

# ‘By Instruments her Powers Appear’<sup>1</sup>

## Gender, Intimacy, and Power: The political uses of Music and Miniature Portraits at the court of Queen Elizabeth I

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*Queen Elizabeth I had a strong reputation for musicality. She played the lute and the virginals, sang and even claimed to have composed dance music. Her court musicians, Thomas Tallis and William Byrd, even suggested that music was ‘indispensable to the state’.<sup>2</sup> While the Queen’s gender and her representations have been extensively examined by historians seeking to determine their respective roles in policy-making and in Elizabeth’s inclination towards marriage, the impact of music on the formation of her royal image remains an overlooked area of study.<sup>3</sup> Through the analysis of a miniature portrait by Nicholas Hilliard in which the Queen is uniquely depicted in the act of playing the lute, this article invites us to discuss the ways in which the creation of the Queen’s image as a musical monarch enabled her to rise beyond gender stereotypes and assert her authority in courtly and diplomatic affairs.*

### I. MUSIC AND ROYAL IMAGE: SEDUCTION BY CULTURAL STEREOTYPE

The first fifteen years of Elizabeth I’s reign were marked by scepticism. Despite the preceding rule of her half-sister Mary Tudor (1553–1558), it was then still widely thought that a husband was key to ‘give shape and direction to English politics that only a man could provide’.<sup>4</sup> John Knox’s uncompromising critique, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558), may not have been directed specifically at Elizabeth, but it is nonetheless a useful source in articulating the major contemporary objections to women’s rule. Knox’s argument then focused on the idea

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<sup>1</sup> Sir John Davies ‘Of the Organs of her Minde’, in *Hymnes to Astraea in Acrosticke Verse*, (London, 1599), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Katherine Butler, *Music in Elizabethan Court Politics* (The Boydell Press, 2015), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Butler, p. 5, points to the lack of research by historians on the political role of music in the Elizabethan court, in spite of a wide acknowledgement of the Queen’s musicality and the dominant presence of music in court entertainments and plays.

<sup>4</sup> Wallace T. MacCaffrey, *The Shaping of the Elizabethan Regime: Elizabethan Politics, 1558–72* (Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 94.

that women are ‘weake, fraile, impacient, feble and foolish [...] inconstant, variable, cruell and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment’, they ‘usurpe authoritie over man’. Female rule is ‘a thing repugnant to nature’, he argues, ‘because it perverts God’s necessary order in which a woman’s ‘greatest perfection’ was that she ‘was created to be subject to man’.<sup>5</sup>

Far from shunning the infinite possibilities of her unique position as a ruling queen however, Elizabeth embraced and celebrated it, seeing it as a genuine asset. She espoused her musical reputation and ‘capitalize[d] on the expectations of her behavior as a woman [...] to use them to her advantage’, and ‘plac[ed] herself beyond gender expectations by calling herself king’.<sup>6</sup> Louis Montrose further argues that both the public and private representations of Elizabeth politicized traditional images of womanhood and eroticized the political sphere through the rhetoric of courtly love which characterized her relationships with her courtiers.<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth’s natural body thus blended with the Queen’s political being, as exemplified in Nicholas Hilliard’s unique portrayal of Elizabeth playing the lute in a miniature portrait (figure 1).

This miniature portrait is unprecedented within Hilliard’s oeuvre, and presents the only surviving image of Elizabeth with an instrument. But Hilliard’s composition also ingeniously encapsulates a multiplicity of gendered meanings and raises the question of the representation of Elizabeth as both musician (embodying sensuality and femininity) and queen (projecting political authority and rationality). It has been suggested that this Berkeley Castle artefact belonged to Elizabeth’s first cousin, Lord Hunsdon, and it must have been a major commission, adds Roy Strong, as it indicates a sitting of the Queen for the occasion. While Hilliard only painted from observation and was most likely granted access to the Queen’s wardrobe and jewels, he predominantly had to rely on dressed manikins to proceed with his compositions. This miniature ‘is unique in depicting Elizabeth playing a musical instrument’ comments Strong, ‘and the quality of precise linear draughtsmanship on a minute scale both in this and in the hands of Hilliard was rarely to equal. In fact, no other miniature of the Queen was to surpass this one for sheer virtuosity [...] the liveliness of interpretation of the face indicates a sitting’.<sup>8</sup> But why did Elizabeth agree to be depicted in the act of playing the lute in a miniature portrait?

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<sup>5</sup> John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, ed. by Edward Arber (London, 1878), pp. 17–18.

<sup>6</sup> Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p.1. For further reading on Elizabeth and the political use of dance read Bella Mirabella, ‘In the Sight of all’: Queen Elizabeth and the Dance of Diplomacy’, *Early Theatre: A Journal Associated with the Records of Early English Drama*, Vol.15, No.1 (2012), 65–89.

<sup>7</sup> Louis Montrose, ‘Shaping Fantasies’: Figuration of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture’, *Representations*, Vol.2 (Spring 1983), 61–94 (p. 85).

<sup>8</sup> Roy Strong, *The English Renaissance Miniature* (Thames & Hudson, 1983), p. 85.



*Figure 1: Nicholas Hilliard, Queen Elizabeth I of England Playing the Lute, c.1575–80, miniature including brass stand, vellum stuck onto card miniature, 4.8 × 3.9 cm, © Gloucestershire, Berkeley Castle*

## II. ART IN MINIATURE: MAKING INTIMACY POLITICAL AND POLITICS INTIMATE

Elizabeth, unlike her father, never collected works of art. She could certainly be complimented on her artistic abilities and appreciation but not for her lavish patronage. The thriftiness of the Crown under Elizabeth increasingly diminished control over the royal image. The production of debased images of the Queen during the 1560s was forbidden by proclamation, until ‘some special person’ should paint her portrait as a ‘patron’, which was to be subsequently copied by other painters. The Queen had a penchant for miniature portraits and the notoriety and sheer virtuosity of Hilliard as a miniaturist, both in England and on the Continent, allowed for the image of the Queen to be measured against government thinking, without incurring too much expense.<sup>9</sup> In Elizabethan England, artistic innovations developed on the continent during the Renaissance were almost entirely alien, and even a little suspect, due to their associations with Catholic Europe. Yet, the desire to keep up with foreign rulers such

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<sup>9</sup> Strong, p. 66.

as the Medicis was counterbalanced by an interest in cultivating the cultural heritage burgeoning from the English Reformation. Miniature painting was a watercolour technique which grew out of illuminated manuscripts, the Italian word *miniare*, from which the term miniature portrait derives, literally translates as ‘to illuminate’. It is a personal and intimate object, a love token associated with passion and courtship, capable of achieving a stupefying degree of intricacy and psychological penetration at an astonishingly small scale. Yet, for the Elizabethans the most important aspect of a miniature was how much the portrait corresponded to reality. ‘These objects presented men and women of their age as they really were’, comments Roy Strong, and encouraged secret passions provoked by the longing gazes depicted.<sup>10</sup> The miniature’s ability to convey the sitter’s presence made them ideally suited to diplomatic exchanges and other intimate negotiations, such as courtships. Miniatures were a vivid, intimate portrayal of individuals as they wanted to be seen, in love or in mourning, royal, or simply beautifully human.

As such, the immense popularity of miniature portraits ostensibly echoes the inward-turning and secretive nature of the Elizabethan age: the desire to reveal one’s innermost self, which could otherwise never be displayed and expressed in public portraits, is divulged to a select few in the littleness of the miniature. This distinction explains the sharp contrast between Elizabeth’s public portraits and her representations in small scale until the 1580s; these intimate portraits were intended for the audience of potential lovers rather than a royal queen, confirms Fumerton.<sup>11</sup> The miniature in question here was commissioned during the last years of the challenging marriage negotiations with Francis Duke of Anjou, brother of King Henry III of France. These negotiations, lasting nearly a decade, provoked intense political debates and their eventual collapse in the early 1580s marked the end of Elizabeth’s real attempt at marriage. The emphasis in this miniature is manifestly placed on Elizabeth’s desirability and marriageability, reflecting Hilliard’s gradual shift in the mid 1570s towards a style already popular in France. The portrait tightly focuses on Elizabeth’s face, revealing an enigmatic smile, and on the elegance and intricacy of her dress, which was originally painted from pure gold and silver pigments. The effect of this portrait in its original condition must have been absolutely dazzling.

Additionally, by looking at an illuminating map of the architectural layout of rooms in Elizabethan aristocratic houses, we can easily identify that miniatures were typically kept in the most private room of the house, in the bedchamber or its attached closet.<sup>12</sup> A miniature is ‘viewed’, affirms Hilliard, ‘of necessity in hand near unto the eye’, obliging its audience to get intimately close to the limning, and therefore to each

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<sup>10</sup> Roy Strong quoted in Erin V. Obermueller ‘On Cheating Pictures’: Gender and Portrait Miniatures in Philip Massinger’s *The Picture*, *Early Theatre*, Vol.10, No.2 (2007), 87–107 (p. 90).

<sup>11</sup> Patricia Fumerton, “‘Secret’ Arts: Elizabethan Miniatures and Sonnets”, *Representations*, No. 15 (Summer, 1986), 57–97 (p. 60).

<sup>12</sup> Fumerton, p. 60.

other.<sup>13</sup> But to experience this highly personal moment, prospective viewers of these ‘pictures in little’ had to be permitted to access the private room where miniatures were concealed.<sup>14</sup> Take, for example, the anecdote of an intensely intimate moment between the Scottish ambassador Sir James Melville and Elizabeth in which Melville recounts how in 1564 the Queen arranged for him to be taken to a private chamber where she was alone and playing the virginal.<sup>15</sup> Feigning to be overheard, Elizabeth instantly left the room. And yet, she subsequently led Melville into the heart of her labyrinthine state apartments at Whitehall and disclosed her collection of miniatures wrapped in papers. ‘One gets the sense almost of being let in on a secret as Elizabeth penetrates outer layers of herself – her “bed-chamber”, her “little cabinet”, her personally inscribed paper wrappings – to reveal her highly prized miniatures’ and her private musical skills. ‘The sense of secrecy as Elizabeth opens herself up to Melville is highlighted by [...] the “littleness” of the pictures that requires Melville to “press” forward and hold up his candle for more light’, confirms Fumerton.<sup>16</sup> The Queen frequently relied on the erotic potential of private performance to facilitate her political manoeuvrings and give ambassadors the illusion that they were being drawn into her circle of intimates. The Imperial ambassador Baron Breuner was honoured with a private performance by Elizabeth in the summer of 1559, while travelling in a boat on the river Thames. On this occasion, Breuner recalls ‘she spoke a long while with me, and invited me to leave my boat and take a seat in that of the Treasurer’s. She then had her boat laid alongside and played upon the lute’.<sup>17</sup> The presence of a lute and its function in this Valois-inspired miniature is an arresting choice and requires elucidation.

### III. THE LUTE: LASCIVIOUS LOVE AND NOBLE SENSIBILITIES

The lute was immensely popular in England between 1570 and 1630.<sup>18</sup> For Elizabethans, this instrument was a vehicle for socially acceptable expressions of subtle emotions and feelings.<sup>19</sup> From its origins, the lute had also been allegorically associated with marriageability, fertility, and sexuality, with ‘its rounded back reminding the observer of the pregnant belly of a woman’.<sup>20</sup> When looking at Hilliard’s miniature, it

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<sup>13</sup> Fumerton, p. 60.

<sup>14</sup> The term ‘miniature portraits’ was rarely used by the Elizabethans who preferred the terms ‘limning’ or ‘picture in little’.

<sup>15</sup> Linda Phyllis Austern, “‘Sing Againe Syren’: The Female Musicain and Sexual Enchantment in Elizabethan Life and Literature”, *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Autumn 1989), 420-448 (p. 435).

<sup>16</sup> Fumerton, p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew Spring, *The Lute in Britain: A History of the Instrument and Its Music* (Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 55.

<sup>18</sup> Julia Craig-McFeely, ‘The Signifying Serpent: Seduction by Cultural Stereotype in Seventeenth-Century England’ in *Music, Sensation, and Sensuality*, ed. by Linda Phyllis Austern (New York: Routledge, 2002), 571–602 (p. 572).

<sup>19</sup> McFeely, p. 576.

<sup>20</sup> McFeely, p. 573.

is essential to re-contextualize Elizabeth's position in the 1570s: by that point Elizabeth was already a middle-aged woman, and France would only be willing to pursue the Anjou negotiations as long as Elizabeth was still able to secure an heir and thus the longevity of the Valois House. Without the assured prospect of a conceived child, the diplomatic value of an inter-dynastic match between England and France would be lost.<sup>21</sup> The choice of a lute in this miniature was most likely intended as a tool to fashion the private image of the Queen, promoting Elizabeth's 'mask of youth' in accordance with her motto: *semper eadem* (always the same).<sup>22</sup>

Since classical antiquity, the lute was also associated with humanist symbols and acted as an emblem of political harmony between countries (harmony between many strings), a fact well known in Elizabethan England.<sup>23</sup> These beliefs in musical harmony were inherited from classical authors. Plato's view in *The Republic* (380 BC) was that political communities could be kept peaceful and ordered through the control of music, a notion which echoes the Elizabethan concept of musical governance. In *De Institutione Musica*, Boethius (477–524 AD) identifies three different types of interconnected musical harmonies: *musica mundana* (heavenly music), *musica humana* (human music), and *musica instrumentalis* (instrumental music).<sup>24</sup> Although written in the early sixth century, these classical notions on the fundamentals of music were still read as an authority in the sixteenth century. Musicians could thus aspire to alter the passions of the human soul, or command all elements on earth, if they succeeded in imitating the music of the heavens.<sup>25</sup> It is fitting then that the Queen, imbued with divine qualities, could therefore govern the heavens, the political world, and the human soul. She was able to hear and play heavenly music which could in turn affect the passions, including the most complex of all: *Love*. Music was especially associated with love, as illustrated in Mary Burwell's 1660s manuscript *Lute Tutor*, in which she praises the unique ability of the lute to gain direct access to the listener's soul:

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<sup>21</sup> For further reading on Elizabeth's courtships and the Anjou negotiations, refer to Susan Doran *Monarchy and Matrimony: The Courtships of Elizabeth I*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1996); Mack P. Holt, *The Duke of Anjou and the Politique Struggle during the Wars of Religion*, (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Nathalie Mears, 'Love-making and Diplomacy: Elizabeth I and the Anjou Marriage Negotiations, c.1578–1582', in *Historical Association*, Vol. 86, No. 284 (2001), 442–466.

<sup>22</sup> The 'Mask of Youth' is a term given to the portraits and miniatures of Queen Elizabeth I which adopted a standardized image of ageless beauty.

<sup>23</sup> Katherine, Butler, "'By Instruments her Powers Appear'": Music and Authority in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I', *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (2012), 353–384 (p. 373).

<sup>24</sup> Butler, *ibid*, p. 362.

<sup>25</sup> Butler, *ibid*, p. 362 further explains 'Musica mundana was the heavenly harmony produced by the movements of the planetary spheres. Each sphere was believed to produce a sound, all of which together formed the celestial harmony. The sound was believed to be produced either by the supposedly glassy spheres rubbing against each other (as related in Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*), or by a singing female muse or siren that governed each sphere (as in book 10 of Plato's *Republic*). Musica humana was the harmony of the human soul, and between the soul and the body, while Musica Instrumentalis was the audible music of everyday life produced by instruments and voices.'

If the heart be closed it openeth it and if it be too much opened, it gently shutteth it to embrace and keep in the sweetness that the lute inspires into its sensible concavities.<sup>26</sup>

As such, the lute was an instrument ideally suited to the intimate nature of the miniature portrait, furthering the expression of inner-feelings and sensibilities. Similarly, the Low Countries in the beginning of the sixteenth century began to use instruments in portraits to express the sitter's inner-attributes. Antwerp then served as a major central point of reception and dissemination of tastes in England, as Italy still remained an unlikely destination for English artists. Playing the lute was in itself a means of entry to fashion private spaces. Lute performances were not designed for public spectacles, but took place in private contexts, while the lyrics of lute songs were introspective and often enacted seemingly personal confessions, especially of melancholy or love – a fundamental characteristic reflected in the music of John Dowland for instance.<sup>27</sup> The lute-case itself symbolised the outward appearance or superficial presentation of emotions. Shakespeare in his plays employs the lute and its case specifically to represent the conflict between the inner-person and the public image, yet he also refers to the capabilities of this particular instrument to alter moods or arouse passions. In *Richard III*, the King is seduced by a lady playing a lute, but it is unambiguously clear that the playing of the lute itself bewitches him even more than the dynamic agent herself.

[he] capers nimbly in a lady's chamber.  
To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, the undoubted visual enticement of a woman 'stroking' her lute is, in effect, used as an ideal tool for the seduction of men:

All the actions that one does in playing of the lute are handsome, the posture is modest free and gallant. [...] The shape of the lute [...] sets [the body] in an advantageous posture. The beauty of the arm, of the hands and of the neck are advantageously displayed in playing of the lute. The eyes are employed only in looking upon the company [...] of all the arts that I know there is none that engages more the inclination of men than the lute.<sup>29</sup>

Interestingly, McFeely points out that Elizabethan women hastily abandoned the lute once married in order to avoid suspicions of infidelity. Such dangers had been realised

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<sup>26</sup>McFeely, p. 577.

<sup>27</sup>Christopher Hogwood, *Music at Court* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1977), p. 41. For further reading on Dowland's political engagement as a lutenist read Kirsten Gibson, 'John Dowland and the Elizabethan courtier poets, in *Early Music*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Oxford University Press, 2013). On Dowland's contribution regarding the evolution of the Elizabethan lute, read Donald Gill, 'The Elizabethan Lute', *Galpin Society Journal*, Vol. 12 (May, 1959), 60–62.

<sup>28</sup>William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Richard III*, ed. by John Jowett (Oxford University Press; The Oxford Shakespeare, 2000), I: i, 1–13.

<sup>29</sup> McFeely, p. 580.

for Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn, and another of Henry VIII's wives, Catherine Howard, when supposed affairs with court musicians were among the evidence used to condemn them. In fact, existing portraits of noble women with a lute rarely presented them in the act of *playing* the instrument. Whether the lute is being played or is present only as a prop is important as it regulates the intensity of the message conveyed. In this instance, however, Elizabeth's hands are elegantly positioned to give a sense of a real note being played. So how should the audience read Hilliard's portrait? Is this private image a form of self-expression on Elizabeth's part? An attempted act of divine power, or a deliberate erotic invitation? Travelogue accounts such as Thomas Coryat's *Crudities* (1611) reveals a rather unflattering and problematic aspect of the lute, when he describes the practice of Venetian courtesans carrying the lute as a characteristic of their trade.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the Flemish word for lute, 'luit', was also the word for vagina, which explains the sheer quantity of Flemish pictures involving prostitutes. Whether Elizabeth was actually aware of these unfortunate connections when she agreed to sit for this portrait is, as ever, uncertain.

Indeed, the fine line between the lute as a symbol of lascivious love (the badge of the courtesan) and its nobler counterpart as a vehicle for the expression of higher sensibilities is not one of simple dichotomy. Scholars such as McFeely and Carla Zecher both agree that the iconography of a lute-playing woman invited erotic interpretations.<sup>31</sup> But Elizabeth was not an ordinary woman, and she saw to it that everyone knew of her divine musical abilities. Hilliard's portrait could simply aim to draw on both the sensual and the rational connotations of Elizabeth's musical skills. Her musical image was carefully constructed by artists and courtiers from the 1570s, comments Katherine Butler, to ensure that her music-making remained associated with power and authority, asserting her ability to govern, whilst maintaining her eloquence and her youthful beauty.<sup>32</sup> Sir Thomas Elyot (ca. 1490–1546) in *The Boke Named the Governour* (1537) justified the special place of music in the education of a leader and highlights this notion of harmony in government which was not simply metaphorical: being prepared for public life was 'necessary [...] for the better attaining the knowlege of a publyke weale, which [...] is made of an ordre of astates and degrees, and by reason therof conteyneth in it a perfect harmony.'<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth's musicality, therefore, became a representation of her power, her position as a divinely-appointed king enabled her to rise above the weaknesses stereotypically presumed of her own sex. Sir John Davies (ca. 1569–1626), poet and servant to Elizabeth, in his poetic *Hymnes to Astraea* (1599) similarly appeals to Elizabeth's unique powers through her lute-playing:

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<sup>30</sup> McFeely, p. 573.

<sup>31</sup> Carla Zecher, 'The Gendering of the Lute in Sixteenth-Century French Love Poetry', *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (Autumn 2000), 769–791 (pp. 772–774).

<sup>32</sup> Butler, *ibid.* p. 361.

<sup>33</sup> Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Boke Named the Governour*, deuyed by Syr Thomas Elyot Knight (London, 1537), p. 22.

By Instruments her powers appeare  
Exceedingly well tun'd and cleare:  
This Lute is still in measure,  
Holds still in tune, euen like a spehare,  
And yeelds the world sweet pleasure.<sup>34</sup>

But beyond these notions of political harmony, Elizabeth's music-making 'helped [her] to create the impression of her court as an alluring, intimate fantasy world in which she, as the unattainable beloved, was the central focus of admiration and devotion. This atmosphere of courtly love allowed the Queen to appropriate the traditional erotic and musical powers that women were said to have over men in order to assert her primacy in courtly and diplomatic relationships.'<sup>35</sup> This practice was famously echoed by Francis Bacon who deplored that Elizabeth 'allowed herself to be wooed and courted, and even to have love made to her'.<sup>36</sup>

#### IV. CONTROL OF COURT MUSIC: THE CASE OF WILLIAM BYRD

Elizabeth's court musicians, William Byrd (c.1540–1623) and Thomas Tallis (c.1505–85) dedicated their 1575 *Cantiones Sacrae* to their Queen, praising 'the refinement of [her] voice or the nimbleness of [her] fingers'.<sup>37</sup> They associated Elizabeth with the highest form of musicianship, where music is no longer merely sensual but demanded a rational and intellectual response from the auditor. Elizabeth's remarkable musical skills enabled her to judge and esteem their work.<sup>38</sup> Tallis remains the most illustrious and well-remembered member of the Chapel Royal who continued to sing under four monarchs – Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary Tudor, and Elizabeth I – and to endure as many changes in liturgical practice. The appointment of his pupil William Byrd, an unreformed Roman Catholic, is especially noteworthy however, as it completes the picture of Elizabeth as a musical monarch.

Evidently, the Queen recognized the paramount importance of music in her kingdom, simultaneously capable of turning her royal image and creating an open space for religious sympathies. Both Tallis and Byrd were granted a monopoly on the printing of music<sup>39</sup> and were given the Queen's permission to compose and perform in Latin for

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<sup>34</sup>Davies, p. 19.

<sup>35</sup>Butler, *ibid*, p. 365.

<sup>36</sup>Francis Bacon quoted in John Morrill, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Tudor and Stuart Britain* (Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 234.

<sup>37</sup> Katherine Butler, *Music in Elizabethan Court Politics* (The Boydell Press, 2015), p. 29.

<sup>38</sup>Butler, *ibid*, p. 366.

<sup>39</sup>Monson, Craig, 'Byrd and the 1575 *Cantiones Sacrae*. 1', *The Musical Times*, Vol. 116, No. 1594 (December, 1975), 1089–1091 (pp. 1089–1091).

the Chapel Royal, when such practice was prohibited everywhere else in the kingdom.<sup>40</sup> Craig Monson, when discussing Byrd and the Elizabethan ‘golden age of Church music’, confirms Elizabeth’s political use of the Chapel Royal: it allowed her to reassure foreign ambassadors of her soft Protestantism, with the aim that they would return home with reports of lavish services in Latin.<sup>41</sup> A German visitor to St. George’s Chapel, Windsor, in 1599 remarked with great surprise that ‘in outward ceremonies [the Queen’s services] much resemble the Papists’.<sup>42</sup>

Yet, Byrd’s more contentious private motets against the Church of England certainly exposes the Queen’s lack of control over the music produced by her court musicians. Indeed, Byrd’s controversial music travelled as far as the court of the Holy Roman Empire.

How shall we sing the Lord’s song in **a strange land**?  
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand **forget her cunning**.

Byrd was manifestly permitted to exploit his royal patronage to serve his own ambitions, without ever being severely reprimanded by the Crown, confirms Joseph Kerman. Byrd was a radical who publicly ‘traced his own individual course’ and ‘clearly [...] sailed close to the wind’. He consistently ‘refused to attend Church of England services as required by law’ and was frequently suspected of “‘seducing” Protestants back into the old religion’. Yet, his transgressions only ever amounted to a fine of £200.<sup>43</sup> The Queen’s own political strategy vis-à-vis the Catholics in part explains her remarkable clemency. At the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign, most of her subjects, following Mary’s rule, were Catholics, and as a result the Queen’s religious policy was predicated on tolerance. In addition, the unstable political climate surrounding England, combined with Elizabeth’s reduced likelihood of finding a Protestant candidate for marriage, all in turn explains the Queen’s religious moderation. ‘England might be Protestant’, says Monson, ‘but Elizabeth’s Protestantism was not Calvin’s’.<sup>44</sup> The Queen ‘frequently made a point of displaying [the music of] her chapel to foreign guests’, and to them, it was her music which presented the clearest testimony of the queen’s religious tolerance.<sup>45</sup> These reports carried home by foreign visitors were essential and needed to be handled carefully – they served both to enhance the image of princely

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<sup>40</sup>For further reading on the political role and controversial music of William Byrd, read Joseph Kerman, ‘Music and Politics: The Case of William Byrd (1540–1623)’, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 144, No. 3 (September, 2000), 275–287. On foreign influences on the music of William Byrd, especially Italian, see Joseph Kerman, ‘An Italian Musician in England, 1562–78’, *Revista de Musicología*, Vol. 16, No.1 (1993), 561–573.

<sup>41</sup>Craig Monson, ‘Elizabethan London’, in *The Renaissance: from the 1470s to the End of the 16th Century*, ed. by Ian Fenlon (London: Macmillan, 1989), 304–340, (p. 305).

<sup>42</sup> Monson, *ibid.* p. 308.

<sup>43</sup> Kerman, ‘Music and Politics: The Case of William Byrd (1540–1623)’, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 144, No. 3 (September, 2000), 275–287, (p. 276).

<sup>44</sup> Monson, *ibid.* p. 308.

<sup>45</sup> Monson, *ibid.* p. 309.

magnificence and good order of the Queen's court abroad, but also aimed to counteract any tales of vilifications spread by Rome, which had grown particularly intense after Elizabeth's excommunication in 1570. Elizabeth's coronation on water was once compared by a Venetian ambassador with one of the grandest ceremonies of the Venetian Republic: the splendour of the Elizabethan court, undeterred by the English Reformation, could still rival the most impressive dynasties from across the Channel.<sup>46</sup>

But above all else, Byrd's political machinations were mediated through the excellence of his compositional skills. His political advocacy would not have been possible had he not been the composer that he was – a genuine national asset in the eyes of the Queen. Whether or not Elizabeth personally cared about his allegiance towards the crown or the pope is almost irrelevant, she understood that the distinction of her chapel and the prestige of her royal image rested upon him.

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Nicholas Hilliard, *Queen Elizabeth I of England Playing the Lute*, c.1575-80, miniature including brass stand, vellum stuck onto card miniature, 4.8 × 3.9 cm, © Gloucestershire, Berkeley Castle

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<sup>46</sup> Monson, *ibid*, p.322.

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