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A thesis submitted to the Department of the English Language and Literature as a partial fulfillment for the Master's Degree in the English Option:  
Literature and Civilization

**Unveiling the Character of Queen Elizabeth I: A Historical Analysis of  
Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth: the Golden Age* Film (2007)**

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**Academic Year: 2023/2024**

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my parent Salah and Meriem whose support and love have been always the guiding light to realize my goals one of which is this master thesis.

I also dedicate it to my siblings Soundous, Mouetasim, Saif Allah, and friends Omaima and Narimane who have accompanied me through tough circumstances.

## **Acknowledgments**

First and foremost, my deepest gratitude goes to the Almighty Allah for endowing me with the strength and capacity to conduct and accomplish this research.

I am thankful to my supervisor, Dr. Boumaraf Hanane, for her support, guidance, and assistance throughout the research process. I am likewise grateful to the esteemed jury members, Dr. Kerboua Salim and Dr. Mohrem Boubakeur, for their commitment to evaluate this work and providing me with insightful instructions that contribute to its elaboration.

I am also indebted to all my professors of the English Department at Biskra University who have enlightened my mind with information about English as a language and culture.

## **Abstract**

Throughout history, Queen Elizabeth I has been portrayed as a perfect lady with unraveling faculties to rule England at the height of the Renaissance. Nevertheless, artistic works that adopt different perspectives to tackle the vital presence of the most recognized queen in English history provide different depictions of her character. One of the movies shedding light on this historical icon is Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* film (2007) which is the case study for this investigation that explores the queen's personality, her flows and strengths, and her contributions to the construction of the history of England. The study requires the incorporation of the historical approach and the feminist perspective to display the place of this historical figure as a woman, queen, and war leader. The findings show that Queen Elizabeth is depicted artistically not purely historically where some falsifications serve to the aesthetic representation of her character.

### **Keywords**

Character, depiction, English history, historical film, Queen Elizabeth I.

## ملخص

على مر التاريخ صورت الملكة اليزابيث الاولى كسيدة قوية تتمتع بقدرات مثالية حيث حكمت إنجلترا في ذروة عصر النهضة. ومع ذلك فإن الأعمال الفنية التي تعتمد وجهات نظر مختلفة لمعالجة الوجود الحيوي للملكة المعترف بها في التاريخ الإنجليزي تقدم تصورا مختلفا لشخصيتها. أحد الأفلام التي تسلط الضوء على هذه الأيقونة التاريخية هو فيلم إيزابيث للمخرج شيخار كابور: فيلم اليزابيث العصر الذهبي. (2007) تم اختيار الفيلم كحالة دراسة لهذا البحث الذي يستكشف الشخصية، نقاط الضعف والقوة لديها والمساهمات في بناء تاريخ إنجلترا. لذلك تتطلب الدراسة نهجا تاريخيا ودمج المنظور النسوي لإظهار مكانة هذه الشخصية التاريخية كأميرة وملكة وقائدة حرب. تظهر النتائج أن الملكة إيزابيث من خلال هذا الفيلم قد تم تصويرها فنيا ليس تاريخيا حيث بعض التزييف يخدم التمثيل الجمالي لشخصيتها.

## الكلمات المفتاحية

الشخصية /التصوير /التاريخ الإنجليزي /الفيلم التاريخي /الملكة اليزابيث الاولى

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## General Introduction

In the contemporary era, some historical figures are artistically represented through works of fiction. The historical novel has been the best means for this representation. Recently, the historical film started to gain fame, especially by shedding light on such famous figures as kings and queens of England. One of them is Queen Elizabeth I who appeared in various movies, yet the most remarkable appearance is in Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* film (2007). This study explores the manifestation of the character of Queen Elizabeth I in the film, showing its flaws and power and its contribution to the flourishing of England and thus her presence in the English history.

There have been previous studies dealing with the depiction of this significant historical figure. Some of them used the feminist approach for the analysis of the character in the historical film. Bausela Buccianti explores in her article, "*Elizabeth: The Golden Age: Historical Film or Fictionalized History?*" that Kapur's movie *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*, displays some historical inaccuracies. One of these falsifications is the omission of such important figures as William Cecil and Sir Francis Drake and crediting Sir Walter Raleigh with unachievable deeds particularly in the battle against the Armada, and manipulating the age, accent, and ethnicity of characters including those of Infanta Isabel of Spain; Mary, Queen of Scots, and the Spanish. The script also introduces major changes to events leading to the Babington plot, a planned assassination attempt by English Catholics. While historical novels often use detail for faithfulness, the implications of manipulated events in historical fiction remain. Cate Blanchett, the actress who played the major role in the movie, emphasizes that the film aims to entertain and inspire audiences rather than focusing on historical accuracy. However, the film portrays Queen Elizabeth as compassionate and merciful while Catholics in England were persecuted, Mary was held in terrible conditions, and her adversaries were not physically deformed. Mia



Treacey's study on "Screened History" reveals that historical fiction films after the 2000s often overlook key themes like national identity, heritage, war, gender, race, and popular culture, leading to Anglo-centric discourse. The film's hyperbolic characters and changes contribute to a negative image of Catholics in England during the late sixteenth century. Combining historiography and literary theory can help determine the accuracy of historical fiction, as there is no clear distinction between factual and fictional language (7-8). Despite the negative reviews on this film, it stands as an iconic artistic product of contemporary historical drama. Therefore, the study is significant as it focuses on depicting the queen as a woman in power and a female in the mirror. It examines her inner life and her presence as a queen who creates solutions for religious matters and as a winning war leader.

The general research question is:

To what extent does the film character unveil the real character of Queen Elizabeth I?

This general question is subdivided into sub-questions:

- How do the Female actors impact the construction of Queen Elizabeth I character?
- What are the factors that make Elizabeth I a powerful queen in the historical film?

The research aims are as follows:

- To show the shadow of Queen Elizabeth I throughout the film, focusing on her weaknesses and strengths.
- To display the effect of different characters, male and female, on the major character.

For the exploration of Queen Elizabeth I character in the movie, the study requires the use of the historical approach and the feminist perspective. The historical figure that is represented through a work of art is thus examined from the point of view of history and

feminism. Queen Elizabeth I is seen as a woman holding power and a female with her weaknesses and secrets.

The thesis is structured into two chapters: theoretical and practical besides the general introduction and a general conclusion. The first chapter, a theoretical framework, explains the approach used for the study and of the genre of the historical film, ending with a review of the representation of Elizabeth I as a queen in films. The second chapter is an interpretation of the representation of the character of Queen Elizabeth I through the film using the historical approach.

## **Chapter I: Theoretical Background**

### **Introduction:**

Historical films bring the past to life on screen, blending fact with fiction to create compelling narratives rooted in historical events. Directors use various approaches, from strict adherence to historical accuracy to artistic interpretation, to engage audiences and convey the essence of different eras. These films not only entertain but also educate, offering insights into cultures, events, and figures that have shaped our world.

The historical genre encompasses films set in the past, often focusing on significant events, figures, or periods. It blends elements of drama, adventure, and sometimes romance, with settings ranging from ancient civilizations to recent history. While historical accuracy is valued, filmmakers often prioritize storytelling and emotional resonance, crafting narratives that resonate with contemporary audiences while honoring the spirit of the past.

Queen Elizabeth I, renowned for her reign during England's Golden Age, has been a compelling figure in historical films. She is portrayed as both a powerful monarch and a complex woman, so her on-screen depictions vary widely. From the regal portrayals of Cate Blanchett to the intimate dramas of her personal life, these films explore her leadership, intrigues at court, and enduring legacy. Each portrayal offers a glimpse into her persona, highlighting her strength, intellect, and influence on history. These topics introduce the rich diversity and narrative potential of historical films, showcasing how they bring the past alive while interpreting history through cinematic storytelling.

### **1.1 A Historical Review of Film Industry**

The adaptation of written literary works and dramatization of the historical figures lives have revolutionized literary studies field. Indeed, the appearance of film industry has enriched literature and culture with a new artistic genre which is the movie. The latter entails sub-genres, its different types based on its perspectives, such as the historical film.

A historical film is a genre of films that aim to depict events, figures or periods from the past with creating and representing historical details. “A fiction film” exposes “past events or set within a historical period.” In addition, this extensive genre shares territory with the biopic, costume drama, heritage film, and epic film” (Kuhn, Westwell 636). It seems that there isn't a unified definition for the historical cinema genre, which shows historical events; it's still unclear to film experts.

Arguably, prominent scholars of film and history, such as Robert Rosenstone, have distinct interpretations of what makes a historical film. The degree of true history, the duration of the past, and the use of the term "historical" in characterizing the genre are among the elements that have varied across thinkers. One significant gap in the discussion of movies and history is the absence of a single definition (McMahon 6).

### **1.1.1 Categories of the Historical Film**

Historical films cover a wide range of historical representations on screen, such as spectacle, essay, personal, oral, and postmodern histories, as well as drama and anti-drama. It divides them into three categories: history as experiment, history as document, and history as drama.

Dramatic history has been produced all around the world ever since motion pictures started narrating stories. Several well-known movies, like *Cleopatra*, *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, and *Gone with the Wind*, have dramatized historical events. Two

types of historical films exist: those are based on real people, events, or movements, and those whose main storyline and characters are made up, but whose historical context is essential to the meaning and story. But in historical movies, the line between real and made-up characters is frequently blurred, as the new movie *Glory* demonstrates by switching between real and made-up locations (Rosenstone 2).

History as a document is a recent form of historical film, originating from the social problem documentary of the 1930s and post-World War II patriotic retrospective. It combines recent footage of historical sites with older footage, often from newsreels, photos, artifacts, paintings, graphics, and newspaper and magazine clippings. Professional historians trust history as a document more than history as a drama because it seems closer to written history. However, the promise of historical materials in documentary films is often saturated with nostalgia, claiming to see and feel what people in the past saw and felt (Rosenstone 2).

History as an experiment encompasses various film forms, both dramatic and documentary, and sometimes a combination of both, including works by avant-garde and independent filmmakers in the United States, Europe, former communist countries, and the Third World (Rosenstone 3).

The film constructs a historical reality by blending representation codes and creating a realistic film to make the past accessible and suitable for the present audience. This involves detailed production design according to the historical context. Cinematography and special effects reflect the historical world, while scriptwriting adapts historical language.

Rosenstone points out how the film constructs the historical word in the following ideas. Mainstream films tell history as a story with a beginning, middle, and end, often

conveying a moral message and feeling of uplift. These films, whether about slavery, the Holocaust, or the Khmer Rouge, often portray progress or uplift. They are structured to leave viewers grateful for the better times they didn't live in. However, some films, like *Radio Bikini* and *JFK*, leave lingering questions about meaningful change or human progress, such as the future of American democracy. Despite these doubts, the presence of stars like Kevin Costner reassures viewers that the security state problems will be addressed (3).

Film focuses on history as the story of individuals, often renowned or those who have faced exploitation and oppression. This approach substitutes personal problems with historical solutions, avoiding difficult social issues (Rosenstone 3). Film presents history as a closed, complete, and simple past, with no alternative possibilities or doubts. This confidence in the screen's assertions can trouble even historians. Natalie Davis, a historical consultant on the film, questions the cost of the "powerful simplicity" of *Martin Guerre*. She later wrote a book to restore this dimension. Despite incorporating various witnesses and experts, the documentary remains uncontested and unproblematic, allowing for alternative viewpoints to be expressed. This effect is similar to dissenting minor characters in a drama, underlining the truth and solidity of the main world or argument (Rosenstone 3).

The film emotionally and personalizes history through actors and historical witnesses, presenting it as triumph, anguish, joy, despair, adventure, suffering, and heroism. Both dramatized works and documentaries use the medium's special capabilities, such as close-ups, quick juxtapositions, and music and sound effects, to heighten and intensify the audience's feelings about the events depicted on the screen. This raises questions about whether emotion should be a historical category and if film adds to our

understanding of the past by making us feel deeply about historical people, events, and situations (Rosenstone 4).

Film shows history as a process, bringing together things that are often split apart in written history. It breaks the convention of analytic history, which often fragments the past into distinct chapters, topics, and categories. The film provides an integrative image, making history centrally a process of changing social relationships where political and social questions are interwoven (Rosenstone 4).

The film also gives us a sense of how common objects appeared when it were use in the film to give the past vibe, such as period, clothing, tools, utensils, weapons, and furniture. This capability of the film may lead to the myth of false historicity, which suggests that history is simply a "period look" and that things themselves are history because of what they mean to people of a particular time and place (Rosenstone 4).

History as experiment is a film of opposition to the mainstream practice and Hollywood codes of realism and storytelling. It includes works that are analytic, unemotional, distanced, multicausal, expressionist, surrealist, disjunctive, and postmodern. These films aim to point to past events, converse about history, and show why history should be meaningful to people in the present. They rarely clean, nationalize, or concrete the past, but often ideologize it. Experimental films help revise history, bypassing the demands for truth, evidence, and argument. Although unfamiliar, their breakthroughs are incorporated into mainstream film scripts (Rosenstone 3).

### **2.4.1 Historical Film Approaches:**

Throughout history, historical films have been controversial subjects often disturbing professional historians and never satisfying them, because they can fabricate

history by fictionalizing important people, events, and movements. However, some scholars argue that films are out of the control of historians, it manifests that they do not own the past. On the other hand, some historians are influenced by historical films; it is unclear how many historians learn about the past through films outside their professional area. However, by this time some historians become more involved with film either teachers or students. Thus, that historical film can convey more than written world for that historical films have become a regular part from academic community and journals (Rosenstone 1). The contribution of historical films to historical understanding has not been systematically evaluated. Rosenstone defines two major approaches to evaluating historical films are the Explicit and Implicit approaches.

The explicit approach views motion pictures as reflections of the social and political concerns of the era they were made, such as *American History/American Film*. This strategy does not provide a specific role for films discussing historical issues or distinguishing them from other types of films. It is time to treat written works of history similarly (Rosenstone 1).

The Implicit approach views motion pictures as books on screen, subject to the same judgments as written history. It assumes that written history is the only way to understand past-present relationships and that it mirrors reality. However, history is a construction, containing data from a larger project or theory embedded in the practice (Rosenstone 2).

The debate on history on film requires a new perspective, focusing on the larger realm of past and present. Instead of focusing on whether historical films convey facts or arguments as well as written history, it is important to consider the historical world each film constructs, how it is constructed, and how it relates to written history. This approach



allows for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the two (Rosenstone 2).

## **1.2 Elizabeth I on the screen:**

Queen Elizabeth is an iconic historical figure in English history. Thought-out history has been portrayed in several artistic and literary works, which inspired the filmmakers to provide different images for her in their films. Yet, the most remarkable film is directed by S. Kapur.

### **1.2.1 Elizabeth 1998 Film:**

Produced by Shekhar Kapur, the film revolves around Elizabeth, the Queen, and the woman, as the title suggests. As the movie goes on, we get to see the story from her perspective and see how her appearance and attitude change. With the terror of the Protestant executions, the political intrigues, the power struggle, the color and bustle of the Elizabethan court, and the possibility of betrayal towards the young Queen, the movie creates a realistic sense of the era. Conflict is the film's central theme. Conflict arose between the Queen and her bishops, between Mary and Elizabeth, between Catholics and Protestants, and between duty and love. The idea that death is imminent is another ominous and dangerous feeling that permeates the movie. There are several ways to convey this ominous and menacing vibe. The audience is given a God's eye perspective of the terrible martyrdom in the opening scene as it is filmed from a high vantage point, showing the victims as they burn. The Duke of Norfolk is portrayed as a political and sexual predator. He has a clean-shaven head and is clothed in black, just like other great villains in movies (Kirkup 6).

The way that John Ballard, the monk, tries to assassinate Elizabeth is reminiscent of a horror movie. He glides down the dimly lit hallways in slow motion, his robe covering his face, and when Elizabeth speaks, he inexplicably disappears (Kirkup 6). But Elizabeth steals the show in this movie. She is initially seen in the light, smiling and dancing slowly, unburdened by responsibilities or state-related matters. She takes on increasing amounts of responsibility as the movie goes on, as evidenced by the way her appearance, haircut, makeup, and demeanor evolve (Kirkup 6).

She appears to be practicing her speech like an actress rehearsing lines for a play as she gets ready to meet with her bishops to consider uniting the Church of England. The brief direct-to-camera clips are put together to resemble a video show reel. She does, however, gain confidence when she comes before the bishops, or the audience, and is seen kindly reprimanding her court with grace and wit. Her sacrifice of love and marriage is revealed in the film's climactic scene, when we witness her hair being chopped off, connecting her to the martyrs at the opening of the story "See, I have become a virgin. I am married to England" (Kirkup 6).

### **1.2.2 Queen Elizabeth I (1912) by Sarah Bernhardt:**

Victoria Duckett in her chapter "Her Majesty Moves: Sarah Bernhardt, Queen Elizabeth and the development of motion pictures" discusses the representation of the young queen in the movie. Sarah Bernhardt's roles in the late nineteenth century and her belief that they could still be relevant to audiences in the twentieth century are reflected in the 1912 feature film *Queen Elizabeth*. *Queen Elizabeth* is frequently cited as an example of "filmed theater" in the annals of the film industry. The chapter examines the techniques used in *Queen Elizabeth's* cinematography and how the movie makes use of Queen Elizabeth's lengthy and rich history of appearances in popular culture, theater, and

the visual arts. It makes the case that Queen Elizabeth was a perceptive and imaginative reaction to both the tastes and styles of Bernhardt's day as well as the dramatic possibilities of the motion picture. It also talks about how Bernhardt applies the same methods and techniques to filmmaking that Paul Delaroche did with historical painting in the past. Lastly, it presents itself as a historical drama film by demonstrating how Queen Elizabeth forges a connection with William Shakespeare (Ducket).

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, defining the historical film as a genre involves recognizing its distinctive features: a narrative rooted in past events, authentic period settings, and an emphasis on historical accuracy, often intertwined with creative storytelling. Various approaches to historical films range from rigorous adherence to documented history to more liberal adaptations that prioritize dramatic effect. This spectrum allows filmmakers to explore different facets of historical storytelling, from documentary-like precision to imaginative reinterpretations. *Elizabeth I on the Screen* exemplifies these diverse approaches, with portrayals that oscillate between factual representation and artistic license, each adding unique dimensions to our understanding of her reign and legacy. Together, these elements underscore the rich complexity and enduring appeal of historical films.

## **Chapter II: the Representation of Queen Elizabeth I Character via**

### **Kapur's Film**

#### **Introduction:**

One of the historically recognized Monarchs of England whose cultural and political presence is remarkable stands Queen Elizabeth I. Due to her contribution which is documented by historians, this eminent historical icon is dramatized by movie makers. S. Kapur's film offers an artistic image of the historical figure focusing on her as a heroine and certain characters who have an impact on her character formation and decision such as solving the religious conflict between the Protestants and the Catholics and her victory against the Spanish in the Armada war.

## **2.1 Reviews of the Movie:**

*Elizabeth: The Golden Age* is a biographical historical drama film, released on 12 October 2007, USA. Directed by Shekhar Kapur and produced by Universal Picture and Working Title Films. The movie is a sequel to Kapur's film *Elizabeth* (1998). The major actors are Cate Blanchette in the role of Queen Elizabeth I and other actors Abbie Cornish as Elizabeth Throckmorton in the role of Bess, Geoffrey Rush Sir Francis Walsingham the advisor of the queen, Clive Owen as Sir Walter Raleigh in the role of piracy, Samantha Morton as Mary Stuart the queen of Scot, Jordi Molla as Philip II of Spain and other casts. The movie has a wild spread in the Hollywood industry on 9 September 2007 and premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival. The movie won Best Costume Design and Cate Blanchett received a nomination for Best Actress.

The story of the movie talks about Elizabeth I the queen of England. She is known as a Vergin queen because she is unmarried and has no master. It focuses on the late years of her life as a queen in 1585. she transformed England into Protestantism with the help of her advisor Sir Francis Walsingham. For many reasons and because of her wisdom Queen Elizabeth earned her people's love and respect. Moreover, she refuses to punish her people because of their beliefs but punishes them if they break the rules.

At that time Spain was the most powerful empire in the world, ruled by King Philip II. He was catholic and led the supporting effort to combat Protestantism in Europe, only England stood against him. This conflict creates many problems between the kingdoms. Besides that, Mary Stuart Queen of the Scots, the cousin of the Queen and part of the catholic system are against her. Thus, the partnership between Mary, Philip II, and the Catholics against Elizabeth I is ignored. For this reason, the queen calls for the help of the pirate Mr. Walter Raleigh. Elizabeth hides her love for Sir Raleigh and instead of confessing she pushes Bess to be with him. By the time they end up married. For this, the Queen envies Bess. The advisor Walsingham helps to protect the queen from the danger of the Catholics who bear so much hate towards the queen. During that, King Philip II prepared his naval fleet to attack England. However, the execution of Mary Stuart manipulates King Philip II. Therefore, the Spanish started the attack. For this reason, the queen kept Mr. Raleigh under her service because of his experience in the sea and his knowledge of every small detail about the Spanish Armada. At the end of the movie, England defeats the Spanish Armada. However, Queen Elizabeth I, blessed with victory, turned back her pride and protected her Empire.

The movie *Elizabeth: the Golden Age* has many responses. Orange County Register posted on YouTube channel an interview with Cate Blanchett on October 10, 2007. She talks about the character of Queen Elizabeth I in *Elizabeth the Golden Age*. She said that the thing that made her do the role again was the triangle love story, which made her excited about it. She said that the connection between Elizabeth and Raleigh wasn't youthful love because in the movie Elizabeth was over fifteen. She was more curious about him, and it was a different kind of love. She explained it as living through him, experiencing a different world, and seeing it from his vision. Cate thinks that, because Elizabeth was cultured and well-educated and Raleigh was the hero who

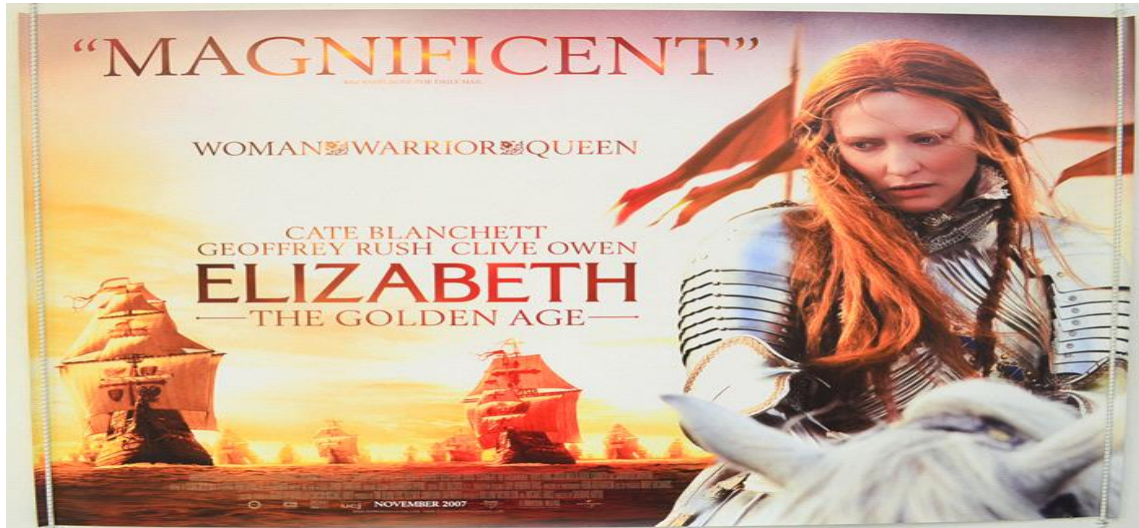
discovered a new word, it was exciting for her that maybe she met her match. And how she loses control over the things that she can't have (Orange County Register).

According to Roger Ebert's review on October 11, 2007, "Elizabeth: *The Golden Age*" focused on the strong performance of Cate Blanchett as Queen Elizabeth I and the rich production of the movie. However, Ebert criticizes the movie and considers it as historical misleading such as Sir Walter Raleigh's exaggerated role in the defeat of the Spanish Armada and overly dramatic elements. He feels that the movie highlights costumes, sets, and music that dominate the story and characters. Also, he thought that the historical events are simplified compared to Cate Blanchett's performance which has positive comments. In addition, he points out that the movie conveys a romantic and action scene and focuses on the creation of visual effects more than the historical facts (Ebert).

Will Lawrence's review of the movie from Empire Magazine, was published on October 26, 2007. He provides a detailed critique of the movie. Lawrence appreciates Shekhar Kapur's epic direction of the movie but shows that the movie mixes between personal and political war drama. Whereas, the first film Elizabeth 1998 focuses on survival, love, and the loss of innocence when in return set on the throne and gain power, the sequel movie Elizabeth: The Golden Age explores the issue of what happens when that power is endangered and the transformation of the queen from a human being into a goddess. he thinks well about Cate Blanchett's performance and mentions her ability to present the queen's strength through her acting. He notices that the movie sacrifices historical coherence for the dramatic effect and highlights the artistic side of the movie. Also, he thinks that Cate Blanchett may be rewarded for her performance and Geoffrey Rush also does a fantastic job in his retaliation against Walsingham (Lawrence).

Ride Home Reviews YouTube channel posted a video on March 25, 2020, titled #RetroReview: Elizabeth: The Golden Age. First, he sheds light on the movie's plot then he speaks about the similarities between the first film Elizabeth, and the sequel which are the art direction, the production design, and the costumes. He declares that those elements give an aesthetic pleasure, and the costume was great. On the other hand, he didn't like everything else about the movie, he thinks that it conveyed two disjointed plotlines that did not mesh, and the events of the movie were undeveloped and seemed rushed. Also, he mentioned that both actors Cate Blanchett and Geoffrey Rush, who are nominees and Oscar winners, need more than that to show their talent and shine. He feels that Geoffrey Rush's character was confusing and the only reason to watch the movie is Cate Blanchett's performance (Ride Home Reviews).

## 2.2 A Semiotic Reading of the Film's Poster



**Figure 1. The original poster of the movie**

The poster of this movie can reveal much about it. It attracts the attention of the spectators and guides their assumptions about the movie to the main points included in it. The first remarkable point in the poster is the presence of the war theme; it is obvious in the optimal selection of color, the costume of the actor and descriptive words, and the

painting of the naval fleet in the poster. The warm colors such as red, orange, and yellow are symbols of fire. In addition, the picture of the actor Cate Blanchett wearing the warrior dress and raiding a horse describes the idea of the Queen as a warrior and the long red hair describes her as a woman. And this is exactly what the descriptive words express in the poster. Therefore, these words and the pictures are correspondence. The movie's title in the poster refers to the Queen's name and her reign era The Golden Age.

This chapter deals with the analyses of the movie *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* and the different sides of Elizabeth I character within the historical context. First of all, as a powerful lady as a “queen, warrior ”and second as a female “woman”. This chapter illustrates Queen Elizabeth I and how she is presented in the movie versus how she has been mentioned in the history and book pages as a magnificent queen of England throughout history. The chapter is devoted to four sections. The first section focuses on the reviews and what has been said about the movie. The second section explains how the movie represents Elizabeth as a powerful queen compared to history. The third section clarifies the representation of Elizabeth's character as a female compared to history. Also, this chapter describes the influence of the major characters on the queen’s character in the movie.

## **2.2 Queen Elizabeth I: The Woman in Power:**

This section discusses the character of Elizabeth and how the movie portrays her as a queen who reigns and rules, based on historical context. This discussion will relate to the movie and history to compare and blur the line between fiction and reality. The movie provides not only a historical event but also includes religion, politics, and war themes during the reign of Elizabeth I as a queen of England. The process of movie



analysis requires some elements for a better understanding of the movie and to transform inclusive interpretation of the movie.

Firstly, many elements indicate the religious side of the movie. Elizabeth I was a prominent royal in English history in both monarchy and church. Elizabeth played a crucial role in the establishment of Protestantism in England. As a consequence, transformed England from a Catholic into a Protestant nation, this created a conflict between England and the Catholic Spain ruled by Philip II. The filmmakers didn't hesitate to show that in the movie.

The Christian symbols appear in different angles in the movie. At the start of the movie (Elizabeth: The Golden Age 01:53:31-07) the subtitles say, "Philip of Spain, a devout Catholic has plunged Europe into holy war only England stands against him ruled by Protestant Elizabeth". This expression "holy war" primarily refers to a conflict driven or justified by religious motivations. Also, the word "Catholic" refers to Christian sect. Also, Those two expressions pave the way and direct the viewer's minds to understand that this movie includes a Christian religious conflict between the Catholics and Protestants.

Many signs are referring to religion in the movie. The cross is the main symbol representing Christianity emerges in several scenes. For example, in (Elizabeth: The Golden Age 01:53:01) in the title of the movie the T letter in the name of Elizabeth is written in an unfamiliar style instead of the T, there is a cross. Thus link the name of Elizabeth with Christianity. As in the picture below:



**Figure 2.**

**The cross in the name of the Queen in the movie posture.**

Not only just here but also the cross appears in some places and the clothes of some characters.

The candle is also known as a symbol of religion and belief. In Christianity, it is used in worship and represents the light of God or Christ. In the scene (Elizabeth: The Golden Age 01:52:52-42) Philip of Spain does his prayers facing a candle. This reflects his personality and portrays him as a very religious man. Yet, he is a catholic fellow. As a result, this belief was the main driver to wage war against England. He believes that he follows the will of God. And this is what he said to his daughter Isabella “God has spoken to me...” (Elizabeth: The Golden Age 01:52:52), “England is enslaved to the devil we must set her free” (Elizabeth: The Golden Age 01:51:58). The devil here refers to Elizabeth. however, in (Elizabeth: The Golden Age 00:15:06) the candle went off after the defeat of the Spanish Armada, which means that the war wasn't blessed and God abandoned Philip II.

On the other hand, the filmmaker shows the religious side of Elizabeth I in many scenes, doing her prayers and worshiping God. Queen Elizabeth was pragmatic in her religious policy, she allowed the Catholics to practice their religion freely and refused to punish her people for their beliefs (Elizabeth: The Golden Age 01:50:21-20).



**Figure. 3: Queen Elizabeth I in the Church**

In addition, the movie sheds light on the Queen's political issues and how she plays a major role in practicing her duty as a queen of England. In addition, her participation in domestic and foreign political affairs is remarkable. Elizabeth's ultimate power puts her in danger and brings to her different feelings envy, hate, anger, hostility or support, love, satisfaction. With her efforts and wisdom, Queen Elizabeth I tried with her consultants to create a stable state and protect England from external attacks.

The relationship between Elizabeth and her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots, wasn't friendly. Mary was a Catholic and portrayed in the movie as a danger to Elizabeth and threatened her throne. Although she was in the prison of Scot in Fotheringhay castle did not give up on her right to be the queen and participate in the Catholic's conspiracies against Elizabeth (Elizabeth: The Golden Age 01:50:07-01:49:06). Mary was marginalized in the movie mentions only her journey in the castle, received letters from the catholic system and the important event her execution(Elizabeth: The Golden Age 01). History mentioned her in detailed information. Mary's

execution was one of the reasons behind waging war against Queen Elizabeth I. Indeed, Mary's influence impacted Elizabeth's peace and made her unstable and feel the danger.

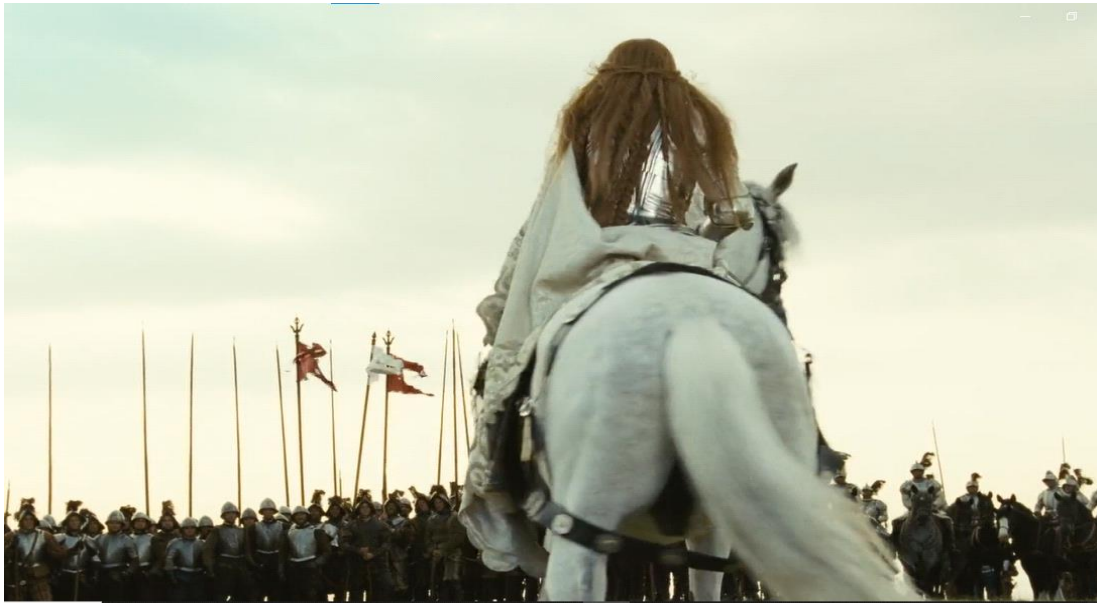
In the movie, *Isabella*, Philip's daughter holding the Queen Elizabeth doll between her hands. This means that Elizabeth I was well known in the world and Spain or Philip of Spain was so obsessed with defeating Elizabeth which can be seen by the look in his eyes. He is ambitious enough to raise his child with the idea of replacing Elizabeth even though he named her Isabella. He put his enemy in the hands of his daughter. Also, this scene can embody the view of Philip II to Elizabeth I and considers her like a doll.

In these circumstances, Queen Elizabeth I had to face the challenges of protecting the Empire. Yet, she acted like a man when she was queen or warrior. It seems like she wears a mask of masculinity, this is obvious in her personality; her confident, deep voice, walking with straight posture, and serious facial expression. In the scene (*Elizabeth: The Golden Age* 01:47:19) she is bold enough to hit her adviser Walsingham in his head because he discusses personal issues in public. However, she shows a defensive attitude to keep her calm, and self-control and protect her pride as queen first and as a woman second.

For example, in the scene when the Spanish ambassador underestimates her in front of the queen's guards, he is upset because of Mr. Raleigh, the ambassador argues that piracy attacked Spain he said, "You see a leaf fall and you think you know which way the wind blows, well there is a wind coming, madam, that will wipe away your pride;" here refers to England and the wind refer to sprain or danger. She defends herself and stands against him with powerful language, she says "I, too, can command the wind, sir! I have a hurricane in me that will strip Spain bare if you dare to try me!" (*Elizabeth: The Golden Age* 01:54:42). Also, she shows strength with the bravest heart, facing danger beside her army and hiding her fear and weakness.

As the queen of England, Elizabeth goes out and supports the men who are ready to obey her and risk their lives to protect their beloved Queen and precious land. she stands next to the

army and encourages them with her warmth and strong words (Elizabeth: The Golden Age 00:23:22).



**Figure 4. The Queen as a War-leader**

### **2.3 Queen Elizabeth I: The Female in the Mirror**

The femininity of the Queen's character appears on different sides within the film, through other characters, through the queen's characters, and her physical appearance. Bess or the second Elizabeth as Mr. Raleigh calls her, is the queen's lady-in-waiting. Her character plays a controversial role in influencing the queen's character. The queen likes her and treats her well. Sometimes it seems like her daughter, her friend, the reflection of the youthful Elizabeth. Bess is a pretty youthful soft girl. Her personality is completely the opposite of the queen's personality or basically what the queen's hide. She loves her because she reminds her of her youth and envies her because she can't be hers because she is queen, she owns power and people's lives, but she can't own her own life, this is what Bess can represent in the movie The Female Adventure.

Otherwise, Mr. Raleigh is the male adventure; he represents what the queen can't have, freedom, wildness, and exploring outside the castle walls. The queen likes his savage personality; he is more masculine than the other man she met before. Her feminine side wanted to be

submissive to him, but her masculine side rejected him. He gives her contradictory feelings about herself, this makes her lose her temper. Rather than dance with a man she races the man (Elizabeth: The Golden Age 01:54:52) said instead, “The queen doesn’t give away to others”. She knows her values and what she has. Mr. Raleigh treats the Queen for her person, she treats him as his queen, but she can’t deny her desires as a human being and as a women.

On the other hand, Sir Walsingham, the queen’s advisor reflects another aspect of the private life of the character. His relationship with the queen is close to a friendship relationship. He is taking much responsibility towards the queen. He represents the family, which she doesn’t have, he is like her father. He cares about her in (Elizabeth: The Golden Age 01: 36:21) he says to his wife “She needs me” and he can’t leave the court. He supports her decision and protects her. Because of this, he did not like the relationship between Mr. Raleigh and the Queen for two reasons. He thinks that Mr. Raleigh is a pirate, he will threaten the queen's throne, or he wants to protect her heart Because the queen can’t marry any man.

Furthermore, the mirror in the movie can symbolize many things. Throughout history, the mirror has a big connection with women. It reflects the self and physical body. In (Elizabeth: The Golden Age 01: 54: 52) she said, “more lines on my face”. Through the mirror, Elizabeth sees her aging face and sees her beauty fade away. She didn’t express her sadness in words, but her eyes, her long breath, and her heavy fake smile did. In (Elizabeth: The Golden Age 01:54:52) she looks at her necked old body in the mirror. Her body represents her virginity; the body no man has touched before. She may think, I’m a woman too, or I’m too old.

Elizabeth known as a virgin queen and unmarried woman, has no chance of having children or experiencing the female instinct desire to be a mother. Thus, as a female and woman direct this desire toward her lady-in-waiting Bess and her people. Elizabeth was over fifteen. However, she was old enough to take care of Bess and felt happy when she carried Bess's child, with a slight soft smile, she carried him as her child and gave him her blessing. For the first time she experienced that feeling (Elizabeth: The Golden Age 00:09:43). Elizabeth was the mother of

her people she said: "I am called the virgin Queen, unmarried, I have no master, childless, I am a mother to my people" (Elizabeth: The Golden Age 00:00:16).



**Figure 5. Queen Elizabeth Carrying her Servant's Baby**

The costumes and makeup give Elizabeth an aesthetic look in the movie. But represent the two sides of Elizabeth. She puts on makeup and wears luxury dresses when she is queen. In her room, she is an old lady with short hair and a bare face while her ladies-in-waiting with her. She hides her weaknesses and flaws under those briteful costumes. She is like a flower between those black shadows, but she becomes wilted when she is alone.



**Figure 6. The Queen's reflection into the Mirror**

This movie portrays Elizabeth I as a woman with desires and fears who ruled England. Despite going through many complexities, the queen's character appears strong, decisive and recognizable. Kapur's film depicts her personality through many sides and goes deep. Therefore, this movie seems to be a personal story more than a historical one. In one of the scenes that highlights the strength of the historical figure as a queen, the woman in power who hides her personal suffering for the survival of her people the movie unveils the truth that England and its people are prioritized over the queen's private life. Elizabeth I is there for England and should hence sacrifice for its flourishing. The following picture summarizes this paradox which the queen has experienced throughout this historical film:





**Figure. 7 The Queen Showing Power and Wisdom to Rule England**

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, Kapur's film offers a complex representation of Queen Elizabeth I, blending historical accuracy with dramatic style to capture the spirit of her reign. The portrayal highlights the complexities of women in power, emphasizing Elizabeth's strategic acumen, resilience, and the challenges she faced in a male-dominated society. Furthermore, the film explores the queen's identity as a female monarch, exploring her navigation of gender expectations and the personal sacrifices she made for her role. Together, these themes provide a

multifaceted view of Elizabeth I, highlighting both her historical significance and her lasting influence as a strong and well-known female leader.

## **General Conclusion**

Throughout history, Queen Elizabeth I has been portrayed as a powerful leader who ruled England during the Renaissance and contributed to its flourishing in various fields. Despite the challenges Elizabeth I has faced, she could overcome the obstacles and mark her presence in books of history. Works of art too have reflected the role of this historical figure,

but some of them focused on her inner life. The focus of this study was to unveil the character of Queen Elizabeth I through Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* film (2007).

The adoption of the historical approach and the feminist perspective allowed for the accurate analysis of the film, focusing on the actor Elizabeth I. Indeed the analysis unveiled the character of this historical figure, shedding light on her contributions, decisions, and flaws. The exploration of this character gives a different view of the image of the queen as a woman and a female and sometimes acting as a man in leading war and making significant decisions.

The findings of this study are summarized in the following ideas: the queen is represented as both a leader and a female. However, as the film is a work of art not of pure history, the actor's inner life is exposed and the queen is seen in all different psychological states, happy and sad, winning and losing, and powerful and weak. The historical film also focuses on the major actors who have an impact on the queen as a political leader and as a female. Finally, the film is an artistic re-presentation of Queen Elizabeth I which is enjoyed for its exploration of the hidden life of the actor and of her character.

The depiction of Queen Elizabeth I in the film can be summarized in the following: The film represents her from a different perspective; the queen character swings from one to another. Sometimes she is brave, bold, wise, and wild queen. Sometimes she is a weak, fragile, unstable woman. Her character coincides with a different plot. She is a human being in the end, not a goddess and humans are good at adapting to different situations they face. The characters that have influenced the queen's character are portrayed as the following: Mr. Ralieggh and Bess are considered as a mirror of her inner desires. She could be one of them but she could not. They seem to be her reflection of her wishes as a normal woman, not as a queen. Mary of the Scots and Philip II represent her fears, hate, danger, and emotional and psychological instability. Yet, Sir Walsingham was like her father, friend, protector, and guide. He brings peace and safety

and follows her through her way. In one way or another, she interacts with those characters positively or negatively.

The examination of this character in Kapur's historical film, *Elizabeth: the Golden Age* (2007), allowed for the exploration of the aesthetical manifestation of Queen Elizabeth I. accordingly, the study was given a feminist and historical perspective. Further researches may study the movie from other perspectives. As future prospects, the use of a psychoanalytical approach for the analysis of the actor Queen Elizabeth I in the film can give more details of her character.

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