

## **Early Modern Queens on Screen: Victors, Victims, Villains, Virgins and Viragoes**

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Queens have been a seemingly never-ending source of fascination across a variety of media, in contemporary accounts, biography and prosopography, historiography, fiction and film. In terms of academia this same fascination, coupled with the rise of women's history and gender studies has resulted in the advent of queenship studies, a rich vein of scholarship which has brought new layers of analysis and understanding to the lives and roles of queens across the centuries. In terms of popular culture, each generation has overlaid its own interests and values on the lives of queens, reinterpreting them to fit in with the societal values and preoccupations of their era. Indeed, as noted in the section introduction, in the current era we are all influenced, directly or indirectly, by the progression of feminism and a plethora of female politicians and leaders, which has affected the way that we view queens both past and present. This modern rise of female leaders has perhaps increased our fascination with the 'Monstrous Regiment' of regnant, regent, and powerful consort queens of the early modern era but has also encouraged us to make 'proto-feminists' out of these premodern women, looking for harbingers of our own age of female politicians from these intriguing royal women of the past. While we do have to be careful of present-centeredness or 'Whig history' on screen in our interpretation of queens, an analysis of the representation of early modern queens on film can tell us a great deal about our own society and how we view women today by how we present and categorize these historical figures.

This chapter will give a wide-ranging overview of the representation of early modern queens on film and television, focusing on the typologies that the queens of this period have been grouped into by modern media. While it must be noted that there are also excellent

representations of medieval queens, such as the renowned performance of Katherine Hepburn

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in *The Lion in Winter* and non-European contemporaries of the Monstrous Regiment, such as the fascinating examination of the Sultanate of Women period in the Ottoman Empire in the Turkish television series *The Magnificent Century*, this chapter will focus on European queens from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, primarily, though not exclusively, in English-language modern media formats.<sup>1</sup> It is hoped that further research might take the categories suggested in this paper for the representation of queens in this period and analyze how readily they map to women beyond the confines of Europe and/or this particular period of the ‘Monstrous Regiment’.

### **Typologies of Queens on Screen: Victors, Victims, Villains, Virgins, and Viragoes**

To understand how these historical figures have been classified and interpreted by (post)modern viewers and producers, this study proposes five major categories of representation, which have been labelled as ‘Victors, Victims, Villains, Virgins, and Viragoes’. Exploring each one in turn will give a greater understanding to the ways in which filmmakers and television producers have depicted these royal women on screen and how these queens have been continually reshaped by the interests of successive generations of viewers.

It is only natural to assume that the ever-increasing emphasis on female equality that has run alongside the development of film and television would have an impact on the representation of the queens of the ‘Monstrous Regiment’ as Victors—strong rulers and ‘proto-feminists’. While representations of queens as Victors certainly exist, as will be discussed shortly, this category is not as popular as one might imagine—indeed this paper will argue that filmmakers, by and large, have been more concerned with the love lives, rather than the political agency, of queens.

One of the ways in which the queens of this period are most clearly shown as political actors is at the moment of their coronation when they are assuming power. It is indeed coronations which define a queen's position and thus form key scenes for any biopic, particularly those of a female ruler. Examples include the deliberate references to Elizabeth I's coronation portrait in Kapur's *Elizabeth* (1998) or beyond our period, depictions of the coronations of Victoria and Elizabeth II in their respective 2016 television series.<sup>2</sup> All three feature young, beautiful queens (nervously perhaps) assuming the weight of office in ceremonial garb in packed cathedrals against a score of choristers.

A coronation can be seen as a triumphal moment when a queen had to overcome considerable obstacles to claim a throne. An excellent example is the RTVE miniseries *Isabel*; the entire first series is dedicated to the Infanta's difficult position in the fractured court of her half-brother Enrique IV and her contested position as heir.<sup>3</sup> Isabel's coronation forms the climax of the first series—it is foreshadowed in the opening scene of the series, but it is only in the final episode, after the trials that she had to endure to secure her throne that we see the full coronation scene where Isabel is finally crowned in front of a cathedral and a crowd of supporters, looking majestic and ethereal in a long white gown. Yet it is in the scene immediately after the coronation where the steel of the young queen is shown, and her determination to rule. Though she directs her councilors to sue for peace, she argues that she will not be a weak ruler like her brother Enrique and that 'Everyone in this realm must understand one thing very clearly: that I, Isabel, am the Queen of Castile. And only God can remove me from this throne.'<sup>4</sup>

Catherine the Great's coronation, after her coup against her husband Peter in 1762, was another triumphal moment. Indeed, the critical events of 1762 are often the climax and ending of films of the Empress' life, with the exception of the 1995 series that continued to explore her reign and affair with Potemkin. Yet, they do not always paint this moment as one This is the accepted version of a chapter published by Palgrave Macmillan in *Premodern Rulers and Postmodern Viewers: Gender, Sex, and Power in Popular Culture*, available online at <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68771-1>. It is not the version of record. © Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

of complete triumph or a celebration of female rule. The 2014 Russian series *Ekaterina* is perhaps the most understated example of her victory, with the first series ending with Catherine's march to the throne in full ceremonial garb while a herald announces the incredibly long list of her subsidiary titles—at the final moment, the Empress turns with an expression of quiet triumph and satisfaction.<sup>5</sup> Catherine's coup and coronation are sometimes portrayed on film as triumph spliced with tragedy. In *Young Catherine*, Julia Ormond gives a rousing speech to her troops on horseback which incites them to support her bid for the throne.<sup>6</sup> Her subsequent coronation juxtaposes the ceremony with images of her brooding lover Orlov who salutes her almost wistfully with his sword though he cannot be by her side as her consort, and it is insinuated, as the father of her child. In the final scenes of 1934's *The Rise of Catherine the Great*, Catherine receives the adoration of a cheering crowd below from a balcony and claims 'This is the happiest day of my life! And I always believed nobody cared for me—and suddenly I'm loved. I'm loved by so many!'.<sup>7</sup> She thanks the nobles who have supported her coup and heads to her room with her lover who has the unenviable task of telling the Empress of her husband's death. Catherine, aghast and angry, returns to the nobles asking 'Who was it? Who killed him? Who spoilt my victory?' Her anger builds to hysterics, shouting 'I'll punish all of you if you don't show me the one [who killed him]!' and ordering them to get out before sinking into a chair to bemoan her husband's death. Her counsellor tells Catherine that 'Everything has a price, Your Majesty. And the crown has the highest price of all...Russia wanted you at any price.' The Empress stares into space, tearfully claiming 'He always called me Little Catherine...' and the picture fades to black, reducing Catherine from a triumphant Empress to a grieving widow—insinuating that a crown is less important than love or demonstrating the high price a woman can pay for power.

Coronations are not the only way to show a queen as a triumphant and savvy political leader—speeches are another excellent way to demonstrate her agency and leadership on This is the accepted version of a chapter published by Palgrave Macmillan in *Premodern Rulers and Postmodern Viewers: Gender, Sex, and Power in Popular Culture*, available online at <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68771-1>. It is not the version of record. © Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

screen. In Kapur's *Elizabeth the Golden Age*, Cate Blanchett delivers several speeches which emphasize her strength as a ruler.<sup>8</sup> In one scathing interchange with the Spanish ambassador, she tells him, 'Go back to your rathole sir. Tell Philip I fear neither him, nor his priests, nor his armies. Tell him if he wants to shake his fist at us, we'll give him such a bite he'll wish he kept his hands in his pockets!' The ambassador responds by warning her that 'There is a wind coming madam, which will sweep away your pride' and turns to leave. Elizabeth shouts after him, shaking with anger, 'I too can command the wind, sir! I have a hurricane in me that will strip Spain bare if you dare to try me!'

The Tilbury speech is perhaps Elizabeth I's most well-known proclamation, and though historians are still divided on the most accurate version of the speech, or indeed if it was ever given, it continues to be frequently represented on screen.<sup>9</sup> It is a rousing monologue than any actress would relish delivering and indeed many of the most celebrated women who have taken on the role of Elizabeth I including Flora Robson, Glenda Jackson, Helen Mirren, Cate Blanchett, and Anne-Marie Duff have all given moving versions of the famous Tilbury speech.<sup>10</sup> To magnify the militaristic aspect of the speech, as an exhortation to her troops, Elizabeth is often represented on horseback in some form of armor, from Glenda Jackson's armored collar, to the breastplate worn by Mirren, Duff, and Robson, or even Cate Blanchett's improbable full suit of armor. It is this last costume that shows a modern preoccupation with gender equality—Elizabeth not only has the 'heart and stomach of a king' but she can wear his armor too.

Yet queens are not always depicted as strong victors, astride horses on the battlefield—they are also represented as victims and tragic figures. This can be either of events beyond their control, such as Helen Mirren's Oscar nominated portrayal of Queen Charlotte who is struggling with her husband's deteriorating mental health and interfamily strife in *The Madness of King George* (1995) or queens who are undone by love. Mary Queen  
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of Scots is perhaps the classic example of the latter category, a queen who lost her throne after three marriages ended in tragedy; with François II's early death, Darnley's murder and Bothwell's exile and death in prison. She is repeatedly portrayed as an example of a ruler who put the woman before the queen 'privileging the idea that a woman's real happiness lies in the private realm, with a husband and a child'.<sup>11</sup> She is the foil to her rival Elizabeth, who chooses duty and crown over love, as John Guy argues ruling from her head, whereas Mary ruled from the heart.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, as if to stress the differences between the two queens, they are often portrayed in a meeting on film, in *Mary Queen of Scots* (1971) or *Mary of Scotland* (1936) for example, although we know that no such meeting took place.<sup>13</sup> Recent theatrical performances have taken this duality even further, for example in the two-woman show *It's so nice* (2011), Barbara Sylvain and Lula Béry play out a conversation/confrontation between the two queens, and at the Almeida theatre in the winter of 2016-17 Juliet Stevenson and Lia Williams enacted Fredrick Schiller's *Mary Stuart*, flipping a coin before they took the stage to see which actress will play which queen.<sup>14</sup> Yet no matter how the rivalry between Mary Queen of Scots and Elizabeth I is staged or filmed, ultimately Mary remains the victim, losing first her heart, then her crown, and ultimately her head, while Elizabeth emerges the victor from their rivalry.

Mary Queen of Scots is not the only queen who is depicted on film as losing a crown for love. Sophia Dorothea of Celle lost the opportunity to become the first Hanoverian queen of England as her husband George I dissolved their marriage and imprisoned Sophia for over 30 years due to her affair with Count von Königsmarck—her tragic story became the plot for the film *Saraband for Dead Lovers* (1948). Juana I of Castile is often given the sobriquet of 'la Loca' ('The Mad') due to the persistent image of her as being mentally unstable, and her fascinating story has been repeatedly filmed—Janice North gives an extended consideration to treatments of Juana's life, reign, and relationship with her husband later in this volume.

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Juana's decline is often represented in film as being due to her tempestuous relationship with her husband, Philip 'the Fair' of Castile. Indeed the English title for the 2001 Spanish film *Juana la Loca* was *Mad Love*, expressing the central role that love played in undoing the queen who was literally driven mad by love for her unfaithful husband in this portrayal.<sup>15</sup> Juana and Philip's relationship is also a feature of the last section of the RTVE series *Isabel* and forms the focus of the follow-on feature film *La corona partida* (The Broken Crown).<sup>16</sup> In the RTVE version, we see Juana's decline from a sharp, intelligent girl before her marriage to a miserable wreck due to the cruel treatment of her ambitious consort. Yet, however much she appears to hate him and rail against his imprisonment of her in the early stages of her reign, once he dies Juana is devoted to him, consulting and even kissing his corpse as she travels with it each night on its way to be interred. Juana appears as a character again in the *Carlos, Rey Emperador* (*Carlos, King Emperor*) series, which RTVE commissioned as a sequel to the popular *Isabel*.<sup>17</sup> Here she is a mercurial figure and poor mother, something which she claims to regret on her deathbed scene with her daughter Leonor, though she argues that Philip was always more important to her than her children and wishes for death so that she might be finally reunited with him.

Anne Boleyn is another queen who is often portrayed as a tragic figure whose rise and fall was tied to the waxing and waning of love. Anne Boleyn is not only a popular figure in historical films, as Susan Bordo's *The Creation of Anne Boleyn* has demonstrated; she is arguably a cultural industry in her own right, with a plethora of novels on her life, popular histories and academic studies as well as websites and blogs that discuss her short but eventful life and reign.<sup>18</sup> Before Anne's first film outing in the 1920 German epic *Anna Boleyn*, she had featured on stage in plays such as Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* and Donizetti's early nineteenth-century opera *Anna Bolena*.<sup>19</sup> The question of Anne's ambition is a recurring

theme in popular culture portrayals of the queen and provokes the question of whether she can be classed as a Victor or a Victim.

Retha Warnicke charts the portrayal of Anne in English-language sources, arguing that Anne was largely portrayed as an innocent victim, devoid of ambition until George Boker's mid-nineteenth-century play 'Anne Boleyn: A Tragedy'.<sup>20</sup> An increasing emphasis on Anne's ambition can be seen in more recent film portrayals of her life, yet interpretations differ between Anne's slowly developing ambition in *Anne of the Thousand Days* to Anne being supremely ambitious and almost a villain in stage and television adaptations of Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*.<sup>21</sup> In the TV series *The Tudors* and the film adaptation of Philippa Gregory's *The Other Boleyn Girl*, there is more ambiguity as to whether Anne (and her sister Mary) is a victim of her family's ambition or masterminding her own rise.<sup>22</sup> Anne's increasingly ambitious and hypersexualized portrayal can be seen as a reflection of modern society, reframing Anne as a sexually liberated, proto-feminist figure that twenty-first century women might be able to relate to better than the demure and virtuous figure of John Banks's 1682 Restoration play 'Vertue Betray'd: Or Anna Bullen, a tragedy'.<sup>23</sup> Anne's ambition and drive can also be seen as a precursor to her daughter, the regnant queen, Elizabeth I—echoed in Anne's remark to Henry VIII in *Anne of the Thousand Days* that 'Elizabeth shall be a greater queen than any king of yours!'<sup>24</sup> Just as premodern plays and works such as Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* often portrayed Anne as the genesis of Elizabeth's stewardship of the Reformed religion in England, modern audiences can see an ambitious and bold Anne as a harbinger of a powerful female ruler.<sup>25</sup>

However victorious her production of Elizabeth might appear, Anne's execution groups her with a small but significant group of Victim queens who suffered the same tragic end, including Mary Queen of Scots, Lady Jane Grey, and Marie Antoinette. Like the focus on coronations for the Victor queens, the executions of these 'victims' have often played a

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dramatic role in the conclusion of films about these royal women. Anne's execution has been captured in generally every major biopic about her including *The Other Boleyn Girl*, *Anne of the Thousand Days*, and series where she appears, such as Showtime's *The Tudors*. The execution of Lady Jane Grey, so dramatically pictured in Delaroche's famous 1833 painting, is captured at the finish of the 1986 film starring Helena Bonham Carter, who later played another execution scene as Anne Boleyn in the 2003 British television series *Henry VIII*.<sup>26</sup> Jane's actions on screen in *Lady Jane* closely follow the account in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* in which she fumbled for the block asking plaintively 'Where is it? What do I do?'<sup>27</sup>

The execution of Mary Queen of Scots has also been a feature of most biopics of the Scottish queen as well as a key scene in many films on Elizabeth I due to the pivotal nature of Mary's trial and death in Elizabeth's reign. Indeed, Mary's execution forms arguably the earliest portrayal of queens on film, with the 1895 minute-long feature on her death. Jonathan Stubbs notes that while an effort was made to produce the Elizabethan costumes for this short film 'it seems most likely that the film's attraction was its gruesome content [i.e. Mary's execution] rather than its evocation of the past.'<sup>28</sup> Yet not all of the screen versions of her death capture the many blows that it supposedly took to sever her head from her body, preferring to let their leading actresses make a more dignified end. Marie Antoinette's execution has also been filmed multiple times from the 1938 version with Norma Shearer to the 2001 *Affair of the Necklace*.<sup>29</sup> The English title *Shadow of the Guillotine* for the 1956 French film *Marie Antoinette Reine de France*, demonstrates the continuing fascination with the queen's execution, as does the constant stream of tourists who make a pilgrimage to the Conciergerie in Paris, where an imprisoned Marie Antoinette spent her last days.<sup>30</sup> From the cultural industries and tourist sites connected to these executed women, it is clear that Victim queens leave a long, lasting legacy, which makes them cinematic gold.

Queens can be not only victorious or tragic heroes, but Villains too. Some queens, such as Marie de Medici who appears as a scheming royal mother in the BBC's *The Musketeers*, have an occasional outing as a villainess, while other women like Catherine de Medici or Mary Tudor, seem typecast in the role.<sup>31</sup> Catherine de Medici has a veritable Black Legend, which began in her own period, arguably triggered by those horrified by the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre and the turbulence of the French Wars of Religion, when Catherine de Medici was at the heart of governance alongside her sons.<sup>32</sup> Malevolent portrayals of this queen are typified in 1994's *La Reine Margot* where Virna Lisi, in her first major scene, is negotiating coolly with a paid assassin.<sup>33</sup> In the CW series *Reign*, Catherine is still a schemer but is oddly cast with the Canadian actress Megan Follows, famous for portraying the Edwardian ingénue Anne of Green Gables. Follows brings not only a note of wry comedy at times but has tried to bring a somewhat nuanced understanding of her character noting that 'What I like about my character is even if my actions are unsavory or might seem really outrageous... she's grounded in a motivation that, for her, justifies her actions. They may not justify them for everybody else (laughs), but in her mind they justify her actions.'<sup>34</sup>

Mary Tudor is another queen who is often portrayed or identified as a villain, even though her popular sobriquet of 'Bloody Mary' has been challenged by newer revisionist histories of her reign.<sup>35</sup> She most frequently appears as a villain foil to her sister Elizabeth I, for example in Joanne Whalley's regal but dark portrayal of Mary in *The Virgin Queen* opposite Anne-Marie Duff in 2005 or Kathy Burke's version in Kapur's 1998 *Elizabeth*. When Mary is not an outright villain, she often becomes a victim of her hopeless love for Philip of Spain. Examples of a victim Mary include Jane Lapotaire's portrayal of a woman who wishes to protect her young cousin in *Lady Jane* but is ultimately forced to send her to the block to progress her marriage to Philip. Another example is Angela Cremonte's beautiful

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but lovelorn Mary who tries desperately to please her young husband in *Carlos, Rey Emperador* but knows that he will never truly reciprocate her affections. Even Whalley claims in an interview for the BBC that she felt sorry for the queen she portrayed ‘because day-to-day life was pretty tough on her. She was very alone and very conflicted about how to deal with things.’<sup>36</sup> While some queens, like Mary Tudor and Catherine de Medici have an international renown as Villain queens, others have a significant place in national memory and popular culture as a villainess. Kataryzna Kosior has profiled the long-term reputation of Bona Sforza, Queen of Poland, who has long been cast as a scheming poisoner, surveying historiography as well as modern portrayals in popular culture from a play in 1914 to a television series on the queen in the 1980s.<sup>37</sup>

An interesting trend can be spotted in the portrayal of Virgin queens, focusing on their younger years or rise to power. This emphasis can be linked to the plethora of teen films, with a first wave in the 1950s followed by another surge in the 1980s, which Timothy Shary argues is connected to the placement of multiplex theatres within or next to malls, a key locus of American teen culture.<sup>38</sup> Finding that teens were a lucrative market of moviegoers, Hollywood began producing increasing numbers of films designed to appeal to their interests. Films on queens can be seen to be capitalizing on this trend, with *Lady Jane* appearing in 1986, the same year that the classic teen flicks *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off* and *Pretty in Pink* made their debut.<sup>39</sup> Although *Lady Jane* may not be instantly identified with these more mainstream teen films, the protagonist also struggles with issues that many teens could readily identify with and that form the basis of many teen movies: conflict with parents, social awkwardness, first love, coming of age and taking on adult responsibilities. The young Helena Bonham Carter makes an engaging ingénue and Cary Elwes an attractive romantic foil as Guildford—he went on to play the dashing lead in *The Princess Bride* the following year.<sup>40</sup>

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While again perhaps less obvious as teen films, a renewed focus on the early years of well-known queens made their stories more appealing to a younger audience. In the nineties, multiple movies and miniseries revisited the rise of two famous premodern queens: Elizabeth I and Catherine II ‘the Great’ of Russia. The latter’s early years were the focus of two miniseries, *Young Catherine*, starring Julia Ormond in 1991 and *Catherine the Great*, starring Catherine Zeta-Jones in 1995.<sup>41</sup> *Young Catherine* as the title suggests, focuses on Catherine’s rise to power, culminating in her coup and coronation in 1762. Although Ford and Mitchell argue that Ormond ‘neither looks nor acts like a teen,’ clearly this coming of age biopic of the beautiful young princess who emerges from the control of the aging Empress Elizabeth, finds love in the form of the gallant Orlov, and ultimately triumphs over her husband to take the crown would appeal to a younger audience as a sort of follow-on from a Disney fairy tale.<sup>42</sup>

The rise of Elizabeth I was also revisited in the nineties in Shekhar Kapur’s *Elizabeth*, starring Cate Blanchett. Elizabeth’s early years had been portrayed before in *Young Bess*, starring Jean Simmons in 1953, emerging just before the early heyday of teen films in the fifties.<sup>43</sup> Both films have a strong emphasis on a central romance but a very different focus for Elizabeth’s affections. In *Young Bess*, the love story is focused on Elizabeth’s obsession with Thomas Seymour, played by Simmons’ husband Stewart Granger. Simmons’ Elizabeth not only deals with first love and heartbreak but plays the rebellious teen in her confrontation with her father Henry VIII.<sup>44</sup> Kapur’s *Elizabeth* also struggles with a controversial relationship, but this time with Joseph Fiennes’ Dudley. Fiennes was perhaps at his peak as a romantic lead, with the Oscar winning *Shakespeare in Love* coming out in the same year. However, while both *Young Bess* and *Elizabeth* feature young love, heartbreak, and Elizabeth’s precarious transition to adulthood and monarchy, Kapur’s 1998 biopic is perhaps slightly too dark to be classified as a teen film—in this case the 1953 treatment is clearly better suited to a younger audience.

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Teen queens returned to the screen in the twenty-first century, led by Sofia Coppola's romp *Marie Antoinette*, starring Kirsten Dunst, in 2006.<sup>45</sup> In this film, there is no doubt of the appeal to the teenage audience, with not only romance and coming-of-age struggles but an extended shopping scene, played out against Kevin Shield's remix of the Bow Wow Wow classic from the 1980s 'I want candy'. Robert Rosenstone notes that this version of Marie Antoinette 'in behavior and speech can seem more like a Valley Girl than the rigidly raised daughter of Austrian empress Maria Theresa.'<sup>46</sup> Dunst graced the cover of *Vogue* in September 2006 with the headline 'Kirsten Dunst is the teen queen who rocked Versailles' and in an article on the life of Marie Antoinette by Kennedy Fraser accompanied by a full photoshoot by famed photographer Annie Leibovitz.<sup>47</sup> Belén Vidal argues *Marie Antoinette* started a trend for 'monarchy films with an emphasis on young women', pairing it in his discussion with 2009's *The Young Victoria*. Belen notes that '*Marie Antoinette* and *The Young Victoria* update the monarchy genre and target it at young female audiences by foregrounding a feminine perspective on teen romance as opposed to a feminist consciousness.'<sup>48</sup> Belén goes further to suggest that these films engage in the 'commodification of feminism', allowing these privileged royal teens to demonstrate 'consumption and self-display' on screen—certainly something that the infamous shopping scene in *Marie Antoinette* appears to demonstrate.<sup>49</sup> The following decade saw the advent of the popular CW series *Reign*, which can best be described as Mary Queen of Scots went to high school.<sup>50</sup> T.L. Stanley argues that the show's producers aimed to capitalize on fascination with the marriage of William and Kate, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, and give viewers a teen-friendly 'sanitized' version of Showtime's *The Tudors*.<sup>51</sup> Like *The Tudors*, *Reign* has been criticized for playing fast and loose with history in its desire to appeal to its core teen audience. The modern soundtrack, hairstyles and costumes are all designed to appeal to today's teens rather than bearing any resemblance to the historical fashions for

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example. The first episode features an scene where Mary and her ladies prepare for an event—the sequence of the girls dressing and applying their anachronistic makeup feels almost like a post from a YouTube beauty vlogger. The series’ star Adelaide Kane dismissed this criticism with the comment ‘How many teenage girls do you know who are obsessed with history — I wasn’t at that age.’<sup>52</sup>

The emphasis on romance, and even sex, in the teen-focused films is part of a wider trend in cinematic depictions of voracious or Virago queens in the twentieth and twenty-first century. There is little doubt that early modern queens have been ‘sexed up’ on modern screens. Indeed, the explicit nature and the number sex scenes in the Showtime series *The Tudors* lent it an air of notoriety, not to mention historians’ protests regarding the historical inaccuracy of the show.<sup>53</sup> Basil Glynn argues that the series is completely driven by Henry’s sexual needs, reducing the agency of the queens in this series to women who are forced to submit to the king’s desires in order to have any influence.<sup>54</sup>

Certainly sex itself is not anachronistic, but the emphasis on sexual scenes and the presentation of scantily or provocatively clad queens on screen is a product of modern culture. There has been intensive and prolonged debate about the representation and sexualization of the female body on film by feminist scholars. Laura Mulvey’s groundbreaking and controversial piece ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ argued that female bodies on screen were objects of pleasure to be ogled by the ‘male gaze’.<sup>55</sup> Yet Stacey and others have argued that we need to consider the ‘female gaze’ on male bodies and women’s homoerotic appreciation of the female form on screen as well.<sup>56</sup> Yet whether the body of a queen is (erotically) surveyed by the male or female gaze, it is clear that the inclusion of sex is a key element of modern cinema. This makes Viragoes theoretically more interesting than Virgins to filmgoers; Pidduck notes when discussing portrayals of the love

life of Elizabeth I that “clearly a queen who is not a virgin makes for more interesting

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cinema.”<sup>57</sup> Pidduck argues that the portrayal of Elizabeth I in Kapur’s 1998 film, which stresses the tension between her sexualized ‘body natural’ and her increasingly constrained ‘body politic’ as queen is ‘a contemporary profeminist discourse about women’s pleasure, power and right to control their own bodies.’<sup>58</sup> Gill, in her work on postfeminist media culture and the sexualization of modern culture, has argued that a woman’s possession of an attractive and highly sexualized body can be seen as both her source of power and a questionable asset which is under constant scrutiny and criticism by others, both male and female—the bodies of queens on screen would appear to be no exception to Gill’s arguments.<sup>59</sup>

While this emphasis on sex can largely be seen as a reaction to the post-sexual revolution mentality of modern audiences, it is important to note that steamy portrayals of the love lives of queens can predate the ‘Summer of Love’. Indeed, Marlene Dietrich’s turn as Catherine the Great in *The Scarlett Empress* (1934) with its emphasis on her supposed legion of lovers risked contravening the recently enacted Hayes censorship code.<sup>60</sup> Even the promotional material was suggestive, with one poster bearing the tagline ‘Her whisper was a command to love’. Dietrich’s movie contrasted with another 1934 movie on the Russian Empress, *The Rise of Catherine the Great*, which made Catherine more of a spurned wife than a sexual predator. Ford and Mitchell argue that ‘Each of the two 1934 biopics wraps Catherine’s marriage and sexuality in a package recognizable to viewers: the faithful wife and the insatiable wanton, opposite stereotypes, but both less risky than presenting Catherine’s sexual dilemma [i.e. the need for an heir] to the Hayes office or to viewers.’<sup>61</sup> Zeta-Jones’ post-sexual revolution portrayal of Catherine’s love life in 1995 takes the innuendo of Dietrich’s biopic to another level entirely ‘like *The Scarlett Empress* on steroids, with less artsy presumption and more bare flesh’.<sup>62</sup>

Queens in bed or behaving badly has become a recurring theme in recent movies with several portrayals of adulterous consorts. Anne Boleyn was brought down by accusations of affairs with other men, including her brother George Boleyn. The 2008 film *The Other Boleyn Girl* runs with this allegation, in a scene in which Natalie Portman's Anne tearfully begs her brother to help her conceive a son to maintain her hold on the throne, to the aversion and disgust of their sister Mary and George's wife Jane, who watches their tryst from the shadows. A running plot line in the BBC's *Musketeers* series (2014-16), which became a favorite of fan wikis and video montages, was the love story between Anne of Austria and the musketeer Aramis. This affair also features in *The Man in the Iron Mask*, which is also based on the novels of Alexandre Dumas, although Roger Macdonald alleges a real-life love affair between Anne and the Duke of Buckingham in his book *The Queen's Diamonds*.<sup>63</sup> A more widely recognized queenly love affair between Caroline Matilda, Queen of Denmark and the physician and royal advisor Struensee, forms the basis of the aptly titled 2012 film, *A Royal Affair*.<sup>64</sup> Like Anne of Austria, Caroline Matilda is another neglected royal wife who seeks comfort in the arms of another, but Caroline and Struensee's relationship is redeemed by their efforts to reform the realm with Enlightenment ideas and preserve it from the excesses of an unstable king. Staying with the eighteenth century, in *Marie Antoinette*, Dunst embarks in a steamy love affair with her lover Axel von Fersen, while in 2012's *Les Adieux à la Reine*, the emphasis is on innuendos of a lesbian romance between the queen and at least one of her ladies.<sup>65</sup>

Greater interest in LGBT studies and wider public acceptance of lesbian relationships have not only changed our understanding of the love lives of queens but their portrayal on film. Queen Christina of Sweden is an excellent example of the impact this societal and scholarly shift has had on the cinematic representation of a historical figure, and Séverine

Genieys-Kirk's chapter to follow discusses the shifting portrayal of Christina in greater detail. This is the accepted version of a chapter published by Palgrave Macmillan in *Premodern Rulers and Postmodern Viewers: Gender, Sex, and Power in Popular Culture*, available online at <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68771-1>. It is not the version of record. © Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.



detail. In Greta Garbo's star vehicle *Queen Christina* in 1933, the central plot premise is the queen's love affair with the Spanish ambassador.<sup>66</sup> Garbo's Christina gives up the throne to run away with Don Antonio but he is tragically killed just before the couple are due to embark on a ship, leaving the queen alone and throneless. *The Girl King* was released in 2015, taking a radically different interpretation of Christina's abdication and her sexual preferences.<sup>67</sup> In *The Girl King*, Christina is obsessed with her lady-in-waiting, Ebba Sparre, with whom she shares kisses and an erotic love scene. Christina's sense of betrayal and fury when Ebba marries is demonstrated in a scene where the queen's passion for Ebba makes her seem almost unhinged with her love. Interestingly, Garbo's Christina also briefly kisses Ebba and shows anger at Ebba's marriage, but this is portrayed as a jealous friend and mistress, rather than a romantic passion. Ultimately, while both movies engage with Christina's well known cross-dressing tendencies, masculine attitudes, and refusal to marry, they portray her sexuality in very different ways, reflecting the times in which each biopic was produced.

This emphasis on the love lives and sexuality of the queens can be seen as a way of humanizing them for modern viewers, making them less of a historical ruler and more of a relatable woman with recognizable feelings and physical needs. However, does this emphasis on their emotional and physical sides also rob these queens of agency and authority—two areas which queenship scholars are constantly seeking to identify and analyze? Are we more interested in them as women than as queens on screen?

There is also a sense that runs through these films that love and power are incompatible, that queens are doomed to be unhappy in love or must sacrifice one for the other. Indeed, David Grant Moss argues that the predicaments of Elizabeth I, and arguably all of these queens surveyed here, represent the 'postmodern difficulty of a woman "trying to have it all,"' balancing careers, motherhood, and relationships.<sup>68</sup> Yet can we equate these

premodern queens and their postmodern viewers so simply, given that their lives were played  
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out in a completely different societal context and that these queens dealt with responsibilities and pressures that most moviegoers could not map to their own day-to-day experience of juggling careers, commuting, and the rest? Perhaps we continually return to the lives of premodern queens because their lives are so different from our own that watching movies about them becomes a kind of escapism from modern life. Emphasizing the love lives of queens is a way to make connections with the audience, reminding us that however different their lives might be, they had to cope with heartbreak and tragedy like their postmodern viewers. Yet by watching them triumph over the Spanish Armada, as in *Elizabeth the Golden Age*, or claiming a contested throne in *Isabel*, or even in going nobly to their death like Anne Boleyn in *Anne of the Thousand Days* we find aspirational models, even if we cannot (or would not want to) replicate their exact experiences. Yet, even though the historical queens of the early modern period often wielded considerable power and authority, they would arguably find it harder to empathize with today's feminist values and the lifestyles of the postmodern viewers who enjoy watching films about the lives of queens.

Ultimately, it is important to recognize that these categories of Victors, Victims, Villains, Virgins and Viragoes are constructs of our modern value system, including the advent of feminism and our modern views of sex and sexuality, rather than any reflection on early modern queenship or the realities of these historical figures' lives. While filmmakers and television producers did not necessarily intend to create these typologies, their formation reveals a perception, even if it is unconscious or inaccurate, of how powerful women and gender roles operate in both the premodern period and in our own.

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63. Roger Macdonald, *The Queen's Diamonds* (Cambridge: Cambridge Academic, 2010); *The Man in the Iron Mask*, Feature Film, directed by Randall Wallace (United Artists, 1998).
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65. For continuing popular interest in Marie Antoinette's relationship with Fersen, see Evelyn Farr's collection of their letters in *I love you madly: Marie Antoinette and Count Fersen-The secret letters* (London: Peter Owen, 2016); *Les Adieux à la Reine* was linked to Chantal Thomas' book *The Wicked Queen: The Origins of the Myth of Marie Antoinette* (English version, New York: Zone Books, 2001), which explored the sexual slander directed at the French queen. *Les Adieux à la Reine*, Feature Film, directed by Benoît Jacquot (GMT Productions, 2012).
66. *Queen Christina*, Feature Film, directed by Rouben Mamoulian (MGM, 1933).
67. *The Girl King*, Feature Film, directed by Mika Kaurismäki (Mariana Films, 2015).
68. David Grant Moss, "A Queen for Whose Time? Elizabeth I as Icon for the Twentieth Century" *The Journal of Popular Culture* 39 no, 5 (2006), 800.