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The Virgin or the Wanton? The Negative Representations of Queen Elizabeth Tudor in Popular Opinion

The Virgin Queen, Good Queen Bess, Eliza, Gloriana, Amazon, Diana, Cynthia,¹ Belphoebe,² Astraea,³ Deborah,⁴ Judith⁵... These and other glowing epithets describing Queen Elizabeth Tudor are familiar to all. Two old men, from the famous conversation from the prologue to Dekker's play *Old Fortunatus*, show how some at least of her the subjects viewed the Queen:

- Are you then travelling to the temple of Eliza?
- Even to her temple are my feeble limbs travelling. Some call her Pandora⁶: some Gloriana: some Cynthia: some Belphoebe: some Astraea: all by several names to express several loves: Yet all those names make but one celestial body, as all those loves meet to create but one soul.
- I am of her own country, and we adore her by the name of Eliza.⁷

¹ The moon goddess. The moon cult was started by Walter Raleigh in the 1580s as a personal, private one. See Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth* (London, 1977), 48.

² "A bright one", a Titaness, daughter of Uranus (Heaven) and Gaia (Earth). Grandmother of Apollo and Artemis. In later Greek writers her name was used for Selene (Moon).

³ A Roman goddess associated with justice.

⁴ Deborah was a Biblical prophetess of Israel. She acted as an adviser to her people, and was a judge in their disputes. Deborah was admired for her wisdom, and she rose to a position of leadership among her people.

⁵ Judith is the heroine of the Book of Judith, one of the Apocryphal books of the Old Testament. When the Assyrian general Holofernes attacked the Jews and laid siege to the town of Bethulia, Judith saved them. She went to Holofernes, and her beauty won his favour. On their third night together, she cut off his head while he was asleep. As a result, his forces fled.

⁶ The name Pandora means "all gifts" in Greek. Pandora, in Greek mythology, was the first woman. The gods and goddesses adorned Pandora with gifts to make her appear alluring.

⁷ Thomas Dekker, *Works* (London, 1873), 1: 533.

Also the greatest historian of the age, William Camden, describes Elizabeth as “the all-glorious, all-virtuous, incomparable, invict and matchless pattern of princes, the glory, honour and mirror of womankind, the admiration of our age”.⁸

If Elizabeth and her reign have become a canonical subject in the field of history, the canonical secondary texts in Elizabethan studies are those of Roy Strong, Frances A. Yates, and J.E. Neale.⁹ In the last years, fifteen or so, it has, however, become fashionable to speak slightingly of these scholarly works, because they concentrated only on the more positive aspects of Elizabethan court and reign. But because they chose to stress the fascinating glitter of Elizabeth’s reign, does not mean that the darker side of it did not exist.

Similarly, Dekker’s description of Elizabeth does not necessarily represent the only opinion about the Queen circulating among her subjects. Dekker’s play was performed before the ‘Queenes Majesty’ at Christmas 1600, so it is obvious that it would include laudatory verses. And as for the ‘celestial body’ it is described – at about the same time – as ‘wrinkled’,

as for her face, it is and appears to be very aged. It is long and thin, and her teeth are very yellow and unequal, compared with what they were formerly, so they say, and on the left side less than on the right. Many of them are missing so that one cannot understand her easily when she speaks quickly.¹⁰

Camden’s history was written under the influence and patronage (read: the financial support) of Robert Cecil, Elizabeth’s erstwhile minister and in later editions published under James I, Elizabeth’s portrayal lost quite a lot of glitter – indeed, the whole part lauding Elizabeth was omitted – and instead Mary Stuart’s picture gained considerably. Thus, the portrayal of Elizabeth, or any other monarch, found in official histories or pieces of literature written for the sovereign can hardly be taken as representing the real opinion of the people. Here, I would like to quote some of the negative, often scandalous, contemporary opinions of Elizabeth voiced by her own subjects.

Negative opinions about the Queen are rather difficult to find. There are a few printed libels, mostly anti-Protestant pamphlets, where the Queen is a prominent figure, and by attacking the Queen authors aim at attacking the Protestant religion. There are also a few books, e.g. John Knox’s *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558), which attack the Queen only because she was a woman; and even the Protestants thought that when God created Eve, he certainly did not have in mind that women should rule men or that women should wear a crown. The portrayal of Elizabeth found in these writings was meant to be

⁸ Quoted in *The Reign of Elizabeth*, ed. Christopher Haigh (London, 1984), 1.

⁹ Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth*; Frances A. Yates, *Astraea. The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1975); J.E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I* (London, 1934).

¹⁰ *A Journal of all that was Accomplished by Monsieur de Maisse Ambassador in England from King Henri IV to Queen Elizabeth Anno Domini 1597*, ed. G.B. Harrison and R.A. Jones (London, 1931), 25–6.

a propaganda – a negative propaganda, the same way that Camden's and Dekker's works were meant to be a positive propaganda.

It is still more difficult to find records showing the negative opinion on Elizabeth voiced by common people. There are, however, a few glimpses that survived in the documents of the day, namely in the depositions of people accused of slandering the Queen. They seem to be a rather reliable source, if not on what Elizabeth really was like, at least on what common people thought her to be.

Even today, common people are always talking about politicians – few can understand the economic policy of a Prime Minister but many voice expert, “informed”, opinions on his taking a mistress or drinking too much. And they usually know it all. The times have not changed much in this respect since the sixteenth century. We might be able to give reasons why people talk badly about a Prime Minister; but why the Englishmen living during the “Golden Age” be slandering their very own Queen?

The answer seems to be quite simple - people of England were disappointed and frightened. Disappointed that their next monarch (after Bloody Mary's death) is again a woman. At the beginning of Elizabeth's reign many hoped that she would soon marry and have plenty of babies and would leave the business of ruling the country to her husband. As the reign progressed, however, and the hope that Elizabeth would leave an heir diminished, the people of England were increasingly frightened – frightened as to what their future would be. The fear did not at all disappear after the victory over the Spanish Invincible Armada, England's gravest enemy, for in 1588 it was obvious that Elizabeth would not be able to have any children and therefore the problem of her successor was becoming a very serious one. Thus Elizabeth-the-woman disappointed the people of England. Elizabeth-the-Queen's duty was to protect her subjects while she lived and in this she was successful. But her duty was also to insure a clear Protestant line of succession to the English throne which would avert the dangers of a civil war on her death. This she refused to do until a few minutes before her death.

The question of Elizabeth's marriage and maternity was an important political issue throughout much of her reign. No doubt, then, the public opinion was eagerly observing the Queen and interpreting her behaviour according to their expectations. Camden tells us that Elizabeth swore an oath to follow a life of virginity soon after her accession, but it is obvious today that the story is little more than a myth.¹¹ Elizabeth's contemporaries never expected their Queen to remain a virgin, and her behaviour showed them that she did not intend to remain without a man.

Indeed, even when she was a girl, Elizabeth was closely observed and her chastity was being questioned. Scandalous rumours about Elizabeth's sexual activities had already started when she was a young teenager during the so-called

¹¹ J.N. King, “Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen”, *Renaissance Quarterly* 43 (1990): 30–74.

“Seymour incident.”¹² Thomas Seymour, aged 38, the then husband to Catherine Parr, widow of Henry VIII, would frequently come into Elizabeth’s bedchamber in his night-gown, and “one Mornyng he strave to have kissed hir in hir bed”. On another occasion, Catherine colluded in the sexual harassment, for she was holding Elizabeth while “in the Garden, he wrated with hir, and cut hir gown in an hundred Pieces.” Such behaviour resulted in slander, and Elizabeth herself wrote that ‘ther goeth rumeursAbrode, wiche be greatly both agenste my Honor and Honestie [...] that I am in the Tower; and with Childe by my Lord Admiral. My Lord these ar shameful Schandlers”.¹³ She also requested that the Council should “sende forthe a proclamation in to the countries that they refrane their tonges, declaring how the tales be but lies.”¹⁴

The proclamations of this type were issued several times during Elizabeth’s reign but they did not stop people from talking. As the reign progressed, the scandalous rumours about Elizabeth’s sexual activities became more and more common. And the person most often named as her lover was Robert Dudley, the future Earl of Leicester.

Although a considerable body of work has been written about the relationship between Elizabeth and Leicester, it is still shrouded in mystery.¹⁵ Even Camden, discussing the reasons for Elizabeth’s favour towards Leicester, finds it difficult to explain:

Whether this proceeded from any vertue of his, whereof he gave some shadowed tokens, or from their common condition of imprisonment under Queene Mary, or from his nativity, and the hidden consent of the starres at the houre of his birth, and thereby a most straight conjunction of their mindes, a man cannot easily say.¹⁶

Hardly anything is known about Leicester’s relationship with Elizabeth before her succession. In 1566, he told the French agent Jacob de Vulcob, Sieur de Sassy, that they had been friendly before she was even eight years old.¹⁷ But knowing the reality of the English court, it is most unlikely that they really were close companions and spent much time together, although they must have seen each other at Court functions and entertainments.

¹² See, e.g. Sheila Cavanagh, “The Bad Seed: Princess Elizabeth and the Seymour Incident” in *Dissing Elizabeth*, ed. Julia M. Walker (London, 1998), 9–29.

¹³ *Collection of State Papers... Left by William Cecil*, ed. Samuel Haynes and William Murdin, 2 vols. (London, 1740–59), 1: 99, 100.

¹⁴ *Original Letters Illustrative of English History*, ed. Henry Ellis, 2nd series (London, 1825), 3: 156–7.

¹⁵ At least three book-size studies entitled *Elizabeth and Leicester* have been devoted to the relationship, namely, Frederick Chamberlin’s (New York, 1939), Elizabeth Jenkins’s (London, 1962), and Milton Waldman’s (Boston, 1945).

¹⁶ William Camden, *Annales* (1630 ed.), 1560.10.

¹⁷ “Ayant commencé a la cognoistre familierement devant qu’elle eust huit ans”. 6 August 1566, PRO SP 31/3/26 fol. 134.

It seems that Leicester only became Elizabeth's favourite a few months after her accession, as she got to know him better while he had been using his courtly attainments to ingratiate himself with her. With responsibility for her stables, Leicester was Elizabeth's regular companion at her favourite pastimes of riding and hunting, where he could demonstrate his excellent horsemanship. As he was also responsible for arranging lodgings at Court and during progresses, he attended royal suppers and entertainments, where he was able to show off his abilities as a dancer and companion.

As early as April 1559 the extent of Leicester's personal closeness to Elizabeth became open knowledge and a subject of gossip. The Spanish ambassador reported that "during the last few days" Lord Robert has "come much into favour" and it is even said that Elizabeth visits him in his chamber "day and night."¹⁸ A few weeks later Il Schifanoja writes that:

My Lord Dudley is in very great favour, and very intimate ("priva molto") with her Majesty. On this subject I ought to report the opinion of many, but I doubt whether my letters may not "miscarry", or be read; wherefore it is better to keep silence than to speak ill ("mal parlare").¹⁹

In 1566 the French ambassador was rather more straightforward when he claimed that the Queen slept with Leicester on New Year's night 1566,²⁰ a rumour not dispelled by Leicester's habit of going into her bedchamber early in the morning and handing Elizabeth her shift.

During the July 1559 progress Elizabeth's relations with Leicester grew increasingly intense. Elizabeth began spending most of her leisure time with Leicester, hunting with him "dayly from morning tyll nyght" and showing evident delight in his company, so much so, that she had begun to neglect her state duties.²¹ As their intimacy became more obvious, so did the scandal surrounding their affair, and if foreign ambassadors preferred to repeat the rumours only in very general terms, ordinary people were less restrained.

A common slander against Elizabeth was to accuse her of secret childbirths and even infanticide. In June 1560 Mother Anne Dowe was committed to jail for openly asserting that the Queen was with child by Robert. She informed her listeners that Leicester had given Elizabeth a red petticoat, but one of them retorted that it was not a petticoat, "No, no, he gave her a chylde, I warrant thee." Anne quickly repeated this piece of gossip to her other friends. "Dudley and the quene hadd playd by legerdemayne to gether" and "he hathe geven her a child." When being told that the

¹⁸ De Feria to Philip II, 18 April 1559, *Calendar of State Papers* (afterwards *CSP*), *Spanish*, 1: No 27 at 57.

¹⁹ Il Schifanoja to the Castellan of Mantua, 10 May 1559, *CSP, Venice*, 1: No 71 at 85.

²⁰ Guzman de Silva to Philip II, 4 February 1566, *CSP, Spanish*, 1: No 336 at 520; de Silva doubted the news, however, as it came from "a Frenchman".

²¹ Leicester to Sussex, 7 September ?1560, quoted in Susan Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony. The Courtships of Elizabeth I* (London, 1996), 42.

Queen does not have a child, Mother Dowe concluded “if she have nott he hath putt one to making.”²² In January 1563 some Suffolk ladies had called Elizabeth “a naughty woman” and said that during her recent visit to Ipswich “she looked pale, as one lately come out of child-birth.”²³ In 1572 Elizabeth was described as “so vyle a Woman [...] that desyrethe nothings but to fede her owne lewd Fantasye” and it was added that Leicester had more recourse to her in her Privy Chamber than “Reason would suffre, yf she weare so vertuose and well inclined, as some naysythe [noiseth] her.”²⁴

Rumours of this kind continued for years, and even as late as 1581, when the Queen was almost fifty, a Henry Hawkins explained that Elizabeth’s frequent progresses throughout the countryside was a way for her to leave Court and have her illegitimate children by Leicester – “She never goethe in progress but to be delivered” – and he claimed that she had five children. Robert Gardner of Epping claimed that Elizabeth and Leicester had had four children “three girls all still alive, but one boy whom they had thrown into the fire.” In 1582, Dionisia Deryck of Chipping Hill said that the Queen “has as many children as I” claiming that some had been burned to death at birth. The father of those children was said to be Leicester, who had “wrapped them up in the embers, which was in the chamber where they were born.”²⁵

The rumours about Elizabeth’s pregnancy by Leicester continued almost until Leicester’s death, and after the Queen was past childbearing, there were stories about their illegitimate children. In 1574 there were reports of a marriage between the son of the Earl of Hertford and “a daughter of Leicester and the Queen of England” who was “kept hidden”, although some bishops could witness that she was legitimate.²⁶ In 1587 an Arthur Dudley claimed to be the illegitimate son of Leicester and Elizabeth. He had been brought up, he said, in the household of Robert Southern, who on his deathbed revealed to the boy his true identity.²⁷

²² ‘Examinations of certain persons of the shire of Essex, touching slanderous reports raised against the Queen’, 13 August 1560, Public Record Office, S.P. 12 13 no 21, calendared in *CSP, Domestic, Elizabeth (1547–1580)*, No 21 at 157, printed in full in Frederick Chamberlin, *The Private Character of Queen Elizabeth* (London, 1921), 173–5.

²³ “Examination of Robert Garrerd”, 19 January 1563, *CSP, Domestic (Addenda 1547–65)*, 534; Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King. Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia, 1994), 76.

²⁴ “Deposition of Kenelme Berneye”, 29 January 1572. *Collection Of State Papers... Left by William Cecil*, 2: 203.

²⁵ F.G. Emmison, *Elizabethan Life: Disorder* (Chelmsford, 1971), 42, 57; Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, 83.

²⁶ “Substance of letters from Antonio de Guaras from London, 12th, 19th, and 26th December 1574 and 1st January 1575”, *CSP, Spanish*, 2: No 408. For the Pope’s plans to use Elizabeth’s daughter to bring England back to Catholicism see, Nicholas Ormanetto, the Bishop of Padua to Ptolemy Galli, the Cardinal of Como, 9 December 1575; Cardinal of Como to Bishop of Padua, 19 January 1576, *CSP, Rome 1572–78*, 238, 250. Cf. Chamberlin, *Private Character*, 199–200.

²⁷ See *Ibid.*, 169–72, 309–18; Ettwell A.B. Barnard, *Evesham and a Reputed Son of Queen Elizabeth* (Evesham, 1926). Osborne, writing in 1658, says, “that she had a son bred in the State of Venice, and

The scandalous rumours are summarised in contemporary libels. In *Leicester's Commonwealth* Elizabeth is presented as a victim of Leicester's debauchery. Leicester turned to sorcery to "procure" Elizabeth's love. Mother Davis, "a famous and notable sorceress" was his main helper. She advised him that if he found himself not much liked by a lady, he should give her some "precious liquor" made from "young martins" taken out of their nests and "distilled with some of his own nature or seed" and certain other herbs and drugs.²⁸ Because his sexual potency diminished with time, and his flesh got weaker and weaker, Leicester used an Italian ointment, whereby he was able to "move his flesh at all times, for keeping of his credit, howsoever his inability be otherwise for performance", and he also kept handy a bottle of potion, ten pounds a pint, to the same effect.²⁹ Cardinal William Allen, the author of the *Admonition to the Nobility and the People of England*, puts the whole blame on the Queen. According to Allen Elizabeth "took up" Leicester "to serve her filthy lust", and she decided not to marry because she could not "confine herself to one man" and the older she got the more debased she was: "with divers she hath abused her bodie against God's lawes [...] by unspeakable and incredible variety of luste" and also she made her Court "as a trappe, by this damnable and detestable art to entangle in sinne, and overthrowe the yonger sorte of her nobilitye and gentlemen of the lande."³⁰

At the same time as the rumours of Elizabeth's pregnancies and children abounded, there was other gossip claiming that the Queen not only was not able to have any children at all, but was not even capable of consummating a sexual relationship. In 1559 Philip II's ambassador in England wrote: "If my spies do not lie, which I believe they do not, for a certain reason which they have recently given me I understand she will not bear children."³¹

Elizabeth's light and irregular periods are often mentioned and she was said to have "hardly ever the purgations proper to all women." To correct the problem "nature has come to the rescue by establishing an issue in one of her legs."³² Camden writes about Dr Robert Huicke as a "disswader of her marriage for I wot not what womanish impotency" and he adds that there was much talk about perils of a possible pregnancy, "out of hidden causes."³³ Mary Stuart claimed she heard from

a Daughter I know not where and when, with other strange tales that went on her, I neglect to insert, as better for a Romance, then to mingle with so much truth and integrity as I professe". Francis Osborne, *Historical Memoires* (1658), 60.

²⁸ *Leicester's Commonwealth*, ed. D.C. Peck (Athens, Ohio, n.d.), Appendix B, at 241.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁰ William Allen, *Admonition to the Nobility and People of England* (1588), quoted in John Lingard, *A History of England from the First Invasion by the Romans to the Accession of William and Mary in 1688*, 10 vols (London, 1883), 6: 706–8.

³¹ Feria to Philip II, 29 April 1559, *CSP, Spanish*, 1: No 29 at 63.

³² Salvati, Nuncio in France to the Cardinal of Como, 6 January 1578, *CSP, Roman*, 2: 363; *CSP, Venice*, 1: 105. See also the discussion in Jenkins (1962), 51.

³³ Camden, *Annales* (1630 ed.), 1566.5, 1581.14.

Bess of Hardwick that Elizabeth “undoubtedly” was “not as other women” and that no conjugal union could be consummated, besides, Elizabeth “would never wish to lose liberty of making love and gratifying yourself with new lovers.”³⁴ Ben Jonson repeated a similar suggestion that Elizabeth had a membrane that made her incapable of intercourse, but despite that “for her delight she tried many”. Jonson also said that at the time of the proposed marriage to Alençon, a French surgeon “took in hand to cut it, yet fear stayed her [the Queen].”³⁵ Such “dishonorable and naughty reaportes” must have caused consternation among Elizabeth’s ministers at home and abroad.

The more salacious gossip – that “Lord Robert did swyve the Queen” – was most probably unfounded, because she was attended round the clock by her ladies. Court etiquette was such that she was hardly ever alone, and there would have been very few opportunities for her to carry on a sexual relationship with Leicester without other people finding out. Indeed, it would have been virtually impossible to conceal the existence of an illicit relationship from the prying gaze of matchmaking ambassadors, to whom every detail of Elizabeth’s private life was of the greatest interest and who were prepared to pay good money for information from the palace servants.

When Kate Ashley, Elizabeth’s favourite lady-in-waiting, begged the Queen to put an end to all the disreputable rumours about Leicester, saying that she showed herself so affectionate to him that “Her majesty’s honour and dignity would be sullied,”³⁶ Elizabeth answered that in this world she had much sorrow and tribulation and so little joy and if she showed herself gracious towards Leicester, he had deserved it for his honourable nature and dealings. She also wondered, how anyone could suspect her, seeing that she was always surrounded by her ladies of the bedchamber and maids-of-honour, who at all times could see whether there was anything dishonourable between her and Leicester. But, then, she added, if she ever wanted to become his lover, she knew nobody who could stop her.³⁷

On being questioned the Queen’s ladies swore that despite the fact that she showed her liking for Leicester more “markedly than is consistent with her reputation and dignity”, she had “certainly never been forgetful of her honour.”³⁸ In 1564 Elizabeth told the Spanish Ambassador:

³⁴ Mary Stuart to Elizabeth, ?1584, *Lettres, Instructions et Mémoires de Marie Stuart*, ed. Alexandre Labanoff, 7 vols (London, 1844), 6: 50, translated and quoted in Chamberlin, *Private Character*, 166; but see *Ibid.*, 208–12, for a discussion of the authenticity of the letter.

³⁵ Ben Jonson, “Conversations with Drummond”, after Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, 86.

³⁶ Baron Breuner to Ferdinand I, 6 August 1559, *Queen Elizabeth And Some Foreigners. Being A Series Of Hitherto Unpublished Letters From The Archives Of The Hapsburg Family*, ed. Victor von Klarwill (London, 1928), 114.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 114–15.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 113, 114.

They charge me with a good many things in my own country and elsewhere, and, amongst others, that I show more favour to Robert than is fitting; speaking of me as they might speak of an immodest woman [...] I have shown favour, although not so much as he deserves, but God knows how great a slander it is, and a time will come when the world will know it. My life is in the open, and I have so many witnesses that I cannot understand how so bad a judgement can have been formed of me.³⁹

William Cecil believed in Elizabeth's complete innocence, and in 1566 he wrote to his friend that when he hears the "tales of court and citie" about Leicester's absence and his return to favour, they "be fond and many untrue", and added that although Elizabeth may be "by malicious tongs, not well reported", in truth she is blameless, and has "no spot of evill intent."⁴⁰ One of the Spanish ambassadors, who were happy to forward any gossip which could incriminate Elizabeth for "it is nothing for princes to hear evil, even without giving any cause of it", writing in 1564 concluded that "she bears herself toward [Leicester] in a way that together with other things that can be better imagined than described make me doubt sometimes whether Robert's position is so irregular as many think."⁴¹ However, Jenkins' conclusion that Elizabeth and Leicester were not lovers because Elizabeth was never emotionally yielding to Robert in the way a woman would be after she had slept with her lover, would be dismissed by feminist writers today.⁴²

Elizabeth's confession of her true relationship with Leicester took place in 1562. Elizabeth, delirious and believing herself to be on the point of death from smallpox, solemnly swore that although she had always loved Leicester, as God was her witness, nothing improper had ever passed between them. She also told her Council that if she were to die she wanted Leicester to rule England as protector.⁴³ The fact that Elizabeth proposed Leicester as the protector of the realm shows how important he was for her and as there is no reason not to believe her words spoken *in extremis mortis*, it could be concluded that Elizabeth and Leicester were not lovers in the obvious sense, at least not before 1562.

The supposition that Elizabeth and Leicester abstained from sexual intercourse does not mean that they were not sexually attracted to each other. Later encounters showed that he always gravitated towards thin, vivacious redheads, while she preferred tall, handsome, magnificently dressed, athletic men. It has been observed that Elizabeth's male companions were generally handsome, for except "some few that had handsome wits in crooked bodies, she always took personage in the way of election." But to maintain her interest – and patronage – it was also necessary to

³⁹ Guzman de Silva to Philip II, 9 October 1564, *CSP, Spanish*, 1: No 270 at 387.

⁴⁰ Cecil to Sir Thomas Smith, 26 March 1566, *Queen Elizabeth and Her Times. A Series of Original Letters*, ed. Thomas Wright, 2 vols. (London, 1838), 1: 225.

⁴¹ Guzman de Silva to the Duchess of Parma, 23 September 1564, *CSP, Spanish*, 1: No 267 at 381.

⁴² See, e.g. Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, 192 n. 20.

⁴³ Bishop Quadra to Philip II, 25 October 1562, *CSP, Spanish*, 1: No 190 at 263. She also asked that 500 pounds a year be given to Leicester's body-servant, which could indicate that there were aspects of her relationship with Leicester she did not want to be exposed.

shine in courtly attainments. Clapham noticed that all her most important favourites, namely, Leicester, Sir Christopher Hatton, Sir Walter Raleigh, and the Earl of Essex,⁴⁴ “enjoyed her grace in the highest measure, being men of very comely personage, and adorned with all outward gifts of nature.”⁴⁵

Thus Leicester and Elizabeth were most probably attracted to each other and Leicester often professed love for her. It might be suspected that Leicester feigned his love for Elizabeth-the-Queen only to further his own ambitions, for it is not easy to prove if Leicester really loved Elizabeth-the-woman as well. As has been observed, he had to love the Queen “by every law human and divine; if she commanded him into bed with her, it was his part as a good subject loyally to obey.”⁴⁶ Thus it would be wrong to take everything he said or wrote at its face value.

Convention demanded flowery and exaggerated statements and it was the courtier’s role to make ostentatious displays of loyalty and devotion to the sovereign. Devotion to the Queen was the very essence of the Court, in which love games – or as one observer put it “the ordinary infection of this place” – were endlessly in play. And Elizabeth needed to be admired and flirted with, and courted; she loved hearing that she “did fish for men’s souls, and had so sweet a bait that no one could escape her network.”⁴⁷ During the first half of her reign, there was a physicality in the flirtation. Later on, love for Elizabeth became the chivalrous, idealised love of poets for the unattainable.⁴⁸ “Theatrical” flirtation and courtship could sometimes become quite a dangerous game, though, as reality could be confused with illusion in court play, and for both the Prince and the courtier it could become difficult to discern the truth beneath the facade.⁴⁹

The salacious gossip frequent among the people of England does not mean that Elizabeth was not loved by her subjects. Her achievements are unquestionable. But the very real adoration most of her people felt for Elizabeth made her even more the focus of their distress. The distress expressing some of the terror over a future for which she had not provided the country, failing to leave an heir or even refusing to name her successor.

⁴⁴ Other favourites were Sir William Pickering, William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, and Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford.

⁴⁵ The reference to “crooked bodies” relates to Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, who was a hunchback. John Clapham, *Certain Observations Concerning The Life And Reign Of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. Evelyn Plummer Read and Conyers Read (Pennsylvania, 1951), 90.

⁴⁶ Waldman, *Elizabeth and Leicester*, 64.

⁴⁷ Quoted in *Dissing Elizabeth*, 89.

⁴⁸ Cf., e.g. Hatton’s letters to Elizabeth in *Memoirs Of The Life And Times Of Sir Christopher Hatton, K.G., Vice-Chamberlain And Lord Chancellor To Queen Elizabeth. Including His Correspondence With The Queen And Other Distinguished Persons*, ed. Harris Nicolas (London, 1847), 25–30; and accusations in Mary Stuart’s “scandal letter” to Elizabeth, in *Lettres, Instructions et Mémoires de Marie Stuart*, 6: 50–1; Chamberlin, *Private Character*, 166–8.

⁴⁹ The mixture of reality with the world of the theatre could also be used to indirectly pass on a veiled message, as was the case during the Kenilworth entertainments. See, e.g. Jean Wilson, *Entertainments for Elizabeth I* (Totowa, 1980), 7–13.

Dziewica czy rozpustnica?

Negatywny obraz królowej Elżbiety Tudor w opinii publicznej

Streszczenie

Elżbieta Tudor, pamiętana dzisiaj jako "Królowa Dziewica", za życia była tematem licznych plotek i pomówień. Z jednej strony oskarżano ją o mordowanie swoich dzieci będących owocem rozwiązłości seksualnej i wyuzdania, z drugiej strony szeptano, że w związku z anormaliami w budowie Elżbieta w ogóle nie jest zdolna do zbliżenia z mężczyzną, a tym samym nie może mieć dzieci. Zainteresowanie życiem prywatnym królowej miało związek z obawą o losy królestwa po jej śmierci, a rozbieżne opinie wynikały często z niezrozumienia kodu zachowań dworskich.

