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Elizabeth I, her life and portrayal in films

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## **Abstract**

This bachelor thesis focuses on the life of Elizabeth I and her portrayal in five selected films. The theoretical part covers the most important events in Elizabeth's life, starting from her childhood, and includes two chapters dedicated to her famous parents. In the practical part, selected films are analysed, and the main topics, which they cover, are discussed.

## Introduction

The Tudors are definitely one of the most interesting dynasties in England's history. Each member of this family stands out, and their names are remembered until today. However, the most memorable members are Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, the father and the daughter. While Henry is best known as the king who married six wives and executed two of them, including Elizabeth's mother, and separated England from Roman Catholic Church, Elizabeth is remembered as a strong woman who, despite many obstacles her life brought her, managed to gain the English throne and rule successfully for almost 45 years.

It might come as a surprise, but Elizabeth lived quite a difficult life. Although she was born a princess, she learnt at a very early age that one can lose the title and the privileges that come with it with just a blink of an eye. The hardships followed her even in her young years, whether in a form of a man who wanted to use her to gain what he wanted or a step-sister who strived for her life. Elizabeth survived and endured a lot, but she still had to fight with a lot of prejudices and opinions about her. She stands out not only because she was a female monarch at the time when people expected very little from women but also because in time she became a sort of an icon. Of course, there is the fact that she remained unmarried and people nicknamed her 'the Virgin Queen' but she also ruled so well that the period of her reign became known as the Golden Age.

All of these are probably the main reasons why Elizabeth attracts the filmmakers who keep coming back to her story and giving her life again in their films. Through this art form, they not only inform the viewers about her life but also present their ideas of what Elizabeth could have been like. She could have been a strong leader as in the films with Cate Blanchett, respected and beloved queen as in the film with Judi Dench, a monarch who struggles to find the man to be with as in the film with Helen Mirren, or a not very confident woman as in the recent film with Margot Robbie.

Everything that was mentioned leads to the main aim of this bachelor's thesis, which is to analyse Elizabeth's life from two perspectives, historical facts and her portrayal in films. The thesis aims to address these following research questions:

1. What are the key historical events that shaped Elizabeth I into the queen she was?
2. Which of these events are portrayed in the films?
3. Do these films try to stay historically accurate?
4. What message do the films about Elizabeth I convey to their audiences?

# 1 THEORETICAL PART

## 1.1 Daughter and her mother

The first chapter of this bachelor thesis focuses on Anne Boleyn, the mother of Elizabeth I, who played a significant role in the life of her daughter, even though they did not spend much time together. Anne's actions as first the king's mistress and later his wife and her unflattering reputation, which followed Elizabeth during her life, shall be discussed in this chapter.

The date of Anne Boleyn's birth is unknown, but many historians presume she was born somewhere between 1500 and 1501. She was one of three siblings and showed signs of great intelligence and talent from a very young age. Because of that, her father Thomas Boleyn decided to send her to French court where she served as one of the maidens for Archduchess Margaret of Austria. Anne's stay in France deeply influenced her upbringing and the development of her character and manners. (*Borman, 2017, 178*)

Anne returned to England in 1522 and almost instantly got a position as one of the maidens of Katherine of Aragon, the Queen of England and wife of Henry VIII (*Borman, 2017, 179*). Three years after her return, Henry started to show interest in Anne. She knew how frequently the king changed his mistresses, and therefore decided to ignore all his love confessions. Her strategy turned out to be well-thought-out, the more she refused him the more he wanted her (*Hutchinson, 2010, 64*). Once Anne knew she was in Henry's favour, she became very arrogant and proud and treated Katherine of Aragon and her daughter Mary very impudently (*Borman, 2017, 187*). She gained many enemies at the court, and people who disliked her often called her 'king's concubine'. (*Borman, 2017, 200*)

Somewhere in the middle of January 1533, Anne found out she was pregnant (*Hutchinson, 2010, 73*). She saw her pregnancy as a victory because she believed she would give Henry a male heir and secure her position as his partner. Her wish came true when they married in secret on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January. Four months later, the Archbishop of Canterbury declared that Henry's marriage to Katherine of Aragon was void and that his wife now was Anne Boleyn. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1533, Anne finally reached her long-desired goal and was crowned the Queen of England in Westminster Abbey (*Hutchinson, 2010, 73-74*). However, she was so unpopular that not many people attended her ceremonial procession, and those who did, did not celebrate her as their new queen. (*Jurewitz-Freischmidt, 2012, 81*)



All of this, however, happened to Pope Clement's big displeasure. He threatened Henry with excommunication from Roman Catholic Church but it had very little effect. In 1534 the Act of Supremacy came into force making Henry the Supreme Head of the Church of England. To stay married to Anne, Henry forever separated the Church of England from papal authority. (*Bingham, 2012, 70*)

After Elizabeth's birth on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September, Anne and Henry's relationship changed vigorously (*Erickson, 2003, 15*). Henry was looking forward to having a son and the birth of another daughter was a big disappointment for him. He aimed all of his anger at Anne who, according to his opinion, failed miserably as a woman and his wife (*Erickson, 2003, 17*). Anne was aware that she was losing the king's favour and could no longer control him but instead of trying to gain his favour and trust back, she started to act aggressively and hysterically. Her behaviour only led to Henry's realization that what he once loved about her he now hated (*Jurewitz-Freischmidt, 2012, 85-87*). In the three years of her marriage to Henry, Anne was not able to give him a son and suffered two miscarriages. Henry started to believe that his marriage to Anne was cursed and began to plan how to divest her. (*Woolf, 2017, 83*)

Everything escalated in May of 1536 when Anne was accused of having an affair with five different men, among whom was also her brother George, and was imprisoned in the Tower. Almost no one showed sympathy for her. Her enemies at court celebrated her downfall, and commoners believed she finally got what she deserved. Many of them never accepted her as their queen and never forgot how she chased their beloved Katherine of Aragon away. Anne was sentenced to beheading. Henry decided to grant Anne her last wish and agreed with decapitation with a sword. Anne's execution was carried out on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May in Tower Green inside the Tower (*Hutchinson, 2010, 80-81*). Shortly after her death, Henry married his next wife Jane Seymour. Everything which once belonged to Anne was removed, and people soon forgot about her. (*Erickson, 2003, 29*)

Anne Boleyn was English queen for only three years and even though she was very unpopular, she influenced the history of England in major ways. Borman (*2017, 179*) mentions that even though Anne was not considered to be a typical beauty and did not come from the aristocracy, she was still able to captivate the king, the most powerful man in the country, who wanted to be with her so badly that he separated England from the Catholic Church and created a new religion. Their relationship was full of passion which gradually disappeared after the birth of Elizabeth. Henry was not pleased that he fathered another daughter, but Anne instantly fell in love with her child. She visited Elizabeth at her home at

Hatfield as often as she could and even had a velvet pillow next to her throne so that she could have Elizabeth as close as possible (*Borman, 2017, 197*). Maybe this was the true nature of hers. A caring and devoted mother, instead of a mean and cruel woman.

## **1.2 The King and his children**

What is Henry VIII the best known for, is probably his desperate pursuit of having a son. Not many people realize, however, that to father a male heir was the main duty any king had to fulfil. A king had to secure the continuation of his dynasty, for this was something everyone expected from him. Henry fathered three sons, one of whom was illegitimate, and two daughters who experienced a very different treatment than the boys. There is a possibility that Henry had more offspring as he had multiple mistresses, but this chapter focuses only on those who are recognized by most of the historians.

His first child was Henry, Duke of Cornwall, whom he had with Katherine of Aragon (*Borman, 2017, 109*). Henry and Katherine must have been quite relieved because a male heir was born so soon after they married. The celebrations of Henry's birth were one of the biggest Henry VIII ever arranged, after all, he managed to fulfil his duty not long after he became the king of England. Unfortunately, Henry's firstborn son lived only for 21 days (*Borman, 2017, 110*). Henry fathered only one more child with Katherine – a daughter named Mary who was born in 1516 (*Borman, 2017, 117*). Henry would have been more satisfied with a boy but at that time he believed that he and Katherine would have more children. This, however, did not happen, and it was the main reason why Henry later divorced Katherine. When Elizabeth, a child from his second marriage, was born, Mary became illegitimate. (*Erickson, 2003, 21*)

During his marriage with Katherine of Aragon, Henry started a romance with Elizabeth Blount which culminated with the birth of his illegitimate son in 1519. His name was Henry Fitzroy (*Hutchinson, 2010, 245*). Although an illegitimate child, Fitzroy was the only son the king had at the time and therefore decided to acknowledge him (*Borman, 2017, 121*). Henry often took his son to court and paid a lot of attention to him. He made sure that his son was treated like royalty. Fitzroy had his own household, expensive clothes, and the best possible education. When he was six years old, Henry gave him the title of Duke of Richmond and Somerset which promoted Fitzroy into aristocracy (*Borman, 2017, 170*). Even though Fitzroy was born out of wedlock, Henry thought about naming him his successor, but everything changed when he met Anne Boleyn. (*Hart, 2011, 17*)

Henry fathered another daughter with Anne. He went through a lot of difficulties, which are described in Chapter 1.1, to marry her because she assured him, and so did doctors

and astronomers, that their child would be a boy (*Hutchinson, 2010, 75*). When their promise was not kept, Henry was furious. He needed a son and could not understand why his new wife was not able to provide him. The birth of Elizabeth was a portent of the ending of their marriage. Anne Boleyn was executed and Elizabeth was ridded of her title of a princess and declared illegitimate. (*Erickson, 2003, 30*)

In 1537 Henry welcomed his third son named Edward (*Weir, 2001, 13*). He fathered him with his third wife Jane Seymour who died shortly after giving birth. Edward became his last hope for a male heir (*Bingham, 2012, 100*). His illegitimate son Henry Fitzroy died shortly before Edward was born, leaving Henry VIII with no child that could become his successor (*Hart, 2011, 167*). Luckily for Henry, everything changed with Edward, and even though Edward was the youngest of Henry's three children, he had the right in succession before Mary and Elizabeth. (*Woolf, 2017, 87*)

Mary, Fitzroy, and Elizabeth create a very interesting trio. Although Fitzroy was a child of Henry's mistress, Henry had no problem acknowledging him and intentionally gave him the name of Fitzroy which means 'son of the king' (*Hart, 2011, 54*). Mary and Elizabeth, on the other hand, were born when their parents were in marriage but lost their legitimacy as soon as Henry either divorced or executed their mothers. Fitzroy grew up in the best possible conditions, whereas Mary and Elizabeth were put aside. They both lost their titles of princesses and were treated as if they were just ordinary girls and not members of the royal family.

Henry's attitude towards his daughters changed during his marriage with his last wife Katherine Parr. In July 1543, the Parliament passed the Third Succession Act in which Henry established new succession and returned both Mary and Elizabeth to the line of succession (*Jokinen, 'The Third Act of Succession, 1544', 2011, Luminarium*). The Act, which came into force in February 1544, stated that in case of a premature passing of his son Edward, who took precedence over his older step-sisters because he was a man, firstly Mary and then Elizabeth would have the right to the English throne. (*Oxford Reference, 'Acts of Succession'*)

The Tudor dynasty ruled almost 120 years, yet neither of Henry's privileged sons was as much remembered as his two daughters (*Bingham, 2012, 205*). It is fair to say that in Mary's case, people mostly associated her with fear and cruelty, and because of that, they later nicknamed her 'Bloody Mary' (*Weir, 2001, 355*). Elizabeth, on the other hand, brought England prosperity and peace. Because of that and many other things, the time of her reign is often described as the Golden Age (*Bingham, 2012, 205*). Henry VIII would have been very

surprised that it was his daughter who was the last in the line of succession who uplifted the name of Tudor.

### 1.3 Becoming a Queen

Elizabeth's journey to the English throne was full of obstacles. Most of them arose because she was no longer accepted as a member of the royal family, others through her relationships with people who accompanied her during the young years of her life, whether it would be Thomas Seymour, who wanted to use her for his benefit, or her step-sister Mary, who saw her as a dangerous rival. All the troubles, however, started with her mother's execution.

As soon as her parents' marriage ended, Elizabeth lost her title of a Princess, and people had to address her as 'Lady Elizabeth' (*Borman, 2017, 208*). Everyone started treating her as if she was just an ordinary person, but the worst part of it all was that people started to question whether she truly was Henry's daughter (*Erikson, 30*). Most people believed she was a child of one of her mother's alleged lovers. Mary, her step-sister, was convinced that Elizabeth was a child of Mark Smeaton, a musician who was one of the men accused of having an affair with Anne Boleyn (*John Simkin, Spartacus Educational*). The accusations and speculations about her origin were something Elizabeth had to deal with almost her entire life.

When Edward was born, Elizabeth was almost forgotten and no one, particularly not her father, cared much about what was going on with her. Her biggest support in the time when she was abandoned by her family was her governess Katherine Champernowne, later known as Kat Ashley, who became one of her closest and dearest friends. Kat entered her life when Elizabeth was about four years old and substituted the role of a mother. Although sometimes Kat did not take care of her charge as well as was expected of her, she had a huge impact on Elizabeth's education. Kat herself was unexpectedly well-educated and taught Elizabeth everything from mathematics and geography to history and astronomy, and also many languages, such as French, Spanish, or Italian (*Weir, 2001, 19*). Many people were impressed by how smart and bright Elizabeth was. A certain sir Thomas Wriothesley reported that, 'If she be no worse educated than she now appeareth to me, she will prove of no less honor and womanhood than shall beseem her father's daughter.' (*Pollnitz, 2015, 242*)

By the time Elizabeth was thirteen her father settled down with his sixth and last wife Katherine Parr. Many considered Katherine for an intelligent and charming woman (*Borman, 2017, 251*). In the three years of her marriage to Henry, Katherine established friendly

relationships with all of his children. She was particularly close to Elizabeth, whom she loved as if she was her own daughter. They often exchanged letters, and Katherine greatly contributed to Elizabeth's reconciliation with her father (*Borman, 2017, 262*). After Henry died in 1547, Edward became the new king of England (*Woolf, 2017, 93*). For it was not appropriate for Elizabeth and Mary to stay at the court because neither of them was married, each of them decided to live somewhere else. Elizabeth accepted Katherine's offer and moved in with her in Katherine's manor in Chelsea. (*Borman, 2017, 278*)

Elizabeth did not live in Chelsea only with Katherine. Thomas Seymour, Katherine's new husband, also lived with them. Thomas was a very handsome man according to some. He often used his looks and charisma to manipulate women, among who was not only his wife but also Elizabeth, to whom he developed a very unhealthy interest (*Jurewitz-Freischmidt, 2012, 120*). One of the oddest things he did was visiting Elizabeth's chambers dressed only in nightclothes at very early hours (*Jurewitz-Freischmidt, 2012, 123*). At first, Elizabeth's response was to get up even earlier so that she would not be surprised by him. His visitations, however, started to happen regularly, and after some time Elizabeth interpreted his fancy in her as romantic. Kat Ashley, who moved to Chelsea with Elizabeth, did not intervene at first, because she was fond of Thomas and thought that he was just teasing her but at some point decided to tell everything to Katherine Parr (*Weir, 2001, 61-63*). Katherine's response to this allegation was that Thomas was just having fun with his new step-daughter. She was blind to his abuse of a 14-year old Elizabeth. Many books mention that Katherine sometimes took part in Thomas's 'plays' and describe a situation when she held Elizabeth while Thomas was cutting her dress (*Borman, 2017, 281*). What was happening to Elizabeth in these years was truly scandalous, and some rumours would have probably started to spread if Katherine did not put an end to it by ordering Elizabeth to leave. (*Weir, 2001, 74*)

Once Elizabeth left, she realized how big of an influence Thomas had on her. She never really had a proper father figure in her life, and maybe that was one of the reasons why she was so attracted to him. However, once she learned he was only using her for his selfish aims and never truly cared about her, she finally opened her eyes. It can be said that this affair affected her decision to never marry. Elizabeth realized that a woman's feelings could be easily misused and that it was vital for her to use her head instead of heart when making important decisions. She convinced herself never to show her true emotions in public. She withdrew from public life and returned to her home at Hatfield where she immersed herself in further studies. (*Jurewitz-Freischmidt, 2012, 128*)

In the next nine years, Elizabeth's limits were gravely tested. When Edward died in 1553, she was drawn in Mary's attempt to win the English throne, which was denied to her in Edward's last will (*Woolf, 2017, 106*). It seemed for a while as if Mary would finally be able to overcome all the prejudices she had for Elizabeth because she was Anne Boleyn's daughter, but once she was crowned the Queen of England, she only saw Elizabeth as someone who could steal her throne. During the time of Mary's reign, Elizabeth had to worry about her life almost every day and try intensively to not set her step-sister against herself, nevertheless, it did not save her from the Tower where she had to spend two months as she was accused of being involved in a conspiracy (*Erickson, 2003, 136-137*). She languished there both physically and mentally. After all, she was imprisoned in the same place where her mother spent the very last moments of her life. (*Weir, 2001, 313*)

Mary's hatred towards Elizabeth was at its peak when her reign was coming to an end. Mary tried to think of a way how to not give the throne to her step-sister, but at that time, she was too ill and too tired to argue with her advisors and eventually agreed that Elizabeth would become her successor (*Jurewitz-Freischmidt, 2012, 184*). Mary died in 1558 and for Elizabeth, this was the first time after a long period of living in fear when she could finally feel relieved. At the age of 25, she became the new Queen of England. (*Woolf, 2017, 121*)

The officials announced Mary's death to the subjects the next day. The death of the king was usually kept a secret as long as possible, but in Mary's case, her passing was a reason to celebrate (*Jurewitz-Freischmidt, 2012, 186*). Many people hoped for the ending of Mary's reign during which they lived in fear and were unwillingly forced to return to the Catholic Church under the threat of burning at the stake. Elizabeth was seen as a liberator from Mary's tyranny and even before she ascended the throne, she was very much liked by everyone. Some of the powerful men at the court, however, were worried that the reign of another woman would turn out to be as catastrophic as Mary's and questioned whether a woman was truly fit to rule. Even though Elizabeth could not be more different than her step-sister, many believed a man on the throne would be a better choice. Elizabeth was aware of this, and on one hand, criticized and regretted that she was not born the fitting gender, on the other, she was self-confident and proud of her womanhood. (*Borman, 2017, 330-331*)

Elizabeth's coronation was held on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 1559 in Westminster Abbey, and it was a day full of celebration. People travelled to London from all over the country to catch at least a glimpse of their new queen (*Woolf, 2017, 122*). Elizabeth's biggest wish at that time was to be loved by her subjects. This was very unusual for a monarch but not surprising in the case of someone whose legitimacy was questioned almost their entire life. The way

people perceived her was the most important thing. Elizabeth often described herself as an ‘Englishwoman’, showing that she and the commoners are part of one nation. (*Jurewitz-Freischmidt, 2012, 188-189*)

Not many kings had to go through so many troubles as Elizabeth did to win their thrones. It is highly probable that if Elizabeth had been born a boy, she would have avoided all of this. Her father would have never driven her away, her mother would have most likely still been alive, she would not be manipulated by any man, and her sister would not try to divest her. If that was the case, however, it brings up the question of whether people would still like her as much as they did when she ascended the throne. Would she still be a good monarch, if she had not experienced the bad first? Those are the questions that never will have any answers, but it is important to think about them and think about how hard it was for a woman in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to prove her worth. Elizabeth’s step-sister Mary did not do well, and therefore it was up to Elizabeth to either confirm or disprove whether a woman was fit to rule or not.

#### **1.4 Queen’s Affairs**

Elizabeth ascended the English throne at the time when England was not in a very good state. Several problems arose during her step-sister’s reign, and Elizabeth had to fix them. However, the most important thing that was expected of her was to find a husband and give birth to an heir who would secure the continuation of the Tudor dynasty. Elizabeth decided to solve the question of marriage and children in her unique way for which she became most famous for.

One of the first things Elizabeth had to do when she officially became the Queen of England was to fix problems that arose during her step-sister’s reign. At the end of the 1550s, England was a very unstable country which was in debts, had almost no foreign commerce, and worst of all, was religiously divided (*Bingham, 2012, 165-166*). In 1559 the parliament approved the Act of Supremacy again. This time, however, Elizabeth did not receive the title of Supreme Head, which was used by her father and brother, but Supreme Governor. This was a concession on her side as some people could not reconcile with the fact that a woman should be the head of the church (*Woolf, 2017, 125*). Although this made England protestant again, Elizabeth did not prosecute those who professed different religions. This led to a return of people who escaped during Mary’s reign. Elizabeth also managed to lower the state’s debt and set foreign commerce in motion by lowering high taxes for traders. (*Bingham, 2012, 166-168*)

Elizabeth proved that everyone who doubted her abilities to be a good ruler was wrong. However, in the eyes of many, she was still just a woman who was constantly reminded that the main duty she had to fulfil was to provide an heir to the throne. The question of marriage was the very first thing that was discussed after her coronation. Elizabeth was considered to be a highly desired match, and there was no lack of prominent suitors. Elizabeth, however, had to think carefully about whom she should choose. If she had chosen someone from the leading sovereign houses in Europe, she would have risked that England would become territorial possession of another country. If she had chosen someone from the English aristocracy, it could have led to a civil war in case of disapproval of the opponents (*Bingham, 2012, 160*). Elizabeth had to face an uneasy task which seemingly had no acceptable solution. The pressure put on her increased in 1562 when she fell ill with smallpox. Her state of health worsened rapidly, and she even fell into a coma for a couple of days. Everyone was worried that their queen would die. Fortunately, Elizabeth recovered after some time. Her advisors, however, strongly insisted on Elizabeth either getting married or choosing someone to be her successor. She refused to do both and instead decided to stay unmarried (*Woolf, 2017, 135*). Her decision led to the creation of probably her most famous nickname, the Virgin Queen, which should have affirmed her purity. (*Erickson, 2003, 421*)

Elizabeth's unwillingness to marry is probably connected with her childhood. Many authors, such as Alison Weir in her book *Děti Anglie (2001, 21)*, state that when Elizabeth was eight years old, she told her best friend Robert Dudley that she would never marry. It is not very surprising as Elizabeth experienced many traumas connected with marriage in her young years. Her mother was executed because in the eyes of Henry VIII she did not do well as a wife. Katherine Howard, Henry's fifth wife, was also executed. Katherine was accused of committing adultery with another man and found guilty. Although in her case it was an act of treason, in the eyes of little Elizabeth it set a bad example. Later in her life, Elizabeth confided to the Scottish ambassador that the events she witnessed in her childhood caused her to fear marriage. (*Borman, 2017, 334*)

There was also the affair with Thomas Seymour. It is hard to say how Elizabeth felt and what she thought about it all, but as was suggested in Chapter 1.3, she might have believed that it was better for a woman to not be in love, as a woman in love can be easily manipulated. This might be the best explanation for why Elizabeth wanted to stay unmarried. She simply wanted to rule freely and according to her conscience. Being married meant that her potential husband would receive the title of a king, which would be his until his death. She probably foresaw that the man by her side would want to share some, if not all, royal



competences and intervene into royal businesses (*Jurewitz-Freischmidt, 2012, 200*). Some of this she saw in the marriage of her step-sister to Philip II of Spain. Although his remits were precisely demitted, in reality, it looked very different. Elizabeth was determined never to submit to anyone. When she was pressured by the royal counsel to get married again, she angrily responded that she 'will have but one mistress and no master' (*Borman, 2017, 333*). Nevertheless, she brought up the question of marriage every time it was useful for her. Whenever England needed powerful allies, the only thing she had to do was to offer her hand. (*Woolf, 2017, 134*)

Elizabeth's reluctance to have a man by her side did not mean that she did not like to spend time with men. She enjoyed compliments and flirting, and it is arguable whether she was such a pure 'Virgin Queen' as she was believed to be (*Bingham, 2012, 161*). The only man, however, who had a special place in her heart was the mentioned Robert Dudley. Even though Elizabeth swore to herself she would not show her emotions in public, whenever she was with Robert she behaved quite irresponsibly. It was inappropriate for a queen to show her affections for someone as noticeably as she did for him. Kings could have been accompanied by their mistresses, but for a queen, this was something unthinkable. Elizabeth had to be very careful when she was in public. Many people did not forget about her mother and thought that her Boleyn's nature was finally showing. (*Jurewitz-Freischmidt, 2012, 205*)

Elizabeth shared a special bond with Robert. She knew him since she was a child, and when she talked about him, she addressed him as her 'sweet Robin' (*Woolf, 2017, 133*). There is a possibility that she truly loved him and might even consider marrying him, but she knew this could never happen on the basic fact that Robert was already married to someone else (*Bingham, 2012, 163*). This, of course, caused the spreading of unflattering rumours. People thought that he would either annul his marriage or kill his wife to not lose Elizabeth's favour. When Robert's wife was eventually found dead under the staircase of their house, many people were certain that it was all Robert's doing (*Woolf, 2017, 133*). After all, many advantages arose from his relationship with Elizabeth. Once she became the queen, Elizabeth named him Master of the Horse. This position was one of the most prestigious anyone at court could receive (*Jurewitz-Freischmidt, 2012, 192*). He was also the one who delivered Elizabeth the message of her step-sister Mary's passing. It is possible that he did not do it just because he was so in love with her but more likely because he could have gained something from it – a well-paid position and political influence, for example. (*Jurewitz-Freischmidt, 2012, 209*)

The death of his wife did not only affect Robert's life, but it also had an impact on Elizabeth's reputation as some people started to question whether she was involved or not

(*Erickson, 2003, 209*). Robert was eventually found not guilty, but the damage was already done. As of now, it was unacceptable for Elizabeth to marry someone who was even just considered to be involved in a murder (*Woolf, 2017, 133*). Even though they were forbidden to be together officially, Robert continued serving Elizabeth for another 30 years. Their passionate love for one another gradually faded away, but Robert Dudley was probably one of the few most loyal friends Elizabeth ever had. (*Jurewitz-Freischmidt, 2012, 210*)

Even though Elizabeth proved everyone that she was fully capable to rule on her own, during much of her reign she was pushed by others to fulfil the traditional duties of every woman. It almost seems as if she was always a woman first and then the Queen. Elizabeth did not trust the institution of marriage and was afraid that a man by her side would try to overshadow her. One man eventually did manage to win her heart, but the circumstances of their relationship were not right. She decided to follow her heart and sense and said no to marriage. This was a brave move for which she would later be admired and celebrated.

### **1.5 Mary Stuart – Elizabeth’s cousin and rival**

Mary Stuart and Elizabeth had a lot of things in common – they came from the Tudor dynasty, they were queens, and they had the right to the English throne – but each of them had a very different life story. Mary Stuart is important to mention, for if the history ended up differently, she could have deprived Elizabeth of her throne. This chapter focuses on the most important and also tragic events of Mary Stuart’s life and explains her connection with Elizabeth.

Besides her duty as a sovereign to produce an heir, there was another big reason why Elizabeth had to consider getting married, even though she was already seriously determined to rule England on her own. That reason was her cousin Mary Stuart. Mary was the daughter of James V, the King of Scotland, and his second wife Mary of Guise (*Guy, 2008, 31*). Thanks to her father, Mary also belonged to the Tudor dynasty. Her mother, on the other hand, came from the house of Guise which was one of the most powerful aristocratic families in France (*Guy, 2008, 32*). Just like Henry VIII, James was also not pleased that his only legitimate offspring was a girl, but unlike the English king, he did not have much time to worry about it. James died six days after the birth of his daughter, making Mary the Queen of Scotland (*Guy, 2008, 34*). Unlike Elizabeth, Mary had a very nice childhood and was treated with the respect she deserved as the head of the state. When she was five and a half years old she was sent to France where she was meant to be raised and later marry the French dauphin to secure a powerful ally to the Scottish kingdom. (*Guy, 2008, 55*)

Mary was brought up on completely different terms than Elizabeth, and since she was born in an unquestionable marriage, there were no doubts about her legitimacy. Many of those who were not happy with Elizabeth being on the English throne started to claim that the rightful Queen of England was Mary Stuart. They defended their claim on the fact that Elizabeth was a daughter of Anne Boleyn, who was never accepted as the rightful wife of Henry VIII and Queen of England by the Pope and the Catholic church. They pointed out that after Anne's execution, Elizabeth was declared illegitimate by the law, and even though Henry VIII later changed his mind and included Elizabeth in his succession, the original clause was never removed. Unsurprisingly, Mary Stuart's right to the English throne was never raised during the reign of Edward VI and Mary Tudor because no one doubted their legitimacy, but in comparison with Elizabeth's, Mary Stuart's right seemed much stronger. (*Guy, 2008, 65*)

When the news of Elizabeth's newly obtained title of Queen of England reached the house of Guise in France, they declared Mary the 'Queen of England, Scotland, and Ireland' without any hesitations (*Guy, 2008, 102*). It almost seemed that Mary had the opportunity to dethrone Elizabeth, but fortunately, the Pope intervened and refused to declare Elizabeth illegitimate. He did that out of fear of losing the support of Philip II of Spain, the former husband of Mary Tudor, and also one of the suitors for Elizabeth's hand. (*Guy, 2008, 103*)

Mary Stuart was not even 17 years old when she became Queen of France (*Guy, 2008, 106*). However, she was not fortunate enough to keep this title for a longer period of time. After her husband died, Mary was forced to return to Scotland where she was still the rightful queen (*Guy, 2008, 122*). Once she was back in her homeland, Mary began exchanging letters with Elizabeth, hoping that a new friendship would form (*Jurewitz-Freischmidt, 2012, 238*). She never really let go of the idea of having the English throne and sent diplomats to Elizabeth's court to negotiate the conditions of her succession. The Scottish diplomats tried to persuade Elizabeth that a treaty with Mary would be beneficial for her, but Elizabeth never planned to appoint her successor while she was still alive. She argued that if she had done that, the English would turn against her and joyfully await the arrival of a new monarch. Elizabeth herself experienced this during the reign of her step-sister, and she did not want to lose the support of her people. She assured the diplomats that if she died childless, Mary would become the only rightful heiress. (*Jurewitz-Freischmidt, 2012, 239-240*)

There were several attempts to arrange a meeting between these two queens, but Elizabeth always found a reason why she could not come (*Jurewitz-Freischmidt, 2012, 245*). In some literary works, such as in Schiller's *Mary Stuart* (1800), or film adaptations, such as

'Mary, Queen of Scots' (2018), a dramatic scene occurs where they meet face to face. This, however, is only the figment of the imagination, and it never happened in real life (Guy, 2008, 409). Some authors, such as Jurewitz-Freischmidt (2012, 241), suggest that Elizabeth did not want to see a woman who was in many ways a rival to her. Not only there were claims she had the right to Elizabeth's throne, but Mary was also younger, attractive, and possibly more likeable than Elizabeth.

Finding a husband and give birth to a preferably male heir was one of the most important tasks Mary had to accomplish after her return to Scotland. Although Elizabeth was not fond of Mary, she knew that it would be best for her if Mary would marry an English nobleman and suggested Robert Dudley. She knew she had Robert's loyalty and hoped to unite the two kingdoms through this marriage. Mary, however, was offended by it as she knew, just like everybody else, that Robert was Elizabeth's lover and was accused of murdering his wife. Instead, Mary decided to marry her English cousin Henry Stuart also known as Lord Darnley. Their marriage was not a happy one as Darnley was an arrogant and unstable man with a fondness for alcohol, but despite that, in 1566 Mary gave birth to a son named James. (Woolf, 2017, 140-141)

If the set of unfortunate events that later followed had never happened, it could have been possible that Mary, who unlike Elizabeth secured the continuation of the Stuart dynasty with a healthy boy, would have ended up on the English throne. Mary's life, however, was meant to be more tragic. Eight months after James's birth, Darnley was killed during a planned explosion. Not long after that, Mary married James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, one of the men accused of Darnley's murder. Whatever powers Mary had as the queen, she lost all of it by marrying Hepburn. Mary was later imprisoned in Loch Leven castle by the Scottish noblemen and forced to sign abdication in favour of her son James. (Woolf, 2017, 141-142)

After 11 months, Mary managed to escape from her prison. She gathered an army to gain her powers back, but even though the number of soldiers fighting in her name was higher than those of her opponents, she lost the battle and had to flee to England to save her life. She wrote a letter to Elizabeth with the hope that Elizabeth would help her. And Elizabeth considered it. She did not like to see how easy it was for the Scottish nobility to dethrone their queen. If this could have happened to Mary, who had a birth right to the Scottish throne that no one doubted about, it could surely happen to another queen whose legitimacy was questioned since she was a child (Guy, 2008, 298-299). Elizabeth's advisors, however, argued that having Mary in England could be dangerous and that it would be easier for Elizabeth's enemies to divest her and put Mary on the throne. Elizabeth decided that it would be safest if

Mary was detained and kept on different castles in England. Mary's next imprisonment lasted for long 19 years. (*Woolf, 2017, 142*)

It would be interesting to see how long would Mary Stuart, whose health and looks worsened during the years, bear being kept prisoner if she had not started plotting against Elizabeth (*Borman, 2017, 412*). Mary exchanged correspondence with a young Catholic named Anthony Babington, who was planning to assassinate Elizabeth, and with help from the Spanish army, put Mary on the English throne. Unfortunately for Mary, Elizabeth's spymaster Francis Walsingham learnt about this and set a trap for Mary, who got caught once she approved the assassination. Mary Stuart was found guilty of treason and sentenced to death. Elizabeth, however, had quite a few reasons why to hesitate. Mary was still an anointed queen and her relative. Just like in the case of thinking to give Mary a helping hand when she escaped from her prison, Elizabeth had to think once more, what would Mary's sentence mean for her future. She knew that her decision could create a dangerous precedent. She would send a message to the world that it was all right to execute any queen or any monarch in general. She also remembered her mother and Katherine Howard, who were both condemned to the same fate (*Borman, 2017, 414-415*). And if that all was not enough, several European countries threatened with sanctions if Mary Stuart were to be executed (*Jurewitz-Freischmidt, 2012, 435*). Elizabeth, however, could not prolong it any longer, and after several months she finally signed the order. Mary Stuart was executed on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, 1587. Elizabeth's reaction to it was disbelief, which quickly turned into anger and regret over what she had committed. She might have not realized it at that time, but with her decision, she just gave Spain another excuse for war. (*Borman, 2017, 416-418*)

The relationship between Mary and Elizabeth is one of the most complicated in England's and maybe even in Europe's history. After all, where else lived two queens whose vanity and hunger for power resulted in the downfall and execution of one of them? Elizabeth's worries that she would make a dangerous precedent and her life would end the same as her cousin's, were only the top of the ladder of problems which followed after Mary Stuart's death.

## **1.6 Elizabeth fights Spain**

There are many things Elizabeth I is remembered for but the one that brought her the biggest popularity during her almost 45year long reign was the victory over the Spanish Armada that sailed out to England on the order of Philip II of Spain.

Although Philip claimed he wanted to avenge Mary Stuart's execution, his reasons for starting a war with England were much more personal. Philip never overcame the fact that he lost England after Mary Tudor's death (*Borman, 2017, 419*). He always believed he had the right to the English throne, and even tried to keep his position as the English King by asking Elizabeth for her hand. She, however, was not foolish and was aware Philip would only use her to get what he wanted and that she would lose most of her powers as a queen. She refused his offer politely (*Woolf, 2017, 132*). Philip was also furious that Elizabeth permitted pirates, such as Francis Drake, to attack and loot Spanish ships and that she sent her soldiers to help Netherlands fight against Spanish supremacy. (*Bingham, 2012, 185*)

Elizabeth's reaction to the discovery that Spain was building a fleet and Philip was planning to invade England was to choose diplomacy. She knew that it would be devastating for England to go to war for which it was not prepared (*Jurewitz-Freischmidt, 2012, 445*). Even though England was no insignificant country at the time, it could not compete with Spain, which was a world power that dominated the seas (*Bingham, 2012, 186*). After Walsingham's insistence, however, Elizabeth permitted Drake to begin with his plan. To provide England with some time to build its own fleet, Drake sailed to port Cádiz and destroyed several Spanish ships. (*Jurewitz-Freischmidt, 2012, 446*)

The Spanish Armada sailed to the sea in 1588. Their goal was to sail across the English Channel and disembark at England's shores. Although the number of Spanish ships was much higher, English ships were well-armed and quick. Due to smart strategy, they were able to fend off the enemy (*Bingham, 2012, 186*). The Spanish Armada anchored at Calais but was soon attacked by English who sent ignited ships. Spanish were not prepared for something like this and started to panic and tried to escape. No Spanish ships were burnt down, but the Armada's formation was breached. Those who fled had to fight with unfavourable weather, which caused more damage than the attack itself. (*Woolf, 2017, 157*)

Although there were no more signs of the Spanish fleet, nobody was certain whether the invasion was fully deflected. Elizabeth arrived at Tilbury to show her support for the soldiers. Some historians claim that she rode on a white horse and was dressed in white velvet clothes and silver armour to be well-seen by everyone (*Bingham, 2012, 186*). She gave here her most famous speech in which she declared that, '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, and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any prince of Europe, should dare to invade the

borders of my realm: to which rather than any dishonour shall grow by me, I myself will take up arms.’<sup>1</sup>

Once all the English realized that the Spanish fleet was defeated, the whole country started to celebrate. They saw their victory as a display of God’s favour (*Woolf, 2017, 159*). Elizabeth was praised by everyone from French King Henry III to Pope Sixtus (*Bingham, 2012, 187*). She was no longer a poor woman sitting on the throne but a successful commander. The conflict between England and Spain, however, would last for another 16 years, but Spain would never succeed to reach England’s shores. (*Woolf, 2017, 159*)

Although Elizabeth did not personally engage in the war, her speech was enough to encourage not only her soldiers but her people too. It also assured them that as long as Elizabeth would live, she would make sure that England would suffer no harm from countries of continental Europe. Together with England’s victory, the speech was one of the most significant moments in Elizabeth’s life, and it helped to create the image of a strong female ruler that most of the people have in their minds until today.

## **1.7 Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen**

The last chapter of the theoretical part serves as a summary and conclusion of everything that was discussed and gives reasons why Elizabeth I is an important historical figure of England’s history.

When Elizabeth ascended the throne, she had an uneasy task to do. She had to prove not only to the powerful men at court but also to her subjects that her ability to rule was more important than her gender. It is somewhat understandable why these people had their doubts. Elizabeth’s step-sister Mary did not paint a good picture of a successful female ruler, and for several years Elizabeth had to fix the damage that was made during Mary’s reign and slowly gain the trust of her people and advisors.

Elizabeth’s deeds as the Queen of England were remarkable. Not only did England thrive in many ways during her time on the throne, but she also secured peace and stability for her country, which lasted over 40 years. One of the biggest problems she had to solve immediately was the religious dividing of England, which happened when Mary tried to make England Catholic again. What Elizabeth did was to strengthen the Church of England and name herself the Supreme Governor. This, of course, meant that people were no longer afraid, and those who had to escape during Mary’s reign could return home. In the 1580s, England

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<sup>1</sup> British Library Web - *Elizabeth's Tilbury speech, July 1588*

also became one of the most important maritime powers in the world. This, of course, happened because of England's successful defence against the Spanish Armada. The defeat of a country, which was meant to win, but did not, brought Elizabeth the biggest popularity during the time of her reign. Although she did not participate actively in the fight, her well-written speech, which she read in Tilbury, was enough.

In the late years of her life, Elizabeth became a big supporter of literature, and authors, such as Christopher Marlowe, Ben Johnson or William Shakespeare, could enjoy her favour. Elizabeth loved drama, and therefore many of the plays had a premiere at her court. She was also a muse for some of the authors, and some of their works were dedicated to her. Edmund Spenser, for example, wrote an epic poem named *'The Faerie Queene'* (1590) in which appears a character named Gloriana that is believed to be a poetical embodiment of Elizabeth – Gloriana also became one of her famous nicknames. (*Woolf, 2017, 171-173*)

For most people, however, Elizabeth remains the 'Virgin Queen'. Although many historians today think that Elizabeth was not a virgin, in my opinion, the word itself does not refer to her purity, but rather her determination to stay unmarried and have no children. Her decision was met with a constant attempt from her advisors, who were, of course, all men, to try to change her mind. Elizabeth, however, was not stupid and had to be fully aware of what her decision meant for her life and also the Tudor dynasty. She might have wanted to marry Robert Dudley, a man who is believed to be her biggest love, but who knows how she would have been remembered if that happened. Elizabeth's unwillingness to give in the pressure of others is definitely something that everyone can admire her for.

Everything that was just said led to a creation of a bit of romanticized version of Elizabeth. It is probable that in reality, she was not as great as many people made her be either in books or in films, but think for a second about how she started her life and what she later became. Elizabeth was basically an unwanted child because she was not born a boy. Because of that, she was deprived of her mother at an early age and grew up in conditions as if she was not a member of the royal family. She was a young woman whose feelings were used by a man who was much older than her and who wanted to be with her only to gain power at court. She had a step-sister Mary who wanted Elizabeth to suffer for all the wrongs that Elizabeth's mother did to her and endangered Elizabeth's life every day since she became the queen. Elizabeth was a daughter of King Henry VIII, who drove her away as soon as he married another woman with whom he later fathered a son. He had very little faith in his second daughter, and yet it was her who was voted the best monarch in history in a survey by the



Historical Writers Association in 2015. Ironically, Henry VIII ended up as the worst. (*Alison Flood, The Guardian*)

Looking back at Elizabeth's life, one realizes that she was never meant to rule England. She was the last in the line of succession because Henry VIII put all of his hopes into his only legitimate son Edward to bring glory to the Tudor name. Edward, however, did not go down in history as memorably as Elizabeth and was somewhat forgotten. Out of all the children of Henry VIII, Elizabeth is the one who left the biggest legacy behind her when she died. Maybe it is so because today she is not remembered only as Queen of England, but also a woman who refused to submit herself to any man, a cousin who had her relative executed, a strong leader who swore to fight anyone who would dare to invade England, the last living member of the Tudor dynasty with whom ended their almost 120year long reign. Elizabeth I was all of that, but above all, she was an Englishwoman who gave her all to the country she loved the most.

## 2 PRACTICAL PART

### 2.1 'Elizabeth' (1998)

'Elizabeth' (1998) portrays the events which led to Elizabeth's coronation and the first few years of her reign, as well as her romance with Robert Dudley and her relationship with Mary Tudor. The English queen is portrayed by an Australian actress Cate Blanchett who is probably, out of all the actresses, the most known for her portrayal of Elizabeth.

#### 2.1.1 *Elizabeth and her step-sister Mary*

The film opens in the period of time when Elizabeth's step-sister Mary still ruled. From the very first moment she appears, Mary shows strong negative emotions for Elizabeth. It is not exactly explained why Mary feels that way, but it is evident that it has a lot to do with Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn, against whom Mary still holds a grudge. Apart from that, the thought of Elizabeth sitting on the throne and ruling England is something that makes Mary furious. She hates her step-sister so much that she orders her advisors to find or rather to create evidence of Elizabeth's betrayal so she could divest her for good. Elizabeth is eventually accused of treason and sent to the Tower. As is stated in Chapter 1.3, Elizabeth was imprisoned for two months, but unfortunately, the film does not show any psychological or emotional impact that it certainly had to have on Elizabeth in real life. The film, however, includes a horrific scene that occurs shortly after her release from the Tower and in which Elizabeth rides in a carriage and sees the consequences of Mary's tyranny. She watches in terror how are people beaten and dragged by the soldiers. It is probably for the first time when Elizabeth sees the reality of a badly-ruled England.

When Elizabeth meets with Mary for the first and only time during the film, she tries to act as the most loyal subject as she knows that everything she might do could lead to her execution. Mary, who is ill at this point, summoned Elizabeth to talk to her about the succession. Elizabeth talks politely with Mary and even accepts Mary's insults without saying a word, but as soon as Mary brings up the question of the Catholic faith and demands that it would be preserved after she is gone, Elizabeth decides to risk her life and indicates that when she is queen, she shall rule as she pleases. Perhaps Elizabeth was aware that Mary would not rule much longer, or maybe it was the encounter with the desperate subjects that gave her the courage to speak for herself. After this scene, Elizabeth never sees Mary again. She continues quietly living her life when she learns of Mary's passing. Surprisingly, she does not look

relieved or happy that the only person who threatened her with execution is gone. Instead, Elizabeth looks rather sad. Perhaps she is sorry that she just lost her sister, her last living relative, and that is even despite that Mary treated her very poorly. It almost seems that in her heart Elizabeth never saw Mary as her enemy, even though this is exactly what Mary was.

### **2.1.2 Elizabeth's romance with Robert Dudley**

A large portion of the film is dedicated to Elizabeth's relationship with Robert Dudley. At first, the love that they have for one another looks very gentle and subtle. It is clear that Elizabeth has feelings for him but is careful and tries to not show them in front of others. Robert, on the other hand, does not hold back. He wants to be there for Elizabeth and shows his support for her in the moments such as when he declares that Elizabeth would become the Queen of England, even though it was too soon to tell and it was dangerous to proclaim such thing, or when he is present during her coronation. Their relationship starts to change when Elizabeth is finally crowned the Queen. At first, it seems that nothing could be better, Elizabeth is no longer worried about who might see her with Robert and shows her love for him in a scene which looks like a love scene. It is hard to say whether the same happened in real life too, but at this point in the film, Elizabeth made no claims that she would live a virginal life, and since they were both in love with each other, it is not surprising that something like this would happen.

The first problems appear when Elizabeth agrees to meet with Duke of Anjou, one of the suitors for her hand. Robert is present during the moment, and it is clear that he is both angry and jealous. Elizabeth somewhat degrades herself in front of other people when she runs towards Robert and tries to explain her decision to him, even though as a queen she has no reason to do so. What can be taken from their argument is that Robert sees Elizabeth more as his lover and less as his queen, who must marry someone more suitable for her than he is. Nevertheless, they continue with their public relationship without knowing that bad rumours are starting to spread. Elizabeth seems to think about making Robert her husband when she is suddenly informed that he is already married. It is evident that she had no idea about it, although, in reality, Elizabeth was well-informed about Robert's marriage, as is stated in Chapter 1.4. When Elizabeth confronts Robert with her knowledge, he tries to persuade her that she is the woman he loves the most and tells her that she is still 'his Elizabeth' (*Elizabeth, 1998, 1:20:17*). At this moment, however, Elizabeth has a broken heart and feels betrayed. His words have no meaning to her, for he had degraded her by making her his mistress, and mistress is a position that is absolutely unacceptable for a queen. Elizabeth sees, probably for

the first time with opened eyes, that men will always try to use her to their advantage, and instead of allowing it, she decides to be her 'own mistress with no master' (*Elizabeth, 1998, 1:20:40*). She strengthens this conviction of hers during the last part of the film when she learns about Robert's act of treason. It is clear that his love for her was never pure. Someone who would truly love her would never endeavour to deprive her of her crown. Instead of letting him executed, Elizabeth pardons Robert. However, she does not do so based on the remaining feelings she has for him, but rather because she wants him to always remind her how dangerous love can be.

### ***2.1.3 Elizabeth becomes the Queen of England***

The film focuses not only on Elizabeth's love life but also on her first steps to become the proper queen. Elizabeth is thrown into the matters of the state immediately after her coronation when she is informed about the very poor state of England, which corresponds with the facts mentioned in Chapter 1.4. It seems, however, that she does not take any of the facts too seriously, and when she is told that England has no way to defend itself from a potential threat, she simply says that she has no desire to go to war. Not long after that, Elizabeth and her advisors gather and talk about the growing military power of Scotland. Mary of Guise, the mother of Mary Stuart, united her army with France to obtain the English throne. Elizabeth's position as the queen is threatened as she did not yet secure it with marriage or a child. She is uncertain about what to do and asks her advisors for help. They all agree that the attack on Scotland is the only logical solution, but Elizabeth seems to disagree. She does not want to go to war and wants to solve the situation diplomatically. In return, she is yelled at by one of the men present, as if she was an ordinary woman and not a monarch, who insists on dealing with the threat by using force. Instead of acting according to her conscience, she decides to yield to the majority and sends an army to Scotland. The result is a catastrophe. English army is crushed, and the bishops, who are probably the most powerful men in England, no longer want Elizabeth to rule. In the eyes of many, she failed as the queen.

Elizabeth gains some self-confidence as the Sovereign when she decides to address the same bishops who wanted her resignation and convince them to accept a law that would unify all the religions. Although in the scene where she rehearses her speech, she looks nervous, in front of the bishops Elizabeth shows no weakness, and through her humour and determination, gains what she wants. Having seen that depending on her own intellect brought her victory, Elizabeth eventually informs one of her advisors that she will no longer take

advice from others and instead ‘will follow her own opinion’ (*Elizabeth, 1998, 1:36:14*), which in the case of dealing with Scotland proved to be right. The advisor opposes by saying that she is only a woman, but Elizabeth tells him that if she chooses, she ‘has the heart of a man’ (*Elizabeth, 1998, 1:36:20*). Perhaps she tried to point out that she is not limited by her gender, even though most of the men at court think so, and when she sets her mind on making the hard decisions, she can be as competent as any man.

#### **2.1.4 Conclusion of chapter ‘Elizabeth’ (1998)**

‘Elizabeth’ (1998) is the only film, out of those five mentioned in this bachelor thesis, which focuses the most on her first years as the Queen of England and slightly shows her life during the reign of her step-sister Mary. In ‘Elizabeth’ (1998), the viewer gets the chance to see how Elizabeth gradually gains her confidence and how she transforms from a gentle lady to a powerful monarch. These things mentioned, and also Blanchett’s great performance, are the main reasons why this film was selected. As for the accuracy of the topics discussed here – Elizabeth’s relationship with her step-sister, Robert Dudley, and the beginning of her reign – most of them seem to be close to reality, except for the part with Marie of Guise which none of the used source books mention and seems to be rather fictional. The definitive split between Elizabeth and Robert is also a bit glamorized, for they remained friends until his death, as is said in Chapter 1.4.

## **2.2 ‘Elizabeth: The Golden Age’ (2007)**

‘Elizabeth: The Golden Age’ (2007) is a continuation of ‘Elizabeth’ (1998), and Elizabeth is once more portrayed by Cate Blanchett. ‘The Golden Age’ starts in the 1580s when Elizabeth ruled England for over 20 years. The film focuses mainly on the threat from Spain, its Armada and involvement of Mary Stuart, and how Elizabeth dealt with it, but also depicts her romantic interest in Walter Raleigh and slightly deals with the question of marriage.

### **2.2.1 Troubles with the Spaniards**

This particular film starts in the year 1585 and focuses mostly on the inevitable threat which Spain represented. Elizabeth is informed that the subjects who are Catholic and make about half of inhabitants could endanger her life by joining forces with Spain, probably the most Catholic country in Europe at the time. Elizabeth does not seem to feel threatened but is cautious and does not take this situation lightly. At the same time, however, whenever she has

to talk with Spanish ambassadors present at her court, she does not try to flatter them and instead treats them a bit harshly. This is a perfect demonstration of the development of her character. The young Elizabeth would probably try to please them and diplomatically avoid any military attack, but since then, she has grown and gained some kind of self-respect. She does what is best for her country without humbly bowing to someone who is her enemy. Her stance against Spanish proves to be justified when one of the ambassadors deeply and deliberately insults her by making a remark on her love life – which is something he would probably never dared to do to a king. Elizabeth is so surprised that it takes her a moment to react, but once she pulls herself together, she tells the ambassador that she is not afraid of Spain and whether it would be necessary is prepared to go to war. From this moment on, Elizabeth slowly prepares for the attack that she is now certain is coming. She visits her astrologist to assure her that the war is winnable for England. He informs her that one of the empires will rise while the other will fall but is not able to foretell which of these statements apply for England.

### ***2.2.2 Elizabeth and Mary Stuart***

In the Spanish attempts to divest Elizabeth and gain her crown, is also involved Elizabeth's cousin Mary Stuart who is currently imprisoned in England. The relationship between Elizabeth and Mary is not examined here as much as in 'Mary, Queen of Scots' (2018), but it is clear that they are not fond of each other. Mary despises Elizabeth, but Elizabeth seems to not think about her cousin very much for she has other worries. Mary, however, plots against Elizabeth for some time and secretly sends her orders and messages to her supporters. One of the messages contains Mary's approval of Elizabeth's assassination. During her prayers in church, Elizabeth is disturbed by one of Mary's assassins. He points a gun at her and demands her attention. Elizabeth, who is dressed in white and looks very virginal, stands up and with a slight quiver of fear, opens her arms, and is prepared to accept her destiny and die. Her almost divine appearance, however, astonishes the assassin so much that he is unable to kill a queen he has been taught to hate.

After that, Elizabeth is persuaded by Walsingham, who had been gathering evidence of Mary's treachery, to give the order for Mary's execution. Elizabeth, however, is reluctant to do so. Just like it is described in Chapter 1.5, she does not want to give other countries, especially Spain, the impression that it is perfectly fine to murder an anointed queen. She remembers that the same destiny awaited her mother and proclaims that she herself would not want to die this way. Elizabeth tries to avoid signing the order by saying that the law only

applies to common people and not monarchs but eventually sees that she has no other option than to let Mary be executed. On the day of the execution, Elizabeth is unsettled and unwell. It is evident that she regrets what she had done, but the worst part of it all is that Spain expected all of this and now it finally has a strong reason why to send its Armada to England's shores.

### ***2.2.3 The fight against the Spanish Armada***

From that moment on, Elizabeth takes up the role of a military strategist and commander. She orders that everyone capable of fighting, even men who were imprisoned, must join her army and protect England. As was mentioned in Chapter 1.6, everything important took place in Tilbury. Elizabeth shows up riding on a white horse wearing a shiny armour to be well-seen by every soldier. Surprisingly, she does not have one of her typical hairstyles but rather wears a wig with very long hair. The original speech of Elizabeth's was, unfortunately, not quoted, but some bits from it are borrowed. Elizabeth tries to give the soldiers courage to fight and ensures that she will be standing next to them when the enemy arrives. She declares that they all will do whatever it takes to stop Spanish from invading England. As it eventually happened in reality, no war ever came to England. Thanks to the weather and the idea of igniting the ships, the Spanish Armada was defeated. The prediction of Elizabeth's astrologist was correct. As Spain suffered a defeat from which it never recovered, England rose and gained a reputation of a strong and powerful nation.

### ***2.2.4 Elizabeth meets her suitor***

Although 'Elizabeth' (1998) ends with Elizabeth proclaiming that 'she is married to England' (*Elizabeth, 1998, 1:57:40*), by which she meant that she shall not take any man as her husband, in 'Elizabeth: The Golden Age' (2007) the question of marriage continues to be dealt with. Walsingham pushes her to marry since people started to question whether she will ever give birth to an heir. Elizabeth decides to yield a bit and agrees to take a look at the pictures of possible suitors, yet she is unimpressed by most of them. She is still determined not to lose the reputation of an unmarried queen that she has been building for quite some time now and even asks Walsingham how much longer she should pretend her interest. Out of all the suitors, she picks the youngest one, Archduke Charles of Austria, not because she would think about marrying him but more likely for her own amusement. When Charles arrives at her court, he seems to be very nervous when talking to Elizabeth, and it is evident that he learnt his speech by heart as English is not his mother tongue. It seems as if Elizabeth

felt a bit sorry for him and that this is something he does not want to do too. She eventually sends him away, and he does not appear in the film again.

### **2.2.5 *Elizabeth's romantic interest in Walter Raleigh***

Elizabeth, however, is interested in one man, and that is the explorer Walter Raleigh. Clearly, he is a replacement for Robert Dudley with whom Elizabeth did not end her relationship on good terms at the end of 'Elizabeth' (1998). As it is mentioned in Chapter 1.4, however, even despite some quarrels between them, Robert stayed Elizabeth's loyal friend until the day he died. In this regard, the screenwriter decided to deflect the story a bit from reality. Walter Raleigh is pictured here as a very charming and good-looking man. He is also intelligent and very loyal to his queen, at one point Walter even informs Elizabeth that he seized land in America and in Elizabeth's name named it Virginia (*Elizabeth: The Golden Age*, 2007, 12:42). As an explorer, he is a magnet on women who want to hear all the incredible and adventurous stories from his travels. This applies even to Elizabeth, who would very much like to abandon her duties of a Sovereign and set sail to explore the unknown. After a long time, Elizabeth starts to feel emotions that she forbade herself from feeling. She starts to spend time with Walter, and it is obvious that she is attracted to him, and he is to her in some part too. Elizabeth does not think about marrying him but rather keeping him as a close friend. Everything shatters, however, once she learns that Walter secretly married Bess, one of her lady-in-waiting and also her confidant, and expects a child with her. Elizabeth is furious as she has been betrayed by two people who she held dear the most. She orders their imprisonment but pardons Walter when the Spanish Armada approaches England and eventually reconciles with Bess.

### **2.2.6 *Conclusion of chapter 'Elizabeth: The Golden Age' (2007)***

In 'Elizabeth: The Golden Age' (2007), there is not as big development of Elizabeth's character as in 'Elizabeth' (1998), although she still faces a lot of obstacles, but now she is more a queen than a helpless woman, and she acts accordingly. She matured and accepted the duties that her position involves. She no longer allows men to influence her decisions and opinions, and rather keeps them as her advisors while reminding them that the final decision is always hers and not theirs. Elizabeth also continues to maintain the same sense of humour which was shown in the previous film and which is similar to Judi Dench's Elizabeth in 'Shakespeare in Love' (1998). Unlike Margot Robbie's Elizabeth in 'Mary, Queen of Scots' (2018), Cate Blanchett's Elizabeth accepted a life without motherhood. Although the film



ends with Elizabeth holding Bess and Walter's son, she never expresses regret over not having a child of her own. Instead, she gratefully accepts the position of a mother to her people while showing probably the most out of all the Elizabeths how much she loves her country and how much she is willing to sacrifice for the good of all the Englishmen.

Although the tone of the film is quite different from its predecessor, 'Elizabeth: The Golden Age' (2007) is still a worthy continuation of 'Elizabeth' (1998). Cate Blanchett gives once again a great performance as Elizabeth and adds some elements to the character which were missing in the previous film, such as the intransigence to men or her strength as the queen. The film also portrays the fight between England and Spain in a rather entertaining way and shows how Spanish planned to destroy Elizabeth. As for the storyline of Walter Raleigh, he did marry Bess in secret and they were both imprisoned for quite some time, but in case of his involvement in the fight with Spanish Armada, it was, in fact, Francis Drake who did everything that is portrayed in this film. Elizabeth probably had some romantic interest in Walter, but at the same time, it feels unlikely that the events occurred in the way that is portrayed in this film. 'The Golden Age' (2007) tries to stay true to the historical facts and can be enjoyable to watch even for those who are not necessarily interested in Elizabeth's life.

### **2.3 'Mary, Queen of Scots' (2018)**

As the title suggests, this film does not tell the story of Elizabeth I, who is portrayed here by Margot Robbie, but rather her cousin Mary Stuart who was dedicated Chapter 1.5 to. This movie focuses quite a lot on the comparison of characters and different levels of confidence of both Elizabeth and Mary, as well as their relationship in general. It also depicts Elizabeth's relationship with Robert Dudley and deals with the question of marriage and also motherhood.

#### ***2.3.1 Comparison of Elizabeth and Mary's confidence***

What this film deals with the most is the comparison of the appearance and confidence of Elizabeth and Mary. Although the viewer would expect that Elizabeth will be a strong and confident woman, the opposite is the truth. Elizabeth is rather quiet and quite concerned about her visage. This can be seen in one scene, in which Elizabeth looks at a small portrait of Mary while looking at herself in mirrors to compare which of them is more beautiful. Elizabeth sees everything she is not in the picture of her cousin and states that even without a right to the Scottish throne, Mary would have no trouble finding a husband (*Mary, Queen of Scots, 2018*,

09:14). It is obvious that Elizabeth's issues with her looks are big. This might come as a surprise since not many people would expect that a queen would be so worried about her beauty.

Mary, on the other hand, is Elizabeth's complete opposite. She never worries about the way she looks, and even though she is several years younger, she immediately acts like a queen, when she returns to Scotland from France where she spent most of her life. Mary is proud of who she is and knows exactly what she wants. Once she is settled in her new kingdom, Mary begins to correspond with Elizabeth. Every time Mary writes to her, she insists to be named Elizabeth's successor, although this is only a formality to her as Mary is fully aware that she can claim the English throne either way. As the story continues and Elizabeth tries to persuade Mary to marry an Englishman, Mary decides to act in her own interest and find herself a proper husband. When she informs the English ambassador about her intentions, Mary even insults Elizabeth by pointing out that since Elizabeth became the queen, she did not marry nor gave birth to an heir, and declares that she will not fail as Elizabeth did.

### **2.3.2 *Elizabeth and Robert Dudley***

Marriage is not the most important subject of this film, but since it tells a story about two unmarried women, it is no surprise that it is included here as well. Robert Dudley once more appears as Elizabeth's love interest, but their relationship does not feel as strong or emotional as the one in 'Elizabeth' (1998). Robert sees Elizabeth more like his queen than his lover and never forces her to decide between her royal duty and their romance. Their love looks more platonic than passionate, and there is no indication that they would like to marry. Although everyone at the court knows about them, Elizabeth and Robert do not display their affection to one another publicly. It also seems that in this film Robert has no wife for Elizabeth suggests to him to marry Mary so that England could control her and Scotland. Robert is not pleased by the idea, but as a loyal subject, obeys Elizabeth's wish. Elizabeth realizes what her offer to Mary means once she receives a reply from her with the potential of losing Robert. Ill with smallpox, which will later leave scars on her face, and in tears, Elizabeth expresses her concerns to Robert, even though she knows the offer cannot be taken back, and she might lose the only man she had ever loved forever.

### ***2.3.3 The question of marriage and motherhood***

Later in the film, one of the advisors discusses marriage with Elizabeth and tells her that she is approaching an age when it would be impossible for her to have a child. Not only at this moment but also a few times during the film Elizabeth stands firmly behind her decision to stay unmarried and bear no children. She explains that she shall not fulfil the traditional duties of a woman and that she rather chose to be a man who is not under so much pressure as a woman is. It is not properly explained why as this film only deals with a specific period of Elizabeth's life and nothing from her childhood or young years is shown, but she states that marriage is dangerous and some of the reasons for her thinking so are named in Chapter 1.4. All of this, however, does not mean that she does not long for motherhood or marriage. At one point she puts a part of her dress on her belly so it creates a silhouette of a pregnant woman. It looks like Elizabeth likes to see herself that way, but then she realizes this is something she will never have and is saddened by it. When Mary eventually gives birth to her son James, Elizabeth takes it as Mary's victory. Mary became a woman that Elizabeth could never be, and instead of fighting with it, Elizabeth decides to put all the wrongs between her and Mary aside and name Mary and James her successors, even though this is something that her counsel is not pleased to hear.

### ***2.3.4 Elizabeth meets her cousin***

Everything, however, changes vigorously when Mary is dethroned and seeks help from Elizabeth. This event leads to the most important and powerful scene in the whole film, the final meeting between these two queens. Although this is a complete figment of the screenwriter's imagination since Elizabeth and Mary never met, it would be a mistake not to include something like this in an art form where adhering the facts is not so strict. Elizabeth and Mary meet in a house, which perhaps serves as a laundry. They both hide behind the sheets, Mary unintentionally, Elizabeth deliberately. They do not see each other, but the viewer gets the chance to look at them both. While Mary practically has not changed since the film began and still looks youthful and beautiful, the same cannot be said about Elizabeth, who hides her face, which is now pock-marked, under a strong layer of white make-up. This scene leads back to what was discussed at the beginning of this chapter – the confidence of two powerful women, one of whom doubts about herself because of the way she looks.

Mary wants her throne and kingdom back and is willing to do whatever is necessary. She begs Elizabeth for her help, but Elizabeth knows that she cannot help a Catholic queen,

for it would be dangerous for her to do so. It seems like Elizabeth feels sorry for Mary and that she has to refuse her, Mary, on the other hand, does not settle with Elizabeth's offer for safe residence in England and establishes her dominance by calling Elizabeth 'her inferior' (*Mary, Queen of Scots*, 2018, 1:48:23). Mary still acts like a queen, even though she no longer is one, and thinks that Elizabeth would obey since Mary is a Stuart and has a stronger claim on the English throne than Elizabeth. Mary's behaviour opens Elizabeth's eyes as she realizes that Mary's pride and everything she was jealous of, Mary's beauty and son, caused Mary's downfall. Yet Elizabeth remains unconfident and says nothing to Mary's claim that if she would agree with Mary's execution, she would murder her queen. (*Mary, Queen of Scots*, 2018, 1:50:35)

### **2.3.5 Conclusion of chapter 'Mary, Queen of Scots' (2018)**

In comparison to Cate Blanchett's Elizabeth, Margot Robbie's Elizabeth does not radiate such strength and majesty. It is at the very end of the film when the viewer gets to see Elizabeth with the appearance that is most known to the world. Most of the time, however, Elizabeth gives the impression of a subtle woman who rarely acts dominantly, even though she claims that she is more a man than she is a woman. She truly seems to be inferior to Mary, who acts the way she is supposed to, but perhaps it was designed that way since this is not a film about Elizabeth. However, it seems very doubtful that Elizabeth in real life would be so insecure and let Mary speak to her the way she did in this film.

'Mary, Queen of Scots' (2018) was selected for this bachelor thesis not only because it focuses the most on the relationship between Elizabeth and Mary but also because it is a rather new film compared to the other four. Although the films of today aim to portray female characters as very strong and confident, Elizabeth seems to be rather suppressed here, and because of that Mary Stuart gives the impression of a more dominant woman. It is unlikely that it was like that in reality, but despite that, it is an interesting change in Elizabeth's character and it allows comparing Elizabeth in this and other films. 'Mary, Queen of Scots' (2018) seems to also follow historical facts, mainly in the storyline of Mary but adds some fiction to it, such as the mentioned meeting between Mary and Elizabeth.

## **2.4 'Shakespeare in Love' (1998)**

As the title suggests, the main protagonist of 'Shakespeare in love' (1998) is the famous writer William Shakespeare. The film is a fictional piece of work which tells the story of Shakespeare and his romance with Viola De Lesseps, who is one of the made-up characters

appearing in this film, and his creation of his most famous tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*. Queen Elizabeth plays here a small, but still in some way, important role, and although the film does not focus on her, it would be a pity not to include it in this bachelor thesis.

#### **2.4.1 Elizabeth I as a supporting character**

Elizabeth I is portrayed by Judi Dench who won her only Academy Award for this portrayal and is, therefore, one of the few actors who won such award, even though they appear in only a few minutes of the film. At the time ‘Shakespeare in love’ was released Dench was about 64 years old, which means that the viewer gets the chance to see Elizabeth in advanced age and at the end of her reign. Since the film captures a specific period in her life, nothing from Elizabeth’s past is shown here, there is no development of her character and no mention of her struggles. Instead, she appears to be an unquestionable Queen of England who enjoys and supports theatre and literature.

It is important to say that Elizabeth appears here only as a supporting character that does not have a big influence on the story. Bigger emphasis is put on her only in two scenes. In the first one, in about half of the film, Elizabeth argues that playwrights show love in a way that is not realistic. Love in their plays is portrayed either as pretty, comical, or a lust (*Shakespeare in Love, 1998, 1:02:50*). Viola De Lesseps, however, opposes her, saying that there is one playwright who can truthfully write about love. Viola was, of course, referring to Shakespeare, who already started to work on *Romeo and Juliet*. Viola is confident of her statement since she is secretly one of the actors performing in the play and therefore is familiar with the story. The people present in the room are shocked that Viola dared to question the queen’s opinion, but instead of punishing Viola for her gall, Elizabeth decides to test her conviction and makes a wager – whichever playwright manages to show the true nature of love wins 50 pounds. The second scene takes place nearly at the end of the film. *Romeo and Juliet* is played for the audience for the first time and is watched by Elizabeth and her maidens, who all disguised themselves to not be recognized. Elizabeth named herself a judge of the wager and therefore visited the theatre to decide whether Shakespeare is worthy of the prize or not. The ending of the play leaves everyone speechless, and it takes a moment before they calm themselves down. What follows is big applause and a standing ovation. Shakespeare did something Elizabeth believed was impossible – he made the love true and undeceived her. There was no argument that Shakespeare deserved to win the wager, and Elizabeth gladly credited him with the money.

#### **2.4.2 *Depiction of Elizabeth in her late years***

The version of Elizabeth in this film shows quite a few similarities with Cate Blanchett's Elizabeth, such as the wit or the presence of a queen. It makes me think that if Blanchett portrayed Elizabeth in her late years, she would make her almost the same or very similar to Dench's Elizabeth. Since Elizabeth is much older in this film as in the previous ones, she is no longer worried about or concerned with losing her crown. No one can or dares to claim her throne or order her to find a proper man to marry. It is clear that she is a beloved and respected queen. She seems to have reached everything that the younger versions of her portrayed in the other films hoped for. 'Elizabeth' (1998) and 'Mary, Queen of Scots' (2018) end with the image of Elizabeth that is seen throughout the whole film – she wears white make-up, expensive gowns, and ginger wig, and looks exactly as she is remembered to look. Although she claims that she carries out a man's profession, there are no signs or claims that she has decided to become a man as it was with Margot Robbie's Elizabeth. She maintains some distance from emotions, but at the same time gives the impression of a compassionate and understanding woman, and that is especially when it comes to the question of love. This quality of hers makes her not only very likeable but also human.

#### **2.4.3 *Conclusion of chapter 'Shakespeare in Love' (1998)***

Although 'Shakespeare in Love' (1998) is based on a fully fictional storyline, it is the only film included in this bachelor's thesis, which shows how involved Elizabeth was in theatre. In this film, Elizabeth focuses mainly on Shakespeare's work, but as was implied in Chapter 1.7, she supported quite a few other authors present at her court for many of whom she also served as an inspiration for the creation of some of the characters. On top of that, Elizabeth is portrayed here in the last period of her reign when she was liked and respected by everyone and could live a calmer life. The film does not focus on important events in Elizabeth's life since she serves the story only as a pleasant additional character but manages to portray her in a way that could probably be close to what Elizabeth was like in her last years.

#### **2.5 'Elizabeth I – Part 1' (2005)**

'Elizabeth I' (2005) is a two-part miniseries depicting the second half of Elizabeth's reign. The second part of this miniseries focuses a lot on Elizabeth's relationship with Earl of Essex which was not discussed in the theoretical part and therefore it is not important to

include it in this particular bachelor's thesis. The first part, on the other hand, covers the topics that were mentioned in the theoretical part. This chapter focuses on Elizabeth's relationship with Robert Dudley, the question of marriage, the threat from Spanish Armada, and her stance on Mary Stuart's treason.

### ***2.5.1 Elizabeth's relationship with Robert Dudley***

Elizabeth is portrayed by Helen Mirren, who was about 60 years old when the two-part film was released. Given the age of Mirren when the film was shot, it is clear that the film takes place in the second half of Elizabeth's reign. At some point, it is eventually said that Elizabeth has been ruling England for 19 years. Unfortunately, the film does not include any scenes from Elizabeth's childhood or troubled youth, and because of that, the viewer does not get the chance to see how she evolved as the queen through the years. The biggest development can be seen in her relationship with Robert Dudley, who she sometimes addresses as Robin or Earl of Leicester.

Elizabeth's relationship with Robert seems to be more friendly and mature than romantic, but it is evident that they still have some love for each other. At the beginning of the film, it is revealed that Robert is not only very close to Elizabeth, but he also occupies a position as a member of her counsel. Their romance, however, is tested when Elizabeth invites one of her suitors Francis, Duke of Anjou, to her court. Robert is not happy about it and tries to convince Elizabeth several times that Duke of Anjou should not be trusted, and she should not marry him. It is hard to say whether this is his true opinion on Francis or just his jealousy. The viewer might believe that the love was involved that Robert himself wanted to marry Elizabeth and live with her until they die, but it quickly turns out that he is just a hypocrite. He tries to wreck Elizabeth's chance for advantageous marriage, although he himself has married someone else without even telling a word to Elizabeth or ask for her permission. Elizabeth finds out thanks to the French ambassador, and her reaction to the revelation of Robert's marriage is a surprise, anger, but also sadness. She does not want to make a scene, since there are lots of people watching, and holds her emotions, even though it is obvious that it is hard for her for she has been betrayed by the person closest to her. Elizabeth forbids Robert to ever visit her court and declares that she does not want to see him again but after seven years allows him to return once her life is threatened by Spain and her cousin Mary Stuart. One might perceive this as if Elizabeth is not able to stand by her word, but she explains that she needs a confidant and a friend, and that is exactly what Robert becomes. Although Elizabeth seems to not have aged after the seven years, Robert is a bit

older and also looks quite tired. They do not continue in their romance but establish a strong friendship. Even though Robert betrayed Elizabeth's trust, he has never stopped being a loyal subject, and that is perhaps what Elizabeth appreciates the most.

### **2.5.2 *Elizabeth and Francis, Duke of Anjou***

As in all the other films mentioned in this bachelor thesis except for 'Shakespeare in Love' (1998), even in this one, Elizabeth has to search for a suitable husband, although at the time she would be considered to be quite old to get married. The film opens with a medical examination, after which the doctor proclaims that Elizabeth could still have children. Elizabeth's advisors do not wait since they know that an heir would not only secure Elizabeth's position as the queen, but also save her from those who want to harm her, and start to act accordingly. They suggest that she should meet with the mentioned Francis, Duke of Anjou. After initial doubts and Robert's attempts to talk her out of it, Elizabeth agrees.

The character of Francis also appeared in 'Elizabeth' (1998), but there he was ridiculed and not portrayed very realistically. In this film, Francis gives the impression of a rather charming and handsome man who is several years younger than Elizabeth. Their age difference, however, seems to not influence the fondness they have for one another. Although their meeting was arranged mainly for political reasons, Elizabeth is quickly captivated by her French suitor. It feels that the connection between them has something to do with the fact that she can discuss anything with Francis. Elizabeth seriously considers marrying him, she thinks that he would be the perfect husband for her, and she could finally have a long-desired child. Although Francis was recommended to her by her advisors, it seems that no one from Elizabeth's court and also her subjects want to see a Catholic by her side. The religion is ultimately what divides them. Francis does not want to become Protestant, and Elizabeth cannot be Catholic. She is very saddened that she has to let go of a man that not only fits all the political requirements but is also a man she is attracted to. As Elizabeth watches Francis sail away she whispers to herself, 'Well England, the Queen is all yours' (*Elizabeth I, 2005, 43:10*), suggesting that she shall no longer search for another man that would eventually turn out to be unsuitable and rather stay alone and focus all her attention to the state's affairs.

### **2.5.3 *Elizabeth and Mary Stuart***

As it was in 'Elizabeth: The Golden Age' (2007), even in this film, Elizabeth has to deal with the threat that her cousin Mary Stuart represents. Elizabeth decides to act strategically and see if she can talk some sense into Mary. Elizabeth visits her cousin in the



prison she put her in. The years spent locked up vigorously changed Mary's appearance, from a once beautiful lady became an old overweight woman. Although the character of Mary Stuart appears in two films previously mentioned, 'Elizabeth I – Part I' (2005) is the only one which accurately shows the impact of the imprisonment on Mary's visage and also her health. The meeting between Mary and Elizabeth is purely fictional, but unlike it was portrayed in 'Mary, Queen of Scots' (2018), here is Elizabeth the superior one. Mary tries to act as if she was still Elizabeth's equal, but Elizabeth implies that she is the one who is in control and warns Mary that if Mary shall conspire against her, she would have no choice than to let her executed, even though she would commit a crime for she would kill another anointed queen. Despite Mary's assurance that she does not plan to harm Elizabeth, the truth is eventually revealed when a letter with Mary's approval of Elizabeth's assassination is captured.

Although Elizabeth claimed that she would not hesitate punishing Mary for her treason when she is informed about the letter, she is no longer certain in what to do, mainly because she is aware that Spain would attack England, which is not prepared for war, immediately after Mary's execution. Elizabeth does not pay attention to any evidence or the result of Mary's trial. She does not want to listen to the advice from her advisors. The person who eventually persuades her is Robert Dudley, who agrees with the advisors that Mary's death is inevitable. Elizabeth signs the order, but when she is told that Mary was executed, she acts as if she does not remember what she gave her permission to. She does not believe at first and asks who gave the order but is quickly told that it was her. Elizabeth rages and tries to blame others for her own doing, but once she calms down, she realizes that the deed cannot be taken back, and the consequences of her actions must be accepted.

#### ***2.5.4 The Spanish Armada attacks***

The part with the attack of the Spanish Armada is portrayed here as well, but it is not as dramatic as in 'Elizabeth: The Golden Age' (2007). Elizabeth once again arrives at Tilbury to give her speech and encourage her soldiers to fight for England. She is dressed in a gown and wears only a chest-part of the armour to protect herself from harm. She does not look as majestic as Cate Blanchett in the film from 2007, but what it lacks on the appearance it adds to the speech which is not only longer than in 'Elizabeth: The Golden Age' (2007), but Helen Mirren also quotes here a part of the real speech that Elizabeth gave and that is included in Chapter 1.6. Unfortunately, she does not mention here the part in which she promises that she will fight next to her soldiers to protect her kingdom from invaders. Unlike in 'The Golden

Age' (2007), nothing from the actual fight is shown here, and Elizabeth and her soldiers are informed about England's victory by a ship that puts out flags of white and black colour.

### **2.5.5 *The Portrayal of Elizabeth***

Mirren's Elizabeth is calmer and not as dominant as Dench or Blanchett's Elizabeth but what differentiates Elizabeth in this film from the other Elizabeths is that she is the only one who sometimes uses the plural 'we' when she talks about herself, suggesting that this Elizabeth blended fully with the state in one. Just like the other Elizabeths, this one also does not let men influence her, but whenever she is in a difficult situation, she seeks help from Robert Dudley. In some moments it seems as if she is dependent on him a bit too much and is unable to make decisions without consulting with him. As was mentioned earlier, their relationship is not very romantic, and basically, all romance disappears once it is revealed that Robert is married. Then they seem more like friends with Robert serving as Elizabeth's confidant. There is not much of a development of Elizabeth's character, which is understandable for she is no longer young and has been a queen for quite some time. There are some moments in which Elizabeth looks like a powerful queen, for example in the scene where she meets with Mary Stuart which was, in my opinion, handled better than in 'Mary, Queen of Scots' (2018), but the fact that she relies on Robert's opinions and seeks comfort from him quite too often, makes me think that she cannot rule according to her own conscience and whenever something turns wrong, she rather blames others than accepting that she is the one in charge and only she can make all the important decisions.

### **2.5.6 *Conclusion of chapter 'Elizabeth I – Part 1' (2005)***

Although this TV film focuses on themes that were included in the other four films, it still manages to portray them differently. The biggest difference is probably in the relationship with Robert Dudley, which seems to correspond the most with the reality as it is the only film where Robert becomes Elizabeth's friend and does not leave her side until his death. As was mentioned, the scene where Elizabeth visits Mary in her prison is fictional, but somehow this meeting feels like the best scene shot for this film for it shows that Elizabeth feels sorry for her cousin and for what she had to do to her, yet is unwilling to grant Mary freedom because she knows that Mary's promises cannot be trusted. The situation with the Spanish Armada was also handled well, although it was not as entertaining as in 'Elizabeth: The Golden Age' (2007), and what I appreciate the most was the quotation of the actual speech from Tilbury. Even though I do not mention him specifically in the theoretical part, for

there were many men who wanted to marry Elizabeth, Francis, Duke of Anjou, was really one of the suitors for Elizabeth's hand. I would say that his depiction in this film is a bit improved from the real Duke of Anjou but is still better than in 'Elizabeth I' (1998). What was not fabricated, however, was the fondness Elizabeth had for him, although she probably did not seriously consider marrying him.

## **2.6 Elizabeth I as a film character**

The last chapter of the practical part of this bachelor thesis serves as the summarization of what was discovered in the five selected films and how accurate they are in comparison to the historical facts.

Although Elizabeth I appeared as a character in a lot of films, none of them starts to tell her story from the beginning to the end. It is somewhat understandable why the filmmakers always choose to make a film about a specific period of her life, for Elizabeth is mostly perceived as this great monarch who is mainly remembered for the deeds she did during her reign. However, not including her difficult childhood and struggles in her young years may lead to an incomplete understanding of some of the decisions she made as the queen. It also robs the viewer of an important part of Elizabeth's life which greatly influenced her later development of character.

The repeating theme, which appears in four of the films, is marriage. Elizabeth is constantly reminded that she has to find a suitable husband and preferably someone who would be beneficial for England. Although it was Elizabeth's duty to meet with all the suitors and choose one of them to marry, she made it clear that she wanted to rule on her own. However, as is mentioned in Chapter 1.4, she sometimes offered her hand in marriage when she needed powerful allies. This is something that was not depicted in any of the films, which is unfortunate for it shows that Elizabeth knew her value and was able to use it to get what she wanted. In the films, she is often pressured by her counsel to make a decision. Elizabeth usually agrees to meet with some of the men but never starts talking about marrying them. One exception could be in 'Elizabeth I' (2005) where Elizabeth is seriously thinking about marrying Duke of Anjou, one of the eligible suitors, but before she even gets the chance to discuss marriage with him, it is made clear that because of his religion he would be unwelcomed in England.

Part of the question of marriage is also Robert Dudley, who appears in three of the films. It is not surprising for Robert is often viewed as the 'fated' man in Elizabeth's life. They knew each other since they were children, and Elizabeth shared a big part of her life

with Robert. As for their romance, the depiction of the early stages of their relationship is probably portrayed the best in 'Elizabeth I' (1998). In this film, they do not hide the attraction they have for one another and Elizabeth seems to think about making Robert her husband. This could have been also the case in Elizabeth's real life, but these are rather assumptions that cannot be supported by historical evidence. What this film, however, did not get right was Elizabeth's knowledge about Robert's marriage, and the storyline with his involvement in treason is made-up. Also in the continuation of this film, 'Elizabeth: The Golden Age' (2007), the character of Robert Dudley completely disappears, which also did not happen in real life. Their relationship evolved into a friendship that is depicted in 'Elizabeth I' (2005).

The second theme which occurs the most and also appears in 'Elizabeth: The Golden Age' (2007) and 'Elizabeth I' (2005) is the conflict between Spain and England. Both films pretty much follow what is mentioned in Chapter 1.6 and what is more, they give a glimpse of what Elizabeth could have been like as a military strategist. However, the most important part of this is the correct depiction of Elizabeth's speech at Tilbury. In this case, 'Elizabeth I' (2005) is closer to the reality for a part of the actual speech is quoted. 'Elizabeth: The Golden Age' (2007) has an adjusted speech, but on the other hand, includes Elizabeth's promise to fight next to her soldiers if Spain reaches England's shores. The way it is performed here is also more dramatic and powerful than in 'Elizabeth I' (2005).

A character which often appears as part of Elizabeth's story besides Robert Dudley is, of course, her Scottish cousin Mary Stuart. The film which probably depicted their relationship the closest to reality was 'Elizabeth: The Golden Age' (2007). In this film, Mary is already imprisoned and plans Elizabeth's dethronement. There is no communication between them, Mary does not beg Elizabeth to spare her life. Out of those three films where Mary appears, 'The Golden Age' (2007) is the only one where Elizabeth and Mary do not meet, which did not happen in real life either. Elizabeth also does not want to allow Mary's execution and tries to find excuses to avoid it. After some time, however, she signs the order, and on the day of Mary's execution, she is overthrown with emotions. The same also happens in 'Elizabeth I' (2005), but here Elizabeth acts more hysterical. It is mentioned in Chapter 1.5 that Elizabeth indeed felt bad and regretted her decision but no one can say for sure how much saddened she was by it and therefore the filmmakers can make this scene as emotional as they want to.

'Elizabeth I' (2005) and 'Mary, Queen of Scots' (2018) are two films which follow the historical facts but also add some fiction to the real story. This is mainly the case of the meeting between Elizabeth and Mary, which occurs in both of these films. If we were to

pretend for a moment that this happened, 'Elizabeth I' (2005) is more likely closer to what might have happened. It would not be surprising that Elizabeth visited Mary in prison and tried to not only reason with her but also warn her that her actions could lead to her death. The film also correctly depicts Mary's appearance. As is mentioned in Chapter 1.5, the stay in prison had a great impact on her visage and also health. She was no longer the beautiful and young Scottish queen she once was. This is unfortunately not the case in 'Mary, Queen of Scots' (2018). Although the film is true to the facts, Mary's unchanged visage after spending almost 19 years in prison is quite confusing and unrealistic. On top of that, once there is a conversation between her and Elizabeth, and this can be seen perfectly in the scene where they meet, she always acts as if she was superior. Elizabeth, of course, had some doubts about herself but it is highly unlikely that she would allow Mary mistreating and sometimes mocking her the way she did in this film.

It can be said that all of the films included in this bachelor thesis try to stay in some way or another as close to reality as possible. The only exception could be 'Shakespeare in Love' (1998), but although the story of the film is mainly fictional, it tries to not give a false impression of the historical figures appearing in it. In this case, Elizabeth serves the story only as a supporting character, but this film is the only one which shows the viewer why Elizabeth was important not only for England's history but also its literature. It also tries to show Elizabeth's character in her late years and how beloved she was by her subjects. It is not hard to imagine that it could have been like that in real life too.

The five films selected for this bachelor thesis try to give the viewer an idea what Elizabeth I might have been like while either informing them about the most important events in her life, such as in the films with Cate Blanchett, or going more in deep in some specific themes, such as the relationship with Mary Stuart or her support of literature. Although the films are very well-done, in my opinion, it is always better to know at least a little bit about the subject of the film and the matter it focuses on before watching it. It is because the filmmakers often try to glamorize or change, slightly or bigger, the historical facts and figures. Therefore, a viewer who might not know a lot or nothing at all about Elizabeth could believe everything that is told to them, even though the true story could be completely different. On the other hand, when the viewer is informed, they themselves can compare how many things in the films are real or fictional and later decide how accurate those films are.

I personally knew a thing or two about Elizabeth before I started to write this thesis, but after learning so much new information about her life which allowed me to compare the facts and the fiction, I realized that the films try to do their best to stay accurate. They do not

always succeed and they could never replace the history books, but I can imagine showing one of these films to the students as not only informational but also entertaining material in the English class and maybe inspiring them to want to learn more about this extraordinary Queen of England's.

## Conclusion

The main aim of this bachelor's thesis was to analyse Elizabeth's life from two perspectives. The first was the historical facts which was dedicated the theoretical part to and which focused on answering the question of which historical events shaped Elizabeth I into the queen she was. The second perspective was her portrayal in films. In this part, the aim was to find out which of the key historical events of Elizabeth's life are portrayed in the films and how accurate there are, and also to discover what message the films convey about Elizabeth to their audiences.

In the theoretical part, it was discovered that Elizabeth did not have an easy life. Although she was born into a royal family, it did not ensure her a happy childhood or life. It can be determined that the period between when she was approximately three years old and when she was 25 years old was the hardest. The crucial moment was the cruel and brutal separation from her mother followed by a cold disinterest from her father. The absence of a mother was compensated to her by her governess Kat Ashley and her step-mother Katherine Parr. Whereas Kat remained one of the Elizabeth's closest friends, Katherine, although she was always nice to Elizabeth and they were fond of each other, engaged in Elizabeth's abuse by her husband Thomas Seymour and partially and unintentionally contributed to Elizabeth's decision to stay unmarried. The problems followed when Elizabeth's step-sister Mary became queen. Mary never really liked Elizabeth and viewed her as someone who would try to steal her throne. She made Elizabeth's life very difficult and even imprisoned her in the Tower. Until the very last moment, Mary also refused to pass the English throne on Elizabeth.

Elizabeth's life changed for the better once she became the Queen of England at the age of 25. Although being a ruler was quite challenging, Elizabeth handled her newly-gained position with grace. Some people doubted whether a woman should rule, but Elizabeth proved them that her ability to be a good monarch has nothing to do with her gender. In the almost 45 years long reign, she brought stability to her country and with the defeat of the Spanish Armada made England a powerful nation. Moreover, she managed to do all of that without a man by her side. The fact that Elizabeth decided to stay unmarried and become this 'Virgin Queen' was very unusual and shocking at that period of time. She met with some of the suitors, but the only man who she probably seriously considered marrying was Robert Dudley. The circumstances of their relationship were, unfortunately, not favourable, and instead of getting herself into a marriage where she could not be happy and had to yield to someone else, Elizabeth decided to rule independently.

The main aim of the practical part was to analyse the selected films, find the main topics which they focus on, and discuss them. During this process it was discovered that the filmmakers like to come back to the same or very similar topics. One of the topics, for example, is the question of marriage and Elizabeth being romantically involved with someone which is dealt with in all the films except for 'Shakespeare in Love' (1998). The filmmakers present this either in a scene where Elizabeth is forced to meet her suitors or where she struggles to maintain her romance with Robert Dudley. Another repeating topic is Elizabeth's relationship with Mary Stuart. This is depicted in three of the selected films, but only one of them stayed completely true to the facts. The other two include a scene where Elizabeth and Mary meet which is completely fictionalized.

This leads to the problematic of accurate portrayal of the events presented in those five films. Although they try to stay accurate, in some of the cases, the fiction is more appealing than reality. It has to be said, however, that these films are not documentaries and therefore no one can be mad at the filmmakers if they glamorize one or two things. Their main aim is to give the viewers an idea of how some of these events occurred and what was Elizabeth like as the queen. It can be concluded that each of the films serves as a relatively respectable source of information which not only educates its viewers but also entertains them.

Each film also portrays a very different version of Elizabeth. This is, of course, connected with their choice of which specific period of Elizabeth's life they focus on. The films seem to portray Elizabeth realistically with a small glamorization. She mostly appears as a strong female character and ruler who, in different ways, deals with some internal struggles. There is no wrong depiction of Elizabeth, everyone can interpret her personality in their own way. The viewers themselves then decide which Elizabeth they find most likable and memorable, and if they read some historical materials about Elizabeth I then also decide which portrayal of Elizabeth is, in their opinion, closest to true nature of this Queen of England.



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