

Queen Elizabeth I

In England, the period between the Gothic and Renaissance styles is known as the Elizabethan age. It reached its peak in the late 1500s, toward the end of the long reign of Queen Elizabeth I, and is often considered the last phase of the long-lasting Tudor style. Although the Elizabethan age produced a certain amount of characteristic sculptures and paintings, the Elizabethan style can best be seen in the period's architecture. The dramatic personality of Elizabeth became the subject of a voluminous literature (Elizabethan Age). However, the literature coming out of this period was also quite exceptional. Among the many great writers and poets were Edmund Spenser who wrote a very detailed piece about a feast for Elizabeth, Sir Walter Raleigh who wrote poems about Elizabeth, and William Shakespeare (Elizabethan Writers). The Gothic period preceding the Elizabethan age was based very much on religion. Secular buildings, sculpture, stained glass, illuminated manuscripts, and other decorative arts were produced in Europe during the latter part of the Middle Ages. Since then the term Gothic has been restricted to the last major medieval period, immediately following the Romanesque (Gothic Period). The Renaissance, following the Elizabethan age was a rebirth of scholarly interests. It was based on the classics of art, religion, science and inventions, philosophy, and humanism (Renaissance).

Queen Elizabeth I was a powerful political figure in English history. Her background was definitely relative to her choice of words and her topics that she used in "When I Was Fair and Young." Elizabeth was born in London on September 7, 1533. She spent her childhood away from the court and received an excellent classical education under such scholars as Roger Ascham, who influenced her greatly (Plowden 7). Her exceptional education aided in many of her future decisions and successes.

In 1554, Elizabeth was imprisoned on the false charge of having been involved in Wyatt's rebellion. "She was later released, having outwardly professed Roman Catholicism, and regained Mary's favor" (11-12)). Mary was her sister who locked her up because she felt threatened by Elizabeth. Mary falsely accused Elizabeth of aiding in a Protestant rebellion. At the death of Mary in 1558, Elizabeth became queen, beginning one of the greatest reigns in English history (15).

At the time of Elizabeth's accession, England was torn by religious strife, was economically insecure, and was involved in a disastrous war with France (19). "Although she was excessively vain and capricious, her monarchical duties were always her primary concern. Her policies and her colorful personality made her extremely popular with her subjects." (20)

"Elizabeth's domination of the period to which her name became attached was due in part to the exuberant national spirit that she inspired, and that characterized all of England during the second half of the 16th century" (23). With

the religious question settled and the war with France concluded by the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559, England was able to develop industrially and economically. Under Elizabeth's direction, the government began to regulate commerce and industry on a national scale. A new system of coinage was introduced in 1560 to replace the silver coins that had been the basis of England's

economy throughout the previous years. As a result, prices fell to normal levels and confidence in English money was restored. Foreign trade, encouraged by the government, became a great capitalistic enterprise. The Royal Exchange of London was opened in 1566, and the company of merchants, that later became the English East India Company, was chartered in 1600 (25).

Above all this activity stood the figure of Elizabeth. "In the eyes of her subjects, Elizabeth was England" (Smith 36). From the beginning of her reign, Elizabeth's marital status was a political concern because there was no English heir to the throne. Parliament insistently asked her to marry, but she replied with the statement that she intended to live and die a virgin, and she became known as the Virgin Queen. "She was besieged by royal suitors, each of whom she favored when it was in her political interest to do so. Her affections, however, were bestowed on a succession of favorites, notably Robert Dudley and Sir Walter Raleigh" (38). Sir Walter Raleigh has printed poetry to Queen Elizabeth. He writes about how he adores her and he always will find her beautiful. In one line, he refers to her by saying "For knowing that I sue to serve saint of such perfection" (Raleigh lines 15-16).

"Elizabeth's most delicate political problem was that involving her Roman Catholic cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots. Mary sought refuge in England after being defeated in battle by her half brother, James Stuart, Earl of Moray" (43). Elizabeth immediately imprisoned Mary because the Catholic monarches of Europe and her own Catholic subjects considered Elizabeth illegitimate. "By their reasoning, Mary was the lawful Queen of England." (45) To Elizabeth, Mary was the potential center of conspiracy. Mary was kept captive for years, giving rise to many plots by English Catholics for her release. "When in 1586 Walsingham, then Secretary of State, discovered a plot to assassinate Elizabeth and place Mary on the throne of England, Elizabeth reluctantly agreed to have Mary executed in 1587. The execution had serious results (46-47). "Philip II of Spain had, for years, been troubled by the raids of English mariners on his colonial possessions. Because Mary and Philip were Catholic, her death provided him with an added stimulus to prosecute the war with England that had been going on since 1585" (49). He therefore sent a fleet to invade the country in 1588. The Spanish Armada, however, suffered an inglorious defeat, and England eventually took the place of Spain as the great colonizer of the New World and the reigning power on the seas (50).

Elizabeth spent the last years of her life unhappy and alone, having outlived a glorious age, the beginning of the history of what would become modern England. She died in London on March 23, 1603 (Plowden 53). One of her works, "When I Was Fair and Young," was a poem written around 1579 and released in 1590. This was about the way she felt about herself:

"When I was fair and young, and favor
graced me,
Of many was I sought, their mistress for
to be;
But I did scorn them all, and answered them
therefore,
"Go, go, go, seek some otherwhere,
Importune me no more!"

How many weeping eyes I made to pine
with woe,
How many sighing hearts, I have no skill
to show;
Yet I the prouder grew, and answered them

therefore,
"Go, go, go, seek some otherwhere,
 Importune me no more!"

Then spake fair Venus' son, that proud
 victorious boy,
And said, "Fine dame, since that you be
 so coy,
I will so pluck your plumes that you shall
 say no more,
"Go, go, go, seek some otherwhere,
 Importune me no more!"

When he had spake these words, such
 change grew in my breast,
That neither night nor day since that, I
 could take any rest,
Then lo! I did repent that I had said before,
"Go, go, go, seek some otherwhere,
 Importune me no more!"

(Elizabeth I 173)

In this poem, I consider Elizabeth to be very conceited. In the opening stanza, she talks about many people wanting her. She was young and beautiful, and also the most powerful person in England (lines 1-2). Later on in that stanza, she says how despite the numerous requests, she would reject them. Basically, they were not worth the time (lines 3-4). In the next stanza she talks about the numerous rejections she makes. It sounds like she's starting to almost brag (lines 5-6). She comes back with the same line as in lines three and four, saying they are not worth it (lines 7-8). In the third stanza, someone a little more special requests her company. He is Venus' son, Cupid. Along with his mother, they are the patrons of love (lines 9-10). As usual, she uses the same line as the others. The line asking them to stop wasting her time (lines 11-12). The fourth and final stanza is different from the others. She realized that Cupid had an affect (lines 13-14). She realized she should not have used the words that she used so often, "Go, go, go, seek some otherwhere, Importune me no more" (lines 15-16)! This poem was a perfect description of her love life. As I mentioned earlier, Parliament wanted her to marry, but she replied with the statement that she intended to live and die a virgin, and she became known as the Virgin Queen. Her affections, however, were bestowed on a succession of favorites, notably Robert Dudley and Sir Walter Raleigh" (Smith 38).

Queen Elizabeth was an extremely independent woman and turned a country of many problems into a prosperous one. She was very selective and never married, making the successor to the throne James I, Elizabeth's cousin's son. Elizabeth's background was definitely the reason for her style of writing. She was a remarkable woman.
