

# Portraits: More than Paint



## 2. Her Royal Majesty

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BY FOCUSING ENTIRELY ON BRITISH QUEENS in this class, we address two separate areas of concern. One is how the artist may balance the depiction of the monarch as an individual against the need to create a political statement of her symbolic role as head of state. While certain factors are the same for all rulers, we shall find that portraitists of Elizabeth I faced issues that did not apply to Victoria or Elizabeth II, and vice-versa.

The second purpose of this class is to show how many different ways there are of creating a portrait or its equivalent. Painted portraits obviously, of all three. But also miniatures, sculpture, coinage, poetry and music, and later photography, film, and opera. So many are the possibilities, in fact, that we cannot sample them all; for example, the many composers and poets depicting the first Queen Elizabeth allegorically as the *Fairie Queene* or *Gloriana* can get no more than a mention, and sculpture gets short shrift throughout. *rb.*

[Note that as we shall browse numerous portraits of each queen, most individual artists are not listed below.]

### A. The Queen's Mask

There are many portraits of Queen Elizabeth I, made by many different artists. The question of capturing a perfect likeness, though, is tempered by the need to show her with the symbols of her virginity and might, and blessed with the appearance of eternal youth.

**Effigy** of Elizabeth I in Westminster Abbey

**Portraits** of Elizabeth I at various ages

***The Armada Portrait*** (exhibition, Queen's House, Greenwich)

♪ **Videos:** Mary Beard and Mat Collishaw (Greenwich)

- ♪ **Video:** Elizabeth's makeup
- ♪ **Film:** Cate Blanchett in *The Virgin Queen* (1998)

## B. The Fallen Hero

We expand the subject to include portrait-equivalents made at a later date, through creative non-fiction, film, and opera. The linking thread is the relationship between Elizabeth I and Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, the last of her favorites.

- Hilliard:** various miniatures
- Hilliard:** *Portrait of a Young Man* (Essex?), London V&A
- Gheeraerts:** *The Earl of Essex* (c.1596, London NPG)
- Strachey:** *Elizabeth and Essex* (1928), various excerpts
- ♪ **Byrd:** *Pavan*
- ♪ **Film:** Cate Blanchett in *The Golden Age* (2007)
- ♪ **Film:** Bette Davis in *Elizabeth and Essex* (1939)
- ♪ **Britten:** *Gloriana*, Essex's intrusion (film, Josephine Barstow)
- ♪ **Donizetti:** *Roberto Devereux* (NY Met, Sondra Radvanovsky)
- ♪ **Britten:** *Gloriana*, ending (Royal Opera, Susan Bullock)

## C. The Family Album

Portraits from the first half of Victoria's reign show her (in contrast to Elizabeth I) as a wife and mother, not so different from her subjects. She went into virtual seclusion after the death of Prince Albert in 1861, but still served as a symbol of Britain and her growing Empire.

- Winterhalter:** *The Family of Queen Victoria* (1846, Royal Coll.)
- Portraits** of Queen Victoria at different ages
- Von Angeli:** *Queen Victoria*, 1875 and 1899
- Brocky:** Chalk portraits of Victoria and Albert (1841)
- Winterhalter:** *The First of May, 1851* (Royal Collection)
- Thorburn:** *Queen Victoria with Children* (1847, Royal Coll.)
- Barker:** *The Secret of England's Greatness* (1863, London NPG)
- ♪ **Video:** Tribute to Queen Victoria (unknown compiler)
- ♪ **Film:** Judi Dench in *Victoria and Abdul* (2017)

## D. The Burden of Tradition

Elizabeth II was the first sovereign to be more recognizable in photos, film, television, currency, and stamps than through painted portraits. So traditional artists faced the problem of making their depictions relevant in an age when the relevance of the monarchy itself was coming into question.

- Festing:** *The Queen at the Royal Hospital Chelsea* (1998)
- Portraits** of Queen Elizabeth II through the ages.
- Queen Elizabeth** in UK Stamps and currency
- Queen Elizabeth** on Commonwealth banknotes
- Annigoni:** *Queen Elizabeth II* (1954, Fishmongers' Hall)
- Leonard:** *Queen Elizabeth II* (1986, London NPG)
- ♪ **Sex Pistols:** *God Save the Queen*, opening
- ♪ **Morgan:** *The Crown*, season 5, royal yacht scene (2022)
- ♪ **Morgan:** *The Audience* (2013), various productions

Heinrich von **Angeli** (1840–1925, *Austrian painter*), Pietro **Annigoni** (1910–88, *Italian painter*), Benjamin **Britten** (1913–76, *English composer*), Charles **Brocky** (1807–55, *Hungarian painter*), William **Byrd** (1542–1623, *English composer*), Gaetano **Donizetti** (1797–1848, *Italian composer*), Edward **Elgar** (1857–1934, *English composer*), Andrew **Festing** (1941–, *English painter*), Marcus **Gheeraerts** the Younger (1561–1636, *Flemish painter*), George **Gower** (1540–96, *English painter*), Nicholas **Hilliard** (1547–1619, *English painter*), Michael **Leonard** (1933–2023, *English painter*), Peter **Morgan** (1963–, *English writer*), Thomas **Morley** (1557–1602, *English composer*), Lytton **Strachey** (1880–1932, *English writer*), Robert **Thorburn** (1818–85, *Scottish painter*), Franz Xaver **Winterhalter** (1805–73, *German painter*), NC **Wyeth** (1882–1944, *American painter*)

The course website is [www.brunyate.com/portraits](http://www.brunyate.com/portraits)  
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