of her lady-in-waiting. By stealing the Queen's garment, Isabel also steals her lover, at the same time saving her life, inadvertently sacrificing hers.

In two scenes Lord Dudley is shown mirroring the colors of Elizabeth's dresses in his own clothing. Similar to what happens in *The Golden Age*, namely Elizabeth Throckmorton mirroring the dress color of Elizabeth, Dudley's character seems to be highly dependent on the Queen's in his presentation throughout the film. This dependence of character is reflected in clothing.

The audience's gaze at the intimate bed scene between Elizabeth and Dudley is limited only by a light **curtain** that is decorated with eyes and ears. The scene is preceded by showing her ladies in waiting watching them through a tiny window. The eyes and ears on the curtain remind us, the audience, that a Queen is a public persona and even her most intimate actions, like sleeping with Robert, are observed by others.

In a boat scene the lovers are again covered by a curtain which is decorated with stars, supporting Elizabeth's line: "Does not a Queen sit on the same

stars as any other woman?” The above examples of the use of curtains prove the interrelation between content and decoration in film.

The climax is the end of the film when Elizabeth, now secured in her power thanks to Walsingham, presents herself in the iconic image of the Virgin Queen. This transformation in appearance is triggered by Walsingham’s remark that people have a need to touch the divine on earth. Inspired by the Virgin Mary, Elizabeth creates her own image, presenting herself with the iconic red wig and white face. She tells Lord Burghley who had been advising her to get married as soon as possible that now she is married to England, pointing at her crowning ring.



Elizabeth, scene xx

David Moss criticizes Elizabeth’s presentation as reduction to simple appearance in his article “A Queen for Whose Time? Elizabeth I as Icon for the Twentieth Century”. Moss states that her manifestation of power is portrayed to be secured in her iconic appearance only. She seems to function merely as a “figurehead,” rather than being a monarch truly in control of the state’s affairs. Her mere reduction to appearance is one that seems to please a modern audience, desiring the spectacular. From this perspective, the achievement of the Queen seems to lie in her ability to fashion herself into the icon still recognizable for an audience of the twentieth century.

Byrnes lamented that the difficulty of presenting Elizabeth in the second interpretation by Kapur, *The Golden Age*, was that there was no such iconic scene like the finally of the first film. That is why she introduces the Queen in a royal red at the beginning to establish her being presented as a self-confident ruler. The most significant portrayal of the Queen is an obvious imitation of the Ditchley portrait, showing Elizabeth dressed in white with fairy wings and standing upon the map of the world. A non historic image of the

Queen is invented also by presenting her as a female warrior like Jeanne d'Arc.

The scene depicting Elizabeth giving her famous Tilbury speech in order to get the troops into the right mood to fight the predominant Spanish Armada shows her as an armoured warrior. Byrnes herself claims that this depiction is highly reminiscent of the image of **Joan of Arc**, imitating Milla Jovovich in Luc Besson's *Jeanne d'Arc* of 1999. Both films put their female heroines into silver armor and let her ride on a white horse.

"Bess as the mortal side of Elizabeth the divine," the quote comes from director Shekhar Kapur himself³⁰, and refers to the central relationship between Queen Elizabeth I and her lady-in-waiting Elizabeth Throckmorton, called Bess. Kapur argues that Elizabeth can live out her mortal human side through Bess, manifesting this in calling Bess her adventurer. Bess's status as mirror persona to Elizabeth is established in film through her dresses. Bess's dresses always reflect those of Elizabeth, in that they have the same color but are slightly lighter in shade. The lighter shade seems to be a reference to both her younger age and her less significant part. Bess is living out the love affair with Raleigh that Elizabeth would like to have herself.

The introduction of the two antagonists of *The Golden Age* tells a lot about the way director Kapur stylizes his film.



Both Philipp of Spain and Elizabeth I of England are shown as window paintings like iconic depiction of Saints present in Catholic churches.

³⁰ cited on <http://www.elizabeththegoldenage.com>



The introduction of the actress Cate Blanchett as Queen is done very effectively by showing her silhouette through an ornate window frame. Given that the opening of the film introduces the story through window paintings, changing from painted to “real” figures on or behind glass appears to be a very artistic way of continuing the picture composition.

This depiction of the Queen demonstrates that Kapur highlights the Queen’s status as icon, thereby focusing on the word’s meaning, namely the representation of Saints in Catholic and Orthodox churches. His understanding of the iconic status of the Queen is one that is similar to the glorification of Saints in the Catholic tradition. Saints are admired for their moral behavior and seen as idols for the faithful community, who should find inspiration in their model lives. Saints are recognizable through familiar codes that connect them with the legendary myths of their lives’ story. They are often depicted with characteristic symbols, for instance, lilies, which symbolize chastity. To be able to decode these symbols, a culture tries to familiarize its offspring with such particular knowledge. Monarchs, like Queen Elizabeth I, obviously used this knowledge to create their own iconic image. Kapur’s focus on the religious interpretation of the term “icon” finds some source in the Renaissance imagery of the Queen that represent her as having supernatural powers and being almost divine. The Ditchley portrait, for instance, suggests the godlike monarch could move the storms and the winds would stop on her command. This motif is also reproduced in *The Golden Age*, where Cate Blanchett as Queen seems to become a spiritual being commanding the storm that helps the English win the battle against the Spanish Armada. Besides Christian symbols, the imagery of the Renaissance drew heavily on images of mythology from Ancient Rome. The Queen was depicted and referred to

as Virgin Tuccia or Belphoebe, for instance, as has been demonstrated in the chapter on the Queen in Renaissance portraits above.

Although not a film but a TV mini-series, *Elizabeth R* (1971) is of some interest for this chapter as mise-en-scene is given a lot of attention especially in regards to recreating Renaissance costumes. Famous portraits of the Queen are used as models for the dresses that transform Glenda Jackson into the sixteenth-century monarch. The first series called “The Lion’s Cub”, written by John Hale, depicts a young Princess Elizabeth, whose image is highly reminiscent of a portrait painted when the later Queen was thirteen. A similar painting is actually situated above her shoulder on the left as can be seen in this screen shot.



The famous Darnley portrait served as model for a dress that Glenda Jackson’s Elizabeth exhibits in the fourth part of the series entitled “Horrible Conspiracies,” written by Hugh Whitemore.



Also recreated within the series are the dresses of the Armada and the Ditchley portraits, illustrated below.



3.6 Intermedialities

In his second presentation of Elizabeth, Kapur chose to make an obvious reference to the 1955 story line of *The Virgin Queen*. Both films circle around the triangle relationship between the Queen, Sir Walter Raleigh and a lady-in-waiting, Bess Throckmorton. This intermediality is made evident already in the introduction of Raleigh.

Both films feature scene that could be entitled “**A cloak and a puddle**”. Similar to Koster’s Raleigh, Kapur’s character recommends himself to the Queen by throwing his cloak over a puddle in her way.



The Virgin Queen, scene vi



The Golden Age, scene iii

In Kapur's version this scene is not very significant as regards the story, it is merely used to introduce the new character Raleigh. The Queen seems surprised when her walk to church gets interrupted by Raleigh's sudden movement. She seems slightly amused about his explanation, that there was a puddle. The puddle is not very large as shown by the screen shot above. In close-up it is fully covered by Raleigh's cape. In Koster's version, however, the "puddle" could rather be described as a runnel which runs through the court. In the director's comments, Kapur explains that he used this scene because it is highly representative of Raleigh, although it is doubtful it ever happened. Whatever its historic accuracy, it is definitely an intermedial reference to *The Virgin Queen* that Kapur must have had in mind.

The *Private Lives*' Queen is remarkably decorated with rings throughout the film. One ring gets special attention in Scene xiv. It is a ring, she claims, given to her by her father. The ring supposedly once saved her life at its return to her father. When he was mad at her, the ring reminded him of a vow of forgiveness attached to this token. Now it gets passed on to Essex, with the same pledge of forgiveness adhering to it. It is this ring she is hoping to receive during Essex's arrest in the Tower after his failed attempt of usurping her. Giving her the ring, she claims, could save him from the axe of the executioner and make him her equal. Essex, however, refuses this gesture, realizing the forlornness of their situation. The ring as symbol of exchange between the lovers is heavily reminiscent of engagement vows between men and women. Elizabeth's wish of Essex's returning her the ring could thus be interpreted as her female wish of getting proof of his love. It is this ring that Essex kisses before his execution, thereby trying to demonstrate the constancy of his love to her, which helps him accept death in order to protect the position of his beloved.

The dramatic plot around a ring is a familiar story for observers of the history of the Queen on screen. *Les amours*' tragic plot circles around just that. In *Les amours* the ring story is all the more thrilling as it involves four characters, Essex, the Queen, the Countess and the Earl of Nottingham.

One striking storyline within the films that feature the Renaissance Queen which reoccurs is that of the **aging woman**. Already hinted at in the chapter “The evolution of acting”, age is a factor that might lead to discrimination, especially for women. This could be one of the reasons why depictions of later periods of the Queen’s life include her contemplating over her advanced age. Given the similarity in plot, it is no surprise that both 1955- and the 2007-versions of Elizabeth struggle with her advancing age. This manifests itself primarily through a wrinkled face.

Age seems to play an important role for the construction of femininity in the twentieth century, considering the “deification of the Dolly Bird” (Church) in the London of the Sixties, for instance. In her article “The Deification of the Dolly Bird: Selling Swinging London, Fuelling Feminism”, Church argues that the icon of the young girl in the sixties was very much depending on the approval of men. This approval seems to be highly connected not just with her fashion, but primarily with her youth.

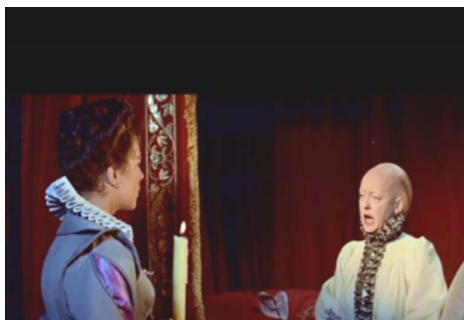
Three of the films analyzed depict an aging woman that struggles with her age mainly in reference to the competition for the love of a man she is losing, or in 1939’s version afraid to lose, to a younger woman. The interdependence of sexual attraction and age seems to play an important role for the twentieth and twenty-first century’s images of the Queen.

In *Private Lives* the Queen destroys her mirror when discovering her wrinkles. Her rival in regards to her lover Lord Essex, Penelope, provokes her anger by performing Sir Walter Raleigh’s “The nymph’s reply to the shepherd”, thereby mocking the Queen’s being in love with a younger man. In Raleigh’s answer to the famous Marlowe poem “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love”, the shepherdess’s rejection of love is triggered by her discovery that love’s joys are connected to date and age. The Queen understands Penelope’s hint and as a reaction asks her servants to remove all mirrors in her presence. She needs no reminders of her aging appearance, as she claims. Her age is the main source of insecurity regarding the truthfulness of Essex’s affection for her. In the final scene she does not allow Penelope to be present at Essex’s appearance as she fears that he would lose his

affection for her when seeing the young beautiful face of Penelope first. Despite these insecurities on the Queen's part, Essex claims his true and irrevocable affection for her till his execution ordered by Elizabeth herself. Nevertheless, it seems unconvincing to the audience that the young stud Essex, incarnated by the heart-throb of the time Errol Flynn, would truly fall for the consciously hideous portrayal of the Queen.

Bette Davis deliberately enhanced this ugly appearance. She shaved her eyebrows and hair in the front in order to increase the impression of ugliness attached to the presentation of her character. In *Virgin Queen*, Davis's similarly defaced character loses the battle for Raleigh's affection to the younger lady-in-waiting Elizabeth Throckmorton. Although the Queen does hold a certain power over both Raleigh and his mistress Throckmorton thanks to her position as their sovereign, she cannot control Raleigh's romantic affection, which clearly aim at the younger Bess.

A similar fate strikes Shekar Kapur's version of the Queen in *The Golden Age*. This is partially due to the fact that *The Golden Age*'s plot draws on the story of *The Virgin Queen*, as mentioned above. Still it is worth while mentioning that this particular aspect of the storyline has been kept, while other parts of the film are completely different from the 1955 version of the Queen on screen. The intermediality here, unlikely to be understood by a modern audience, becomes interesting when comparing the image of Cate Blanchett as aging Queen to Bette Davis's portrayal.



The Virgin Queen (1955)



Elizabeth – The Golden Age (2007)

As mentioned before, Davis consciously decreased her appearance by means of shaving natural hair. Blanchett, in contrast, appears still quite

attractive and young, younger than one would imagine a fifty-year-old woman to look. Nevertheless, Raleigh prefers Bess to Elizabeth as the Queen suggests because Bess is still younger and thus more beautiful. Being an 'old hag', she can only dream of such romance, which is shown with a flashback to Blanchet's presentation of Elizabeth in 1998, when she was still a young girl. An extreme form of make-up aging can be seen on Glenda Jackson in the TV mini-series *Elizabeth R*, dating from 1971. It tried to capture the Queen's life from early adulthood up to her death, here to compare the first and the last series:



3.7 Further semiotic analysis of the films

One of the filmic devices used in *Les amours* is the application of the rule of thirds. The separate "tableaus" the film is constituted of can be divided into three units according to where important information is situated or where actors and objects are placed. This composition is done in great consideration of using background, middle ground and foreground as well as left, right and center. An example thereof would be the opening scene with Essex discussing maps on the left hand side of the screen in the foreground. Behind him, in the right-hand middle ground, another group of actors is situated. In the background, there are courtiers occupying the center. When the Queen arrives, this order is dissolved and the actors gather in a new formation. Through this method the directors enable us to experience the

rather static picture that we get through the fixed camera, to experience a certain depth within this tableau.

The narrative plot of the film deserves some attention as it makes use of the structure of a dramatic triangle, constituting a rising and a falling action, divided by a climax. After a loose introduction of the time and the characters, Drake in the first scene as allusion to the Armada and a performance of Shakespeare's "The Merry Wives of Windsor" in the second to highlight the theatrical aspect of the film, the play begins. The third scene introduces a new character, the fortune teller who is used to create suspense. She forecasts Essex's death and an unhappy future for the Queen. We already expect the dramatic ending and are not surprised by it. The star-crossed lovers cannot be helped and the "knowing" audience remains the muted witness who can only watch as the doomed characters fulfill what already was foretold as their destiny.

Another dramatic device used in this film is the play-within-the-play, so familiar from Shakespeare and relating indirectly to Elizabethan England. During the second "tableau", Essex and the Queen are present at a performance of Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. We see the stage on the left and its audience on the right, Essex in the foreground with the Queen in the center and the courtiers behind them. The two major places of action, stage and audience, are shaped like a trapezoid, in perspective to the camera. The play-within-the-film play serves several purposes here. First of all, it is a cultural link to the time, as masques were commonly performed at the Elizabethan court and Shakespeare made use of this dramatic device of the play-within-the play in *The Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hamlet*. Secondly, it allows for the introduction of the character Shakespeare that is heavily present when scholars think of Elizabethan England. The introduction of Shakespeare is wittily done when a box, around which evolves the stage action, is removed to the left and the character of Shakespeare is revealed, sitting behind the stage. The camera then moves with a pan to the right and thus puts Essex and Elizabeth into the center of the frame. Essex then goes behind the stage to return with Shakespeare, whom, as the introduction told us, he introduces to the Queen. This play, written in 1598, is often indicated

as having been written for the Queen herself³¹ as she supposedly liked the character of Falstaff and wanted to have another play that featured him, one finished shortly before Essex's execution in 1601. This "Shakespeare"-scene seems to suggest that a film mirroring the Elizabethan era is mediated primarily through the works of Shakespeare. One of the major themes in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is jealousy.

Ford: I will rather trust a Fleming with my butter, Parson Hugh the Welshman with my cheese, an Irishman with my aqua-vitae bottle, or a thief to walk my ambling gelding, than my wife with herself.
(*The Merry Wives*, II, 3)

It is jealousy that drives the plot of *Les amours*. The Earl of Nottingham discovers his wife is unfaithful with Essex, plots against him and the Queen, feeling betrayed by Essex, orders Essex's execution. Then she discovers that he was not too proud to return the ring, but it is too late: Essex's head has been cut off.

As explored above, the opening scenes of 1939's Warner Brother's production, *Private Lives*, are very elaborate. First we see a triumphant entry of Lord Essex through the streets of Renaissance London with people cheering and ladies admiring. Then, when Essex enters the court, there is a very long distance shot of the Queen sitting on the throne, making her little figure on the huge chair look quite ridiculous. When Essex walks through the halls, the camera moves to reveal what he is about to see until he finally arrives before the Queen. The camera now shows us her feet only, which are sitting on a purple cushion decorated with a giant royal emblem in gold. Then the camera pans up to show the "whole" Queen in a medium full shot. This is obviously a quite dramatic introduction.

When Essex speaks to the Queen, she is shown in bird's perspective, implying again that the camera adapts Essex's point of view. It also makes the Queen appear inferior, especially with regard to Essex, the military hero

³¹ cf. for instance Stein 762.

who looks down on the aging Queen. When she slaps him for turning his back on her, he replies that he wouldn't have taken this from the king, her father, and much less is he willing to accept it from a "king in petticoats," a scene discussed under *mise-en-scène* above. Essex's declaration is accompanied by dramatic music and zoom-in, in on the Queen's face in an extreme close-up, which expresses frustration. This way of filming indicates support for the film's plot as focusing on the battle of power between Elizabeth and Essex.

Another scene shows the Queen sitting alone in her chamber and looking up on a bigger than life portrait of the handsome young stud Essex. She sighs the words: "Oh Essex, I don't know which I hate the most, you for making me love you or myself for needing you so." She is again shown in bird's perspective, whereas Essex's portrait, in contrast, is shown to us through a frog's perspective, now the camera following her gaze. This perspective makes the man on the portrait look huge, powerful and proud. The image conveys that this is a hero everyone looks up to. Moreover, by adopting the Queen's point-of-view out of a frog perspective, it conveys that she is inferior to him.

Shakespeare and his contemporary Marlowe are also mentioned in this film of 1939 that bases its action on the Elizabethan court. Marlowe's *The Passionate Shepherd To His Love* is about to be performed by the ladies-in-waiting, when Penelope changes the plans to perform Raleigh's sarcastic response to it instead, claiming that it would fit the Queen's relationship with Essex as one line reads: "Love cannot endure without its youth". The Queen at first welcomes this change in program as she is amused by the fact that Sir Walter (Raleigh) has turned rhymester. But when she becomes aware of the intended insult, that she is criticized as being an older woman who seeks the love of a younger man, she starts an outburst of anger, scolding the ladies for their disloyalty. This scene, as many others, shows the Queen as a ridiculed, absolutely powerless person, who does not have any control either over her surroundings or her feelings. She is completely irrational. After the scolding, the Queen desperately looks into a mirror, touching her wrinkled face. This scene is presented to us with a full close up of the mirror image of

the Queen lasting quite long to capture a feeling of despair and hopelessness. She then destroys the mirror and orders all mirrors to be removed, performing what is viewed as the opposite of superiority and ease.

After she has made everybody leave, she is left alone with a crying lady who is revealed as being Lady Margaret, described as good-hearted girl who cries over her fiancée, an English soldier serving in Ireland. The Queen at first interprets her crying as being for her sake: "You too, think I am too old, too ugly for a man to look upon with love," again proving her insecurity regarding her age. The story around Margaret's soldier, who remains a background character as we never actually see him, introduces another important storyline of the film's plot. It is the theme of the destructive war that the English are fighting in Ireland. Margaret's fiancé is one of its victims. Later in the film, Essex is tricked into going to Ireland by his enemies as they believe this to be his certain death. Furthermore, this scene portrays the Queen as a soft hearted motherly figure, as she has an ear for Margaret's sorrows and sends for her fiancé to be brought back to England. It is, however, too late, as we find out in the next scene that features a half-dead messenger delivering horrible news from Ireland and after the Queen's inquiry informs us about the fiancée's death.

The Irish are portrayed as Robin Hood-like figures, wearing their national color green and sitting on trees, with bows and arrows against the English soldiers. They are portrayed as boys of nature and their leader is a tough, down-to earth guy, whereas Essex stands out as an English gentleman.

Then comes what is strongly representative as a conspiracy scene. Three figures are lit by back lighting only their silhouettes revealed. They appear like mere shadows, which makes them secretive and menacing. This filmic device immediately tells us that the three characters are up to something mean. This assumption is supported, moreover, by menacing background music.

The character of Bacon again, similar to *Les amours*, acts like a spy, as he overhears the conspirator's plans. This is similar to the Bacon character in *Les amours*. In contrast to the earlier representation of this character,

however, this Bacon is not a downright vicious character who aims to harm Essex, but in contrast is constructed as being Essex's protégée, who, after several warnings to Essex, tries to save his own skin. In this film Bacon represents rationality who warns against the irrationalities of feelings like the attachment between Essex and the Queen.

The Virgin Queen (1955) opens with a dramatic entry, showing a coach in the middle of nowhere getting stuck in the mud in a rainy and alienating atmosphere. The only civilization nearby is a country inn, where the two lost courtiers head to for aid. The scene introducing the inn is heavily reminiscent of a Brueghel picture. We see Raleigh and his friend occupied with two unknown ladies in the left front, whereas the rest of the inn is represented in the middle and background, towards their right, giving the whole image the impression of depth. Another image shows a fight between Raleigh and a soldier, who, after having lost an eye in the war in Ireland, refuses to help the Queen's courtiers, and is thus challenged by court-ambitious Raleigh. The scene is again filmed with the earlier foreground, only that there is a drunkard, head down on the table in the right front and oblivious to the fight going on behind him, despite the noisy destruction of the inn's interior the fight is causing.

After the fight, Raleigh is celebrated not only by his opponent, but also by the inn keeper. According to the destruction he has caused, and for which no compensation is offered, this seems quite surprising. What seems to be celebrated here is the natural war hero, ready to fight for his country to protect the English Crown. Raleigh's behavior impresses also the two courtiers, whom he helps tear out the wagon, for which they offer him a sack of gold, which he refuses in vision of higher goals, with the words: "To help the Queen is reward enough," and adds "one small purse of gold, my hopes are higher than that." One of the courtiers in need turns out to be Sir Robert, the Earl of Leicester, who states having been friends with Raleigh's father back in Derbyshire. That helps ambitious Raleigh even more to get Leicester to advocate his introduction to the Queen.

Before Raleigh goes to Court, invited by the Earl of Leicester, he visits a tailor. The tailor scene proves Raleigh's tricky ways and uncompromising ambition. He aims for the highest, as stated above. Whatever the tailor shows him is not good enough, but when he sees a blue cloak fabricated for the French ambassador, he tricks the tailor into loaning it to him. He manages that by inventing a French complot against English tailoring, which proves the ongoing differences between the French and the English that are also prominent in Kapur's version 1998³². Also it signals that French fashion is the finest, which even the English aspire for. Moreover, the scene portrays the English tailor as a silly man easily tricked by prude Raleigh. Raleigh here proves a certain wit that might not have been viewed as the appropriate comportment for a hero, as which he is obviously featured in this film. In this version of 1955, it is, however, obviously the success that counts and that rectifies Raleigh's behavior. Thanks to his shrewdness, he gets what he wants, first the cloak and then the ear and favor of the Queen, who too is impressed by his straight-forwardness and declares these, Raleigh's, virtues to be generally lacking at Court. Finally he even manages to marry and live with the woman of his desire and starts off into the New World. He is a winner.

One striking character trait of Raleigh is his absolute persistence in achieving his goals and it is the portrayal of a shrewd, down-to-earth, straight-forward and greatly ambitious character that seems to point at American values, as it is this sort of person that went to discover and inhabit the "new" continent. One of the major themes of this film is obviously Raleigh's wish to sail to the New World, as he repeatedly asks the Queen to support his voyage. His love interest and later wife, Elizabeth Throckmorton, played by Joan Collins, constantly reminds him of his goals that he seems, she feels, to lose out of sight the longer he serves the Queen at Court as Captain of the Guards. Ambition and the urge for adventure are the great character traits of this going-to-be American and are what, according to the message of this film,

³² Les amours does not feature such controversies, as it is, in contrast to later films, a collaboration between French, English and American actors, directors and producers.

has formed the settling of the North American continent. This new generation does not pride itself with aristocratic upbringing but rather freed from such strangling, terrible experiences, such as in Raleigh's case the fighting in Ireland, rises as the new power that has, by 1955, significantly decided the outcome of two World Wars and thus established itself as a super power.

Furthermore, Raleigh is a soldier, who, as mentioned above, has fought in the war in Ireland. This is again a hint at the American war hero that is greatly celebrated in the post war era of 1955.

Raleigh's cloak becomes center of attention when he throws it over a puddle to let the Queen walk over it. It proves his great ambitions and his little appreciation of valuable things; this is, for instance, the flaw of Sir Christopher Hatton wearing the finest sable, which the Queen remarks is too fine to be wasted on "a mere Queen". Raleigh portrays a new careless spirit who has not been corrupted by the privileges of high birth and thus is free to achieve new goals and move things into new directions, for instance into discovering the New World across the Atlantic. The Queen ends her final soliloquy with the resignation that she must go on with the business of state and thus back to normal. That also shows that although the "Old Continent" lacks and misses this new pioneer spirit, it continues its old ways. The exciting new life that awaits the young family is left to the spectators' imagination but they are inclined to imagine them living happily ever after.

The most obvious proof of the film's propagating American values is shown in the portrayal of the Queen and Raleigh, representing the old versus the new world, via accent. Although both characters are supposed to be born and raised in England, the Queen speaks with a strong British accent, whereas Raleigh uses the American variety, as do Elizabeth Throckmorton and Raleigh's friend Derry. Sir Christopher Hatton, in contrast, speaks, like the Queen, the noble royal and somewhat distant British English. These variations in accent serve to win the American audience to identify and thus sympathy with the character of Raleigh and his friends.

The film could thus be seen as offering also a political message, namely that of the British repression of the Irish that has been lasting for centuries,

beginning with Henry VIII and heavily continuing under Elizabeth I and finally ending with the war of Independence in the 1920s. Historically, the usually pacified Queen fought this war as her advisors feared that if Ireland was not controlled by Britain, it would serve England's enemies as a base wherefrom it would be easy to attack the island. The Irish people felt, however, strongly rebellious against any sort of English hegemony and thus resisted strongly, which led to horrible ongoing bloodshed and strong resentments among the neighboring islanders.

Friendship is another important aspect in this film. Despite his having fought the Irish, Raleigh's best friend is an Irishman. As an Irishman, Raleigh's friend is an outsider in English society. The friendship thus proves Raleigh's open-mindedness and reaching beyond borders as well as his non-conformity regarding social conventions or prejudices, again symbolizing American values which posit that all men are created equal and that many Americans' ancestors had left Europe due to their status as outsiders in the established society in old Europe. Moreover, this friendship is completely unconditional and the protagonist's true friend stands in for him even if that causes his own death. Raleigh, who is greatly in danger for not carrying out the Queen's commands, tries to flee a sentence, whereas his friend, Lord Derry, rides to Plymouth to seek Raleigh's secret wife, Elizabeth Throckmorton. When escaping with the bride, he is followed by English soldiers who eventually catch up, after a short fight Derry is stabbed to death, cowardly from behind of course, by an English soldier. In dying he laments that he has to die on a Friday and that it is an English sword that finally kills him but then is content to die at the sight of beauty, even if this beauty is that of his friend's bride, whose attempt to save her cost him his life in the first place. Here unconditional friendship is celebrated as the friend is ready to give his life by doing his friend a favor. Raleigh, as the protagonist is, however, never really in danger. The scene also puts the noble Irish friend above the foul playing English, who though in greater number, cannot help themselves but by killing him from behind while he is trying to protect a pregnant lady.

The myth of devoted, self-neglecting friendship, symbolized through Derry, who as the perfect gentleman risks his life for a woman, can be viewed as mirroring the virtues that are also present in John Ford's *Western Stagecoach* (1939), in which character Hatfield gives his life to save pregnant Lucy; here it is pregnant Elizabeth Throckmorton who needs to be protected by the generous self-sacrificing of the young Irish. Nevertheless, here this sacrifice is merely symbolic, and as it turns out useless, as Elizabeth is captured nonetheless and later set free again by the forgiving Queen. The fact that it is an Irishman that is getting killed by the English is of course part of the message that is portrayed here. It is the unjustified colonization and propagation of English interests on the neighboring island that is criticized. Furthermore, the scene viewed as a tribute to Ford is supported by the fact that Ford, too, was Irish.

Another obvious theme is that of traditional family values, as the little family consisting of Raleigh, Throckmorton and the unborn child is finally reunited and together sets off to sail to the New World. This theme is even highlighted by the Queen's final statement that after seeing the happily reunited on board of the ship, reflects on the pregnancy: "Two have already passed, seven are yet to come" and the difficulties that await the expecting mother on such a voyage. It is this well-functioning, nuclear family that is going to be the founding generation of the American nation.

The focus on America is also detectable in Kapur's 2007 version that imitates the story of 1955, as mentioned in "Intermedialities". Raleigh similarly has the wish and ambition to sail a ship across the Atlantic. Featured also in 1998's *Shakespeare in Love*, the puddle scene is imitated when the Queen appears, thus rendering the scene iconic in portrayals of the Queen. America is merely introduced at court and an important factor in concerns of world hegemony between England and Spain. The film's focus on England's colonization of America supports the film's tendency to celebrate this golden age of the British nation and contributes thus greatly to the heritage culture and the feelings of identity and nationhood as stated above. The film could be intended to reach a greater audience. The American film market is very important and the film's ambition to portray the time when the English left to

settle the New World could be regarded as interesting also to an American audience, as this was an important time in their history also. The storyline thus serves two purposes, to attract and appeal to nationhood and identity feelings of both the British as well as the American Nation.

As Kapur is highly interested in reaching great numbers of audiences, he tries to make his films in a way that they can appeal to various groups of people. Because Costume Dramas tend to attract primarily female audiences, another genre has found its entry into the Elizabethan films. It is the action or thriller genre, as Kapur wanted to motivate a supposedly predominantly male action-oriented audience to go see his films and thereby boost the box office. His filmic basis was Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather*, his historic inspiration the diverse plots to assassinate the Queen and restore the Catholic power like the Babbington and the Rudolphi plot, as he states on the bonus material to both *Elizabeth* and *The Golden Age*.

Conclusion

In this paper I tried to show that the reason for the recurring versions of the Queen on screen is that she is a cultural artifact used to celebrate and preserve the feelings of belonging within the British nation. The various representations then qualify the Queen as signifier, as every presentation shows obvious similarities to the 'original', transmitted via readable codes, as well as differing greatly from both the original as well as other presentations of the Queen. One major aspect in the codification and furthermore deciphering of the signifier Queen Elizabeth I is via shape. The Queen's iconic shape is also a result of the fixed dress code of Renaissance fashion, consisting of a wide farthingale and elaborate ruffs. The shape clearly signals the period. It is this importance of period represented through dress that caused me to lay a special emphasis of my analysis on the costumes worn in the films. The importance of costume within a film's language leads to its being categorized under the genre of costume drama, a genre that is greatly exploited within the Heritage Film Industry of the British cinema. This again can be traced back to the popularity of boosting patriotic feelings. Nevertheless, films that feature a historic persona or monarch only make up a small part of this genre. What is more is that the audiences of this genre tend to love these films for their great efforts in recreating the historic period. The *mise-en-scène* gets a lot of attention, probably more than in most other genres. In order to be able to recreate the respective period, costume designers probably lean on paintings of the particular time they want to recreate. That is why in this paper I tried to look at portraits of the Queen. These portraits are highly idealized as they too, have a specific function in that they try to popularize the Queen among her subjects. In order to convey messages, they are furnished with symbols and recreate a divine, immortal, idealized image of the Queen. It is this 'intended meaning' that is represented and also that which is left to the afterworld. Similarly, the filmic interpretations of the Queen create completely new meanings, despite their proclamation to recreate the Renaissance Queen. What complicates this recreation is the fact that the Queen gets portrayed through an actress who has her own

'meanings' and connotations that audiences might have come up with through prior films, the actress's appearance as well as her particular way of playing. It adds to my finding that one signifier, as I call the Queen, leads to various signifieds, who again become signifiers of their own. As directors and story writers usually study prior works on their topic and because film has a tendency to make references to other films, intermedialities are detectable in the works on the Queen on screen. Therefore my conclusion is that one topic offers many different interpretations, and yet these interpretations show obvious similarities and necessary codes that make them interpretable as signifying the same. It was both the differences and the similarities that I tried to illustrate.

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Appendix

German Abstract

Diese Diplomarbeit untersucht das Phänomen der beeindruckenden Leinwandkarriere der Renaissancekönigin Elizabeth I von England. Erstaunlicherweise stammt der erste Film, der den Charakter der Königin ins Zentrum stellt, bereits von Anfang des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts und fällt somit in die Anfangszeit des Mediums Film überhaupt. Von da an erscheint die Königin im Abstand von zwei Dekaden regelmäßig auf der Leinwand. Dabei wird sie meist von hochkarätigen Schauspielerinnen interpretiert. Die erste Königindarstellerin im Film war die, als „die Göttliche“- gefeierte, französische Theaterschauspielerin Sarah Bernhardt. Während und nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg schlüpfte Bette Davis zweimal in die Rolle. Nach Aufkommen des Fernsehens wurden in England mehrteilige Fernsehserien über das Leben der Königin gedreht, von denen besonders eine aus 1971, mit Glenda Jackson in der Hauptrolle, hervorsticht. Zur Jahrtausendwende wurde Cate Blanchett zum neuen Gesicht der Königin, indem sie 1998 den Werdegang der jungen Elizabeth spielte und 2007 in einer Fortsetzung bekannte Episoden aus ihrer Regierungszeit wiedergab.

Den Filmen ist allen gemein, dass sie besonderen Wert auf Dekor und Kostüme legen und eine unglückliche Liebesgeschichte beinhalten. Deshalb passt der Begriff „costume drama“, oder abwertend „frock flick“, zu ihnen. Er bezeichnet ein Genre, das durch üppige Kleider und dramatische Romanzen besonders weibliches Publikum anziehen soll. Um das sechzehnte Jahrhundert im Film wieder auferstehen zu lassen, liegt ein besonderer Fokus der Filmemacher in der Inszenierung, die in dieser Arbeit untersucht wird. Anhaltspunkte für Kostüme und Dekor sind erhaltene Portraits aus der Zeit der Königin.

Die Portraits hatten allerdings selbst eine Propagandafunktion, was eingearbeitete Symbole verdeutlichen. Diese Zeichen und Symbole

untersucht die Semiotik. Deshalb ist das Feld der Semiotik die Grundlage auf der diese Arbeit aufbaut, sei es um Portraits der Königin zu deuten, oder die Bedeutung von Filmsprache zu analysieren. Am Ende wird klar, dass die Hülle Elizabeth I mit verschiedensten Bedeutungen gefüllt werden kann und wurde. Um dennoch einen Wiedererkennungswert zu schaffen, gibt es bestimmte kodierte Konstante, wie die rote Perücke und die Renaissance-Silhouette, die in den verschiedenen Darstellungen ähnlich anmuten. Somit gleichen sich die Königinnen und sind doch Grund verschieden.

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