"A More Natural Mother": Concepts of Maternity and Queenship in Early Modern England

Anne-Marie Kathleen Strohman
University of Massachusetts - Amherst

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations_2

Part of the Literature in English, British Isles Commons, and the Other English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Dissertations and Theses at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.
“A MORE NATURAL MOTHER”: CONCEPTS OF MATERNITY AND QUEENSHIP IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

A Dissertation Presented

by

ANNE-MARIE KATHLEEN STROHMAN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

February 2014

English
“A MORE NATURAL MOTHER”: CONCEPTS OF MATERNITY AND QUEENSHIP IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

A Dissertation Presented

by

ANNE-MARIE KATHLEEN STROHMAN

Approved as to style and content by:

________________________________________
Joseph Black, Chair

________________________________________
Arthur F. Kinney, Member

________________________________________
Elizabeth Petroff, Member

________________________________________
Jenny Spencer, Department Head
English
DEDICATION

To my husband and children, who made this work possible.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation began in two graduate classes at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, more than a decade ago: Renaissance Literature with Dr. Linda Halisky, and Linguistic Analysis of Literature with Dr. Johanna Rubba. Both of these scholars, along with other Cal Poly faculty—namely Dr. Michael Wenzl, Dr. Douglas Keesy, and Dr. Evelyn Torres—taught me much about scholarship, teaching, the pursuit of precise analysis, and the need to find the story in my work. I am pleased to have been their student.

At University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Arthur Kinney has trained me to read widely and proofread carefully. My time as the Walter Chmielewski Fellow at English Literary Renaissance has been one of the highlights of my education. Joseph Black has helped me grow from a tentative researcher to a confident scholar. Jenny Adams has offered sage advice, inspiration, and friendship. In my undergraduate work at Whitworth College, Dr. Laura Bloxham first encouraged me toward graduate work, and she taught me that one can get a graduate degree and still love to read afterward.

Kevin Petersen read many poor drafts of these chapters and always pointed me in the right direction. He is a writing partner nonpareil. For over a decade, Sally Demerest has proved to be the best coffee shop study partner I could ask for. She helps me see my work with new eyes. Emily Moberg Robinson’s editing skills have vastly improved this dissertation.

Behind this successful woman is a great man. Trevor Strohman talked me out of quitting the PhD program every month for many years. He has supported me with persistence—listening to me talk through writer’s block; taking the kids for regular adventure days so I could work; doing all the dishes every day, even on weekends. My
children, Evan and Natalie, have been amazingly patient in waiting for me to finish this
dissertation. They are also what made it take such a long time.

To all listed here, many humble thanks.
ABSTRACT

“A MORE NATURAL MOTHER”: CONCEPTS OF MATERNITY AND QUEENSHIP IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

FEBRUARY 2014

ANNE-MARIE KATHLEEN STROHMAN, B.A., WHITWORTH COLLEGE
M.A., CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY SAN LUIS OBISPO
Ph.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Joseph Black

Early in her reign, in response to Parliament’s formal requests that she marry and secure the succession, Elizabeth calls herself the “mother of England.” Her metaphorical maternity signals a rhetorical transaction between Elizabeth and her people that stretches across time, space, and genre; writers respond to Elizabeth by modifying the metaphor in order to shape her behavior. Conceptual blending theory, developed by cognitive scientists Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, provides language to articulate the complexities of Elizabeth’s metaphor—to understand how language, culture, and cognition interact to create and modify meaning.

Furthering the work of critics who analyze Elizabeth’s self-presentation and in light of Amy Cook’s work with conceptual blending theory and theater, this dissertation examines Elizabeth’s maternal metaphor in her speeches and considers Sidney’s Arcadia (c. 1581-82, 1584; published in 1590), Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus (c. 1588), and Spenser’s The Faerie Queene (1590, 1596) as examples of responses to and explorations of Elizabeth’s mother–queen blend. By manipulating the mother–queen metaphor in
various ways, these writers urge Elizabeth to fulfill her responsibilities as a figurative mother: first, through actual marriage and motherhood, and later, as Elizabeth’s age led to infertility, by naming an heir. Elizabeth’s attempts to control her image through metaphor were thwarted by the very nature of her method. This examination of her metaphor in the context of imaginative writing reveals the malleability of Elizabeth’s carefully crafted image.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .................................................................................................. v

ABSTRACT ...................................................................................................................... vii

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................... xi

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION: THE MOTHER OF ENGLAND AND CONCEPTUAL BLENDING THEORY ................................................................................................ 1

   Literary criticism and cognitive science ................................................................. 5
   The family/state analogy and the queen’s two bodies ............................................. 8
   Elizabeth I’s “self-fashioning” ................................................................................ 14
   Conceptual Blending Theory .................................................................................. 16
   Conceptual Blending Theory applied ...................................................................... 23

2 QUEEN ELIZABETH, METAPHORICAL MOTHER OF ENGLAND ....................... 28

   Elizabeth as Mother of England ............................................................................ 30
   Immediate context of her usage: succession ......................................................... 32
   Historical continuity of the metaphor .................................................................... 34
   Cognition and Elizabeth’s subjects ........................................................................ 38
   Cultural conceptions of motherhood and queenship ............................................. 44
   The metaphor before and after Elizabeth ............................................................. 51
   Cognition: Metaphor construction ........................................................................ 53
   Rhetorical transaction: Contemporary responses to the metaphor ....................... 63
   The rhetorical transaction goes underground ....................................................... 68
   Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 72

3 LITERALIZING THE METAPHORICAL MOTHER–QUEEN: SIDNEY’S ARCADIAN MOTHERS ................................................................. 85

   The texts of Arcadia ............................................................................................... 94
   Early modern maternity: a position of authority .................................................... 97
   Elizabeth, Sidney, and maternity .......................................................................... 99
   Mothers in Arcadia: Venus .................................................................................. 103
   Mothers in Arcadia: Gynecia ............................................................................... 108
   Mothers in Arcadia: Miso (Old and New) ........................................................... 115
   Mothers in Arcadia: Cecropia ............................................................................. 125
   Maternal identity and its implications ................................................................. 132

ix
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>MOTHERHOOD EMBODIED AND (EN)ACTED IN <em>TITUS ANDRONICUS</em></td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tamora, the mother-queen</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conceptual blending: the megablend</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The base blend: boy actor/Tamora</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tamora as mother</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tamora’s shifting role as queen</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tamora’s plan for vengeance: public vs. private selves</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tamora as Rome/Roman</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The scene in the woods: lust, revenge, and family</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The baby: redefining Tamora’s motherhood and power</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recapitulation of Tamora’s plan for revenge: an incredible self-assessment</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tamora as Revenge: an incomplete embodiment</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literalizing the devouring mother</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>THE GRANDMOTHER OF ENGLAND: BRITOMART AND MERLIN’S PROPHECY IN SPENSER’S <em>THE FAERIE QUEENE</em></td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deferral in romance narratives</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Britomart’s exceptional deferral</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Britomart the errant knight</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knightly deferral</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maidenly delays</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maternity as its own category</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasons for deferral: mode, structure, and allegory</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasons for deferral: the maternal body and maternal authority</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Britomart “Out of Time”</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading the mothers of <em>Arcadia</em></td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading Tamora</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading Britomart</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading Elizabeth</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conceptual blending and literary analysis</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.1: The basic diagram of a conceptual blend</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.2: Elizabeth as Petrarchan beloved</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.1: Metaphor analysis, source domain to target domain</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.2: Metaphor analysis, “The mother is a tiger”</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.3: Elizabeth’s “body of a weak and feeble woman/heart and stomach of a king”</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.4: “Heart and stomach of a king” expanded</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.5: STATE and FAMILY frames</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.6: “That surgeon is a butcher”</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.7: STATE and FAMILY frames: Elizabeth is the mother of England</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.8: Where is the father?</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.9: “Sylvia is the mother of Simon”</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.10: “Elizabeth is the mother of England” three ways</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.11: Vital Relations</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.12: “Elizabeth is the mother of England” with “Queen Elizabeth” compression</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.13: “Elizabeth is the mother of England” megablend</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.1: Elizabeth is the mother of England</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.2: Elizabeth/Arcadian maternity</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.3: <em>Arcadia</em> redefining motherhood, presents a warning to Elizabeth</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.4: Basilius and Euarchus as direct analogues to Elizabeth</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.5: Gynecia, Cecropia, Miso, and minor mothers establish “Arcadian motherhood” to redefine Elizabeth’s “mother” blend</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.6: <em>The Four Foster Children of Desire</em> (subject-lover-child)</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE MOTHER OF ENGLAND AND CONCEPTUAL BLENDING THEORY

In her first speech to Parliament, on February 10, 1559, in response to the members’ formal requests for her to marry, Queen Elizabeth describes herself as “mother of England” or “mother” to her people: “And reproach me so no more,’ quoth she ‘that I have no children: for every one of you, and as many as are English, are my children and kinsfolks, of whom, so long as I am not deprived and God shall preserve me, you cannot charge me, without offense, to be destitute.”

Again in January of 1563, she answers the Commons’ petition that she marry: “And so I assure you all that though after my death you may have many stepdames, yet shall you never have any a more mother than I mean to be unto you all” (72, an alternate version reads “a more natural mother,” fn. 7). Even the petitions themselves employ the metaphor of queen as mother, assuring her that her subjects confess her “most gracious and motherly care for them and their posterity” (73) and recognize her “most honorable and motherly carefulness for them” (76). Queen Elizabeth is arguing that she cares for her people “as a good mother of [her] country” (58,

---


2 “Queen Elizabeth’s Answer to the Commons’ Petition that She Marry, January 28, 1563.”

3 “The Commons’ Petition to the Queen at Whitehall, January 28, 1563.”
fn. 9) and will only marry if it is in the best interest of her people. Moreover, she already cares for her people in a maternal fashion, though she is an unmarried virgin.\(^4\)

By invoking cultural constructions of motherhood, Elizabeth both compels her listeners to accept her as maternal toward them and attempts to distract from her unwillingness to marry and bear children. But why a maternal metaphor? What interplay of gender and power coincide to construct a mother that can enhance the authority of a

queen? To answer these questions, we can look to literature. While non-literary works deal directly with and speculate about female authority, literary works explore the intersection of motherhood and queenship in compelling ways, and in ways not available to non-literary writers both because of generic conventions available to them and because it became increasingly difficult during Elizabeth’s reign to discuss issues of succession; the issue of succession is at the core of Elizabeth’s introduction of the metaphor and remains intimately connected with any maternal attributions. While Elizabeth did not invoke maternal metaphors directly after 1563, she often presented herself as affectionate toward children and was later associated with the Virgin Mary. Even in elegiac poems that praise Elizabeth as a mother to her people, the greater focus on a smooth succession to James I’s ascension silently acknowledges her lack of an heir. Kevin Petersen argues that in the 1590s, the problem of succession moved from the public sphere, as Elizabeth attempted to suppress discussion by law, into the literary realm. Poets, playwrights, and


writers of fiction engaged with the issues of what happens when a monarch does not prepare adequately for a successor, and what the consequences of—and remedy for—a bad successor might be.

In this dissertation, I examine works by three major authors of the Elizabethan age—Sidney, Shakespeare, and Spenser—to explore the play of power and gender in multiple genres. In considering Titus Andronicus (c.1588-93), the two versions of The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia (Old, written c. 1581-82; and New, written by 1584; published in 1590), and The Faerie Queene (1590, 1596), I aim to tease out the issues of motherhood and queenship at play in the late 1580s and early 1590s, between the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and Elizabeth I’s death in 1603. I am interested in what these works have in common in their depictions of queenship and motherhood, and how these commonalities reveal the Elizabethans’ understanding of these concepts in a particular cultural moment. These questions ultimately end up being about cognition: how did early modern readers conceptualize these ideas? The most direct expression of cognition is through language, and so these texts provide essential access to the early modern mind. In turn, the cognition revealed in literary texts can be a model for how the early modern mind understood the concepts and their interaction in the world.

Literary criticism and cognitive science

Current literary criticism that engages with cognitive science endeavors to couple together both the contextual strain of criticism—for example, the New Historicism of Greenblatt, Montrose, and others—and the rhetorical strain—in its initial modern critical form, New Criticism—culminating in a new kind of materialism focused on the embodied mind and in cognitive poetics. In the last decade, some literary scholars have engaged with Cognitive Science in areas of metonymy, embodiment, and symbolism, among others, from Mary Thomas Crane’s *Shakespeare’s Brain* (2001) to Alan Richardson and Ellen Spolsky’s collection *The Work of Fiction: Cognition, Culture, and Complexity* (2004) to Arthur Kinney’s *Shakespeare’s Webs* (2004) and *Shakespeare and Cognition* (2006). While the work began and continues in Renaissance studies, cognitive analysis has become more widespread among literary, religious, theater, and cultural studies. Analysis of literary works using conceptual blending theory, a branch of

cognitive science that grew out of metaphor theory, has increased since the publication of Fauconnier and Turner’s *The Way We Think* (2002), though their initial theories were published as early as 1994.\(^\text{10}\) Turner’s *The Literary Mind; The Origins of Thought and Language* (1996) is the first major work to apply conceptual blending theory and other cognitive models to literary analysis.\(^\text{11}\) (This work follows his earlier work with George Lakoff, which uses Conceptual Metaphor Theory in literary analysis.\(^\text{12}\)) Recent articles have expanded Turner’s scholarship.

In the first book-length work to engage conceptual blending theory since *The Literary Mind*, Amy Cook approaches theater studies from a cognitive perspective, focusing on cognitive linguistics, both metaphor theory and conceptual blending theory,


as a way to access both the text and performances of Hamlet. She argues, “Conceptual blending theory exposes how Shakespeare means what he means, rather than what he means. It destabilizes previous conceptions of how meaning was made and provides a tool for watching the process of meaning making, from two often contrasting ideas into a third emergent idea” (153-54). My work furthers Cook’s task, applying conceptual blending theory to prose fiction and poetry, as well as theatrical texts. Cook is interested in the space of the theater—an embodied space—as a site for blending: “meaning comes from the transaction between storyteller and audience; the stage needs the bodies and the story needs the audience. The focus becomes what happens between performer and spectator: a neurological transaction, or neuroplay, that is both performed and received, staged and housed, you and me, at the same time” (153). I extend Cook’s transaction between storyteller and audience beyond the bounds of the playhouse, engaging linguistic transactions between speakers and writers, performers and audience, playwrights and readers across time and space.

Elizabeth’s invocation of a maternal metaphor is not just a rhetorical moment in a speech as she refines her public image. It is the beginning of a rhetorical transaction between Elizabeth and her subjects, some of whom record their responses, sometimes encoded in literary works. The two forces—Elizabeth’s self-presentation and writerly texts by her subjects—form a complex discourse. My aim in this study is to examine one element of Elizabeth’s image—motherhood—and the resonances of this image in Sidney, Shakespeare, and Spenser, for in reality Elizabeth’s interlocutors, however distant, have

the power to affect her image as much as she shapes their writing. For example, Helen Hackett cites William Camden’s hindsight bias in his works, published after her death: he retells Elizabeth’s history to emphasize her virginity and purity and creates a sense of a “cult of Elizabeth” by likening her to the Virgin Mary.14 Elizabeth’s image was not only shaped within her time, but continued to be manipulated (both unconsciously and with intent) after her death. Just so, Elizabeth’s rhetoric in her early speeches was itself shaped by writers and ideas of the past. In claiming the metaphor of maternity, Elizabeth invokes two very old, yet immediately relevant political concepts, which provide a context for this rhetorical transaction: the family-state analogy and the theory of the king’s two bodies.

The family/state analogy and the queen’s two bodies

The family/state analogy was not new in Elizabeth’s reign. Karen Raber traces the concept back to Aristotle’s Politics,

But as concerning the husband and the wife, the father and the children, and every of their virtues . . . we shall necessarily treat thereof in our discourse of the forms of government. For sith every house is parcel of the city, and all the matters above spoken of are parts of the house, and the virtue of the part is to be imputed to the whole, it is necessary to refer the instruction and ordering of women and children to such magistrates as have the oversight of the states of cities.15

Gordon Schochet points to John Hooper’s 1551 commentary on Romans 13 as the earliest instance in England of the family-state link: “Hooper unhesitatingly equated the

14 Helen Hackett, Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), 230.

duties of children with those of subject.”

Hooper states, “Feare is due unto God, the kyng, to parentes, to all others [by] whome we be holpe in bodie and soule, and so is honour due likewyse. Therefore sayeth the lawe, feare God, honoure the kynge, honoure father and mother.”

In 1556, Bishop John Poynet also used “familial reasoning in support of political authority” when he said that “only because of the advantages of living under benevolent rulers, people ‘used in times past to call such good Governours, Fathers: and gave them no lesse honour, than children owed to their Parents.”

Schochet traces the development of the family/state analogy through Scots Presbyterian reformer John Knox, who excluded “mother” from the equation, and John Aylmer, Elizabethan Bishop of London, who claimed that a woman could be a subject in marriage while being the head of her husband as a queen, to later Tudor writers who invoke Aristotle’s Politics. The idea developed further during Elizabeth’s reign and reached its zenith during James I’s reign with the “[e]stablishment of a clear, theorized connection between patriarch and absolute monarchy [...]—largely through the writings like Sir Robert Filmer’s Patriarcha—[which] intensified the potency of this interrelationship” between

---


18 Schochet, 43, quoting J[ohn] P[oynet], A Short Treatise of Politique Power (1556; [London], 1639), 45.

family and state. During Elizabeth’s reign the concept was formalized in the *Homily on Order*, which “made family and state mutually constitutive—the latter relied on the former to order and inform behavior.” As the *Homily* put it, “kings and subjects are like fathers and children or husbands and wives in that each binary pair shows God’s organizing hand at work, and further ‘each hath need of the other’ if civilization is to resist ‘chaos and babylonical confusion.’” It is not surprising, then, that Elizabeth would access a familial role in her articulation of her political position in respect to court and Parliament; however, it is surprising that she was able to invoke “mother” in the family-state analogy because most theorists left mothers out of the political equation except as subjects. Elizabeth stretches the assumed constraints of the analogy as she negotiates the place of “mother” as an authority figure within the state (and thus the home).

The metaphor contrasts Elizabeth’s physical state with her “reigning” state, through the concept of the king’s two bodies—the private body and the body politic. She makes this distinction herself in her first speech, before her coronation: “as I am but one body naturally considered, though by His permission a body politic to govern” (52). Similarly, on April 10, 1563, in an answer to yet another petition from the Lords that she marry, particularly in response to their suggestion that she has committed never to marry, she

20 Raber, 302. On the development of patriarchalism, esp. by Filmer and James I, see Schochet.

21 Raber, 302. She quotes Thomas Cranmer, “An exhortation concerning good order and obedience to Rulers and Magistrates,” in *Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth I (1547-1571)* (Gainesville: Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints, 1968), 69. The homily was first published in 1561 and reprinted in later editions. This facsimile is of the 1623 edition.
claims that they are mistaken, “For though I can think it [a life of solitude] best for a private woman, yet do I strive with myself to think it not meet for a prince. And if I can bend my liking to your need I will not resist such a mind” (79). As a private person, she is an unmarried female, but she must function as both private woman and public prince.

The concept of royalty’s two bodies was established in ecclesiastical courts in the medieval period and was confidently discussed as an established part of the monarchy by the time of Elizabeth’s ascension. In his Reports, Edmund Plowden, the prominent apologist for the theory, explains how the king’s body natural and body politic interact:

For the King has in him two Bodies, viz. a Body natural, and a Body politic. His Body natural (if it be considered in itself) is a Body mortal, subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident, to the Imbecillity of Infancy or old Age, and to the like Defects that happen to the natural Bodies of other People. But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People, and the Management of the publick-weal and this Body is utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities which the Body natural is subject to, and for this Cause what the King does in his Body politic cannot be invalidated or frustrated by any Disability in his natural Body.

Stephen Greenblatt summarizes Ernst Kantorowicz’s 1957 argument in The King’s Two Bodies that Elizabeth’s reign “witnessed the first major secular elaboration of the mystical legal fiction of ‘the King’s Two Bodies.’ . . . When she ascended the throne, according to the crown lawyers, her very being was profoundly altered; in her mortal ‘Body natural’ was incarnated the immortal and infallible ‘Body politic.’ Her body of


flesh would age and die, but the Body politic, as Plowden wrote, ‘is not subject to Passions as the other is, nor to Death, for as to this Body the king never dies.’”

David Norbrook argues that Kantorowicz’s absorption with the mystical elements of the theory becomes overwrought. He claims that the phenomenon of the king’s two bodies was not a dominant force in English politics in the Renaissance, as Kantorowicz argues, and that “it has acquired a mystic status out of proportion to its historical significance.”

In Elizabeth’s claims to metaphorical motherhood, she invokes both the two-bodies theory and the family-state analogy, as I have detailed above. Norbrook’s argument cautions against favoring the one concept over the other, and provides a more general caution for this project as a whole: Elizabeth’s “motherhood” is only one aspect of her complex public persona, and though there is great value in tracing the creation of meaning in this one metaphor, we must always return to seeing the metaphor as but one part of her self-presentation.

The strong presence of the metaphor at the point in her reign when the marriage question is most potent links the metaphor with actual marriage and maternity in a way that makes the image more complex. On the surface, the queen-as-mother metaphor is a simple reading of Elizabeth’s care for her subjects, but through the allusions to the prince’s two bodies, Elizabeth herself complicates the metaphor. She argues in 1559, “I am already bound unto an husband, which is the kingdom of England, and that may


25 David Norbrook, “The Emperor’s New Body? Richard II, Ernst Kantorowicz, and the Politics of Shakespeare Criticism,” Textual Practice 10.2 (1996), 329-57 (343). See especially 342-347. Norbrook points to Marie Axton’s argument that “the theory was far from being the only available political discourse in the period.”
suffice you” (79). Because Elizabeth is metaphorically married to the realm (in a
coronation ceremony much like an actual wedding), she might be neglecting her duties by
marrying a mere man. The question of her marriage reveals the links between her
personal and public selves—her husband could fulfill the public longing for an heir (and
might possibly mitigate her power), while simultaneously being married to her private
self. She attempts to blend the two bodies even as she seeks to delineate them.

Elizabeth complicates the family–state analogy by assuming motherly authority
over her people. Raber points out the dual position of the mother in the analogy: she is
both subject to her husband and has authority over her children. Raber claims that “the
analogy worked in complex and often logically incoherent ways to situate women’s roles
at the heart of political structures” (303). Elizabeth’s own self-descriptions indicate this
complication of gender. She often contrasts her royal role as “prince” with her “weak
womanhood,” describing her private body as female and her public body as male.
Perhaps the most famous citation is in the Armada Speech attributed to her (August 9,
1588): “I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and
stomach of a king and of a king of England too” (326).26 However, she also invokes a
“female prince” image by referring to her public body as mother. These images of
Elizabeth are especially complex because of her gender and issues of authority. At a time
when many questioned Elizabeth’s right to rule because she was a woman,27 emphasizing

26 See my analysis of this speech in Chapter 2, pp. 38-40.

27 For the discussion of female rule, typified by the works of John Knox and John
Aylmer, see Carole Levin, The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics
of Sex and Power (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 10-16; Susan
Doran, “Why Did Elizabeth Not Marry?” in Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations
her gender could be unwise. A king describing himself as a father is unsurprising because of his clear right to rule and the parallels between the father as head of the household and the king as head of the country. Elizabeth’s mention of motherhood forces gender and authority issues to the forefront.

**Elizabeth I’s “self-fashioning”**

Elizabeth’s maternal metaphor can be read as an example of her “self-fashioning,” her construction of a public persona separate from her private self. Many scholars have studied Elizabeth’s “self-fashioning” or presentation of her public image, in portraiture and rhetoric. In his groundbreaking work on the subject, Stephen Greenblatt includes a brief section on Elizabeth, focusing mainly on the erotic fictions of court—Elizabeth was the mistress, and her courtiers were her lovers. He uses the example of Sir Robert Carey, who, in 1597, when approaching the Queen without invitation to collect on a salary owed him for his services as Warden of the East Marches, portrayed himself as a forgotten lover who could not live without the sight of his beloved. All was resolved, and Greenblatt concludes, “By insisting upon the romantic fiction, [Elizabeth] determined the whole tone of their subsequent dealings: Carey was no longer a civil servant demanding his pay, but a lover at the feet of his mistress. He had been absorbed into Petrarchan

———


politics.” What Greenblatt describes is conceptual blending at work. Elizabeth takes on the identity of the Petrarchan beloved, and the real dynamics of interactions are changed. She is not really the beloved—Greenblatt calls these roles “fictions”—but the pretense of belovedness creates a space in which real relations are changed. We can see Elizabeth’s metaphorical motherhood in much the same way—a “fiction” meant to change the real relations between the queen and her subjects.

This dissertation seeks to add to the body of scholarship on Elizabeth’s public image by examining one element of her complex and multi-faceted “self,” and to propose a novel way to approach such a reading. By considering Elizabeth’s claim to metaphorical motherhood, an image that lasted throughout her reign though the rhetoric of it was short-lived, from the perspective of how it means what it means can provide a deeper understanding not only of the more-or-less automatic meaning of Elizabeth’s metaphor, but also how that metaphor is shaped by and influences other writers, revealing an undercurrent of anxiety about Elizabeth and her rule. To begin to explore this intersection of Elizabeth’s “motherhood” and queenship, we must consider the concepts of Renaissance motherhood and of female rule. The theory of conceptual blending, developed by cognitive scientists over the last few decades, can help us to analyze the interplay between these concepts.

29 Greenblatt, 166.

30 Speech Act theory also deals with the ways that real relations are changed by words, such as vows, promises, curses, pronouncements, etc. The foundational text on Speech Act Theory is J. L. Austin’s *How To Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975). For more recent work see J. Hillis Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). In fact, the understanding of the king’s two bodies relies on the Speech Act of the coronation ceremony to infuse the body politic into the private body of the new monarch.
Conceptual Blending Theory

Conceptual blending theory attempts to explain how the brain’s capacity for integration is “a basic mental operation in language, art, action, planning, reason, choice, judgment, decision, humor, mathematics, science, magic and ritual, and the simplest mental events in everyday life.” In their comprehensive *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind’s Hidden Complexities*, Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner detail various aspects of their theory and its relevance to many different disciplines. Their work grows out of cognitive linguistics, which posits that culture and embodied experience come together in language to create meaning. Fauconnier, defining cognitive linguistics, writes,

> Cognitive linguistics recognizes that the study of language is the study of language use and that when we engage in any language activity, we draw unconsciously on vast cognitive and cultural resources, call up models and frames, set up multiple connections, coordinate large arrays of information, and engage in creative mappings, transfers, and elaborations. Language does not “represent” meaning; it prompts for the construction of meaning in particular contexts with particular cultural models and cognitive resources. Very sparse grammar guides us along the same rich mental paths, by prompting us to perform complex cognitive operations. Thus, a large part of cognitive linguistics centers on the creative on-line construction of meaning as discourse unfolds in context.

The study of cognitive linguistics coincides with other cognitive studies (computation, psychology, anthropology, biology, neuroscience, philosophy, sociology, and others)

---


under the umbrella of cognitive science, the study of the brain, behavior, and computation.\textsuperscript{34}

For literary studies, the traditional analytical tool most similar to conceptual blending is metaphor analysis. Although conceptual blending is quite distinct from metaphor analysis, a comparison can provide a link between literary practice and conceptual blending theory. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s exploration of metaphor theory, \textit{Metaphors We Live By} (1980), details cognitive metaphor theory, which expresses the relationship between elements in a metaphor as a transfer of information from a Source Domain to a Target Domain. For example, to understand the metaphor A NATION IS A SHIP, we understand the following correspondences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nation</th>
<th>Ship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National policies/actions</td>
<td>Ship’s course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining national policies/actions</td>
<td>Steering the ship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National success/improvement</td>
<td>Forward motion of the ship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National failures/problems</td>
<td>Sailing mishaps (e.g., foundering)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circumstances affecting the nation (e.g., on the political or economic levels)</td>
<td>Sea conditions\textsuperscript{35}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In a sentence like the following, the correspondences enable us to understand the metaphor: “Without the consent of our fellow citizens, we lose our moral authority to steer the ship of state.”\textsuperscript{36} This explanation of metaphors works in many circumstances and is especially effective in working out entrenched conventional metaphors like UP IS GOOD, or LIFE IS A JOURNEY, but when more than two domains are invoked in an extension of the metaphor, cognitive metaphor theory can only handle the metaphor by adding layers of complexity to its analysis with no way to clearly identify the relationships among them. Consider the statement, “With Trent Lott as Senate Majority Leader, and Gingrich at the helm in the House, the list to the Right could destabilize the entire Ship of State.” It provides an example of a metaphor that “recruit[s] more mappings than those between a single source and target domain. For instance, this example introduces the notion of right-hand directionality (i.e. starboard, in the context of a ship), which is independent of the Nations-as-Ships metaphor. The standard association between right-left polarity and conservative-liberal alignments is clearly not based on the ship model, as it is frequently encountered in contexts where there is no ship imagery.”\textsuperscript{37} Conceptual blending theory offers a complete framework for understanding the complex relationships between multiple concepts and multiple links among those concepts.

In “Blending and Metaphor,” Joseph E. Grady, Todd Oakley, and Seana Coulson argue that Cognitive Metaphor Theory and Blending Theory are complementary, with metaphor theory focusing primarily on entrenched conventional metaphors, and blending theory concentrating on novel “online” blends that may be fleeting. The two theories also

\textsuperscript{36} Grady, Oakley, and Coulson, 426.

\textsuperscript{37} Grady, Oakley, and Coulson, 426, 427.
differ in that cognitive metaphor theory “posits relationships between pairs of mental representations, while blending theory allows for more than two,” and that in metaphor theory the aspects of the source domain are applied to the target domain and no qualities reverse (directionality), while blending theory allows for mappings to move from the inputs to the blended space and for material from the blended space to move back into the inputs.\textsuperscript{38}

Instead of mapping from one domain to another, conceptual blending posits two input spaces (analogous to the source and target domains), and a third “blended” space that takes aspects from both inputs to blend them into a third concept that carries some, but not all, of the aspects of each input. The blend, then, has its own emergent structure, meaning that there are relationships within the blend that are not necessarily indicated in either of the inputs. There may be additional frames of reference that help one understand the blend, and one is able to “run the blend,” or understand particular action within the blend if time and space are involved (see Figure 1.1).\textsuperscript{39} The basic processes of blending are \textit{composition}, “the projection of content from each of the inputs into the blended space,” \textit{completion}, adding information to the blend from long-term memory that is evoked by structure projected from the input spaces, and \textit{elaboration}, or “running the

\textsuperscript{38} Grady, Oakley, and Coulson, 420.

blend,” in which “we are able to imagine scenarios which unfold along various possible trajectories,” and the blend takes on a life of its own.  

As a case study, let us return to Greenblatt’s example of Elizabeth as an object of courtly love (see Figure 1.2). One input space contains Queen Elizabeth and her courtiers. (Elizabeth herself is a blend of Queen and the individual Elizabeth Tudor; I will discuss this blend and its compression in Chapter 2.) The second input space contains the structures of courtly love—a mistress who is distant and unattainable, and men who pay her court and often fall prey to physical manifestations of lovesickness, and who ply their mistress and record their woes in poetry. The courtly love input was conventional in the Renaissance, and was elaborated through court practice. Both of the inputs are considered “mental spaces,” “small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk for the purposes of local understanding and action.”41 Certain elements from the input spaces then project into a blended space.

In the instance of Sir Robert Cary’s approach to the Queen, Queen Elizabeth blends with “mistress/beloved,” and Sir Robert Carey blends with “lover.” In their particular roles, then, Carey must beg of Elizabeth in a stylistically appropriate way, which contains much flattery and wooing, in order to ask for his pay. It would be inappropriate for a lover to approach his beloved with demands, especially ones that he expects to have requited. At the same time, Carey retains his status as an unpaid subject of the Queen, and she retains the power to pay him or not as she sees fit. In the “lover/beloved” scenario there is no room for monetary payment; however, if Carey makes his request

40 Grady, Oakley, and Coulson, 424-25.

41 Fauconnier and Turner, The Way We Think, 40.
appropriately (as a lover may) and Elizabeth grants his request (as the beloved may), then a financial transaction will take place. The financial transaction takes place fully in the realm of the “Elizabeth/courtiers” input space, and the granting of Carey’s request projects back into the first input space. In conceptual blending, the blend is both stable—it is complete and can “elaborate,” or take on a life of its own—and not so convincing that it obliterates either of the input spaces. All three spaces exist at once, and what happens in the blend can change the material reality and relationships within an input blend. According to Fauconnier and Turner, “the resulting blend must have integrated action and meaning, on the one hand, and enough disintegration that the participants can connect it to both of the inputs, on the other.”42 It is the purpose of blends to consider two incompatible things: “mental spaces . . . juggle representations that, in the real world, are incompatible with each other.”43

In order for conceptual blending to be useful to literary studies and to the analysis of historical political rhetoric, we must posit, as Mary Thomas Crane does, “a potentially essentialist assumption that most human brains share biological and chemical components,” an assumption that “does not prevent a consideration of the ways in which material culture interacts with, shapes, and is shaped by those physical attributes.”44 We must also posit that the human brain and its capacity for blending has not changed significantly over the last half-millennium, even though some material and cultural inputs


44 Crane, 10.
have clearly changed. Though cognitive scientists are finding that the brain is quite flexible, rebuilding connections between various parts of the brain when parts of the body are incapacitated, for example, the basic way the brain functions appears to be stable. In fact, scholars assume that basic brain function has been stable since at least the origins of language.

Conceptual blending underlies our imaginative capacities, and thus a reader’s ability to understand literature and a writer’s ability to create literature. Writers must draw on cultural concepts and embodied experience to create meaning that is shaped by culture and can shape culture. As Fauconnier and Turner argue, “Blending imaginatively transforms our most fundamental human realities, the parts of our lives most deeply felt and most clearly consequential. Meaning goes far beyond word play. Meaning matters, in ways that have relevance for the individual [and] the social group.”

As we’ve seen with the example of Queen Elizabeth and Sir Robert Carey, the ways we imagine relationships in the blend can have consequences for real action. By examining the meaning creation in

---

45 Cognitive scientists often reference evolutionary change to the brain and human cognition, but in terms of the time allotted for evolutionary change, the last five hundred years are hardly a drop in the bucket.


these literary texts, we can find the ways that the imaginative world affects real relationships, both within the fictions themselves and within the larger culture.

**Conceptual Blending Theory applied**

Elizabeth used her maternal metaphor to redefine her relationship with her people. She drew on traditional connotations of mothers as caring and loving to shape her role as Queen as familial rather than political. Elizabeth as “mother-queen” extended later into her reign after her verbal incantations of the metaphor ceased. In Chapter 2, I introduce Elizabeth’s metaphor and its implications. I draw on other of her self-descriptions from various speeches to illustrate that she relied on her auditors’ abilities to perform complex cognitive functions to understand her blends. I also examine the ways in which the history of Elizabeth’s mother metaphor and its acceptance into the public consciousness provided a strong precursor to James IV/I’s more formal and demanding patriarchalism and created a site for writers to respond to Elizabeth, even when public comment was restricted.

In *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia*, which I consider in Chapter 3, Sidney engages with Elizabeth’s “mother-queen” blend by redefining one input into the blend: motherhood. Sidney constructs a version of motherhood which, when it replaces the traditional understanding of motherhood in Elizabeth’s blend, acts as a corrective and a warning to Elizabeth that she should fulfill her duty to her children/subjects by naming an heir. In the text, mothers are clearly linked to political power. All three main mothers, Gynecia, Cecropia, and Miso, become threats to the established political order. In the *New Arcadia*, the threats become even more significant. However, Sidney retracts the power of all three women: Gynecia is reinstated to her queenly role (a role of power, but
little autonomy) by chance and by her husband’s mercy, Cecropia falls to her death, and Miso is caught and punished cruelly. This chapter argues that the power of mothers is mitigated within the text as a warning to Elizabeth and is historically linked to Sidney’s concerns over the Anjou marriage negotiations and the role and responsibilities of the Queen for her people.

In *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare engages the mother-queen metaphor, not by focusing on one input of the blend, but by creating a character that embodies the blend: Tamora, a literal mother and queen. In Chapter 4, I analyze her as a complex blend, performing the roles of mother, queen, Roman, and Revenge, while at the same time she is the wronged Queen of the Goths bent on revenge. The concept of performance is key because performance itself is a blend: the play staged presents the blend of male actor and female character. An audience seeing Tamora would have go through multiple blends (which combine into one megablend) in order to understand her as actor, character, wronged mother/vengeful mother, merciful queen/vengeful queen, and Roman/Goth. I will detail the stages of this blend in order to describe the complexity necessary to understand this performance—an analysis that provides an example for understanding

---

Elizabeth’s metaphor and her performance as Queen—and the implicit critique of
Elizabeth’s own performances.

Spenser also approaches Elizabeth’s blend through a single character: Britomart,
the knight-maiden, and the maiden-wife-mother-widow. Chapter 5 begins with the
moment in Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* when Merlin prophesies that Britomart
will be mother to the line of kings that descends to Elizabeth, and then lapses into silence,
unable to continue the genealogy. I argue that we can read his silence in light of what
conceptual blending reveals about Britomart’s future motherhood. I consider Britomart as
both “in time”—in the narrative present of the poem—and “out of time”—as an imagined
blended figure—and why Spenser chooses to leave this blended Britomart in conceptual
form rather than writing her “end” into the narrative present of the poem. I conclude that
Merlin’s silence is itself a kind of blended space, one that highlights the potential inputs
but stops short of any conclusive associations. Thus Spenser emphasizes the requirement
of the reader to do the mental work of blending. Reading Britomart the *potential* mother-
queen has implications for Elizabeth as a *metaphorical* mother-queen: for both, success
and the succession are inextricably linked.

Conceptual blending theory offers us a way to understand *how* words mean
something. For linguists and cognitive scientists, this end is interesting in and of itself.
For literary scholars, the theory offers a way to tease out complexities of character and
heighten our understanding of metaphors. Literary writing has the potential to exploit the
natural capacity for conceptual blending, to surprise the reader with unusual blends, to
stretch the limits of automatic blending. Understanding Elizabeth’s metaphorical
motherhood is an automatic function—one we don’t have to think about. The responses
of Parliament confirm that they knew Elizabeth intended to say she was a loving and
caring mother and therefore also desired to express that she was a loving and caring
Queen. These readings of *Arcadia*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *The Faerie Queene* show how
Elizabeth’s auditors processed the metaphor and how their interpretation of her may have
changed over time, how the metaphor could be used to challenge Elizabeth’s behavior
and image, and how blending allows for multiple and sometimes contradictory versions
of the Queen. They help us to see one aspect of Elizabeth in all its complexity.

Figure 1.1: The basic diagram of a conceptual blend
Figure 1.2: Elizabeth as Petrarchan beloved
CHAPTER 2
QUEEN ELIZABETH, METAPHORICAL MOTHER OF ENGLAND

Elizabeth called herself the “mother of England” publicly only early in her reign, according to extant records. The most prominent moments were in two speeches responding to Parliament’s requests that she marry and bear an heir, thus securing the succession. With this metaphor, Elizabeth attempts to redefine her relationship with her people from one based on hierarchy and duty to one based on familial love and to assert her authority in a way that deflects attention from “natural” motherhood. Grounded in Elizabeth’s particular historical context, the metaphor draws on contemporary concepts of maternity and queenship. And what goes on in the minds of Elizabeth’s auditors when they hear this culturally primed metaphor is astounding and complex. This chapter examines the cognition necessary to comprehend Elizabeth’s maternal metaphor and considers the dynamics of the metaphor as Elizabeth’s subjects respond, challenge, and reshape it. Elizabeth’s metaphor, as part of the larger cultural imagination, became an effective site for her subjects to renegotiate their relationship with her and push her toward political action, particularly regarding the succession.

Elizabeth’s maternal metaphor is part of what critics term her self-presentation. But her self-presentation is not simply her own words about herself. Nor is it solely court-sanctioned portraits. Elizabeth did attempt to control her public image, as critics have attested, but in order to have meaning, Elizabeth’s self must have had interpreters and a cultural context. Much of the scholarship on Elizabeth’s self-presentation treats it as semi-static—depictions of Elizabeth change slowly over time as various aspects of her
character (or desired characteristics) are emphasized, as depicted in her official portraits. New historicists, first Stephen Greenblatt in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, followed by Louis A. Montrose in “‘Shaping Fantasies’: Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Texts,” focus on the cultural context of gender in the Renaissance and give attention to the elements of culture that shape Elizabeth’s self-presentation. More recently critics have drawn attention to changes in Elizabeth’s image over time; her self-presentation in her speeches, letters, and poetry; and popular perceptions of Elizabeth. Scholarship has moved from examining Elizabeth as an isolated subject to looking at her in the context of other voices. I extend this work by considering Elizabeth’s words in both cultural and interactive contexts. Elizabeth’s words are not static. They are part of a rhetorical transaction with her subjects: a conversation which can stretch across time and space and mode.

---

1 Yates; and Strong, *Gloriana*, and *The Cult of Elizabeth*. Susan Doran directly challenges this reading in “Virginity, Divinity, and Power.”


29
My reading of Elizabeth’s self-presentation draws on linguistic analytic
techniques. I consider Elizabeth and the writers of her time as interlocutors, engaged in a
sometimes immediate and sometimes asynchronous conversation about who Elizabeth is
and what she represents. For instance, Parliament’s direct responses to Elizabeth’s
speeches provide a record of a formal conversation between Elizabeth and her subjects.
William Camden’s later reporting of her speeches, in his *Annales: The True and Royal
History of the Famous Empress Elizabeth* (1625), reshapes Elizabeth’s metaphor through
emphasis and embellishment years after her words were spoken. I focus on the metaphor
of motherhood to examine how Elizabeth’s words invoke meaning within her historical
and cultural context by relying on the cognitive responses of her auditors. I consider the
immediate context of Elizabeth’s usage; historical precedent for the metaphor; cultural
constructions of motherhood and queenship that affect the inputs of the metaphor; the
metaphor construction itself; and the responses to Elizabeth’s metaphorical maternity,
both near the time of her speeches and throughout her reign. Elizabeth’s “mother of
England” metaphor is an attempt to refine and redefine the relationship between monarch
and subjects, one that relies on cognition and thus is vulnerable to the speech and writings
of her interlocutors.

**Elizabeth as Mother of England**

As we saw in Chapter 1, the language of Elizabeth’s maternal metaphor varies in
different reported versions of her speeches, though she adheres to the connotation of the
mother–child relationship as loving and caring. Some examples of her language bear
repeating. Elizabeth styled herself “mother of England” perhaps as early as her first
speech before Parliament (February 10, 1559). One manuscript reads, “I will never in that
matter [marriage] conclude anything prejudicial to the realm, for the weal and safety whereof, as a good mother of my country, will never shun to spend my life” (*Collected Works*, 58, fn. 9). She repeated this claim in a January 1563 speech to Parliament in response to their request that she marry, stating “Think not that I, that in other matters have had convenient care of you all will in this matter touching the safety of myself and you all be careless. [...] And so I assure you all that though after my death you may have many stepdames, yet shall you never have any a more mother than I mean to be unto you all” (71). Another good manuscript of the speech reads, “yet shall you never have any a more natural mother” (72, fn. 7), though the editors find no reason to suppose the second version is superior. In these cases, Elizabeth describes herself as loving and caring, sacrificing her own desires for the needs of her people.

But how accurate are the reports of Elizabeth’s words? And how accurate do we need them to be? I argue that people in Elizabethan England were a necessary part of Elizabeth’s self-presentation because of the cognitive processes required to understand her words. I also argue that Elizabeth’s metaphor changed the relationship (or meant to) between her and her people. This argument appears to require accuracy in the reporting of Elizabeth’s speeches. However, we have, in most cases, multiple eyewitness reports which differ, and posthumous reports, which are often cited by critics as accurate representations of her words but differ from earlier reports. We also have some published court-sanctioned versions as well as a few manuscripts of the speeches edited by Elizabeth herself. The work of Leah Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose draws attention to the variety of reports, and questions the possibility of our access to an accurate version of Elizabeth’s spoken words. Reports of her speeches vary, and the
published versions, where we have versions to compare, appear to have been modified for print. Because we have uneven access to Elizabeth’s speeches, it might seem an impossible task to analyze her words. It is valuable to attempt to figure out how close we can get to Elizabeth’s utterances, as Marcus does. But it is also reasonable to analyze the remembered and written reports of people who heard her. While these reports may not contain her exact words, the words they do record give insight into both the general sense of the speech and the concepts and linguistic constructions available in the culture. However Elizabeth phrased her metaphor of motherhood, it was a culturally accessible linguistic device reported by her auditors. While I examine specific linguistic constructions in reports of Elizabeth’s speeches, I am more interested in the fact of her metaphor, how it could be cognitively understood, and how Elizabethan subjects engaged with the metaphor to change public discourse.

**Immediate context of her usage: succession**

Elizabeth’s maternal metaphor occurs primarily in the discussion of the succession. She enters into an exchange with Parliament regarding her marriage, specifically addressing the hope that she will marry, and soon, in order to produce an heir and thus stabilize the succession. In its petitions, Parliament casts her responsibility to provide a successor in terms of maternal love and care for her people. The Commons’ petition (January 28, 1563) reads in part, “your said subjects . . . confess your majesty, of your most gracious and motherly care for them and their posterity” (73). It characterizes her calling of

---

4 According to Leah Marcus, the records of people who heard Elizabeth speak and reported her words soon after are the most likely to be accurate representations of Elizabeth’s actual words: “Oral Delivery,” 37-38.
Parliament as a maternal act: “which by your most honorable and motherly carefulness for them hath occasioned this assembly” (76). Later it invokes her motherly duty to her people when it asks her to limit the succession as her father did, “of his most princely duty and fatherly zeal to his most loving subjects” (76). A month later, the Lords’ petition alludes to her parental responsibilities toward the succession with biblical examples: “Besides it is plain by the Scriptures that godly governors and princes, as fathers of their countries, have always been careful to avoid the great evil that might ensue through want of a certain limitation of succession” (85). Both houses of Parliament appeal to Elizabeth’s motherly care and imply that she should follow the paternal examples of her own father and of biblical figures, by accepting her motherly role and taking action to secure the succession.

Elizabeth’s claim to metaphorical motherhood is risky because it articulates a promise, as some saw it, that she might (and did) fail to fulfill. She attempts to claim maternity in order to quell the call for her biological motherhood and to give her authority over decisions regarding her own marriage. In direct response to the Commons, Elizabeth appropriates maternal authority, by claiming that she does care for her people as a mother cares for her own natural children. At this point it was exceedingly likely that Elizabeth would marry and bear an heir; she was thirty years old at the time of the 1563 petitions from Parliament. A maternal metaphor, then, would only be a placeholder for Elizabeth’s actual motherhood. In Elizabeth’s progress of 1565, the Recorder of Coventry welcomed Elizabeth with a speech which included rhetorical use of the maternal metaphor to request (or celebrate the possibility of) her literal motherhood: “like as you are a mother to your kingdom . . . so you may, by God's goodness and justice, be a
natural mother, and, having blest issue of your princely body, may live to see your children's children unto the third and fourth generation.”5 The statement of metaphorical motherhood encouraged the hope of actual motherhood, an event that was perceived as the best outcome for Queen and country. Elizabeth would be fulfilling her God-ordained role as a woman, and the country would have political and religious stability. Also implicit in the hopeful address, however, is the fear of what would happen if there were no natural heir. If Elizabeth had birthed children the metaphor may have gained a different sort of power—the maternal Queen watching over and protecting her people through her love and care and through the provision of an heir. The metaphor cast Elizabeth as the source of generation, in control of England, her own destiny, and the succession.

**Historical continuity of the metaphor**

Even though Elizabeth only called herself “the mother of England” in her early speeches, she emphasized relationships as familial or maternal throughout her reign. The only later occurrence of the metaphor is in a French prayer from Elizabeth’s Prayer Book, written in 1563.

---

5 Quoted in Doran, “Why Did Elizabeth Not Marry?” 30-31. This oration alludes to biblical passages that refer to “children’s children” to mean “generations”: “Yea, thou shalt see thy children’s children, and peace upon Israel” (Ps. 128.6), and “But the loving kindness of the Lord is endureth forever and ever upon them that fear him, and his righteousness upon children’s children” (Ps. 103.17). In addition the phrase “third and fourth generation” comes from the Ten Commandments: “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon children’s children, unto the third and fourth generation” (Ex. 34.7; for other instances see Ex. 20.5, Num. 14.18, and Deut. 5.9). All scripture quotations are from the Geneva Bible.
in her own hand, likely between 1579 and 1582, during her courtship with Anjou.\textsuperscript{6} In fact, in her 1576 speech at the close of Parliament, she states that the faithful zeal of her subjects is \textit{unlike} the changeable love of children for their parents.\textsuperscript{7} However, the image of Elizabeth as a mother continued throughout her reign and beyond her death. Christine Coch points out that even though Elizabeth dropped the metaphor from her speech, “she retained the maternal attributes it implied,” and she even took to “coddling [children] at court”—a visual image of her as a mothering figure (260-61). Elizabeth continued to emphasize her connection to children through her numerous god-children, and through her attentiveness to children at court, creating tableaux that indicated a mothering relationship to her subjects.\textsuperscript{8} In addition to public displays of the mother image, Elizabeth created familial relationships with other monarchs, addressing them in her letters as “brother,” “sister,” “cousin,” “mother,” “daughter,” or “son.”\textsuperscript{9} She no longer expressed her maternal metaphor publicly with language, but the metaphor found expression in

\textsuperscript{6} The French Prayer reads in part, “Therefore, my God and Father, I render Thee everlasting thanks that Thou hast given me the honor of being mother and nurse of Thy dear children” (\textit{Collected Works}, 314). For dates of composition, see \textit{Collected Works}, 311-12, fn. 1.

\textsuperscript{7} Elizabeth claimed, “whereas variety and love of change is ever so rife in servants to their masters, in children to their parents, and in private friends to one another (as that though for one year or perhaps for two they can content themselves to hold their course upright, yet after, by mistrust or doubt of worse, they are dissevered and in time wax weary of their wonted liking), yet still I find that assured zeal amongst my faithful subjects, to my special comfort, which was first declared to my great encouragement”: \textit{Collected Works}, 168.

\textsuperscript{8} Orlin, 85-109. Carole Levin cites Orlin and extends her discussion into rumors of actual motherhood both during her reign and in contemporary film and literature: “All the Queen’s Children.”

\textsuperscript{9} Orlin, 96-99.
private ways, indicating that familial tropes were in her imagination—and in the wider cultural imagination.

Not only was the association of Elizabeth and maternity “persistent throughout [her] long reign,” but the image was also used by her subjects “both to bolster her authority and to challenge it.”¹⁰ And the way Elizabeth’s subjects used the maternal metaphor changed over time. According to Helen Hackett, the rhetorical function of maternity during Elizabeth’s reign shifted from “a deliberative rhetoric which was self-consciously time-bound, seeking to change policy and looking to the future” to an “epideictic rhetoric, praising Elizabeth as a timeless icon of eternal, ideal, symbolic motherhood” during her courtship with Anjou (1579-82).¹¹ For instance, Camden’s retelling of Elizabeth’s speeches in his Annales (1625) posthumously describes Elizabeth as an intentional virgin married to her country and mother to her people: “And reproach me so no more,’ quoth she ‘that I have no children: for every one of you, and as many as are English, are my children and kinsfolks, of whom, so long as I am not deprived and God shall preserve me, you cannot charge me, without offense, to be destitute’” (59). Camden relies on the culturally accessible image of the mother-queen, intensifying the image to present subjects as Elizabeth’s sole children, even celebrating Elizabeth’s virginity, a trend that occurred in the last half of her reign and after her death.

The posthumous connections between Elizabeth’s virginity and her metaphorical motherhood culminated in her association with the Virgin Mary. David Norbrook argues that the trigger for the emphasis on Elizabeth’s virginity was the failure of the French

¹⁰ Hackett, “(In)fertility,” 149, 150.

¹¹ Hackett, “(In)fertility,” 164.
Match. Similarly, Susan Doran argues, “The image of the Virgin Queen, in fact, appeared relatively late in Elizabeth’s reign. Early royal portraits which deployed emblems of virginity were clearly presenting a marriageable queen rather than one whose power rested on her celibacy.” Writers likened Elizabeth to Mary because of her virginity; she became an eternally pure figure. But the association of Elizabeth with the Virgin Mary also emphasizes Elizabeth as mother—a metaphorical mother.

Although she herself did not use the metaphor after 1563, it was at least present enough in the cultural imagination to make the Marian associations possible and for the Marian associations to intensify the idea of Elizabeth as both virginal and motherly. As the association was exploited in eulogies and other posthumous writings, such as Camden’s, the idea of Elizabeth became more tied to virginity and simultaneously more tied to motherhood. As we examine Elizabeth’s use of the “mother of England” metaphor, we must keep in mind that we are likely to tend toward a posthumous view that emphasizes her virginity rather than her presumed motherhood. Elizabeth and motherhood, however, were linked throughout her reign and provided a means to shape and discuss the relationship between Elizabeth and her people and the responsibilities each had to the other.

---


13 Doran, “Why Did Elizabeth Not Marry?” 37. Doran argues in another essay that Elizabeth’s portraiture contains “very little that can be called Marian iconography”: “Virginity, Divinity, and Power,” 172.
Cognition and Elizabeth’s subjects

Elizabeth’s 1588 Tilbury speech illustrates her expectation of cognitive work in her listeners, the presence of cultural concepts that allowed for the blend to be understood, and what happened in the mind of the listener as he or she—likely in a split second—processed Elizabeth’s rhetoric. Elizabeth invokes an odd construct in what are perhaps her most famous words, those she is reported to have spoken to the troops in August 1588: “I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too” (326). Elizabeth describes herself as both female and male: her physical female body has the constitution of a male monarch.

Elizabeth commonly used the rhetoric of the female–male blend to describe herself and to claim authority outside the norms of expected female behavior. In her January 1563 speech to Parliament, she justifies her bold speech with a similar contrast: “The weight and greatness of this matter [Parliament’s petition for her to marry] might cause in me, being a woman wanting both wit and memory, some fear to speak and bashfulness besides, a thing appropriate to my sex. But yet the princely seat and kingly throne where in God (though unworthy) hath constituted me, maketh these two causes to

14 The editors of Elizabeth’s Collected Works state, “there can be little doubt that the speech was actually delivered, and in language reasonably close to that reproduced here”: 325, fn. 1. Janet M. Green argues for the speech’s authenticity in “I My Self”: Queen Elizabeth I’s Oration at Tilbury Camp,” Sixteenth Century Journal 28.2 (1997): 421-445. In contrast, Susan Frye questions whether or not Elizabeth actually uttered these words; as with many of her utterances, they were reported after events, and the most famous constructions were distilled and written by authors with particular agendas: “The Myth of Elizabeth at Tilbury,” Sixteenth Century Journal 23.1 (1992): 95-114. Whether or not Elizabeth used these exact words, the fact that people in early modern England might have believed Elizabeth to have spoken them, and the fact that someone wrote them down and they became a popular representation of Elizabeth through her speech, gives a certain credibility to the image itself.
seem little in mine eyes” (70). In an earlier speech, she states, “though I be a woman, yet I have as good a courage answerable to my place as ever my father had. I am your anointed queen.”  She uses the contrast between her female body and her God-given authority through to the end of her reign. In her Golden Speech (1601) she states, “Shall I ascribe anything [her royal authority] to myself and my sexly weakness? I were not worthy to live then, of all most unworthy of the mercies that I have from God [...]” As with much of her rhetoric, Elizabeth does not claim any special status for women. She aligns herself with the common stereotypes of women as “weak and feeble,” given to emotion, not strong of wit or morals, and needing the protection and guidance of male authority. Janet Green considers these reference to weak femininity to be merely a “glancing reference”; of Tilbury in particular she claims, “the truth was that she was a vigorous and healthy fifty-five-year-old Tudor prince with the strong nerves of her redoubtable father. [...] [S]he speaks with all the authority and power of her real voice—as a queen” (427). Elizabeth’s actions and speeches contradict a view of herself as weak,

15 “Queen Elizabeth’s Speech to a Joint Delegation of Lords and Commons, November 5, 1566,” Collected Works, 97.

16 Collected Works, 340. The above quote is from a full transcription by a Member of Parliament in attendance. A published variant, also prepared by one in attendance, reads, “But should I ascribe anything of this [effective royal authority] to myself, or my sexly weakness, I were not worthy to live, and of all, most unworthy of the mercies I have had from God” (342).

17 At times Elizabeth even aligns herself with common women: “if I were a milkmaid with a pail on mine arm, whereby my private person might be little set by, I would not forsake that single state to match myself with the greatest monarch”: “Queen Elizabeth’s Speech at the Close of the Parliamentary Session, March 15, 1576,” Collected Works, 170. See Mendelson, 194.
but she consistently returns to these descriptions as a rhetorical strategy. She does so both to salve the concerns of those who might have issues with female authority and to acknowledge her physical body and the social constructions that restrain it. Her female body, however, is always paired with some kind of kingly or sanctioned authority given her by God, or by history, or by inheritance, establishing her as firmly within her rights to speak.

It does not seem difficult to understand that Elizabeth is both acknowledging her female sex and claiming male monarchical authority in this most famous sentence of her Tilbury speech. But the image of the female prince, one common in her speeches and writing, actually demands complex cognitive functions from her auditors—those listening to the speech, those reading it in printed form in the 1590s, and those reading it today. Elizabeth expects her listeners/readers/interlocutors to imagine her physical body, which she directly acknowledges, as having the authority, intelligence, power, and grace believed to be resident only in a male body. Conceptual blending theory allows us to analyze what happens in the mind of the listener to produce and accept this dissonant blend.

Conceptual blending considers a dynamic relationship between metaphor and reality. It goes beyond metaphor theory, which focuses on direct associations between elements in

---

18 She also uses the trope to open a speech in Latin delivered to scholars at Cambridge: “Although feminine modesty, most faithful subjects and most celebrated university, prohibits the delivery of a rude and uncultivated speech in such a gathering of most learned men, yet the intercession of my nobles and my own good will toward the university incite me to produce one”: “Queen Elizabeth’s Latin Oration at Cambridge University, August 7, 1564,” in Collected Works, 87.
the source domain and elements in the target domain that move in one direction (see Figure 2.1). For example, metaphor theory explains that in the phrase “that mother is a tiger,” the quality “fierce” from the tiger domain (source) maps to the mother domain (target) to give the reader or listener the idea that the mother is fierce, particularly in protecting her children (see Figure 2.2). The characteristic from one maps onto the other; the metaphor doesn’t tell us anything about tigers, but does purport to describe something about mothers. Conceptual blending, on the other hand, interprets a metaphor as a blend between two inputs (or more, in the case of a megablend). Blends create mental spaces where we can elaborate them—“treating [the blends] as simulations and running them imaginatively according to the principles that have been established for the blend”—and where elements from the blend can project back into the inputs. For instance, in the “Elizabeth is a Petrarchan beloved” blend we considered in the introduction, the concept of Elizabeth’s person blends with the Petrarchan lover. In the mind of the auditor, there is an imagined Elizabeth who takes on characteristics of the Petrarchan lover. This blend then projects the relationship between a beloved and her lover back into the real relations between the Queen and her courtier. The courtier must behave in a way appropriate to a beloved, wooing her and making requests, rather than making formal political demands. But the actual relationship between sovereign and

---


20 Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 48. Conceptual blending is not applicable solely to metaphors. One might engage in conceptual blending to understand a puzzle, or to take instruction in a sport, for instance. I am focusing on its differences from metaphor analysis because of my particular application of conceptual blending to Elizabeth’s metaphor of motherhood.
subject remains—Elizabeth has the ultimate control to grant or deny requests, like the beloved, but in a more direct and powerful way. The cognitive process required to understand Elizabeth as Petrarchan beloved is necessary to understanding much of her self-presentation.

The line above from Elizabeth’s Tilbury speech requires the blending of two disparate images—the weak and feeble woman with the stout and courageous king. By directly contrasting the female body with the male constitution, she acknowledges the rarity of the blend. It is not something she expects her audience to formulate or cognate on their own; she guides them to the blend through her explanation, calling on cultural constructs and linguistic structure to generate her meaning. Elizabeth heightens the contrast between her male and female “parts” by calling her female body “weak and feeble,” as women were commonly stereotyped. She stays within the frame of reference to the body by describing the kingly qualities she wishes to claim in physical language: “heart” and “stomach.” In a literal sense, she claims (within the blended space) to have a physical body that is a blend of male and female parts—she is externally female, but (some of) her internal organs are male (see Figure 2.3). The metaphor works because of the blended space where two imagined physical bodies are imagined to be combined. Elizabeth cannot literally have male internal organs, though it was common for certain parts of the body to be understood as tied to the biological sex of the person, so the listener is forced to introduce the substitution of quality for internal organ. The organs she refers to have particular sixteenth-century meanings: “The heart was both the seat of courage—hence the English etymology by way of Anglo-French cor and corage—and the seat of royal identity, commanding special regard to where a monarch’s heart was
buried. Specifically at this period, the stomach was the organ for doing violent deeds that might have a positive or negative animus.”

These male internal organs – and the qualities of person they represent—are not simply male; they are kingly. In this military setting, Elizabeth is claiming that she is willing to fight to the death: she has the courage and “great-souledness” of a king. The blend of quality and organ occurs such that when the literary body blend happens, the brain instantaneously substitutes the quality for the body part (see Figure 2.4). The Tilbury speech example, then, is a megablend that requires complex cognition from those who hear and understand it.

While Elizabeth constructs the blend rhetorically, emphasizing the cognitive function she demands from her listeners, she is drawing on and invoking the legal concept of the king’s two bodies, which I detailed in the introduction. The development of the concept from medieval manifestations to the more explicit constructions in Elizabethan legal philosophy allows for a cultural context that would prove favorable to this kind of blend. As Mary Thomas Crane points out, cognitive theory “provides a way of tracing in the text the interactions between culture, language, and cognition” (31). Amy Cook describes the work of cognitive linguists as “based on the fact that through language we can see important elements of the mind/body/brain.”


22 Amy Cook cites a study that shows that reading literal and metaphoric sentences take the same amount of time, but the metaphorical sentences use more parts of the brain. Thus when blending is necessary, “processing is more involved, not more time consuming”: Shakespearean Neuroplay, 3.

23 Cook, Shakespearean Neuroplay, 6.
Elizabeth sets the female body and the male/kingly constitution in contrast to each other, she asks her listeners to see her as both at the same time: woman and king. She sets up a blend where the “weak, feeble woman” input combines with the “courageous and steadfast king” input to create what at first seems to be an incongruous blend—a courageous and stouthearted woman: a kingly queen.

**Cultural conceptions of motherhood and queenship**

Maternity in the 1590s was a contested concept. Popular guides to women’s behavior prescribed the behavioral model of “chaste, silent, and obedient,” even as women were granted greater authority within the household. These courtesy books were written by men and differed in their prescriptions for women.\(^{24}\) For instance, Castiglione’s *The Courtier* (first published in English in 1561), directed at an elite audience, “emphasized the need for grace, wit, learning, understanding, and ‘the vertues of the minde, as wisdom, justice, noblenesse of courage, temperance, strength of minde, consistency, sobermoode, etc.’” In Richard Braithwaite’s *The English Gentlewoman* (1631), “the ideal modest woman is a wife and mother involved in the ‘Breeding or Education of Youth.’” Within the household, women had responsibility for raising, preparing, and preserving food; overseeing household staff; and providing medical care and other assistance to those who lived on the estate.\(^{25}\) While the authority of women varied according to class, the shamefastness the culture required of them remained consistent.

---


\(^{25}\) Hull, 32, 33-34, and 36.
Maternity, though relegated to private life, was not without power. During the early modern period a shift occurred for women’s roles that Betty S. Travitsky terms “The New Mother,”\textsuperscript{26} characterized by an increased level of authority within the home as religious doctrine focused on the relationship between an individual (whether male or female) and God, and as the idea of companionate marriage grew. For example, the diary of Margaret Hoby, recorded in the early seventeenth century, reports her authority running the estate, from commanding servants to medical care for the community.\textsuperscript{27} The diary also reveals a companionate relationship with her husband: they walk together regularly to discuss religion and estate management. Mothers were in charge of children’s education, and they managed their households and often their children’s marriage prospects.\textsuperscript{28} As Travitsky describes, the “new mother” was “learned and pious, responsible for raising her children and developing her own potential” (33). Her maternity was to be “the outlet for her creative, spiritual, and intellectual needs” (33). The rise of the New Mother occurred as Renaissance humanism arrived in England and religious reform flourished, coinciding with Elizabeth’s metaphor use.

Elizabeth’s metaphor responds to the cultural expectation that she fulfill her womanly duty to bear children and her duty as queen to provide an heir. While there was clear pressure to bear an heir, there were also legitimate reasons not to. Elizabeth knew


\textsuperscript{27} Lady Margaret Hoby, \textit{The Private Life of an Elizabethan Lady: The Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby, 1599-1605}, ed. Joanna Moody (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1998).

\textsuperscript{28} Mendelson and Crawford, 65, 157-58, and 161-63.
the pressures on royal wives to produce a successor: her own mother had been one of Henry VIII’s six wives and beheaded because she could not produce a male heir, and Elizabeth and her half-sister, Mary, had been deemed illegitimate and removed from the succession before their brother, Edward VI, ascended the throne as a boy. Critics and historians sometime conjecture about the impact of Anne Boleyn’s death on Elizabeth’s career and private life, implying that she intended to avoid having children. Christine Coch speculates that Anne’s failure to produce a male heir served as a warning to Elizabeth that to try and fail could be costly (140). Some suggest that Elizabeth avoided marriage in order to avoid the risks of pregnancy—the possibility of only bearing girls, of miscarriage or stillbirth, of monstrous birth, of the death of a young child, of her own death in childbirth.\footnote{Coch, 138-39.} It is possible too that the pregnant body of a monarch, while a hopeful image, would be too grotesque or inappropriate for the public or court, and might mitigate some of her carefully cultivated authority. Gail Kern Paster asserts that in the Renaissance there was “an understanding of the maternal body as polluted and polluting,” which certain cultural practices attempted to contain and counter (165). Pregnancy was risky: “Even if she escaped medical complications and bore a perfect child, she would still risk her political health merely by inhabiting a maternal body and facing the repressive disgust it could elicit in her society.”\footnote{Coch, 142.} Additionally, the isolation and seclusion of pregnancy and childbirth would separate Elizabeth from the public court.
where she could exercise her power.\textsuperscript{31} For Elizabeth, then, maternity was at least as threatening as it was desirable, both as a risk to her person and to her queenly authority.

The authority of queenship was also contested in the early modern era. The two tracts that define our current understanding of the conflict over female political authority are John Knox’s ill-timed \textit{The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women} (1558), responding to the Catholic Queen Mary and published just before her death, and John Aylmer’s \textit{A Harborowe for Faithull and Trewe Subjects} (1559), published in an attempt to recalibrate the Protestant relationship with Queen Elizabeth upon her ascension. Knox described female authority as anathema; although he allows for the God-ordained rule of Debora, he finds rule by women—weak and changeable by nature—to be “monstiferous.”\textsuperscript{32} Further, he “describes biological motherhood as utterly incompatible with public authority.”\textsuperscript{33} Aylmer justified Elizabeth’s reign by signaling her exceptionality: like the prophet Debora, she was placed on the throne by God, as an exception to the proper order of the world, to rule in justice, despite her shortcomings as a woman.\textsuperscript{34} Elizabeth herself claimed to serve as God’s handmaiden and also presented herself as exceptional. In the context of queens ruling in ways opposed to Protestant ideals, authors blamed the queens’ weak feminine nature. Elizabeth always had this background to her authority present, even as she assumed an effective queenship.

\textsuperscript{31} Coch, 142. On birth practices, see Mendelson and Crawford, 153-56.

\textsuperscript{32} Quoted in Hackett, \textit{Virgin Mother}, 39.

\textsuperscript{33} Coch, 156.

\textsuperscript{34} Levin, \textit{Heart and Stomach}, 11. For further discussion of Knox’s and Aylmer’s texts, see Schochet, 44-46.
More generally, the means of maintaining order in the state were much discussed during Elizabeth’s reign. Works such as Erasmus’s *The Education of a Christian Prince*, Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, Castiglione’s *The Courtier*, and the spate of courtesy books published in England and directed at monarchs, debated the qualifications, qualities, and approaches to rule that a prince should have and engage in. Similar texts directed toward family order addressed how parents should “govern” their children. One survey of Puritan guides describes the ways parents were to maintain order within their households:

Parents were to be the authority in the family; they were to set the examples for their children; parents were not to spoil their children nor correct them for no apparent reason; discipline should be done with common sense, wisdom, by assessing the nature of the infraction, the capability of the child, and then carrying out the discipline when in a calm state of mind after explaining to the child why the correction was to be done. The parent was to use verbal reproof first and physical punishment only as a last resort.35

These guides for parental behavior explain how parents could promote the obedience of children, raising them to be good citizens and servants of God. Conduct books both for parents and for rulers demonstrate that there were discussions of (and sometimes controversies over) how order should be established within both the home and the realm. As we have seen, the discussions intersect in the family–state analogy.

Existing rhetoric about the family and state creates a context in which Elizabeth’s maternal metaphor can exist. The connection between family and state was established as far back as Aristotle’s *Politics*, which “cites the moral imperative for husbands to rule at

35 Robert V. Schnucker, “Puritan Attitudes towards Childhood Discipline, 1560-1634,” in *Women as Mothers in Pre-industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren*, ed. Valerie Fildes (New York: Routledge, 1990), 108-21 (117). Both Catholics and Protestants had the goal of godliness within the family that would extend into the public sphere for God’s glory; the Puritans were especially prolific in providing guides toward this end, writing twice as many guides as any other group (108).
home as integral to the moral health of the state."\textsuperscript{36} Cicero considered the home “the nursery . . . of the state,” raising good citizens to support the order of government.\textsuperscript{37} In both of these examples, the home should be ordered as the state; the state provides the model for the household. In the Elizabethan \textit{Homily on Order}, however, the relationship tends toward mutuality: kings and subjects, fathers and children, husbands and wives, all show the divinely ordained order required for the stability of civilization.\textsuperscript{38} Further, the organized state allows the subjects of a country to have safe and ordered homes: “Take awaye Kynges, Princes, Rulers, Magistrates, Judges, and such estates of Gods order, no man shall [...] keepe in his own house or bed unkyllde, no man shal keepe his wife, children, and possessions in quietness [...].”\textsuperscript{39} Elizabeth herself becomes the origin and model of beautiful order: “God has sente us his high gift, our moste deare soueraigne Ladye queen Elizabeth, with a godly, wise, and honourable counsel, with other superiors and inferiors in a beautiful order.”\textsuperscript{40} In order to meet the ideal of a balanced and ordered state, both the households that make up the state and the government itself must strive toward an appropriately hierarchical stasis. The family–state analogy was fundamental to

\textsuperscript{36} Raber, 301.

\textsuperscript{37} Raber, 302.

\textsuperscript{38} Raber, 302.

\textsuperscript{39} Cranmer, 69.

\textsuperscript{40} Cranmer, 70. The 1623 edition reads, “our moste deare soueraigne Lord King James.” For an earlier version see “An exhortation concerning good order and obedience to Rulers and Magistrates: The First Part,” in \textit{Certaine sermons appointed by the Queenes Maiestie}, 1574. STC (2\textsuperscript{nd} ed.) 13654.
early modern understandings of order and provided context that makes Elizabeth’s use possible.

As Mark Turner asserts in *Death is the Mother of Beauty: Mind, Metaphor, Criticism*, kinship metaphors are entrenched in Western culture⁴¹; thus, Elizabeth’s use of the metaphor is not surprising. She uses an ordinary concept to illustrate something about her and her reign. As we’ve seen above, the metaphor’s connection to monarchy is not surprising either. Her use, however, does say something new about her connection to her people and what their response should be. Turner acknowledges the connection between the everyday experience of kinship and its metaphorical use: the cognitive and metaphorical principles that underlie our interpretations of kinship metaphors are motivated by our knowledge of kinship and our everyday experience with it. Not just any kinship metaphor is consistent with that knowledge and that experience. Thus, the so-called free play of imagination is not, strictly speaking free, though it is infinite. It is constrained by our knowledge, our experience, and our modes of cognition. And a violation of any given constraint, when successful, is meaningful precisely because the constraint exists. (16)

Literary writers push the boundaries of cognition in their use of metaphor, and Elizabeth’s claim of metaphorical maternity allows for a meaningful exchange of ideas in which authors stretch and extend the metaphor to comment on Elizabeth and her rule (see Chapters 3, 4, and 5). The ordinariness of Elizabeth’s metaphor is what makes it compelling.

The metaphor before and after Elizabeth

The cultural concepts of motherhood, queenship, and the family-state analogy provided a fertile context for Elizabeth’s metaphor. In fact, the metaphor was not novel to Elizabeth, though she used it in new ways. Elizabeth’s predecessor, Queen Mary, made allusions to her maternal relationship to the state during her reign, providing a gender-appropriate example for Elizabeth to follow.\(^{42}\) Mary had stated, “I cannot tell how naturally a mother loveth her children, for I was never the mother of anie; but certeinlie a prince and governor may as naturalie and as earnestly love subjects, as the mother dothe her child.”\(^{43}\) Christine Coch asserts that Mary “converts [the trope] into an uncertain simile, claiming no knowledge of maternal identity,” while “Elizabeth arrogates the mother’s cultural authority to her throne” (135). Mary’s construction distances her from maternity—she “was never the mother of anie”—and employs a simile rather than a metaphor. Elizabeth assumes a maternal identity, invoking a blended space where she is a mother to her people. Elizabeth modifies Mary’s construction to reveal an intimate connection with her people (whether actual, imagined, or desired). While their uses of the maternal metaphor differ, the presence of the metaphor in Mary’s rhetoric allowed for Elizabeth to modify and extend the metaphor in her own speeches.

Elizabeth’s metaphor did not end at her death. In addition to its existence and intensified use in eulogies and posthumous reports of her speeches, it also provided a concrete precursor to James VI/I’s more formalized view of patriarchalism. As Lena Cowen Orlin asserts, histories of political theory haven’t acknowledged

\(^{42}\) Doran, “Why Did Elizabeth Not Marry?” 38.

\(^{43}\) Quoted in Coch, 135.
that early intimations of the parental metaphor as a resource for monarchical authority are very much present in Elizabeth’s rhetoric. She professes her parental care for her people, true, but she also uses the maternal metaphor to make demands of her people—even if only, as in her first use of the analogy, to ask that the people not make demands of marriage and childbirth upon her. (91)

In *Patriarchalism in Political Thought*, Gordon Schochet recounts the impact of earlier expressions of patriarchalism in medieval and Tudor England, providing early examples of the connection between family and state. He argues that because “Obedience was due to the reigning king simply because he was in power,” there was little need for formal patriarchalism.  

In the 1550s, political treatises began to establish patriarchal ideas: “naturalistic, patriarchal conceptions [began] to supplement or replace the conventional defenses of unlimited governmental authority” in works like Bishop John Hooper’s commentary on Romans 13, in which he “unhesitatingly equated the duties of children with those of subjects” (42). This transition in political culture set the stage for James’s claims for the “divine right of kings” to rule and be obeyed as a father of his people. Debora Kuller Shuger argues that James’s patriarchalism was not primarily about legitimating autocratic power; James follows Elizabeth in establishing a connection with his people that demands their obedience based on the loving (constructed) relationship between king/father and his subjects/children.  

James’s formalized views grow out of Elizabeth’s assertions of her maternity. In contrast to Mary’s uncertain claims of metaphorical motherhood, Elizabeth’s claim to be the “mother of England” exploits the hierarchical relationships within the

44 Schochet, 37.

conceptual structures FAMILY and STATE to create an emotional connection between her and her subjects. Shuger argues that patriarchalism is concerned principally with a psychosocial response rather than a structural one: “Patriarchy thus does not depend on structural transformation but [...] on mystification: on the king’s perceiving himself as a father and the subject’s perceiving himself as the son of a loving parent.” The perception Shuger describes is only possible through blending. She continues, “[patriarchy] provides a model for sacred and social relations based on the mutual love (storge) of parents and children, a love frequently defined in contrast to political relations of domination and oppression.” Subjects, these monarchs hoped, would respond to a metaphor of paternal love with the appropriate response: obedience. Responses to Elizabeth’s metaphor acknowledged her love and care for her people, and assumed her subjects’ submissive response, as we shall see. But her metaphor does more than establish a familiar feel between monarch and subjects; it establishes her as having fulfilled her role as queen by having children, directly challenging the Parliamentary requests for her to marry in order to secure the succession. She may have still held to the possibility that she would produce an heir, but it would be on her own terms, and not out of obligation.

**Cognition: Metaphor construction**

The statement “Elizabeth is the mother of England” was possible because of the historical and cultural context as well as the immediate circumstances in Parliament. Elizabeth used

---


specific linguistic structures in speaking of motherhood (as much as we can tell from the written record), as did Parliament. However, Elizabeth’s utterances cannot be fully understood without considering the cognitive activity of her auditors. I have argued that whatever Elizabeth’s specific words, she likely uttered some form of a maternal metaphor, alluding to herself as, or claiming to be, “mother of England.” Although we can’t know with precision Elizabeth’s exact utterances, we can examine the general metaphor available to the historical and cultural context in which she spoke.

Elizabeth’s maternal metaphor can be considered a type of blend that Fauconnier and Turner call “single-scope.”

A single-scope network has “two input spaces with different organizing frames, one of which is projected to organize the blend. Its defining property is that the organizing frame of the blend is an extension of the organizing frame of one of the inputs but not the other” (126). For instance, one can use the language of eating to describe reading: “He digested the book” or “He devoured the book.” The EATING frame provides the language of digesting or devouring through which we can understand something about reading: one can think deeply about what one has read to understand it well, and one can read quickly. In our example, the FAMILY input appears to be the organizing frame, projecting back into the STATE frame to redefine the relationship between Elizabeth and her people.

However, because of the history of the family–state analogy, in which at times the STATE input provides the organizing frame, and at other times the FAMILY input does,


49 The example is from Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 131.
the blend could be considered a “double-scope” blend. A double-scope blend draws on two distinct organizational frames, which often seem in conflict, to form a blend that has an emerging structure of its own. A simple example is the computer desktop blend. It uses traditional workplace items and activities (folders, trash, opening files, etc.) with the frame of traditional computer commands (save, print, find, etc.). What results is an emergent frame that includes activities like “printing” from the computer frame, and “emptying the trash” from the physical office frame. For computer users, these two frames don’t seem contradictory because the emergent frame of the Computer Desktop has become entrenched. In a similar way, Elizabeth’s metaphor calls on a kinship frame and a monarchy frame to develop a hybrid organizing structure that at the time of her speech is already becoming entrenched through the common family–state analogy. Elizabeth, however, establishes the relationship between the two frames in a way that effectively redefines the relationship between the queen and her people. I will analyze Elizabeth’s novel use of the maternal metaphor primarily as a single-scope network, though I will examine the effect of considering it a double-scope network.

There are two ways to analyze the map of “Elizabeth is the mother of England”: as a combination of two frames, what we might term a “double-scope analysis”; and as an “XYZ construction,” where multiple sources of information accumulate to the blend in sequence. In actual cognition, these complex blends don’t take more time than understanding a literal sentence, and cognition is nearly instantaneous, so we can’t know which analysis is more likely to model accurately how the brain functions. However,


each model draws attention to a different feature of the blend: A “double-scope analysis” emphasizes the frames and the discontinuities between them, and an analysis of an “XYZ construction” highlights the fact that the blend can be modified.

First, we can consider the metaphor a blend of two linguistic structures: “Elizabeth is the Queen of England,” contained within conceptual frames of English monarchy, and “X is the mother of Y” where X and Y are unnamed individuals within the kinship frame (see Figure 2.5). This analysis follows the structure of the blend “The surgeon is a butcher” (see Figure 2.6)\textsuperscript{52} In this example, the elements from the SURGERY input and the BUTCHERY input correspond with one another (what are called “cross-space mappings”), and some elements from each input enter the blended space: the identity of the surgeon, the setting of the operating room, and the goal of healing enter the blend from the SURGERY space, while the role of butcher and the means of butchery enter from the BUTCHERY space. It emerges from the blended space that the surgeon is incompetent. As Grady et al. explain,

Besides inheriting partial structure from each input space, the blend develops “emergent” content of its own, which results from the juxtaposition of elements from the inputs. In particular, the BUTCHERY space projects a means-end relationship incompatible with the means-end relationship in the SURGERY space. In butchery, the goal of the procedure is to kill the animal and then sever its flesh from its bones. By contrast, the default goal in surgery is to heal the patient. In the blended space, the means of BUTCHERY have been combined with the ends, the individuals and the surgical context of the SURGERY space. The incongruity of the butcher’s means with the surgeon’s ends leads to the central inference that the butcher is incompetent. (424)

Although Elizabeth’s metaphor does not share the “means-end” incongruity of the surgeon-butcher blend, it is incongruous in its own ways.

“Elizabeth is the mother of England” contains the input spaces related to STATE and FAMILY (see Figure 2.7). In the STATE frame, we have the role of Queen (in this case, a ruling queen), the identity “Elizabeth Tudor,” the role of subjects, the goal of order, and implied rule as a means to achieve that goal. In the FAMILY input, there are the roles of father, mother, and children, which relate to each other hierarchically; the goal of order; and a relationship characterized by love to which children should respond with obedience as a means to order. The cross-space mappings begin to reveal some complexity: the role of Queen, since it is gendered, should map to the role of mother; in fact Elizabeth explicitly references the mother. In this case, there is no analogue for the father in the STATE space (see Figure 2.8). Clearly, then, the father role does not fit in the blended space, though traditionally within the FAMILY organizational frame the father has ultimate authority over the household, including his wife, children, and servants. Elizabeth is invoking a role that is subject to ultimate authority, but one that has authority over children and servants. The metaphor draws attention to the question of gendered authority: what happens when the ultimate authority in a country is not gendered to have ultimate authority? Elizabeth appears to solve the problem of the female monarch by invoking God as the ultimate authority—the one who has placed her on the throne by his Divine Will, who has made her exceptional, and whom she serves as a handmaiden. (At other times, outside familial metaphors, Elizabeth claims male authority, as in the Tilbury speech blend. In both cases, Elizabeth must account for the ultimate authority she is subject to as a woman.) The rest of the cross-space mappings
correspond: both frames have a goal of order, although they differ on the means to maintain order. This double-scope analysis reveals the disjunction between the two frames and the absences within Elizabeth’s metaphor.

In addition to the double-scope analysis which blends the FAMILY frame and the STATE frame, the “Elizabeth is the mother of England” blend can be analyzed in stages, like “Sylvia is the mother of Simon” (see Figure 2.9), what Fauconnier and Turner term an “XYZ construction,” which “systematically prompt[s] for blends” (142). In this blend, Sylvia’s identity blends with her role as mother. Simon’s identity blends with his role as son. The generic relationship of mother–son within the FAMILY frame applies so that the relationship between Sylvia and Simon becomes clear. Elizabeth’s metaphor follows the same structural pattern, though it differs in its level of complexity. Though we can draw a figure that corresponds directly with the simplex XYZ blend (see Figure 2.10), the inputs themselves complicate the blend, essentially requiring other blends to construct the inputs. Because the actual relationship between Elizabeth and England is not specified in the language of the metaphor, we must make inferences about the relationship based on general knowledge.

Elizabeth’s maternal metaphor is a megablend, one which includes multiple blends linked together. The first level of complexity in the megablend is that Elizabeth herself is a blend of the identity “Elizabeth Tudor” and her role “Queen”; the blend, however, has been compressed so that we are not aware of it being novel or a blend. Conceptual blending theory posits a set of vital relations that are often compressed. Elements that can be mapped between the two inputs—“cross-space mappings” or “outer space relation”—become connected within the blend—an “inner space relation” (see
Figure 2.11). The blend, then, becomes entrenched culturally, such that we are not aware there is a blend taking place at all.\textsuperscript{53} Thus far I have used the terms “input” and “space” to identify the elements of a blend, but they are more formally called “mental spaces”:

“small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understating and action.” Fauconnier and Turner propose that mental spaces are “very partial assemblies containing elements, structured by frames and cognitive models. [...] Mental spaces are interconnected in working memory, can be modified dynamically as thought and discourse unfold, and can be used generally to model dynamic mappings in thought and language.”\textsuperscript{54} When vital relations are compressed, the blended mental space does not appear to be a blend.

The compression of “Elizabeth Tudor” and “Queen” relies on the vital relation role: \textsuperscript{55} “Lincoln was president, Elizabeth is queen, and the president is the head of state.”\textsuperscript{56} The role can be linked to other values within mental spaces or across mental spaces. One example is the role Pope: “In the simplest looking case, we have a role like Pope in one input and a value like Karol Wojtyla in the other, and a unique element, Pope John Paul II, in the blend.”\textsuperscript{57} By adding other popes to the list, we can then compress them again into one role: “one unique Pope who goes through many cycles and we can

\textsuperscript{53} Fauconnier and Turner, \textit{The Way We Think}, 99-100.

\textsuperscript{54} Fauconnier and Turner, \textit{The Way We Think}, 102.

\textsuperscript{55} Other vital relations are change, identity, time, space, cause-effect, part-whole, representation, role, analogy, disanalogy, property, similarity, category, intentionality, and uniqueness: Fauconnier and Turner, \textit{The Way We Think}, 92-102.

\textsuperscript{56} Fauconnier and Turner, \textit{The Way We Think}, 98.

\textsuperscript{57} Fauconnier and Turner, \textit{The Way We Think}, 98.
say ‘He was Italian for centuries but in 1978 he was Polish for the first time.”

Elizabeth falls into the same category as Pope John Paul II; when Elizabeth Tudor was crowned she became Queen—her identity was blended and became inseparable from her role. The concept of the queen’s two bodies draws attention to this compression. As Elizabeth states in her first speech to her lords at Hatfield, “I am but one body naturally considered, though by His permission a body politic to govern” (52). Whenever Elizabeth invokes the theory of the king’s two bodies, she draws attention to the compressed blend, and attempts to separate out the two inputs to the blend, allowing them to function separately. She is at the same time the public’s Queen and a private person, yet because her identity is compressed, she cannot function solely as one or the other, as much as she might attempt to distinguish between the two. The blend resists this separation. The problem of blending is fundamental to Elizabeth’s identity, and in the course of her reign she relies on blending and draws attention to it to form a shifting self-representation that establishes her relationship with her people.

We’ve examined the first input to this complex blend, “Queen Elizabeth,” which is compressed and thus not signaled as a blend within the linguistic construction. In fact, in Elizabeth’s speech, the actual first input to the blend is an implied “I.” In her speeches to Parliament, Elizabeth never claims directly “I am the mother of England,” but her “I”s are placed in relation to the subject “you”—her subjects. She states, “for every one of you, and as many as are English, are my children and kinsfolks” (59), and “yet shall you never have any a more mother than I mean to be unto you all” (72). She asserts a maternal authority in an oblique way, focusing the attention on her subjects and implying

58 Fauconnier and Turner, The Way We Think, 98.
their centrality to the relationship rather than her own. Behind these sly constructions, however, is the strong metaphor “Elizabeth is the mother of England.” One variant manuscript of Elizabeth’s first speech to Parliament contains a direct assertion of maternal authority, as we saw above: “I will never in that matter [marriage] conclude anything that shall be prejudicial to the realm, for the weal and safety whereof, as a good mother of my country, will never shun to spend my life” (58, fn. 9).\textsuperscript{59} She claims the quality of her decisions will be based on maternal care, and invokes a maternal authority, describing her country as a child she must care for. Teasing out the complexities of the blend provides an image of dynamic authority to which Elizabeth’s people, including the authors whose works I will examine in later chapters, respond.

Parsing out the compressed blend of “Elizabeth Tudor” and “Queen” and adding it to the metaphor mapping turns the blend into a megablend (see Figure 2.12). Another element that makes the metaphor a megablend is the generic application of the mother–child space. Elements in both spaces correspond: “Elizabeth” to “mother” and “England” to “child.” The element that corresponds to the “child” in the cross-space mappings between family and state is not a literal human being, complicating the blend further. Fauconnier and Turner use the example blend “The Pope is the father of the Catholic Church,” which “arguably projects the role of a child to a single social entity (the Church). The blend reflects a type of socio-cultural model—specifically, one in which a social entity (church, nation, community) is the ‘child’ of its leader” (142). The authors point out that we don’t project progitation into the blend in this instance.Elizabeth’s

\textsuperscript{59} Marcus, Mueller, and Rose report variations of the Cambridge University Library, MS Gg.III.23, fols. 199-201.
blend appears to be this type of blend, where England fills the role of child. Church and country both “stand in metonymic relation to people and groups of people” (142). So in Elizabeth’s case, the blend is made more complex by the metonymy of country for people (see Figure 2.13). The “Elizabeth is the mother of England” blend, then, contains multiple blends. It is important to remember that this blend is constructed almost instantaneously in the mind of the auditor and that the blend is dynamic: it may change over time, or even a moment later, and is subject to the influence of other speakers, cultural sensibilities, and time as Elizabeth ages. Examining “Elizabeth is the mother of England” as a megablend emphasizes the multiplicity of concepts invoked in the blend and provides a glimpse of the opportunities available to modify the blend.

Carefully mapping the blend “Elizabeth is the mother of England” allows us to see more clearly the cultural, linguistic, and cognitive elements necessary to understand the Queen’s metaphor. Emphasizing what transfers from the inputs into the blend makes plain what is left out: possible material for those wanting to modify Elizabeth’s blend. For instance, Elizabeth’s and Parliament’s insistence on the “loving” and “caring” aspects of maternity leaves outside of the blend the cultural knowledge of maternal infanticide, harsh treatment of children, and neglect. However, these negative associations of motherhood, while not invoked, still are present in the “mother” frame and available to those who would use the metaphor to attack Elizabeth.

Examining the metaphor with conceptual blending theory highlights the complexity of Elizabeth’s rhetoric and of the cognition required to understand that rhetoric. This metaphor is one small element in Elizabeth’s self-presentation and in the language used about her. As we shall see in Chapter 4, blends can accrue and modify,
creating a megablend that describes a character or person. What I have been calling
Elizabeth’s self-presentation can be examined fully in light of conceptual blending theory
to see the connections between different elements of her rhetoric—spoken, written, and
visual—and how her self-presentation changed over the course of her reign.

**Rhetorical transaction: Contemporary responses to the metaphor**

Responses to Elizabeth attempt to redefine, subvert, or idealize her description of her
relationship with her subjects. Parliament’s attribution of maternal qualities to Elizabeth
reinforces the supposed “loving and caring” attitude toward her people. By naming the
qualities of love and care, Parliament emphasizes her treatment of her subjects rather than
their response to her (presumably, obedience). In effect, they are shaping the blend,
asking Elizabeth to interpret the blend in a particular way.

Elizabeth expected her subjects to see her as motherly, and many of them did.
Peter Wentworth, a Puritan Member of Parliament, praised Elizabeth for not marrying a
foreigner, claiming that while her sister Mary would “have had this Island to have
become a dwelling for strangers: much like unto an unnatural nurse,” Elizabeth
maintained “peace and prosperity, most like unto a natural nursing mother, for the use of
the ancient inhabitants thereof.”

In a letter to his wife, Sir John Harington, one of
Elizabeth’s godsons, described Elizabeth as “our deare Queene, my royale godmother
and this state’s natural mother.” Carole Levin reports a number of other instances:

---

60 Peter Wentworth, *A Pithy Exhortation to her Majesty for Establishing her Successor*
(London: 1598), sigs. F6r-v, quoted in Orlin, 91.

61 Quoted in Levin, *Heart and Stomach*, 87.
John Jewel, bishop of Salisbury, in 1567, referred to Elizabeth as “the only nurse and mother of the church of God.” In 1578 a person representing the city of Norwich told Elizabeth in a pageant to celebrate her coming: “Thou art my joy next [to] God, I have no other, My Princesse and my peerless Queene, my loving Nurse and Mother.” This image was repeated during the week of Elizabeth’s stay, and when she left she was told, “Farewell, oh Queene, farewell, oh Mother dere.” (87)

The language of motherhood was applied to Elizabeth in numerous circumstances, many of which, as in these examples, were overwhelmingly positive. As Sara Mendelson argues, public perceptions of Elizabeth were mostly enthusiastic.62

Other responses were not so positive, however. By repurposing the metaphor to mean the opposite of “loving and caring,” some of Elizabeth’s subjects attempted to claim that she was a tyrant rather than a loving parent figure. Paul Wentworth, a member of the House of Commons, stated in 1566 that if Elizabeth refused to name a successor, “she may be reckoned of, not as a Nurse, not as a Mother of Contrye, but as a Step-mother, nay as a Parricide of her Countrey.”63 Evidence from both Mary’s and Elizabeth’s reigns indicate that being a step-mother monarch meant one was or could be a usurper or a tyrant. The step-mother figure was, in the public consciousness, a negative tyrannical figure, and it was a small step to turn the mother into a step-mother: “Because of their lack of control over their passions, women [were seen as] natural tyrants—a tendency exacerbated in stepmothers by their position as usurper of the biological mother.”64 Both Jaqueline Vanhoutte and Helen Hackett note that John Stubbs’s The

62 Mendelson, 208.

63 Quoted in Levin, Heart and Stomach, 87

*Discovery of the Gaping Gulf* (1579), a tirade against Elizabeth’s proposed marriage to Anjou, attacks Elizabeth as an “unnatural mother.” Elizabeth seems to confirm this in her proclamation denouncing the *Gaping Gulf*, stating “neither is there once, in any one sentence of this libel, any so much as a supposal touched of any motherly or princely care to be in her majesty.” In these examples, Elizabeth’s subjects transformed her metaphor from sympathetic to the Queen to critical of her.

Interestingly, Elizabeth herself played with this rhetorical shift from natural to surrogate parent. In a 1569 discussion with the French ambassador, Elizabeth said that she “had taken great pains to be more than a good mother to the Queen of Scots,” but that “she who uses and plots against her mother, deserves nothing other than a wicked stepmother.” Here, Elizabeth juxtaposes her thus far generous (motherly) treatment of Mary Stuart with her as yet unexercised power to punish Mary harshly for her plots. She is under no obligation to respond to Mary with “natural” love and care. She affirms the hierarchy between her and the Queen of Scots, and goes further to threaten Mary.

---


Elizabeth claims the possibility of shifting from mother to stepmother, modifying her maternal metaphor from one of benign authority to a figure capable of cruel vengeance. That Elizabeth can state the possibility of this shift indicates how flexible and malleable the metaphor is.

Late in Elizabeth’s reign and then after her death, her subjects use the metaphor to idealize their Queen. Peter Wentworth’s 1598 description of Elizabeth as “a natural nursing mother” exemplifies this trend. In an elegiac poem called “Offering,” Thomas Byng describes Elizabeth as “the aged mother of these orphane lands.”68 The 1578 farewell oration at Norwich calls her “the mother and nurse of this whole Common welth, and Countrie,” and describes her subjects’ sorrow at her leaving: “How lamentable a thing is it, to pul away sucking babes from the breastes and bosomes of their most louing mothers?”69 This language of the nursing mother continues in eulogies, which by and large idealize Elizabeth and her reign. Patricia Phillippy discusses Radford Mavericke’s *Mourning Weede*, which relies on scriptural descriptions of kings and queens as nursing parents:

“And forasmuch as the Scripture calleth kings nursing fathers, and Queenes nursing mothers of the church and common wealth,” Radford Mavericke’s *Mourning Weede* asks, how can her subjects not mourn, “being not lately weaned for any longer sucking the sweete and tender paps of our late most dearest beloved Queene, who living, loved us as dearely (doubtles) if not more dearly, then ever any nurse or mother loved her beloved baby.” Mavericke’s literalization of the biblical image emphasizes Elizabeth’s maternal essence, but disturbingly

68 Thomas Byng, “Offering,” in *Sorrowes Joy, or A Lamentation for our late deceased Sovereigne Elizabeth, with a triumph for the prosperous succession of our gratious King James, &c.* (Cambridge, 1603), 10, quoted in Phillippy, 319.

69 Quoted in Hackett, *Virgin Mother*, 4.
casts her death as the occasion of the nation’s weaning, revising the natural process of maturation with the unnatural severance of the mother-child bond.\textsuperscript{70} Because of the biblical resonances, the nursing monarch image was not uncommon, and writers exploit the image after her death, taking her “loving and caring mother” blend to its extreme. These authors modify Elizabeth’s blend from “mother” to “nursing mother,” intensifying the positive connotations of the image.

Camden does the same in his reports of Elizabeth’s speeches after her death. His work is colorful and focused, articulating Elizabeth’s self-presentation in dramatic ways, such as his report of her pointing to her ring as she claims marriage to England in her 1559 speech before Parliament. His report bears quoting at length:

“To conclude, I am already bound unto an husband, which is the kingdom of England, and that may suffice you. And this,” quoth she, “makes me wonder that you forget, yourselves, the pledge of this alliance which I have made with my kingdom.” And therewithal, stretching out her hand, she showed them the ring with which she was given in marriage and inaugurated to her kingdom in express and solemn terms. “And reproach me so no more,” quoth she, “that I have no children: for every one of you, and as many as are English, are my children and kinsfolks, of whom, so long as I am not deprived and God shall preserve me, you cannot charge me, without offense, to be destitute.”\textsuperscript{71}

Marcus and Hackett both caution that Camden’s reports are not concerned with accuracy as much as they are with shaping Elizabeth’s political legacy.\textsuperscript{72} Camden’s writings emphasize Elizabeth’s maternal metaphor, refining her words to place more emphasis on the familial relationship between her and her people. Whereas Elizabeth includes the

\textsuperscript{70} Phillippy, 327, quoting Radford Mavericke, \textit{Three Treatises Religiously Handled, and named according to the severall subject of each Treatise: the Mourning Weede. The Mornings Joy. The Kings Rejoicing} (1603), C2v and B3v.

\textsuperscript{71} Elizabeth I, \textit{Collected Works}, 59.

\textsuperscript{72} Hackett, \textit{Virgin Mother}, 229-30; Marcus, “Speech Made Visible,” 194. See also John N. King, 69-72.
maternal metaphor only briefly, Camden makes it a central piece of her argument. Camden’s familial emphasis coincides historically with James VI/I’s more formal patriarchalism, even as Camden rewrote history at James’s behest. As we have seen, the rhetoric began to take on particularized form: initially, as Elizabeth claimed a maternal relationship with her people, and in Camden’s text, the metaphor is extended and exploited to idealize Elizabeth.

**The rhetorical transaction goes underground**

The anxiety about the succession that began early in Elizabeth’s reign and grew as she approached menopausal age remained to the end of her life. With no formal successor to the throne, the English expected the transition after Elizabeth’s death to be anything but smooth. After James’s ascension Anne Clifford recorded in her diary, “About ten o’ the clock King James was proclaimed in Cheapside by all the Council with great joy and triumph. [...] This peaceable coming in of the King was unexpected of all sorts of people.” In hindsight, we can see that the anxiety was for naught, but during Elizabeth’s reign, anxiety about her virginal state grew with each failed courtship—Philip II of Spain, Archduke Charles of Austria, Eric of Sweden, and Henri, Duke of Anjou, among them.

The failure of Elizabeth’s final courtship, with Francis, Duke of Anjou, the younger son

---

73 J. King, 69.


75 Susan Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 10, 22, and 30. Levin discusses the way anxieties found their way into rumors of Elizabeth’s sexual exploits and illegitimate children: “All the Queen’s Children,” 57-76.
of Catherine de’ Medici, a pock-marked man twenty years Elizabeth’s junior, meant that the hope of a natural-born heir was lost.

Elizabeth’s potential for biological maternity was at issue during this final courtship, pointing to the time when her motherhood could only be metaphorical. Elizabeth was forty-five at the time the marriage negotiations began, and though her royal physicians assured the court that Elizabeth could still become pregnant, there was much discussion even at this point whether Elizabeth could physically bear an heir. In 1566 she had announced to a joint delegation of Parliament, “I hope to have children; otherwise I would never marry” (95). Her sentiments might have changed during the intervening years, but her fertility was still possible. William Cecil, Lord Burghley, Elizabeth’s chief minister, was convinced of her fertility. In a memorandum from early in the courtship he wrote,

considering the proportion of her body, having no impediment of smallness in stature, of largeness in body, nor no sickness, nor lack of natural functions in those things that properly belong to the procreation of children, but contrarilywise, by judgment of physicians that know her estate in those things and by the opinion of women, being most acquainted with her majesty’s body in such things as properly appertain, to show probability of her aptness to have children, even at this day. 77

However, in 1580, according to Susan Doran, “Elizabeth acknowledged to the French court the possibility that she might be unable to conceive.” 78 Elizabeth’s maternal metaphor considered her body only for its femaleness in an abstract sense, but the physicality of her actual body was under discussion in the requests of Parliament and in

76 Hackett, “(In)Fertility,” 155.
77 Quoted in Hackett, “(In)Fertility,” 159.
78 Doran, Monarchy and Matrimony, 159.
other forums. Once Elizabeth and Anjou fell out, it was presumed that Elizabeth would not have children, and she was pressured to name an heir. She refused to do so to the end of her life, and she attempted to squash the discussion among her court and her subjects. She did so without the formal use of maternal metaphors, instead using regal authority and force.

Early in her reign, roughly coincident with her use of the metaphor, Elizabeth seemed accepting of various opinions about the succession, though she was displeased with Parliament’s requests for her to marry. This tolerance allowed for the rhetorical transaction surrounding motherhood (both literal and metaphorical) to be public. In conversation with the Scottish Ambassador, William Maitland, in the fall of 1561, Elizabeth said, according to Maitland’s report, “the succession of the crown of England is a matter I will not mell in; but as in the sacrament of the altar some thinks a thing, some other, whose judgment is best God knows. In the mean time unusquisque in sensu suo abundant, so I leave them to do with the succession of the crown of England.” At another audience with Maitland the same year, she considers the request to name Mary, Queen of Scots, as her heir an affront: “to require me in my own life to set my winding-sheet before my eye! The like was never required of no prince!” (64). This statement may be merely a strategy to delay the Scottish Queen’s insistence on being named as Elizabeth’s successor, but at this stage of her reign, Elizabeth is able to act unconcerned about the issue, acknowledging diverse opinions among her subjects. She didn’t like the pressure to marry and to choose an heir, but she was tolerant, at times using the competing opinions to hold everyone in stasis, not favoring one group over another.

79 Collected Works, 62-63.
She became less tolerant of the discussions of her marriage and the succession later in her reign, forcing the discussion out of the public sphere. She made her disapproval of the subject law in the 1580s, over twenty years into her reign. Parliament’s Act of 1581 extended earlier “Actes against sedicious Wordes and Rumors” and equated discussion of the Queen’s death and her successors with treason, the first offense punishable by having one’s ears cut off, or by a large fine and six month’s imprisonment:

And for that divers persons wickedly disposed, and forgetting their Duetie and Allegiaunce, have of late not onlye wisshed her Majesties Deathe, but also by dyvers meanes practised and sought to know howe longe her Highenes should lyve, and who should raigne after her Decease, and what Chaunges and Alteracions shoulde thereby happen; To the entent that suche Mischeifes and Inconveniences as maye thereby growe in the Common Weale, to the greate Disturbance of the same, maye be cut of and prevented.80

Kevin Petersen concludes that “[t]o wonder when the Queen might die and what would follow, according to this Act, is akin to wishing for the Queen’s death.”81 He considers the Act “a method for the Queen to hinder any plots that may seek to usurp her authority or shift attention from her to the next potential magistrate” (38). With such severe punishments for any discussion of such an urgent and fraught issue, the discourse on succession must have continued in a way that would not risk the life or freedom of the speakers. Petersen argues that succession discourse did occur in public life, but “underground,” hidden in plain sight in the imaginative worlds created by authors and playwrights in the period (64-65). Fiction appears to be a haven for discussion, though it

81 Petersen, 37.
was not without risk. Published works were subject to censorship and theaters could be closed. The most extreme example of punishment was for John Stubbs’s tract *The Gaping Gulf*: his right hand was cut off. Edmund Spenser imagines a similar but hypothetical punishment for poets in *The Faerie Queene*, Book V, where the poet Bonfont’s name is changed by the authorities to Malfont, and his tongue is nailed to a post (V.ix.25.4-7). While a poet might be ostracized from court, physical harm for writing fantasies was unlikely. Even lightly veiled fictions allowed an out for those critical of the Queen. Writing could be a form of “not saying,” of commenting slantly. I argue that maternal imagery follows the course of the succession debate; the rhetorical transaction begun with Elizabeth’s claim to be the “mother of England” continues to occur in Elizabethan England, but “underground,” in the literature of the time, through the character of the mother–queen.

**Conclusion**

The following chapters examine a few well-known examples of the intersection of motherhood and queenship in early modern literature: Sidney’s Gynecia (along with the other mothers in *Arcadia*), Shakespeare’s Tamora, and Spenser’s Britomart. These works span the latter part of Elizabeth’s reign—*The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* (written c. 1581-84, published in 1590); *Titus Andronicus* (c. 1588); and *The Faerie Queene* (1590 and 1596). All three authors engage with concepts of female power, articulations of

---

maternal authority, the physicality of the female body, and the consequences of female desire. These concepts of authority, physicality, and desire come to life in the mothers in these texts. But each mother is also a construct—a confluence of cultural conceptions of motherhood and queenship and the character details that the author develops. When mothers are placed in the landscapes and political climes of Arcadia, ancient Rome, and the Faerie world, the authors can respond to the mother–queen blend Elizabeth presents. These authors engage Elizabeth’s blend by modifying the “mother” input, broadening the authority of mothers, or bringing to light the connotations of motherhood left in the shadows, for instance. They stretch what it means for Elizabeth to be a metaphorical mother and challenge the flat, idealized “love and caring mother” she promotes. They are not depicting Elizabeth directly. Fiction creates a buffer between their true subject and their words. The blend allows authors to engage with Elizabeth at a remove through the mother–queen.

Conceptual blending allows for a dynamic understanding of Elizabeth’s metaphor, one that might change over time and as other speakers and writers (and even Elizabeth herself) modify or add inputs to the blend. Elizabeth’s metaphor functions within the cultural milieu, creating the context for James’s patriarchalism; it is not static, but is shaped and challenged over time by writers and speakers even as it moves out of Elizabeth’s public speeches. By examining the intersection of language, culture, and cognition within the rhetorical transaction between Elizabeth and her subjects, we can tease out the complexities of Elizabeth’s self-presentation. This chapter examines only one element of her persona. The following chapters not only explore readings of literary
texts and their connection to Elizabeth’s maternal metaphor, they also model the kinds of analysis that can be applied to a more complete reading of the public Elizabeth.

Figure 2.1: Metaphor analysis, source domain to target domain

Figure 2.2: Metaphor analysis, “The mother is a tiger”
Figure 2.3: Elizabeth’s “body of a weak and feeble woman/heart and stomach of a king”
Figure 2.4: “Heart and stomach of a king” expanded
Figure 2.5: STATE and FAMILY frames
Figure 2.6: “That surgeon is a butcher”
Figure 2.7: STATE and FAMILY frames: Elizabeth is the mother of England

Figure 2.8: Where is the father?
Figure 2.9: “Sylvia is the mother of Simon”
Figure 2.10: “Elizabeth is the mother of England” three ways
Figure 2.11: Vital Relations
Figure 2.12: “Elizabeth is the mother of England” with “Queen Elizabeth” compression
Figure 2.13: “Elizabeth is the mother of England” megablend
As we saw in Chapter 2, Elizabeth uses the structure of the family to help define her role as monarch and her relationship to her people. When Elizabeth claims that she is the mother of England, she accesses the identifications of mothers as “caring” and “loving,” promoting a familial relationship with her people. In doing so, she asks them to conceive a political relationship as a domestic one: her subjects should bow to her will not because she has the authority of a monarch but because she has the love and care of a mother. Elizabeth does not negate her regal authority. But by emphasizing the blend between the state and the family, she casts her authority in a more accessible form, taking some of the sting out of the figure of the female monarch. In doing so she claims a more palatable authority. In *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia*, written midway through Elizabeth’s reign, Sidney attributes qualities to motherhood that he wishes for Elizabeth: supporting the succession, maintaining the established order, and providing an heir for the country. He asks readers to reassess Elizabeth’s role as “mother of England,” considering the political aspects of motherhood that should drive Elizabeth’s politics.

If we consider Elizabeth’s metaphor part of a rhetorical transaction between Elizabeth and her subjects, we can examine Sidney’s *Arcadia* as one response. Sidney’s work engages Elizabeth’s metaphor: by reshaping the “mother” input, Sidney introduces his argument into the blend, which can then be projected back into the “Elizabeth” input.

Through the blend, he is able to offer indirect advice and criticism of the queen. Sidney emphasizes the mother’s relationship to the state as a primary element of maternity, turning Elizabeth’s metaphor on its head. Instead of allowing for a non-political family frame to shape Elizabeth’s relationship with her people, Sidney asserts that the family frame is political. In other words, according to Sidney, Elizabeth has defined her political role with another political frame: family. He challenges the culturally implied definition of the “mother” input by re-evaluating the qualities and consequences of mothering. By exploiting the blend of “Elizabeth: mother-queen,” Sidney argues—indirectly—that Elizabeth’s primary job as a metaphorical mother is to protect the succession. In this chapter, I will examine the way Sidney reshapes Elizabeth’s metaphorical motherhood—her blend—using traditional tools of literary analysis, to consider the language and patterns of Sidney’s text in light of its cultural context, and to access the meaning implicit in the Arcadia. Sidney’s literary mother–queen and mother figures challenge the “loving and caring” aspects of motherhood Elizabeth’s metaphor foregrounds.

Interlocutors can respond to a blend in a number of ways. For instance, one could challenge the blend itself, changing “mother” for “step-mother” or another related concept. Alternately, one could emphasize specific characteristics of an input—say, Elizabeth’s virginity, or the “loving” and “caring” aspects of the common cultural understanding of motherhood. One could also elaborate the blend, asking what consequences the blend could entail. Sidney, in the Arcadia, challenges Elizabeth’s blend in two ways: first, by providing a literalization of the mother-queen blend in Gynecia, and second, by establishing consistency in the stories of other mothers in the text such that he articulates a generalized concept of “motherhood” that extends from the family frame
into the state frame. For Sidney’s mothers, these frames cannot be separated; the mother figures join together the family and state frames, establishing a political motherhood. For Elizabeth’s metaphor, Sidney’s revised concept of motherhood means that the family frame is already political, and her maternal endeavours not only shape the relationship between Elizabeth and her subjects, but should also shape her political actions, especially in terms of the succession. Elizabeth desires to depoliticize her relationship with her people, privileging familial authority rather than regal power, and claiming that she has fulfilled her motherly duties toward her people and need not settle the succession.

Sidney’s mothers reveal the intimate link between maternal authority and political authority, and stress that good mothering supports the right order of succession.

Sidney likely did not expect that Elizabeth herself would read Arcadia or that she would respond to it, but the work nonetheless served a political purpose. As many as fourteen copies of the Old Arcadia were made, ten of which are extant, indicating that the text had some degree of circulation. In addition, notes and letters by Sidney’s close friends and their intimates show that a number of people were familiar with Sidney’s tale.1 Sidney’s

“first and chief” reader was his sister Mary, as he describes in the opening letter to her, in which he presents his text as “idle work” and “but a trifle, and that triflingly handled” (OA, 3).\(^2\) The Old Arcadia was a semi-private document, but because Sidney’s circle included counsellors and the politically connected, it had public import. Moreover, he almost certainly expected the New Arcadia to have a wider circulation, making his political exploration a part of the larger culture.\(^3\) Sidney’s revision emphasizes the importance of the role of government and the relationship between a government, specifically the monarch, and his or her people. In this context Sidney reconceptualizes motherhood: motherhood cannot be relegated to private households because even women’s internal vices will out and will affect public life.

In Sidney’s lengthy prose romance, and its revision, motherhood is not solely biological, nor purely cultural: it is also political. The three main mothers in the text—Gynecia, the queen; Miso, a shepherd’s wife who is guardian to the princess Pamela; and Cecropia, the widowed mother of the former heir to the Arcadian throne—all threaten the text, noted as OA and NA. For information on dates of composition, see the introductions to these editions.

\(^2\) The primary stated project is an entertainment for his sister Mary and her friends, but Helen Hackett suggests, “we may take it that there is a degree of rhetorical exaggeration”: Women and Romance Fiction in the English Renaissance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 102, 104. Katherine Duncan-Jones claims that “Writing for lively young women, often away from Court, liberated Sidney from all sorts of constraints which would have operated had he chosen to write fiction for the Queen, or Cecil, or Walsingham”: Sir Philip Sidney, Courtier Poet (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 18.

\(^3\) Woudhuysen suggests that the calligraphic transcript made may have been intended as a present to the Queen or a family member (354-55). For more on Sidney’s revision, see Regina Schneider, Sidney’s (Re)Writing of the ‘Arcadia’ (New York: AMS, 2008); and Donald Stump, “Mapping the Revisions to Arcadia: Geo-Political Decision-Making in Sidney and Virgil,” Sidney Journal 31.2 (2012): 1-31.
orderly succession to that throne. Despite their social and economic differences, the three women share proximity to the royal children, and thus have the potential to destabilize the established political order of Arcadia. In the *Old Arcadia* (completed in 1581-82), the power mothers have and the problems they cause are nullified. Gynecia’s undoing is itself undone by her husband’s public kiss of forgiveness, and although Miso does suffer severe punishment for her negligent care of princess Pamela, her public faults are ignored. In the *New Arcadia* (substantially in its present form by 1584), the mothers wield more power to affect the succession—Miso has direct influence over both princesses, and Cecropia foments civil war—but the means of neutering their power are strengthened as well: Miso is ridiculed, and Cecropia plunges to her death. In Sidney’s pastoral world, although mothers have the ability to impact the politics, when they do, they are punished or dismissed—their power ultimately has no force. In both versions of Sidney’s romance, the *Old Arcadia* and the *New*, Sidney explores maternal authority in the public realm, only to undercut its power through chance, providence, or justice. In doing so, he challenges the scope of authority Elizabeth claims through the maternal metaphor and warns her against changing the status quo.

Sidney’s text literalizes Elizabeth’s mother–queen metaphor in these characters, inviting readers to see Elizabeth in light of the *Arcadia*’s concept of maternity (see Figure 3.2). As with all literature, the text requires the reader to make interpretive connections, and in Sidney’s case, he invites his readers to blend the fictional world with the Elizabethan political world to find what fictional elements project back into the “real” world. Contemporary readers likely produced these blends automatically—the act of conceptual blending is by its very nature an unconscious process. Critics often make
connections between Arcadia and the Elizabethan world, arguing, for instance, that the duke Basilius or the king Euarchus represents Elizabeth, or that they are placed in a political position analogous to hers. By examining the literal examples of Elizabeth’s metaphorical maternity, we see a political commentary rarely considered in the Arcadia. None of the mothers are directly analogous to Elizabeth (though Gynecia comes closest); rather, Sidney’s tales of political mothers provide an alternate input for “motherhood” in Elizabeth’s self-presentation (see Figure 3.3). Blending allows Sidney to comment indirectly on Elizabeth’s political behaviour.

In 1580, as Sidney was composing the Old Arcadia, issues of succession, female authority, and the role of the monarch were at the forefront of the national political consciousness. Queen Elizabeth was engaged in marriage negotiations with the Duke of Anjou, the son of Catherine de’ Medici, and Sidney cautioned her directly against the match in his open letter, “To Queen Elizabeth, Touching her Marriage” (late 1579), where he suggested that Elizabeth’s stable rule would be undone by marriage to a Catholic prince.4 Her people loved her, he argued, and did not wish change. He

mentioned succession in the letter once, alluding to his own choice for her heir, though she had not yet declared one. While this letter was in direct address to the Queen, it is “likely that a good many contemporary copies were made [...] for use as propaganda by the Leicester-Walsingham party.”

Hubert Languet, a continental humanist friend and correspondent of Sidney’s, alludes to the circulation of the manuscript in a letter to Sidney: “I am glad you have told me how your letter about the Duke of Anjou has come to the knowledge of so many persons.” Sidney intended his letter to have a direct political impact: to dissuade Elizabeth from marrying Anjou.

Negotiations with Anjou fell apart in late 1581, and by 1584, when Sidney was composing his revision of *Arcadia*, it was apparent that Elizabeth would neither marry nor bear children. As Elizabeth aged, the succession question became increasingly fraught. Many wanted Elizabeth to name a successor in order to ensure a smooth transition at the time of her death. While her maternal role would no longer be literal, Sidney and others implied that she could and should play the figurative maternal role she initiated early in her reign, by caring for her people through providing a successor. The *New Arcadia* engages with this political reality in its increased focus on the potential destabilizing effect of maternal figures—a category of authoritative women in

---

5 Duncan-Jones, Introduction, 38-39. Duncan-Jones cites 20 manuscript copies and four printed versions, and indicates that there are more in private collections.

6 Quoted in Duncan-Jones, Introduction, 33.

Renaissance culture. Sidney’s letter circulated among members of Elizabeth’s court, and the contents found an extended life in the *Arcadia* itself: Sidney reproduces parts of the letter’s text in the *Arcadia*, when Philanax enjoins Duke Basilius not to abandon his political responsibilities by retiring to the country, an indication of the political resonances of Sidney’s fiction.

The political message within *Arcadia* is often located in the tale of Basilius, a king who throws his country into disarray by his seeming abdication of the throne. For instance, in *The Sound of Virtue*, Blair Worden sees Basilius’ story as an admonition to Elizabeth not to relinquish her responsibilities to her Protestant allies at home and abroad by marrying the Catholic Anjou.\(^8\) Deborah Shuger cautions, however, that the analogy between Basilius and Elizabeth can only go so far, and suggests looking to the central romance for political commentary.\(^9\) Similarly, Katherine Duncan-Jones argues, “Basilius is not precisely an Elizabeth-figure, any more than Arcadia is precisely England.”\(^10\) Brian Lockey argues that Euarchus, a neighboring king who acts as judge after Basilius’s “death,” also corresponds to Elizabeth, in light of Sidney’s views on the necessity for England’s charitable intervention in the Netherlands.\(^11\) Worden and Lockey both ask readers to consider Elizabeth as analogous to a monarch character, and then to take a


\(^10\) Duncan-Jones, *Sidney*, 177.

political message from the fiction and apply it to Elizabeth’s circumstances. Essentially this process requires blending: Elizabeth and the monarch are blended in the mind of the reader, and the political consequences in the fictional world are projected back into the Elizabethan world (see Figure 3.4). These direct analogies allow readers to imagine Elizabeth as one who acts according to the example of the character, creating the possibility that she might also do so in the real world.

Blending also effectively works with the mothers in the text, providing another viable mirror for Elizabeth, especially in the context of her claims to metaphorical motherhood. Rather than setting up a one-to-one correspondence, however, Sidney accrues meanings of motherhood through the similarities in his diverse characters, adding an extra step in the blending process and making his prescription for Elizabeth more indirect (see Figure 3.5). These women pose a more critical threat to the established political order than does Basilius, and they illuminate Sidney’s concerns about the monarch and her people. In the Old Arcadia, Gynecia’s and Miso’s political threats surface when their internal passions spill over into family and public life. In the revision, however, Sidney matches his emphasis on good government with an increase in both accidental and purposeful threats to the succession by Gynecia, Miso, and Cecropia. Reading the mothers in Arcadia not only helps us understand the relationship among individual, family, and state within the story itself, but also expands our notions of maternal identity beyond the biological and familial to include a mother’s interaction with the state. This political motherhood reshapes the implications of Elizabeth’s metaphorical motherhood. As we examine Elizabeth as mother of England, the mothers
in *Arcadia* provide key insights into the “mother” input, and reveal an author wrestling with the political implications of a female monarch.

In considering mothers in both the *Old Arcadia* and the *New Arcadia*, I take conceptual blending as my starting point, asking what happens when an author takes a metaphorical blend seriously and uses fiction to explore the ramifications of the metaphorical claim—both where it may go wrong and what ideally it may accomplish. In this case, Sidney examines the potential political power of mothers through their impact on the succession, severely limits those powers through the means of justice and providence, and ends the *Old Arcadia* with the restoration of order and continuance of the succession. He does so, I argue, in order to prescribe behavior for Elizabeth—“to draw her love to [his] likings and to frame her will to [his] fantasies” \(^\text{12}\) to continue in fiction the warning he gave in his letter, which is reiterated to Basilius in Philanax’s speech, and to argue for a figurative mothering that would acknowledge the next in succession.

**The texts of *Arcadia***

Both versions of the *Arcadia* begin with the same basic plot structure, which follows romance conventions and in which mothers at first seem to be incidental. Arcadia is troubled. In an attempt to subvert the dire predictions of an oracle, Duke Basilius has moved his wife, Gynecia, and his two daughters, Philoclea and Pamela, into the country, leaving Philanax, his second-in-command, to rule in his stead. \(^\text{13}\) Basilius places Pamela in

---

\(^{12}\) See Montrose, “Spenser,” 940.

\(^{13}\) The oracle predicts that “Thy elder care shall from thy careful face / By princely mean be stolen and yet not lost; / Thy younger shall with nature’s bliss embrace / An uncouth
the care of the shepherd Dametas and his wife Miso, and encloses Gynecia and Philoclea in a second lodge under his own care. Meanwhile, Pyrocles and Musidorus, young Greek princes, wander into Arcadia on their journeys. Pyrocles sees Philoclea and is overtaken by love. In order to have easy access to Philoclea, Pyrocles disguises himself as an Amazon princess and ingratiates himself into the family. At the same time, Basilius becomes infatuated with the “Amazon” (called Cleopha in the Old Arcadia, and Zelmane in the New Arcadia), as does Gynecia, who realizes that “she” is a man in disguise. Soon after, Musidorus falls in love with Pamela and disguises himself as a shepherd to be near her. In the New Arcadia, Sidney introduces Cecropia, widowed sister-in-law to Basilius, who is determined to disrupt the succession to place her son on the throne.

Although the plot ostensibly centers on the young lovers, the wider tension arises as their love is repeatedly thwarted, often by the mothers. Gynecia’s lust for Pyrocles disrupts both her family life and the political realm. In the Old Arcadia, Miso’s failure to attend to Pamela results in her attempted elopement with and assault by Musidorus. In the New Arcadia, Miso regularly interrupts the couples and tries to drive Pamela and Philoclea away from love and marriage with her wild and threatening tales of dangerous romance. Cecropia, the most politically effective—and politically threatening—mother, endeavours to place her son on the throne by engineering a civil war and by attempting to

love, which nature hateth most. / Thou with thy wife adult’ry shalt commit, / And in thy throne a foreign state shall sit. / All this on thee this fatal year shall hit” (OA, 5).

force one of the princesses to marry him. And while the mothers provide many of the 
obstacles that prevent the lovers from uniting, more importantly, they obstruct the 
succession. In the process, they focus the reader’s attention on Sidney’s exploration of 
good government.

I propose to analyze the *Old* and *New Arcadias* as two intertwined texts—the *Old 
Arcadia* stands on its own, and the *New Arcadia*, though it stops mid-sentence in Book 
III, provides an expansion of ideas and shift of focus in the narrative. In particular, the 
changes in Miso’s character and the introduction of Cecropia both transform the reading 
of Gynecia, whose character can be understood in comparison with the other two 
mothers. Sidney’s revision emphasizes the political power women have, and their 
obligation to use this power to support rather than disrupt the established order. In other 
words, maternal identity within Arcadia is not determined solely by biological change or 
constructed solely within the household; maternal identity also is established in relation 
to the state. This connection between the maternal and the political is substantially 

15 Critics speculate as to why Sidney’s revision ends so abruptly. Karen Saupe argues that 
Sidney revised to match his narrative of the last two books of the *Old Arcadia* in “Trial, 
22-29 (27-29). In contrast, Peter Lindenbaum argues that Sidney was dissatisfied with his 
ending, especially the trial scene, in “Sidney’s *Arcadia*: The Endings of the Three 
Versions,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 34.3 (May 1971): 205-18. Woudhuysen 
suggests that Sidney stopped his revision of *Arcadia* “not because . . . he had to rush off 
to fight the Spanish, but because what he had created in the third book meant he could not 
finish it” (354). David Norbrook suggests that it was “possibly because he realized that 
the work’s serious religious and political concerns, and its increasing inwardness, were 
becoming incompatible with the courtly framework”: *Poetry and Politics*, 95. Donald 
Stump suggests that Sidney had a “grand design” that would culminate in a climactic war 
where the Greeks would prevail, and asserts that “Sidney’s only failing was that he died 
before he could carry [it] out”: 28.
relevant to considerations of Elizabeth’s “maternal” authority, as we consider the blend of Queen Elizabeth and the *Arcadia’s* concept of motherhood.

**Early modern maternity: a position of authority**

In order to consider Sidney’s reshaping of motherhood, we must begin with cultural conceptions about maternity, particularly as a position of authority. As we have seen, Elizabeth uses the metaphor to inspire obedience. Sidney, too, begins with the assumption that mothers have a certain limited power. In line with Protestant reforms, mothers in early modern England increasingly occupied positions of authority within their own households. They supervised their children’s educations, girls throughout childhood, and boys until age seven. Mothers sometimes wrote deathbed instructions meant to be read immediately by their adult children, or later in life by their infants; as these legacies attest, maternal influence could continue into their children’s adulthood. Upper class women supervised vast estates, including large numbers of tenants and

---


workers.\(^{18}\) Moreover, widowhood often revealed the kind of authority that women had within their households: despite the fact that women were considered weak by nature and thus were legally incapacitated, many men, in their wills, “were willing to entrust widows with important responsibilities for the rearing of children and the management of their properties—the very tasks on which the family’s future depended.”\(^{19}\) Widows sometimes took over their deceased husbands’ businesses, becoming, in effect, independent businesswomen.\(^{20}\) Within Renaissance culture women had a certain amount of power; sometimes only limited, but other times notably expanded, their authority was tied to maternity.\(^{21}\)

This maternal authority within the home, as we’ve seen, became politically relevant in the family–state analogy, common through medieval and Renaissance political theory.\(^{22}\) The Renaissance household, with its “extended network of servants, distant relatives, foster-children, laborers, and other retainers […] was a pattern in miniature of the state.”\(^{23}\) While some argued that the hierarchy of the state was a model

\(^{18}\) Mendelson and Crawford, 303-13.


\(^{20}\) Mendelson and Crawford, 330-34.


\(^{22}\) Constance Jordan traces the origins of the Family/State analogy to Aristotle in “The Household and the State,” 308-26. See also Schochet, especially Chapter 3: “Patriarchalism in Tudor Political Thought.”

\(^{23}\) Raber, 301.
for the household, most perceived that the way a household functioned was the way the
state should function. The patriarchal authority of the husband/father provided an
example of appropriate Neoplatonic hierarchy. Cultural conceptions posed women as
weak-minded yet with a desire for power that threatened the hierarchy; a husband’s job
was to maintain order. Susan Dwyer Amussen goes so far as to argue, “the control of
gender disorder [within the household] symbolically affirmed all social order.” Women
have an odd position within the family–state analogy, as Karen Raber summarizes: the
mother’s “presence is additive and occasionally confusing since she can function as both
subordinate and superior (wife, but also parent; woman, but also in charge of male
servants and others of lower rank in her home).” Thus the sanctioned authority of
mothers produced anxiety when it entered the political context, as it necessarily did. As
we shall see, Gynecia, the mother-queen; Miso, the guardian of the princesses; and
Cecropia, the mother to a prince, straddle both sides of the family-state analogy, shedding
light on Elizabeth’s place in the model as a female authority figure. Sidney uses these
women to explore the unsettling political implications of motherhood, primarily through
their impact on the succession.

**Elizabeth, Sidney, and maternity**

Sidney was writing *Arcadia* when the nation’s focus increasingly turned to motherhood
and succession. Because of Elizabeth’s refusal to marry or to name an heir, England

\[24\] Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern

\[25\] Raber, 303.
stood in a dangerous political position in relation to Europe, and many feared the possibility of domestic unrest if pretenders began to claim the throne. 26 From the first year of Elizabeth’s reign, Parliament made formal requests that Elizabeth marry and bear children to ensure the continuation of the Tudor dynasty. Elizabeth resisted Parliament’s pressure, claiming that she was married to her country and was the “mother of England.” 27

While the rhetoric of motherhood faded from her speeches over time, she still promoted the connection visually and in the vast number of godchildren she had. 28 Sidney’s awareness of Elizabeth’s descriptions of herself as a mother is evident in The Four Foster Children of Desire (sometimes called The Fortress of Perfect Beauty, or the Triumph), an entertainment in which Sidney took part, and probably had a hand in devising, performed for the Queen and a French delegation present for the marriage negotiations in May 1581. Sidney and three other courtiers were “foure long haples, now hopeful fostered children of Desire: who [have] bin a great while nourished up with that infective milke, and to to much care of their fiery fosterer, (though full oft that dry nurse despaier indevered to waine them from it).” 29 Katherine Duncan-Jones argues, “Here

26 Worden, “Delightful Teaching,” 77.

27 See Chapter 1, pp. 1-1, and Chapter 2, pp. 32-34, 35. For specific examples in Elizabeth’s speeches, see “Queen Elizabeth’s First Speech Before Parliament, February 10, 1559,” version 2, an English translation of William Camden’s printed Latin translation (1615), in Collected Works, 59; and “Queen Elizabeth’s Answer to the Commons’ Petition that She Marry, January 28, 1563,” Collected Works, 72.

28 See Coch, 423-50; Hackett, “(In)Fertility,” 165-69; and Orlin, 90-94.

‘Desire’ was as much political as amorous, figuring the eager dependency of courtiers on the Queen’s favour,” in this his “most public use of the image of lovers as hungry, dependent babies.” In effect, *The Four Foster Children* requires a two-step blend—lover to child and child to subject. Elizabeth’s court conventions blended the concepts of “subject” and “lover” in the figure of the courtier. Sidney’s entertainment adds to the subject–lover figure the “hungry baby” image: the knight is a mewling, sucking babe (see Figure 3.6). Sidney not only recognizes this blend, but also engages with it to comment on the possibilities and realities of Elizabeth’s rule and her relationship with her people.

The lack of an heir prompted much political positioning, especially as the Queen aged. Elizabeth entertained many suitors over the years, playing up possible alliances and using the courtships to support her international policy. Ultimately, all of the suits were for naught. However, the second round of negotiations with the Duke of Anjou, which took place while Sidney was working on the *Old Arcadia*, in particular reminded Elizabethan courtiers and subjects of their precarious place in Europe: a Protestant island nation in opposition to Catholic France and Catholic Spain. Moreover, compounding the threats from the Continent were challenges closer to home. Mary, Queen of Scots, actively pursued the regency, requesting regularly that Elizabeth formally acknowledge her claim to the throne and participating in plots to usurp it. The *Arcadia* must be


32 Though Elizabeth resisted authorizing severe punishment, keeping the Queen of Scots under house arrest for many years, Mary was finally executed in 1587. For Cecropia as Mary Queen of Scots, see Tiffany Werth, “The Reformation of Romance in Sir Philip Sidney’s *The New Arcadia*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 40.1 (2010): 35-55 (49-50,
placed in this context: Elizabeth’s unsettled succession and her anomalous female rule certainly influenced Sidney’s writing.\textsuperscript{33}

Because of Sidney’s focus on maternal identity in \textit{Arcadia}, the pastoral/epic romance informs our reading of Elizabeth as mother of England. I have argued that the conceptual blend of Elizabeth as mother became common, and that it also became a means for her to define her relationship with her people and a means for members of Parliament and other writers to attempt to prescribe her behavior. Louis Montrose terms this convention a part of the “political imaginary”—an arsenal of concepts and symbols accessible in early modern discourse.\textsuperscript{34} The blend of Elizabeth–mother, designed to highlight the “loving, caring” elements of motherhood, became a part of her self-description—the megablend that established her “fashioned” self.\textsuperscript{35} In \textit{Arcadia}, Sidney literalizes the blend of “mother–queen” through Gynecia, the queen of Arcadia and mother to the heirs. Miso and Cecropia behave in similar ways to Gynecia though their status, class, and characterizations differ drastically. The similarities among these diverse mothers create a single vision of motherhood that provides a forceful image for Elizabeth.


\textsuperscript{34} Montrose, “Spenser,” 907. See also his “‘Shaping Fantasies,’” and \textit{The Subject of Elizabeth}. His work on Spenser is one application of his theory of the “political imaginary,” which, he argues, functions across early modern culture (and by extension, any culture).

\textsuperscript{35} For a full description of a megablend, see Chapter 4, pp. 145-147; for specific readings of Elizabeth’s megablends, see Chapter 2, pp. 54-62.
to attend to. Through reshaping the concept of motherhood in a political framework, and thus modifying Elizabeth’s blend, Sidney considers the implications of Elizabeth’s maternal identity, both positive and negative, concluding that she should value right order and smooth succession more highly than personal matters. In literalizing the mother blend, Sidney explores the potential power of mothers to impact dynastic realities; he undercuts those powers, however, showing mothers to be one piece in a wider order.\textsuperscript{36} He offers Elizabeth both warnings and exhortations to be a good mother to her people, but shows how limited that power should be.

**Mothers in Arcadia: Venus**

Before Sidney introduces the three mothers in the *New Arcadia*, he provides an idealized image of motherhood which foregrounds the political aspect of maternal identity in Arcadia. As Musidorus (calling himself Palladius) recovers from a shipwreck, he tours his host Kalander’s garden and sees a statue of Venus with her son: “At her breast she had her babe Aeneas who seemed, having begun to suck, to leave that to look upon her fair eyes which smiled at the babe’s folly, the mean while the breast running” (*NA*, 14). Mother Venus is making a bountiful offering of nurture and sustenance to her child: her milk literally is overflowing. This “good” mother nurses her baby—perhaps the most physical practice of good motherhood.\textsuperscript{37} Her response to Aeneas neglecting that bounty is

\textsuperscript{36} Even Basilius is merely one part of the whole; he must play his part, and though it is a powerful one, it is still heavily prescribed.

one of amusement, rather than anger or frustration. Venus serves as a graphic contrast to the living, complicated, and dangerous mothers of Arcadia. In addition, Venus reveals the political emphasis of the Arcadia. She is not cradling her son Cupid, the god of love, which would have signaled the primacy of romance within the text. Instead, she nurses Aeneas, the ancestor of the founder of Britain. Born of Venus and the mortal Anchises, Aeneas was the grandfather of Brutus, who sailed to the British Isles to found the New Troy, which later became London. The Roman pattern for the British realm was commonly rehearsed in chronicles to signal a cultural equality with Rome. Whereas Spenser, in The Faerie Queene, makes the links explicit through invented genealogy—Arthur’s and Guyon’s histories in Book II, canto x, and Merlin’s account of the generations from Britomart to Elizabeth in Book III, canto iii—Sidney uses the figure of Aeneas to embody the dynastic ideal. The Venus statue, then, presents the ideal mother as a dynastic mother and focuses the text on succession rather than on amorous love.

mother would be tender and loving, transmitting her own good qualities to her offspring by her breeding of the child in the womb, and by her nursing it at her own breasts” (67).


Unlike Shakespeare’s mother-like lover in *Venus and Adonis*, or Spenser’s sexualized Venus “joying” Adonis on the mount in the Garden of Adonis, Sidney’s Venus does not primarily invoke erotic notions. She is more akin to *Venus Urania*, the heavenly Venus referred to in the opening section of the *New Arcadia* where the shepherds Strephon and Claius long for the shepherdess Urania. In her role as *Venus genetrix* in specific relation to Aeneas, the statue of Venus symbolises maternal love. However, as Catherine Belsey argues, in early modern texts, “Love, perceived as civilizing in its effects, is also understood to be the source of all our woe.” The Venus of Kalander’s garden illustrates the first phrase of Belsey’s statement: maternal, dynastic love is a stabilizing force in society. The woe Belsey describes comes to the fore in the narratives of Gynecia, Miso, and Cecropia. All of *Arcadia*’s mothers, including Venus, play a role in political life. For Gynecia, Miso, and Cecropia, however, the power they have surfaces when they challenge the established order of government. They stand in sharp contrast to Venus, the idealised image of the loving, caring heir-bearer.

Venus is established as a representative mother because of her place in Kalander’s garden. Michael Leslie presents compelling evidence that Sidney modeled Kalander’s garden after Italian-style gardens on the Continent and in England. These formal gardens


41 Belsey, 179.
were meant to present visitors with opportunities to appreciate and interpret various features such as fountains and summerhouses: “the process of walking around one of these gardens was dramatic and didactic; […] the visitor to the garden had to read and consider his position, to contemplate the often moral choices offered him and their consequences.”

Venus is the first stop in Kalander’s garden, providing Musidorus and the reader an opportunity to consider the form and meaning of the dynastic mother. The viewer must consider the artistic form the statue takes. Sidney describes the naturalness of the art, which in turn draws attention to the skill of the artist: “a naked Venus of white marble wherein the graver had used such cunning that the natural blue veins of the marble were framed in fit places to set forth the beautiful veins in her body” (NA, 14).

In drawing attention to the sculptor, Sidney reminds the reader of Sidney’s own artistic role, shaping the image of the statue with words. The poetic and artistic mediation between the reader and Venus shape the reader’s interpretation—just as Sidney the poet is shaping the possibilities for maternal authority for Elizabeth.

The second stop in Kalander’s garden provides a counterpoint to Venus as an idealized mother figure: the dynastic mother Gynecia is depicted with her daughter and


43 Leslie argues that in focusing on the artist Sidney “stresses the apparentness of art, not its deception or illusionism” (33).


106
husband in a large painting in the garden’s summerhouse. Musidorus and the reader are given another opportunity to contemplate the meaning of art. The narrator’s description of the painting foregrounds the relationship between mother and daughter, especially in terms of beauty: “a large table which contained a comely old man with a lady of middle age—but of excellent beauty—and more excellent would have been deemed but that there stood between them a young maid whose wonderfulness took away all beauty from her, but that which it might seem she gave her back again by her very shadow” (NA, 15).

Gynecia is presented in direct comparison with her child, and her gaze is one of competitive watchfulness. Instead of offering bounty to her child, as Venus does, she attempts to withhold. Instead of a loving gaze, she gazes in potential jealousy.

Gynecia’s beauty—a beauty that signified virtue in early modern culture—paired with her jealousy points toward the complexity within her character. She appears to


46 The portrait appears in the Old Arcadia as well, but it is in a gallery in Mantinea where Pyrocles sees it with his host Kerxenus. This first view of Philoclea is “either evil or good fortune” to see the “picture, newly made by an excellent artificer, which contained the duke and duchess with their younger daughter Philoclea, with such countenance and fashion as the manner of their life held them in, both the parents’ eyes cast with a loving care upon their beautiful child, she drawn as well as it was possible art should counterfeit so perfect a workmanship of nature. For therein, besides the show of her beauties, a man might judge even the nature of her countenance, full of bashfulness, love, and reverence—and all by the cast of her eye—, mixed with a sweet grief to find her virtue suspected” (OA, 11).

47 Critics have pointed out the complexity of Gynecia’s character in contrast to the simple “saint/whore” dichotomy common in Renaissance depictions of women. See Katherine J. Roberts, Fair Ladies: Sir Philip Sidney’s Female Characters, Renaissance and Baroque Studies and Texts, Vol. 9 (New York: Peter Lang, 1993). She is a character developed
possess a beauty born of virtue; however, her watchful gaze indicates that her virtue may be suspect. The contrast between Venus and Gynecia ostensibly sets up a simple dichotomy of options for Elizabeth’s motherly sense—Venus the good mother, signified by her nurturance, and Gynecia the bad, based on her implied jealousy (see Figure 3.7). However, I argue that these mothers form more than a simple opposition. Both mother images point to the primacy of succession in the text and the ideal role of mothers to nurture their relationships with their children and their responsibility to support and promote the order of the state.

**Mothers in Arcadia: Gynecia**

In creating his vision of political motherhood, Sidney approaches the complex figure of the mother-queen in Gynecia and her relation to the succession. Instead of establishing and preserving the succession, as is her duty, Gynecia threatens the succession through her lust for the disguised Pyrocles. Her threat to order manifests in two ways: fracture within her family and betrayal of her people. Gynecia attempts to keep her feelings secret, struggling internally between desire and duty but refraining from any shameful action. However, her hidden passion still affects her family and the state. She neglects one daughter—“both the duke and the duchess had forgotten [Pamela], so were all their thoughts plunged in one place” (*OA, 50*)—and becomes hateful toward the other—she falls “into a jealous envy against […] Philoclea, because she found Cleophila showed such extraordinary dutiful favour unto her” (*OA, 49*). Later in the text Gynecia rages:

through her own speech regarding her internal states and through third person narration that details her unexpected complexities.
“No, no, it is Philoclea his heart is set upon (if he be a he); it is my daughter which I have borne to supplant me. But if it be so, the life I have given thee, ungrateful Philoclea, I will sooner with these hands bereave thee of than my birth shall glory she hath bereaved me of my desires” (OA, 92; NA, 120). Like Medea, who murders her children to exact revenge on her unfaithful husband, Gynecia contemplates filicide, an act that would deprive the kingdom of an heir.

Though Gynecia does not actually kill her daughter, she can be compared to the murderous mothers of Renaissance drama, who, as Betty S. Travitsky argues, “manifest the fear that women are by nature disordered, and when given power through motherhood are liable to lapse into extreme evil, uncontrollable passion, and monstrous acts.”

Gynecia differs from many of these mothers not only in her restraint, but because her sympathy is based on her history of virtue. She is described as “so excellent a wife” (NA, 17), who had a “well governed youth” (OA, 4), “of more princely virtues than her husband, [and] of most unspotted chastity” (NA, 16). In her own estimation, “she was witness of a long-exercised virtue, which made this vice the fuller of deformity” (OA, 91). Her virtue and her lust stand in uneasy relation throughout the text. In fact, Gynecia’s virtue causes her to rue her feelings for Pyrocles. The narrator reports, “There appeared unto the eyes of her judgement the evils she was like to run into, with ugly infamy waiting upon them; she saw the terrors of her own conscience […]. No small part of her evils was that she was wise to see her evils” (OA, 91). The text explores what happens when vice in a woman wins over virtue, when Gynecia’s passions move

48 Raber, 300, summarizes Travitsky, “Child Murder,” 63-84.
outward. As Gynecia succumbs to jealousy and lust she threatens not only the stability of her family, but also the stability of the kingdom.

Gynecia’s moral struggles remain hidden until she poisons Basilius in a bed-trick gone wrong; the consequences of her desires then affect her relationship with her people. Although she poisons Basilius accidentally—he takes and consumes what she believes is a love potion, even though she begs him not to—she sees Basilius’s death, and her subsequent punishment, as the product of her shameful passion. She confesses to Basilius’s murder after the shepherds find her, claiming, “It is I, faithful Arcadians, that have spoiled this country of their protector. I, none but I, was the minister of his unnatural end […]. You need not fear a woman, reverence your lord’s murderer, nor have pity of her who hath not pity of herself” (OA, 282). The shepherds are surprised at Gynecia’s confession because they see her as beautiful and virtuous: her people “had always carried a singular love for her courteous liberalities and other wise and virtuous parts which had filled all that people with affection and admiration” (OA, 281). The long-standing public image of an honorable Gynecia makes the shepherds more sorrowful, as they lament not only the physical loss of their King but also the moral loss of their Queen. (This scene can be read as a not too subtle hint to Elizabeth on the high stakes of her performance.) Furthermore, Gynecia and the people of Arcadia explicitly restate the family–state analogy as they mourn Basilius, the “good, just, merciful, the father of the people, the life of his country” (OA, 283). By extension, Gynecia is the mother of Arcadia. Thus her private break with her husband and daughters transcends the family and becomes a public break between a ruler–mother and her people.
The destroyed relationships between Gynecia and her daughters, and between the Queen and her people, become explicit at her trial. The narrator foregrounds the public perception of Gynecia, both the former admiration of her subjects and their disillusionment. The people of Arcadia felt “great [...] compassion [...] to see their princess’s estate and beauty so deformed by fortune and her own desert, whom they had ever found a lady most worthy of all honour” (OA, 376). Gynecia’s confession acknowledges her wrongs toward her people, her husband, and her children: “It was I, and none but I, [...] that have made all this people orphans of their royal father. I am the subject that have killed my prince. I am the wife that have murdered my husband. I am a degenerate woman, an undoer of this country, a shame of my children” (OA, 382). In describing herself as subject, wife, woman/mother, and murderer, Gynecia blends personal, familial, and public relationships, and acknowledges the utter brokenness of them all. However, in her confession, she no longer claims her role as Queen, as mother to her people. (In this way, her name is appropriate—Gynecia’s name means “woman,” an unequal pairing with Basilius whose name means “king.”49 She establishes all the relationships she has as a woman, and neglects the one she has as Queen.) Sidney sets Gynecia’s maternal identity in a conflicted space between virtue and vice, in the context of household and state. Within the Arcadia, the disruption of Gynecia’s family relationships presages the disruption that occurs with her people, a situation that foregrounds her role in the state and emphasizes the public consequences of her private vice, a common cultural concern about women in general and about Elizabeth in particular.

49 Grossberg, 26.
Gynecia’s broken relationship with her people damages the body politic. In accidentally killing Basilius, she has created a pastoral “headless Rome.” Her initial punishment appears to make restitution for her actions: Euarchus sentences Gynecia to be buried alive in Basilius’s tomb so that “death might redress their disjoined conjunction of marriage” (OA, 383). From a public perspective, this punishment restores her to Basilius by matching her demise with his, and justly requires her life for his life. However, Euarchus’s ruling is based on Gynecia’s confession, not an accurate description of the crime. Gynecia did not ruthlessly murder Basilius as she claims; she accidentally poisoned him. She is guilty of attempted adultery, but not intentional murder. Arthur Kinney argues that in “tak[ing] apparent truths […] as facts” Euarchus “is neither wise nor just.” Whether or not Gynecia’s punishment is just, however, it does circumscribe her political power—a turn that Sidney emphasizes by providing an extreme judgment for an accidental crime.

Sidney does not leave Gynecia to Euarchus’s justice, however. By the end of the tale Gynecia is restored fully to her previous position of honor, emphasizing that maternal authority should be directed toward preserving the established order and maintaining the succession. Her restoration to both family and state begins with Basilius’s miraculous resurrection (the potion only induced deep sleep) and is completed through her husband’s testimony. Basilius immediately “recount[s] before all the people the excellent virtue was


in her, which she had not only maintained all her life most unspotted but now was content so miserably to die to follow her husband” (OA, 416). Even Gynecia’s acceptance of an unjust punishment becomes a virtue and a testament to her supposed faithfulness. Basilius “publicly desired her pardon for those errors he had committed” and “left her to receive the most honourable fame of any princess throughout the world, all men thinking (saving only Pyrocles and Philoclea who never bewrayed her) that she was the perfect mirror of all wifely love” (OA, 416). The text specifies that she does not deserve this fame, but that her exemplary life afterward moves toward justifying it. Her husband’s words and kiss restore her to her wifely role, which she assumes “observing all duty and faith” (OA, 416).

This restoration to her people (and Philoclea’s silence about her mother’s untoward desire) signals a restoration with her daughters as well. Instead of a passionate reunification scene where her daughters are re-incorporated into their family of origin, they are properly married to the Greek princes, and they bear children—Pamela a daughter by Musidorus, and Philoclea a son by Pyrocles. This restoration of order elides Gynecia’s private failings, reinstating her to her roles as duchess, wife, and mother. Moreover, from a dynastic perspective, the situation in Arcadia is not simply restored to its former state; it is improved. The succession has been righted—Pamela and Musidorus can rule, and their child will inherit the throne. All of the potential harm Gynecia could have caused has been mitigated by a kiss. Gynecia’s maternal authority is redirected from threatening the political hierarchy to supporting it.

The ending is quite a celebration, but the joyous occasion does not fully cover up Gynecia’s dishonor, nor our readerly knowledge of her internal struggles and her
potential to function in a way that compromises the right order of family and state. In fact, Katherine Duncan-Jones considers Gynecia’s restoration a sort of punishment in itself: “with the revival of Basilius, Gynecia has to accept the sentence imposed on innumerable real-life women in the early modern period: to remain married to a foolish elderly man for the rest of his natural life, presenting the world with the misleading impression ‘that she was the perfect mirror of wifely love.’”  

Gynecia’s “end” here points to her performance of her role of the virtuous queen, faithful and dutiful to support the dynastic order. This is a performance, Sidney implies, that Elizabeth would do well to imitate, if we read a one-to-one correspondence between Gynecia and Elizabeth. In his depiction of Gynecia, Sidney allows for a difference between appearance and reality—she was “the perfect mirror,” containing the image of perfection, but not embodying it. In the implied blend between Gynecia and Elizabeth, he suggests that Elizabeth, too, may have had private passions that diverge from her public image. Nonetheless, she should maintain the public image, her body politic, even if it meant the overruling of her body natural.  

Sidney establishes maternal identity as a supportive role meant to further the dynastic order. In Gynecia’s case, her public image is a performance: when she is restored to her proper role, “[w]hich though in that point underserved, she did in the remnant of her life duly purchase with observing all duty and faith, to the example and glory of Greece—so uncertain are mortal judgements, the same person most infamous and most famous, and neither justly” (OA, 416). Thus in the

52 Duncan-Jones, Sidney, 185.

53 On the queen’s two bodies, see Chapter 1, pp. 10-13. The two seminal works are Kantorowicz, esp. 9-23 and 496-506; and Axton. For a more recent appraisal, see Norbrook, “The Emperor’s New Body?” 329-57.
performance of maternity, the mother must appear to engage in a supportive role in relation to family and the state (see Figure 3.8). Sidney, however, does not merely provide an analogue to Elizabeth in Gynecia. He uses other maternal characters to establish a pattern of behavior that characterizes his vision of desirable motherhood. The tales of these mothers develop an ideal Arcadian maternity that shapes an interpretation not simply of Elizabeth as Gynecia, but Elizabeth as mother. Broadening the scope of his conceptualization allows Sidney to exploit Elizabeth’s own metaphor.

**Mothers in Arcadia: Miso (Old and New)**

Gynecia and Miso are in many ways opposites: one is Queen, the other a shepherd’s wife; one is beautiful, the other a hag; one full of pathos, the other set up as comic relief. Yet despite their differences in person, status, and character, these two mothers both have the power to affect the succession—Gynecia through intemperate passion for a young prince, and Miso through uncontrolled jealousy in the *Old Arcadia*, and through misplaced watchfulness and elaborate tale-telling in the *New*. Each woman exhibits a characteristic that fueled contemporary cultural anxieties about women—lust and jealousy were considered particularly feminine weaknesses—and each woman undermines public life as well as the life of her family. While initially Miso seems merely a foil to Gynecia, she actually reinforces Sidney’s articulation of maternal identity as politically effective—and potentially dangerous. Miso is not an analogue for Elizabeth per se, but she establishes the maternal pattern Sidney emphasizes in *Arcadia*.

Miso is the comic opposite to Gynecia, the shrewish scold to the beautiful and (seemingly) virtuous queen. The narrator uses a droll tone in introducing Dametas’s wife: “yet so handsome a beldam that she was counted a witch only for her face and her splay
foot” (OA, 30). She has a “hollow rotten voice” (OA, 33) and “a wretched body and a froward mind” (OA, 30); she is “unfit company for so excellent a creature [as Pamela], but to exercise her patience and to serve for a foil to her perfections” (OA, 416).

Moreover, she is clownish in her lack of self-awareness and in her propensity to believe what is untrue.

In the Old Arcadia, Sidney pairs Miso’s unattractive visage with a character prone to suspicion, one that can be stoked into uncontrollable jealousy. He thus articulates the cultural fear that women may become overly passionate and disrupt the family and the community.54 When Musidorus, disguised as the shepherd Dorus, plots a way to escape with Pamela, he considers Miso’s weaknesses and homes in on her “cursed mischievous heart” which he finds “most apt to be tickled with jealousy, as whose rotten brain could think well of nobody” (OA, 186). Her suspicious character is akin to Gynecia’s generalized desire, which only becomes dangerous when it turns into lust for her daughter’s lover and leads to the betrayal of her husband. Similarly, Miso’s character flaw begins to affect the public realm only when it turns from something felt to something performed. It requires little effort for Musidorus, disguised as the shepherd Dorus, to convince Miso that Dametas is cheating on her with the fictional Charita, a ploy he uses to prompt Miso to leave him alone with Pamela. Miso’s latent mistrust of Dametas turns to jealousy, envy, and rage. She is overcome by her emotions: “her jealousy [swells] the more with the poison of envy […] her hollow eyes [yield] such wretched looks as one might well think Pluto at that time might have had her soul very

good cheap,” and she “flies about the house, borne up with the wings of anger” (*OA*, 192).

Miso’s suspicious nature and susceptibility to lies lead to her public display at Manitea, a spectacle that both humiliates her husband and gives Pamela the opportunity to run away with Dorus. Miso rides through Manitea’s streets, gathering a crowd to hunt for her wayward husband and “encouraging them with all the shameful blazings of his demeanour” (*OA*, 269). Consumed with “devilish disdain and hateful jealousy,” Miso is incapable of imagining her husband to be innocent (*OA*, 269). When she finally finds her husband, she berates him and beats him with a cudgel in front of the crowd. What begins as an internal propensity for mistrust—“her heart being apt to receive and nourish a bitter thought”—poisons her relationships with her daughter (Miso actually mistakes Mopsa for the invented Charita) and her husband, whom she humiliates in the town square (*OA*, 269). This humiliation up-ends the right relationship between husband and wife; the woman’s private vices have public consequences.

Furthermore, although the larger ramifications of her jealousy seem quite accidental, the significance of Miso’s actions are not only is public, but political. Just as Gynecia’s consuming passion results in the supposed death of the Duke, Miso’s consuming jealousy results in the disappearance of the heir. Miso provides comic relief, but she also repeats the pattern of Gynecia’s behavior and its consequences in Sidney’s Arcadian world: even a shepherd’s wife, exhibiting stereotypically feminine “weakness,” can disrupt the right order.

In the end, Sidney gives Miso little real impact on the state, undercutting her inadvertent power when Pamela is found safe and undefiled by the amorous Dorus. Miso
does not go unpunished, however. She and her family suffer greatly for their errors: the
three are “fettered up in as many chains and clogs as they could bear, and every third
hour [...] cruelly whipped” (OA, 288). Just as Euarchus’s judgment against Gynecia is
harsh, substituting full justice for equity, his judgment against Miso and her family gives
no consideration of the fact that Pamela was privy to the plot and has returned. In his
discussion of Euarchus’s rulings, David Norbrook argues that Sidney “clearly expects his
readers to feel the injustice of treating noble and magnanimous princes in the same way
as everyone else.” However, Miso’s sentence is also surely much more than she
deserves. This extreme punishment eviscerates all of Miso’s authority by subjecting her
to unending torture. In contrast to Gynecia’s restoration to her powerful role, Miso is
deprived of any bodily integrity.

In the scope of the Arcadia Miso is a minor character, who has often been ignored
by critics; however, she is important as both a foil for and a complement to Gynecia.
Sidney uses the two mothers together to emphasize that maternity is political and that a
“good” mother is one who supports and protects the order of succession. Further, these
characters exist in a world where the consequences for not doing so are grave. The Old

55 Norbrook, Poetry and Politics, 91. Brian Lockey reads Euarchus’s judgments as
necessary to a program of charitable intervention, one that favors the justice of the nation
over personal interests (77).

56 Roberts does not mention Miso in her book-length study of Sidney’s women. Worden
mentions her once in passing: The Sound of Virtue, 211. Helen Hackett discusses Miso’s
tale briefly: Women and Romance Fiction, 112-13, as does Julie A. Eckerle in “Urania’s
Example: The Female Storyteller in Early Modern English Romance,” in Oral Traditions
and Gender in Early Modern Literary Texts, ed. Mary Ellen Lamb and Karen Bamford
in “On the Margins of Romance, At the Heart of the Matter: Revisionary Fabulation in
Arcadia establishes a consistent category of maternity that complicates Elizabeth’s maternal metaphor by redefining her “loving and caring mother” input.

Miso’s role is expanded in the New Arcadia, as she more firmly establishes Sidney’s concept of political maternity. By shifting the focus onto Miso’s duties as guardian of the princesses, Sidney emphasizes her potential impact on politics, just as he does with the other primary mothers in the New Arcadia. In his revision, the jealous scold becomes an inept guardian and old wife whose actions lead to a more significant disruption of the succession. She exhibits those characteristics of caregivers that early modern society found suspicious—tale-telling and over-attentiveness, attempts to dissuade her wards from necessary rites of passage, inattention to guarding moral virtue, and lack of control over her charges (Pamela is still kidnapped on her watch in the New Arcadia).

Gynecia instructs Miso to keep a constant eye on both daughters, “and particularly not to let Zelmane and Philoclea have any private conference—but that she should be present to hear what passed” (NA, 157). Miso appears to take her commands very seriously, and instead of remaining an observer, she wields her power and interrupts the couple, barging in on their private moments. Her over-attentiveness frustrates the young couple, and she obstructs (what turns out to be) a good match, both politically and

personally. In the most prominent example, Miso wields her power and interrupts the couple as they sit in the lodge telling stories. Justifying her presumption, Miso says, “I promise you, as long as I have the government, I will first have my tale—and then my Lady Pamela, my Lady Zelmane, and my daughter Mopsa [...] may draw cuts [...]. For I tell you, and this may be suffered, when you are married you will have first and last word of your husbands” (NA, 210). Miso takes her authority from her position as wife and mother, ruling over her child and charges. And although Miso grounds her own authority in the maternal, her interruptions, in fact, are a misuse of authority.

Unlike in the Old Arcadia where she humiliates her husband before crowds, the New Arcadia’s Miso speaks to only four people: Pamela, Philoclea, Pyrocles/Zelmane, and her own daughter, Mopsa. However, her influence on the political realm is greater because of who her audience is. Pamela’s disappearance in the Old Arcadia is a serious consequence of Miso’s folly, and this is reproduced in the New Arcadia when Cecropia kidnaps Pamela, Philoclea, and Zelmane. But the lost are often found, especially in romances. More serious is Miso’s tale-telling attempt to convince the princesses to resist love and marriage, which in turn has grave implications for Arcadia’s dynastic line. The tale is, as old wives’ tales were thought to be, “at best trivial and erroneous and at worst dangerous and corrupting.”58 In redeeming the old wife, in Julie Eckerle’s view, successful story tellers “complete their tales against the odds, not only gaining the respect of their auditors but, in best-case scenarios, actually achieving the persuasive goal of their

tales as well.”59 Thus we can assume that Miso means her subversive tale to be instructive.

Miso’s narrative is divided into three stages: an account of the authority of her tale, the story of how she first heard the story, and the story itself. Her claims for authority are hearsay and unsubstantiated: “I will tell you now what a good old woman told me, what an old wise man told her, what a great learned clerk told him, and gave it him in writing; and here I have it in my prayer-book” (NA, 210). She cites an educated male as her end source, but because she has no way to test his authority, the tale itself becomes suspect. The next part of her tale continues to discredit her sources. The “good old woman” shows Miso what love is—“a foul fiend” painted in the corner:

he had a pair of horns like a bull, his feet cloven, as many eyes upon his body as my grey mare hath dapples, and for all the world so placed. This monster sat like a hangman upon a pair of gallows. In his right hand he was painted holding a crown of laurel, in his left hand a purse of money; and out of his mouth hung a lace, of two fair pictures of a man and a woman; and such a countenance he showed, as if he would persuade folks by those allurements to come thither and be hanged. (NA, 211)

This perversion of the Cupid figure reveals the woman’s (and thus Miso’s) misinterpretation of his lineage. The woman mistakenly credits Cupid’s parentage to Io and Argus, an error first introduced in Arcadia by Dicus in the First Eclogues (OA, 65, ll. 21-24). The woman warns Miso not to love any of the young men who are pursuing her, but her misunderstanding discredits her authority. Miso says the tale is confirmed in a book that she received from the old woman who had received it from an old painter who had received it from a ballad printer. Miso seems to believe that the written word and the book-making give the tale itself credibility. Helen Hackett points out, “Miso’s story is a

59 Eckerle, 25.
stereotypical old wives’ tale, digressive, inconsequential, and embroidered by oral tradition.” Miso herself acts as the old wife, passing along her misinformation to the next generation, and discouraging marriage for the very women who most require a good match: the heirs to the throne. She has turned into the old woman who first counseled her, and the consequences of her tale are potentially disastrous.

As he does in the *Old Arcadia*, however, Sidney mitigates Miso’s threat. Miso’s old wives’ tale, if taken seriously, could sour the princesses on love and marriage, bringing a halt to Basilius’s dynasty. However, her audience’s immediate reaction dispels any notion that Miso’s dangerous argument can persuade the young princesses: they laugh. According to Sidney’s own assessment in his *Defence of Poetry*, “laughter almost ever cometh of things most disproportioned to ourselves and nature. Delight hath a joy in it […]. Laughter hath only a scornful tickling.” In a similar consideration of joy versus laughter, French physician Laurent Joubert asserts in his *Traité du Ris* (1560), “all that is laughable is found in actions or in words, and is something ugly or improper, yet unworthy of pity or compassion.” Sidney prepares the reader for this kind of derisive laughter by describing the earnest Miso as ridiculous: “having threatening not only in her ferret-eyes, but, while she spake, her nose seeming to threaten her chin, and her shaking limbs to threaten one another” (NA, 210). During her recitation Sidney emphasizes her

Hackett, *Women and Romance Fiction*, 112.


uneducated speech and overly emotional reactions; she interrupts her own tale to exclaim on the loss of the “good old woman” who warned her: “(Oh the good wold woman! Well may the bones rest of the good wold woman!)” (NA, 211). Sidney’s language casts Miso as risible, and he indicates how the reader should respond to her by the princesses’ responses—they laugh and “make sport at the description and story of Cupid” (NA, 213). Unlike Bakhtin’s ambiguous festival laughter, the laughter here reveals “indignation and scorn” and “also reveals a sense of righteousness and superiority on the part of him who laughs.”

Instead of upending hierarchies, as festival laughter does, the princesses’ laughter reinscribes hierarchies, emphasizing the class differences between themselves and their guardian.

Miso’s lack of schooling coupled with her desire to impart wisdom to her charges is a destabilizing combination. And even though the ladies do not absorb her lesson (presumably because of their own education), Miso’s attempts to edify her charges in fact threaten to corrupt them. This silly tale about Cupid is hardly dangerous—as Eckerle concludes, “such narrative efforts [as Miso’s] would of course draw scorn in aristocratic and high-literary circles”—and Sidney may be making a slant justification for his writing of romances—his own silly tales, based on the authority of no one, but written down by an educated man, would hardly be as corrupting as some might propose.

____________________________


readers, his sister included, would be inclined to laugh at his fantastic tales of love and adventure. Sidney’s depiction of Miso here is shaped by common fears about women as primary educators and about women’s words and tales as potentially corrupting. His answer to this fear is in the ladies’ dismissive response to the story. Miso is an apparent foil to Cecropia and Gynecia—their potential to impact the political realm is not laughable at all—however, she is also aligned with these other mothers; none of the mothers ends up being a credible threat to the established order.

By aligning Miso with Gynecia, Sidney confirms that the appropriate use of maternal authority is in support of the continued succession. As in the Old Arcadia, Miso’s role in the New Arcadia is twofold: she is a comic foil to the pathos of Gynecia, and she is aligned with Gynecia in defining motherhood as a political category. Sidney continues to circumscribe maternal identity through comparison, first by showing Gynecia in contrast with the good mother Venus, then by comparing and contrasting Gynecia with Miso. He continues this strategy in the New Arcadia, by modifying Miso’s role to intensify her potential impact on the succession, and by introducing the wicked Cecropia, who dominates Book III. These mother characters further develop the concept

---

65 Brayman Hackel cites Mary Ellen Lamb’s description of a prescribed reading of the Arcadia: “Men were to read it for ‘political insight,’ and ‘rhetorical guidance’; women for pleasure.” Brayman Hackel cautions that “Lamb’s account remains speculative in the absence of women’s accounts of their own reading,” but affirms that Lamb “gets to the center of the contradictory views of the Arcadia as a serious work and as a trifle” (153, fn. 56, citing Gender and Authorship in the Sidney Circle [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990], 112-14). Using evidence from marginalia and apparatuses attached to early modern printed versions of the text, Brayman Hackel argues that Sidney’s Arcadia was often taken seriously by educated (male) readers (137-95). But just as Sidney is clearly doing something more with Arcadia by exploring the nature of good government in a pastoral romance, Clare Kinney finds that Miso’s story acts as a commentary on the narrative events surrounding it (“On the Margins of Romance,” 143-47).
of an approved maternity that supports to succession and established political order. By redefining motherhood, Sidney complicates Elizabeth’s blend: Sidney’s version of maternity acts as an input to the “Elizabeth is the mother of England” blend, changing Elizabeth’s meaning in a way that urges her to modify her actions regarding the succession.

**Mothers in Arcadia: Cecropia**

Sidney worked on his revision in and before 1584, when the dynastic pressures on Elizabeth’s reign were changing: it was becoming increasingly apparent that she was not going to marry or give birth. In designing Cecropia as a counterpoint to the (falteringly) virtuous Gynecia, Sidney drew on the character and circumstances of Catherine de’ Medici, mother of the Duke of Anjou, who at the time of *Old Arcadia*’s composition had been attempting to marry her son to Elizabeth, a match Sidney saw as detrimental to the English monarchy. Cecropia emphasizes the increased focus on government in Sidney’s revision, for she is a political figure defined primarily by her motherhood. Her presence further develops Sidney’s concept of maternity, relevant to a re-reading of Elizabeth as mother in the last half of her reign.

Cecropia is the widow of Basilius’s brother and the mother of Amphialus. Before the aging Basilius married the much younger Gynecia and fathered two daughters, Cecropia’s son Amphialus was the heir to the throne. As a widow and mother to a former heir, Cecropia now is in a difficult position. Without a direct connection to Basilius and his family, she has no clout. Stephanie Chamberlain reads Cecropia’s actions—

kidnapping Philoclea, Pamela, and Zelmane, and attempting to persuade one of the heirs to marry Amphialus—as a desperate attempt to remain politically relevant.\textsuperscript{67} Cecropia is vilified, described as innately evil and devoid of redeeming qualities. This evil mother contrasts with Gynecia in a different way from Miso. In Cecropia, Gynecia’s internal badness is made external: instead of Gynecia’s lust for a man, Cecropia has a lust for power. Cecropia embodies yet another cultural anxiety about women: if they are not made subservient, their thirst for power will destabilize the patriarchy. Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford report, “Feminine insubordination ranked as an egregious crime not only in its own right, but because it raised the spectre of an inversion of the sexual as well as the political gender hierarchy.”\textsuperscript{68} Cecropia’s attempts to overthrow Basilius and destabilize the government confirm her threat to society.

Cecropia is the opposite of Gynecia in another way: whereas Gynecia attempts to keep her lust hidden in the hope that it will not affect her family or her public life, Cecropia’s actions are focused specifically on gaining public prominence. She believes that as the daughter of a powerful king she married down. She did so because she believed her new husband, brother to the childless Basilius and next in succession, would become king. From early in her marriage, she plotted with her husband against the Duke so that they “should not have needed to have waited the tedious work of a natural end of Basilius” (\textit{NA}, 318). Even after her husband’s death, she continues to attempt to re-


establish her role in Arcadia by increasing Amphialus’s stature and claim to the throne. When her more benign attempts to reincorporate herself and her son into the line of succession fail, she thinks “to play double or quit,” and subsequently kidnaps the Princesses and Zelmane in a ploy to convince one of the heirs to marry Amphialus, making him again next in line for the throne (NA, 319). Her actions place Amphialus in direct opposition to Basilius, and the Duke and his men wait across the lake from the castle, ready to lay siege, putting Amphialus in mortal danger. Amphialus already has sustained wounds, has been labelled a traitor against the crown, and has little hope for any future. Recognizing this, Cecropia bends “all the sharpness of her malicious wit how to bring a comfortable grant to her son, whereupon she well found no less than his life depended” (NA, 418). Ironically, however, in her attempts to regain her former honor and glory, she has put her son in danger. And in a reversal of Gynecia’s pattern, Cecropia’s attempts to disrupt the political order have familial consequences.

Cecropia’s failing appears to be a lust for power: she plans to elevate herself and her family by destroying Basilius and his heirs. But her other and more insidious fault is a too-intense maternal love. Sidney buries the mention of her love in a long parenthetical description of Cecropia that focuses on her viciousness: Cecropia is “(in nature violent; cruel because ambitious; hateful for old-rooted grudge to their mother, and now spiteful because she could not prevail with girls, as she counted them; lastly, drawn on by her love to her son and held up by a tyrannical authority)” (NA, 419). According to Jonathan P. Lamb, parentheticals such as this one “provide depth, revealing some element of a
character or object not directly relevant to the plot.” Here, the parenthetical effectively buries Cecropia’s love for her son in a litany of negative qualities. Katherine Roberts points to Cecropia’s maternal love as a humanizing characteristic that separates her from earlier literary evil mothers. Though distinct from her literary predecessors, Cecropia is still has a “crooked disposition” at the core of her motivations, and her love for her son serves to draw out the evil that exists in her already. Her love has become corrupt because she “had confined all her love only unto him [Amphialus]” (NA, 414). As with The Faerie Queene’s Cymoent, mother to Marinell, for Cecropia, excessive love for a child becomes stifling to the child and ultimately proves disastrous.

Cecropia’s corrupting love complicates Sidney’s concept of maternal identity. Maternal love, ostensibly a virtue, now is added to the list of canonical maternal weaknesses—specifically sexual lust, jealousy, misuse of authority, and lust for power. It is clear from the surrounding narrative that Cecropia’s exclusive love for her son drives her to give free rein to her evil disposition. She controls his sickroom, only allowing in servants who are fully under her influence, and when she gains control over all decision-making for the weakened Amphialus, she threatens to behead the prisoners if Basilius does not retreat. She exhibits her greatest cruelty to fulfill her son’s desires; she acts at his service, although she functions outside of his wishes and his character. Ultimately, she infantilizes him. Furthermore, unlike Gynecia, who accurately describes her inner


70 Roberts, 93.

71 On Elizabeth infantilizing her courtiers, see Mazzola, 141.
state and recognizes the dangerous nature of her desire, Cecropia has a distorted view of her self. In her own backward estimation, she expects that Amphialus will see that she is motivated by love, and will justify her actions as she does. She tells her son, “howsoever I might be ashamed to tell it strangers, who would think it wickedness, yet what is done for your sake, how evil soever to others, to you is virtue” (NA, 317). Sidney’s Cecropia exposes motherly love as a potential source of cultural anxiety: obsessive motherly love mixed with political ambition, because it infantilizes sons, is especially dangerous to the established order.\textsuperscript{72}

Cecropia’s attempts to overthrow the right order of the state do not go unpunished, and her punishment is in direct proportion to her threat to the kingdom. However, unlike Miso and Gynecia, who receive their initial sentences from the seemingly just Euarchus, Cecropia receives a kind of poetic justice, meted out by chance: backing away from her son’s raised sword, she plummets to her death off the roof of the castle. She dies believing her son is trying to kill her, while Amphialus reveals that he was only planning to kill himself. On the top of the castle the difference between mother and son is made clear: she falls to her death muttering curses, while he mourns her loss: “‘And was I not enough miserable before,’ said he, ‘but that before my end I must be the death of my mother—who, how wicked soever, yet I would she had received her punishment by some other’” (NA, 441).

In Cecropia’s death, Sidney yet again derails the threat of maternal power. Although Cecropia wreaks havoc in Arcadia, she cannot disrupt the state fully by placing

Amphialus on the throne. Even the faked deaths of Philoclea and Pamela do nothing to move the princesses and do not ultimately harm them. They are saved from Cecropia’s custody and are on their way to being restored to their family when the *New Arcadia*’s narrative arrests. Cecropia is not so different from Gynecia and Miso: even the “evil” mother exhibits the qualities Sidney critiques. As with the other primary mothers in *Arcadia*, when her maternal authority challenges the hierarchy or harms the succession, she is put in check. She is only allowed to wield authority in support of the established order.

Cecropia, then, is the third mother in *Arcadia* to depict Sidney’s concept of maternity as political. Sidney deconstructs the “loving” and “caring” associations of Elizabeth’s metaphor through the powerful political mother who lets her familial feeling pair with her lust for power to drive her ambitions to disrupt the political order. Like Miso, Cecropia is not an analogue for Elizabeth so much as she is part of a redefinition of motherhood in general. Gynecia, Miso (both versions), and Cecropia in aggregate establish Sidney’s call for Elizabeth to right the succession. They do so through the behavior, traits, and fates they have in common.

Through the three primary mothers in *Arcadia*, Sidney champions a model of motherhood which uses its authority only to support the established order and to ensure the succession, supported by the minor mother characters, who mirror the behavior of the main mothers. There are good mothers, like Pyrocles’s and Musidorus’s mothers who are described as “dear” and “virtuous” (*NA*, 313-14). Pyrocles’s mother dies shortly after childbirth, and he is raised by Musidorus’s mother, who behaves in an exemplary manner
when she sets aside her own affections and sends the young men to Euarchus
(Musidorus’s father, her brother) to aid him in fighting a war (NA, 164). On the other
hand, Parthenia’s mother most closely resembles Cecropia as she attempts to marry off
her daughter to the undesirable Demagoras trying “all ways which a witty and hard-
hearted mother could use upon so humble a daughter, in whom the only resisting power
was love” (NA, 29). Sidney’s study in contrasting and conflicted mothers does not merely
prescribe acceptable behavior for mothers, or even for aristocratic mothers. By virtue of
extra textual connections, he asks his audience to consider the ramifications of Elizabeth
“mothering” her people, placing issues of succession and public responsibility at the fore.
In the Arcadia, Sidney offers his readers a specific conception of motherhood that
politicizes Elizabeth’s essentially non-political input.

Sidney exploits Elizabeth’s blend, current in the culture as a way to re-create the
relationship between the Queen and her subjects, and available to writers and other artists
as a way to challenge Elizabeth’s conceptions of her rule and to shape her behavior. He
engages in a rhetorical transaction with Elizabeth which stretches asynchronously from
the beginning of her reign to the midpoint (and beyond). Elizabeth attempted to reduce
the emphasis on her political body, drawing attention to her private female body in order
to claim a familial relationship to her people. Sidney determines, through the mothers in
his text, including the mother–queen Gynecia, that Elizabeth’s move toward the familial
in no way reduces the political ramifications of the political structures; in fact, it
reinforces them.
Maternal identity and its implications

The shape of maternal identity in *Arcadia* is limited to that which supports the established government. Sidney creates a template for acceptable interactions between the mother and the state; the consequences of the role’s definition necessarily affect a mother’s relationship with her children and her role within her family. By admonishing Arcadian mothers for particular behaviors, Sidney prescribes for Elizabeth acceptable actions for her performance as “mother of England.” Through the inclusion of his “Letter to Queen Elizabeth” in *Arcadia*, Sidney signals that the manuscript might be interpreted in light of contemporary political circumstances. (Sidney’s family members and editors invite interpretation of later published editions, all printed after Sidney’s death, in light of events contemporary with the work’s composition and its publication.) Given Elizabeth’s self-description as a mother to her people and the frequency of the trope in Elizabethan culture, Sidney invites the readers to connect his assessment of the proper use of maternal authority to Elizabeth’s public behavior. Sidney’s audience could blend his concept of maternal identity with Elizabeth herself, thus projecting back to Elizabeth’s political world the ways her figurative motherhood should function.

The seriousness of Sidney’s project is evident, and the importance of restraining maternal authority is a necessary part of that project. Given the fraught political climate of the early 1580s, exacerbated as it was by the Queen’s final courtship, Sidney expresses widespread anxieties about Elizabeth’s role as “mother of England” and how it connects to her rule. If Elizabeth is to entertain private passions as Gynecia does, Sidney emphasizes, she can put the whole nation at risk. If she does not protect, or even acknowledge, a succession, she neglects her duty as mother and monarch. In the character
of Gynecia, Sidney acknowledges that there may be a difference between Elizabeth’s private and public persons. He both cautions and requests that her private person not take precedence over her public responsibilities. The grace Gynecia receives from Basilius after he wakes from his death-like sleep offers Elizabeth a vision of how her people will respond to her—if she gives up Anjou and works toward the promise of a peaceful succession by naming an heir, her people will forgive her and restore her to “all wifely love.” In addition, she should name an heir to avoid the instability that could ensue if pretenders were to compete for the crown.

Examining Elizabeth’s claims to metaphorical motherhood through the lens of conceptual blending allows us to slow down the cognitive processes required to understand the image. It also allows us to consider the parts (or inputs) more precisely, and how they fit together to make a blend, one that has real world relevance. Sidney’s redefinition of motherhood as political in the *Arcadia* is one example of how the rhetorical transaction between Elizabeth and her subjects played out. Elizabeth’s usage and its immediate context focused on the “loving and caring” aspects of maternal authority and attempted to redefine the political relationship she had with her people in terms of a familial structure. He challenges the bifurcation of Elizabeth’s person into two bodies, public and private. Elizabeth attempts to define her political relationships as familial—extending the private realm into the public. Sidney asserts that the private realm of motherhood already is public: Elizabeth cannot eschew political responsibilities through a maternal metaphor because even the private desires of mothers ultimately affect the public good. Elizabeth’s maternal metaphor, for Sidney, actually emphasizes
her responsibility to name a successor and secure the future peace of her country.

Elizabeth’s motherhood is always and already political.

Figure 3.1: Elizabeth is the mother of England
Figure 3.2: Elizabeth/Arcadian maternity
Figure 3.3: *Arcadia* redefining motherhood, presents a warning to Elizabeth
Figure 3.4: Basilius and Euarchus as direct analogues to Elizabeth
Figure 3.5: Gynecia, Cecropia, Miso, and minor mothers establish “Arcadian motherhood” to redefine Elizabeth’s “mother” blend
Figure 3.6: The Four Foster Children of Desire (subject-lover-child)
Figure 3.7: The false opposition of Venus the “good mother” and Gynecia the “bad mother”
Figure 3.8: General Arcadian mother input

Figure 3.9: Developed Arcadian mother input
CHAPTER 4

MOTHERHOOD EMBODIED AND (EN)ACTED IN *TITUS ANDRONICUS*

*Titus Andronicus* (1594) begins with a problem of succession. Titus has just returned from war and is charged with choosing the next Emperor—either Saturninus, the next in line by primogeniture; or his brother Bassanius, the people’s favorite—because he refuses to take on the role himself. The topic of succession is one of many elements that link Rome to the Elizabethan world. Marion Wynne-Davis proposes that we can then “imagine Tamora as a distantly refracted image of Elizabeth I.”¹ But, she cautions, *Titus* “is too awkward a play to settle exclusively into close political allegory”; the play trades in “complexity rather than neat identifications” (217). We cannot, then, look for Elizabeth specifically in the text. What we *can* do, however, is look for the intermediary figure: the blend of the mother–queen.

In the character of Tamora, Shakespeare creates an embodied mother–queen, the figure Elizabeth invoked early in her reign in relation to the succession question. The mother–queen is brought to life on the page and literally embodied by the actor on the stage. Cognitive science is centered on the embodied mind—how and to what extent our cognition is bounded by the physical body. Conceptual blending theory focuses on mental creations, shaped by body, thought, and culture, that impact physical, cultural, social, and/or political realities. Drama is a particularly interesting case for conceptual blending theory because the cognition required by audiences and actors is so complex.

and because blends come alive on stage. In a way, we can see Titus as a grand elaboration of the blend of the mother–queen. Shakespeare gives Elizabeth’s blend a body (a post-adolescent male body in productions at the time) and, as the play progresses, reveals the complexity of Tamora’s character; her reliance on a scaffold of blends as she presents herself to Romans and Goths, Saturninus and Titus; and the instability of those blends as a means of self-preservation. If we read Tamora as an embodied blend, we can ultimately ask what from the elaboration projects back to the Elizabethan world.

Tamora, the mother-queen

In Titus Andronicus, the entrance of Tamora, the Queen of the Goths, visually establishes her as a mother. She is flanked by her sons Chiron, Demetrius, and Alarbus as Titus leads them into Rome as prisoners (1.1.69 s.d.). As Tamora moves around the stage during the first act—“aloft” with the Emperor (1.1.298 s.d.) and returning to the main stage (1.1.398 s.d.)—Chiron and Demetrius accompany her, along with Aaron the Moor. The presence of her sons and the ritual sacrifice of her eldest, Alarbus, reinforce an initial view of her as maternal. Her eloquent speech begging for Alarbus’s life to be spared confirms linguistically what the audience has seen visually: “Victorious Titus, rue the tears I shed, / A mother’s tears in passion for her son; / And if thy sons were ever dear to thee, / O, think my son to be as dear to me. / . . . / Thrice-noble Titus, spare my first-born son.”

Tamora is simultaneously a conquered queen and a mother reduced to begging. Titus’s refusal of mercy sets the revenge plot in motion, but as Anthony Young argues, Titus’s

son Lucius’s demand for the ritual sacrifice of Alarbus is a response to his own loss of twenty-one brothers in the Gothic war: “In this sense, then, the elements of the revenge tragedy were already present before the beginning of the play.”

Deborah Willis states, “Much discussion of Titus Andronicus cites the ritual sacrifice of Tamora’s son Alarbus as the play’s initiating conflict [...]. Nevertheless, it is not the first traumatic event referenced by the play; the ritual’s function is tied to the battlefield deaths that precede it.” In a similar way, Tamora’s humiliation before the play begins also sets the stage for her revenge. Willis points out that Alarbus’s death is a public offense to Tamora’s honor, “but it is the injury to her identity as queen [...] that prompts her wish to ‘raze’ Titus’s family and faction” (37). Alarbus’s death may be the most immediate motivating event, but Tamora’s revenge responds to much more than this particular crime against her and her maternal identity.

The play does refer to Alarbus’s death as the crisis point that drives Tamora to revenge, and we can see the speech itself as a metonymy for all the humiliations and injustices Tamora has faced. She herself indicates that Titus’s great crime is putting her in the position where she would need to beg: “I’ll find a day to massacre them all, / And raze their faction and their family, / [...] / And make them know what ’tis to let a queen / Kneel in the streets and beg for grace in vain” (1.1.450-51, 454-55). Here it is not Alarbus’s death but her humiliation that drives her to revenge. While one may certainly read Tamora’s speech as a heartfelt and sorrowful plea, it is at least also a public


performance of her grief. She begins by acknowledging her audience—“Stay, Roman brethren”—before she addresses her “gracious conqueror, / Victorious Titus” (1.1.104-105). She presents herself as a weeping mother and argues for Titus’s mercy, describing herself and her sons as “Captive to thee and to thy Roman yoke,” objects meant to “beautify thy triumphs.” She asks Titus to align himself with the gods in their mercy, the true sign of nobility. This public performance is one of many Tamora engages in throughout the play. In fact, her entire character is built on one performance after another: first of motherhood, then of Romanness and queenship, and finally of Revenge. These moments of performance are important, I argue, because they are performances. While she is a mother, a queen, and a Roman, her public performances of these identities differ greatly from her private moments—her asides to Saturninus, her words to Aaron, and her speeches to her sons. Her performances collapse at three moments in the play. First, in the woods with Lavinia, Tamora blurs the line between her private and public selves as she reveals her vengeful self to Lavinia (whether out of anger, frustration, or humiliation, or because she assumes that she is safe because Lavinia will die). Second, the actual birth of her illegitimate child threatens to reveal her unfaithfulness to Saturninus; at this moment, Tamora is not a model mother, queen, or Roman. Finally, her final performance, when she literally “puts on” the character of Revenge, places her thus-far hidden plan in the public realm. Doing so allows her performances of motherhood, queenship, and Romanness to be subsumed by revenge, making her vulnerable to Titus, who turns her into the literally devouring mother that she already is metaphorically.

Conceptual blending offers a unique approach to Tamora that reveals the structure of her character, the shifts in her character throughout the play, and the places where her
character is open to interpretation—where elements of the input spaces are unspecified or rely on cultural information we may not have access to. Approaching Tamora from the perspective of conceptual blending theory, we can begin to see not only the complexity of her character, but also the complexity of the way the mind understands her. Analyzing the blends needed to understand Tamora within the play requires a megablend, a blend that depends on more than one conceptual integration network (blend) for its inputs. In Chapter 2, I analyzed Queen Elizabeth’s metaphor of motherhood as a megablend. Tamora as a megablend has similar properties and suggests ways we can read Elizabeth more fully, as a dynamic “self” based on public performances and utterances.

**Conceptual blending: the megablend**

Megablends begin with constituent parts: simplex integrations. Consider the statement, *Paul is the father of Sally*. In one input space are the roles of father and child, and in the second input space are the individuals Paul and Sally. Paul is linked with the role of father because of the explicit statement *is*, and Sally is linked (by implication) with the role of child. The integration is therefore complete (see Figure 4.1). The statement *Ann is the boss of the daughter of Max*, however, is more complex; we need a megablend to map the structure (see Figure 4.2). The first blend is built from the inputs 1) boss, worker, and 2) Ann, unnamed person. The blend, then, contains *Ann/boss* and *unnamed/worker*. The second blend is built from the inputs 1) father, daughter, and 2) Max, unnamed daughter. This second blend contains *Max/father* and *unnamed/daughter*. These two blends are

---

5 The examples that follow are from Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 149 and 154-59.
linked by the connection between *unnamed/worker* in the first blend, and its cross-space counterpart *unnamed/daughter*. These two blends, then, can be compressed into the megablad that contains *Ann/boss, worker/daughter*, and *Max/father*. In this case, syntactic cues reveal the relationships between elements of the blend.

The pattern of this literal blend works in cases of metaphor as well. Conceptual blending theory assumes that the same thought processes underlie all conceptual understandings. According to Fauconnier and Turner,

> The language forms that lead to intuitively literal meanings can also give us intuitively metaphorical meanings that seem to belong to radically different kinds of thinking. Yet those identical forms are prompting for identical mapping schemes to guide those radically different constructions of meaning. And those mapping schemes compose in identical ways, regardless of whether the ultimate meanings are flatly literal, poetically metaphorical, scientifically analogical, surrealistically suggestive, or opaque. (154)

The authors provide analyses to establish the truth of their claim. The one we will examine here is a metaphor in the pattern of the *Ann is the boss . . .* example above:

*Prayer is the echo of the darkness of the soul* (see Figure 4.3).

In this example, the mapping looks exactly like the *Ann is the boss . . .* mapping, since the grammatical structure is identical. The input *prayer* comes from a generic religious space (that also contains *soul*, which will be relevant in the second blend). The other input contains the explicit link to *prayer, echo* and an implied *sound*—the thing that creates the echo, or that the echo repeats. In the blended space, *prayer/echo* is grounded in the input space and in the generic religious space, and *sound* is grounded in one input space, but is left open-ended, ready to connect to whatever comes after the *of*. In this

---

6 Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 156-59. For a more complex literary example, see their reading of Milton’s Satan, as father of Sin and as father of Death (160-62).
case, it will link to darkness in the second blend. The imagination comes into play here, as it did with sound in the first blend, because there is nothing more explicit for the first input space in Blend 2 than darkness: “it is up to the imagination to construct an appropriate space containing darkness, and again the imagination may make many different choices, any of which could later be revised; but one obvious choice is a space in which there is a locus and a gradient of light in that locus” (156). Following Fauconnier and Turner, if the first input into Blend 2 is darkness/locus, the second input of soul from the generic religious space corresponds to an unnamed element in the religious space that links to darkness. The second blend, then, contains darkness/unknown and locus/soul. To complete the megablend, prayer/echo, sound/darkness, and locus/soul are compressed into the final megablend space. The imaginative component of this integration network, what Fauconnier and Turner call “completion,” may be available from the generic context (in this case, religion), or may be “mostly available and we need only build some new elements and relations in it,” or might be created by the structure of the blend itself (157). This metaphoric blend involves compression, typical of megablends, as we saw with the compression “Queen Elizabeth,”7 and the intermediate blends leave much room for interpretation, based on context, personal experience, or cultural constructs.

For our purposes, the megablend shows the underlying structure of complex relationships, whether literal or metaphoric. Perhaps most crucially the mapping can reveal where various levels of interpretation are taking place. Where must the speaker or reader complete the inputs? What imaginative options do they have? In this chapter, I

7 See above, pp. 58-60.
will examine more literal blends in the character of Tamora, her performances throughout the play, and the roles she attempts to take on. In styling herself as “mother” or “queen” or “Roman” or “Revenge,” Tamora invokes compressions that will allow her to complete her plan of vengeance. However, when these compressions fail, they leave Tamora’s plans exposed. Tracing the progression of blends Tamora relies on over the course of the play reveals the complexity of her character, as well as the mental work required of the audience to follow her shifting character from literal boy actor to an embodiment of Revenge. Ultimately, Tamora’s performance of Revenge both encompasses and threatens her performances of her roles of mother, Roman, and queen.

**The base blend: boy actor/Tamora**

A simple compression is fundamental to all interpretation of the play: Tamora and the actor who plays her. We must remember first that a play is performed, adding an extra layer to the character Tamora’s performances. The controversies surrounding boy actors during the English Renaissance raise questions concerning blending. How much is the audience conscious of the boy actor’s sex? How does that knowledge affect their perception of the character, or their own relationship to the actor/character? How does the blend change the behavior of the audience? What happens when the text of the play draws attention to the disconnect between the sex of the character and the sex of the actor?

Although critics have very different answers to these questions, they do agree that it was common practice to cast male actors—late adolescent apprentices—in female roles. Stephen Orgel, Michael Shapiro, Laura Levine, Phyllis Rackin, Juliet Dusinberre and
others either assume or argue for the presence of boy actors in major roles.\textsuperscript{8} James Hill even goes so far as to argue from the texts of Shakespeare’s plays that the character structure within the female roles demand less of an actor, rarely requiring changes in emotion or tone to occur within one speech and presenting female characters in reaction to the male characters around them.\textsuperscript{9} While we know that there were boy actors in apprenticeships at theater companies, a few critics suggest that more expansive female roles—Cleopatra, for instance—were played by young men in their early to mid-twenties.\textsuperscript{10} With no early records of \textit{Titus Andronicus} performances, we can only know with certainty that the roles of Tamora and Lavinia were played by male actors; their age is a matter of speculation from circumstantial evidence. Margaret Tassi suggests that adult male actors “would be needed to satisfy the requirements of personating such charismatic mature queens” as Tamora and Queen Margaret.\textsuperscript{11} In any case, the age of the actor might only have a slight impact on our estimations of what might occur in


\textsuperscript{11} Margaret Tassi, \textit{Women and Revenge in Shakespeare: Gender, Genre, and Ethics} (Cranbury, NJ: Rosemont, 2011), 116.
Renaissance playgoers’ brains as they view the male actor portraying a woman or girl on stage.

In considering the problem of the boy actor, critics make claims about the cognitive processes of playgoers. Some critics argue that the presence of the boy actor was titillating to male audience members, while others believe the disconnect between actor and character was comic; this debate questions the success of the blend between actor and character. Michael Shapiro argues that the audience was always aware of the disconnect between the age and sexual (in)experience of the character and the child actor, to comedic effect, while Stephen Orgel suggests that the similarities between boys and women in Renaissance culture enabled a less jarring cognitive awareness.\(^{12}\) However, today’s arguments notwithstanding, early modern critics of boy actors playing female roles were concerned with the effect on the audience. Orgel summarizes their fears: “Male spectators, it is argued, will be seduced by the impersonation, and losing their reason will become effeminate, which in this case means not only that they will lust after the woman in the drama, which is bad enough, but also after the youth beneath the woman’s costume, thereby playing the woman’s role themselves.”\(^{13}\) Historian David Cressy argues that cross-dressing itself was not eroticized in the historical record nor


\(^{13}\) Orgel, 27. Levine discusses the argument in Gosson’s *School of Abuse*, 131.
often in plays—what was more often problematic was that the disguise gave men access
to female space, and the inappropriate invasion of the festival into a church building.\textsuperscript{14}
Thomas L. Martin and Duke Pesta argue that critics like Stephen Orgel, Phyllis Rackin,
and Lisa Jardine rely too heavily on Puritan views in their claims that “boy actors dressed
for women’s roles created a homoerotic theater.”\textsuperscript{15} Instead, they argue for a semiotic
(rather than a mimetic) theory of drama that holds the fictional world as primary—the
“raw materials of stagecraft, be they a boy in woman’s clothing or a block of wood
dressed as a Greek god” are subordinate “to the imaginative world created in the dramatic
performance.”\textsuperscript{16}

Although these various views of the interaction between audience and play make
claims about cognitive processes, they don’t attempt to examine those processes
themselves. Alisa Solomon goes further in her analysis, arguing that “With all the textual
references to boy-actresses, it’s hard to imagine that the audience forgot altogether that
they were actively participating in the theatrical event by consciously taking one thing for
another.”\textsuperscript{17} Though she doesn’t engage specifically with cognitive science, she details the

\textsuperscript{14} David Cressy, “Gender Trouble and Cross-Dressing in Early Modern England,”

\textsuperscript{15} Thomas L. Martin and Duke Pesta, “Boy Actors and the Semiotics of Renaissance

\textsuperscript{16} Martin and Pesta, 52.

\textsuperscript{17} Alisa Solomon, \textit{Re-Dressing the Canon: Essays on Theater and Gender} (London and
New York: Routledge, 1997), 37. Especially relevant to this discussion is her Chapter 1:
“Much virtue in if: Shakespeare’s cross-dressed boy-actresses and the non-illusory
stage,” 21-45.
“double-consciousness” of the audience, which knows the reality of the production but accepts the performance as “real” in some sense:

Shakespeare’s plays don’t demand that the audience believe such events in any literal sense, but merely that the accept the as-ifness of the situation, that, like Orlando taking Ganymede as ‘if thou wert indeed my Rosalind’ (IV, I, 187-188), they agree to a conditional, that they go along with a proposition that says, if this, then that. After all, like the bed trick, theatrical representation depends on the substitution of one thing for another. What matters isn’t some sort of scientific accuracy in the substitution, but its effect: the if coils things up so the then can unwind. We grant it knowingly for the sake of the result. Indeed, the pleasure in this type of theatrical spectating comes from consciously entering into the mimetic contract, whose terms are recalled and displayed again and again. Frequent metatheatrical moments in Shakespeare’s plays bring the play between engagement and distance to the surface, reminding the audience of its double-consciousness, and of its role in effecting theatrical representation. (37)

Conceptual blending, then, provides a way to analyze the “as-ifness” of performance and to map the mental processes of playgoers. The theory provides a tool to deal with the complexities of the cognition necessary for negotiating the “real” and “not-real” on stage.

Conceptual blending specifies the relationship between actor and character and confirms the question on which critics disagree: how complete is the blend? In the most basic blend of male actor and female character, the two input spaces are composed of the performance and of the play. In the theater space, the frame invokes a particular stage in a particular theater, playgoers, particular actors, specific props, etc. The Titus Andronicus space holds the specific characters, their words, their actions, etc. The generic space contains a generic theater, playgoers, actors, props, etc. and a generic play with characters, words, and actions (see Figure 4.4). In our more focused blend, Input 1 contains a specific (but unknown to us) male actor, and Input 2 contains the character of Tamora. The blended space compresses the two into “male actor/Tamora” (see Figure 4.5). What is up for debate is how conscious the audience was of the inputs, whether the compression held together, as Martin and Pesta postulate, or whether the difference in
gender between the actor and the character was such that the compression was not completed, that the audience was always conscious of the disjunction between actor and character, as many critics suppose.

Conceptual blending theory posits that the answer is “both/and.” The blend coheres enough to function on its own and to elaborate or create conditions that don’t exist outside the blend. Yet the blend is not so complete that the inputs are erased. In fact, information from the blend can project back into the input spaces. In the case of Shakespeare’s plays, the textual reminders of the input spaces could create confusion—the boy actor playing Rosalind is both a boy playing a girl and a girl playing a boy at the same time. Conceptual blending attempts to explain how it is possible for the human mind to conceive these seemingly contradictory states; these “both/and” qualities of blending allow us to understand Tamora on her many levels—inputs and blends alike.

Early modern ideas about boy actors also explore the relationship between inputs and blends, which we must clarify as we consider the “Tamora/male actor” blend. Anti-theatrical critics articulated great anxiety over the possibility that the actor/character blend could influence or even take over the actor himself. Laura Levine outlines the progression of early modern anti-theatrical tracts, from Stephen Gosson’s 1579 pamphlet, The School of Abuse, in which he “remark[ed] that theater ‘effeminated’ the mind,” to Phillip Stubbes’s The Anatomie of Abuses (1583), which “insist[ed] that male actors who wore women’s clothing could literally ‘adulterate’ male gender,” to William Prynne’s Histrio-mastix: The Player’s Scourge or Actor’s Tragedy (1633), which “described a man
whom women’s clothing had literally caused to ‘degenerate’ into a woman.”18 While Levine is interested in the differences between these tracts and examines the view of self that each reflects, I am more concerned with the general sense that a male actor playing a female role will somehow become effeminized or womanly. (Interestingly, this is the same concern that Musidorus expresses in the Arcadia when Pyrocles presents his plan to dress as a woman to gain access to Philoclea.) Essentially, the anti-theatrical writers’ concern is one of blending—they fear that the compression in the blend between male and female will project back into the actor input, changing the actual state of the male actor. They do not seem to be concerned that the blend will project back into the character portion, making the female character somehow more masculine: “It is not that the actor himself has the power to shape identity, but that the part is actually constitutive and shapes the man who plays it,”19 whether the character played is male or female. Conceptual blending theory allows for this possibility, however: what occurs in the blend may affect either input, or the viewer’s perception of that input. The blend is occurring for the audience and is possibly occurring for the actor. The audience may perceive an actor as effeminized after experiencing the blend in a performance. Similarly, it follows that the actor may take on characteristics from the blend that have either minimal or lasting effects. Amy Cook presents the example of actors today performing with prosthetic bodies or body parts, or changing their physical posture: “The body he plays in


19 Levine, 125.
performance begins to colonize the body of the actor,” and “the actor’s brain can begin to rewrite his/her sense of self.”\textsuperscript{20} These current examples indicate that the anti-theatricalists’ fears may have been based on real cognitive possibilities.

Early modern anti-theatrical tracts present only one contemporary view of the theater and boy actors. Duke and Pesta point to material in plays themselves—the Prologue to \textit{Henry V}, the rustics’ performance in \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream}, the puppet scene in Jonson’s \textit{Bartholomew Fair}—that they believe reveal an early modern view that theater was \textit{play}, a place to live in the “what if” that Solomon points out. In this “what if,” the theater itself expects and relies on the audience’s cognitive capacity for blending. In addition to accepting an outdoor stage under the sun as the dark foggy night when the ghost of King Hamlet appears, or a middle class actor as the King of England, or a piece of paper for a letter, theatrical performances also rely on cultural knowledge and experience both for completion and as extra signals to interpretation. Amy Cook provides a twentieth-century example from Michael Almereyda’s film \textit{Hamlet} (2000). By casting Sam Shepard as King Hamlet, and filming him as “full-bodied and not ghostly,” Almereyda invokes Shepard’s “strong silent type” persona in other films and his real-life occupations as actor and playwright (585). The director takes advantage of conceptual blending: “Casting a star with a precise persona allows a director to enrich a small part by strenuously projecting information from the star’s real life onto the character. It also allows actors to reify their persona by playing their persona in a movie” (585). We know that this happened in Shakespeare’s time with the clown characters. Will Kempe and

Robert Armin had very different styles of clowning, but each one evoked for the audience the character of the fool. The actor input, then, has the potential to influence the blend not just by providing a physical body, and a voice, movement, and acting choices, but through the identity of the actor himself, established both in real life outside of plays and also onstage through his previous roles.

In introducing her discussions of Tamora and of Queen Margaret, Margaret Tassi speculates that using male actors in female roles impacts the character:

Indeed, many critics and some of the play’s male characters perceive these unruly females as usurpers of male traits and prerogatives; thus, performing the female avenger might involve activating masculine aspects of the actor. At the same time, these characters are unequivocally female, their gender marked through costume and familial relationships. The dramatic texts make clear that Margaret and Tamora appear as desirable women chosen by male monarchs for marriage and rule. (116-17)

Tassi suggests here the “both/and”: these characters have masculine and feminine traits, the characters on stage are at one time male and female. In theatrical incarnation, they are fully both. To grasp conceptually that an actor and character are one and not one at the same time is the essential task of blending. Clearly, we can’t know all of the details about the actor space—those facts are lost to history, especially in the case of Titus Andronicus where we know so little about its early production history and its composition. But we can draw conclusions about the blended space; understand the relationships between actor and character; pinpoint the contested issues, such as how aware audiences were/are of the actor, and what role biological sex, gender, and sexuality play in that awareness; and seek to increase our knowledge of the dynamics of performance in order to inform our interpretations.

21 For an overview of the production history, see above, p. 24, fn. 48.
Titus Andronicus helps us to do this and more: the play itself examines performance and blending, in the character of Tamora, enabling us to see in action the limits and powers of performance. In some ways we are hamstrung by the inaccessibility of the performance input. In literary interpretation we must rely heavily on the PLAY input with a general sense of the PERFORMANCE input, based primarily on the generic theater input, especially in the case of Titus Andronicus. But the play itself, in its examination of performance, speaks to the issues discussed here—how complete is the blend? Does the performer rely on audience cognition?

Tamora as mother
Tamora is first a mother, both by the visual associations of herself with her sons and by the language of her speech begging Titus to spare Alarbus’s life. She is associated from the beginning with the role of the good mother, one who weeps for her children, begs for their lives despite the humiliation involved, loves them, and cares for them.Only later in the play as she wreaks her vengeance, does Tamora call up the stereotype of the bad mother, the one who is willing to commit infanticide to protect her reputation.

Tamora’s maternity is central in part because it justifies her rage. Her tigerish fierceness, associated in the culture with the unnaturalness of a murderous mother and

---

22 For a more detailed examination of the good mother, see Chapter 2, pp. 45, and Chapter 3, pp. 97-99.

in the play with a character’s perceived bestial and inhuman nature, could be read initially as the mother tiger protecting her young. Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford point out the presence of positive mother–tiger associations in the culture: “Maternal love was recognized as one of the strongest human emotions which could excuse certain female behavior outside the stereotype. Faced with a threat to her child, a good mother could become as fierce as a tiger” (67). This fierce vengeful mother has specific literary precedent, as Margaret Tassi specifies in *Women and Revenge in Shakespeare*. She describes Tamora as a mother “whose fierce maternal love inspires their strongest passions and actions” (117) and points to Hecuba as Tamora’s literary predecessor. Tassi summarizes Tamora’s situation: “Tamora gives voice momentarily to supplication, which fails, and then to the captive woman’s traditional lament. Her grief converts quickly to a black, maternal wrath and vengefulness. The desire to repay Titus for his cruelty consumes her, just as it did her ancient prototype, Hecuba” (136). Hecuba’s maternal revenge is motivated by the death of her and Priam’s son, who is killed by his guardian

24 The following characters speak about tigers: Lavinia about Tamora, 2.3.142; Titus about being attacked, 3.1.54; Lucius about Aaron and Tamora, respectively, 5.3.5, 5.3.194. Tassi mentions Tamora’s association with the tiger, 141.


26 Especially relevant to my discussion is Tassi, Chapter 4, “Hecuba’s Legacy: Wounded Maternity and Vengeance in the First Tetralogy and *Titus Andronicus*,” 116-147.
Polymestor during the war, after the fall of Troy. Hecuba avenges her son’s death by blinding Polymestor and killing his two sons. Golding’s translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* describes her transformation to vengeance as motivated by viewing her son’s body:

> Shee looked on the face of him that lay before her killd.  
> Sumtymes his woundes, (his woundes I say) shee specially behilld  
> And therwithall shee armd her selfe and furnisht her with ire:  
> Wherethrough as soone as that her hart was fully set on fyre,  
> As though shee still had beene a Queene, to vengeance shee her bent  
> Enforcing all her witts to fynd some kynd of ponnishment.  
> And as a Lyon robbed of her whelpes becommeth wood . . .  
> Purseweth him though out of syght: even so Queene Hecubee. . . .

We don’t see Tamora’s transformation into vengeful mother, but we do see her plot for vengeance, to which we will return, near the end of Act 1 (1.1.449-55). She, like Hecuba, is a conquered queen who wreaks vengeance on those who have killed her son. However, Hecuba, here, appears motivated by sorrow over her son’s death, while Tamora’s vengeance is tinged with her own humiliation. The combination of Tamora’s grief-stricken speech, her visual presentation noted in the stage directions, and her desire to avenge her son’s death all affect her performance as a mother.

In terms of conceptual blending, then, the basic first blend can be developed from the visual cues at the beginning of the play, where Tamora is shown in relation to her sons, and thus as a mother (see Figure 4.6). The added dimension of her association with Hecuba allows us to see her as a vengeful mother. The “Hecuba/vengeful mother” input contains the mother, the dead son, grief, the “ire,” and the desire for vengeance. The initial “Tamora/mother” blend contains mother and sons, as we’ve seen, and the speech

begging for her son’s life adds the elements of grief and humiliation. The blend, then, maps the counterpart mothers, sons (one alive, one dead), and grief; and it projects Hecuba’s ire and vengeance and Tamora’s humiliation into the blend (see Figure 4.7). The audience members have not heard the words specifying her desire for vengeance here in the middle of Act 1, but through the blend with Hecuba they may anticipate Tamora’s movement toward vengeance. Alarbus’s death (between 1.1.129 and 141) strengthens the blend with Hecuba: both counterpart sons are dead. During the portion of the text where Alarbus is murdered, Demetrius makes a reference to Hecuba and suggests that Tamora’s hope should be founded in the gods that “armd the Queen of Troy / With opportunity of sharp revenge / Upon the Thracian tyrant in his tent / May favour Tamora, the Queen of Goths / (When Goths were Goths, and Tamora was queen), / To quit the bloody wrongs upon her foes” (1.1.136-41). This speech makes explicit the associations between Tamora and Hecuba and anticipates the direction of the plot. The movement from the first blend, “Tamora/mother,” to the modified blend, “Tamora/vengeful mother” shows the “online” quality of blending: the blend is modified as more information is provided in the play. Tamora’s designation as “mother” becomes the foundation for her carefully constructed persona—one that is available to the Roman people and that simultaneously is available in its modified form to the audience. This maternal blend—one of role and identity—continues throughout the play and makes possible Titus’s revenge at the final feast.

28 Tamora is also compared to Semiramis, Phoebe, and Diana, but none of these allusions speak to her motherhood. The conceptual blending structure would be similar to what we’ve seen with Hecuba. For an analysis of Tamora as Semiramis, see Sara Hanna, “Tamora’s Rome: Raising Babel and Inferno in Titus Andronicus,” Shakespeare Yearbook 3 (1992): 11-29 (14-16), and Tassi, 139.
Tamora’s shifting role as queen

Tamora’s performances continue in her role as queen, a role that changes based on her political associations. As Demetrius specifies early in the play, she is no longer queen: “(When Goths were Goths, and Tamora was queen)” (1.1.140, emphasis mine). Her initial entrance styles her as Queen and not Queen at the same time: she is “a public spectacle of shame [...] which serves to heighten Titus’s honor.” The shame comes from her status as a queen who has been reduced to a captive—but who still retains the qualities of queenliness. It is who she was that makes her a war prize to enhance Titus’s reputation. This image of the conquered queen is one that takes complex cognition (see Figure 4.8). The QUEEN input, which might contain elements of royalty, ruling, power, importance, honor, legitimacy, etc., is blended with the CAPTIVE input, which might contain powerlessness, worthlessness, dishonor, illegitimacy, servitude, etc. In this blend, the cross-space mappings directly contradict each other. Tamora is at once a person who deserves honor, yet is dishonored. She is simultaneously royal and subservient. Some elements project from one space or the other: she no longer rules and she has no power, so those qualities do not project from the QUEEN input, but powerlessness and servitude project from the CAPTIVE input. At the same time, she is not worthless or illegitimate; she is valuable both as queen and to Titus as such, and so those qualities project from their respective input spaces. This complex blend allows us to see Tamora’s “former glory,” some of the qualities of which still adhere to her person, and to see her as captive. Titus emphasizes her transition from glory to humility. As Tassi points out, “For Tamora, this situation is deeply humiliating: Titus has brought her to her knees, rejected her

29 Tassi, 137.
supplication, and publicly lorded his power over her” (138). Titus conquers the glorious outsider, and her presence as the captive queen indicates his superiority.

Our notion of Tamora as captive queen quickly changes as the new emperor, Saturninus, chooses her for his bride. Instantly, her power and ruling authority are reinstated, and the captive subservience and powerlessness are erased, as Saturninus “creates” her “Empress of Rome” (1.1.320). Tamora’s reply to his proposal reveals much about her state as she invokes her former title, her new relationship to Rome and Saturninus, and her status as a mother: “And here in sight of heaven to Rome I swear, / If Saturnine advance the Queen of Goths, / She will a handmaid be to his desires, / A loving nurse, a mother to his youth” (1.1.329-32). She labels herself Queen of Goths, continuing to claim this political status, even though through her capture it has become defunct.

The title “Queen of Goths” appears here without its counterpart “captive” from the previous blend. Tamora has no direct subjects and thus cannot rule or have power; those aspects of queenship are elided in her evocation. She is a queen ready to be advanced. Moreover, Saturninus has placed her in an even greater position: Empress of Rome. With Saturninus as the subject of the dependent clause, she acknowledges his power to advance her; however, by enclosing his power with an “if,” she focuses attention on her proposed role, her promise following his favor to her. By swearing to Rome, she acknowledges a new relationship with the city-state, to which we will return later. By identifying herself as a queen who will be advanced, she positions herself as a woman with power. And by naming herself a figurative mother to Saturninus, she puts herself in a position of influence over him. The three identifying terms—handmaid, nurse, mother—transition from servant, to one who cares for, to one who influences. All
sound innocuous, and perhaps motherhood simply functions to highlight their difference in ages, as many critics note.\textsuperscript{30} However, the version of motherhood that is emphasized in the staging of Act 1 and reiterated in Tamora’s desperate plea for her son’s life is channeled into a narrower definition that focuses on her ability to influence the most powerful man. In her pleas for Alarbus’s life Tamora is humiliated and has no sway over Titus; now the prospect of Roman queenship promises her influence over Saturninus and thus over all of Rome—including Titus. This modification of motherhood offers an example of the elaboration possible in a blend—the blend can take on a life of its own, so to speak, and can change the relationships between people.

Tamora’s strategy mirrors the way in which Elizabeth defined her relationships with her courtiers by the rules of courtly love.\textsuperscript{31} Both present themselves in terms of blends—“Elizabeth/beloved” in relation to “subject/lover,” and “Tamora/mother” in relation to “Emperor Saturninus/youth”—in order to manage the relationships to their advantage. In the interaction between Elizabeth and Sir Robert Carey, the “romantic fiction […] determined the whole tone of their subsequent dealings.”\textsuperscript{32} Tamora creates a scenario in which she as a mother figure has authority even over an emperor. In the blend, the mother’s age relation to her child and her authority map to Tamora’s age and imply her authority. The child’s subjection to the mother and his youth correspond with Saturninus’s stated youth and imply his subjection to Tamora (see Figure 4.9). As we

\textsuperscript{30} See, for instance, David Willbern, “Rape and Revenge in Titus Andronicus,” \textit{English Literary Renaissance} 8.2 (1978): 159-82 (164, fn.11).

\textsuperscript{31} See above, p. 20-21.

\textsuperscript{32} Greenblatt, 166.
have seen in Chapter 3, the new Renaissance mother had clear jurisdiction over her children, even writing to influence their behavior as adults. Tamora claims this role. The language she uses subsequently—“My lord, be ruled by me” (1.1.442)—reiterates her influence and power in the relationship. This blend both reinforces her as a maternal figure and uses her maternal associations to elaborate this particular relationship. Tamora unites her roles as mother and queen to enhance her power over Titus as she plans her revenge.

Thus far the blends in the play so far have been modified as new information is added constructing a role for Tamora that offers her power and protection: we have seen “Tamora–mother” increase in its specificity to “Tamora–vengeful mother” by way of the “Tamora–Hecuba” blend, and we have seen the “captive–queen” blend shift to the “Queen of Goths–Empress of Rome.” Most interestingly, Tamora blends “queen” and “mother” by presenting herself as a metaphoric mother to Saturninus (see Figure 4.10). At this point the map of blends gets much more complex. The categories “vengeful mother,” “Queen of Goths,” “Empress of Rome,” and “mother to Saturninus” all blend into the complex character called “Tamora” (see again Figure 4.9). Her performance of her maternity and her embodiment of queenship place her in a position to take revenge on Titus. The development of her plot of revenge and its intensification throughout the play requires an increased complexity of blending. Ironically, this very complexity threatens to destroy Tamora’s carefully constructed façade—a façade developed through performance and necessary to protect her from death.
Tamora’s plan for vengeance: public vs. private selves

Through the first 440 lines of Titus Andronicus, Tamora has been a public figure. She is presented alongside other characters and in public forums, and the play requires her to be “onstage,” as it were—as a spectacle to promote Titus’s honor and as a bridal prize to promote Saturninus’s honor. At the end of Act 1, however, Shakespeare provides a brief but crucial glimpse into her private world, one that reveals her plan for vengeance. This glimpse is paired with her performance of another queenly quality: mercy. She asks Saturninus to “look graciously” on Titus, and to “Lose not so noble a friend on vain suppose, / Nor with sour looks afflict his gentle heart” (1.1.439-41). In this public speech Tamora clearly means to present herself as a merciful queen—a foil to Titus’s lack of mercy for her—Titus is at this point kneeling before Saturninus, pledging his loyalty, in a repetition of Tamora’s public kneeling. Although Saturninus fears losing face—“What, madam,” he replies, “be dishonored openly, / And basely put it up without revenge?” (1.1.332-33)—Tamora prevails.

Crucially, however, it is not Tamora’s public performance of mercy that convinces Saturninus, but her private aside. Her words to him bear quoting at length:

My lord, be ruled by me, be wont at last,
Dissemble all your griefs and discontents;
You are but newly planted in your throne;
Lest then the people, and patricians too,
Upon a just survey take Titus’ part,
And so supplant you for ingratitude,
Which Rome reutures to be a heinous sin,
Yield at entreats; and then let me alone,
I’ll find a day to massacre them all,
And raze their faction and their family,
The cruel father and his traitorous sons,

33 For a discussion of the similarities between Titus and Tamora, see Wynne-Davis, 222.
Tamora urges Saturninus to play the part of the true Roman ruler—one who is grateful to his soldier. In addition to maintaining the favor of the people, Saturninus can depend on Tamora, she claims, to avenge him. Juxtaposing a public appeal to mercy and humility with a private vow of vengeance reveals the conflict between these public and private worlds, a conflict we have seen in Elizabeth’s speeches and in the *Arcadia*’s Gynecia. As Tamora plans and executes her retribution on Titus and his family in the rest of the play, these public and private spaces intersect until they collapse in her performance as Revenge, allowing Titus to transform her into a devouring mother.

Although Tamora’s plans for revenge begin privately, ultimately they must become public. As Deborah Willis describes, revenge is essentially theatrical—it requires an audience:

> The experience of humiliation leads the revenger not only to double his or her violent deeds but also requires a public performance to repair self-image. Now he is the one on top and in control, while the perpetrator of the original wrong is placed not in the position of the true victim (the murdered or violated child) but in that of the trauma survivor—the parent forced to experience extremities of loss and humiliation through the murder or violation of his child. Hence the violence of revenge swerves from its true target, requiring the sacrifice of innocents who function as props in the revenger’s show, performed for an audience that includes the perpetrator along with the broader community. (33)

Tamora uses performance in three ways—to protect herself, to position herself in a place of power from which to enact her revenge, and as a vehicle for her revenge. These modes of performance are in conflict, and her public performances must in the end collapse into her private purposes in order for her to effect her revenge.

Tamora’s aside to Saturninus reveals her plans for revenge and confirms those parts of the the blends that create Tamora’s character and modifies others. Again, the
online nature of blending allows the audience/reader to take into account modified or additional inputs and accommodate them within the blend. In this case, the vengeance from the Tamora–Hecuba blend, the power and the royalty from the queen blend, and the authority from the mother blend all join to “create” Tamora. The aside further modifies the “merciful queen” blend generated in the opening of the speech: the audience is asked to create a complex blend where Tamora is simultaneously merciful queen and vengeful mother (see Figure 4.11). We can understand which blend the Romans comprehend, and that our vision of Tamora both contains that blend and contradicts it. The speech itself reveals the necessity of this doubleness. “I’ll find a day” indicates that the time for vengeance has not yet arrived and that Tamora insists on a public mercy to maintain appearances until she can strike. This aside yet again highlights the element of performance in Tamora’s character. She has performed as a grieving mother, as a conquered queen, as a merciful and influential queen. Now she desires the latter performance to continue so that the “vengeful mother” blend, known to the audience but not to the Romans, might surprise Titus and his family and faction.

**Tamora as Rome/Roman**

In her next speech, addressed to Titus, Tamora again performs a persona the enables her to set in motion her vengeful machinations. Her self-presentation as mourning mother, as merciful queen, and now as Roman—absorbed into the body of the formerly headless Rome—is a means of self-preservation, of increasing her power, and of appearing innocuous for the purpose of forwarding her revenge. Tamora takes on the role of Roman queen and can demand particular actions of those to whom she extends royal mercy. She begins, “Titus, I am incorporate in Rome, / A Roman now adopted happily” (ll. 462-63).
While “incorporate” on the surface means “to have become a part of,” the resonance of the word is much greater. She is a part of the body of Rome now, and she in some ways incorporates Rome—she has become Rome.\(^{34}\)

Tamora’s embodiment of Rome requires another blend—she is at once Roman and Goth (see Figure 4.12). As a public figure, Tamora is claiming that she has been fully absorbed into Rome; she is no longer Goth. Cynthia Marshall asserts that “Tamora abandon[s] her position as Queen of Goths to be ‘incorporate[d].’”\(^{35}\) However, she has already lost and retained her queenship, and, I argue, she has sublimated her Goth identity rather than abandoning it. As Francesca T. Royster argues, “Tamora is always a Goth”; despite her claims to be Roman, “she is never absorbed into the body of Rome,” though Royster points primarily to Tamora’s “hue” as what distinguishes her from the Romans.\(^{36}\) I agree that Tamora is not actually absorbed into Roman culture from her own perspective (she still intends to bring down Titus) or ultimately from the Romans’ perspective (Titus reveals her intent at his feast) but the speech constructs Tamora as Roman, and for much of the play the general populace could take her as such. The mental feat of conceptual blending enables the play’s audience to understand her as publicly

\(^{34}\) See David Fredrick, “Titus Androgynous: Foul Mouths and Troubled Masculinity,” \textit{Arethusa} 41.1 (2008): 205-33: Tamora is “‘incorporate in Rome’ (1.1.467), with the legal sense of ‘formally admitted,’ but also the more primal suggestion that her body has become identical with Rome’s” (212). Willbern argues that Lavinia and Tamora are both “symbolic personifications of female Rome” (164).


Roman and privately Goth. However, the distinction isn’t quite so demarcated. She is fully Roman and fully Goth.

Giberta Golinelli speaks to the double identity of Tamora as being absorbed into the female body—a blend in itself, one often defined by outside sources. She states, “Tamora’s body, which is incorporated into Rome through her marriage with the Roman emperor Saturninus, becomes a site of performed contradictions, the female body being itself a liminal space where the Renaissance culture of display could project ancient desires and taboos, but also dislocate the result of a subversive union, since to the Romans the queen of the Goths herself represented and embodied otherness.”37 Tamora embodies Rome and embodies Otherness at the same time. Golinelli suggests that the Romans would “read” her as Other, rather than as the Roman she insists she is, and this interpretation is possible. But it is also possible to see Tamora as a blend of Roman and Other—and her Romanness can project back to her Goth/Other identity at the same time that her Otherness projects back onto her Roman identity. Tamora presents her physical body as Roman, but the audience knows that her heart is Goth. She favors the Roman identity publicly to ensure her protection and plan for vengeance. Problems begin for Tamora’s plan when she is no longer able to control—the blends accessible to the Romans, her public image.

The scene in the woods: lust, revenge, and family

Many critics define Tamora exclusively in terms of her sexuality. She is the “lusty widow,” desirable to and desiring Aaron and Saturninus. However, until Act 2, her sexuality is not central at all. In Act 1, though Saturninus desires her, she is not shown to have sexual desire. Within Act 2, she expresses sexual desire for Aaron, and she is accused by Lavinia and Bassanio as being lustful. Her desire for Aaron and her reputation of lust threaten to undo her carefully constructed persona. However, Tamora’s sexuality is simply another element to add to the blend: it does not negate the mother, queen, and Roman that she has purported to be, nor does it cancel out her initial motivation for revenge. Deborah Willis argues that “[h]er villainy is not driven by lust; rather it unfolds from her reaction to the horror of her son’s death by torture, dismemberment, and fire.” As we consider Tamora’s sexuality, we must remember that it is additive. Moreover, the addition of her sexuality threatens to destabilize the public persona that she has created.

Sexuality is certainly a part of Tamora’s character, and while it appears to be something present in the public sphere, she does not perform it publicly as she does her motherhood, queenship, and Romanness. After she describes, in private, an idyllic dalliance with Aaron, he chastens her: “Madam, though Venus govern your desires, / Saturn is dominator over mine” (2.3.30-31). Lavinia describes Tamora’s reputation,

---

38 Willis, “‘The Gnawing Vulture,’” 37. Willis continues, “Calling attention not only to her sexuality but also to her finely tuned sense of entitlement as queen and mother in an honor culture, Shakespeare gives Tamora more coherence as a character than these critics generally acknowledge”: “‘The Gnawing Vulture,’” 37.

39 Tamora’s Venus-inspired imagining contains an interesting element of motherhood, comparing the forest and hunting as “a nurse’s song / Of lullaby, to bring her babe
while addressing her with mock respect: “Under your patience, gentle Empress, / ‘Tis thought you have a goodly gift in horning, / And to be doubted that your Moor and you / Are singled forth to try thy experiments” (2.3.66-69). And Bassanius asks, “Why are you sequestered from all your train, / [...] / Accompanied but with a barbarous Moor, / If foul desire had not conducted you?” (2.3.75-79). The audience sees Tamora’s desire for Aaron, and they see Lavinia and Bassanius’s attacks on Tamora, which circle primarily around the object of her desire, the “barbarous Moor.” The combination of female desire and what was seen as a racially inappropriate object of desire threatens Tamora’s public persona; she has transgressed social boundaries by aligning herself with a Moor in a way that undercuts her allegiance to Rome.

At this point in the play, Tamora is able to keep her public persona more or less intact (less if we are to believe the rumors specified by Lavinia) by continuing to perform her roles. However, she begins to perform her revenge in not-so-public settings. In fact, as Bassianus and Lavinia enter, Aaron prompts her to perform: “No more, great Empress; Bassianus comes. / Be cross with him, and I’ll go fetch thy sons / To back thy quarrels, whatsoever they be” (2.3.52-54). Hers is an unscripted performance, and she hardly needs to precipitate a quarrel; Bassianus and Lavinia scorn her immediately with their charges of infidelity and miscegenation. She continues her performance as Chiron and Demetrius enter, depicting the forest, which she had originally described to Aaron as a peaceful “sweet shade” complete with birds singing and a babbling brook, as “A barren detested vale,” with trees “forlorn and lean” though it is summer: a place of desolation asleep” while they rest in a cave, their “pastimes done” (2.3.28-29, 26). Willis glosses this as Tamora’s “wish to be both mother and child”: “‘The Gnawing Vulture,’” 39.
and decay. She concocts a story that implicates Bassianus and Lavinia in a plot to destroy her, and reports their actual assessment of her as a “foul adulteress” and “Lascivious Goth” (2.3.92-110). Her performance is calculated to drive her sons to revenge, though Aaron has already gone to retrieve them and has explained his plan. Though her performance here is not strictly necessary for her plan to be put into action, it heightens the audience’s awareness of revenge as performance, and adds “pretended victim” to her list of roles. This act, however, is for a limited audience. It seems almost a rehearsal for her large act of revenge, the final plot to destroy Titus at the end of the play.

Her revenge is also connected to her maternity, though in a different way here than at the beginning of the play. Initially, she decides on revenge to repair her honor to make Titus suffer for the way he has humiliated her and to avenge her son’s murder. Here, she makes revenge familial. She commands Chiron and Demetrius: “Revenge it, as you love your mother’s life, / Or be ye not henceforth called my children” (2.3.114-15). Her language of mother–child obligation continues as she asks for a poniard to kill Lavinia. She asserts, “You shall know, my boys, / Your mother’s hand shall right your mother’s wrong” (2.3.120-21). These specific references to herself as mother to Chiron and Demetrius implicate them in her plot. When she includes her sons in her revenge, she alters her description of the scene when she kneels begging for mercy on the street: this time she invokes Titus’s mercilessness to their brother (not, as before, to her son):

“Remember, boys, I poured forth tears in vain / To save your brother from the sacrifice, / But fierce Andronicus would not relent. / Therefore away with her, and use her as you will; / The worse to her, the better loved of me” (2.3.163-67, emphasis mine). Tamora demand filial loyalty, expecting her sons to act as agents of revenge. Whereas in the
beginning she indicates her desire to eradicate Titus, his family, and faction, she now involves her own family in exacting that punishment.

Lavinia, in begging Tamora for a quick death rather than the humiliation of rape, attempts to disentangle the sons from their mother’s control by questioning their likeness to their mother: “(To Demetrius) When did the tiger’s young ones teach the dam? / O, do not learn her wrath; she taught it thee; / The milk thou suck’st from her did turn to marble; / Even at thy teat thou hadst thy tyranny. / Yet every mother breeds not sons alike; / (To Chiron) Do thou entreat her show a woman’s pity” (2.3.142-47). Chiron’s reply is revealing: “What, wouldst thou have me prove myself a bastard?” (2.3.148). Lavinia asserts that Chiron and Demetrius have been suffering under Tamora since they were infants and that it is not necessarily true that the traits of the mother transfer to her children (through breastmilk or through teaching). But Chiron suggests that differing from his mother’s cruelty would show not his humanity, but his lack of familial connections. The Goths here prioritize family identification and family loyalty over moral qualities like mercy and pity. They prize family honor as much as the Romans do.40

Finally, in this scene, Tamora reveals her private plans in this performance for this small audience, and she contains her secret by making sure that both opponents will be unable to spoil her plans. By killing Bassianus and by sending Lavinia off to be raped and murdered, she both enacts her revenge on Titus and preserves her public persona so that she can exact her revenge fully. As Deborah Willis points out, “Though Titus is not

present in the forest, he is the most important audience of what is performed there—
destined to endure the very suffering Tamora endured as a witness of her son’s terrible
sacrifice” (40). This is so; however, Tamora is not done with her revenge—she needs to
protect her persona so she can damage Titus even more. Tamora wants Titus to suffer as
she did, but she wants him to suffer the complete destruction of his honor and his person.
While initially, Tamora’s sexuality threatened to expose her as not what she appears to
the Roman people, according to Lavinia’s and Bassianus’s challenges, it is ultimately her
sons who begin her undoing. Titus must suffer the rape and mutilation of his daughter,
but Lavinia’s ability to communicate the crimes and the perpetrators moves Titus to
avenge his daughter’s rape and mutilation. In the second act, Tamora’s complex
constructed blend as grieving mother, merciful Queen, and embodied Rome begins to
appear less stable. Her private sexuality and her alignment with Aaron have the potential
to destroy her public image, and by the end of the act, the audience can guess that the
murder her sons left undone will be her undoing. The familial connections she
emphasizes and relies on in Act 2 ultimately fail her.

The baby: redefining Tamora’s motherhood and power

Act 1 established Tamora as a blend of mother, queen, Roman, loving, merciful, and
vengeful. In Act 2 her performance of revenge begins to unravel her carefully crafted
public and private spaces. In Act 4, her public persona is threatened, not by the intrusion
of her revenge into the public space, but by a baby—her actual motherhood threatens to
upend her plans.

At this point in the play, Act 4, scene 2, this new aspect of Tamora’s motherhood
is likely a surprise. Tamora is not present in the scene, and from the text itself we have no
indication of whether she has appeared onstage pregnant or not. Directors might choose to costume Tamora to suggest a pregnancy, or, since Tamora is offstage for all of Act 3 and the beginning of Act 4, the pregnancy might only be implied by the dialogue of Act 4, scene 2. Tamora’s pregnancy functions in two ways—it promises to solidify her role as Empress because she is carrying the heir of the empire, and it threatens to destroy her public image because the baby is illegitimate.

Shakespeare introduces Tamora’s pregnancy as positive, and then undercuts this impression by revealing the baby’s illegitimacy. First, Demetrius (rather out of the blue) suggests that he and Chiron and Aaron “go and pray to all the gods / For our beloved mother in her pains,” and Chiron determines the reason for the Emperor’s trumpets to be “for joy the Emperor hath a son” (4.2.46-47, 50). The stage direction following first hints at a problem: “Enter Nurse with a blackamoor child.” Because of the juxtaposition of the stage direction with a discussion of the Emperor and Empress’s child, the audience/reader can surmise that this infant might be Tamora’s baby. After some banter with Aaron the nurse articulates the problem and Tamora’s solution: “A joyless, dismal, black, and sorrowful issue. / Here is the baby, as loathsome as a toad / Amongst the fair-faced breeders of our clime; / The Empress sends it thee, thy stamp, thy seal, / And bids thee

---

41 Renee Brier argues, unconvincingly, that Tamora must have been pregnant before her marriage to Saturninus; while this is possible, reason and social convention suggests that she would not have appeared pregnant until after she was wed to Saturninus, based on the plans to pass off a baby as the heir of Rome: “The Longleat Manuscript: Tamora’s Great Belly,” English Language Notes 35.3 (1998): 20-22.

42 Since there are few markers of the passage of time, the play appears to function on both a short time-scale and a long one, a strategy critics have termed “double time,” most often in reference to Othello and Romeo and Juliet. Tamora’s pregnancy is one of the few indications we have that somewhere around a year has passed.
christen it with thy dagger’s point” (4.2.66-70). Everything changes with the nurse’s entrance. Tamora’s private relationship with Aaron threatens to undo her public persona. As Tamora’s motherhood threatens her carefully crafted public image, she turns to infanticide, establishing herself as the “bad mother” of ballads who would kill her own child to protect her and her lover’s identity and to destroy the evidence of her transgression.43 Her private self is becoming more and more opposed to the qualities she cultivates in public. She performs good motherhood, yet would kill her own child; she performs merciful queenship, yet is set on destroying Titus with the maximum amount of suffering; she performs Romanness, yet holds no love for Rome or its people.

Again, her plan to save her public image requires death, and again those meant to carry out the murder fail in their duty: the living child remains a threat. Here, Aaron undercuts her plans because of paternal feeling. The character most clearly bent on violence and destruction—he claims later that “nothing grieves me heartily indeed, / But that I cannot do ten thousand more” “dreadful things” (5.1.141-42, 144)—feels protective of his “first-born son and heir” (4.2.92). Aaron’s familial duties do not include Tamora, though she is the mother of his child. His loyalties center on his heir; his own line of succession takes priority over romantic associations. For the first time, Tamora’s role is defined as subservient, a mother whose power is easily limited. She becomes subject to Aaron’s plans instead of ruling with her own. Aaron attempts to preserve Tamora’s powerful position and save her from Saturninus’s fury by substituting a lighter-skinned baby for his own, and by killing the nurse and the midwife so the family secret stays within the family. This plot element is dropped after this scene, but in Act 4, scene 4,

43 On infanticide, see Miller, 7; and Travitsky, “Child Murder,” 68.
Tamora appears to be on good terms with Saturninus, so we can assume the ruse was successful. Once again the plot structure allows Tamora to keep separate her public and private selves, though they move inexorably closer together as the play progresses.

**Recapitulation of Tamora’s plan for revenge: an incredible self-assessment**

Tamora’s second scene of asides to Saturninus reinforces the dislocation between her public and private characteristics evident in Act 1; moreover, she expresses great faith not only in her desire for revenge, but in her ability to perform in such a way that Titus will be manipulated toward her will. This bravado doesn’t change the blends we have seen, but intensifies her intentions and her perception of how confident she can be. She frames the scene again with public mercy: “My gracious lord, my lovely Saturnine, / Lord of my life, commander of my thoughts, / Calm thee, and bear the faults of Titus’ age, / [...] And rather comfort his distressed plight” (4.4.27-29, 32). She follows this flattery of Saturninus and request for mercy toward Titus with an aside that signals her confidence: “Why, thus it shall become / High-witted Tamora to gloze with all; / But, Titus, I have touched thee to the quick; / Thy life-blood out, if Aaron now be wise, / Then is all safe, the anchor in the port” (4.4.34-38). She believes she can exact the ultimate revenge on Titus—his life-blood—and retain her position and power.

In describing her art, she fails to realize that Titus might fool her, or might have the wherewithal to resist her. She uses her honeyed tongue to soothe Saturninus, and it works. She expects as much success with Titus. She claims, “I will enchant the old Andronicus / With words more sweet and yet more dangerous / Than baits to fish, or honey-stalks to sheep”; “I can smooth and fill his aged ears / With golden promises, that were his heart / Almost impregnable, his old ears deaf, / Yet should both ear and heart
obey my tongue” (4.4.88-90, 95-98). She plans to use “all the art” she has, and asks Saturninus to “bury all thy fear in my devices” (4.4.108, 111). She gives herself almost magical powers to enchant with the art of her words. Her words are meant to be ingested, like bait or clover, and enter his body through his ears to compel his heart to obedience. Her metaphors here introduce the theme of ingestion that will become literalized in the feast scene, and she implicitly contrasts her active and powerful tongue with Lavinia’s lack of speech and power. Tamora’s confidence is misplaced, however, because Lavinia has spoken, though Lavinia has no tongue, and Tamora underestimates Titus’s ability to read her. This last scene of Act 4 intensifies all the blends Tamora has set up: her embodiment of Revenge will necessarily conflate the public and private worlds and cause her destruction.

Tamora as Revenge: an incomplete embodiment

In Act 5, Tamora’s confidence in her ability to perform roles persists as she attempts to convince Titus of a blend in which the character she is putting on obscures who she is. In Act 5, scene 2, Tamora appears costumed as Revenge, with Chiron and Demetrius clothed as Rape and Murder. The stage directions imply that the costumes would indicate their allegorical identities (see Figure 4.13). Tamora is determined to perform, to “encounter with Andronicus, / And say I am Revenge” (5.2.2-3). Her ploy is not to

pretend to be an attacking sort of revenge come to torment Titus, but to be Revenge, “come to join with him, / And work confusion on his enemies” (5.2.8). She takes on a double-identity as Revenge—she professes to be Titus’s mode of revenge, but she means to take revenge on him herself.

Her initial conversation with Titus focuses on her identity: Titus identifies her as Tamora and recognizes her motives. In response she claims to actually be Revenge and disclaims his accusations. Tamora tells Titus, “If thou didst know me, thou wouldst talk with me,” and he replies, “I know thee well enough” (5.2.20-21). She speaks here as if he doesn’t recognize the symbolic significance of her attire. His full reply acknowledges that he sees through her disguise, and he identifies her with his sorrow: “Witness this wretched stump, witness these crimson lines, / Witness these trenches made by grief and care, / Witness the tiring day and heavy night, / Witness all sorry that I know thee well / For our proud Empress, mighty Tamora” (5.2.23-27). Titus sees the blend in its entirety; Tamora, the concept of revenge, and the blend of the two in the costumed Queen. His speech identifies the revenge Tamora has already taken, clarifies that as Revenge she is not for him but against him, and recognizes the woman in the costume and her public persona—“proud Empress, mighty Tamora.” Titus’s response illustrates the audience–actor relationship we examined at the beginning of this chapter. He is able to conceive of Tamora as her own person (one input), the concept of revenge (the second input), and the blended creature before him—a combination of both, but functioning specifically to continue the destruction of his life and person. He asks her, “Is not thy coming for my other hand?” Tamora’s denial of her actual identity and motives is only possible if she believes in the power of her performance and has great confidence in the blend itself—
she believes she can hide behind an allegorical costume. Her mistake is that she does not understand how a blend functions. One can be conscious of the inputs as well as of the blend. One can see Tamora both as herself and as revenge, or as the vengeful version of herself.

The identities of Chiron and Demetrius also take on an interpretive doubleness. While Titus reads their costumes accurately, recognizing them as Rape and Murder, he also sees “how like the Empress’ sons they are” (5.2.64). Tamora as Revenge calls them her “ministers,” called Rape and Murder “‘Cause they take vengeance of such kind of men” (5.2.62-63). Titus’s response identifies all parts of the blend—the boys’ identities as Tamora’s sons, their actual crimes of rape and murder, and their allegorical representations. He follows Tamora’s statement that they work against rapists and murderers, but calls them rapists and murderers in the process: “(to Demetrius) Look round about the wicked streets of Rome, / And when thou find’st a man that’s like thyself, / Good Murder, stab him; he’s a murderer. / (To Chiron) Go thou with him, and when it is thy hap / To find another that is like to thee, / Good Rapine, stab him; he is a ravisher” (5.2.98-104). Again, Titus recognizes the blend, but he points to the input (the sons’ identities) and treats their disguises as metonymy—their crimes standing for the whole person—rather than an allegorical means of vengeance.

The cognitive work required of the audience in this scene is quite complex. The audience members visually see an actor costumed as Revenge, but immediately recognize that it is the character Tamora in disguise as she reveals the plan at the beginning of the scene. They know that Titus knows that Revenge is really Tamora, but that he is pretending to believe she is Revenge. They know that Tamora’s denials of her identity
are false, and that she is attempting to deceive Titus into thinking she wants to help him, rather than hurt him. And they know that as much as Tamora thinks she is succeeding in her ruse—“For now he firmly takes me for Revenge,” she says—she is utterly failing. When Titus appears to accept that the figure before him is Revenge incarnate, sent to help him, his language replicates the doubleness within the scene. As he physically moves to where Tamora is, from his study door above,\(^45\) he says, “O sweet Revenge, now do I come to thee” (5.2.67). In one sense he is addressing Tamora in her disguise as “Revenge” and describing his literal movement from one part of the stage to another. In another sense he, in his surety of Tamora’s identity, is figuratively embracing his own act of vengeance, his opportunity to punish Tamora for her crimes against him and his family. The end of the play turns on Titus’s ability to exploit the blend and Tamora’s misplaced certainty that the blended figure of embodied Revenge will be the only thing visible to Titus. Ultimately, Tamora’s performance of Revenge fails because she cannot fully embody an abstract concept.

This is the pivotal scene in which Tamora’s public performance and private desires become one. She attempts to make Revenge kindly toward Titus, but her disguise brings out what so far has been revealed only to her sons, her lover, her husband, and those who she believed would be dead before long directly to Titus himself, her acknowledged foe. She does not perform as Revenge in front of crowds, but she moves her revenge from a carefully protected secret into a performance. And she must perform her vengeance in a public way for it to have any teeth at all, as Willis argues.

\(^{45}\) Waith discusses the possible stagings of the scene that respond to the stage direction “Titus opens his study door above” (5.2.8 s.d.) in his footnote (176).
Literalizing the devouring mother

If Tamora’s failure in the previous scene was incomplete embodiment and the transparency of the blend, her punishment in the final scene is to fully embody Titus’s revenge, to become a literal devouring mother. In this final scene, Tamora enters as her public self—mother, queen, Roman—in front of people who know of the existence of her private self, namely Titus, Lucius, Marcus, and Lavinia. They know of Tamora’s crimes and character. Only Saturninus seems surprised by Titus’s accusations: he reacts to Titus’s killing Lavina, to his killing of Tamora, and to the unholy feast. The others recognize Tamora’s conflation with Revenge, a blend which has produced three corpses, a damaged body, and a mangled limb. She has enacted her vengeance while still fiercely protecting her public roles. Tamora has managed to keep her private and public selves separate, only revealing her machinations to select people. Through the play, the circle of those who know has expanded. In this scene her crimes become fully public, and she must suffer Titus’s wrath.

Some critics read Titus’s revenge in the feast scene as solely related to Lavina’s rape. Titus’s speeches during the scene, and his murder of Lavina, point to the rape as a prime factor in his revenge. But just as Tamora’s revenge is for the loss of her son and her humiliation and the losses of war, so Titus is motivated by the rape and by the loss of

---

46 On the feast as Ovidian or Senecan, see D. E. Green, 318. For an analysis of Titus Andronicus in light of the Philomela myth, see Karen Robertson, “Rape and the Appropriation of Progne’s Revenge in Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus, Or ‘Who Cooks the Thyestean Banquet?’” in Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature, ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 213-37 (esp. 219-221).

47 See K. Robertson, for example.
his hand and the death of his sons in battle and at Tamora’s behest. Revenge is familial, just as an affront to honor is familial. *Titus Andronicus*, for all its straightforward plot points, is not a simple play. The motivations for revenge start accruing before the play begins.

Thus Titus punishes Tamora *and* her sons by killing them all and by making Tamora witness to her own undoing. As we have seen, revenge must be performed to be effective, and Titus waits to kill Tamora until she has recognized that Chiron and Demetrius are “both baked in this pie, / Whereof their mother daintily hath fed, / Eating the flesh that she herself hath bred” (5.3.59-61). Willis speaks of Titus’s revenge as performance—“Humiliation, a wound that is produced in public, seeks healing through public spectacle: Titus designs their revenge to disclose itself through a series of scenes, to punish his audience(s) through theater” (48)—and of Tamora as his audience—“She must not only eat her sons’ flesh but know that she has done so, living just long enough to see their crimes exposed in front of Saturninus and, by implication, all of Rome” (49). Tamora’s ingestion of her sons, her performance of the role of devourer, completes Titus’s revenge. She becomes both womb and tomb—the place that generates life and that absorbs what is left at the end of life.\(^{48}\) She becomes a literal receptacle for her sons’ bodies, and at the same time she becomes a figurative receptacle for Titus’s vengeance. More than a container for Titus’s revenge, however, Tamora’s identity becomes fused with Revenge—not in the way she planned, through disguise, but in embodying Titus’s

---

\(^{48}\) Many critics connect the womb, tomb, pit, vagina, and mouth. See, for example, Willbern, 178-80; Wynne-Davis, 219-20; Marshall, 206; and K. Robertson, 220.
revenge. Tamora’s entire blended construct has been fulfilled and collapses in the moment before Titus kills her.

**Conclusion**

Dorothea Kehler argues that underneath the public (and even private) constructions of her character, Tamora is really “a wretched, frightened woman, a prize of war, fighting back,” desiring security more than anything. However, Tamora, as we have seen, desires security in order to have the power and means to destroy Titus and his children. She is reacting to her humiliation and loss of honor, as well as the death of her son. Kehler’s assessment gives Tamora too little credit. “Wretched and frightened” indicates something extra-textual, and diminishes her capacity to desire and to fight back out of anger or honor—to right perceived wrongs of her own volition. She is conquered, but that does not make her merely a passive victim. She is a victim, a “prize of war,” but nothing in her confident moves of revenge indicate that she is frightened. I argue that Tamora desires revenge, and that the security of motherhood, Romanness, and queenship enable her to exact it.

Tamora is a complex figure. She creates a public persona as a grieving and loving mother, a merciful queen, and a loyal Roman. She protects this blended persona to the point of murder and attempted infanticide. The audience is aware of her private agenda; they see the disconnect between her self-presentation and her words and actions as she interacts with her sons, lover, and husband. Tamora manages to keep the two separate

---

49 Kehler, 329.
within the world of the play until she literalizes her plan by costuming herself as Revenge. When the public and private come together, as they must for her to enact her revenge in any meaningful way, she is exposed. Titus takes advantage of her overconfidence and her failure to perform Revenge (and her revenge) to transform Tamora into her sons’ tomb.

To understand Tamora’s character we must hold all of these complex blends and contradictory pieces of information at the same time. Our brains are required to form a megablend—a blend with multiple inputs. In this chapter, as I introduced rather straightforward blends, they became compressed—the full blend of Tamora, mother, Hecuba, vengeful mother became in short-hand “vengeful mother”—and the compressed blends combined to create the person of a loyal, good, merciful mother/wife/queen. Throughout the play, various elements threaten the stability of this megablend, and it is destroyed in the final scene when Titus exposes her heinous crimes, perverts her motherhood by feeding her her children, and then kills her. In addition to the complex blending required within the play, we must consider the requirements of an audience viewing the play, who must blend the male actor playing the part of Tamora with Tamora. At one point the male actor plays Tamora who plays Revenge—that in itself is a megablend. Of course, to some extent the actor–character compression takes over, as it has in this chapter, and Tamora and the actor become conflated—the very kind of conflation that Tamora expects to occur during her performance of Revenge. The play does not answer the question of how successful the compression is, or how conscious an audience is of the blend and its inputs, but Tamora as Revenge opens up the possibility
for a consciousness of the actor and character, one Titus plays with in his responses to Tamora/Revenge.

In Chapter 2, I looked at one element of Elizabeth’s public persona, her metaphorical motherhood, and analyzed how it relied on conceptual blends for its construction. My reading of Tamora provides an example, one contained by the parameters of the text, of how one might go about considering multiple aspects of a performed self: the constituent blends involved, and the dynamic nature of the blends and thus the “self.” Tamora as a literal queen–mother figure reveals the intersection of maternal authority, familial bonds, and regal power, an intersection that Elizabeth constructs through metaphor. Most important to our reading of Elizabeth is the disjunction between Tamora’s public performances and her private dealings. It extends the distinction between Elizabeth’s body natural and body politic to suggest that her public performances may not be unified with her personal feelings. At a time when anxiety about the succession was running high, Shakespeare’s mother–queen questions whether the metaphorical maternal and familial associations of the actual queen might be suspect and whether her seemingly secure public self might be vulnerable.
Figure 4.1: Simplex blend, “Paul is the father of Sally”
Figure 4.2: Literal megablend, “Ann is the boss of the daughter of Max”
Figure 4.3: Metaphor megablend, “Prayer is the echo of the darkness of the soul”
Figure 4.4: *Titus Andronicus* in performance
Figure 4.5: Male actor/Tamora blend
Figure 4.6: Tamora/mother blend (identity and role)

Figure 4.7: Vengeful Tamora
Figure 4.8: Tamora, the captive queen
Figure 4.9: Tamora and Saturninus/mother and child
Figure 4.10: Tamora, the merciful and vengeful queen
Figure 4.11: Tamora at Act 1, scene 1, line 400
Figure 4.12: Tamora the Roman/Goth

Figure 4.13: Tamora/Revenge blend
CHAPTER 5

THE GRANDMOTHER OF ENGLAND: BRITOMART AND MERLIN’S PROPHECY IN SPENSER’S THE FAERIE QUEENE

Spenser’s Britomart, the heroine of The Faerie Queene’s Book III, is often considered a “mirror” for Elizabeth. In the preem to Book III, Spenser urges Elizabeth to see herself in the poem and names Gloriana and Belphoebe as possible analogues: “Ne let his fayrest Cynthia refuse, / In mirrors more then one her selfe to see, / But either Gloriana let her chuse, / Or in Belphoebe fashioned to bee: / In th’one her rule, in th’other her rare chastitee” (III.Proem.5.5-9). Spenser neglects to mention Britomart at all. Critics make the assumption that the central character of the book, the knight of Elizabeth’s signature virtue, must represent the Queen or some aspect of her. Yet in the narrative of the poem, Britomart is related by blood to Elizabeth—she is Elizabeth’s great-great-great . . . grandmother. We must, I think, look both at Britomart within the narrative of the poem and at what she represents outside of the time confines of the narrative to better understand Britomart as a mirror for Elizabeth. Similarly, we can examine Britomart as a blended figure in both cases to read more effectively the blended Elizabeth. Spenser uses blended spaces as sites of ambiguity, emphasizing the need for reader cognition. Ultimately, Britomart and Elizabeth must both be read.

Book III, canto iii, of The Faerie Queene opens with a paean to Elizabeth by way of Britomart’s lovesickness. Love makes Britomart “seeke an unknowne Paramoure, / From the worlds end, through many a bitter stowre,” but her eventual union with Artestall will lead to glory: “From whose two loynes [Love] afterwarde did rayse / Most famous fruites of matrimoniall bowre, / Which through the earth have spredd their living prayse, /
The poet calls on his muse to fulfill the purpose of his poem and Britomart’s quest:

    Begin, O Clio, and recount from hence
    My glorious Soveraines goodly auncestrye,
    Till that by dew degrees and long protense,
    Thou have it lastly brought unto her Excellence. (III.iii.4)

The muse presumably motivates the rest of the canto, where Britomart and Glauce find Merlin in his cave, and he provides information about Argeall, Britomart’s future husband, and prophesies about their marriage, their child, and Argeall’s subsequent death. Merlin then rehearses the long line of monarchs from Britomart to Elizabeth. His prophecy ends, however, in silence.

> Merlin’s silence occupies the place in the poem indicated for Elizabeth’s glory. Instead of signaling unequivocal praise for the queen, the text itself opens up possibilities of ambiguity, and makes explicit the interpretive role of the reader. After recounting Elizabeth’s success against the Spanish Armada, stanza 50 begins with Merlin’s final words, “But yet the end is not.” Spenser then describes Merlin’s state and Britomart and Glauce’s response to it.

> There Merlin stayd,
    As overcomen of the spirites powre,
    Or other ghastly spectacle dismayd,
    That secretly he saw, yet note discovre:
    Which suddein fitt, and halfe extatick stoure
    When the two fearefull wemen saw, they grew
    Greatly confused in behaveoure;
    At last the fury past, to former hew

---

1 All citations are to Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, and Toshiyuki Suzuki, rev. second ed. (New York: Longman, 2006) and will be cited in the text. I have regularized u/v and i/j according to modern usage.
Hee turnd againe, and chearefull looks did shew. (III.iii.50)

Merlin is fixed in a trance, appears frightening in some way, in contrast to his later “chearfull looks,” and incites confusion in the two “fearefull wemen.” Elizabeth’s glory has been reduced to four lines in Merlin’s prophecy, and her future is signaled by an ambiguous silence. Dorothy Stephens reads the ambiguity in her note on the passage: “The implication is that Merlin sees something either so wonderful or so horrifying that he cannot relate it to Britomart and Glauce. Spenser, of course, does not know what will happen next.”2 Some critics argue that Merlin’s silence is meant to indicate the unspeakable glory of Elizabeth, an awe akin to Isaiah’s silence in his vision of God’s glory (Isaiah 6); others argue that the silence emphasizes Elizabeth’s lack of successor.3 Yet Spenser’s ambiguity invites interpretation and highlights the role of the reader in this poetic transaction.4

I would like to suggest that we can better understand Merlin’s trance through the lens of conceptual blending, as it applies specifically to Merlin’s silence and as it applies to Britomart and Elizabeth within the poem. The silence points to Elizabeth’s childlessness—the silent bloodline; and though Britomart’s main role is to become the

2 Dorothy Stephens, ed., _The Faerie Queene: Books Three and Four_ (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 64 fn. 2.

3 Patricia Parker reads the silence as a “gap which is the opening of the poem onto an uncertain present,” which is not unquestionably positive: _Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode_ (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 91. Bart van Es mentions “the abruptness of Merlin’s conclusion—with its implied fears about the Queen’s childlessness”: “Priuie to His Counsell and Secret Meaning”: Spenser and Political Prophecy,” _English Literary Renaissance_ 30.1 (2000): 3-31 (4).

4 For the rise of an “active readership” in the period, see Stephen Dobranski, _Readers and Authorship in Early Modern England_ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), esp. 2-11 and 15-17 for discussions of textual omissions analogous to Merlin’s silence.
mother of the line that ends in Elizabeth, she is childless within the text itself. In this chapter, I consider Britomart’s deferred motherhood in the context of the various roles she plays within the text in order to expand our understanding of Elizabeth and ultimately Merlin’s ambiguous silence about her, a silence I see as a blended space which requires interpretation.

As we’ve seen, conceptual blending theory grew out of metaphor theory, providing a way to analyze concepts created or explained by multiple inputs. Some information from each input enters the blended space, and the blend may project back into the input spaces and can change real relations. Most blends we interpret automatically, but more complex literary blends may be ambiguous either because of unclear inputs, or because of non-obvious selection of what aspects of the input should be projected into the blend. Blends, as we’ve seen with Elizabeth’s “court–courtship” model, can be used to shape real relations, in this case between the monarch and her courtiers. By examining conceptual blends, we are pulling back the curtain on the “political imaginary,” both in literature and in court life.

Conceptual blending relies on mental spaces, as I detailed in Chapter 2. Both inputs for a blend, and the blend itself, consist of mental spaces, separate regions of

5 Fauconnier and Turner, The Way We Think, 160-62. For the complexity of literary metaphor, see Turner, Death is the Mother of Beauty.

6 See above, pp. 20-21.

7 The term is Montrose’s. See “Spenser and the Elizabethan Political Imaginary,” and The Subject of Elizabeth, 3.

8 See above, pp. 58-59.
understanding. As a brain takes in language, it constructs conceptual packets that include the utterance or text and information stored in memory. The mental spaces that “contain” these concepts are temporary cognitive structures used to understand action and utterance, and thus can shift and disappear quickly. In the act of blending, Fauconnier and Turner posit, the mental spaces remain separate, and one can project elements into the blend and back into the inputs from the blend. In order to do so, the mental spaces must remain autonomous. I argue that Merlin’s silence is an explicit mental space, a blended space, that draws attention to the interpretive function of the reader in the poem as “readers” of Elizabeth’s iconography, both her self-representation and how poets and other writers describe her. As we shall see, this mental space means everything and nothing. It exposes the contested space surrounding Elizabeth’s childlessness. Spenser asks us to consider what is NOT said—primarily the mandated silence about Elizabeth’s lack of a successor—by creating an ambiguous silence that holds the possibility of glorification and of criticism. The issues surrounding Merlin’s silence—motherhood and deferral—were also central to Elizabeth’s self-presentation. She cast herself as an already-and-not-yet mother, deferring decisions about the succession indefinitely. In The Faerie Queene, Britomart’s motherhood is deferred and consequently Elizabeth’s very existence is only a promise.

---

Deferral in romance narratives

Romance narratives depend on deferral. The central characters are most often young men and women transitioning from youth to adulthood, from the care of their parents to the loving embrace of a spouse. The narratives depend on obstructions and frustrations that delay the union of young lovers, and almost always these impediments to marriage are overcome. *The Faerie Queene* is full of such characters, particularly in Books III and IV, but most couples in the poem remain unmarried: their unions are continually deferred. Susan C. Fox asserts that “all the important lovers are left separated when Book VI ends,” and calls the “dangling states” of the lovers an “allegorical disaster.” Whether or not Spenser intended to bring all the lovers together in his proposed Book XII at the court of Gloriana for a great wedding feast, as Fox proposes, the poem as it exists is more concerned with deferral than with union. And Britomart is exceptional among all the “dangling” lovers.

---


Many critics treat Britomart’s deferred ending as a romance narrative convention and describe her goal as marriage. Humphrey Tonkin claims that Britomart’s journey is “obviously a quest for marriage and womanhood.” Margaret Thickstun suggests that “[h]er quest is not so much virtue oriented as marriage oriented.” Examining the deferral of Britomart’s “end,” Mary Frances Fahey notes that Spenser “hold[s] the marriage of Britomart and Artestall in abeyance.” While Britomart may be destined to be married to Artestall, I argue based on the specific emphases of Merlin’s prophecy that the goal of her adventure is motherhood and that this focus on motherhood makes her a unique case for deferral. I would like to consider what effect her future maternity has on her transition from maidenhood and why Spenser continually defers her motherhood.

Few critics have examined motherhood in *The Faerie Queene*, and those who do consider mother figures as well as literal mothers. Jonathan Goldberg’s 1975 article provides a psychoanalytic reading of Book III which argues that Britomart, Florimell, and Amoret all must accept psychologically their role as mothers. Goldberg sees Britomart as mothering other figures within the poem, pronounces her the “Great Mother of the

---

12 Patricia Parker focuses on *The Faerie Queene*’s deferred endings in Chapter 2 of her *Inescapable Romance*, but she is more concerned with the pattern and effects of deferral as generic requirement rather than particular reasons for it.

13 Tonkin, 412.

14 Thickstun, 43.

15 Fahey, 55.

English” (18), and argues that her initiation into maternity begins as she journeys to Merlin’s cave and ends in the House of Busirane. More recently, Joanne Craig considers mother-child relationships in the poem. She argues that Spenser’s handling of origin stories reveals a deep anxiety about female sexuality and that the poet attempts to replace biological generation with a male-centered artistic creation. She mentions Britomart only in contrast to Belphoebe and as the means for Marinell to escape his overbearing mother. Neither of these critics links Britomart’s motherhood to the concept of delay.

However, deferral for Britomart is essentially connected to her future motherhood. Merlin prophesies that she will marry Artesall, bear his child, and be the mother of a long line of rulers leading to Elizabeth. The common construction of women’s roles—maid, wife, widow—signals a cultural elision of “wife” and “mother,” but both cultural practice and Spenser himself establish distinctions between the two. By examining cultural norms for women’s transitions and for women’s roles, we can explore how Spenser distinguishes Britomart. Merlin also prophesies that Britomart will remain a transitional figure—a knight—until her baby is born and her husband subsequently dies. The knightly disguise she dons for protection in her search for Artesall will become her habitual attire signaling her continued transitional state. Through her knighthood, Britomart combines categories—she functions as male and as female. While Spenser seeks to distinguish between categories of wife and mother, Britomart is expected to fuse them at a later time. Britomart is a character both frozen in her deferred state and in motion toward an expected end. Throughout the long poem, Spenser maintains the tension which is emphasized in Merlin’s cave. The disguised Britomart and Merlin’s
prophecy raise questions: Why is Britomart’s motherhood deferred? How is it that we can understand her as both virgin warrior and mother of the future queen?

These questions get at the paradoxical problem of Britomart’s stasis and progress; however, they are asked with different considerations of time. The first asks about the narrative present of the poem, and considers the prophecy in the “future,” outside the confined timeline of the poem. The second disregards time and asks about the cognition that occurs when one considers at the same time what Britomart was, is, and will be—what one is required to do when considering prophecy. The cognitive theory of conceptual blending provides us with tools to unravel the seemingly contradictory parts of character. Conceptual blending can help us to consider Britomart as a transitional figure within the narrative present of the poem and her whole character out of time, as it were. By answering the questions of her identity both in the narrative present of the poem and outside of time, we can better understand Spenser’s use of delay. Britomart’s deferral is exceptional within the poem because of Merlin’s prophecy and because her transition to marriage is deferred in uncommon ways, through disguise and quest. If we examine maternity as its own category of womanhood, as I suggest we should, we find that Britomart’s maternity is deferred because of a pervading cultural discomfort with the maternal body and maternal authority that exists within *The Faerie Queene* itself. Conceptual blending allows us to examine both embodied and culturally constructed maternity. Taking the analysis a step further, I will examine what conceptual blending has to offer if we consider Britomart as an analogue for Elizabeth, and how that deferral—a silencing of the future—is predicted in Merlin’s silence, which becomes a
space for the confluence of time, identity, and meaning, situated around the prognosised maternal body.

**Britomart’s exceptional deferral**

Merlin prophesies, “For so must all things excellent begin”—in pain, her lovesickness—

“And eke enrooted deepe must be that Tree, / Whose big embodied braunches shall not lin, / Till they to hevens hight forth stretched bee. / For from thy wombe a famous Progenee / Shall spring” (III.iii.22.1-6). Britomart has seen an image of the knight Artegall in Merlin’s magic mirror and fallen in love.17 Her nurse Glaucé has brought her to Merlin that they might find out how to cure Britomart’s lovesickness.18 Instead of providing a cure, he assures her that her vision of Artegall was “the streight course of hevenly destiny, / Led with eternall providence” (III.iii.24.3-4), and she should “by all dew meanes [her] destiny fulfill” (III.iii.24.9). Merlin specifies, however, that her destiny is not simply marriage, but motherhood—the “famous Progenee” she will bear. The prophecy emphasizes the importance of Britomart’s motherhood in the following twenty stanzas, which detail the lineage from her child through the ages to Elizabeth, the “royall

---


Virgin” (III.iii.49.6). Later in the poem, Glauce, comforting the lovesick Britomart, reminds her not that she will find Artegaill, but that one day she will bear children:

“Through hope of those, which Merlin had her told / Should of her name and nation be chiefe, / And fetch their being from the sacred mould / Of her immortall womb, to be in heaven enrold” (III.iv.11.6-9). Britomart must become a wife to fulfill the prophecy (and ensure legitimacy), but love and marriage are only supporting elements of her maternal destiny.

This most important stage—her maternity—is continually deferred within the text. Britomart’s destiny depends on her finding Artegaill, but once she finds him, he must continue on his quest without her. Their union is delayed again after she rescues him from Radigund, leaving her still in her transitional state. Thereafter, Britomart drops out of the poem in Book V, after rescuing Artegaill from Radigund. We can’t know if her prophecy would be fulfilled if Spenser had continued the poem, but we can explore why and how Britomart’s end is deferred within the text as it stands.

By keeping Britomart from fulfilling her destiny, Spenser effectively traps her in a transitional state between being under the care of parents and being under the care of a husband. Romance narratives center on this condition for young men and women. Young men are depicted as knights, pursuing glory and fame, gaining the wealth and

19 Britomart and Artegaill also battle at Satyrane’s tournament in III.iv.44-48, but Artegaill is unrecognized as the Salvage Knight and Britomart is the “stranger knight”: her identity is not revealed during the battle, nor during her subsequent choice of fair maidens as her prize.

20 See Hackett, *Women and Romance Fiction*, 24-26; and Andrew King, 145-59.
social connections they need to be able to move successfully to householdership.\textsuperscript{21} Often, young women of romance narratives leave their parents’ care and wander through the woods, a liminal place and time of life that puts them in peril of losing life or its socially constructed equivalent, chastity. Both knights and maidens are at risk for getting stuck in their respective states. Britomart faces the same dangers as other romance characters, but the way she functions as both maiden and knight allows her to withstand these threats and conquer them. Britomart becomes, in effect, a blend of knight and maiden; her identities commingle in one physical body (see Figure 5.1), like Elizabeth as a female prince. In what follows, I examine how this dual identity affects the deferral of her maternal identity, as I consider Britomart “in time”—within the narrative present of the text—and examine other factors that defer her end. I will also analyze Britomart “out of time,” as a complete blend of the historical categories \textit{maid}, \textit{widow}, \textit{wife}, and \textit{mother}, cultural categories that must be looked at historically. I argue that motherhood should be seen, as it was in practice, as its own category, rather than a constituent part of the “wife” identity. Finally, I will consider the implications of the blended “out of time” Britomart for other blends within the text, particularly Merlin’s silence, and for our reading of Elizabeth.

\textbf{Britomart the errant knight}

Britomart enters the poem as a young man in transition: a knight errant. The language at the beginning of Book III assumes that she is a male knight: “They [Guyon and Arthur] spide a knight, that towards pricked fayre, and \textit{him} beside an aged Squire there rode”

\footnotesize
(III.i.4.2-3, emphasis mine). Britomart’s sex is revealed to the reader within a few stanzas, but only after she has unseated Guyon with her enchanted spear—an exhibition of phallic power that establishes her as an active knight. Britomart doesn’t just appear as a knight; she functions as a knight. The narrator addresses Guyon, suggesting that his shame would be even greater if he knew “That of a single damzell [he was] mett / On equall plaine, and there so hard besett; / Even the famous Britomart it was [...]” (III.i.8.4-6). This introduction to Britomart categorizes her as a knight—the “famous Britomart”—and as a woman—“a single damzell.” She functions as a male knight, though the narrator continues to use the pronoun “she” in the following stanzas. Linguistically speaking, she is an in between figure, both knight and woman, revealed and hidden. The narrator articulates this double identity in Red Cross Knight’s assessment of Britomart: “Faire Lady she him seemd, like Lady drest, / But fairest knight alive, when armed was her brest” (III.ii.4.8-9).

Conceptual blending illuminates Britomart’s knight-woman identity, which continues as she progresses in time through the narrative. As we’ve seen, a simple blend consists of two input spaces and a blended space. As we saw with Tamora in Titus Andronicus, as characters develop, they often comprise multiple blends, mimicking the “online” nature of blending—the blends can change as new information is added. The poem begins by showing us the blended Britomart, without giving the reader any information to signal the blend. As far as the reader is concerned, the errant knight is merely a typical romance character. The incongruity of the terms “knight” and “maiden” describing the same physical body turns those terms into inputs and the dual character of Britomart into a blend (disguise is also a romance convention, one that Spenser exploits).
The blend, then, contains Britomart the chaste errant knight, the male maiden (as we’ve seen in Figure 5.1). We are able to see Britomart carry the qualities and protections of knighthood and maleness, and we also see Britomart’s vulnerabilities. The qualities from the blend can then project back into the input spaces, and here we can see the maleness and knightly valor project back onto Britomart herself, providing the maiden of Chastity with knightly qualities. Her armor serves as a signal of the blend as she takes on the identity of a male knight.

For Britomart, this blend—dressing as a knight—is a means of self-protection. Because “all Britany doth burne in armes bright,” disguising herself in “feigned armes” protects her from those that would “empeach” her “passage” (III.iii.52-53). Glauce’s suggestion of the knight and squire disguises is described as a “bold devise” “conceived” in “foolhardy wit,” but this foolish plan is the crux of Book III, providing Britomart with the identity of a “mayd Martiall” (III.iii.53.9).22 As we shall see, this blend is maintained throughout the text, with varying emphases. Though Glauce suggests and advocates for the disguise, Britomart herself chooses to assume maleness when she orders Glauce “her Maides attyre / To turne into a massy habergeon” (III.iii.57.7-8). Britomart knowingly enters the transitional male stage between youth and householder so that she may range through the forest without the need for flight and to “inspyre” a “generous stout courage” (III.iii.57.4). At the same time, the disguise introduces risks for her overall project.

22 Kathryn Schwarz points out, “Allegorically, Britomart’s armor is not a disguise at all, but a realization of symbolically impenetrable virtue”: Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 160.
Knightly deferral

The knight input plays an important role in Britomart’s deferral. A knight’s ultimate goal is to complete his quest, set aside his knightly pursuits, and settle into marriage and householdership. In romance narratives, however, a knight may be kept from completing their quest by either internal or external forces. First, in a knight’s transition from youth to householder, he may fall prey to a particular love for the life of errancy, which distracts him from his quest, and may even turn the elements of knightly pursuits into goals in themselves. This misplaced love can take many forms: a thirst for fame and glory, a desire to hoard wealth, a wish to maintain chivalric status, or an inclination to preserve homosocial relationships as primary. Britomart falls prey to some of these temptations for a time. Distracted from her search for Artegall, she fights the Giant Ollyphant to protect an unknown young man (Scudamour) (III.xi.3-6). She then journeys to save Amoret from Busirane (III.xi-xii), a valiant and successful effort but not part of her initial quest. Defending the helpless is an honorable pursuit and can gain her fame and glory, but her detour to Busirane’s house hinders her from completing her mission, especially in the 1596 version where, after Britomart and Amoret escape from Busirane, they must seek Scudamour and Glauce. Though these diversions do not directly help Britomart find Artegall, they are necessary for her allegorical and psychological development. They are necessary to Spenser’s task, not Britomart’s. In the language of conceptual blending, these episodes add inputs to her character blend. Acting as a knight, or having her chastity tested, intensifies the “maid” and “martial” inputs that comprise Britomart’s knight–woman identity. Spenser’s choices serve not to highlight the blend so

23 Celovsky, 218-23.
much as to strengthen the division between categories of knight and maiden, emphasizing
the paradox of Britomart: a woman who embodies contradictory categories.

In addition to these internal distractions, knights also may become trapped in their
transitional states by external forces: the most dangerous ones infantilize or emasculate
them. For example, though Marinell’s mother, Cymoent, promotes his knightly activity,
she forbids him to love because Proteus prophesies that Marinell will be wounded by a
woman. Though Marinell has amassed great wealth and honor with his mother’s
encouragement, he cannot transition to householder status because he is isolated from
female companionship.\(^{24}\) After Marinell is wounded by Britomart, Cymoent takes him to
a protective cave and mourns over him. Her actions do not allow Marinell to separate
from her enough to complete his transition. In another example, when Radigund captures
Artegall, she emasculates him by dressing him as a woman and giving him womanly
tasks, limits his physical movement by imprisoning him, and endangers his psychological
health by placing him in her thrall. Both his imprisonment and treatment restrict
Artegall’s ability to move beyond knighthood.

Britomart, however, escapes these infantilizing and feminizing forces. First, she
has no mother in the text. Spenser provides no explanation for her mother’s absence, but
Britomart’s association with only a father places her squarely in the patrilineal succession
that is her destiny.\(^{25}\) He does assign a substitute mother in Glauce, Britomart’s nurse, but
Glauce separates Britomart from her home and propels her toward her destiny rather than

\(^{24}\) Celovsky, 229-30.

\(^{25}\) Linda Gregerson calls her a “daughter of patriarchy” in *The Reformation of the
Subject: Spenser, Milton, and the English Protestant Epic* (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1995), 12.
limiting her physical or psychological movement. Second, Britomart is never captured. She triumphs over Malecasta, Busirane, Radigund, and others, and though she is often in danger, she is never at the mercy of her enemies for long. She is protected primarily by her magic spear; this employment of masculinity that never wavers (that is its magic) preserves her from external forces that might delay her quest. As long as she stays firmly within the blend and identifies as male, she continues her progress. The disguise, though having the capacity to defer her motherhood, acts as sufficient protection for the chaste maid. The moments when she is emasculated/unmasked merely reveal her female identity, which presents its own risks.

Maidenly delays

Though Britomart is initially introduced as a male, chronologically her transition into knighthood begins after she is already a female liminal figure, the chaste maiden of the second input. The out-of-order narrative foregrounds Britomart’s quest, promoting an affinity with Books I and II. But the first flashback indicates that this is a book quite different from the first two—a book where cycles and refigurations work alongside a linear quest.26 In the scene preceding Merlin’s prophecy and in the prophecy scene itself, Britomart is isolated from her family of origin; she is separated from the protective care of her father and moving toward marriage as she sees Artegaill’s image in the magic mirror. Britomart finds Merlin’s “mirrhour fayre” in her father’s closet. Though her

father is never present in the poem, the text suggests Britomart’s relationship with her father: “For nothing he from her reserv’d apart, / Being his onely daughter and his hayre” (III.ii.22.3-4). Britomart has complete access to her father’s private world, and he values her. As she gazes into the mirror, she is at a point that encapsulates her transition: she is in her father’s closet gazing at her future husband. The men cannot both exist fully for her in the same space. Her father’s closet acts as another blended space—at this moment Britomart is both daughter and lover/wife, and neither. The moment is another example of Britomart as a character of blends, one who embodies two seemingly contradictory categories. In order to become a wife, she must leave the space defined by paternal control to move outward toward her husband. After her moment of blending, when Britomart leaves her home, she is completely severed from her family of origin, transitioning from maid to wife.

Britomart’s separation from her family moves her more fully into a transitional state. Britomart’s nurse Glauce appears to stand in for Britomart’s parents, but she is primarily an agent who distances Britomart from her family of origin. Glauce separates Britomart from her home by suggesting that they seek out Merlin—the maker of the mirror—after Glauce fails to cure Britomart’s lovesickness. They travel dressed up “in straunge / And base atyre, that none might them bewray” (III.iii.7.1-2). Britomart’s

27 Britomart’s father is also mentioned in the context of Glauce’s fears that he will castigate her for Britomart’s lovesickness: “great care she tooke, and greater feare, / Least that it should her turne to fowle reprieve, / And sore reproch, when so her father deare / Should of his dearest daughters hard misfortune heare” (III.iii.5.6-9). Julia Walker notes the similarities between Britomart and Elizabeth: both are motherless daughters of kings: “From Allegory to Icon: Teaching Britomart with the Elizabeth Portraits,” in Approaches to Teaching Spenser’s Faerie Queene, ed. David Lee Miller and Alexander Dunlop (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1994): 106-16 (106).
physical journey distances her from her father, and her disguise separates her from her identity as a royal daughter. Entering Merlin’s cave further isolates her: it is an unearthly place, “low underneath the ground, / In a deepe delve, farre from the vew of day, / That of no living wight he [Merlin] mote be found” (III.iii.7.6-8).²⁸ Even though the cave can be interpreted as a protective womb-like space, it isolates Britomart from her family (and serves as a prison for Merlin).²⁹ As we will see, Merlin’s cave, like Britomart’s father’s closet functions as a liminal space where identity is blended. In the narrative present of the poem, however, though Glauce attempts to fulfill her role as Britomart’s protector, she makes Britomart vulnerable by removing her from her family home. This physical separation further exacerbates the emotional separation from her family of origin signaled by her lovesickness.

In romance narratives, young women in transition—not under the protection of parents or of a spouse—are especially vulnerable to external threats, particularly threats to their chastity. For example, Florimell is chased by the Foster “Breathing out beastly lust her to defyle” (III.i.17.3) and by Arthur and Guyon, who are purportedly attempting to save her but who in actuality are lusting after her beauty (III.i.17-18). Florimell is also threatened by the witch’s son when she seeks help at the witch’s cottage; he feels “No love, but brutish lust” (III.vii.15.9, vii.14-19). In contrast, Belphoebe is the one woman not in transition, and thus not sexually vulnerable; she is a chaste huntress raised by


Diana, and she attacks Braggodocchio and Trompart when Braggodocchio attempts to embrace her (II.iii.34-46). 30 Joanne Craig claims that the young women’s “virtue exposes them to threats of violation or violation itself.” 31 A young woman alone in the woods is in danger because of her identity as a chaste maiden—she is desirable and at the same time untouchable and penetrable. Male desire threatens to defer marriage for these young women.

Moreover, Spenser also explores the possibility that an internal threat to chastity—a maiden’s own lust—might keep a young woman from becoming a wife. Amoret’s experience in Lust’s cave serves as particularly apt example because the sexual threat is personified, and the text indicates that the threat may be internal or external. As William Oram suggests, a literal reading can present Amoret as “blameless,” but attention to allegory complicates the reading, suggesting that Lust is an “internal enemy,” and that Amoret is “not intemperate” but “is nonetheless incontinent.” 32 (45). While Britomart sleeps, Amoret is captured by a “wilde and salvage man,” named in the argument as Lust, who has an appearance quite like male genitalia, and whose long hair and ivy belt signal his identity (IV.vii.4). 33 When Amoret regains consciousness in Lust’s pitch-black cave,


31 Craig, 22. See also Stephens, “Into Other Arms,” 528.


another woman there, Aemylia, explains that Lust lives “on the spoile” of women’s “bodies chast”: “He with his shamefull lust doth first deflowre, / And afterwards themselves doth cruelly devoure” (IV.vii.12.5-9). Lust’s goal is not merely sexual conquest, but psychic destruction.

When Lust re-enters the cave, Amoret runs, and Lust gives chase. It is therefore easy to read Lust here as external male lust, pursuing and capturing the object of his lust, and in fact this is a proper reading—Oram’s “literal” reading. But Lust can also be read as emanating from Amoret’s own psyche—she is subject to her own lust. Amoret is imprisoned in Lust’s cave with two other women who are characterized by ambiguity—they are victims of Lust and perpetrators of lust. Aemylia, a young woman, was captured in the woods where she was to meet her lover; instead she finds Lust there. Her desire became embodied in this threatening figure. Her own lust motivates the scene in the forest. The old woman in the cave first appears as self-sacrificing: she willingly substitutes her body for Amoret’s so Lust may take his pleasure. Aemylia’s description of the old woman is sympathetic: because of the woman’s “helpe,” she has been able to preserve her “honor,” “though into thraldome throwne” (IV.vii.19.5-6). In the light of day, the woman is revealed as an old hag, female sexual corruption personified. The old woman is a blend—both a stereotypical lascivious widow and a self-sacrificial mother figure. The shift in tone from within the cave to outside the cave emphasizes the multivalent nature of the cave; like the closet or Merlin’s cave, Lust’s cave is a space of

34 Stephens notes that within the female community of the cave, Amoret is grateful to the old woman rather than horrified at her wickedness, but when the old woman exits the cave into the male world, she is seen as corrupt (“Into Other Arms,” 537-38). See also Oram, 44.
ambiguity. Amoret emerges from the cave wounded but whole (Scudamour accepts her as his virgin bride)\textsuperscript{35}; she has escaped ravishment through the protection of blended women who are both Lust’s victims and perpetrators of lust themselves. Reading this scene allegorically reveals the possibility that internal lust might imperil a woman’s chastity, and thus keep her from transitioning “whole” to the role of wife.

Is Britomart subject to these same threats that endanger chaste maids in the woods? Her disguise as a knight protects her from the external sexual threats that may prevent women from completing their transition from maid to wife\textsuperscript{36}; however, she is still vulnerable when her disguise is removed or fails.\textsuperscript{37} Spenser reveals Britomart’s vulnerability in the first canto in the Castle Joyeous where Malecasta (her name can mean “badly chaste”) rules as the Lady of Delight (III.i.31). Britomart refuses to be disarmed within the castle until night, and she defends herself from Malecasta’s advances even when the Lady of Delight sneaks into Britomart’s bed. When Malecasta’s cry alerts the house, those who run in see “the warlike Mayd / Al in her snow-white smocke, with locks unbownd, / Threatning the point of her avenging blaed” (III.i.63.6-8).\textsuperscript{38} When her disguise is removed, Britomart appears vulnerable, but in reality the characteristics of knighthood—valor, bravery, martial skill—have been projected back onto her. She is still

\textsuperscript{35} Stephens, “Into Other Arms,” 539.


\textsuperscript{37} Anderson, 80.

\textsuperscript{38} Maureen Quilligan points to the comic elements surrounding Spenser’s reveal of Britomart as sexually attractive (though as a man): \textit{Incest and Agency in Elizabeth’s England} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 164.
a “warlike Mayd,” even when she is undressed (see Figure 5.2). Britomart and Red Cross Knight successfully fight off the threatening crowd, but Gardante—the looker—wounds her slightly. His look becomes a metaphorical arrow, “Which forth he sent with felonous despight, / And fell intent against the virgin sheene: / The mortall steele stayd not, till it was seene / To gore her side, yet was the wound not deepe, / But lightly rased her soft silken skin” (III.i.65.3-7). As with Lust, the look may be seen as coming from a source external to Britomart, or from Britomart herself: Britomart’s own gaze into the magic mirror that caused her pain. The ambiguity signals the potential for Britomart to succumb to lust, both her own and others’. Britomart remains chaste, but her vulnerability is revealed: a minor wound from lust threatens not just to defer her marriage and motherhood, but to derail it altogether.

Britomart is a blend of knight and maiden, and this blend functions to create the “complete” Britomart. It also allows knightly qualities to be projected back to her undisguised character. While both categories have the potential to defer the accomplishment of the knight’s quest or a maiden’s marriage, Britomart escapes these delays. In addition to this exceptional turn, Britomart is also unique in the goal of her quest, which combines the proactive knightly journey with her maidenly desire: she actively pursues motherhood.

As Spenser relates the story of Britomart’s entry into knighthood, he emphasizes her transitional state and establishes her true destiny: motherhood. Britomart is now the subject of two blends: she is the maiden–knight, and she is the maiden–future mother.

These roles combine into a megablend where the knight is a future mother. The blends can be accounted for in two ways—chronologically and narratively. Chronologically, first Britomart the maid is prophesied to be a mother, and then she dons her knightly disguise (see Figure 5.3). The narrative order reverses the chronology: first the knight is revealed as a maid, and then Merlin prophesies that she will be a mother (see Figure 5.4). As I’ve mentioned, the narrative structure of Book III mimics the structure of Books I and II, enabling a continuity between the qualities of Holiness, Temperance, and Chastity. The narrative structure also emphasizes the autonomy and force available to Britomart, surprising us with her femaleness, and making her not only an exceptional woman, but an exceptional knight—for very few knights have motherhood as their end.

Britomart is a conglomerate of transitional figures, everything at once but nothing at all. In the double state of transitioning female and transitioning male, Britomart still faces multiple threats, many of which could hinder her from fulfilling her destiny. She is vulnerable to sexual threat as an isolated female when her disguise is removed, and she is vulnerable to the temptations facing an errant knight, which might keep her from completing her initial quest. She also faces an unknown future as a mother—though her destiny is sure, the practical world of motherhood remains mysterious and possibly dangerous.

**Maternity as its own category**

In considering Britomart as a mother, we must examine how she fits into the cultural categories of womanhood: maid, wife, and widow. These commonplace stages defined women’s lives in terms of their relationships with men. One might suggest that women’s lives be defined instead by biological transitions—menarche, pregnancy, menopause—
but in their study of early modern women, Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford reject these stages anchored in the female body as markers because they found “no women who conceptualized their lives in those terms.”

Culturally, wifedom and motherhood were treated as one stage. The primary role of a woman in marriage was to bear children: woman was, according to Purchas in 1619, “a House builded for Generation and Gestation.” For Britomart, however, Merlin’s prophecy defines her life in terms of motherhood, with wifedom being the required precursor, not the main event. In her work on embodiment, Gail Kern Paster examines the difference of the maternal body, particularly in her discussion of the wet-nurse’s dug in contrast to the oft-emblazoned breast of the Petrarchan beloved. She complicates the categories by contrasting the maternal nursing breast with a maiden breast and argues that one reason women did not nurse their own children was to preserve the beauty of their breasts—attempting to maintain maidenly physical qualities in their matrimonial state. Paster’s work on the maternal body both blends categories—creating the “maiden-wife” or “maiden-mother”—and acknowledges the cultural delineation between maidenhood and wifedom. The preservation of the maiden breast privileges the desirable body made wife and sequesters motherhood. In the common constructions there was no distinct cultural space for motherhood.

40 Mendelson and Crawford, 77.
41 Mendelson and Crawford, 26, 67. Purchas qtd. in Mendelson and Crawford, 67.
Though early modern cultural constructions established the monolithic wife–mother category as dominant, in practice and in cultural mythology marriage and motherhood were not always intertwined. Not all women had children. According to Mendelson and Crawford, “Scripture declared that to be a barren wife was one of the greatest misfortunes which could befall a woman” (67). Additionally, many women had children out of wedlock (148-49). Spenser explores this particular separation of marriage and motherhood in the figures of Chrysogone and Cymoent, for instance—examples of mothers who conceive without present fathers or husbands. Chrysogone becomes impregnated while sleeping by “sunbeames bright” that preserve “her chaste bodie,” and is not aware of giving birth to Amoret and Belphoebe (III.vi.7.5, 5.8, 26.7-9). Cymoent is sleeping when she conceives Marinell with Dumarin, although she does know who has impregnated her (III.iv.19). Both women experience motherhood outside of proper cultural norms. Joanne Craig considers these origin stories as revelations of “deep anxiety about women’s sexuality”: “a series of fantasies of origin that struggle unsuccessfully to minimize or even altogether to exclude the contamination of maternity” (16). Their stories indicate that even within The Faerie Queene there are fissures in the traditional categories of womanhood, breaks that are also present culturally.

43 While The Faerie Queene glorifies Belphoebe’s virginity and privileges generation, as we shall see, there are few married, childless women in the text, and their childlessness does not appear problematic in the context of the poem. For instance, Hellenore, as the “faithless wife,” appears to be childless because of her husband’s impotence, but she is set up as the lusty woman who becomes the common woman to a band of satyrs. She is criticized more for her lust than for her childlessness (III.xiii-x).

44 Satyrane’s mother and Agape both conceive their children when they are raped (Craig, 22).
This kind of disjunction between established concepts of womanhood and cultural practice occurs around birthing as well. Childbirth within marriage was a distinct rite of passage.⁴⁵ One marker of this new stage was the practice of “churching,” a celebration of a woman’s return to the spiritual community and to everyday life after childbirth.⁴⁶ Churching publicly acknowledged a woman’s status as a mother and her experience of birth as she gave thanks for her survival.⁴⁷ In addition, the practice served to “purify” a woman after childbirth, eliminating the “contamination of maternity” that Craig suggests and Paster explores. Paster argues that “the ceremony’s popularity among women may argue just as forcefully for their internalization of shame and embarrassment as for their pride, relief, and self-congratulation; indeed, the two affects may be inextricable in explaining the survival of the practice” (195). Thus motherhood could be considered both a high honor, fulfilling a woman’s innate purpose, and shameful, because of the unholy, leaky maternal body. Therefore, though the primary cultural categories did not classify motherhood as a separate stage of female adulthood, cultural practice suggests space to recognize motherhood (within marriage) as a discrete stage within the category of “wife.”

⁴⁵ Mendelson and Crawford, 153.
⁴⁷ Mendelson and Crawford, 154; Cressy, Birth, Marriage, and Death, 208-15. The 1559 Book of Common Prayer sets out a brief ceremony consisting of a greeting, a reading of Psalm 121, The Lord’s Prayer, a brief responsive prayer, and a closing prayer. The focus is on God’s deliverance. In the initial greeting, the priest begins, “Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of his goodness to give you safe deliverance, and hath preserved you in the great danger of childbirth,” and in the final prayer, he addresses “Almighty God, which hast delivered this woman thy servant from the great pain and peril of childbirth.” See The Book of Common Prayer, 1559: The Elizabethan Prayer Book, ed. John E. Booty (Charlottesville: Published for the Folger Shakespeare Library by The University of Virginia Press, 2005), 314-15.
Spenser, I argue, does the same with Britomart: Merlin’s prophecy gives the greatest importance to motherhood, signaling it as a separate stage from her becoming a wife. Interestingly, her motherhood will occur contemporaneously with her widowhood: “Long time ye both in armes shall beare great sway, / Till thy wombes burden thee from them do call / And his [Artegall’s] last fate him from thee take away” (III.iii.28.5-7). Artegall will die as his baby is born, and Britomart will become the sole parent of the future king. (I explore the implications of Britomart’s widowhood later in this chapter.) Britomart embodies, or is conceived as embodying, maidenhood, wifedom, motherhood, and widowhood. Spenser plays with these cultural categories, emphasizing divisions and blending them together in the prophesied Britomart. But before we consider how the categories blend in this “out of time” Britomart, let us examine the deferral that exists within the narrative present of the poem, delaying Britomart’s end beyond the poem’s.

**Reasons for deferral: mode, structure, and allegory**

As a romance, *The Faerie Queene* (especially Book III) is characterized by deferral. Patricia Parker defines *romance* “as a form which simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end, objective, or object.”48 *The Faerie Queene*, she points out, “leaves its most important endings open” (77), including Britomart’s marriage and motherhood. Although in the 1590 version of Book III Scudamour and Amoret reunite in a happy ending, the poem leaves our protagonist in her transitional and blended state—a maiden knight on her way from youth to motherhood. And her transitional state is extended in the 1596 version, as is Amoret and Scudamour’s separation. Similarly,  

48 Parker, 4.
Arthur and Gloriana’s union (and actual meeting) is deferred. Una and Red Cross Knight also part after their engagement, as do Calidore and Pastorella. Though romance often relies on a plot that brings the protagonists together and then either separates them or invokes obstacles to their unions, the genre also relies on “happy endings” where frustrated waiting is fulfilled. Britomart and Artegaill, however, only have their happy ending in prophecy, never in the narrative present of the poem. Moreover, Merlin prophesies the delay of Britomart’s destiny, as we have seen, so she stands apart as an exceptional case of deferral.

Julia M. Walker considers this narrative deferral evidence of a “fiction” that mimics Elizabeth’s “narrative,” which “turned her virginity from the promise of physical motherhood into an icon of national motherhood,” a fiction which Spenser never intends to fulfill.49 She argues that one can view the “dynastic construct as a fiction, as the poetic equivalent of an iconic symbol in a painting,” and that Britomart is replaced by Mercilla’s court, representing a motherhood of virtues, ideas, and public policy.50 I find Walker’s reading compelling, but I would suggest that we can also fruitfully examine Britomart’s deferral regardless of whether marriage and children are possibilities, or whether they are simply outside the narrative present of the poem. The prophecy does become a part of her character, as Walker suggests, making the prophecy relevant to our “out of time” Britomart. In fact, given the hindsight view of Merlin’s prophecy, and separating Britomart from a strict allegorical association with Elizabeth (she can be read


both as an unnamed mirror for Elizabeth and as merely a type of Elizabeth), it is reasonable to take the prophecy seriously within the world of the poem.

We might ask how the prophecy functions. Lorena Henry describes two types of prophesy: A classical prophecy will be fulfilled because of the actions one takes to prevent it (e.g., Marinell), while a biblical prophecy invites the subject to participate and aid in its fulfillment. She argues persuasively that Merlin’s prophecy is biblical rather than classical. Merlin clarifies the point: “the fates are firme . . . / Yet ought mens good endeavours them confirme, / And guyde the heavenly causes to their constant terme” (III.iii.25.6, 8-9). The prophecy at once proclaims Britomart’s destiny and invites her to participate in it. The prophecy will be fulfilled, and Britomart must be complicit in her pursuit of maternity.

The text encourages Britomart’s pursuit of maternity, and at the same time defers it. From a narrative perspective, even once Britomart accomplishes her quest in Book IV, she cannot fulfill the prophecy because it would mean keeping Artegall from his quest. Marrying Artegall and bearing his child would force his transition to householdership before he has reached his goal and learned the lessons of Book V. In both instances where Britomart and Artegall are together—after they fight in Satyrane’s tournament and agree to marry (IV.vi.40-47), and when Britomart rescues Artegall from Radigund (V.vii.43-35)—they then separate. Celovský argues that this kind of separation is

necessary to retaining knightly status: “Because chivalric status (like youthful status) depends upon minimizing relations with women, marital bliss and martial occupation have an uneasy relationship throughout the poem” (221). Artegall must, therefore, part from his bride to pursue his own knightly adventure. This narrative requirement at least in part explains the deferral; delaying Britomart’s marriage and motherhood into Book V thus makes a certain kind of sense, but even then the text does not provide a satisfying conclusion.

One could argue that Britomart’s motherhood is deferred because of her allegorical identification as Chastity. Since she embodies Chastity, the argument goes, she must remain chaste throughout the poem; she cannot marry Artegall nor engage in the sexual relations necessary to procreate. Such a reading would rely on the twentieth-century conception of chastity as merely abstention from intercourse and on an assumption that Britomart is Chastity, rather than a person characterized by chastity.52 However, if we see Britomart as embodying the spectrum of chastity, “passing from the virginity of youth to the chaste married love of maturity,” as Thomas Roche asserts, and on which critics concur, the issue becomes somewhat more complicated.53 Chaste love


implies an unsullied love for Artesall, which could include marriage, sex, and children:
“trew in love, as Turtle to her make” (III.i.2.9). To read Britomart allegorically, then, doesn’t fully explain why her marriage and motherhood are deferred. In fact, a full vision of chaste love might very well include marriage and motherhood.

Consider, then, Britomart as a refraction of Elizabeth’s chastity. Must not her chastity remain virginal because of Elizabeth’s claims to virginity? Or could Spenser be critiquing Elizabeth’s version of chastity? David Scott Wilson-Okamura argues that it is unlikely Spenser meant to reproach Elizabeth; he argues that critics often overstate his affinity for married lovers and that by the 1590s Parliament and the Privy Council were no longer urging the queen toward marriage and motherhood—“the issue of Elizabeth’s virginity was moot.”

Wilson-Okamura approaches Britomart’s chastity through Merlin’s prophecy, considering Elizabeth in the context of her specific role in the poem as “the royall Virgin.” Doing so emphasizes the differences between Britomart and Elizabeth—while they may be aligned, Britomart is not a direct representation of Elizabeth’s chastity. In fact, Wilson-Okamura’s arguments answer the first question as well as the second: the text was addressed to civil servants, who were likely to marry, and Elizabeth’s virginity was a non-issue. While keeping Britomart virginal during the course of the poem allows for a stronger connection between her and Elizabeth, the prophecy

---


itself distances Britomart from Elizabeth, placing them in relation to each other
generationally rather than allegorically. The deferral of Britomart’s maternity has more to
do with maternity itself than with strict allegorical renderings.

Reasons for deferral: the maternal body and maternal authority

Modal, narrative, and allegorical explanations, then, cannot fully account for the deferral
of Britomart’s “ending.” To explain this deferral, we need only return to Merlin’s
prophecy and its focus on her “immortal womb,” for it is her destiny as mother that is
key. Despite Merlin’s emphasis on maternity, the poem reveals discomfort with the
maternal body and anxiety about maternal power. These two factors more fully explain
Britomart’s deferral and emphasize the potential she embodies. The narrative keeps
Britomart as the knight–maiden blend, delaying the fulfillment of the prophetic blend.

Maternal bodies can be found in The Faerie Queene, but they are primarily in the
context of idealized birth sequences or stories that marginalize maternal experience of
pregnancy and birth. Amoret and Belphoebe’s origin story focuses on Chrysogone’s
miraculous maternity, one devoid of consciousness. The chaste faerie maid falls asleep in
the woods, is impregnated by the beams of the sun—either a miraculous conception, or a
glorified rape—55—and gives birth without pain or waking, at which point Venus and Diana
take away her twin girls. This stage of life determined by bodily experience is, for her,
divorced from the experience itself: “Unwares she them conceivd, unwares she bore: /

55 Roche, 106; Sheila T. Cavanagh, Wanton Eyes and Chaste Desires: Female Sexuality
She bore withouten paine, that she conceiv’d / Withouten pleasure” (III.vi.27.1-3). 56 This fecundity resident in the body but not consciously engaged in marginalizes the physical aspects of motherhood. Further, her motherhood is limited to biological function: the goddesses take her daughters away from her so that she does not experience motherhood in any sense (though she is conscious of her pregnancy and the social shame associated with bearing fatherless children [III.vi.10]). The telling of Chrysogone’s story points to a discomfort with the physical experience of motherhood and suggests another reason for deferring Britomart’s motherhood: deferral keeps her from becoming a grotesque maternal body, like Error or the uncovered Duessa, and keeps her fertility latent.

While *The Faerie Queene* depicts sex, procreative unions are rare. 57 The description of the Garden of Adonis expresses an ease with the physical body, particularly in the descriptions of sex within the Garden 58; however, sex here is quite separate from generation and associated solely with pleasure. In spite of Time, the

56 Roche terms this “Incarnational imagery” and suggests that Chrysogone’s painless labor is “a direct contradiction of God’s curse on Eve” (109). His reading focuses on the relevance of this origin story for Amoret and Belphoebe, but doesn’t consider its relevance for Chrysogone as a mother. On the “spontaneous” pregnancy erasing her “maternal rights,” see Cavanagh, 129-130.

57 Joanne Craig asserts, “*The Faerie Queene* as a whole suggests a fastidious distaste for procreation” (16).

58 Michael Baybak, Paul Delany, and A. Kent Hieatt argue that the mount in the Garden of Adonis is in the center of Book III, and that it is paralleled by the center of Book I, as Red Cross Knight is conquered by Orgoglio and must be freed by the grace of Arthur, and the center of Book II, where Guyon resists the golden apples in the Garden of Proserpina during his temptation by Mammon. All three moments are signaled by the phrase “in [the] middest,” in addition to being the arithmetical centers of each book in the 1590 version: “Placement ‘In the Middest’ in *The Faerie Queene,*,” in *Essential Articles for the Study of Edmund Spenser*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1972), 389-94.
narrator tells us, the Garden is blissful: “sweete love gentle fitts amongst them throwes, / Without fell rancor, or fond gealousy; / Franckly each Paramor his leman knowes, / Each bird his mate” (III.vi.41.5-8). The description of Venus enjoying the hidden Adonis on the Mount similarly focuses on sexual pleasure separate from generation. Venus goes to the mountain “often to enjoy / Her deare Adonis joyous company, / And reape sweet pleasure of the wanton boy” (III.vi.46.1-3), and Adonis “liveth in eternall blis, / Joying his goddesse, and of her enjoyd” (III.vi.48.1-2). The acceptance of the physical body and of sex in the Garden corresponds with the absence of the maternal body there: the Garden is a place of pleasure without pain, sex without childbirth. As Joanne Craig notes, Chrysogone’s birth story introduces the Garden of Adonis: “The extension of her story to the Garden also extends the fantasy of procreation without volition or consciousness by making the life cycles of plants a model or type of human reproduction” (19). Though we can read the Garden itself as a maternal body—an enclosed place of potential fecundity—the poem focuses attention on non-human reproduction, hiding or erasing mothers in the flesh.

However, there are in the poem images that substitute for gestation, the Garden being the most fully developed. In the mythology of the Garden of Adonis, it is the world which mothers and chaos which provides the “substance”: “For in the wide wombe of the world there lyes, / In hatefull darknes and in deepe horrore, / An huge eternal Chaos, which supplyes / The substaunces of natures fruitfull progenyes” (III.vi.36.6-9) The substance finds its form in matter and becomes life. Spenser does use maternal imagery for creation, but outside or parallel to the confined space of the Garden, establishing a substitutionary system of gestation. Similarly, a series of caves in the text substitute for
pregnancy and birth. When her son is overwrought with grief over Florimell’s escape, the witch works her magic: “Eftesoones out of her hidden cave she cald / An hideous beast, or horrible aspect / […] / But likest it to an Hyena was, / That feeds on wemens flesh, as others feede on gras” (III.vii.22.1-2, 8-9). The witch creates the Hyena-like beast, and it enters the world from her womb-like cave. Britomart emerges from Merlin’s cave having undergone such profound change that it signals rebirth. She gains knowledge of her quest in Merlin’s cave and sets out to pursue Artegaill actively, making the transition from plaintive maid to pursuant knight. Although these caves and enclosed gardens mirror the maternal body, they are merely substitutionary. They take the womb outside of the maternal body, enacting a metonymy that separates the procreative function from the whole body of the mother.

The poem itself recoils from the maternal body. Britomart’s body throughout The Faerie Queene is decidedly non-maternal: it is markedly similar to a man’s. Though she wears female armor, she is often mistaken for a man, as she has purposed. As Judith Anderson suggests, for a Renaissance reader, armor, whether designed for a man or a woman, would signal maleness. More often than not, when Britomart’s sex is revealed, she is “unhelmeted” or unmasked rather than completely divested of her armor. Thus her blended identity as knight–woman is physically maintained. Her body itself is masked, placing it at a remove from maternity and emphasizing her potential for childbearing as an abstract concept tucked in a mystical prophecy rather than a reality. As Christine Coch points out, maternity is the time when a woman’s body is most clearly

59 Anderson, 76.

60 Anderson, 79, 84, and 89.
differentiated from a man’s (142). By containing Britomart’s procreative potential inside a masculine identity, Spenser paradoxically emphasizes her blended self and separates Britomart from her maternal destiny, maintaining the “out of time” blends in the mind of the reader. Somehow the idea of Britomart as a mother, the possibility of her being a mother, is less threatening than the presence of her mothering body within the text.

Although the text obscures female fecundity, it foregrounds mother-child relationships, and these relationships reveal anxiety about maternal authority. Mothers within The Faerie Queene rarely appear with husbands. Even if parentage is important, the primary family relationships are between mothers and children, rather than husbands and wives, or fathers and children.\(^6^1\) We’ve seen Chrysogone, who has no contact with her children and no husband, and Cymoent, who has little contact with Dumarin but loves her son Marinell to excess. As Satyrane’s mother searches for her wandering husband in the forest, she is raped by a lusty Satyr and conceives Satyrane (I.vi.21-23). “Evil” mothers such as Error (I.i.15-26), Corceca (I.iii.13-14, 22-23), and the witch who hosts Florimell (III.vii.8ff) all appear without male counterparts. There are few fathers in the text, though enough appear in backstories to contest any implication that fathers are not necessary—they at least need to be present for conception (except, of course, in Chrysogone’s tale). This absence of fathers provides Spenser with many opportunities to explore mothers who have sole authority over their children, amplifying the power mothers had within the Renaissance household.

\(^6^1\) Jonathan Goldberg makes this claim for Book III: 5.
In the Renaissance, the description of the “new mother” sanctioned women’s dominion over her children within the home and engendered a corresponding anxiety surrounding mothers’ roles. Janet Adelman points out that cultural anxieties about maternal power in Renaissance England began at a child’s birth. She argues that because of high maternal and infant mortality rates, and because of the great control mothers and nurses had over infant/child well-being and health, mothers were powerful figures in children’s lives, both for good and for ill. According to Betty Travitsky’s description of the new mother, her primary responsibility was the physical and spiritual health of her children—for girls for an extended time and for boys until they were seven and fathers took charge of their education. For Renaissance readers, the transmission of good traits and character to children was physical as well as biological and educational. It was commonly believed that a mother or wet-nurse “transmitted her own good qualities to her offspring by her breeding of the child in her womb, and by her nursing at her own breasts.” But the image of the lactation necessary for passing on a mother’s virtues to her child, invokes the “grotesque” maternal body, tainted by both sex and birth, as we’ve seen in Paster’s work. 

In *The Faerie Queene*, maternal power weighs oppressively on older children—young men and women who are meant to transition between youth and adulthood. Marinell’s mother, Cymoent, as we have seen, secures wealth for her son from her father (III.iv.21.7-22.9), encourages him in his knightly valor—she “fostred [him] up, till he

---

62 Adelman, 4-6.


64 Mendelson and Crawford, 29 and 67.
became / A mighty man at armes, and mickle fame / Did get through great adventures by
him donne” (III.iv.20.4-6)—and in essence forbids him to marry (III.iv.26). Critics
describe Cymoent as stifling and oppressing, an example of a mother whose love for her
son extends so far that it proves ill for him.65 Though she saves him from death by
begging the help of Tryphon, “the seagods surgeon” (III.iv.43.7-9; IV.xi.6.5-7), her
protective actions reveal an untoward power over Marinell’s behavior and decisions.
Similarly, the relationship between the witch and her son is one of overt and misused
authority. Goldberg sees them as “a demonic version of mother and son,” though the son
is able to separate from his mother and transfer his affections to Florimell in a “grotesque
parody of the liberation of the male from the overwhelming mother” (13). These mothers
exert a type of control over their sons that infantilizes them. The boundary of permissible
maternal authority is overstepped within the poem, indicating the possibility of unruly
mothers, especially for women with no direct male oversight.

In Renaissance culture this kind of agency might originate in the culturally
sanctioned role of mothers to educate their children. Written confirmation of this
maternal power can be found in mother’s legacies, a genre that depends on the bodily
authority of a mother who bears children and the biblical and cultural authority which
charges a mother to instruct her children to spiritual salvation.66 For example, Dorothy
Leigh’s The Mother’s Blessing (1616), addressed to her sons, provides bold instructions
to men who have long since left the nursery on topics from naming children and choosing
a wife to faith and private prayer. Leigh justifies her writing by reason of her motherly

65 Goldberg, 9-10; Celovsky, 320; Craig, 22.

affection and physical connection to her child: “Can a mother forget the child of her womb? [...] Nay rather, will she not labor now till Christ be formed in it?” 67 The written form of a legacy and the focus on the soul extend a mother’s influence past her own death, and possibly for generations to come. 68 These moments of motherly authority over their nearly (or already) adult children indicate that motherhood is a place of potential autonomy and control hidden within the seemingly dependent role of “wife.”

Mothering without fathers in The Faerie Queene raises the specter of the widow, though none of the mothers we have looked at are actually describes as widows. The widow is a female figure allowed autonomy, but seen as ultimately threatening. The only culturally sanctioned version of single motherhood was widowhood, which itself prompted another set of cultural anxieties. Within literature, widows were depicted “as ugly old crones or as greedy and sexually rapacious women looking for their next husbands.” 69 In a catalogue of literary examples of the “older woman” (often a widow), Patricia Shaw finds mostly “disagreeable manifestations.” 70 The most sympathetic depictions of older women are found in Renaissance drama and are primarily mothers lamenting their dead sons. This sympathetic mother/widow figure contrasts sharply with the stereotype of the oversexed, lascivious widow found in early modern medical texts,

67 Heller, The Mother’s Legacy, 293.


69 Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe, third ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 94.

imaginative writing, and memoirs of suitors who had attempted to woo widows.\textsuperscript{71} In \textit{The Woman's Doctor} (1652), Nicholas Fontanus sums up the stereotype:

\begin{quote}
what shall we say concerning Widowes, who lye fallow, and live sequestered from these Venerous conjunctions? we must conclude, that if they be young, of a black complexion, and hairie, and are likewise somewhat discoloured in their cheeks, that they have a spirit of salacity, and feele within themselves a frequent titillation, their seed being hot and prurient, doth irritate and inflame them to Venery.\textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

In addition to being stereotyped as lustful, widows were also feared because they could have power over minor children, could access family finances, and could arrange marriages, tasks traditionally within the male sphere.\textsuperscript{73} Barbara B. Diefendorf exposes a paradox in early modern culture:

\begin{quote}
The literary ‘querelle des femmes’ revolved largely around the argument that women were by nature weak, frivolous, and light-headed. The same arguments were used by jurists such as André Tiraqueau in commentaries justifying the legal incapacity of women. And yet the very men who argued that women were inherently weak and foolish were willing to entrust widows with important responsibilities for the rearing of children and the management of their properties—the very tasks on which the family’s future depended.\textsuperscript{74}
\end{quote}

She describes the practices in Europe of women promoting their sons’ careers and managing urban households and rural estates, and widows acting as executrixes.\textsuperscript{75} In


\textsuperscript{72} Quoted in Panek, 1.

\textsuperscript{73} See Chamberlain, “The Demonization of Cecropia,” 7.

\textsuperscript{74} Diefendorf, 679.

\textsuperscript{75} Diefendorf, 676-78. She suggests that the paradox can be explained partly by arguing “that women were legally incapable because they were married and not because they
practice, widows did have power, and while much of it was sanctioned and desired, it created cultural anxiety—anxiety that still reflects onto Britomart, who will become a mother and a widow simultaneously. Only by deferring Britomart’s destiny can Spenser avoid both the perils of the maternal body and the anxiety of maternal authority associated with widowhood and motherhood.

**Britomart “Out of Time”**

Spenser provides two views of Britomart: the narrative view, where she is a female knight on a quest for Artegaal, and the prophetic view, where she is simultaneously maiden, wife, mother, and widow. The narrative delays the fulfillment of this prophecy, keeping Britomart a static character, stuck in a transitional state. The delay signals a discomfort within the text about the maternal body and maternal authority. Because of the prophecy, the “out of time” figure of Britomart blends with the static–transitional Britomart. The prophecy’s portrayal of her as a future mother impacts how we read Britomart within the poem.

A Britomart “out of time”—a megablend—contains all the elements of her character that Spenser has introduced (see Figures 5.3 and 5.4). She is a knight in armor, protecting the vulnerable and following her quest. She is a chaste maiden, desiring her future husband and making her way from maidenhood to wifedom. She is a mother, bearing a son whose descendants will find their fulfillment in the reign of Elizabeth. She is a widow, reigning for her son and heir after her husband dies. Within the narrative,

were women” (679). She concludes: “The same principle of hierarchical authority that gave the husband dominion over his wife allowed the widow to step into the role of the head of the household upon her husband’s death” (679).
Britomart’s knightly identity, as we’ve seen, projects from the blend back to her person, the chaste maiden, enabling her to pursue her future husband and to protect herself from external threats. In the “out of time” megablend, her motherly identity also projects from the blended prophecy space to provide her with both additional authority and purpose (see Figure 5.5), grounded in the cultural authority granted to mothers and widows. Britomart is able to access this authority in her maidenly–knightly state to further her quest and move toward the fulfillment of Merlin’s prophecy.

Britomart exerts her authority most explicitly after she wins her battle with Radigund and saves Artegaill from his effeminized slavery. Her martial victory gives her an even greater authority, and she turns to the “household” of Radegone and puts it in order. Britomart “rights” the country by placing Artegaill in charge, privileging male succession and rule, and making women, herself included, subject to the male leadership. But as Julia Walker points out, throughout the scene Britomart is still in control: all of the active verbs are hers, while Artegaill’s are passive. Moreover, Britomart does not stay in Radegone; she and Artegaill separate so he can continue his quest. She is not yet a wife and so not under the authority of her husband, and as we know from the prophecy, her time subject to Artegaill will be minimal. Most important in Britomart’s restructuring of Radegone is the idea that her authority, based on her male prowess and bolstered by the reader’s knowledge of her future authority originating from maternity and widowhood, must and will be used to restore a divinely ordained order, one in concert with Neoplatonic ideals. Like Sidney’s suggestion in Arcadia that maternal authority can only

76 Walker, “Allegory,” 115. For a detailed reading of the Britomart–Radigund–Artegaill sequence, see Mary R. Bowman, “‘She there as Princess Rained’: Spenser’s Figure of Elizabeth,” Renaissance Quarterly 43.3 (1990): 509-28 (512-16).
be sanctioned if it is used for the good of the established order, Spenser establishes the
good use of authority to be to promote cultural conceptions of right order.

Britomart’s restructuring of Radegone is a response to the upside down world
where Radigund is able to manipulate and emasculate Artegall. Julia Walker sees
Britomart’s cry as she sees the effeminized Artegall—“farewell fleshly force”
(V.vii.40.9)—as Britomart giving up hope of the marriage and children “fiction” and
embracing the deferral of the prophecy. This phrase may well speak to Spenser’s
intentions to leave the poem uncompleted and Britomart in perpetual transition, but
Britomart is speaking here of Artegall’s lost faculties. Dressed in woman’s clothes, he
has taken on a female passiveness; the blended figure of Artegall, a knight in womanly
disguise—he is the foil of Britomart—has projected characteristics from the blend to
Artegall himself. He is no longer capable of fighting for his freedom. Britomart’s job,
then, is to reintegrate Artegall to society, reestablishing him as a knight so he is in the
right social position to be husband to her and father to her heir. She must break the blend
and erase Artegall’s participation in the upside-down world. Radigund is a mirror for
Britomart, an example of misused female authority: she embodies what Britomart could
become if she were to wield authority selfishly or for its own sake rather than in the
service of country and community. Britomart does gain authority from her armor and
knightly prowess, as Radigund does, but because her authority also stems from her future
motherhood, her societal position, she is able to use it in service rather than selfishness.

Conclusion

Britomart’s motherhood is deferred because of the concept’s complex figuration of
positive and negative connotations: Spenser avoids her maternity within the narrative
present of the poem to avoid the maternal body and the anxieties of maternal authority, yet maternal authority used in service of right order allows her power to free Artegaill. Britomart, then, is a complex blended figure. The “martiall Mayd” or virgin-knight blend stays consistent through the poem, both when she is perceived as a knight, and when she is revealed to be a maid. But the prophecy introduces another element to Britomart’s identity: she is a future mother. By combining the virgin–knight blend with the future mother blend, we can conceive of Britomart as a virgin–mother/mother–knight (see Figures 5.3 and 5.4). Her prophesied widowhood adds another element that emphasizes the “male–mother” blend—there is little time in her predicted life where she will lack autonomy. When we take the blend toward its future conclusion, Britomart becomes a pure maternal figure, unsoiled. Because her motherhood is deferred within the poem, her future succession is as free of the maternal body as generation is in the Garden of Adonis, or the miraculous conception and birth in and from Chrysogone’s womb. Because her authority is also a future phenomenon, it too stands outside the messy action of narrative reality and instead exists in an unsullied, ideal state.

Because Britomart’s deferral is unique within the text, this reading does not reveal much about other women’s transitions. But it does tell us that the potential for female rule through motherhood and widowhood requires a particular kind of deferral, one that keeps the possibility for the future open, but also one that keeps the messiness of birth and maternal authority outside the text. Spenser may be shying away from making Britomart too different from Elizabeth I. While Britomart doesn’t directly represent Elizabeth, she
does champion “Elizabeth’s signature virtue, chastity.” For Elizabeth, chastity did result in virginity because of her unmarried state. To extend Britomart’s chastity into married love, though the poem describes the process and has prepared Britomart for it, would be to make Britomart less representative of the particular expression of Elizabeth’s chastity. Elizabeth’s virginity exposed another articulation of maternal anxiety: the lack of an heir. Ty Buckman argues that the succession question plays a role in the deferral of Arthur and Gloriana’s meeting, and I think it likely that the lack of a successor for Elizabeth plays a role here too. In his prophecy, Merlin traces the lineage from Britomart to Elizabeth, and then lapses into a stupefied trance; we suspect he is having some sort of vision that he cannot articulate. Britomart’s motherhood amounts to the same thing—unutterable and unknowable except in its broadest outlines.

As we look toward Elizabeth—as both a descendant of Britomart and as one reflected in the various “mirrors” in The Faerie Queene, including Britomart—the issues of female rule and succession are particularly apt. By engaging the issues in the context of celebration of praise of Elizabeth and glorification of her chastity, Spenser creates an ambiguity that softens potential criticism (and avoids treason). At this point in her life, Elizabeth clearly was not going to marry or bear children, so the issue of succession was one of the most important of the decade. By stifling discussion of succession and possible successors, Elizabeth forced the issue of succession underground, as it were.

77 Villeponteaux, 60.


79 Petersen, 5, 17, and 62-65; Bach, 3-8.
Literature became a fruitful place for the conversation to resume. Fiction offered a way for authors to write about succession without directly addressing the succession question and to disguise possible criticism in ambiguity of allegorical referents and interpretive spaces.

Merlin’s silence is itself a blended space, one that is oddly blank. Since it is preceded by a recitation of lineage, the logical next step would be to record who follows Elizabeth in the line of succession. Spenser may have Merlin lapse into silence because he does not know what the post-Tudor world will look like, or because he does not wish to venture a guess. However, instead of seeing the silence as merely an absence—a lack of information or of knowledge—we can read the silence through its possible fullness. Spenser’s silence (exhibited in Merlin’s trance-like state) places the succession question at the center of Britomart’s quest, and at the beginning of her transition from maid to mother. The continued presence of her future motherhood in the text, through the reader’s awareness of Merlin’s prophecy, keeps succession at the forefront of Book III and ensures that Britomart’s success and succession are inextricably linked. By analogy, Elizabeth’s success and succession are linked as well.

Both the “in time” and the “out of time” blends are relevant to our reading of Elizabeth’s blended self-presentation. As a maiden–mother figure, she exists in a state like Britomart’s within the narrative present of the poem: she is chaste and powerful, and possibly vulnerable. Spenser appears to align Britomart with Elizabeth’s “female prince” image. As a woman of authority, Elizabeth maintains a relative stability—or at least creates a myth of stability. She can (and should) be wooed, but it must be on her terms.
She is seeking out her destiny, but is seemingly stuck in a transitional state, not under the authority of father or husband.

The “out of time” Britomart adds the complexity of seeing Elizabeth as a megablend and incorporates the “mother” role that Elizabeth claims early in her reign. Understanding Britomart as a future mother via the blend provides a model for understanding Elizabeth’s maternity as potential. Through part of her reign, she and her people seemed to assume that she would someday be a mother. By the time *The Faerie Queene* was published, her childbearing years were over. Because of her lack of fertility, Elizabeth’s motherhood became solely metaphorical, but the authority Britomart wields as a future mother had been and continued to be imputed to Elizabeth through her figurative maternity.

As Britomart moves through narrative time, she is defined by the combination, or blend, of her present and future roles. So Elizabeth, as she claims maternal authority, relies on future possibilities. By virtue of Merlin’s prophecy, Britomart is all—maid, wife, widow, and mother—yet none.80 She is all potential. By virtue of expectation and metaphor, Elizabeth as well is all—maid and mother, prince and queen, handmaiden to God and servant of her people.

80 Stephens makes this point about Amoret: “Into Other Arms,” 541.
Figure 5.1: The martial maid
Figure 5.2: Knightly qualities project from the blend back to Britomart
Figure 5.3: Britomart in narrative order
Figure 5.4: Britomart in chronological order
Figure 5.5: Knightly and motherly qualities project from the blend back to Britomart
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Whereas Amy Cook asserts that conceptual blending theory focuses on the means of meaning and ignores the meaning itself, ¹ I argue that conceptual blending also explores what authors mean by analyzing how they make meaning—really, how language, culture, and cognition connect in the reading of a text, or the performance of a play. My analyses of Sidney’s Arcadia, Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus, and Spenser’s The Faerie Queene not only apply conceptual blending theory to various genres, but also interrogate the how of meaning making to get at the what of meaning. These chapters attempt three tasks: 1) to explore how each author exploits Elizabeth’s maternal metaphor; 2) to seek meaning within each text, through analyzing blends and focusing on the intersection of language, culture, and cognition; and 3) to indicate what may project from the (blended) world of the text to the Elizabethan reality, particularly toward Elizabeth herself and the succession.

Elizabeth, as we saw in Chapter 2, relied on blends to create her public persona. In the instance of the mother–queen blend, she is focused on the succession and Parliament’s attempts to mandate her biological motherhood. Read in light of these three literary works, I argue, Elizabeth’s metaphor invited contemporary interpretations that mean to push her toward a settled succession. These works also provide evidence of the opportunities her interlocutors had to reshape the blend, reveal the instability of the blend, and establish the incompatibility of the blended self and the isolated body natural

¹ Cook, Shakespearean Neuroplay, 153.
and body politic. Because the discussion of succession was initially frowned upon and ultimately prohibited during Elizabeth’s reign, the maternal metaphor became a site for exploring the forbidden topic. Maternity and the succession were clearly linked, and the function of Elizabeth’s metaphorical maternity shifted over her reign from replacing actual maternity to refiguring her authority to becoming a mode of praise of the queen.

Elizabeth could call herself the “mother of England” in her speeches because of a cultural context in which the family and the state had been linked in various ways for at least a century. Elizabeth’s articulation sits squarely between her half-sister Mary’s distancing simile, when she described herself as “like a mother,” and her nephew James’s formalized patriarchy, which demanded obedience to the king as to a father. Through her metaphor Elizabeth redefined her relationship with her people, claiming to move toward an authority grounded in love rather than force, motivating her subjects to obey because of mutual love rather than duty. Elizabeth’s metaphor, however, did not stand in isolation; it was part of a larger rhetorical transaction. Both through the direct response of Parliament to her speeches, and across time in various media, Elizabeth’s subjects articulated responses to her claim to maternity that challenged and shaped contemporary readings of the metaphor.

**Reading the mothers of *Arcadia***

In *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia*, Sidney provides the strongest evidence for a “hidden” discussion, an example of the way the succession question went underground in the late 1580s and 1590s. By calling herself “mother of England,” Elizabeth attempted to redefine her relationship with her subjects as familial rather than political: to inspire obedience in her subjects by invoking maternal love, rather than requiring obedience
because of political authority and law. Sidney challenges Elizabeth’s self-representation by describing motherhood as always political. Gynecia, Miso, and Cecropia all function within the political realm, even when they are acting within the limits of the household. Gynecia’s unspoken lust for Pyrocles/Cleophila/Zelmane threatens her relationship with her daughters, her husband, and her people, potentially disrupting the succession. Although Miso ostensibly has no political role—she guards the princesses solely in domestic settings—she also nearly derails the succession. And though Cecropia’s forceful entry into the public sphere is motivated in part by domestic feelings of love for her son (she is motivated even more by the drive for power and position), her goal is to disrupt the established political order. Moreover, the other mothers in both versions of the book—Pyrocles’s and Musidorus’s mothers, for instance; or Parthenia’s mother—all affect the public sphere through the ways they raise their children. For Sidney, motherhood cannot be separated from the political; domestic life and public life are interwoven. Sidney redefines motherhood, and in doing so he modifies the meaning of Elizabeth’s maternal metaphor.

By reshaping the “mother” input in Elizabeth’s metaphor, Sidney challenges the idea that Elizabeth’s relationship with her people can be other than political. Even the context of maternity cannot exist separately from public life. Elizabeth’s domestication of her country is more complex. As we saw in Chapter 2, the maternal metaphor can be read as a “single-scope blend” where the organization frame for the blend comes from only one input (in this case, the FAMILY frame provides the structure through which to understand the STATE frame). Sidney echoes shifts of the family–state analogy that occurred over the previous decades when he asserts that the two cannot be separated.
Sidney’s reading may call for Elizabeth’s metaphor to be read as a “double-scope blend,” where elements from both inputs help to structure the blend; the conceptual frameworks of family and of state might intersect in the blend, both providing elements of structure to create a “new monarchy.”

Ultimately, Sidney directs Elizabeth toward a settled succession. While Elizabeth says she is already a loving mother, Sidney shows through his Arcadian mothers that good mothers protect the stability and succession of the monarchy, and that if they do not, there are grave consequences. Through the reinstatement of Gynecia as queen, Sidney also offers grace to Elizabeth, inverting the usual roles—the monarch should offer grace to her people.

Arcadia is closely engaged with political issues, showing a direct response to contemporary discussions of marriage, succession, and rule. But it is important to understand the work as more than one-to-one political allegory. The text addresses the Elizabethan world on a conceptual level, embodying early modern concepts of motherhood in Gynecia, Miso, Cecropia, and the other mothers within the text. Sidney explores the complexities of these concepts, ultimately providing a commentary on motherhood that applies to Elizabeth through her mother-queen blend.

Reading Tamora

Our examination of Titus Andronicus prompts us to read the blend of Elizabeth as mother of England in three ways: as a megablend, in terms of what is left out of the blend, and as a performance. First, the megablend Shakespeare creates as he reveals more and more information about Tamora mirrors the way Elizabeth’s self-representation and iconography was established during her life and after her death. Each additional
appearance, portrait, speech, and letter revealed or reinforced (and sometimes contradicted) an aspect of the blend we term “Elizabeth I.” She was born “Elizabeth Tudor,” and at her ascension her identity became compressed into “Queen Elizabeth”—at that moment her royal identity became inseparable from her person. In taking on the queen’s body—the metaphysical identity of “monarch”—Elizabeth became the being that took on both her private physical self and her public role. In adding associations with motherhood, chastity, worldliness, wisdom, and royalty, etc., she added new elements to her identity. Moreover, the speeches and writings of others added and subtracted from the blend. As we saw with Tamora, a blend, even a blend of identity, is not static. As new information is added, the blend changes. And so with Elizabeth; even after her death, those who eulogized her changed the blend of her identity as they emphasized her glory and her virginity, creating a mythology that did not exist during her lifetime.²

The second element from Tamora’s tale relevant to Elizabeth is the depiction of motherhood itself. As we saw in Chapter 2, Elizabeth’s metaphorical motherhood emphasized the loving and caring aspects of idealized motherhood and implicitly required obedience from her subjects in response to that love. Tamora the mother–queen reveals a darker side of motherhood that mingles with the love and care she has for her sons. Her motherhood is less individual and more clannish, and requires revenge for the injury done to her reputation, her sons, and her family name. Ultimately, Tamora embodies both the womb and the tomb: she is simultaneously the means of entry to the world and a sick means of exit, as she ingests her sons after their deaths. In the moments

² Hackett, *Virgin Mother*, 198-234.
before her own death, her motherhood has become grotesque, a punishment for her cruelty.

Is Tamora a representation of Elizabeth? There is nothing in the play to suggest an explicit linkage. But she does embody the mother–queen Elizabeth deliberately created in her metaphor. As such, Tamora complicates Elizabeth’s blend by embodying what Elizabeth wishes to leave out. Elizabeth does not wish to be a bloody queen like her sister had been; she wishes to keep peace. But in fact she does inflict Tamora-esque punishment on her subjects, such as the mutilation of John Stubbs and his publisher by chopping off their right hands. In Titus Andronicus, Shakespeare acknowledges the possibility that motherhood is not simply a role shaped by Protestant ethics. Rather the historical underpinnings of motherhood are primal and clannish, extending to kin groups and requiring the one—especially the queen—to stand for the many.

Finally, Tamora provides an exploration of queenship as a performance as well as an identity. Tamora is Queen of the Goths, and she embodies that role. She also becomes Empress of Rome, and she embodies that role as well. However, through her asides, revelations from her sons, and her conversations with Aaron, we learn that her embodiment of the role of Empress is a performance, one much like the actor embodying the role of Tamora. This idea of performance allows for a distinction between the identity of the actor and the role itself. In performance they blend, but given separations of time and space and costume, the identity of the actor can become distinct from the role. Tamora does exactly this: she embodies the role of Empress of Rome, but has moments within the play where she steps outside of that role and speaks from her identity as Queen of the Goths. In this way, Shakespeare provides his viewers with the opportunity to
understand the possible duplicity of queens. As he heightens the distinction between the “two bodies”—one public, one private—and resolves them with a collapse of the public body, he draws attention to the performances of Elizabeth (or any public figure) and acknowledges anxiety that might stem from the unknowns surrounding her private self. Reading Tamora provides a conceptual language with which to understand Elizabeth’s “two bodies” and the tensions they belie.

**Reading Britomart**

Of the three authors examined in this dissertation, Spenser exploits blending in the most complex ways. Instead of manipulating Elizabeth’s definition of motherhood to challenge the most obvious interpretation of her metaphor, and instead of using the accumulation of characteristics (or inputs) that increase over the course of the work, Spenser explains his blends early in the work and then explores what happens when two blends describe the same person. For Britomart, this means we see her *in time* (the knight-maiden) and *out of time* (the knight-maiden-wife-mother-widow-queen). The *in time* blend functions on a more literal level: Britomart is actually dressed as a knight. Her blended disguise plays with the same gender issues Elizabeth does, most pointedly in the Tilbury speech, which she reportedly delivered while wearing a breastplate and mounted on a charger.³ Elizabeth’s costume was less a disguise than Britomart’s, and more a signifier of her military associations. However, because military could be equated with maleness, the costume, in effect, served a similar signifying function as Britomart’s: both women have

³ See Levin, *Heart and Stomach*, 143-44.
internal qualities that match the external costume, blending the male and female in one body.

This blending pattern in *The Faerie Queene* continues with the *out of time* Britomart: the knight-maiden-wife-mother-widow-queen megablend. Of all these roles, motherhood is most privileged in Merlin’s prophecy; all the others support it. Wifedom makes motherhood permissible, and queenship makes motherhood crucial. Widowhood reiterates the male–female blend by giving Britomart the authority of a regent, made possible by her motherhood. Elizabeth, too, is a megablend of various roles and characteristics. Moreover, throughout her reign, motherhood was a consistent element in the complex and evolving designs of her own self-representation and her subjects’ representations of their monarch. When she flirted with various courtships, she excited the possibility of her actual motherhood; post-Anjou, she and her people wrestled with what it meant to have a virgin queen—one without a natural successor. How could Elizabeth be mother and not-mother at the same time?

Conceptual blending allows for the cognitive dissonance of the present and the not-present. One can conceive of Elizabeth as virgin and mother at the same time. A logical point of comparison is the Virgin Mary, but Elizabeth differs from Mary in significant ways. Mary’s actual maternity is complicated by the absence of a physical male present at conception. The church explained it as an extraordinary, supernatural occurrence, a mystery. Elizabeth’s motherhood, on the other hand, is possible and present metaphorically, but does not exist in physical reality. The human brain can conceive of both instances because it is able to blend incongruous concepts into improbable imaginings. And Spenser’s exploration of the text-bound complexities of Britomart
provides another avenue for understanding Elizabeth’s already-and-not-yet state of motherhood.

**Reading Elizabeth**

These three texts provide examples of how we can read Elizabeth—as a megablend, as a performer, as always political, as a figure defined through possibility and idealized in later life and in death. Her modes of self-presentation are challenged and extended through literature, especially as discussion of the succession question became unseemly and then a punishable offense. Literature is one site of the rhetorical transaction between Elizabeth and her subjects. As I expand Cook’s analysis by examining poetry and prose as well as drama, one also might look to letters, diaries, art, ballads, material objects, and other texts to find traces of the conversation about Elizabeth’s relationship to her subjects. Lyric poetry lends itself to metaphor analysis and conceptual blending theory because of its extensive use of metaphor; analyzing the way various metaphors interact can be especially fruitful. Masques, entertainments, and other performances are also ripe for analysis because of their reliance on blends between courtier (or subject) and character, and the inclusion of embodied concepts. This dissertation examines one aspect of Elizabeth’s self-presentation, but there is much work to be done on other facets of the elaborate megablend that captures an instance of Elizabeth’s public self.

**Conceptual blending and literary analysis**

Conceptual blending theory offers a unique approach to literary analysis because it focuses on the intersection of language, culture, and cognition. While formal and historicist theories favor one element over the other, conceptual blending, as a part of
cognitive theory, attempts to engage with cognitive processes and foregrounds both language and culture to do so. In the previous chapters, I have analyzed a number of different conceptual blends in order to illuminate my investigation of the historical and cultural context in Elizabethan England, the linguistic articulations of the mother-queen blend, and the ways in which traditional literary theories can support cognitive analysis. Scholarship that addresses the intersection of cognitive science and literary analysis has developed rapidly in the last two decades. Conceptual blending theory is only one subject in a vast discipline that bears on literary inquiry. It is, I argue, a fruitful mode of inquiry. It offers a way to read texts—both literary and otherwise—to discover how something is expressed as a means to understand what a text or utterance means. It is a formal linguistic approach to literature and expression (verbal, written, painted) that asks how the mind can understand contradictory concepts; in other words, how we can blend two familiar ideas to create new concepts. Moreover, it works in concert with traditional literary analysis, with new historicism, with cultural materialism, and with more formal literary theories. Conceptual blending theory examines the places where language, culture, and the brain intersect in order to understand all three elements and to divine meaning. A tool so rich can read even the mind of a queen.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works Written before 1700 (and later editions; place of publication for early modern books is London, unless otherwise noted)


Cranmer, Thomas. *Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth I (1547-1571)*. Gainesville: Scholar’s Facsimiles and Reprints, 1968.

— — — . *Certaine sermons appointed by the Queenes Maiestie, to be declared and reade, by al parsons, vicars, and curates, euery Sunday and holy daye in their churches: and by her graces aduice perused and ouerseen, for the better vnderstanding of the simple people*. 1574. STC (2nd ed.) 13654.


Stubbs, John. *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf VVhereinto England is Like to be Swallovved By Another French Mariage, if the Lord Forbid Not the Banes, By
Letting Her Maiestie See the Sin and Punishment Thereof. H. Singleton for W. Page, 1579. STC (2nd ed.) 23400.


Works Written after 1700


Bowman, Mary R. “‘She there as Princess Rained’: Spenser’s Figure of Elizabeth.” *Renaissance Quarterly* 43.3 (1990): 509-528.


