

## 2: Her Royal Majesty

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### A. The Queen's Mask

1. Class title 1 (the Darnley Portrait)
2. Section title 1 (Effigy in Westminster Abbey and mask at Greenwich)

That little snatch of music was a dance by **Thomas Morley** (1557–1602), one of the most distinguished composers in the reign of **Queen Elizabeth I**. The images are **effigies**, a preservation of the Queen's likeness after death: her tomb in Westminster Abbey, and a modern hi-tech reconstruction that I'll explain in a few minutes. While planning this class, I found myself dividing the material into two categories: **reconstructions** made after the subject's death (whether at a remove of half a year or half a millennium) and portraits and other media executed in her lifetime; these are what we think of as the most reliable, right?

3. Several portraits together

Not necessarily so. When we are dealing with kings and queens, even contemporary portraits are closer to press releases than they are to snapshots. Far from casual glimpses, such portraits are a deliberate attempt to **construct** an image that will serve a political purpose rather than a personal one. Hence my talk of the Queen's **Mask**, rather than the Queen's face. For example, if you look through a number of the dozens of portraits of Elizabeth in chronological order, you see that significant changes in the features simply stop being recorded after a while. Here is a quick half-dozen.

4. Portraits of Elizabeth I at various ages

Like the **Holbein** portrait of George Gisze we saw last week, many of these portraits contain symbols that we may need to decipher but would have been immediately meaningful to her contemporaries. In the so-called *Rainbow Portrait* on the screen now, for instance, she is holding a rainbow next to a Latin inscription which says, in effect, "There can be no rainbow without the sun." Implication: she herself is the Sun that gives life to everything. Despite her age and ill-health—none of which is visible in the picture—she is here and here to stay.

5. *Rainbow Portrait, with detail*
6. Gower and Metsys, *Sieve Portraits*

Here's an odd one. In both these portraits, Elizabeth is shown with a sieve. Presumably this doesn't mean that she like to work in the kitchen? No, it is an allusion to the legend of **Tuccia**, a Vestal Virgin in ancient Rome who proved her chastity by carrying a sieve full of water from the Tiber River to the Temple of Vesta without spilling a drop. The older Elizabeth got, the more emphasis was placed on her virginity; in some respects, the cult of the Virgin Queen replaced the Catholic cult of the Virgin Mary, which was no more encouraged in Potestant England.

## 7. *The Armada Portrait, Woburn Abbey version*

Sometimes the iconography refers to political events that need no explanation. The three extant versions of the *Armada Portrait*, probably all copies of the same original by **George Gower** (1540–96), refer to the defeat of the Spanish Armada by **Sir Francis Drake** in 1588. You can clearly see the Armada approaching out of one window and, out of the other, the surviving ships being wrecked on the shores of Scotland as they were blown north trying to escape. The mermaid figurehead on the Queen's left also refers to her role as Empress of the Oceans. And her right hand is resting on a globe with reference to another maritime triumph, the colonization of America by **Sir Walter Raleigh**. A few years ago, the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich mounted an exhibition of all three pictures, and made a number of videos in connection with it. Let me show you two of them.

8. *Greenwich exhibition: Mary Beard*

9. *Greenwich exhibition: Mat Collishaw*

10. *Portraits of Elizabeth in old age, contemporary and 1610*

In 1596, the Privy Council ordered that unseemly portraits of the queen which had caused her "great offence" should be sought out and burnt; only depictions that show her wearing the **Mask of Youth**, in the phrase of art historian **Sir Roy Strong**, would be permitted. Nonetheless, a few more lifelike portraits do survive, such as this one by **Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger** (1561–1636) from 1595. The other one is posthumous, an allegory from 1610, but it is clearly based on a true picture like the Gheeraerts, not the officially approved portraits. In fact it was not just the painters who depicted Elizabeth with the Mask of Youth—it was how she painted *herself*, applying thick lead-and-mercury-based makeup that might have hastened her death. Excuse the tone of this video; it is very short. I will follow it up with a longer clip from the movie that is references: *The Virgin Queen* (1998), starring Cate Blanchett. The Handel music is entirely anachronistic, but her line "I am married... to England" is spot on.

11. *Queen Elizabeth's makeup*

12. *Cate Blanchett in *The Virgin Queen* (1998)*

## B. The Fallen Favorite

13. *Section title B (portraits of Essex)*

This section is about Elizabeth's relationship with the last of her several favorites: **Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex** (1576–1691), soldier, scholar, and a man 32 years her junior. We do not know for sure that the portrait of the young man leaning against the tree is in fact Essex, but we do know that it is by **Nicholas Hilliard** (1547–1619), who was a goldsmith as well as a painter, and produced miniature portraits of the Queen during the last three decades of her life. I'm showing a few of them because although Hilliard did not challenge the convention that she must always be shown in her youth, he did at least make that youth believable.

14. Hilliard miniatures of Queen Elizabeth
15. Lytton Strachey and *Elizabeth and Essex*

Our guide through the story of Elizabeth and Essex is a member of Bloomsbury Group, **Lytton Strachey** (1880–1932), whose biography of the same title I shall be dipping into from time to time. This is to support my point, which I'll make more than once during the course, that portraits do not need to be done in paint; they can equally easily be the province of biographers, dramatists, or even novelists; Strachey's *Elizabeth and Essex* (1928) would probably now be called "creative non-fiction." Here is how he describes Robert's effect on the Queen:

#### 16. Strachey: quotation from *Elizabeth and Essex, with the Byrd Pavan*

The music there was a *Pavan* by **William Byrd** (1542–1623), one of the many composers who made the Elizabethan era such a rich period in English music. I let it play out complete as a token that, rather than turning to later writers and composers, I might have shown how Elizabeth's contemporaries turned the whole period into an ongoing biography-by-allegory, writing and singing of the *Faerie Queene*, *Gloriana*, or *Oriana*, but all the time portraying the Queen in graceful code. However, I want to keep my feet more on the ground, and for that I need a little history.

#### 17. Elizabeth I and Philip II

We saw the defeat of the Spanish Armada in that Greenwich portrait, and tensions with Spain marked much of Elizabeth's reign. But she tried for a long time to avoid war. **Philip II**, the Spanish king, was in fact her cousin, and he had even proposed marriage to her at one point. But her desire for peace could not last in the face of Spanish provocation. Here is a scene from another Cate Blanchett film, *The Golden Age*, in which she loses her cool.

#### 18. Cate Blanchett in *The Golden Age* (2007)

#### 19. Gheeraerts: *The Earl of Essex* (c.1596, London NPG)

What attracted Elizabeth to Essex was that he was young, brave, and impulsive. But he was not a team player, and kept disobeying orders. In 1596, he captured the city of **Cadiz**, to great popular acclaim back home. But the Privy Council refused to support him and he had to leave. On the way back, he captured a Spanish vessel, partly to release its 100 English prisoners, partly to seize its treasure chests. [I'm not sure I have the history right, but nor did pre-war Hollywood, which was where my next clip was made. It is from the 1939 film *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex*, with **Errol Flynn** marvelously cast as Essex and **Bette Davis** as the Queen.

#### 20. Bette Davis in *Elizabeth and Essex* (1939)

#### 21. N. C. Wyeth: illustration to *Elizabeth and Essex* (cropped)

This is part of an illustration to the Strachey book by **NC Wyeth** (1882–1944); I'll show the full scene in a moment. Essex comes back into Elizabeth's favor, and persuade her to send him as Governor to Ireland. But there he screws up even worse, trying his own diplomacy in place of the course required by the Privy Council. Realizing now the power of his enemies in court who are trying to discredit him, he rushes

back to London to plead his case before the Queen. The Lord Chamberlain sends him up, but—being one of those enemies—does not tell him that the Queen is not yet dressed. Here is Strachey:

### 22. Strachey: quotation from *Elizabeth and Essex* (2)

The scene is particularly dramatic in *Gloriana*, the opera commissioned from **Benjamin Britten** (1913–76) for the coronation of the second Queen Elizabeth in 1953. Here it is in a production by **Phyllida Lloyd**, with **Tom Randle** as Essex and **Josephine Barstow** as the Queen.

### 23. Britten: *Gloriana*, Essex breaks in upon the Queen

Essex's crime is that he has seen Elizabeth without her Mask of Youth. But he is also foolish enough not to distance himself from the people of London, when they hail his return once more as a hero. So he gives his enemies enough material to accuse him of fomenting a rebellion. He is arrested, tried for treason, and condemned to death. Elizabeth hesitates before signing the warrant, but when his young wife, whom she has always resented, demands rather than pleads for his pardon, she picks up the pen. Essex is beheaded the next day.

### 24. Strachey: quotation from *Elizabeth and Essex* (3)

There is a postlude to this. It is an interesting aspect of Strachey's technique that he totally dismisses the story, but uses it anyway; it is just too romantic to resist. And totally irresistible for **Salvatore Cammarano**, the librettist of *Roberto Devereux* by **Gaetano Donizetti** (1797–1848), the last of a trilogy of operas featuring the Queen. The Duchess of Nottingham's confession launches the opera's finale. It ends in a substantial aria for the Queen, but the preceding recitative is plenty dramatic enough, especially as sung here at the Met by **Sondra Radvanovsky**.

### 25. Donizetti: *Roberto Devereux*, finale

### 26. The Coronation Opera

No mask of youth there, and not in the Britten opera either, which was an abysmal failure. But it was not such an odd choice. I was 12 at the time, and remember well the fever of pride in the **New Elizabethan Age** that swept the country. Britten was the go-to composer, and the subject of the first Queen's reign promised fanfares, tournaments, masques, and lots of color. They should have realized that Britten and his librettist **William Plomer** were not about to write a mere celebration of Merrie Olde England. They took the darker sides of the Strachey book as well as the colorful ones, and ended with the Queen as an old woman, wigless and un-made-up, lamenting her wasted reign as she approaches her death. The Queen herself is said to have liked it, but the premiere audience of ambassadors was a dampener from the start, and the press lambasted Britten for his insult to the new young monarch.

### 27. Benjamin Britten's *Gloriana* at the Royal Opera House in 2013 (Richard Jones d.)

So what did the Royal Opera House do in 2013, when they mounted a new production on the 60th anniversary of the original? Director **Richard Jones** took advantage of the fact that we are all Post-Modernists now, and view our myths and history with a heavy dose of irony. He eliminated all suggestion of reality by presenting the whole thing frankly as theater, and amateur theater at that. The

second act of the opera takes place while the Queen is “on progress” (a kind of royal national tour), attending celebrations put on in her honor in Norwich. Jones made this the framework for his entire production, having the Queen—the then-current Queen, not her Tudor namesake—arrive at a makeshift theater in some kind of civic hall. So he was essentially recreating the original premiere—the newsreel we have just watched—but in a way-downmarket, provincial context. I am amazed how well Jones and his designer captured the style of those times; this is exactly the budget-basement Britain in which I grew up. I don’t like everything about the production, but I love the way Jones bridges the ending and curtain-call by bringing the young Elizabeth back onstage. If you look closely at the very end, you will see two figures come on from the wings at the bottom right of the screen; they are **Benjamin Britten** and his partner **Peter Pears**. The Queen is **Susan Bullock**.

28. Britten: *Gloriana*, finale (Richard Jones, 2013)

29. Class title 2 (the *Procession Portrait*)

## C. The Family Album

30. Section title C (photograph, 1857)

That was quite a contrast! A painting of Elizabeth I in procession with her retinue versus a photograph of Victoria with her family. Quite apart from the obvious difference in medium, what differences do you see between the two works in attitude? The Elizabethan picture is all about display, isn’t it? The courtiers are all there in their finery, and the Queen, in more elaborate finery still, carried over their heads like an icon. By contrast, the photographer has assembled Victoria and her family against a sunny side wall of the house. I am sure those clothes were not cheap, but there is no finery, no ostentation; any middle-class family might appear much the same. In short, whereas this depiction of Elizabeth, like all her portraits, is intended to emphasize her *difference* from other people, Victoria’s photograph makes her look more or less like anyone else.

31. Winterhalter: *The Family of Queen Victoria* (1846, Royal Collection)

Now compare this painting by **Franz Xaver Winterhalter** (1805–73), from 11 years earlier, when Victoria still had only five children, not nine. How does it differ from the photo? Last week, we talked about what is and isn’t a portrait. The photograph is on the borderline; it may just have been to keep a family record. But the painting absolutely is. It was made for exhibition and reproduction, and embodies a particular vision of the family that the artist (and presumably the Queen) wished to portray. I think Winterhalter is juggling two requirements: to show the family as one to which ordinary people can relate, but at the same time reminding us that this is the ruler of the Empire. Everything is that much more elaborate, more upscale—silk rather than worsted, gilt furniture—but it is not *that* much upscale; there is still very little ostentation.

32. Winterhalter: *Crown Prince Frederick William of Prussia* (1862, Royal Collection)

Compare this later picture by Winterhalter. **Princess Victoria**, the Queen's eldest daughter, has grown up, married **Crown Prince Frederick William of Prussia**, and given him two children. But their portrait is a lot more formal. By contrast, the children in the earlier picture are all over the place, much as they are when we visit our grandchildren. And there is one other juggling act in play here. In a normal Victorian family, the husband is the master; but the wife here is also queen of the entire country. One of the official websites (though I can't find it again) remarks that Winterhalter makes it clear that while Victoria rules the country, Albert rules the family. I am not quite sure I see that; do you?

### 33. Quotation from Wikipedia

Why is this significant? Elizabeth was an **absolute monarch**. Victoria was a **constitutional one**. Leading by example rather than fiat, it was important to show the entire family as an exemplar of moral values. And this picture works, I think, supremely well.

### 34. Portraits of Queen Victoria at different ages

#### 35. — all six portraits together

Let me repeat what I did before, and show six portraits of Victoria back to back, spanning sixty years. What differences do you find between these and the Elizabethan sequence? The most obvious one I see is that there is no insistence on keeping the Queen young; all look plausible for Victoria's actual age.

### 36. Von Angeli: *Queen Victoria, 1875 and 1899*

You might think that the Queen would have been displeased with **Heinrich von Angeli** (1840–1925), the Austrian portraitist who painted her so plain in 1875. But no, she praised the work for its "honesty, total lack of flattery, and appreciation of character." *And* invited him back to paint her in old age!

### 37. The six portraits, slightly realigned

If you align the portraits in vertical pairs, you may get a better sense of their range. Of course there are the formal portraits in the old style, and I could show many more; I find it interesting that one of them is the earliest portrait here, when Victoria was barely into her teens. The middle pair, by contrast, are simple and dignified, the sash of some order their only decoration. And the two on the right, with the Queen sitting at her desk, lost in thought, are almost private glimpses. Many of the portraits in the Royal Collection are indeed private, showing Victoria relaxing with a cousin in the garden, or her boys playing in the Scottish Highlands; they were for the family collection, not for display.

### 38. Queen Victoria and Princess Victoria, 1845

Victoria, as we have seen, was the first British monarch to use **photographers** as well as painters, but she did this mainly for private purposes. Here is the earliest one in the Royal Collection, made in 1845 as a gift for her husband, Prince Albert. Posed though it is, and against an obvious painted background, it nonetheless has the air of showing the young woman exactly as she was—and doesn't the daughter look exactly like her mother?!

### 39. Chalk portraits by Charles Brocky (1841)

Remember the Winterhalter family group, with Victoria looking out at us, while Albert is seen in half-profile, looking at her? That was for the public. This pair of portraits in chalk by the Hungarian-born artist **Charles Brocky** (1807–55) are the opposite: Prince Albert looks proudly out of the picture while his young bride looks adoringly across at him. But then these were for their use only.

#### 40. Portraits by Winterhalter, 1843 and 1850

Or compare these, both by Winterhalter. The 1850 one is the cameo-shaped equivalent of his grand portrait in royal robes, but what about the one from 1843? This too was a private commission by Victoria for Albert alone; it became his favorite picture of her—not surprisingly, for it is positively erotic.

#### 41. Winterhalter: *The First of May, 1851* (Royal Collection)

Winterhalter was a very flexible painter, capable of many moods. What do you make of this? Its title, *The First of May, 1851*, won't give much away. In fact, the date is triply significant. It is the first birthday of the child shown here, **Prince Arthur**; the eighty-second birthday of the man kneeling in front of him, his godfather the **Duke of Wellington**; and the opening of **Prince Albert's** Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace, seen in the background. But it is also astonishingly akin to one of those Renaissance *Adoration of the Magi* pictures, with Arthur as the Christ Child and the Queen, presumably, as the Virgin Mary!

#### 42. Thorburn: *Queen Victoria with Prince Alfred and Princess Helena* (1847, Royal Coll.)

Over the top? Then try this by **Robert Thorburn** (1818–85). Here the model is clearly a *Madonna and Child with Saint John* by **Raphael**, with Victoria even more obviously in the pose of the Virgin Mary. In this case, though, the child in her arms is not the boy **Alfred**, but her daughter **Helena**. I must say I don't know for whom these last two paintings were done, or whether they were ever put on public display. It may be significant that the Thorburn piece is a miniature painted on ivory.

#### 43. Thomas Jones Barker: *The Secret of England's Greatness* (1863, London NPG), untitled 44. — the same, with title

Look at this. As a portrait, it is no great shakes. But then it was not painted from life. It is dated 1863, yet it shows Prince Albert, who died of typhoid in 1861, and Victoria performing some public function, when in fact she went into deep mourning and remained in semi-seclusion for most of the rest of her life. But look at the title, *The Secret of England's Greatness*. It is not a portrait, but a depiction of an anecdote: that when some visiting potentate asked her for the secret of England's greatness, she did not mention industrial or military might, but presented him with a Bible. The picture, by an otherwise minor artist, has become an icon of **Empire**

#### 45. Victoria as Empress of India (tinted photograph)

I did a whole hour on the British Empire last semester, and don't want to repeat it here. But there is an important point. Albert's death put an end to the representation of Victoria as a wife and mother. But her relative seclusion from public view did not hinder her importance in the public view as the personification of Britain's greatness. An Act of Parliament proclaimed her **Empress of India** in 1876, but for most Britons, she already *was* the Empire; the national portrait and the personal one had somehow

fused. Which is why I find the tribute video I am about to show entirely appropriate as a portrait in a different medium. It was compiled by someone on YouTube out of newsreel shots, film clips, and the slow movement of the *First Symphony* by **Edward Elgar** (1857–1934). I think it works

46. Tribute to Queen Victoria

47. Still from *Victoria and Abdul*

I showed Victoria with two Indian servants. In 1887, she engaged another one, Abdul Karim, and soon promoted him to be her *munshi*, or tutor in Urdu. She developed such a close friendship with him that eventually her councillors threatened to declare her insane unless she sent him home. This is the subject of the 2017 film *Victoria and Abdul*, directed by **Stephen Frears**. I will end with a clip from that, partly because I want to see **Judi Dench** playing at least one queen, and partly because her account of her reign is such a superb summary of all we have seen so far.

48. Judi Dench *Victoria and Abdul* (Stephen Frears, 2017)

## D. The Burden of Tradition

49. Section title D (Andrew Festing portrait, 1998)

This is a 1998 portrait by **Andrew Festing** (1941–), made for the Royal Hospital, Chelsea. The Queen is portrayed against a portrait of its founder, **King Charles II**, with two Chelsea Pensioners in attendance wearing the traditional uniform. The whole thing reeks of tradition, though the viewpoint and grouping are entirely modern. Although I do not have time to cover **Queen Elizabeth II** in the same detail as either of the other two queens, I think it would be interesting to show her as a kind of footnote. For she was born with centuries of tradition on her shoulders, and her task was to maintain it in times when it might have seemed less and less relevant, or adjust it to make it so. Some, but not all, of this, is reflected in her many portraits. Again, I have taken six portraits painted at different ages; first let's look at them all together, comparing them to the gallery I made of Queen Victoria, then show them in chronological order. I won't list all the individual artists.

50. Transformation of Victoria portrait gallery into the Elizabeth II one

51. Portraits of Queen Elizabeth through the ages.

What did you think? There is certainly no question here of any Mask of Youth; the Queen is shown to age gracefully as the decades pass. But then how could it be otherwise? The monarch is far better known through newspaper photographs and television, so the public knew what Elizabeth looked like. Even more people saw her every day on their stamps, coinage, and bank notes. For a while, the Post Office and Royal Mint attempted to preserve her original idealized appearance.

52. Stamps and currency from early in Elizabeth's reign



Then in 1980, the authorities had another thought, and put more mature depictions of the monarch on the currency. In Britain, however, the changes were relatively subtle; the Commonwealth countries allowed a much greater range, as in the banknotes shown here. The middle one is the slightly-more-mature British version; bottom left is Canada; I am not sure where the top right one comes from, but it is equally honest. And I found a website that wouldn't let me in, but teases with the Queen shown at three quite different ages in currency from three different countries.

53. [The Queen on banknotes, all mature](#)

54. [The Queen on banknotes, at three different ages](#)

55. [Portraits by Pietro Annigoni \(1954\) and Michael Leonard \(1986\)](#)

Back now to the painted portraits. My favorite of them in the semi-profile from 1954 by **Pietro Annigoni** (1910–88), perhaps because its elegance so perfectly captured what we all felt back then: a new age characterized by youth and elegance. If I'd known anything about art history then, I'd have said he was channeling the purity of the early Italian Renaissance. And if I'd known what I now know after preparing this class, I'd be pretty sure he was also responding to that Winterhalter portrait of Queen Victoria in much the same vein. [Now compare it to the 1986 portrait by Michael Leonard](#) (1933–2023). They could hardly be more different. The Annigoni is beautiful, but remote. The Leonard portrait looks almost like a photograph, a more democratic medium. The Queen is seated on a [relatively] simple sofa in a [relatively] simple room, addressing us frankly and directly, much as she regularly did on television. One of her corgis is beside her to break the ice, and further soften the image.

And it needed softening. As her reign went on, this remoteness became a disadvantage; many people were beginning to ask whether the Royal Family was still relevant. At or near the top of the British charts in 1977, the Silver Jubilee year, was a song by the **Sex Pistols** called *God Save the Queen*. And it was not positive at all. Despite the huge sales it generated in the shops, it was banned by both the BBC and ITV. Here is a remix of the opening; I have added the words.

56. [Sex Pistols: God Save the Queen, opening](#)

Some of those shots were of the Royal Yacht *Britannia* passing under Tower Bridge. The size of a destroyer, the Royal Yacht was a conspicuous expense that was really only used for overseas visits (and not all of those). Those of you who have been watching *The Crown*—an almost unimaginable form of portraiture of a living monarch in any previous age, and still pretty hard to believe in this one—may remember the scene where the Queen (**Imelda Staunton**, but there were two other actors before her, **Claire Foy** and **Olivia Colman**) asks the Prime Minister **John Major** (**Johnny Lee Miller**) for money for her refurbishment, and is politely turned down.

57. [The Royal Yacht Britannia](#)

58. [The Crown, royal yacht scene](#)

I still find it incredible that *The Crown* was made at all. But **Peter Morgan** (1963– ), the writer, had already had a trial run with his 2006 film *The Queen* and then the 2013 stage play, *The Audience*. When **Laurence Housman** wrote a play about Queen Victoria, *Victoria Regina*, in 1934, he could get it

produced on Broadway, but had to wait until 1937 before it could be seen in London because of a prohibition against putting any monarch onto the stage until 100 years after their accession. But **Helen Mirren** took the role of the still-very-much-living Queen in the film and again in the play, which is basically a one-woman show with walk-on parts for most of the Prime Ministers in her long reign. I am going to end with four short clips from different productions of the show: the teaser for the Broadway production with Mirren; a scene from early in the play at the TimeLine Theatre in Chicago where **Winston Churchill** explains to the young Queen (**Janet Ulrich Brooks**) how the process works; a later scene from the London production when **Kristin Scott-Thomas** has taken over the leading role and congratulates **David Cameron** on winning a surprise re-election; and the final moment of the original production, again with Mirren.

59. Montage of scenes from *The Audience*

60. Class title 3 (*The Audience* poster)