

Chaste Painting: Elizabeth Russell's Theatres of Memory

PATRICIA PHILLIPPY

I. The Staine of Paint

On the face of it, Elizabeth Cooke Hoby Russell does not seem to have been a woman likely to paint. As daughters of Sir Anthony Cooke, tutor to King Edward VI, Russell and her sisters benefited from the humanist education received by the young monarch and his sister, the future Queen Elizabeth I.¹ Married first to Sir Thomas Hoby, and secondly to Lord John Russell, she actively promoted the reformed religion which led her father into exile during Queen Mary's reign and was forged into policy early in Elizabeth's with the help of her father and brothers-in-law William Cecil and Nicholas Bacon.² In her youth, Russell translated Bishop John Ponet's treatise on the Eucharist, publishing it in her old age in 1605.³ Reluctant that "any of [her] father's blood should be infected with bad religion," Russell offered in 1604 to take her grandniece Frances Cecil into her home, where, she vowed, "I will use her as I would mine own, and

¹ See Elizabeth Cooke Hoby Russell, *The Writings of an English Sappho*, ed. Patricia Phillippy (Toronto: CRRS/Iter, 2011), 1–22. All subsequent references are to this edition and appear parenthetically. On Cooke, see Marjorie McIntosh, "Sir Anthony Cooke: Tudor Humanist, Educator, and Religious Reformer," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 119 (1975): 233–50.

² See Patrick Collinson, *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London: Continuum, 1993), 135–36; and McIntosh, "Sir Anthony Cooke."

³ John Ponet, *A Way of Reconciliation of a Good and Learned Man*, trans. Elizabeth Russell (London: Robert Barker, 1605); in Russell, *Writings*, 318–416.

far as my self doth, she shall see here no bad example of life but with me may learn to know God" (297).⁴ We might expect that Russell's refusal of all things Catholic, her advocacy of reformist doctrine, and her self-fashioning as a humanist would lead her to condemn both the decorative art of painting and the cosmetic adornment of the body — the twin senses current in the term "painting" in Elizabethan England⁵ — as equivalent practices, equally vain and deceptive. She seems unlikely to paint or to be painted.

Yet around the time that she sought to publish her religious beliefs and linguistic accomplishments by bringing her translation to press (and by means of her tutelage of a third generation of Cooke women), Russell commissioned a portrait that still hangs in her former home, Bisham Abbey, Berkshire (figure 1). Portrayed in the widow's weeds that she wore for the last twenty-five years of her life, holding a small devotional text and standing beside a folio Bible with an embroidered cover, Russell is the picture of feminine piety and a formidable woman of property. The Turkish carpet on which she stands and the velvet tablecloth where she rests her hand affirm her material wealth, but Russell emphasizes her intellectual property. She presents herself as a reader and implicitly a writer, by associating needlework with writing,⁶ while a Greek verse from Psalm 55 inscribed on the background asserts her humanist credentials.⁷ Amid these emblematic objects, Russell's painted face is an emblem as well. As is often true in Elizabethan portraiture, the female subject's face is an ideal. Conforming to

⁴ Although Frances' aunt was a suspected convert to Catholicism, Cecil nonetheless placed his daughter with her.

⁵ On painting and cosmetics, see Edith Snook, *Women, Beauty, and Power in Early Modern England: A Feminist Literary History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Patricia Phillippy, *Painting Women: Cosmetics, Canvases, and Early Modern Culture* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); and Farah Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

⁶ See Susan Frye, *Pens and Needles: Women's Textualities in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); and see below.

⁷ Psalm 55:22, "O cast thy burthen upon the Lord, and he shall nourish thee," in Church of England, *The Psalter, or Psalms of David* (London: William Seres, 1563), G1^v–G2.

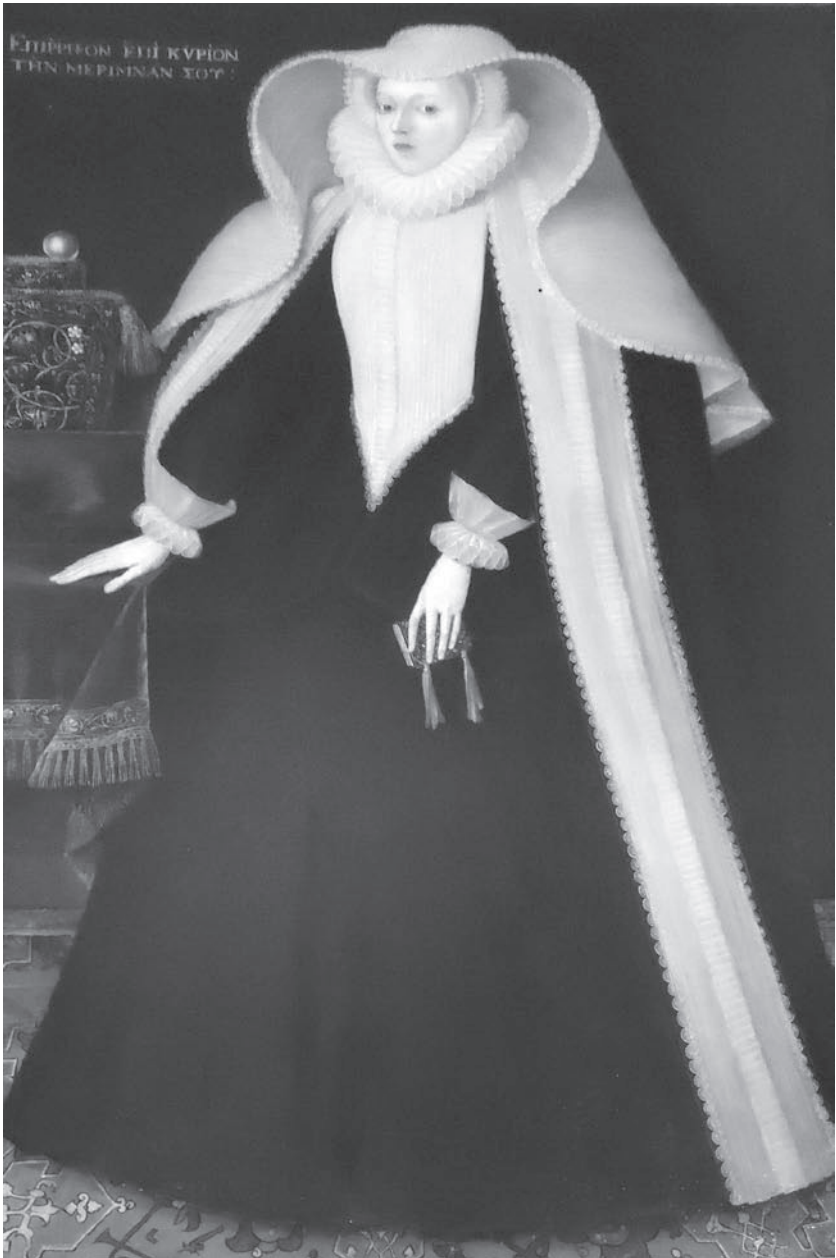


Figure 1. Circle of Robert Peake, *Elizabeth Cooke Hoby Russell* (ca. 1600). Bisham Abbey, Berkshire. Author's photograph.

ideal standards of feminine beauty, Russell's ruby lips, cherry cheeks, and reddish-gold curls belie her age (she was between sixty and sixty-five), but create an image of transparent beauty that implies her virtue and integrity.⁸ Glossed by visual-verbal emblems, Russell's visage argues a chaste alliance between character and appearance. She is essentially what she seems.

Russell's redemptive portrayal of a woman's painted face responds to a complex field of Elizabethan attitudes toward painting and images. The portrait is a positive intervention in the discourses of cosmetics, conducted, for the most part, by men who shared Russell's Puritanism. Grounded on Tudor iconoclasm, invectives against cosmetics compared the severed bonds between inward essence and outward form in the woman's painted face to Catholic "paintings and statues, gilded, like whores."⁹ Suspicious of idols, which seduce the senses with beautiful but empty images, reformed writers condemn painting as false. At the same time, confident that visible signs, correctly read, reveal invisible substances, they regard cosmetic practices as proof of moral corruption. In a chapter entitled "That Painting is Lying," translated from Coignet's *Politique Discourses upon Trueth and Lying*, Russell's son and pupil Sir Edward Hoby voices the reformed opinion of the twin arts of painting, conflating the two:

For as much as . . . all disguising hath beene accounted odious;
It is not without cause that sundrye have blamed and found
fault with paynting, which . . . proceedeth . . . from the Divel a
lyar, and deceiver. . . [S]o doeth painting betoken a diseased
soule marked with adulterie, as Jezebel was founde fault with

⁸ Russell's portrait adopts the ideal of feminine beauty current in the period: see Elizabeth Cropper, "On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style," *Art Bulletin* 58 (1976): 374–94; and Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977). This ideal is indebted to the neo-Platonic notion that "beautie is alwayes good." See Thomas Hoby's trans., *The Courtyer of Count Baldessar Castilio* (London: William Seres, 1561), Tt4–Uu2v. Hoby's translation appeared during his marriage to Russell, and she referred to it frequently: see *Writings*, 182–84, 203–4, 243–44, 262–63, and 289–90.

⁹ Quoted in Huston Diehl, "Graven Images: Protestant Emblem Books in England," *Renaissance Quarterly* 39 (1986): 55. See also Phillippy, *Painting Women*, 133–61.

and punished. . . . And Homer speakeing of a peece of yuorie that was coloured red, writeth, that it was poluted with a staine. A man may rather say so by ones face.¹⁰

While Russell's portrait displays the same confidence in the potency of signs, she guarantees a reliable link between surface and substance by supplementing fragile painted images with authorizing texts. Figure and motto together produce an ideal beauty. The painting accords with Russell's reformed view of sacramental forms: her face is a true and legible sign of inward virtue, as the sacraments are visible signs recalling an invisible spirit.¹¹

Russell's restoration of painting was not unique. Directing sacred images toward civil ends, reformers repaired deceptive visual surfaces by anchoring them in authorizing words.¹² Despite her Puritan leanings, Russell made wide use of the art of painting in various media throughout her life. Concerned to display "no bad example of life," she would not have altered her face with paint (although she may have used wholesome, medicinal cosmetics and waters that were staples of a woman's toilette).¹³ Yet the works examined here present figures of feminine beauty and self-creation in terms that challenge proscriptions of both arts of painting. Focusing on two court entertainments authored or "devised"¹⁴ by

¹⁰ Matthieu Coignet, *Politique Discourses upon Trueth and Lying*, trans. Edward Hoby (London: John Windet for Ralfe Newberie, 1586), 184–85.

¹¹ See Diehl, "Graven Images," 55–58.

¹² See Jennifer Woodward, *The Theatre of Death: The Ritual Management of Royal Funerals* (London: Boydell and Brewer, 1997); and Tara Hamling, *Decorating the 'Godly' Household: Religious Art in Post-Reformation Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010) on painting in Protestant — though rarely in Puritan — homes.

¹³ See Snook, *Women, Beauty, and Power*, 21–62.

¹⁴ For persuasive arguments that individuals who instigate texts or performances should be considered authors, see J. Leeds Barroll, *Anna of Denmark, Queen of England: A Cultural Biography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2001), esp. 74–116; Clare McManus, *Women on the Renaissance Stage: Anna of Denmark and Female Masquing in the Stuart Court (1590–1619)* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); and Peter Davidson and Jane Stevenson, "Elizabeth I's Reception at Bisham (1592): Elite Women as Writers and Devisers," in *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Queen*

Russell — the Bisham entertainment for Queen Elizabeth I (1592) and *The Masque of Eight Ladies* (1600) — I describe her engagements with the material languages of painting, masquing, and embroidery, related modes of signification, each tied to femininity through their shared physicality. Women, like superficial idols, were associated with the body, while men were allotted the intellectual and spiritual depth of the soul.¹⁵ Embracing this materiality, Russell innovatively adapts the reformist treatment of images current in early modern emblem theory to a recuperative reading of feminine beauty and female authorship. I trace this figurative strategy through Russell's sacramental theology in her treatise on the Eucharist and into the imagery of her funeral monument, arguing that her visual-verbal productions and performances, all of which body forth meaning through the interplay of picture and word,¹⁶ advance her social, political, and religious agendas. Russell's entertainments endorse "disguysing" to redeem images for the reformed woman writer. If painting threatens to pollute body and spirit "with a staine," Russell's chaste painting uses the union of body and soul — in the emblem, the sacrament, or the female face — to dispel the dangers posed by the odious pictures and practices of paint.

This study has three goals. First, I show that Russell's fluid deployment of visual-verbal signs across a wide collection of social performances and representations is a potent example of an early modern woman's appropriation of a figurative mode (emblematics) most often associated with men. Although provisionally licensed to employ visual imagery, *women* stood in a difficult relation to images because the ubiquitous merger of the arts of painting provoked suspicions of women's deceptive

Elizabeth I, ed. Jayne Elisabeth Archer, Elizabeth Goldring, and Sarah Knight (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 207–26.

¹⁵ See Phillippy, *Painting Women*, 4–18 and 98–108; Alan R. Young, "The Emblematic Art of Ben Jonson," *Emblematica* 6 (1992): 17–37; McManus, *Women on the Renaissance Stage*, 13–14 and 184–88; and, for a theoretical grounding, Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), 35–44.

¹⁶ I am indebted to Chris Laoutaris for this formulation and for his insightful reading of an earlier draft of this paper, which pointed out the continuities between Russell's figurative methods and symbol theory.

practices and appearances. This portrait of Russell's vindication of painting with the approved imagery of emblems may prompt studies of this strategy in other early modern women's works. Secondly, concentrating on images of female sovereignty, authorship, and self-creation in Russell's court entertainments, I broaden the critical view of Elizabethan women's limited presence and self-representation in dramatic performances. Specifically, I argue that Russell's *Masque of Eight Ladies* was an occasion for women's speech within a courtly entertainment that predates this phenomenon's accepted inaugural event by nearly two decades. Finally, as a preface and invitation to future work, I approach funeral monuments as primary sites for emblematic mergers of word and image in order to outline Russell's use of this figurative mode to underwrite her effigial portrait. The semi-sacred, semi-public spaces of family chapels are theatres of memory, where the essential qualities of the dead are legible and preserved.

II. The Theatre of Signs

Given Edward Hoby's censure of painting as proceeding "from the Diuel," his decision to sit for a portrait (figure 2) may be surprising. It is possible, of course, that Hoby did not share his source's view of painting, or that in the three years between the portrait and his published translation, his view had changed. It is more likely, however, that the nature of the likeness agreed with Hoby's reformed beliefs. In this "*impresa* portrait," an emblematic Hoby is placed amid the symbols of his identity. His coat of arms appears to the left of his armored figure, while in the vignette on the right, a woman emerges from a castle, carrying the motto, "*Reconduntur non retunduntur*" (Laid aside but not blunted) (figure 3). The instruments of Hoby's military career lie on the ground, discarded. The gold lettering on the background reads, "Ano dni 1583 / Aetatis sua 23."¹⁷ Like his mother's, Hoby's painted face is glossed by visual-verbal signs.

As a genre, the *impresa* portrait draws upon heraldry and printed emblem books, giving color to the woodcut and engraved images in pub-

¹⁷ See Alan R. Young, *The English Tournament Imprese* (New York: AMS Press, 1988), 6–7.



Figure 2. Unknown Artist, *Sir Edward Hoby* (1583). © National Portrait Gallery, London.

lished collections. Alciato's *Emblemata* (1531) codified the tripartite structure of the emblem, in which picture and motto work together to produce a meaning summarized in an accompanying verse. Also comprised of three elements, the *impresa* is a more difficult, erudite form.¹⁸ William Camden explains, "an imprese . . . is a device in picture with his Mote, or Word,

¹⁸ N.W., in the preface to Samuel Daniel's *Worthy Tract of Paulus Jovius* (London: Simon Waterson, 1585), *5^v, states that *impresa* evolved from hieroglyphs, both being rooted in essential truths or Ideas, and from these developed, "Coates of Armes, Insignia, Ensignes . . . Emblemes and Devices." On early modern hieroglyphics, see E. H.



Figure 3. *Sir Edward Hoby* (detail). © National Portrait Gallery, London.

borne by noble and learned personages, to notifie some particular conceit of their owne: as Emblemes . . . doe propound some generall instruction to all.”¹⁹ When Ben Jonson (Camden’s student and friend) describes the components of the masque as body, consisting of the “magnificence of

Gombrich, “Icones Symbolicae: The Visual Image in Neo-Platonic Thought,” *JWCI* 11 (1948): 163–92.

¹⁹ William Camden, *Remaines Concerning Britain* (London: Simon Waterson and Robert Clavell, 1605), 158.

outward celebration or show,” and soul, “the inward parts . . . grounded upon antiquity and solid learning,”²⁰ he echoes emblem theory, which sees the picture as body, text as soul, and “the essence or meaning [as] a certain product . . . derived from that third source which is already comprised of the soul and the body.”²¹

This cooperation of body and soul occurs frequently in Russell’s varied corpus, often but not exclusively in heraldic ceremonies and commemorative forms. The account of Thomas Hoby’s funeral, orchestrated by his widow, notes a payment to the painter Robert Greenwood for a “standard of the hobby volant, in proper color black and brownish-breasted . . . and his word, *disce mori*, of 4 yard[s] e[ve]n in length and figured with a difference a son” (*Writings*, 62). Hoby’s true identity is announced by the juxtaposition of his picture, the hobby hawk (a homonymic image of the family name) and his word, the Protestant commonplace “learn to die.” The word painted with John Russell’s arms on the ephemeral cloth standard carried in his funeral procession — “*In Alto requies*” — is also carved in marble on his tomb in Westminster Abbey (*Writings*, 138 and 174).

It is not coincidental that these uses of *imprese* occur in acts of commemoration. Memory was central to the purpose of emblematic forms and was the feature that made them useful to reformers.²² As Russell’s nephew Sir Francis Bacon observed, “Embleme reduceth conceits intellectuall to Images sensible, which strike the Memorie more.”²³ As aids to memory, emblems remind the viewer of what is not visible, much as, in the reformed view, sacraments are signs recalling God’s covenant but not containing divine presence. Emblematic and sacramental figures mirror each other in function and in nature. Thomas Jenner’s emblem depicting “The foolish-

²⁰ Ben Jonson, *Hymenaei*, in *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques*, ed. Stephen Orgel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 76.

²¹ Abraham Fraunce, *Symbolicae Philosophae*, ed. John Manning (New York: AMS Press, 1991), 8–9.

²² Emblem books first appeared during the Reformation. Alciati, a teacher of Calvin’s in Bourges, printed his *Emblematica* in Augsburg and Paris, “both centers of Protestant agitation.” See Diehl, “Graven Images,” 51–52.

²³ Francis Bacon, *Of the Proficiency and Advancement of Learning* (London: Thomas Purfoot and Thomas Creede for Henry Tomes, 1605), Pp2^v.

ness of transubstantiation” compares the commemorative Communion to mourning rings: “If to remember [Christ], then he’s not there; / Thus Rings for absent Friends we use to weare.”²⁴ Abraham Fraunce, explicating the etymology of *impresa* in the verb *impredere* (to undertake), describes this “combination of figure and word [as] a sort of sacrament [*quasi sacramentum*],” an oath or covenant binding the inventor to the promised course.²⁵

Russell’s exposition of the nature of the Eucharist in her translation of Ponet’s *Way of Reconciliation of a Good and Learned Man* describes the figurative understanding involved in the true faith as a kind of reformist emblematics. The sacrament consists of two aspects, “the outward sign” and “the inward virtue,” appealing to the “carnal” and the “spiritual” understanding, respectively. But the figure “comprehendeth them both.” She explains:

the figure [*figura*] hath otherwhile relation to the outward similitude, otherwhile to the virtue inwardly hid. . . . For both because the bread is a figure of the true body, it is justly called his body, and much more because it hath the lively force of the same joined thereto, but in especial, because it comprehendeth both. And that the figure of any thing hath by good reason the name of the same, and is called the thing it self. (386–87)

The sacrament is a *figura*, “the thing it self,” that merges letter and spirit, similitude and virtue.

Russell’s portrait at Bisham (figure 1) is a *figura* in this sense: her similitude and virtue — the image of her face coupled with the idea expressed in her scriptural word — mutually produce an integrated, complete figure of the self. When she turns toward commemorating the visit of Queen Elizabeth I to Bisham in 1592, Russell once again adapts this emblematic approach to depict and embody feminine beauty. Her figurative program aligns art and nature with word and image, and grounds the

²⁴ Thomas Jenner, *The Soules Solace* (London: Thomas Jenner, 1626), F7v; cited in Diehl, “Graven Images,” 60.

²⁵ Fraunce, *Symbolicae*, 24–25.

significance of both pairs in the meaningful body of the queen. While Fraunce claims that “the order of things is a sign of God [and] this whole world . . . a most beautiful theatre, is decorated with His insignia,”²⁶ Russell creates a theatre replete with images ordered by the female author and guaranteed by the essence of the female sovereign.

III. Nature’s *Impresa*

For three days in August 1592, Queen Elizabeth reposed at Bisham Abbey during a regional progress. To welcome the queen, Russell wrote a pastoral entertainment starring her teenage daughters, Bess and Nan Russell, as virginal shepherdesses engaged in the feminine pastime of sewing.²⁷ Russell’s immediate goal was to influence the queen’s verdict on a lawsuit begun with John Russell’s death in 1584 to decide her daughters’ rights to inherit their grandfather’s estate: the girls had been disinherited when John Russell predeceased his father, Francis Russell, 2nd Earl of Bedford. She also hoped to place her daughters as maids of honor to the queen, her best option for arranging their marriages. Although the queen denied Russell’s claim in 1593, Bess became a maid of honor in 1594 and Nan a year later.

The Bisham entertainment convenes the usual inhabitants of the pastoral world, portrayed, with the exception of the shepherdesses, by professional male actors in costumes and make-up.²⁸ As Elizabeth approaches Bisham, coronets sound in the woods, and she encounters a Wild Man who is promptly civilized: “Thus virtue tameth fierceness; beauty, mad-

²⁶ Abraham Fraunce, *Insignium, armorum, emblematum, hieroglyphicorum, et symboliarum, quae ab Italis Imprese nominantur, explicatio: Quae Symbolicae philosophiae postrema pars est* (London: Thomas Orwin, 1588), E1^v: “Ordo rerum indicat deum . . . [et] universam hoc, quasi . . . amphitheatrum suis Insignibus esse illustratum.”

²⁷ The entertainment was printed anonymously from “loose papers” (151). On Russell’s authorship, see Alexandra F. Johnston, “‘The Lady of the farme’: The Context of Lady Russell’s Entertainment of Elizabeth at Bisham, 1592,” *Early Theatre* 5 (2002): 71–85; and Davidson and Stevenson, “Elizabeth I’s Reception at Bisham.”

²⁸ See Gweno Williams, “Translating the Text, Performing the Self,” in *Women and Dramatic Production, 1550–1700*, ed. Alison Findlay and Stephanie Hodgson-Wright, with Gweno Williams (Edinburgh: Pearson, 2000), 39–40.

ness" (152). Next, the queen observes the pastoral god, Pan, wooing the shepherdesses, who display their chastity and wisdom by rejecting Pan's advances and praising Elizabeth's virtues and policies. Finally, Ceres, the goddess of agriculture, arrives in a harvest cart, presents the queen with a jewel, and performs a song of praise and welcome on behalf of "the lady of the farm" (157).

Like any pastoral, Russell's recreates the rural landscape and enriches it with emblems of good government. Through artifice, the defects of nature are repaired: savagery is civilized, illicit desire is transformed to courtly adoration, and the riches of the harvest become Ceres's "crown of wheat-ears with a jewel[,] the ornament of . . . plenty" (156). At Bisham, the translation of nature into a theatre of signs is performed by women. Joint female stewardship of the pastoral landscape lies at the heart of the entertainment's figurative program. This is most clearly staged in the central vignette. When the shepherdesses appear "sewing in their samplers" (152), they work a generative image of the female sovereign. Pan speaks the connection between women's sewing and writing, equating the shepherdesses' rustic craft with the court's trademark poetic form: "How do you burn time, and drown beauty in pricking of clouts, when you should be penning of sonnets?" (152). In the exchange that follows, the creative and transformational powers of the Virgin Queen support Russell's and her daughters' authorship:

Pan: Not for want of matter, but to know the meaning, what is wrought in this sampler?

Syb: The follies of the Gods, who became beasts for their affections.

Pan: What in this?

Isa: The honor of virgins, who became goddesses for their chastity.

Pan: But what be these?

Syb: Men's tongues, wrought all with double stitch, but not one true.

Pan: What these?

Isa: Roses, eglantine, heart's ease, wrought with queen's stitch, and all right.

Pan: I never h[e]ard the odds between men's tongues, and women's. Therefore they may be both double, unless you tell me how they differ.

Syb: Thus: women's tongues are made of the same flesh that their hearts are, and speak as they think. Men's hearts of the flesh that their tongues, and both dissemble. (153–54)

Punning on the names of common embroidery stitches,²⁹ the girls rework eglantine, rose, and heart's ease, all flowers symbolically associated with Elizabeth,³⁰ to authenticate women's speech, writing, and characters. The female body reproduced by "queen's stitch" is not "double" (as men are) but true: the flesh of a woman's tongue and of her heart are the same. As Sybilla explains, this integrity is exemplified in the female body of Elizabeth:

This way cometh the queen of this island, the wonder of the world, and nature's glory, leading affections in fetters, virginity's slaves. . . . In whom nature hath imprinted beauty, not art painted it. . . . By her it is, *Pan*, that all our carts that thou seest are laden with corn when in other countries they are filled with harneys . . . that our rivers flow with fish, theirs with blood. (154–55)

If domestic peace and prosperity are guaranteed by the female sovereign's singular beauty, foreign policy is likewise the fruitful product of the female body politic:

One hand she stretcheth to *France*, to weaken rebels, the other to *Flanders* to strengthen religion; her heart to both countries, her virtues to all. . . . [H]eedless treason goeth headless; and

²⁹ On early modern stitches, see John Taylor, *The Needles Excellency* (London: James Boler, 1631), A1^v.

³⁰ Eglantine figures as one of Elizabeth's flowers in Hilliard's miniature, *Young Man among Roses*: see Strong, *Cult of Elizabeth*, 56–82. Roses refer to the Tudor Rose, while heart's ease or love-in-idleness is famously associated with Elizabeth in William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 2.1.155–74.

close treachery restless; danger looketh pale to behold her majesty; and tyranny blusheth to hear of her mercy. (155)

The red and white imprinted on the queen's receptive face render foreign affairs a matter of uncontrolled countenances: the red of Tyranny's undisguised blush, the white of Danger's blanche. Elizabeth's measured, benevolent policies, moreover, are distinctly reformist: when Edward Vaughan praises Russell's "daily endeavours after divinity . . . at home amongst your household, and abroad amongst the distressed saints," he may use the word "abroad" to signal her support of reformed movements not only in London but overseas as well.³¹ Although Sybilla wishes to the queen's enemies "as many troubles, as the wood hath leaves" (155), the pastoral encourages diplomatic rather than military interventions to spread "the quietness" (155) of Elizabeth's government and the truth of her religion to foreign nations. Russell advocates a diplomacy informed by reformed activism, rooting its legitimacy in the integrated figure of the queen.³² The policies of the Virgin Queen are as spotless and controlled as her face.³³

In method and meaning, the shepherdesses' needlework adapts reformist emblem theory to support and embody women's authorship. Sybilla and Isabel present their embroidered scenes according to the tripartite structure of the emblem: they create pictures and provide verbal glosses for the inquisitive, but incompetent, interpreter Pan. The episode, as Clare McManus writes, "present[s] needlework as a quasi-linguistic

³¹ Peder Palladius, *Introduction into the Books of the Prophets and Apostles*, trans. Edward Vaughan (London: G. S. for William Holme, 1598), A2–A2^v, reprinted in Russell, *Writings*, 269.

³² On women's political agency in the entertainment, see Elizabeth Zeman Kolkovich, "Lady Russell, Elizabeth I, and Female Political Alliances through Performance," *English Literary Renaissance* 39 (2009): 290–314. Russell's evolving militancy in the 1590s reflects her countrymen's exhaustion with the French wars of religion and the Armada war in the Spanish Netherlands. See Paul Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585–1597* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 95–108.

³³ See Anna Riehl, *The Face of Queenship: Early Modern Representations of Elizabeth I* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 123–72, for an insightful reading of the political costs of an uncontrolled countenance.

medium, predicated through gender.”³⁴ Aligning the shepherdesses’ spoken performances with the material languages of embroidery and theatrical performance, the pastoral constitutes what McManus calls “a frail tradition of female voice in Elizabethan entertainments” that prefigured the inaugural moment of women’s speech in a court masque when, in Robert White’s *Cupid’s Banishment* (1617), “Mistress Anna Watkins acted Fortune.”³⁵ As the work of a female writer, however, Russell’s entertainment explores ways to authenticate and empower female self-authorship without the sanctioning script of a male creator. To do so, Russell directs her emblems to a single, defining “third source,” Elizabeth. The queen’s power to validate or annul Russell’s figurative scheme is affirmed by the subtext of the girls’ embroidery: their sampler showing “the follies of the Gods, who became beasts for their affections” alludes to Arachne’s “embroidered web with its heavenly crimes,” a catalogue of beastly shapes assumed by male gods to seduce women, which provoked Athena’s wrath and punishment.³⁶ Russell staves off a similar punitive judgment by the queen, however, by complementing Arachne’s web of masculine crimes with the redemptive picture of the Virgin Queen herself, “the honor of virgins, who became goddesses for their chastity.”

In presenting Elizabeth’s face as a page on which nature imprints beauty, Russell seems at first to discount female agency in terms similar to those employed in the cosmetic debate. Almost universally, these texts describe women as blank canvases, unprinted pages, or lumps of wax, passively receiving impressions from God and men.³⁷ A woman who alters her face with cosmetics is imagined as an irreverent usurper of masculine crea-

³⁴ McManus, *Women on the Renaissance Stage*, 185.

³⁵ See *ibid.*, 164–97, which persuasively argues that White’s masque (in which two of Queen Anna’s god-daughters present embroidered samplers to the queen) is indebted to Russell’s entertainment.

³⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses: Books I-VIII*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, Loeb Classical Library No. 42 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 6:70–145. I am indebted to Chris Laoutaris for pointing out this allusion.

³⁷ See Frances E. Dolan, “Taking the Pencil out of God’s Hand: Art, Nature, and the Face-Painting Debate in Early Modern England,” *PMLA* 108:2 (March 1993): 224–39.

tive prerogative. She is duplicitous and idolatrous. Thomas Tuke laments, “Not *truths*, but *shadowes* of truths shee is furnisht with; with *seeming* truths, and with *substantiall* lies. . . . [S]he is but like a peece of *course cloth* with . . . *a faire die*.³⁸ A beautiful face at once creates and conceals a woman as liar.

Russell’s replacement of painted beauty with nature’s imprint suggests a different relationship between surface and depth, one that involves the materials of the printed text and the methods and assumptions of the emblemist. If image and essence are severed by paint, the impression of ink on the page, like an emblem printed in a book, blends inside and out in a visual-verbal sign that, literally, creates a single image. Because the image is unified and self-identical, if mirrored, on either side of the page, the true character bleeds through. Associating her many images of women’s speech and writing with Elizabeth as a singular figure — a unified and self-identical impression in nature’s book — Russell authenticates the ephemeral appearances of her actors and her text. All women share this singularity, she argues, while duplicity is assigned to men. The shallow flesh of men’s tongues is replicated in their hearts: their glib and oily art bespeaks false, dissembling souls. Women’s faithful hearts, by contrast, are essentially bound to their honest tongues. By nature, women heave their hearts into their mouths.³⁹

For Russell, the beauty imprinted on the queen’s face is a reliable sign of her inner beauty, just as women’s tongues and hearts, composed of the same flesh, are both true. The union of art and nature in Elizabeth’s emblematic face enables Russell to rewrite women’s traditional passivity as objects of creation and to empower women as creators and self-creators. Russell’s gendered relationship to masculine figurative traditions, both emblematics and anti-cosmetic invectives, leads her to treat the material female body as a site of feminine authorship. Crafted by women, Russell’s royal flowers (rose, eglantine, and heart’s ease) are emblems of Elizabeth’s power and authority to control her public display. As part of this recupera-

³⁸ Thomas Tuke, *Treatise Against Painting and Tincturing of Men and Women* (London: Thomas Creed, 1616), 17.

³⁹ William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 1.1.224 and 1.1.93.

tive treatment of women's "disguysing," it is tempting to imagine that Bess and Nan might have worn make-up in their roles as Sybilla and Isabel. Office of Wardrobe and Revels accounts from the 1550s mention having in stock "vermylyon" and "redd leade," both cosmetics used to enhance the reds of women's faces, and ceruse (white lead), used both to whiten the face and as a pigment for painting scenery, props, and pictures.⁴⁰ These accounts suggest a long-standing tradition of cosmetics use in court masques that may have extended to regional entertainments. Although we cannot know whether the girls' theatrical transformation involved make-up as well as costumes, Russell stages a scene that endorses women's self-creation through the approved images presented by their bodies and their texts, in which surface appearances truly reflect the substances within. Bisham is a garden filled with emblems of female authorship: flowers stitched in needlework samplers, wheat ears that become a jewel, the savage tamed by beauty and virtue. Russell creates a golden world of feminine cooperation and stewardship enabled by the queen's figurative power to engender peace and prosperity, craft and cultivation.

IV. The Liberties of her Majesty

Tempering "odious" disguise with the figure of a female sovereign whose beauty is an index of her virtue, the Bisham entertainment takes part in a reformist repudiation of Catholic images and revalidation of painting in the service of "civile disputationes."⁴¹ "By defining acceptable modes for the use of images," Jennifer Woodward explains, "the ruling elite was able to exploit the power of iconography."⁴² Russell's civil program deploys the approved imagery of emblematics to verify the bonds between women's faces, tongues, and hearts in support of an Elizabethan diplomacy aligned with reformist activism. While her chaste painting at Bisham repairs the vexed associations tying images to disguise and disguise to deception,

⁴⁰ Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 317–18.

⁴¹ Richard Haydocke, *A Tracte Containing the Artes of Curious Paintinge* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1598), 26.

⁴² Woodward, *Theatre of Death*, 111.

Russell's second entertainment revisits women's painting under conditions that challenge her correction of shifting appearances through the figurative alignment of surface and depth. In Russell's *Masque of Eight Ladies*, a "word" impossible to script or predict glosses the entertainment, threatening to reveal a corrupt soul beneath the painted face.

On June 16, 1600, Russell once again welcomed Queen Elizabeth to her home, this time in the London precinct of Blackfriars, to celebrate the wedding of her daughter Nan to Henry Somerset, son and heir of the Earl of Worcester. As she had at Bisham, Russell prepared a formal entertainment for the queen.⁴³ In a letter written two days before the wedding, Robert Whyte gives these details of the masque:

There is to be a memorable masque of eight ladies. They have a strange dance newly invented. Their attire is this: each hath a skirt of cloth of silver, a rich waistcoat wrought with silks of gold and silver, a mantle of carnation taffeta cast under the arm, and their hair loose about their shoulders, curiously knotted and interlaced. These are the masquers: my Lady Doritye, Mistress Fitton, Mistress Carey, Mistress Onslow, Mistress Southwell, Mistress Bes[s] Russell, Mistress Darcy, and my Lady Blanche Somerset. These eight dance to the music of Apollo's bringing, and there is a fair speech that makes mention of the ninth, much to her honor and praise.⁴⁴

A week after the event, Whyte continues:

After supper the masque came in as I writ in my last; and delicate it was to see eight ladies so prettily and richly attired.

⁴³ The thematic continuities between the masque and the Bisham entertainment support Russell's authorship of both. She certainly had creative control of the masque, as she did of every aspect of the wedding.

⁴⁴ See Russell, *Writings*, 273–74. Subsequent citations are to this edition. The manuscripts are Centre for Kentish Studies, De Lisle MS U1475, C12/253, June 14, 1600; and De Lisle MS U1475, C12/254, June 23, 1600, both printed in Arthur Collins, ed., *Letters and Memorials of State* (London: T. Osborne, 1746), 2:201–5.

Mistress Fitton l[e]d, and after they had done all their own ceremony, the eight lady masquers chose eight ladies more to dance the measures. Mistress Fitton went to the queen and wooed her to dance. Her Majesty asked what she was. Affection she said. Affection said the queen. Affection is false. Yet her Majesty r[o]se and danced. (275)

The Masque of Eight Ladies may have been memorable because it defied the “male monopoly” on masquing prior to the arrival of Queen Anna in 1603.⁴⁵ The female cast, all maids of honor to the queen, recreates the Privy Chamber as Parnassus. If joint female stewardship of the pastoral landscape is the central theme of the Bisham entertainment, the masque at Blackfriars repeats this theme in relation to the urban and court settings that were also, literally and figuratively, sustained by the queen. As former monastic properties, both Bisham Abbey and Blackfriars were “liberties,” properties that were self-governing by royal grant. The images of female stewardship in Russell’s writings reflect her status as the sole legal authority in her liberty, a privilege assumed with widowhood and guaranteed by the queen. On one occasion, she complains of a dispute with county officials in Bisham: “the warrant had no authority in my liberty . . . [n]either shrive nor any bailiff hath to deal in the manor of Bisham” (119–20). On another, she requests the presence of “a steward and a baily in the Blackfriars to maintain the liberties of her Majesty, and to keep all things in order which now for want of a governor are too bad out of course” (216).⁴⁶ The female masquers, like Russell’s daughters at Bisham, inhabit a symbolic world governed by the female sovereign and nurtured by her female subjects and poets.

⁴⁵ Barroll, *Anna of Denmark*, 76. Most recent work on female masques begins with Queen Anna’s performances. On women’s participation in earlier theatrical forms, see Williams, “Translating the Text;” and Pamela Brown and Peter Parolin, eds., *Women Players in England, 1500–1660: Beyond the All-Male Stage* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

⁴⁶ Although she made use of elite theatrical forms, Russell led a successful campaign to prevent James Burbage from opening a public theatre in Blackfriars in 1596 (*Writings*, 265–67). The King’s Men began using the theatre in 1608.

In the absence of a complete text of *The Masque of Eight Ladies*, we must speculate on the theatrical devices it employed. Prior to the introduction of shifting scenery in Jonson's 1605 *Masque of Blackness*, masques were enacted on pageant cars (such as the cart in which Ceres rides in the Bisham entertainment) or simply on the floor.⁴⁷ The staging of Samuel Daniel's *Vision of Twelve Goddesses*, the first Jacobean masque and one that appropriated Elizabethan mythologies and masquing techniques, suggests that of Russell's masque. Daniel's goddesses descend from a stationary mountain, move through the hall carrying allegories of their virtues, and lead the audience in dance.⁴⁸ If Russell's masque used similar scenery, limited space was available for it: Whyte observed before the wedding, "it is feared that the house in Blackfriars wilbe too little for such a company" (271). Whyte's account of the masquers' attire, "delicate . . . to see," and their hair "loose about their shoulders" but "curiously knotted and interlaced," speaks to the expense and exoticism of the performance, and also to its eroticism.⁴⁹

But Whyte's brief account leaves many questions unanswered. Most crucially, we are left to wonder who performed the "fair speech" in praise of the ninth muse, Elizabeth. Although "acting — playing a role other than one's own — was out of the question: hence all speaking parts in masques were performed by professional actors,"⁵⁰ Whyte tells us that Apollo provided *music* for the measures, while the female masquers performed "all their own ceremony." For the planned marriage of her son Thomas Posthumous Hoby in 1591, Russell reported that she had "appointed your brother's [Edward Hoby's] musicians, have heard them and given the master 5s earnest" (108). When Posthumous' wedding finally took place at Blackfriars in 1596, Russell resolved "not to make any solemnity, but

⁴⁷ McManus, *Women on the Renaissance Stage*, 97.

⁴⁸ Samuel Daniel, *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* (London: T. C. for Simon Waterson, 1604).

⁴⁹ Loose hair could be seen as virginal, but the "curiosity" of the masquers' interlaced hair, especially in a theatrical context, accentuates the masque's erotic display of feminine adornment. Elaborate hairstyles, cosmetics, and rich attire were all targets, often in combination, for censure by polemicists. See Snook, *Women, Beauty, and Power*.

⁵⁰ Orgel, ed., *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques*, 5.

only a private meeting of good and honorable friends" (190).⁵¹ Nan's "great marriage,"⁵² however, was intended to showcase mother and daughters, as the Bisham entertainment had done. Russell's masque for the occasion looks backward to Bess's and Nan's spoken performances at Bisham, which, as McManus has shown, prefigure the inaugural speech of a female masquer in the thematically and formally similar *Cupid's Banishment*.⁵³ If, at Blackfriars, Apollo spoke while the muses were silent, Russell's masque might be seen as a "private, patriarchally supervised entertainment"⁵⁴ in which silent female dancers "prettily" adorn a script performed by an authoritative, governing male. Imagining the female masquers as speakers, however, shifts the gender of the masque's content and voice to discount male authorship and celebrate female creativity, including women's productive use of disguise. Female masquers imitating and inspired by female muses are given voice by a female writer. They perform, moreover, before a female sovereign in the queen's liberty and Russell's domain, where the monarch's presence is a public approbation of the ceremony and its producer. The idea of the masque as a "private," domestic affair profoundly misrepresents Russell's social performance. "The entertainment was great and plentiful," Whyte recalls, "and my Lady Russell much commend[ed] for it" (276). If we look for a patriarch to supervise the festivities, we find that Russell manages that aspect of the wedding as well. She appoints her nephew Robert Cecil "as my husband to command as the master of my house," wittily claiming ownership of the event for herself: "You thought that I should never have bidden you to my marriage, but now you see it pleaseth God otherwise" (254–55).

Whyte's description of Apollo as a musician rather than a speaker, the Russell girls' spoken performances at Bisham, and a second contemporary account by John Chamberlain, who writes to Dudley Carleton, "I doubt not but you have heard of the great marriage at the Lady Russells

⁵¹ Russell tried and failed to arrange Posthumous' marriage to Margaret Dakins in 1591. Margaret married Thomas Sidney, and only agreed to marry Posthumous after Sidney's death in 1596.

⁵² John Chamberlain to Dudley Carleton, TNA SP 12/275, 20^v, June 24, 1600.

⁵³ See McManus, *Women on the Renaissance Stage*, 164–97.

⁵⁴ Barroll, *Anna of Denmark*, 76.

. . . and of the maske of eight maides of honour and other gentlewomen in the name of the muses that came to seeke one of their fellows,"⁵⁵ collectively invite a view of the masque performed in the name of the muses as one also performed in the voices of the muses. The "fair speech" seems more properly to belong to the muses who seek their fellow than to the god of song who provides music for their measures. If they did speak, the masquers would have used cosmetics rather than donning vizards which, by covering their faces, would have marred their speech.⁵⁶ While Jonson's *Masque of Blackness* departed from earlier practice in presenting female masquers in blackface make-up rather than in vizards,⁵⁷ this inaugural use of blackface does not rule out the possibility that masquers wore cosmetics rather than masks at a much earlier moment. As Twycross and Carpenter have shown, masks and make-up were conflated from the medieval period forward. Payments to "a peyntour for peynting Herodes face"⁵⁸ could as easily refer to a vizard as the actor's skin, since "face" was routinely used to signify "mask." This ambiguity points to the fact that wearing a mask and painting one's face were considered to be analogous, and equally transgressive, acts. Puritan critics of masquing reviled the "dis-figuration" of God's natural beauty wrought by both practices. Like women painters, "maskers arrogantly set themselves up as creators, abrogating to themselves the proper function of God."⁵⁹

In response to the perceived dangers of women's self-creation, Russell presents her female masquers as a generative emblem, a material text consisting of picture and word (in Jonson's analogy, body and soul) that

⁵⁵ John Chamberlain to Dudley Carleton, TNA SP 12/275, 20^v, June 24, 1600.

⁵⁶ Virginia Vaughan, *Performing Blackness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10, suggests that the replacement of vizards by cosmetics on the public stage in the 1580s may have been prompted by speaking parts. See also Sophie Tomlinson, *Women in Stuart Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 21, on vizards and "silent rhetoric."

⁵⁷ For an insightful discussion, see Andrea Stevens, "Mastering Masques of Blackness: Jonson's *Masque of Blackness*, the Windsor text of *Gipsies Metamorphosed*, and Brome's *The English Moor*," *ELR* 39 (2009): 396–426.

⁵⁸ Twycross and Carpenter, *Masks and Masking*, 329.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 303.

points toward a “third source,” Elizabeth. Although we have no description of Russell’s *imprese*, Jonson’s *Masque of Blackness* uses symbolic forms in a way (common “in comedies or tragedies when actors’ faces are concealed by masks and . . . veiled by some allegorical dress”) ⁶⁰ that implies Russell’s usage. Jonson’s female masquers “advanced severally” in pairs, “presenting their fans, in one of which were inscribed their mixed names, in the other a mute hieroglyphic expressing their mixed qualities.” ⁶¹ For example, Queen Anna (Euphoris, or abundance) and the Countess of Bedford (Aglaia, or splendor) advance holding a picture of “a golden tree laden with fruit,” a symbol of fertility. ⁶² Since, at Blackfriars, Queen Elizabeth was prompted to ask Mary Fitton “what she was,” Russell’s identically-clad masquers must have been differentiated from each other with emblems or *imprese*, so that each represented simultaneously one of the eight muses (with Elizabeth as the ninth) and one of eight allegorical traits appropriate to marriage. Elizabeth’s question also implies that their *imprese* were obscure. Emblem theorists distinguished between “devices” used in tournaments and masques and “true *imprese*.” Since devices are ephemeral, created for a single occasion and seen only once, they must be easy to interpret. Because *imprese* are more permanent (they may be carved, painted, or printed) they must be more difficult. ⁶³ At the same time, an *impresa* should “be not obscure, that it neede a Sibilla to enterprete it, nor so apparent that every rusticke may understand it.” ⁶⁴ Russell’s devices may have overshot their mark.

Through a productive merger of the material texts of emblematics, masquing, and embroidery, *The Masque of Eight Ladies* constructs a golden world around the recreative figure of the female sovereign. While Russell employed the same strategy at Bisham, the thematic content and social contexts of her masque at Blackfrairs threaten the performance from

⁶⁰ Fraunce, *Symbolicae*, 14–15.

⁶¹ Ben Jonson, *Masque of Blackness*, in Orgel, ed., *Ben Jonson*, 56.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶³ See Denis L. Drysdall, “Samuel Daniel and Abraham Fraunce on the Device and the Emblem,” in *The Art of the Emblem*, ed. Michael Bath, John Manning, and Alan R. Young (New York: AMS Press, 1993), 143–60.

⁶⁴ Daniel, *Worthy Tract*, B3^v.

within and without. The Blackfriars masque alludes to the mythical wedding of Peleus and Thetis, a marriage attended by the gods, at which the muses, as Pindar reports, sing.⁶⁵ Catullus — a poet Russell certainly knew and whom she echoes in another work — divides his narrative of the wedding into two parts, arranged around a central, intractable emblem: “the royal marriage bed” with a “coverlet, broidered with shapes of ancient men, [which] with wondrous art sets forth the worthy deeds of heroes.”⁶⁶ The deed depicted on the coverlet and in the poem’s dazzling *ekphrasis*, however, is Theseus’ unworthy abandonment of Ariadne. Remembering this tale of feminine devotion and masculine infidelity at the heart of the wedding feast (and the wedding night), Catullus demonstrates that “the ideal is never reached,” even in a marriage “above all others the most perfect.”⁶⁷ The spectre of masculine betrayal introduced by Russell’s Catullan subtext threatens the ideal of happy marriage, but beyond this, the embroidered emblem resonates with social and political realities confronting Elizabeth and her court in the last years of her reign. The power of embroidered images to work cultural interventions like that attempted in Russell’s intertextual needlework is clear in a literal marriage bed, “a Bed of State, wrought and embroidered all with gold and silke by the late Queen Marie [Stuart].” William Drummond sent detailed *ekphrases* of the Queen of Scots’ emblems to Ben Jonson, advising him, “the Impressas and Emblems [on this bedspread] will embellish greatly some pages of your Booke, and is worthy of remembrance.” Many of Mary’s *imprese*, as Drummond noticed,

⁶⁵ Pindar, “Pythian Ode 3,” in *Pindar: Olympian Odes, Pythian Odes*, trans. William H. Rice, Loeb Classical Library No. 56 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). James Howell’s *The Nuptials of Peleus and Thetis* (London: Henry Herringman, 1654), performed six times at the Caroline court in Paris, featured speeches by the muses and Apollo. See Alison Findlay, “‘Upon the World’s Stage’: The Civil War and Interregnum,” in *Women in Dramatic Production*, ed. Findlay and Hodgson-Wright, 80–81.

⁶⁶ Catullus, *Catullus, Tibullus, Pervigilium Veneris*, trans. F. W. Cornish, Loeb Classical Library No. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), 64: 46–51. Russell echoes Catullus in a Latin elegy: see *Writings*, 49–50.

⁶⁷ Michael J. Putnam, “The Art of Catullus 64,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 65 (1961): 168.



Figure 4. Mary, Queen of Scots and Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury, *The Marian Hanging* (1570–1585). © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

“seemeth to glance at Queen Elizabeth and herself.”⁶⁸ On the central panel of the Marian Hanging, for example (figure 4), a hand prunes an unfruitful vine growing between two fruit trees beside which are Mary’s arms and *impresa*. The accompanying motto, “*Virescit vulnere virtus*” (Virtue flourishes from its wounds), suggests that “the unfruitful royal branch of the Tudors (Elizabeth) was to be cut down so that the vital branch (Mary) would flourish.”⁶⁹

While the measures concluding Russell’s masque ideally create an interwoven tapestry of female sociability, the queen’s unscripted word, “Affection is false,” threatens Russell’s figurative program in terms that repeat the challenge posed by the Catullan subtext. As if recalling the masculine crime of Theseus, which “express[es] the contrast between vulgarity and chastity,”⁷⁰ Elizabeth’s indictment of Affection glanced, at least in part, toward her recent betrayal by her favorite, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex. Following his unlicensed return from the Irish Campaign in September 1599, he was placed under arrest, and days before Nan Russell’s wedding, on June 5, was formally charged with insubordination.⁷¹ Explaining her harsh treatment of the earl, Elizabeth offered a metaphor: “an unruly Horse must be abated of his Provender, that he may be the easier and better managed.”⁷² The image uncannily recalls Sybilla’s and Isabel’s sampler portraying “the follies of the Gods, who became beasts for their affections.” If the queen’s metaphor echoes the shepherdesses’ censure of men’s dissembling tongues and hearts, it also affirms the link between women’s honest hearts and their truthful tongues, “the honor of virgins,

⁶⁸ Ben Jonson, ed. C.H. Hereford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925–52), 1:208–10. The Bed of State has not survived but it is richly documented: see Michael Bath, *Emblems for a Queen: The Needlework of Mary Queen of Scots* (London: Archetype, 2008), 23–47 and 147–57.

⁶⁹ Susan Watkins and Mark Fiennes, *Mary Queen of Scots* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 187. See also Bath, *Emblems for a Queen*, 58–60. On Mary’s collaborative embroidery with Bess of Hardwick, see Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 30–74.

⁷⁰ Putnam, “The Art of Catullus,” 194.

⁷¹ See ODNB.

⁷² William Camden, *The History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princess Elizabeth* (London: M. Flesher for R. Bentley, 1688), 603.

who became goddesses for their chastity." The queen, as Sybilla claims, "lead[s] affections in fetters, virginity's slaves."

This triumph of virginity over men's false affection, however, issued at the celebration of a wedding, is disheartening at best. The queen's disruptive claim unfolds the masque's memory of failed marriage and infidelity in the contexts of early modern courtship and courtiership, where two possible meanings emerge, each capable of undermining Russell's textual performance as well as her social performances as hostess, widow, courtier, and parent(s) of the bride. Just as the Catullan coverlet envelops the ideal marriage bed in a deflating reminder of the real, the queen's word unravels the romantic dream of marriage, revealing the business of early modern courtship in which affection often had little part. Moreover, spoken to a woman in disguise, the word interrogates the female masquers' engagement in "the remarkable concentration of notorious affairs and secret marriages in the last decade or so" of Elizabeth's reign.⁷³ Affection may be false because women may be false.

As a widow and guardian of two disinherited daughters, Russell worked assiduously to arrange Bess's and Nan's marriages. A husband for Bess, the eldest, was Russell's first priority, and she approached the Earl of Worcester—by proxy, through Robert Cecil—to arrange a match with George Somerset, his eldest son and heir. Negotiations ended with George's death, and shortly afterward, the match was made between Nan and Henry (*Writings*, 204–5 and 250–51). While dynastic interest rather than love was the chief factor influencing Russell's choice of son-in-law, she was also mindful of her daughters' welfare. Exploring a potential match for Bess, she casts marriage as a partnership of affection and government: "I love of life to marry my daughter to a wise man that will love her and govern her in judgment in the fear of God, according to her worth and in all kindness [and] wisdom will deserve her love" (246). Yet as a measured performance in praise of marriage, *The Masque of Eight Ladies* offers an image of a harmonious *female* community that challenges, marginalizes, and elides male rule. Evidence that Russell used her daughters' courtships

⁷³ Paul E. J. Hammer, "Sex and the Virgin Queen: Aristocratic Concupiscence and the Court of Queen Elizabeth I," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 31 (2000), 83.

and Nan's wedding to enhance her reputation and prestige may explain the gendering of her masque: Whyte writes of the elaborate cortege of eighteen coaches with which Russell collected her daughters from court before the wedding that "the like hath not been seen" (271). The portrait gleaned of Russell's self-interested negotiations for her daughters' matches is more oppositional than harmonious. Nan's marriage was managed by her mother, her future father-in-law, and the queen, who acted "in loco parentis."⁷⁴ Assuming the role of wife, Nan would reinforce her own and her mother's social and political alliances, chiefly those between women in the court of a female monarch. Her affections, soon to be restrained by her husband's government, may have had little or no place in the proceedings.

Alternatively, if affection is false because women are false, the female masquers' performative liberties glance toward their actual and imagined sexual liberties at court. All of the masquers were unmarried maids of honor: Bess performed while the bride, Nan, looked on. In spite of Elizabeth's efforts to control romantic and marital alliances in her court,⁷⁵ the maids' affairs suggest that women's affections were as ungovernable as men's. Many of these involved Essex, whose unruly behavior led Russell's sister Lady Anne Bacon to censure his "luste of concupiscence."⁷⁶ In 1597, Whyte reported that "the queen hath lately used the fair Mistress Bridges with Words and Blowes of Anger, and she with Mistress [Bess] Russel were put out of the Coffer Chamber" for stealing away to watch Essex and other courtiers at sport. By February of the following year, Essex had "again fallen in love with his fairest B" — either Bess Bridges or Bess Russell.⁷⁷ If the masque's erotic display indexed the sexuality of its participants, Elizabeth's sex and its difficult political ramifications were implicated in her role as the ninth muse. Critics of female rule, such as Thomas Becon, argued that "queens were for the most part wicked, ungodly, superstitious, and given to idolatry and to all filthy abominations," often calling forth the

⁷⁴ Ibid, 82. As a baron's heirs, Bess and Nan were wards of the crown.

⁷⁵ For discussion, see Hammer, "Sex and the Virgin Queen."

⁷⁶ Quoted *ibid*, 83.

⁷⁷ Collins, ed., *Letters*, 2:38 and 2:90.

archetypal idolatrous female painter, Jezebel, to prove the point.⁷⁸ Female sovereignty, sexuality, and self-creation were all suspect, and illicit affairs in Elizabeth's court could easily be construed as proof of her corrupt character and rule. As if embodying fears that "a deceitfull and effeminate face is the ensigne of a deceitfull and effeminate heart,"⁷⁹ Mary Fitton was three months pregnant when she donned the disguise of Affection. She gave birth to William Herbert's illegitimate son in January 1601.⁸⁰ Elizabeth's acerbic motto may indict her maids as well as her favorite: disguised, the female masquers are essentially what they seem.

Although Elizabeth's barb initially challenges Russell's figurative program, the sixty-seven-year-old monarch nonetheless "r[o]se and danced." Affirming her virginity as an emblem of her virtue and self-control, she submits herself to the masque's orderly correction of all that was out of course in Blackfriars. As an artificial double of the queen's Privy Chamber, however, the masque recalls affections that are not entirely dispelled by the chaste alternatives of virginity and marriage. Whyte's report that Essex, immediately back from Ireland—compelled by overwhelming emotion, affection or otherwise—rushed "to the Privy Chamber, and staid not till he came to the Queen's Bed Chamber, where he found the Queen newly up, the Hare about her Face,"⁸¹ speaks to the conflicted images of restraint and liberty shared by the masque and the monarch. The queen is at once vulnerable and virginal. Her hair "loose about her shoulders," she is a maid confronted by ungovernable affection, an Ariadne before an unfaithful Theseus. Camden's retelling stresses the threat posed to Elizabeth's government by her favorite's intrusion and her need (although not yet armed with the artificial embellishments that enhanced her power) to control her face: surprised and disheveled, "she entertained him with a short Conference somewhat graciously, but not with that Countenance as she was wont."⁸²

⁷⁸ Thomas Becon, *An Humble Supplicacion unto God* (Strasbourg: J. Lambrecht? 1554), B1-B1^v. Becon's target of attack is Mary Tudor. Hammer, "Sex and the Virgin Queen," 82–84, argues the relevance of his attack to Elizabeth.

⁷⁹ Tuke, *Treatise Against Painting*, 61.

⁸⁰ On Mary Fitton, see ODNB.

⁸¹ Rowland Whyte to Robert Sidney, in Collins, ed., *Letters*, 2:127.

⁸² Camden, *History*, 574.

As if awakening from a false dream of affection, Elizabeth's return to self-government is also a return to the fellowship of women, the web of female alliances supporting and approving female rule.

Occurring in the wake of Essex's arrest, the queen's refusal of affection suggests the political valence of Russell's masque. A bitter rivalry between Robert Cecil and Essex had simmered throughout the late 1590s, emerging from their radically divergent views on foreign policy. Cecil's efforts to negotiate with foreign powers were anathema to Essex, who advocated a militant quest to invade and conquer.⁸³ Not surprisingly, Cecil's demeanor during his rival's fall was carefully watched. Around the time of Nan's wedding, one observer wrote of Cecil's behavior during Essex's appearance in the Star Chamber:

Sir Robert Cecil is highly commended for his wise and temperate proceeding in the matter, showing no gall, though perhaps he had been galled, if not by the Earl, by some of his dependants. By employing his credit with Her Majesty in behalf of the Earl, he has gained great credit with himself, both at home and abroad.⁸⁴

Writing to her nephew in October 1599, Russell confirms that Cecil had not been merely galled but overtly threatened: "I hear what I am not willing to commit to paper, yet as an aunt near in blood, I can not with conscience but to let you know . . . that most vile words have been openly uttered of you at an ordinary." She warns, "take heed to your self and life," indicating the subject of the slander with the assurance, "I never sent [to the Earl of Essex] since his return" (241). The masque's picture of the muses led by Affection, glossed by Elizabeth's word, locates the meaning of this kinetic emblem in Essex's fall. Enacted in a space presided over by the queen

⁸³ See Erica Veevers, *Images of Love and Religion: Queen Henrietta Maria and Court Entertainments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 185, on a similar debate between militancy and "peace policies" in Jacobean masques.

⁸⁴ J. B. [alias John Petit] to Peter Halins, from Liege, June 14/24, 1600: see *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth, 1598–1601*, ed. M. A. E. Green (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1867), 441.

and her principal secretary — appointed by Elizabeth in place of his rival and by Russell as “master of the house” — the masque and its measures celebrate Cecil’s ascendancy, and with him, the rise of the reformist policies advocated by his aunt. Russell predicts that the hand and heart of the Virgin Queen, with her nephew’s aid, will continue to reach out to foreign powers, promoting the true religion and tempering aggression with virtue and measured restraint.

Russell’s decision to publish her translation of Ponet’s treatise on the Eucharist five years later provides a final gloss on the political and religious goals of her theatrical works. In May 1604, Cecil (who was by this time the chief architect of Jacobean foreign policy) negotiated with Spain to end the Armada war that had begun two decades earlier. The effort resulted in the signing of the Treaty of London in August, which established peace between the two powers that lasted until 1625. Published under the motto, “Blessed be the peace-makers” (327), Russell’s *Way of Reconciliation* responds to and supports Cecil’s reconciliatory diplomacy. Her prefatory caution that “them that part frays, while seek[ing] others’ safety [may] bear the blows themselves” (327) recalls the price paid by Cecil in his rivalry with Essex and the sacrifices of an earlier generation of reformers (those of her father and Cecil’s, and her own as well) to advance the true religion. Russell, too, attempts to part frays. Edward Vaughan’s exhortation to Russell, “Ride on, Right Honourable . . . with your book in one hand and your alms in the other,”⁸⁵ may best describe Russell’s foreign policy in later life. The reformed church, recalling its embattled past, moves forward led by the female faithful — a potent emblem of religious activism anchored in scriptural authority — toward a dream of international peace and plenty.

⁸⁵ Palladius, *Introduction into the Books of the Prophets*, trans. Vaughan, A2^v; reprinted in Russell, *Writings*, 269.

V. A Lively Picture

When John Donne describes memory as “the Gallery of the soul, hang’d with so many and so lively pictures,”⁸⁶ he confirms the use of emblems, or sacramental *figurae* as Russell terms them, in Christian worship and daily life. Reduced to “Images sensible,” in Francis Bacon’s words, conceits “strike the Memorie more” and stir the soul to moral action. Russell’s brother-in-law and nephew both literalized Donne’s gallery in the Bacon house at Gorhambury.⁸⁷ Inscriptions of thirty-seven Latin *sententiae*, culled from classical authors, gold-lettered and painted as lapidaries, surmounted the walls of Sir Nicholas’ gallery, below which “Glasse-windowes [were] all painted: and every pane with severall figures of beast, bird, or flower” useful “as Topiques for Locall memorie.”⁸⁸ To his father’s “verbal memory-theatre,”⁸⁹ Francis Bacon “made an addition of a noble Portico” on which were “drawn by an excellent hand . . . curious pictures, all Emblematicall, with Motto’s under each.”⁹⁰

If emblems were “the secular counterpart to religious images,”⁹¹ funeral monuments were the Reformation’s most ubiquitous emblematic forms. These secular memorials resembling “pageant devices or stage mansions”⁹² transformed sacred spaces into theatres of memory where picture and

⁸⁶ John Donne, “A Sermon of Valediction at my going into Germany,” in *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. Evelyn Simpson and George R. Potter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), 2:237.

⁸⁷ See Elizabeth McCutcheon, *Sir Nicholas Bacon’s Great House Sententiae*, *ELR Supplements*, no. 3 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977); and Collinson, *Godly People*, 135–54. In 1575/6, Bacon sent an illuminated manuscript (now BL Royal 17 A XXII) of the *sententiae*, painted as inscribed lapidaries, to Lady Jane Lumley at her request, thus recreating his physical memory theatre as a textual one.

⁸⁸ John Aubrey, *Aubrey’s Brief Lives*, ed. Oliver Lawson Dick and Edmund Wilson (London: David R. Godine Publishers, 1997), 14.

⁸⁹ McCutcheon, *Sir Nicholas Bacon’s Great House Sententiae*, 21.

⁹⁰ Aubrey, *Aubrey’s Brief Lives*, 14.

⁹¹ David Norbrook, “The Reformation of the Masque,” in *The Court Masque*, ed. David Lindley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 97.

⁹² Bruce R. Smith, “Sermons in Stone: Shakespeare and Renaissance Sculpture,” *Shakespeare Studies* 17 (1985): 3.



Figure 5. Cure Workshop, Monument for Elizabeth Russell (detail), 1600–1605. Hoby Chapel, All Saints Church, Bisham. Author’s photograph.

Figure 6. Hoby Window (1609). Hoby Chapel, All Saints Church, Bisham. Author’s photograph.

word combined to recall the absent dead. Color was as vital to these commemorative emblems as was text. Elizabethan effigies (figure 5), painted to present “lively pictures” of the dead, were glossed by epitaphs, inscriptions, and coats of arms. Dynastic chapels became galleries adorned not only with tombs but also with stained-glass windows like those at Gorhambury. The window installed by Edward Hoby in the family chapel the year of Russell’s death (figure 6) is decorated with his mother’s name, arms, and symbolic images, weaving a tapestry in glass whose luminous colors present “Topiques” for remembering her life and works.

Russell’s portrait (figure 1) was painted in preparation for the funeral monument she erected in her lifetime in the Hoby Chapel at Bisham (figure 7). Like the portrait, the monument authenticates her painted face



Figure 7. Monument for Elizabeth Russell (detail). Author's photograph.



Figure 8. Monument for Elizabeth Russell (detail). Author's photograph.

with texts. The effigy also represents Russell as a widow and a reader. Portrayed with the children, both living and dead, of her two marriages, she kneels before a prayer table which holds a folio Bible. The biblical verse inscribed on the open page is followed by her name, “Elizabetha Russella Douager” (figure 8). It is the only inscription naming the monument’s subject, but it is hidden from all eyes, visible only from the position occupied by the effigy itself. Since it cannot be seen by viewers, the text cannot serve as a memorial inscription intended to identify the subject to posterity. Inscribed below the scripture, *within* the Word of God, the name instead functions as a motto, and renders the book an *impresa*. Simultaneously image (in stone) and word, Russell’s book is a lasting emblem of her life and works, the point of focus in the “stage mansion” of her monument. Although similar to her theatrical productions at Bisham and Blackfriars, this memorial emblem glosses Russell’s permanent image and authenticates her last work.

At the same time, Russell’s name is a signature, laying claim to her authorial appropriation of the biblical text. As was true of her anonymous entertainment at Bisham and the unpublished, fleeting masque at Blackfriars, the monumental signature secretly, almost invisibly, asserts Russell’s creative control over her image. The biblical verse above her name, widely used on Reformation monuments, authorizes this act of creative

sovereignty: “And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet shall I see God in my flesh. Whom I myself shall see, and mine eyes shall behold, and none other for me.”⁹³ The verse insists that the soul remembers and recreates the body — Russell will see God “in *my* flesh” and with “*mine* eyes” — confirming Russell’s conception of the effigy as a *figura*. It is a sign referring to but not containing an invisible spirit, a figurative embodiment of her *resurrected* body, and an emblem of the unseen church in which the dead take part. Her figure recalls the presence of her material body buried in the tomb but also marks the absence of her ascended spirit. Her painted face is not a lie but an illustration of that figure. Far from usurping God’s creative prerogative, Russell represents both likeness and lively force. “The thing it self,” her effigy is a lively picture, painted piously and chastely, in the theatre of memory.

⁹³ Job 19:26–27. The monument gives the Latin, translated in *Geneva Bible* (Geneva: Roland Hall, 1560). The passage is part of the Anglican burial service, much quoted on tombs. See Church of England, *Book of Common Prayer* (London: Richard Jugge, 1573), P7°.

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