

Galloping onto the Throne: Queen Elizabeth I and the Symbolism of the Horse

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Introduction

As she prepared for the impending attack of the Spanish Armada, Queen Elizabeth I of England purportedly proclaimed proudly while on horseback to her troops, “I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too.”¹ This line superbly captures the two identities that Elizabeth had to balance as a queen in the early modern period: the limitations imposed by her sex and her position as the leader of England. Viewed through the lens of stereotypical gender expectations in the early modern period, these two roles appear incompatible. Yet, Elizabeth I successfully managed the unique path of a female monarch with no male counterpart. Elizabeth was Queen of England from the 17th of November 1558, when her half-sister Queen Mary passed away, until her own death from sickness on March 24th, 1603, making her one of England’s longest reigning monarchs. She deliberately avoided several marriages, including high-profile unions with Philip II of Spain, King Eric of Sweden, and the Archduke Charles of Austria. Elizabeth’s position in her early years as ruler was uncertain due to several factors: a strong backlash to the rise of female rulers at the time; her cousin Mary Queen of Scots’ Catholic hereditary claim; and her being labeled a bastard by her father, Henry VIII. By the end of her reign, however, there was no question of Elizabeth’s power, authority, and success as Queen. Under her rule, England faced a dangerous war with Spain and famously emerged victorious over the Spanish Armada in 1588 at the Battle of Tilbury. This event marked the emergence of England as a major naval and world power.

Many historians have studied Elizabeth’s reign, and the question of her gender has also been the subject of scholarship. This thesis sheds light on a largely unexplored dimension of

¹ *Elizabeth’s Tilbury Speech, July 1588*. Speech. From The British Library, *Learning Timelines: Sources from History*. <http://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item102878.html> (accessed October 15, 2018).

Elizabeth's path to power. It develops the argument that Elizabeth consciously employed the symbolism of the horse, an animal associated with both masculine and feminine characteristics, to establish her authority as Queen of England. In so doing, this thesis contributes to several literatures: equestrian history, the history of Elizabeth I and Elizabethan England, and gender studies.

As regards equestrian history, the image of a female equestrian, especially from an early period such as the Elizabethan era in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is rarely, if at all, featured. Historical literature as a whole has cultivated a narrative that promotes horses and horseback-riding activities as purely masculine endeavors, almost entirely excluding women from the equestrian narrative. The only prominent work that includes women within the male-centric world of equestrian activities is Richard Almond's study of huntresses in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.² Works like Lida Bloodgood and Cuchullaine O'Reilly have focused on Equestrianism through a distinctly feminine lens; however, this type of scholarship has showcased the emergence and practice of a distinctly feminine style of riding, that of the side-saddle.³ For the most part, female equestrians and the role of horses in the lives of women are discussed only peripherally. This patriarchal lens creates a skewed picture. The importance of the horse in the early modern period was both essential to the working-class economy and a symbol of the cultured elite, especially for male elites and royalty. Therefore, it is only logical that horses would have been significant for women as well, at the very least as objects of desire and aspiration; yet, this story of female equestrians has been neglected, told briefly, or only discussed by historians on the margins of the scholarly discussion. Historians as a whole have yet to

² Richard Almond, *Daughters of Artemis: the huntress in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009), 1.

³ Lida F. Bloodgood, *The Saddle of Queens: The Story of the Side-Saddle* (London: J.A. Allen & Co, 1959), 2.

combine the horse's relationship with gender and power, or to delve into the role of the horse in the rule of a female monarch and in the lives of women.

Against this backdrop, this thesis engages with scholarly literature on the role of the horse in society as well as on Elizabeth's rule and Elizabethan culture. The thesis therefore also speaks to the historiography on Elizabeth I from a novel perspective. It brings together examinations of Elizabeth's fashioning herself as a masculine, warrior queen and feminine virgin queen (David Loades, Carole Levin), and studies of Elizabeth's use of public entertainments and processions as a means of purposeful propaganda (Jean Wilson, Mary Hill Cole) with scholarship on equestrian literature and culture, notably works of Peter Edwards, Joan Thirsk, Karen Raber and Treva Tucker.⁴ The goal of combining these literatures is to expand the current understanding of how Elizabeth ruled. Historian Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks notes that Elizabeth's coronation as queen coincided with the rise of a strong sentiment against female rulers in early modern Europe. Due to a series of unexpected dynastic developments, a number of women were able to claim noble or even royal power. The hostile reaction to these rulers rendered the task of solidifying her crown particularly important for Elizabeth.⁵ This thesis will add to the historical discussion about the means through which Elizabeth legitimized her authority as queen by exploring how she made use of the horse as a traditional symbol of monarchical power.

This work draws on a wide range of sources, textual and visual, to examine how Queen Elizabeth I utilized horses to secure her power and authority as a female monarch. A more

⁴ Joan Thirsk, *Horses in Early Modern England: For Service, for Pleasure, for Power* (Stenton Lecture, xi, Reading, 1978).; Peter Edwards, *Horse and Man in Early Modern England* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007).; Mary H. Cole, *The Portable Queen* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999).; Jean Wilson, *Entertainments for Elizabeth I* (New Jersey: D.S. Brewer, 1980).; Carole Levin, *"The Heart and Stomach of a King" Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).; David Loades, *Elizabeth I: The Golden Reign of Gloriana* (Richmond: The National Archives, 2003).; Karen, Raber and Treva, Tucker, *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Early Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁵ Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 279.

thematic view of Elizabethan England and Elizabeth's reign such as this study necessitates the inclusion of contemporary depictions of the role of the horse in general in Elizabethan society and early modern England. I discuss this general information alongside specific instances where Elizabeth herself was on horseback and engaged in horseback riding activities in order to understand how horses legitimized Elizabeth's position as monarch and image as king and Virgin Queen. Special attention rests on sources for public display or use. They include: published eyewitness accounts of Elizabeth on horseback in processions and celebrations; engravings of Elizabeth on horseback and engaged in the hunt to government proclamations to Elizabeth's own speeches; public horsemanship manuals; and scenes involving horses in Shakespeare's plays.

I do not view these sources as completely accurate representations of the time. Instead, I interpret these primary sources as propaganda, deliberately portraying an image of Elizabeth I that supported her own political agenda. The primary sources at the center of this thesis served to publicly propagate a myth in society of Elizabeth as both masculine ruler and feminine Virgin Queen, as the Monarch of England and daughter of Henry VIII, as well as a queen devoted and married to the state. This duality was crucial to the success of a female ruler in early modern Europe. Although not all the sources I utilized represent explicit examples of propaganda, the sources combined to create an aura around Elizabeth I that would have been instantly recognized and understood by her subjects. Thus, I interpreted my sources not as purely factual entities, but rather as creations with specific purposes and intentions. This thesis is based on primary source material I was able to access either through the University of California library system or online archives and databases.

In addition to furthering the historiography on female equestrians, this thesis also tries to expand historical knowledge about Queen Elizabeth I by considering her as an equestrian. She was one of the most successful female monarchs of the early modern period who also happened to love riding horses. While much has been written on the Virgin Queen, the question of her relationship to horses remains largely unexplored. The term “successful,” however, should be defined in greater detail, so as not to shed a strictly positive, uncritical light on the reign of Elizabeth I. This thesis endeavors to understand how the imagery of the horse helped Elizabeth I navigate her position as an unmarried sovereign of a large empire that expanded and unified under her rule. What role did horses play in the rule of Elizabeth I? On what occasions did she ride? How did she use the rich symbolism of the horse and horseback-riding activities to meet and counter gender expectations, to defend her virginity, and to cement her political power and control? I argue that horses and horseback-riding activities were vehicles that allowed Elizabeth I to display authority and enhance her political control as Queen of England. At times Elizabeth defied and at others she succumbed to gender expectations. Throughout, the image of the horse and the gendered connotations associated with horses allowed Elizabeth and her advisors to project her desired dual identity as both a masculine ruler and female Virgin Queen. Horses, both physically and symbolically, played a crucial role in Elizabeth’s negotiating and subverting gender expectations while creating her image as a powerful female monarch.

As mentioned above, this narrative of a powerful female equestrian represents a step towards developing the history of female equestrians more generally. Too often women have been reduced to the edges of history; the history of horseback riding is no different. This work seeks to foster the study of female equestrians in history by combining two fields of study that have largely developed separately: early modern equestrian culture and the carefully cultivated

public persona of Queen Elizabeth I. Elizabethan society in early modern England revolved around horses, whether as a weapon in warfare, a tool for agricultural development, a means of transportation, or an instrument of pleasure. In order to gain a fuller understanding of the time period and the role of horses within that period, women must be included rather than pushed to the side. Although today it is easy to ignore the significance of horses because they do not hold a similar place in modern-day life, historically horses have built empires, kings, and queens. Sharing the story of how horses were instrumental in the rule of Elizabeth I as she guided England to become a more united, major European power, both on the continent and overseas, brings both women and horses to the forefront of history.

This thesis is divided into four sections. The first section discusses the traditional and sociopolitical role of the horse as a signifier for status, wealth, and authority in England. Further, this section analyzes how Elizabeth I used the horse as a cultural icon during public celebrations and processions to legitimize her reign as Queen of England. The next section delves more deeply into a specific aspect of horseback riding, the hunt. The hunt was a particularly important political stage, since it was a noble pursuit and the horseback-riding activity that most distinctly separated the elite from the lower classes. This section turns to portraiture to analyze how Elizabeth fashioned herself as a huntress and develops the argument that she harnessed masculine and elite characteristics associated with the horse and horseback-riding activities to reinforce her claim to monarchical power like that of any king. Yet, at the same time, this section shows, Elizabeth's gender necessitated that she portray herself as a virgin on horseback in order to rule with the support and consent of her subjects. In contrast, the third section investigates Elizabeth's position as a warrior king on horseback, another traditional association of masculinity and horses. This section offers a close reading of equestrian iconography and

literature surrounding Elizabeth's role in England's victory in the famous Battle of Tilbury. The final section turns to the horse as a representation of the strength of the nation and the monarchy itself. This part includes a discussion of Elizabeth's efforts to create a distinctly English breed of horse to complement the rise of British nationalism.

Power and Authority: Horses, Nobility, and Royal Progressions

It is clear that Elizabeth made active use of horses to flaunt her power and status to her English subjects and domestic and foreign political figure-heads. Such a display of authority was especially significant for Elizabeth due to the opposition surrounding her claim to the throne and the religious and political turmoil England endured before her coronation. Upon the execution in 1533 of Elizabeth's mother Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII's second wife, Elizabeth was decreed a bastard by her father and removed from the line of succession. Although the parliament in 1543-4 later reestablished Elizabeth's right to the throne behind her brother Edward and sister Mary, her bastard stain was not fully erased.⁶ In addition, Elizabeth's predecessor and half-sister Queen Mary as well as the rival heir to the throne, Mary Queen of Scots, were both Catholic, whereas Elizabeth was Protestant, enhancing a religious battle that divided England and threatened Elizabeth's crown. In short, in Elizabeth's early years as queen, opponents of her rule were not lacking in arguments to support their claims and undercut hers. Even some Protestants did not support Elizabeth because of her female gender as hostility existed towards female rulers not only in England but also in various parts of Europe. The beginning of the fifteenth century saw a rise in female rulers resulting from "dynastic accidents in many countries, which led to women serving as advisors to child kings or ruling in their own right."⁷ From Isabella of Castile to Mary Tudor and Catherine de Medici, women assumed thrones, sparking opposition and discussion

⁶ Susan Doran, and Norman, Jones, eds., *The Elizabethan World* (Oxford: Routledge, 2011), 5.

⁷ Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 279.

among European men. Contemporary authors such as Anthony Gilby and John Knox were adamant and vocal in their belief that a female ruler could never overcome her inherent weaknesses as a female; her gender was supposedly more determinative than royal power.⁸ John Knox, a Protestant theologian and writer, declared a female ruler to be a “monster in nature.”⁹ Given this climate, Elizabeth’s ascent to power and, later on, her rule, were far from unproblematic. Although she did have many supporters, including Queen Mary’s own widowed husband and Privy Council, Elizabeth’s coronation occurred at a time of great uncertainty in England, making it imperative for Elizabeth to use every tool she had available to enhance her authority and silence her opponents. One such vital tool was the horse as an animal and a symbol.

Horses enabled Elizabeth to cement her power and control in domestic and foreign affairs. The horse, a signifier of status and power in the Western world, also represented the wellbeing and strength of the nation of England and served as a metaphor for the relationship between ruler and subject. In Elizabethan England, horse riders were “likely to be a gentleman of quality, an official in the service of the Crown, or at the very lowest perhaps a messenger on urgent business for His Majesty, or a gentleman’s serving man.”¹⁰ Only the wealthiest and most elite members of society could afford to buy a horse and to maintain its upkeep, let alone to use it as a display of affluence and power as Elizabeth often did. For both men and women, owning and knowing how to properly ride a horse were required to be members of the upper class, with

⁸ Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 279.

⁹ Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 276.

¹⁰ Joan Thirsk, *Horses in Early Modern England: For Service, for Pleasure, for Power* (Stenton Lecture, xi, Reading, 1978).

participation in hunting, hawking, the manège, and jousting as physical representations of their membership and barriers between them and the lower classes.¹¹

Horses deemed specifically for leisure activities such as hunting, the manège, jousting, and processions signified surplus wealth, prestige, and upper class status because of their immense cost and the frivolousness associated with these activities.¹² Those occupying the highest social positions spared no cost in turning horses into ostentatious representations of their owner's wealth. For leisure riding, amblers and pacers were desired most.¹³ But regardless of the type of horse, to own and maintain a stable of horses was an expensive endeavor. The owner of the stable was automatically associated with a certain level of wealth and prestige. In the early years of Elizabeth's reign, in 1562, the cost of simply feeding one horse for a week was estimated at five shillings or 60 pence.¹⁴ In contrast, it was a mere six pence per week to lodge a person in a feather bed.¹⁵ In addition, servants had to be paid to take care of and train the horses, with two shillings and four pence being paid to a "horse boy" and four shillings and eight pence being paid to a groom.¹⁶ The servants were usually dressed in standardized clothing and put in a ranking order, much like an army of soldiers, to propagate the affluence and status of the owner.¹⁷ Horses did not just need to be fed but also required frequent shoeing to protect their feet. They were susceptible to sickness and injury; significant money had to be spent to hire professionals to treat and heal animals. Thus, in addition to the staff needed to feed, groom, and train the horses, already a significant number of employees at a high expense, owners had to hire

¹¹ Peter Edwards, Karl A.E. Enenkel, and Elspeth Graham, eds., *The Horse as Cultural Icon: The Real and the Symbolic Horse in the Early Modern World* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2012), 7.

¹² Peter Edwards, *Horse and Man in Early Modern England* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), 2.

¹³ Peter Edwards, Karl A.E. Enenkel, and Elspeth Graham, eds., *The Horse as Cultural Icon: The Real and the Symbolic Horse in the Early Modern World*, 288.

¹⁴ Peter Edwards, *Horse and Man in Early Modern England*, 5.

¹⁵ Elizabethan Money: Prices. Accessed March 15, 2019. <http://www.guildofstmichael.org/money/prices.html>

¹⁶ Peter Edwards, *Horse and Man in Early Modern England*, 7.

¹⁷ Joan Thirsk, *Horses in Early Modern England: For Service, for Pleasure, for Power*, 7.

blacksmiths and veterinarians.¹⁸ The Crown specifically employed a Master of the Horse, a coveted position for a skilled horseman who served in the Privy Council as a trusted advisor, a clear reflection of the close association between horses and political power. Elizabeth appointed as her Master of Horse her dear friend and rumored lover, Robert Dudley, as befits the importance of the position of controlling the Crown's stable and horses. She also assigned Dudley 400 pounds a year for the management of the queen's stables and horses.¹⁹

The wealthiest and most elite members of society would have had the nicest stables with the finest and largest quantities of horses and staff. The monarchy epitomized this sociopolitical phenomenon. Tellingly, stables often resembled a miniature castle, set apart from other buildings and with the finest products available. The presence of a beautiful stable with multiple strong, majestic horses was a means for the elite to "publicly display their wealth and standing."²⁰ The Crown of course owned the finest and largest number of horses with the most staff to care for them. Elizabeth's personal stables housed around 100 to 300 trained and ready horses at any singular moment, not including stallions or mares for breeding and fous, and in addition to the upwards of 83 servants needed for merely 98 horses.²¹ The Crown displayed its wealth through the ownership and upkeep of a large number of horses, but the quality of the horses was equally as important as the quantity. Elizabeth's stable contained horses of the finest and most pure breeding, demonstrating Elizabeth's commitment to adding elite bloodlines in English horses and the political and social prerequisite of only presenting the finest horses in association with the

¹⁸ Peter Edwards, *Horse and Man in Early Modern England*, 5.

¹⁹ "Warrant for Lord Robert Dudley, Master of the Horse, to Have £400 Yearly for the Furniture of the Royal Stable, Provision of Horses, Etc." Letter to Lord Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. 1560. In The National Archives. Accessed March 15, 2019. <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/1151205c-435c-4313-a33e-7cc6c84fc348>.

²⁰ Peter Edwards, Karl A.E. Enekel, and Elspeth Graham, eds., *The Horse as Cultural Icon: The Real and the Symbolic Horse in the Early Modern World*, 7.

²¹ Joan Thirsk, *Horses in Early Modern England: For Service, for Pleasure, for Power*, 7.

Crown.²² The strong bloodline was associated with beautiful physical and muscular qualities such as a “deep chest, powerful hind-quarters, muscular legs and well-formed hoofs.” Similarly, these horses had to have “good confirmation, a shapely head and limbs, well-set eyes and coat in a fashionable colour.”²³ Thus, Elizabeth’s horses had to be the most skilled and athletic in all of England as well as the most beautiful and magnificent. Horses, in short, were public and physical representations and symbols of their master: the queen.

A rider on horseback conferred an image of power and authority, particularly monarchical power in the case of the queen. Along with the image of horse and rider, horseback-riding activities such as hunting or jousting further conferred an image of masculinity and strength onto the rider. Horses were often given anthropomorphic qualities, a subject more fully elaborated below. Here I want to note that because of these anthropomorphic associations, horses could be used to depict not only the relationship between ruler and subject but also the qualities of an effective and skilled leader. The association of power with horseback riding dates back to the time when God gave “Adam dominion over all living things.”²⁴ Riding this wild animal demonstrated superiority and power because it was tantamount to man enacting his God-given right of dominance over animals. By being able to control, harness, and ride his horse, the rider validated his position of power. As historian Peter Edwards put it: “By showing his easy mastery over such a noble and puissant creature, the rider, as a representative of the ruling elite, provided a justification for aristocratic power and influence.”²⁵ Adam’s act of naming the animals strengthened this link between power and domination of man over animals. Playing on this

²² Peter Edwards, Karl A.E. Enekel, and Elspeth Graham, eds., *The Horse as Cultural Icon: The Real and the Symbolic Horse in the Early Modern World*, 286.

²³ Peter Edwards, Karl A.E. Enekel, and Elspeth Graham, eds., *The Horse as Cultural Icon: The Real and the Symbolic Horse in the Early Modern World*, 288.

²⁴ Peter Edwards, *Horse and Man in Early Modern England*, 17.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

biblical example, elites regularly identified a horse by the name of its owner, an expression of the owner's power over the horse.²⁶ When such a magnificent, wild, and powerful creature succumbed to the will of the rider, it signaled to onlookers the rider's right to maintain a position of power because of their ability to tame his or her horse.

Authors contemporary to the Tudor monarchs, including during the reign of Elizabeth I, commented on the connection between ruling power, legitimate authority, and the art of riding. A case in point is the manual by Sir Thomas Elyot entitled *The Boke named the Governour* in 1531. Sir Thomas Elyot remarks that for a governor “the most honorable exercise in mine opynion... of euery noble persone is to ryde surely and clene on a great horse and a roughe, whiche undoubtedly not only importeth a majestie and drede to inferior persones, beholding hyme aboute the common course of other men.”²⁷ The skilled riding of the horse is what sets the nobility apart from the commoners. When seen astride a horse in public, be it during a procession or in artwork on display, the pose denotes the status of the rider. In other words, a great king or queen needed to own, tame, and ride great horses. William Cavendish commented in his horsemanship manual published in 1667, *A New Method, and Extraordinary Invention, to Dress Horses, and Work Them According to Nature*, that a king is at his most powerful when astride a horse leading his army into battle, “But above all,” he asked rhetorically, “What sets off a King more, than to be on a beautiful *Horse* at the Head of his army?”²⁸ In times of war, the king on his horse marching forward was an image that expressed the strength of both his position as ruler and of his country as a whole. It is not surprising then that Elizabeth's epic victory over the

²⁶ Peter Edwards, *Horse and Man in Early Modern England*, 24.

²⁷ Syr Thomas Elyot Knight, *The Boke Named the Gouernour, Deuysed by Syr Thomas Elyot Knight, 1537*. MS, London. Accessed March 15, 2019, 62.

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A21287.0001.001/1:5.17?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>.

²⁸ William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, *A New Method, and Extraordinary Invention, to Dress Horses, and Work Them According to Nature as Also, to Perfect Nature by the Subtily of Art, Which Was Never Found Out, but by ... William Cavendishe ... 1667*. MS, London. Accessed March 15, 2019, 13.

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A53074.0001.001/1:4.1?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>

Spanish Armada at the Battle of Tilbury, as we will see, is often commemorated by paintings of her on top her white steed leading her men into battle. Cavendish further elaborates on the notion of the horse as a symbol of power for the ruling elite, especially for the monarchy, by asking “What Prince or Monarch looks more Princely or more Enthroned than Upon a Beautiful *Horse*, with Rich Foot-clothes, or Rich Sadles, and Waiving Plumes, making his Entry through Great Cities, to Amaze the people with Pleasure and Delight?”²⁹ When astride a magnificent horse with the finest clothing and saddles in front of their subjects, monarchs asserted their power and right as rulers.

Traditionally in England and much of the Western world, monarchs, mostly male, took advantage of the horse’s status in society in their efforts to demonstrate power and strength. Kings such as Elizabeth’s father Henry VIII, Henry II of France, and Holy Roman Emperor Charles V all commissioned portraits of themselves on horseback. Even Elizabeth’s eventual successor, Charles I of England, Ireland, and Scotland, was particularly fond of and skilled at utilizing the connotation of the horse in his portraits to cultivate a powerful, authoritative image of himself as the ordained ruler. Sir Anthony Van Dyck’s *Charles I à la chasse* and *Charles I on Horseback with M. de St Antoine* are two paintings that highlight how horses are utilized to enhance the image of the monarch. In *Charles I à la chasse*, Charles is depicted in the noble activity of the hunt on a dappled grey horse, a rare color, which helps promote the high status of the rider. The horse paws at the ground, bowing and subduing to its master, which represents how Charles subdues his subjects under the command given to him by God.³⁰ *Charles I on Horseback with M. de St. Antoine* depicts in a less subtle way the superiority of the monarch and his fitness to rule. Since in the Renaissance the horse was used as a symbol for the people of the

²⁹ William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, *A New Method, and Extraordinary Invention, to Dress Horses, and Work Them*, 13.

³⁰ David Howarth, *Images of Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 134.

country, this painting presents the confident and assured Charles commanding his subjects and asserting his dominance.³¹ The king's power is further demonstrated by his elevated position on the horse as the viewer is forced to look up at the king, acknowledging his higher status and fitness to rule, especially during a time of political unrest.³² The placement of the painting in the Gallery in St. James's signifies its importance in depicting kingly authority, as it was placed in the room in which foreign ambassadors would wait before meeting with the king.³³ The painting reminded the ambassadors of the power of the king and court in which they were. Many monarchs, including Elizabeth I, capitalized on the status of the horse in society to propagate a powerful, kingly image and depict their right to rule.



Figure 1: Sir Anthony Van Dyck, *Charles I à la chasse*, 1635; Figure 2: Sir Anthony Van Dyck, *Charles I on Horseback with M. de St. Antoine*, 1633

³¹ Ibid., 139.

³² Peter Edwards, Karl A.E. Enekel, and Elspeth Graham, eds., *The Horse as Cultural Icon: The Real and the Symbolic Horse in the Early Modern World*, 12.

³³ David Howarth, *Images of Rule*, 143.

Elizabeth was appropriating a tradition by utilizing the horse as a signifier of status and power to portray an image of herself to her people and the Western World as the leader of a wealthy and powerful kingdom. This tradition had been employed by kings before her and continued and expanded under her successors, as evident in the example of Charles I. Of course, she did so as a woman, creating an even greater need to establish legitimacy of rule. The spectacle and pompousness surrounding Elizabeth's progresses and celebrations served as propaganda for the English monarchy, her royal court, and her own position as head of state. A crucial tool for her was going on progress; and, tellingly, Elizabeth engaged in this method of interaction with her subjects more so than any other monarch, visiting over 400 hosts throughout her 44 years as queen, a true masterpiece in political relations.³⁴ She poured much thought and resources into the processions she took every spring and summer, traveling with her massive entourage throughout her reign from town to town and to the wealthy homes of her nobility.³⁵ Progresses were characterized by ceremony, lavishness, accessibility to the queen, chaos, hunting and numerous celebrations from host cities and families. On these occasions, Elizabeth made herself and her government visible to her subjects to heighten her popularity and garner support. Popular support was a crucial aspect of Elizabeth's ability to reign for 44 years.

In traveling with large numbers of horses and ceremonies that often featured popular horseback riding spectacles such as jousts and tilts, Elizabeth sought to impress upon the people of England and foreign countries the wealth and power of her kingdom. According to historian Mary Cole, "[Elizabeth's] travels were an important part of her efforts to fashion a public image that portrayed her as both king and queen, man and woman, God's chosen, a warrior and a

³⁴ Mary H. Cole, *The Portable Queen* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 1.

³⁵ Mary H. Cole, *The Portable Queen*, 1.

judge.”³⁶ Progresses acted as a means of propaganda for Elizabeth and the crown by reminding her subjects that she was the ruler of a unified, powerful kingdom reminiscent of the magnificent King Arthur.³⁷ This image was especially important because Elizabeth’s claim to the throne was not fully secure, as discussed previously. The line of succession was surrounded by ambivalence, since Elizabeth’s cousin and fellow queen, Mary, Queen of Scots, had a strong hereditary claim to England and garnered significant support from Catholics in England.³⁸ In order to cement her position as a female monarch and reduce the potential for political unrest and religious upheaval, Elizabeth traveled and visited the great cities and wealthy estates of England again and again to further her support among her subjects and create an air of openness and communication with their monarch.

Already accounts of her first procession into London for her coronation highlight the importance of public displays for Elizabeth’s rule and the crucial role of horses in those displays. After the death of Elizabeth’s half-sister, Queen Mary, Elizabeth was brought to the Tower of London in preparation for her coronation as queen. The most note-worthy publication and resource on Elizabeth’s progresses is a collection of contemporary historical documents and sources that was later compiled by editor John Nichols and his team of antiquarians in its finalized, second edition in 1823. The documents in Nichols’ collection consist of a repertoire of eyewitness accounts, letters, ballads, and pageants all attesting to the pompousness and ceremonial nature of Elizabeth’s processions. The account of Elizabeth’s procession to the Tower of London on the 28th of November 1558 recalls how “before her rode many gentleman, knights and nobles; after them came the trumpeters blowing; then all the heralds in array, my Lord Mayor holding the Queen’s scepter riding with Garter: my lord of Pembroke bare the

³⁶ Mary H. Cole, *The Portable Queen*, 10.

³⁷ Jean Wilson, *Entertainments for Elizabeth I* (New Jersey: D.S. Brewer, 1980), 23.

³⁸ David Loades, *Elizabeth I: The Golden Reign of Gloriana*, 67.

Queen's sword."³⁹ The queen's arrival was preceded by the entrance of many knights and noblemen, confirming Elizabeth's power and support, as well as by the Lord Mayor holding the scepter, and the Lord of Pembroke, who held her sword, the symbols of her authority as the ruler of England. Trumpets announced her entrance to the people to great cheers for the new queen. The symbolism of power and authority only intensified with the sight of the queen herself on the back of a steed: "Then came her Grace on horseback, appareled in purple velvet, with a scarf about her neck; the serjeants of arms being about her person."⁴⁰ Elizabeth came into her kingdom on horseback, presenting the image of a king as every male monarch who had entered in this fashion before her had done, and signaling her strength and power through control of the horse underneath her. The queen took center stage while grabbing the reins, literally and metaphorically.

The many spectators who were standing would have to look upward to their monarch, elevated above her subjects on her horse. Purple velvet colored her outfit, further amplifying her status as noble queen. Elizabeth's master of horse and dear friend, Sir Robert Dudley, rode directly after the queen; his position directly behind the queen reflected the significance of his role of overseer of the queen's stables and steeds. The entourage came to an end with "a great shooting of guns, the like was never heard before."⁴¹ Elizabeth's entrance created the aura of a powerful warrior king, with the many knights and Elizabeth on horseback, the scepter and Elizabeth's sword, as well as the sounding of the trumpets and guns. Already in her very first entrance into London as queen, when she first tried to establish herself before her people as the

³⁹ John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions, of Queen Elizabeth. Among which are interspersed other solemnities, public expenditures, and remarkable events, during the reign of that illustrious princess – illustrated with historical notes, by John Nichols F.S.A. Edinb. And Peth. Volume 1 and 2 – Printed by and for the edited, Printer to The Society of Antiquaries of London.* 40.

⁴⁰ John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions, of Queen Elizabeth.*, 40.

⁴¹ John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions, of Queen Elizabeth.*, 40.

true monarch of England, Elizabeth presented an image of herself on horseback. Elizabeth's coronation, and especially her first entrance into the city of London as queen, were particularly important occasions for Elizabeth to impress upon her subjects and the world not only her authority as a leader, but also the strength of her nation and her government. Transitions of power in the early modern period were usually met with some significant opposition, and Elizabeth's transition was no exception. As previously discussed, Elizabeth's enemies had ammunition to challenge her position because of her nature as a woman, her religion, and differing claims to the throne. At the time of her coronation, England was also still officially at war with France, which began under her father's reign.⁴² Thus, Elizabeth's coronation was as much an act of ceremony as it was of necessity to display her political control over England to her subjects and the world.

Elizabeth's use of the imagery of the horse continued throughout the processions and celebrations leading up to her coronation on January 15th, 1559 as well as at her first meeting of the parliament on January 25th. Elizabeth's exit from the Tower of London on January 14th featured Elizabeth in a richly dressed chariot, "with all the lords and ladies, all in crimson velvet, and their horses trapped with the same; and the trumpeters in scarlet gowns blowing their trumpets... the streets every where laid over with gravel. The city was at very great charge to express their love and joy."⁴³ Even though in this instance Elizabeth herself was not on horseback, she was still surrounded by the majestic animals adorned in matching lavish crimson velvet outfits pulling her in a chariot, much like a Roman Emperor, and surrounded by all the lords and ladies of the land. The presence of the finely garbed horses and aristocrats signaled

⁴² Susan Doran, and Norman, Jones, eds., *The Elizabethan World*, 7.

⁴³ John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions, of Queen Elizabeth. Among which are interspersed other solemnities, public expenditures, and remarkable events, during the reign of that illustrious princess – illustrated with historical notes, by John Nichols F.S.A. Edinb. And Peth. Volume 1 and 2.* (MS. London: – Printed by and for the edited, Printer to The Society of Antiquaries of London), 43.

Elizabeth's wealth and elite status as Queen of England. On the day before her coronation, Elizabeth presented to the public their future queen, the image of herself as the ruler of a wealthy, prosperous, and united country. Similarly, in her first official duty as queen, Elizabeth reportedly rode on horseback on the 25th of January from her palace at Whitehall to the Church of Westminster in her parliamentary robes to meet her lords for the opening of parliament.⁴⁴ In Parliament, Elizabeth was going to be surrounded by men, since the governing bodies of England were traditionally spheres for men. Arriving on horseback, however, conferred onto Elizabeth the powerful attributes associated with the dominance of a rider over his or her wild steed and caused her to literally look down on her parliament during the greeting. Positioning herself on horseback before her Parliament, she physically manifested her control over the government. Lording over parliament, she declared and embodied, as it were, her intention to oversee all aspects of her government, despite the limitations imposed by her gender.

While on progress outside the capital, the number of richly garbed horses, carriages, people, and caravans with which Elizabeth traveled were meant to proclaim in a grand spectacle Elizabeth's royal authority both within her borders and abroad. The sight of hundreds of horses, carts, and beautifully dressed aristocrats traveling through the English countryside was an impressive display of wealth, especially for members of the lower classes.⁴⁵ An eyewitness account of Elizabeth's progression to the town of Worcester noted the commoners outside the city who willingly stabled the queen's horses. The onlookers expressed awe at how many horses there were, "and the com'ons ther, did agree to kepe several for her horses and the horses of her whole trayne and retinue; and, turning her palfrey, marveled to see such a number of horses

⁴⁴ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁵ Mary H. Cole, *The Portable Queen*, 46.

together.”⁴⁶ In a society in which the presence of the horse represented the high status and wealth of the owner, the queen’s large number of horses represented her superior power, authority, and wealth.

The splendid picture of so many horses and a united train of nobility, combined with the war-like nature of the jousts and mock battles, can also be seen as defensive gestures and mechanisms against domestic and foreign enemies, which was a real threat, especially after 1568 when England and Spain’s relationship declined. The same account of her visit to the city of Worcester described the pageantry involved when Elizabeth and her entourage reached the town’s church, “with the Noblemen and others on horseback before,” the city officials “carrying their maces on horseback, and placed next before the Serj’att Armes,” followed by “the Lord Chamberlain carrying her sword before her Majestie; and after her the Lord Robt Dudley, Yerle of Ly’r, M’r of her Highnesses horses, following her with her leede palfrey in hand; and then her Noble Women, Ladies, Maydens of Hon’or all on horseback.”⁴⁷ Elizabeth was at the center of the moving train of people, engulfed in the hospitality of the city and the spectacle of her display. On such a tremendous image of the queen, the people were described as, “the people, being innumerable, in the streets and Chuchyard, crying to her Majestie, ‘God save y Majestie! God save y Grace!’”⁴⁸

During her progresses, Elizabeth created an open channel between her and her subjects in which she could interact with them and listen to their grievances, demonstrating that she could listen and understand her subjects. Here, the metaphorical understanding of the relationship

⁴⁶ John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions, of Queen Elizabeth. Among which are interspersed other solemnities, public expenditures, and remarkable events, during the reign of that illustrious princess – illustrated with historical notes, by John Nichols F.S.A. Edinb. And Peth. Volume 1 and 2.* (MS. London: Printed by and for the edited, Printer to The Society of Antiquaries of London), 541.

⁴⁷ John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions, of Queen Elizabeth.*, 538-539.

⁴⁸ John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions, of Queen Elizabeth.*, 539.

between horse and rider to mirror that between ruler and his or her subjects came into play.

According to historian Karen Raber, “the association of riding skill with the skills of ruling – of good reigning with good reining was... well established.”⁴⁹

The rider is the leader while the horse is the subject, ideally dutiful and obedient. In this view, for the horse to recognize the rider as its master, the rider had to first secure the fear of the animal but also gain the horse’s love and will. The same was said to apply to the monarch and his or her subjects. William Cavendish, an influential aristocrat as well as great horseman, described how a rider gets a horse to obey his commands: “first he must Know, and Acknowledge me to be his Master, by Obeying me: That is, He must *Fear* me, and out of that *Fear*, *Love* me, and so *Obey* me. For it is *Fear* makes every Body *Obey*, both Man and Beast.”⁵⁰ Contemporaries saw an analogy between training a horse and training a human. Horseman Thomas Blundeville in 1561 described the process by which a horse learns through fear and then ultimately becomes a willing participant through love, “for at the firste the feare that he hath of his rider, maketh him to unite his force together, and to beare it out the more stoutelye. But after that he is well acquainted with his ryder, he will not shewe so mucche force in his labour and travel as he dydde before.”⁵¹ This love comes from the rider’s subsequent cherishing and rewarding of the horse when it performs properly, “remember always to helpe him more or less

⁴⁹ Karen, Raber and Treva, Tucker, *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Early Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, 230.

⁵⁰ William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, *A New Method, and Extraordinary Invention, to Dress Horses, and Work Them According to Nature as Also, to Perfect Nature by the Subtily of Art, Which Was Never Found Out, but by ... William Cavendishe ... 1667*. MS, London. Accessed March 15, 2019, 196. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A53074.0001.001/1:4.1?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>

⁵¹ Thomas Blundeville, *The Fower Chiefyst Offices Belongyng to Horsemanshippe That Is to Saye. The Office of the Breeder, of the Rider, of the Keper, and of the Ferrer. 1566*. MS, London. Accessed March 15, 2019. 20-21. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A16229.0001.001/1:2?rgn=div1;view=toc>.

wyth youre voice, rod, or spur, according as the qualitey of the horse shall require, and when he doeth wel, to cherish him.”⁵²

A rider, these sources show, was encouraged to assert his dominance over the horse through fear, although not too crippling or over-exaggerated. Only then and gradually, will the horse learn to love his rider and perform more smoothly and willingly the actions the rider asks. Likewise, a monarch must use fear and power to obtain submission and obedience from his/her subjects, who then must also learn to love and support their monarch. When Elizabeth was seen on horseback by her subjects, the parallel came to life. Her ability to smoothly control the horse on her own verified her as not only a successful rider, but also a successful ruler, since the same qualities that made for a skilled rider also made for an effective monarch. The ideal monarch, much like the successful rider, was stern yet capable of listening and understanding the weaknesses and strengths of his or her followers, whether it be a horse or a human.⁵³ The rider, atop a horse, further had to be in complete control of his or her emotions and to train the horse had to be careful and purposeful when choosing to reward or punish the horse. Showing herself as a good rider, Elizabeth also showed herself as capable of controlling her emotions, a particularly important attribute for a female monarch.

The public ceremonies and protocol associated with Elizabeth’s entrance into a city served to recognize Elizabeth’s status as the most superior person in the land. They also highlighted the city officials’ high status and service to the Crown. On progress, Elizabeth rode on horseback towards the city and the waiting officials, reversing the usual order in which the monarch is stationary and the subjects approach. This reversal lent Elizabeth’s rule the

⁵² Ibid., 21.

⁵³ Elizabeth LeGuin, “Man and Horse in Harmony,” in *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Early Modern World*, ed. Karen Raber and Treva J Tucker (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 182.

impression of exchange and approachability.⁵⁴ When Elizabeth entered Worcester in 1575, the symbolism of rule was in the postures of the rider and receiving party: “And at the presence of her Majestie approaching neer to the said confines of the sd Liberties, the said Baylyfs and all the residue adoresd on their knees... began in grateful words and feir speches on the Cities behalfe to yeld up our lib/ties unto her Majesties hands, by their maces”⁵⁵ Elizabeth’s position on horseback physically separates and elevates her from the kneeling city officials voicing their gratitude and support from below. Elizabeth’s power over them is both symbolic and tangible, as she literally sits on the back of a majestic steed to make herself tower over all those present to pay homage to her royal person. In this particular ceremony, the officials also presented Elizabeth with their maces, figuratively handing her authority and governance of the city.⁵⁶ Elizabeth’s departure from Worcester was accompanied by similar displays of reverence towards her power and authority as queen. Elizabeth exited the city on horseback, and although Elizabeth commanded the city officials not to dirty their clothes by kneeling in front of her in the mud, it is clear that the noblemen and city officials had planned to show their respect of her superior status by dismounting and lowering themselves. They intended to be “lyghtyng from their horses, to have done their duties on their knees; and for that the ways wer fowle, her Majestie said unto them, ‘I pray you, keep your horses, and do not alight.’”⁵⁷ As she remained mounted and higher up than her subjects, Elizabeth embodied her royal authority and status physically and symbolically.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 124.

⁵⁵ John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions, of Queen Elizabeth. Among which are interspersed other solemnities, public expenditures, and remarkable events, during the reign of that illustrious princess – illustrated with historical notes, by John Nichols F.S.A. Edinb. And Peth. Volume 1 and 2 – Printed by and for the edited, Printer to The Society of Antiquaries of London*, 536.

⁵⁶ Mary H. Cole, *The Portable Queen*, 125.

⁵⁷ John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions, of Queen Elizabeth. Among which are interspersed other solemnities, public expenditures, and remarkable events, during the reign of that illustrious princess – illustrated with historical notes, by John Nichols F.S.A. Edinb. And Peth. Volume 1 and 2 – Printed by and for the edited, Printer to The Society of Antiquaries of London*, 540.

A significant account of Elizabeth's progress to and entertainments at Kenilworth Castle in July 1575 can be found in a letter by Robert Laneham, a mercer for the Privy Council.

Laneham's letter suggests that Elizabeth may have stayed on horseback for most of her activities and time in a given city, from her entrance to various hunting excursions and even to watching plays. Elizabeth's permanent mounted position leaves no doubt as to her being the ruler of all affairs and capable of leading the growing nation of England. Even in activities during which one would not expect Elizabeth to be on horseback, such as when watching a play, she is purposely mounted on her steed. The horse incidentally got spooked during the play, but Elizabeth remained calm and handled her horse with dignity and security, as a true king would.⁵⁸

Upon Elizabeth's arrival and entrance into Kenilworth Castle, a pageant took place in which Elizabeth passed through a succession of gates with gifts and performances at each gate towards the castle. The intended, if not actual, impression was one of uncontested sovereignty. The account notes: "Wheraof hee never saw the like nor had any warning afore, ne yet could make too himself any cause of the matter: At last upon better view and aviesement, az hee preast too cum neerar, confessing anon that hee found himself pearced at the prezens of a personage so evidently expressing an heroicall Soveraintee over all the whole Estates."⁵⁹

Elizabeth's procession to Kenilworth and the pageants throughout her stay were particularly significant in Elizabeth's reign because they coincided with a major turning point in her attitude towards marriage. Elizabeth's visit to Kenilworth was a final opportunity for the Earl of Leicester to persuade Elizabeth to marry him. He did everything in his ability to attempt to convince Elizabeth that they should wed, to which end he put on magnificent pageants courting

⁵⁸ Robert Laneham, *A Letter, Part of the Entertainment Untuk the Queenz Majesty, at Killingwoorth Castl in Warwick Sheer, in This Soomerz Progrezt 1575, Iz Signified Robert Laneham*. 1784. MS, London. Accessed March 15, 2019. 22-23.

⁵⁹ Robert Laneham, *A Letter, Part of the Entertainment Untuk the Queenz Majesty*, 10-11.

the queen and describing her beauty, but ultimately Elizabeth chose not to lose some of her power as queen by becoming a wife, subservient to her husband.⁶⁰ Elizabeth's final decision not to wed the Earl of Leicester in 1575 set the stage for the creation of her image as an everlasting virgin queen. Instead of being viewed as a failure, Elizabeth's unsuccessful marriage attempts now became a positive attribute that showed how dedicated Elizabeth was to England and how deeply she cared for her country, further emphasizing her power as the sole ruler. As historian John King states, her status as an unwed virgin was "a paradoxical symbol of the power of a woman who survived to govern despite illegitimization, subordination of female to male in the order of primogeniture, patriarchy, and masculine supremacy, and who remained unwed at a time when official sermons favored marriage."⁶¹

Elizabeth capitalized on and purposefully participated in public excursions to cultivate an image of herself as the powerful and legitimate monarch of England. The horse, through playing on both its physical nature and broader connotations in society and in ceremony, was a key part in formulating this image to her people, which in turn was crucial for Elizabeth's prosperity and long rule. The accounts of Elizabeth's visit to Kenilworth Castle also include a description of the time she spent engaged in the hunt. She hunted so ferociously that "Here her Majestie stayed er horse to favour Sylvanus, fearing least he should be driven out of breath by following her hors so fast."⁶² The hunt had particular meaning for monarchs and accordingly for this female monarch.

Hunting for Power: The Royal Hunt and Female Virginty

Elizabeth was an avid hunter, and the hunt provided her with many occasions to display her power as a female monarch. Hunting represented a fun and exclusive pastime for royalty, as

⁶⁰ Jean Wilson, *Entertainments for Elizabeth I*, 22.

⁶¹ John N. King, "Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen." *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No.1 (Spring, 1990), 30.

⁶² John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions, of Queen Elizabeth*, 83.

well as a way to keep fitness for horse and man and practice for times of war.⁶³ The hunt involved chasing, capturing, and killing wild game on horseback in the forest and on uneven terrain.⁶⁴ It was considered particularly manly, especially on account of its connection to warfare and the act of actually spilling the blood of a wild animal. According to historian Richard Almond, hunting was considered a masculine endeavor to contemporaries, but there is also a rich history of female participation in the hunt, much like other equestrian sports.⁶⁵ Hunting was an activity in which men could display their manly attributes, but also that women could participate in peripherally, although not usually in all parts. A long and rich cultural history in the Western world associated with female huntresses exists. For centuries, myths and legends of the divine huntresses Artemis and Diana had permeated all strata of society. These goddesses personified the hunt as well as youthfulness, beauty, and chastity, and came to symbolize the image of the ideal woman.⁶⁶ While hunting, Elizabeth was the embodiment of Diana and Artemis and the virtues they represented. Plays, poems, and portraiture, including Henrik Cornelius Vroom's famous portrait of Elizabeth with a hunting bow and hound, depicted Elizabeth as the chaste and beautiful and young goddess of the hunt.

For these reasons, hunting was an ideal activity for Elizabeth, since it combined masculine and feminine elements in powerful and compelling ways. Elizabeth was so fond of hunting and being on horseback that she hunted even at sixty-seven years old. Rowland Whyte remarked in a letter to Sir Robert Sidney that "her majesty is well and excellently disposed to hunting, for every second day she is on horseback and continues the sport long."⁶⁷ Elizabeth's

⁶³ Richard Almond, *Daughters of Artemis: the huntress in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁵ Richard Almond, *Daughters of Artemis: the huntress in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 6-7.

⁶⁶ Richard Almond, *Daughters of Artemis: the huntress in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 149.

⁶⁷ Edward Barry, *Shakespeare and the Hunt: A Cultural and Social Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3.

enjoyment of the hunt as well as her mastery of horses demonstrates her courage and skill on horseback. Since the hunt had such strong ties to the act of war and the monarchy itself, it allowed her to flaunt male-coded skills; yet, because hunting on horseback was an area in which women were actually permitted to engage, Elizabeth could flaunt those skills in a non-antagonizing way.

Elizabeth also pushed her hunting activities into areas that were deemed not suitable for huntresses. Taught by her father Henry VIII, a skilled and passionate hunter, Elizabeth engaged in all activities in the hunt, even those that were deemed unfeminine for most women.⁶⁸ The kill was usually reserved for the men, the act of slitting the throat of the game, but Elizabeth claimed it successfully due to her skill as a huntress and her knowledge of the sport.⁶⁹ Elizabeth's endeavors on horseback in the hunt as a woman did not shock people, as women huntresses were socially acceptable at the time; nevertheless, Elizabeth pushed the boundaries of social etiquette by engaging in the hunt and executing the kill with the same strong, masculine qualities that were to be expected of a fit ruler.

This representation is evident in an image from the most popular hunting manual of the time, George Gascoigne's *The Noble Arte of Venerie Or Hunting* published in 1575. In the picture, the huntsman is giving Elizabeth a knife in order to complete the ritual killing herself. She is the only female in the picture but tasked instead of the men, indicating both her higher status socially and that she has the needed masculine traits celebrated in a strong monarch. In addition, it is clear that Elizabeth was previously on horseback, involved in the chase, and just jumped down from her horse. The horse itself looms particularly large in the background of the image. It is the only horse pictured, waiting for when its rider, the queen, chooses to re-mount

⁶⁸ Richard Almond, *Daughters of Artemis: the huntress in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 87.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

after successfully killing the stag. While, or perhaps because, this part of the hunt was not a common act for women, Elizabeth was supposedly pleased to get to cut the animal's throat.⁷⁰

The post-chase act of slitting the animal's throat was an unusual act for a woman. The act was considered unfeminine, due to the bloodshed and its brute nature, "And the chiefe huntsman (kneeling, if it be to a Prince) doth holde that Deare by the forefoote, while the Prince of chief, cut a slyt drawn alongst the brisket of the deare, somewhat lower than the bysket towards the belly. This is done to see the goodness of the flesh, and how thicke it is."⁷¹ The success of killing the animal, however, could demonstrate the courage and anatomical knowledge of the queen. In order for Elizabeth to have successfully killed the animal, she had to display not only bravery to take the stag's life, but also a knowledge of the proper skill associated with killing animals in the hunt.⁷² In all likelihood, this earned Elizabeth the respect of her male peers, "for they take delight to cut off his heade with their woodknyues, skaynes, or swords, to trye their edge, and the goodnesse or strength of their arme."⁷³ Elizabeth's role in concluding the ceremonial actions of the hunt, usually a male privilege and the right of the most elite member on the hunt, portrayed an instance in which Elizabeth could cross gender boundaries to present herself more as a king than a queen. Elizabeth apparently did not view her gender as a barrier to her position in the hunt or her position in the government.⁷⁴ She showed herself as capable of the demands of ruling as any other monarch, regardless of sex, including riding in the hunt and relishing in the kill.

⁷⁰ Richard Almond, *Daughters of Artemis: the huntress in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 132.

⁷¹ George Gascoigne, *The Noble Arte of Venerie or Hunting VWherein Is Handled and Set out the Vertues, Nature, and Properties of Fiutene Sundrie Chaces Together, with the Order and Maner How to Hunte and Kill Euery One of Them*. 1575. MS, London. Accessed March 15, 2019. 135.

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A14021.0001.001/1:1?rgn=div1;view=toc>.

⁷² Richard Almond, *Daughters of Artemis: the huntress in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 132.

⁷³ George Gascoigne, *The Noble Arte of Venerie or Hunting VWherein Is Handled and Set out the Vertues, Nature, and Properties of Fiutene Sundrie Chaces Together, with the Order and Maner How to Hunte and Kill Euery One of Them*. 1575. MS, London. Accessed March 15, 2019. 134.

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A14021.0001.001/1:1?rgn=div1;view=toc>.

⁷⁴ Richard Almond, *Daughters of Artemis: the huntress in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 89.

Images of Elizabeth as a mighty huntress underscored her claim to being a legitimate and competent ruler.



Figure 3: Elizabeth I out Hunting in George Gascoigne's *The Noble Arte of Venerie Or Hunting*, 1575

In fact, this woodcut of Elizabeth displays such monarchical strength, power and superiority that the same image is later used in Gascoigne's 1611 hunting manual, except that the figure of Elizabeth has been exchanged with the figure of the new English monarch, James I. How easily the image is swapped to feature a male king instead of a feminine queen is a testament to its masculine nature and also to its overarching function as a representation of the monarchy itself. The hunt was deeply connected to the royalty as an exclusive right, a significant

manifestation of their enormous power and position, regardless of gender.⁷⁵ Elizabeth as a monarch was able to transcend gender boundaries more fluidly and easily because the monarchy's power, once harnessed to a person, could be used to bypass social barriers. Although the act of ruling had masculine connotations associated with it, the position itself places the ruler above society and its regulations to a larger extent, enabling social class to trump gender in some respects. In the end, the image of the horse was more important for monarchical power than the person in the picture or the gender of the monarch. Such a scene involving the monarch engaged in the hunt on horseback and the killing of the stag was a necessity of monarchs, as seen by its continued deployment as propaganda by both Elizabeth and James I. For both monarchs, male and female, the horse and the hunt represented their power as monarch and legitimized their position as king. Elizabeth had successfully claimed the image for herself.



⁷⁵ Edward Barry, *Shakespeare and the Hunt: A Cultural and Social Study*, 3.

Figure 4: George Gascoigne's *The Noble Arte of Venerie Or Hunting*, 1611

The importance of the horseback-riding activity of the hunt to the monarchy is also evident in other portraits of the royal family, such as Robert Peake's painting of Henry Frederick, Prince of Wales. The painting *Henry Frederick, Prince of Wales and Sir John Harington* is a stunning example of the importance of the horse and the hunt in legitimizing a ruler and perpetuating notions of masculinity. In this painting, a nine-year old Prince Henry is seen putting his sheath away after being "aggressively triumphant in that most regal pursuit, the hunting of the stag."⁷⁶ Prince Henry has just completed the ceremonious dismembering of the stag in the hunt, known as the coup de grâce, the same act in which Elizabeth is about to partake in George Gascoigne's woodcut.⁷⁷ Prince Henry stands in a powerful and strong position, staring confidently and almost daringly at the viewer. His stare freezes the viewer's gaze. His horse stands proudly behind him, supporting his rider and ready to obey his next command. This image promotes the idea of Henry as a young warrior-prince, furthered by his young age and victorious act of killing a deer in the hunt. Prince Henry's youth also makes this act of hunting and this kill a right of passage for the king-to-be, showing both the importance of this equestrian activity to the nobility as well as the development of a young gentleman. Robert Peake is depicting Prince Henry as a young king who will grow up to be a powerful warrior capable of leading and defending his country, capitalizing on the militaristic association of the hunt with the practice of war.⁷⁸ The parallel to Elizabeth's role in the coup de grâce is clear. Also of note in both George Gascoigne's engraving of Elizabeth and Robert Peake's painting of Prince Henry is the presence of the male stag. A stag is a "male red deer of five years" and is "prized for their size, their

⁷⁶ David Howarth, *Images of Rule*, 132.

⁷⁷ Edward Barry, *Shakespeare and the Hunt: A Cultural and Social Study*, 1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

magnificent antlers, their power, and their stamina in the hunt.”⁷⁹ Thus, this animal is considered a more difficult hunt, furthering the notions of masculinity and militarism, as an easier animal would have been more common for women to hunt in a more spectator style of hunting, known as bow and stable hunting.⁸⁰



Figure 5: Robert Peake, *Prince Henry and John, 2nd Lord Harington of Exton*, 1603

Although the art of horseback riding was an avenue for Elizabeth I to present herself as a more masculine, strong, and capable leader of England, Elizabeth and her advisors were also acutely aware of the social limitations of her gender. It was this dichotomy between the successor of Henry VIII and the image of a virgin queen that Elizabeth sought to portray to the public, and oftentimes she accomplished walking this fine line with the use and image of the horse. As a female monarch, Elizabeth could not only present a masculine image of herself, she also had to portray, and did so more noticeably and vehemently, herself as both feminine and

⁷⁹ Edward Barry, *Shakespeare and the Hunt: A Cultural and Social Study*, 17..

⁸⁰ Edward Barry, *Shakespeare and the Hunt: A Cultural and Social Study*, 21.

chaste, a feat in which the image of the horse could also be deployed. Historians have speculated that Elizabeth had to intentionally and skillfully craft a powerful persona of herself that would justify and solidify her crown while also balancing the oxymoron of a female unmarried ruler: The Virgin Queen. Carole Levin, for example, has argued that Elizabeth's perpetual virginity was the result of a deliberate choice to refuse to marry. Elizabeth did not want to deprive herself of power, since, as the man, a male husband certainly would have expected to be granted a significant amount of power. Levin concludes: "her success as monarch was inextricably woven into her refusal to wed."⁸¹ Other scholars such as David Loades have proposed that Elizabeth's decision not to wed may have never been a conscious one, but that when presented with different marriage proposals, Elizabeth ultimately declined each one, unconsciously refusing to give up her power as queen by being tied to a husband and society's expectations of a dutiful and submissive wife.⁸² John N. King advances the notion that Elizabeth's unmarried status and perpetual virginity may not have been an entirely deliberate choice from the start. Instead, he argues that her chaste image resulted initially from her status as a "nubile" virgin prepared for marriage and only became a permanent condition because multiple marriage proposals failed and Elizabeth passed child-bearing and marital age.⁸³ Whether Elizabeth's persona of the Virgin Queen was the result of intentional planning from the beginning of Elizabeth's reign or an unplanned development over time, it is clear that the appearance of chastity was integral to her public persona. This distinction was important for her as either a marriageable queen or a queen devoted strictly to her subjects and country.

⁸¹ Carole Levin, *"The Heart and Stomach of a King" Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 8.

⁸² David Loades, *Elizabeth I: The Golden Reign of Gloriana*, 39.

⁸³ John N. King, "Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen." *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No.1 (Spring, 1990), 32.

The need to cultivate the persona of the Virgin Queen also shaped portraiture of Elizabeth on horseback. Here, Elizabeth's femininity and chastity is signaled through the act of her riding in side-saddle, the gendered style of riding deemed more appropriate for women. Although women did ride astride, straddling the horse with both legs on either side in stirrups, especially when traveling and chasing game on the hunt, in the late Middle Ages it became more proper for women in "formal and ceremonial circumstances" to ride side-saddle.⁸⁴ In fact, early horsewomen all rode astride and the origins of the sidesaddle are deeply intertwined with feudalism and the patriarchal order. Queen Anne of Bohemia and Luxembourg in 1382 is credited with first using sidesaddle.⁸⁵ She purportedly traveled across Europe to England using this new riding position to meet her future husband, King Richard II.⁸⁶ With the rise of feudalism and a growing emphasis on male primogeniture, women's sexual behavior and virginal status were increasingly policed.⁸⁷ It became more important to maintain the virginity of the noble women and brides-to-be. Riding astride was viewed as a danger, as it supposedly could lead to the breaking of the hymen and the resultant loss of virginity. Thus, in order to maintain and prove virgin status, women of high birth were encouraged to ride aside. The legs had to be positioned on the same side of the saddle, and the woman rode sideways, not straddling and facing forward.⁸⁸

"The reins, both of personal power and individual equestrian control" the historian CuChullaine O'Reilly puts it pointedly, "had been taken away by men who now restricted a

⁸⁴ Lida F. Bloodgood, *The Saddle of Queens: The Story of the Side-Saddle*, 3.

⁸⁵ Alison Matthews David, "ELEGANT AMAZONS: VICTORIAN RIDING HABITS AND THE FASHIONABLE HORSEWOMAN." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 30, no. 1 (2002): 180. doi:10.1017/S1060150302301098.

⁸⁶ CuChullaine O'Reilly. "Sidesaddles and Suffragettes the Fight to Ride and Vote," in The Long Riders Guild Academic Foundation. http://www.lrgaf.org/articles/sidesaddles_and_suffragettes.htm

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ CuChullaine O'Reilly. "Sidesaddles and Suffragettes the Fight to Ride and Vote," in The Long Riders Guild Academic Foundation. http://www.lrgaf.org/articles/sidesaddles_and_suffragettes.htm

woman's political and equestrian destinies."⁸⁹ The first side-saddles resembled a chair placed on the horse's back with a padded seat and a wooden pommel at the front of the saddle to hold on to for balance.⁹⁰ A planchette served as a wooden board on which the ladies' feet could rest.⁹¹ In the sixteenth century, Catherine de' Medici advanced the design of the side-saddle by introducing a "second crutch between which and the original pommel she could wedge her right leg."⁹² Even with some progress in the design of the side-saddle, it was still extremely difficult for a woman to mount or dismount by herself when using such a saddle, rendering the woman dependent upon her male peers.⁹³ Its impracticality notwithstanding, the side-saddle became the symbol of the desired aristocratic woman. In Baldassare Castiglione's famous advice manual for the courtly gentleman, *The Courtier*, one reads about the indispensability of chastity to the courtly lady who was expected to be "no less chaste, prudent, and gentle than she is agreeable, witty, and discreet."⁹⁴

Because riding side-saddle became the appropriate behavior for a chaste, decent, lady, and the impression of virginity was extremely important to the queen, Elizabeth was careful to stay within social conventions in this respect. Although she most likely also rode astride, portraits show her riding side-saddle. In one painting of Queen Elizabeth I that can be found hanging in the White Tower at the Tower of London, she is seen on top of a brown horse, most likely a woman's riding horse. She is depicted riding side-saddle and with both hands opened outwards, as if towards the viewer, without regard for the reins of the horse underneath her. This

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ CuChullaine O'Reilly. "Sidesaddles and Suffragettes the Fight to Ride and Vote," in The Long Riders Guild Academic Foundation. http://www.lrgaf.org/articles/sidesaddles_and_suffragettes.htm.

⁹¹ Lida F. Bloodgood, *The Saddle of Queens: The Story of the Side-Saddle*, 8.

⁹² Lida F. Bloodgood, *The Saddle of Queens: The Story of the Side-Saddle*, 17. Further research could continue to analyze how other female rulers under fire, such as Catherine de Medici, used the symbolism of the horse.

⁹³ Alison Matthews David, "ELEGANT AMAZONS: VICTORIAN RIDING HABITS AND THE FASHIONABLE HORSEWOMAN." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 30, no. 1 (2002): 184. doi:10.1017/S1060150302301098.

⁹⁴ Count Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*. Translated by Leonard Echstein Opdycke. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901. 175.

posture is the image of a mother-like figure who is capable of protecting England from all who threaten her borders. Instead of being in control of the horse, Elizabeth is being led by a male figure, further enhancing the feminized nature of the painting; her role passively carried atop this horse better suits social expectations for a dutiful, obedient woman. In contrast to the equestrian portraits that emphasize her masculine qualities of strength and courage, the more feminized equestrian paintings of Elizabeth focus on her role as an angel and mother figure. In the portrait hanging in the White Tower, Elizabeth's position perched on top of the horse gives her an aura of untouchable beauty, grace, and composure - the image of a true queen. This image is completely de-sexualized, not showing the contour of the feminine breast and bodice and with Elizabeth's body completely covered by her gown; only a small part of her shoe is visible underneath her dress. Elizabeth is purposeful and careful about only being depicted in public on horseback in side-saddle, in a full-length dress. This choice is a very deliberate, cultivated image of a horsewoman who in reality actually enjoyed the hunt and rode astride.



Figure 6: Artist unknown, Located in the White Tower in the Tower of London

On the one hand, Elizabeth needed to legitimize her reign by drawing on images that were associated with power and strength; however, on the other hand, because Elizabeth was a woman, certain social conventions remained that even a queen could not disregard. In the public eye, it was particularly significant for Elizabeth to be depicted riding side-saddle and with modest clothing because of the horse's association with the masculine sex drive. Shakespeare's *Henry V*, written around 1599, provides evidence to that effect. The sexual nature of riding a horse is a major theme, as is the contrast between the alleged femininity of the French, who ride mares they cannot control, and the masculinity of the English who ride stallions:

DAUPHIN

Nay, the man hath no wit that cannot, from the rising of the lark to the lodging of the lamb, vary deserved praise on my palfrey. It is a theme as fluent as the sea. Turn the sands into eloquent tongues, and my horse is argument for them all. 'Tis a subject for a sovereign to reason on, and for a sovereign's sovereign to ride on, and for the world, familiar to us and unknown to lay apart their particular functions and wonder at him. I once writ a sonnet in his praise and began thus: 'Wonder of nature,'--

ORLEANS

I have heard a sonnet begin so to one's mistress.

DAUPHIN

Then did they imitate that which I composed to my courser, for my horse is my mistress.⁹⁵ (3.7. 32-44).

In this passage, the Dauphin is clearly relating his steed to his mistress and to fulfilling sexual acts. The love and desire the Dauphin feels for his horse is identical to what he could feel and share in a sonnet to his mistress, his female lover. The horse, just like a mistress, is a source of sexual inspiration for the Dauphin. The sexual innuendo continues through the rest of the interaction between the two men:

⁹⁵ William Shakespeare, *Henry V*. Ed. Barbara A. Mowat., Paul Werstine. Folger Shakespeare Library: Folger Digital Texts, (3.7. 32-44).

Constable

Nay, for methought yesterday your mistress
shrewdly shook your back.

DAUPHIN

So perhaps did yours.

Constable

Mine was not bridled.

DAUPHIN

O, then belike she was old and gentle, and
you rode like a kern of Ireland, your French hose
off, and in your straight strossers.

Constable

You have good judgment in horsemanship.

DAUPHIN

Be warned by me, then: they that ride so, and
ride not warily, fall into foul bogs. I had rather have
my horse to my mistress.⁹⁶ (3.7. 50-60).

The “sexual celebration” associated with the horse reverberates here; in this second passage, the connection between horse and intercourse is made clearer still.⁹⁷ The sexual subtext of the lines “your mistress shrewdly shook your back” and “mine was not bridled” communicates to the listener that riding of horses and sexual intercourse reference one another.⁹⁸ The Constable and the Dauphin are mocking each other’s sexual experiences. Their sexual innuendos offer insight into the humor and social norms of the times. It is evident that society recognized a connection between horses and sex. Even the sex of the horse is an important component to this exchange, as the Dauphin’s horse is male, whereas the Constable’s horse is a mare. Lauren Coker notes that the sex of the horse reflects the sex and even personality of the rider. Paralleling riders and horses, women and female horses were considered more capricious, while males were

⁹⁶ William Shakespeare, *Henry V*. Ed. Barbara A. Mowat., Paul Werstine. Folger Shakespeare Library: Folger Digital Texts, (3.7. 50-60).

⁹⁷ Lauren Coker, “Continental Sexuality and the Authority Construction of Early Modern Englishness” in *Interlinguicity, Internationality, and Shakespeare*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014), 129.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 131.

viewed as more dependable.⁹⁹ Therefore, in this scenario, the Constable's female horse emasculates him, while the Dauphin's male horse makes him seem more masculine. In *Henry V*, Shakespeare constructs a sexual identity of the French through the imagery of the horse. This relationship between horses and sexuality on the Elizabethan stage helps us understand why the Queen treaded carefully when she was depicted on horseback, even as she wanted to be associated with the masculine qualities of power and authority that horses also embodied. This explains why Elizabeth is always seen riding publicly in side-saddle, so as not to be sexualized but rather to maintain her persona as a virgin queen. If depicted as a woman riding astride, for example, it would have harmed Elizabeth's reputation of chastity. Elizabeth's iconography did not pretend she was a man; instead, it portrayed Elizabeth as a woman with masculine characteristics, as we will see more fully in the next section.

The queen's carefully cultivated image extended to her riding costume as well. Janet Arnold explains that Elizabeth did own actual riding gear and donned more flexible clothing that more closely resembled male attire in order to ride easier. In her public outings and in public depictions of Elizabeth riding and hunting, however, she is always dressed in extremely feminine and lavish gowns that cover her entire body.¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth's extreme modesty in portrayals of her on horseback was crucial, because in early modern society, the act of riding horses could also be used to paint an image of a lewd woman. As Alison Matthews put it aptly: "the fine line between fair equestrian and fast woman was not difficult to cross."¹⁰¹ Although it is likely that when hunting Elizabeth opted for an outfit and position on horseback that better suited the sport, in

⁹⁹ Lauren Coker, "Continental Sexuality and the Authority Construction of Early Modern Englishness," 131.

¹⁰⁰ Janet Arnold, "Dashing Amazons: the Development of Women's Riding Dress, c. 1500-1900," in *Defining Dress: Dress as Object, Meaning and Identity*, ed. De La Hay et. al. (UK: Manchester University Press, 1999), 11.

¹⁰¹ Alison Matthews David, "ELEGANT AMAZONS: VICTORIAN RIDING HABITS AND THE FASHIONABLE HORSEWOMAN." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 30, no. 1 (2002): 181.

order to ensure that publicly she was not viewed sexually, Elizabeth was always portrayed as chaste, riding side saddle, and in feminine, long gowns, capes, and robes.

In the later years of Elizabeth's rule, when Elizabeth was no longer of marriageable age, her iconography purposefully focused on her eternal virginal status, presenting Elizabeth as a chaste queen who was married to the state and her subjects, thus eliminating the need for a husband. To Elizabeth's propagandists, the iconography of the Virgin Queen turned Elizabeth's inability to marry into a positive attribute, symbolizing her selfless devotion to England.¹⁰² As historian Louis Montrose states, Elizabeth "defended her maidenly freedom and royal prerogative against... patriarchal expectations," by legitimating "her desire for autonomy among men by invoking a higher patriarchal authority... of her heavenly father, the ultimate ground of her sovereignty."¹⁰³ By depicting Elizabeth riding the side-saddle, portraiture of her underscored her virginal status and by implication her independence from men. Ironically, the horse's association with more negative attributes served to further highlight Elizabeth's chastity, since she took immense strides to have her image on horseback appear modest in the extreme, taming any association between horses and female sexual license. Elizabeth's depiction on horseback portrays her as a virtuous woman with the masculine qualities necessary to rule the great country of England. Elizabeth's equestrianism enabled her to push the gender boundaries necessary for her to rule as a female monarch, with the heart of a man but the body of a virginal woman. It is now time that we analyze more closely Elizabeth's use of the horse's relationship with masculinity and turn to Elizabeth's famous Tilbury speech and to some of the portraits of her as a warrior queen on horseback associated with battle and speech.

Atop a Horse at Tilbury: Woman Warrior and Female King

¹⁰² David Howarth, *Images of Rule*, 104.

¹⁰³ John N. King, "Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen." *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No.1 (Spring, 1990), 32.

Gender and sexuality were intricately tied to every aspect of Elizabeth's rule. As the first unmarried female sovereign in British history, Elizabeth had to tread carefully along an uncharted path. As previously mentioned, at times she bound herself to the contemporary social norms associated with her female gender, while at other times she exploited the image of herself as a powerful, masculine ruler on par with her contemporary male sovereigns and predecessors. As Carole Levin concisely describes, Elizabeth, "fashion[ed] herself as king as well as queen in the ways she represented herself."¹⁰⁴ Society at the time considered women feeble and ill-suited for a public position; thus, Elizabeth had to break the gender boundaries of the time in order to rule, but not too severely where she would be considered unfeminine or unpalatable to the people. According to historian David Loades, these conflicting gender roles resulted in an ever-present juggling act by which Elizabeth involved herself with all aspects of governance, despite her female sex.¹⁰⁵ This thesis has argued that the imagery and connotations surrounding horses and the act of riding provided Elizabeth with a medium for straddling this difficult dichotomy.

The role of horses in combat and war had a special role to play here. Although both men and women of the nobility did engage in the art of horseback riding, the activity was traditionally considered a male sport and the sign of a true gentleman. Horseback riding activities such as the tournament, jousting, and manège, an early version of modern day dressage, were solely for elite men in society.¹⁰⁶ This link to masculinity stems from the horse's indispensable role in cavalry on the battlefield. Over time, the horse became associated with lords in battle and warrior-like qualities such as being courageous and gallant were attributed to the animals.¹⁰⁷ In Elizabeth's time, one sees that association between masculinity, horsemanship, and cavalry in Castiglione's

¹⁰⁴ Carole Levin, "*The Heart and Stomach of a King*" *Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power*, 4.

¹⁰⁵ David Loades, *Elizabeth I: The Golden Reign of Gloriana* (Richmond: The National Archives, 2003), 35.

¹⁰⁶ Karen, Raber and Treva, Tucker, *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Early Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 23.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

widely popular *The Book of Courtier*. He characterizes the ideal courtier in the 16th century as “a perfect horseman in every kind of seat; and besides understanding horses and what pertains to riding, I would have him use all possible care and diligence to lift himself a little beyond the rest in everything.”¹⁰⁸ In addition, the courtier should “show strength and lightness and suppleness, and know all bodily exercises that befit a man of war: whereof I think the first should be to handle every sort of weapon well on foot and on horse.”¹⁰⁹ A true gentleman was skillful in the art of horsemanship and war; the two activities went hand-in-hand. The very use of the word “suppleness” is an ode to horses as “supple“ in horseback riding terminology denotes a horse that is flexible and yielding to the rider’s hand and leg aids. The condition of suppleness represents the optimal outcome of a horse’s training. Horse and rider/courtier are described in the same terms of malleability. In order to become the ideal masculine figure, the courtier had to be a skilled and avid horseman, in times of pleasure and war, interlocking the cultivation of horses and particular forms of courtly manhood.

Aside from the historical ties between horseback riding and the art of war, horses and masculinity also became linked by attributing anthropomorphic qualities to the animals. Man and horse were seen as closely connected, with the human being superior but not by much. In what medieval scholars called the “Great Chain of Being,” horses were placed just below humans in the hierarchy of animals.”¹¹⁰ William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, describes the deep relationship between horses and humans: “The horse [is], after man, the most noble of all animals for he is as much superior to all other creatures as man is to him, and therefore holds a

¹⁰⁸ Count Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*. Translated by Leonard Echstein Opdycke. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1901, 29.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹¹⁰ Peter Edwards, Karl A.E. Enekel, and Elspeth Graham, eds., *The Horse as Cultural Icon: The Real and the Symbolic Horse in the Early Modern World*, 23.

sort of middle place between man and the rest of the creation.”¹¹¹ Although humans had superiority and domination over horses, their closeness in hierarchy allowed horses to take on human traits and confer those traits onto their owner and rider. Horses were associated with masculine qualities such as being “bolde, prowde, hardy” and “courageous, spirited, and possessing stamina and capable of operating under trying conditions.”¹¹² These characteristics were also associated with the rider who mastered the horse.

As regards Elizabethan times, Shakespeare’s plays again offer a window into the broader culture and its views of horses and gender. In Shakespeare’s *Henry IV*, horses are used both as an indicator of the aggressive masculinity of Hotspur, and also an indicate of the ultimately regal and noble image of Prince Harry, who at first seems a disappointment but later reveals his truly virtuous identity. In Act IV Scene II, Vernon describes Prince Harry on horseback:

I saw young Harry, with his beaver on,
His cuisses on his thighs, gallantly arm'd,
Rise from the ground like feather'd Mercury
And vaulted with such ease into his seat
As if an angel dropp'd down from the clouds,
To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus
And witch the world with noble horsemanship.¹¹³ (4.1.110-116)

Prince Harry’s skills as an equestrian as well as his shining armor signify his regal nature to the audience. The image conveys the transformation of Harry from a scandalous and infamous young prince to an honorable man fit to become king. Whereas Harry’s masculinity and nobility is reflected in his skillfulness and majestic horse, Hotspur’s masculinity derives from his persona

¹¹¹ Elizabeth LeGuin, “Man and Horse in Harmony,” in *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Early Modern World*, ed. Karen Raber and Treva J Tucker (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 144.

¹¹² Peter Edwards, Karl A.E. Enenkel, and Elspeth Graham, eds., *The Horse as Cultural Icon: The Real and the Symbolic Horse in the Early Modern World*, 283.

¹¹³ William Shakespeare, *Henry IV*. Ed. Barbara A. Mowat., Paul Werstine. Folger Shakespeare Library: Folger Digital Texts, (4.1.110-116).

as a soldier and warrior. When facing the powerful image of Prince Harry, his enemy, Hotspur responds with violence and threatens war to re-assert his masculine prowess:

Let them come.
 They come like sacrifices in their trim,
 And to the fire-eyed maid of smoky war
 All hot and bleeding will we offer them.
 The mailed Mars shall on his altar sit
 Up to the ears in blood. I am on fire
 To hear this rich reprisal is so nigh
 And yet not ours. Come, let me taste my horse,
 Who is to bear me like a thunderbolt
 Against the bosom of the Prince of Wales.
 Harry to Harry shall, hot horse to horse,
 Meet and ne'er part till one drop down a corse.
 O, that Glendower were come!¹¹⁴ (4.1.118-130)

Their horses will literally meet, one man's masculinity clashing with another's, a physical and symbolic representation of their struggle for domination. This struggle, symbolized through the horse-to-horse combat, will only end when one has died. In contrast to the regal image Prince Harry presents on horseback, Hotspur's language evokes the connection to the cavalry on horseback and an arena for knights and noblemen to assert themselves as more manly and powerful. The name Hotspur itself links the man's prestige to horses, as a spur is the tool used on a boot to kick a horse forward, as well symbolizing his more violent, hot-headed tendencies.

It is clear that Elizabeth played on this familiar symbolism of the horse as a masculine force to legitimize her role as a female monarch ruling in a king's stead. According to historian Betty Rizzo, contemporaries "assigned positive attributes, such as strength, endurance, physical prowess, intelligence, wisdom, and judiciousness to males, leaving the opposite often negative, attributes to females, but electing for them in general a contingent, supportive, and child-

¹¹⁴ William Shakespeare, *Henry IV*. Ed. Barbara A. Mowat., Paul Werstine. Folger Shakespeare Library: Folger Digital Texts, (4.1.118-130).

producing identity.”¹¹⁵ To contemporaries, a woman did not possess the innate qualities necessary to rule. Elizabeth, a female queen in a male-dominated role, had to present herself as being more masculine in order to be able to rule effectively and gain the trust and support of the people who expected a male monarch and the attributes of masculinity. Although the position of monarch was open to females, the characteristics of a monarch were not associated with women but had to be conferred through other means. Horses gave Elizabeth a medium for espousing these positive male qualities and showing herself as a fit ruler of England.

Arguably, Elizabeth most greatly emphasized her masculine qualities and virtues at the Battle of Tilbury in 1588 that ended in the defeat of the Spanish Armada. In her most pivotal defensive battle as queen, Elizabeth I needed to triumph over Spain if she wished to solidify her reign over England. War had become inevitable as the relationship between Spain and England deteriorated over expansion into the New World, trade embargos, and Spain’s dominance over Europe, notably Spain’s annexation of Portugal and involvement in the Netherlands under Philip II.¹¹⁶ In 1588, Elizabeth’s authority and England’s independence were under direct threat from an invasion of the Spanish Armada, the strongest naval prowess in Europe. Although England continued to fight with Spain throughout the end of Elizabeth’s reign, England was spared an invasion under her command at the Battle of Tilbury. This battle and the queen’s speech and her march on horseback amongst her troops feature prominently in the iconography of Elizabeth. She is shown in command just like a male king. Contemporaries remarked on Elizabeth’s visit to her troops on August 8th, stressing Elizabeth’s naturally warlike demeanor and commanding presence on the field. Thomas Deloney, a supposed eyewitness to the event, describes in his many ballads Elizabeth’s entrance into the camp, “Then came the Queen, on prancing steed,/

¹¹⁵ Richard Almond, *Daughters of Artemis: the huntress in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 7.

¹¹⁶ A.L. Rowse, *The Expansion of Elizabethan England* (London: Papermac, 1981).

attired like an angel bright;/ And eight brave footmen at her feet/ whose jerkins were most rich in sight.”¹¹⁷ The ballad evokes an image of Elizabeth riding towards her troops magnificently on

horseback, attired like an angel come from heaven but in command like a warrior king.

Elizabeth’s troops were in military formation, waiting for their general to arrive: “The valiant Captains of the field,/ mean space, themselves in order set;/ And each of them, with spear and shield,/ to join in battle did not let./ With such a warlike skill extended,/ as the same was much commended/.... Thus they stood in order waiting/ for the presence of our Queen.”¹¹⁸

In descriptions like this one, Elizabeth is cast as the commander of the troops, an inherently capable leader whom her army respects. The troops await in military formation for their commander and queen to arrive on horseback, just as any male monarch would arrive on their warhorse, to encourage and inspire her soldiers on the frontlines. The masculine imagery, already notable in the warlike description, is reinforced and amplified by the details of the scene, “With the strokes of drummers sounding, and with trampling horses; then/ The earth and air did sound like a thunder/ to the ears of every man.”¹¹⁹ Elizabeth riding towards her troops on horseback, the captains of her army waiting for her on horseback in military formation, and the horses with trampling hooves, all serve to project an image of masculine military strength. The battlefield marked a distinctly masculine zone, with the horse having historical ties to the all-male cavalry. Thus, Elizabeth’s march at the camp presented a moment where Elizabeth could capitalize on such a masculine association and step into the role of rightful king and leader of her troops. Elizabeth’s self-presentation as warrior- king was not lost on contemporaries either.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Deloney, *Thomas Deloney: His Thomas of Reading: And Three Ballads on the Spanish Armada*. 1903. MS, New York. Accessed March 15, 2019. 198. https://books.google.com/books?id=WbkvAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbg_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

¹¹⁸ Thomas Deloney, *Thomas Deloney: His Thomas of Reading: And Three Ballads on the Spanish Armada*., 198-199.

¹¹⁹ Thomas Deloney, *Thomas Deloney: His Thomas of Reading: And Three Ballads on the Spanish Armada*., 199.

Deloney even refers to Elizabeth as prince, slipping into the masculine gender: “The warlike army then stood still,/ and drummers left their dubbing sound;/ Because it was our Princes’ will/ to ride about the army round./ Her ladies, she did leave behind her,/ and her Guard, which still did mind her, The Lord General and Lord Marshal/ did conduct her to each place.”¹²⁰ The other ladies were not permitted to tour the army with the queen, as it was generally not considered suitable for ladies to do. Their absence makes it even plainer that Elizabeth espoused the role of a male king, patrolling her troops, and, as was within her right as England’s leader, to ride around the troops. It made sense for Deloney to refer to her as a prince in describing her role as leader of the troops in this masculine setting.

Elizabeth was well aware of the need to legitimize her role as commander of the army during a time of war. The queen delivered a powerful and inspirational speech to her troops that has become famous. What is much less commented on is that she did so on horseback. In her speech, Elizabeth plays on the tension inherent in her position as a female ruler and lays claim to the masculine role of the soldier and warrior king, “I come amongst you, as you see, at this time, not for my recreation and disport, but being resolved, in the midst and heat of the battle, to live and die amongst you all; to lay down for my God, and for my kingdom, and my people, my honour and my blood, even in the dust.”¹²¹ Elizabeth made clear that she did not come to the camp for a mere inspiring visit, but as a warrior ready to fight for her country herself if necessary. The delivery of her speech astride a horse drove home the point. The speech culminates in a famous line, which again took on extra punch when delivered from a horse: “I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a

¹²⁰ Thomas Deloney, *Thomas Deloney: His Thomas of Reading: And Three Ballads on the Spanish Armada.*, 199-200.

¹²¹ *Elizabeth’s Tilbury Speech, July 1588*. Speech. From The British Library, *Learning Timelines: Sources from History*. <http://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item102878.html> (accessed October 15, 2018).

king, and of a king of England too... I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of every one of your virtues in the field.”¹²²

Elizabeth here directly acknowledges that women are not usually thought to have the attributes necessary for ruling, especially during times of war. At the same time, she assures her troops and her country that she indeed does. Pointing to the strength of her spirit and determination, she casts herself as a king and a commander who will lead her troops to victory and comforts them by speaking from her warhorse as any leader, male or female, would see fit. Some scholars, such as Susan Frye, have argued that later historians cultivated Elizabeth’s image as a warrior queen and that contemporary accounts do not provide enough evidence for this claim.¹²³ Other scholars, such as Janet Green, have proposed the opposite, that Elizabeth’s speech was spoken and written by the queen herself, and that the contemporary authors who describe the events of her visit to Tilbury express in detail the scene of the day.¹²⁴ The evidence is not conclusive, but we know a few things for certain: Elizabeth did visit her troops at the battle of Tilbury and she did deliver a fierce speech on horseback, presenting a masculine version of herself. On the battlefield amongst her troops, lined and ready for war on their steeds, the queen took her place in the male-dominated setting of the battlefield.

¹²² *Elizabeth’s Tilbury Speech, July 1588*. Speech. From The British Library, *Learning Timelines: Sources from History*.

¹²³ Susan Frye, “The Myth of Elizabeth at Tilbury,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring, 1992), 95-99.

¹²⁴ Janet M. Green, “I My Self” : Elizabeth I’s Oration at Tilbury Camp,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer, 1997), 421.



“Elizabeth at Tilbury” in St Faith’s Church, Gaywood, commissioned by Thomas Hare (Rector) dated 1588

Figure 7: Commissioned by Thomas Hare (Rector), “Elizabeth at Tilbury,” St. Faith’s Church, Gaywood, 1588

Visual depictions of Elizabeth at the battle of Tilbury offer additional evidence for these claims. A contemporary image from St. Faith’s Church in Gaywood, Norfolk shows the queen in her role as commander of the troops. Commissioned by the rector of the church, Thomas Hare, shortly after the battle at Tilbury in 1588, the image depicts Elizabeth amongst her troops, her hand stretched in a commanding gesture. She sits very confidently and securely on horseback, like the soldiers in the back, in full control of her horse. Her saddle position is ambiguous in that it could be seen as either astride or side-saddle, adding to the gender-transgressive quality of the picture. Elizabeth and her horse, clearly a destrier and not a ladies riding horse, are also the largest and most central figures, commanding attention not only from the troops but from the onlookers of the picture as well. In this scene of preparation before war, it is a woman to whom all the men are looking and whom they will follow into battle; her position on horseback signifies her qualifications and position as commander. Even the horse’s head, in a submissive

frame with his right leg slightly lifted from the ground, gives the impression that he is bowing and obeying his rider and chief. The horse's physical body reflects her command over her troops, who are all lined up behind her. All eyes are on Elizabeth, the female monarch who is also a masculine warrior in a pivotal time of war against Catholic Spain when Protestant England needed a true king. The painting was commissioned for and placed in the Anglican Church, St. Faith's, to celebrate the victory of Protestantism over Catholicism. Elizabeth is presented as the savior of Protestantism in England, solidifying not only her role as head of state but also as head of the church, on par with a strong monarch like her father, Henry VIII.



Figure 8: Artist unknown, “Elizabeth at the Battle of Tilbury” painting showcased on the north wall of the chancel at St. Faith’s Church, Gaywood. Dated 1588 commissioned by Thomas Hare

Another image of Elizabeth on horseback at the Battle of Tilbury, commissioned again by Thomas Hare for St. Faith, takes Elizabeth’s role with her troops a step further still. This image places her in what seems like a march forward to meet the Spanish who are arriving on innumerable ships on the sea. Elizabeth, aboard a white steed, is the most visible figure in the

painting. The eyes of the viewer immediately turn to her and the sea of ships behind her. The troops are marching forward on horseback, prepared to fight and defeat the Spanish, with their monarch by their side. Elizabeth is actively engaged and riding her horse into battle while the rest of the soldiers are following her. Aside a warhorse, she appears the protector of the realm, reflective of her pivotal role in the battle. A translation of Elizabeth's speech to her troops accompanied the painting, with images and words reinforcing each other. The speech describes Protestant England's confidence in going into battle against the Catholic Spaniards. The emphasis on the religious dimension of the war was fitting for the painting's placement in a Protestant Church. Elizabeth, the queen with the masculine "heart of a lion," saved Protestant England on horseback.



Figure 9: Cecil, Thomas. *Elizabetha Angliae Et Hiberniae Reginae &c.*, 1625

Contemporary images of Elizabeth I produced for public consumption, such as Thomas Cecil's engraving of Elizabeth at the Battle of Tilbury, often propagated the myth of Elizabeth as a masculine warrior queen and did so beyond her death. Thomas Cecil, the eldest son of William Cecil, the most senior advisor for Elizabeth I, had a significant stake in promoting Elizabeth's rule. It is not surprising then that Cecil would preserve Elizabeth's association with the defeat of the Spanish Armada and by implication of Catholicism in his artwork, since it also enhanced his family's position. After Elizabeth's death, the Battle of Tilbury was portrayed as key to England's emerging military identity and the creation of a unified and powerful empire.¹²⁵

Thomas Cecil's engraving perpetuated the image of Elizabeth as a warrior queen at the Battle of Tilbury and goes beyond contemporary accounts by placing Elizabeth not just among her troops before battle, but having her participate in the heat of the battle. The Battle of Tilbury wages on with Elizabeth trampling a dragon, the symbol of Catholicism, and soldiers, identifiable by their shields and armor, beneath the horse's hooves. Elizabeth, as the warrior queen she is, wears a crown on her head, saddling a richly dressed, majestic looking horse, with armor, a shield and a sword. A naked female, the physical representation of Truth, presents Elizabeth with a lance to assist her in battle against the Spanish. Truth's aid for the Protestant English shows Protestantism as the true and righteous religion, in contrast to Catholicism's false doctrines. Reflective of its wartime nature, the image presents Elizabeth as a warrior, almost like a conqueror, or a goddess defending her land and defeating her enemies, with a warhorse beneath her and truth by her side.

As was necessary with every image of Elizabeth, paintings set in the masculine realm of the Battle of Tilbury had to adhere to expectations for the female gender. Elizabeth's masculine and feminine attributes had to be brought in harmony to make her royal authority palatable to the

¹²⁵ Susan Frye, "The Myth of Elizabeth at Tilbury," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring, 1992), 106.

people. Thus, even in Thomas Cecil's dramatic engraving of Elizabeth at the Battle of Tilbury, which presents her as a powerful warrior-queen, Elizabeth is riding side-saddle, with both legs over the left side of the horse and her body positioned to the side. The armor that Elizabeth wears accentuates her feminine curves and features. Her hair falls flowingly along her chest, almost like that of a youthful, virgin goddess. Elizabeth's chastity was considered not merely a welcome feminine virtue but rather a necessity for the welfare of England, as her virginity, reminiscent of the virgin-warrior Joan of Arc, made her "invulnerable to male threat."¹²⁶ Since Elizabeth was the bodily representation of England, this made England too invulnerable to any male threat.

In the first depiction of Elizabeth at the Battle of Tilbury found in St. Faith's Church Elizabeth is facing forward. It is not entirely clear if she is seated side-saddle or astride, which would emphasize her masculine qualities of bravery and courage, but the curvature of the dress suggests that Elizabeth is riding side-saddle and adhering to the social norms for female riding and, by implication, for female sexuality. In addition, Elizabeth's dress is covering her entire body, including her legs, in contrast to the men in the picture whose riding gear and position sets off their legs as they are undoubtedly riding astride.

The second image at St. Faith's Church of Elizabeth at the Battle of Tilbury also shows her riding side-saddle amongst her troops. The overall coloring of the painting is dark; however, Elizabeth sits perched on her white horse as the lone source of light, like a virgin angel. The lighter colors of Elizabeth and her horse imbue her with an angelic feeling in the midst of the darkness of war coming from the Spanish Armada. Elizabeth could embrace this feminine role of virgin angel and savior without sacrificing any respect toward her monarchical power. She

¹²⁶ Susan Frye, "The Myth of Elizabeth at Tilbury," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring, 1992), 106.

appeared neither too masculine nor too feminine in these images. She rode like both a masculine warrior-king and a feminine, virgin queen for England.

The Rise of British Nationalism and Conclusion

When in Shakespeare's play *Richard III*, King Richard proclaims "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!" after being defeated in battle, Shakespeare is not only pronouncing Richard's unfitness to rule England but also his physical loss of his kingdom.¹²⁷ In losing his horse, Richard literally lost his kingship. Richard was no longer king without his horse.¹²⁸ This line captures the immense significance of the horse in Elizabethan society. In England, horses were more than just propaganda or symbols of wealth and status; they were living representations of the monarch and of the nation itself. Elizabeth and the royal Tudor and Stuart families recognized that horses were integral to the English culture and identity. Throughout Elizabeth's reign and that of her successor, James I, English nationalism came literally on the back of the horse. Monarchs from Henry VIII to Elizabeth I to James I all set out to improve England's breed and stock of horses as a tool for warfare and defense, but more importantly, to increase and cultivate British pride and self-identity as new warfare technology started to replace the need for cavalry. Henry VIII began the process of improving the type of horses available in England, which Elizabeth continued and which culminated under James I in the creation of the English thoroughbred, a breed of horse that came to represent the British overseas empire.

As a defensive measure for England, Henry VIII began importing horses from foreign countries to breed with English horses to create a horse native to England that was stronger and better suited for war. For much of the early modern period, horses were a necessity in war, whether for gaining new land or defending territories. Horses made the difference in winning

¹²⁷ William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Richard III*. Ed. Barbara A. Mowat., Paul Werstine. Folger Shakespeare Library: Folger Digital Texts, (5.4.7).

¹²⁸ Peter Edwards, *Horse and Man in Early Modern England*, 69.

political and territorial power on the field of battle. Henry VIII learned this lesson the hard way. In the 1540s, many years after Henry's first military expedition, England saw a shortage of horses for military service, severely hindering its chances of winning in battle. In the midst of Henry's wars in Ireland and France, England had enough men to muster but had almost no war horses.¹²⁹ To increase the stock and type of England's horses, Henry VIII purchased mares from Flanders to use for his breeding studs, since Flemish horses had proved to be especially useful for warfare.¹³⁰ Henry and other monarchs before and after him considered the well-being of England's horses a source of strength and pride and important to military expansion.

Elizabeth continued her father's policy of improving the English horse as a means of strengthening England's military. When war with Spain became imminent, Elizabeth issued a government proclamation on April 14th, 1580 that singled out the lack of English horsemen and the dearth of breeding of horses for military service. The proclamation expressed Elizabeth's wish that more horsemen and horses be made available in England and appointed a commission to conduct regular inspections of the nation's horses. The commission had to ensure the execution of Elizabeth's laws regarding an increase in horsemen and horse. Elizabeth specifically stressed the importance of horses to the defense of the nation and demanded, "the due execution of the said statutes and orders tend to a common Defence of the Realme."¹³¹ The urgency with which Elizabeth decreed this law as well as the potential punishments for anyone who failed to obey the *Proclamation for Horsemen and Breed of Horses for Service*, indicates that the Queen saw horses as significant for the survival of the nation. Since horses were both a

¹²⁹ Joan Thirsk, *Horses in Early Modern England: For Service, for Pleasure, for Power*, 10.

¹³⁰ Joan Thirsk, *Horses in Early Modern England: For Service, for Pleasure, for Power*, 12.

¹³¹ England and Wales. Sovereign (1558-1603 : Elizabeth I). *By the Queene. A Proclamation for Horsemen and Breed of Horses for Service*. London: Christopher Barker, printer to the Queenes most excellent Maiestie, 1580. Proclamation. From Early English Books Online.

http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full_rec?SOURCE=pgimages.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=V15767

representation of national identity and actual instruments for protecting and expanding the realm, England's horses had to match the aspirations and strength of the nation.

Along with the queen, contemporary horsemen from the upper classes also advocated for an improvement in British horses appropriate to England's reputation as a powerful empire. They too stressed how the condition of the nation's breeding studs should be an important governmental concern. Thomas Blundeville commented in his horsemanship manual of 1561 that England currently has a "lacke of good order of breeding," but that with his manual describing how to breed the best horses, England could have "so good and so faire horses bred here, as in any place in Christendome."¹³² Blundeville went as far as to claim that out of all the countries, England is at the moment in the most dire need for an improvement in their stock of horses and an increase in breeding, "wherof, this realme of all others at this instant hath greatest nede."¹³³ He applauded Elizabeth's continuation of her father's statutes for improving England's breeding of horses and even furthering Henry's efforts through more laws. He saw his manual as an effort to assist the queen in her "so good an acte."¹³⁴

The need for good horses and the health of the horses as representative of the health of the nation are also themes in Shakespeare's plays. They reflect broader anxieties in Elizabethan England regarding the quality of England's horses. In *Henry IV*, when Poins describes his plot to rob Falstaff after Falstaff robs a group of pilgrims with expensive offerings, Prince Henry states, "Yea, but 'tis like that they will know us by our/ horses."¹³⁵ Shakespeare's line reflects the view that horses play a significant role in the cultural identity of the nation and the status and identity

¹³² Thomas, Blundeville, *The Fower Chiefyst Offices Belongyng to Horsemanshippe That Is to Saye. The Office of the Breeder, of the Rider, of the Keper, and of the Ferrer*. 1566. MS, London. Accessed March 15, 2019. 12. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A16229.0001.001/1:2?rgn=div1;view=toc>.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Thomas, Blundeville, *The Fower Chiefyst Offices Belongyng to Horsemanshippe*, 12.

¹³⁵ William Shakespeare, *Henry IV*. Ed. Barbara A. Mowat., Paul Werstine. Folger Shakespeare Library: Folger Digital Texts, (1.2.180-181).

of the individual rider. In the *Henriad*, “Horses provide a code of reference throughout the plays, giving the audience a means by which to understand individual and national identities.”¹³⁶ In the prologue for *Henry V*, Shakespeare tells the audience to imagine the horse as emblematic of England itself. The chorus implores the audience to picture England in place of the horse, “when we talk of horses, that you see them/ Printing their proud hoofs i’ the receiving earth,/ For ‘tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,/ Carry them here and there, jumping o’er times.”¹³⁷ Just as the horse is imprinting their “proud hoofs” into the Earth, England is preparing to imprint its identity on French soil as the prologue sets the stage for the English battle against the French. The horses, symbolized here by the audience’s thoughts, are responsible for whether England wins or loses. By the act of imagining the horse as England, the audience is playing an active role in creating England’s identity, success or failure.

By the 1600s, and at the end of Elizabeth’s reign, much progress had been made in improving England’s horses. The positive trend only continued in James’ reign with the creation of a distinctly and prized English thoroughbred. Elizabeth had built on her father’s work in improving the bloodlines of the English horse and improved the reputation of English horses to the point where even the Holy Roman Emperor wanted England’s horses.¹³⁸ The early 1600s also saw a prosperous trade of horses between France and England, and by the end of the seventeenth century, the British had bred horses that matched the growing strength and power of their nation, with England becoming renowned for having the best horses in all of Europe.¹³⁹ Historian Peter Edwards concludes that “clearly horse breeding can be accounted as one of the

¹³⁶ Peter Edwards, Karl A.E. Enekel, and Elspeth Graham, eds., *The Horse as Cultural Icon: The Real and the Symbolic Horse in the Early Modern World*, 308.

¹³⁷ William Shakespeare, *Henry V*. Ed. Barbara A. Mowat., Paul Werstine. Folger Shakespeare Library: Folger Digital Texts, (Prologue. 28-31).

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 290.

¹³⁹ Peter Edwards, *Horse and Man in Early Modern England*, 7.

success stories of early modern England.”¹⁴⁰ Even though the presence of horses on the battlefield had become scarcer with the introduction of firearms in the sixteenth century, they continued to be an integral part of formulating a cultural identity and transformed into a breed of true English identity under James I who expanded the use of horses in leisure activities such as hunting and horse-racing. Although the origins of the English thoroughbred began with Elizabeth’s efforts to improve England’s horses, and the earliest mention of horse racing is during Elizabeth’s reign, James I is often credited with creating the fine English thoroughbred and establishing the first racetrack at Newmarket.¹⁴¹ Historian Richard Nash posits that the thoroughbred in particular is a “cultural metaphor in early modern England.”¹⁴² An imaginary extension of English pure blood and good breeding, they were supposedly “proud, spirited, independent, and well-mannered” and represented the best of the British.¹⁴³

The self- confidence and pride associated with the English thoroughbred grew out of the fascination with horses during the Elizabethan era, the relative stability, prosperity, and power of her reign, and her active support of breeding. Queen Elizabeth I was successful in securing and legitimizing her authority as ruler in part with the help of the horse, a powerful instrument and symbol. Arguably one of the greatest female monarchs of the Western World, Elizabeth reigned over England from 1558 until her death from health-related issues on March 24, 1603 of the reformed calendar. Under her leadership, England became not just a powerful European nation, but a true global empire, discovering and expanding into the “New World” and increasing its economic and political influence into India, East Asia, Russia, and the Pacific.¹⁴⁴ Horses were

¹⁴⁰ Peter Edwards, *Horse and Man in Early Modern England*, 16.

¹⁴¹ Joan Thirsk, *Horses in Early Modern England: For Service, for Pleasure, for Power*, 22.

¹⁴² Richard Nash, “Honest English Breed: The Thoroughbred as Cultural Metaphor” in *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Early Modern World*, ed. Karen Raber and Treva J Tucker (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 247.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹⁴⁴ A.L. Rowse, *The Expansion of Elizabethan England* (London: Papermac, 1981), xv.

influential in these pursuits as tools of warfare and transportation. They were also of great symbolic importance in Elizabethan society, starting with the Queen herself. Elizabeth I used the symbolism of the horse in support of her persona as a female monarch who combined the masculine and feminine qualities deemed necessary to rule in the early modern period. She expressed her status, power, and authority as queen, as well as the strength of her growing nation. Horses symbolized and represented the characteristics of the human, the individual, the monarch, and the nation, carrying kings and queens, especially Queen Elizabeth I, both metaphorically and literally on their backs.

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