

The Virgin Queen of the “Aprill” Eclogue*

Hande SEBER**

Abstract

Edmund Spenser’s “Aprill” eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579) offers an elaborate portrait of Queen Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen of England who ruled the country between 1558-1603. In the Argument, it is stated that the eclogue is written with an aim of honouring and praising Queen Elizabeth I. In a pastoral realm, with Colin’s “laye” “Of fayre *Eliza*, Queene of shepheardes all” Queen Elizabeth I’s royal power, her imperial and private virtues, her chastity in particular is glorified. As indicated in the final remarks of E.K., the “Aprill” eclogue is modelled on Virgil’s “Eclogue IV” that eulogizes the return of the mythical Golden Age with its virgin goddess Astraea who is the embodiment of justice and peace. The “Aprill” eclogue then celebrates a similar virgin, Queen Elizabeth I whose reign is represented as a new golden age. In the encomium, distinguished as “flowre of Virgins,” the Queen is identified with the virgins of the mythical and Christian tradition, and throughout the eclogue she appears as Elisa/Eliza, a maiden Queen, the sun, the moon (Phoebe/Cynthia), the fourth grace and Venus-Virgo. However, it is commonly agreed that the eclogue contains more than praise. The work was published in 1579 when the marriage negotiations of the Queen and Duke of Alençon were going on. Despite the fact that the marriage did not take place, its possibility created great tension in the country among the Protestants for it was seen as a threat to the religious and political stability of the country. It is in this respect that special emphasis is given to the “Aprill” eclogue for it is believed to mark a turning point in the glorification of the Queen from a maiden queen to the Virgin Queen, whose unmarried state becomes the symbol of national unity. In every compliment of Colin’s song, virginity is insistently emphasised and glorified.

* This article is the revised and expanded version of the paper presented at the *Fourth International IDEA Conference: Studies in English*, 15-17 April 2009, jointly organized by the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Science and Letters, Celal Bayar University, Manisa, and English Language and Literature Research Association of Turkey (IDEA).

** Doç. Dr., Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü,
hande@hacettepe.edu.tr

The eclogue ends with the symbolic coronation of Eliza where she appears as a perfect human being who in her person unites all the superior qualities suggested through her representations. This article, therefore, aims at a study of Spenser’s representation of Queen Elizabeth I as the Virgin Queen of the “Aprill” eclogue with particular emphasis on the symbolic meanings attributed to her in this portrait.

Keywords: *The Shepheardes Calender*, Aprill, Elizabeth I, Eliza, Astraea, Spenser

Öz

Edmund Spenser’in *The Shepheardes Calender* (Çoban Takvimi) (1579) adlı eserinin “Aprill” (Nisan) egloğu, 1558-1603 yılları arasında hüküm sürmüş olan İngiltere’nin Bakire Kraliçesi, Kraliçe I. Elizabeth’in özenle çizilmiş bir portresini sunmaktadır. Eserin Giriş kısmında, bu egloğun Kraliçe I. Elizabeth’e saygı gösterme ve onu yüceltme amacıyla kaleme alındığı belirtilmektedir. Pastoral bir diyarda, Colin’in “Çobanların kraliçesi, güzel *Eliza*” için yazdığı şarkı ile Kraliçe I. Elizabeth’in sahip olduğu kraliyet gücü, yönetim şekline ve şahsına ait erdemleri, en başta da iffeti yüceltilir. E.K.’nin eserin sonunda yer alan açıklamalarında belirttiği üzere, “Aprill” egloğu mitolojik Altın Çağın ve bu çağın adalet ve huzur timsali bakire tanrıçası Astraea’nın dönüşünün övgüyle anlatıldığı Vergilius’un IV. Egloğu örnek alınarak yazılmıştır. “Aprill” egloğu da Astraea’ya benzer bir bakire olan ve hüküm sürdüğü dönem yeni bir altın çağ olarak ifade edilen Kraliçe I. Elizabeth’i kutlamaktadır. Methiyede, “Bakirelerin çiçeği” olarak adlandırılan Kraliçe, mitoloji ve Hıristiyanlıkta adı geçen bakirelerle özdeşleştirilir ve egloğun tümünde Elisa/Eliza, evlenmemiş Kraliçe, güneş, ay (Phoebe/Cynthia), dördüncü güzel ve Venus-Virgo olarak karşımıza çıkar. Ancak bu eglogda övgüden daha fazlası olduğu düşünülür. Eser Kraliçe I. Elizabeth ve Alençon Düku’nün evlilik müzakerelerinin sürmekte olduğu bir dönemde, 1579’da yayınlanmıştır. Bu evlilik her ne kadar gerçekleşmemiş olsa da, evlilik ihtimali Protestanlar arasında ülkenin dini ve siyasi dengesine karşı bir tehdit olarak görülmüş, kaygıyla karşılanmıştır. Böyle bir ortamda “Aprill” egloğunun Kraliçe’ye yapılan övgülerde bir dönüm noktası olduğu, I. Elizabeth’i evlenebilecek bir kraliçe olarak yüceltmekten çok, evlenmemiş hali ile ülkenin bütünlüğünün timsali olan Bakire Kraliçe olarak övmesi dikkat çekicidir. Colin’in şarkısında yer alan her övgüde bekâret vurgulanmakta ve yüceltilmektedir. Eglog, Kraliçe’yi yansıtan karakterlerce ortaya konan tüm üstün vasıfları şahsında bir araya getiren, mükemmel insan olarak beliren Eliza’nın sembolik taç giyme töreni ile son bulur. Bu makalenin amacı Edmund Spenser’in Kraliçe I. Elizabeth’i “Aprill” egloğunun Bakire Kraliçesi olarak nasıl temsil ettiğini, beliren portrenin sembolik anlamları üzerinde durarak incelemektir.

Anahtar sözcükler: *The Shepheardes Calender*, Aprill, Elizabeth I, Eliza, Astraea, Spenser

Astraea, Eliza, the Maiden Queen, the sun, the moon, the fourth Grace, Venus-Virgo; this is how Queen Elizabeth I is reflected from the mirror that Edmund Spenser holds to the pastoral realm of the “Aprill” Eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender*. As the “New Poete” who modestly calls himself “Immerito,” Spenser aims at setting down a praise to honour the Queen in this recreative eclogue. The eclogue praises “fayre *Elisa*, Queene of

shepherdes all” (34) through an identification of her with the virgins of the mythical and Christian tradition distinguishing her as “flowre of Virgins” (48).

The idealistic poet of the Elizabethan poetic tradition, following the Virgilian Example¹ in his poetic progress, Edmund Spenser in the 1590 with the publication of the first three books, and in 1596 with the following last three books of *The Faerie Queene* presents a rather more glorious picture of Elizabeth I, from “mirrors more then one” (III. Proem 5). He celebrates the public and private virtues of the Virgin Queen whose virginity is then seen as synonymous with the peace and order of her country through a number of characters he fashions. All these representations culminate in the abstract picture of Gloriana, the Queen of Fairies whose virtues, greatness and brilliance prevents the poet from setting down a concrete picture. All these fragments that stand for different aspects of the nature of Gloriana are designed to unite in one greatness, who is the Virgin Queen of England. As paving the way to this elaborate portrait of the Queen, “Aprill” eclogue deserves special emphasis for it appears as a brief pattern of praise where Queen Elizabeth I’s virtues, most importantly her virginity is glorified through a number of associations that will all unite in Eliza by the end of the eclogue, who like Gloriana becomes the embodiment of all that is perfect.

During her reign numerous representations of Elizabeth I were made with the aim of idealizing and glorifying her, and these representations were significantly adjusted to the changing historical and political conditions of the time. The religious aspect of medieval literature, romance, courtly love and Petrarchan convention, Neo-Platonic ideal, brave, heroic and virtuous women of the Christian tradition and mythological deities were prominently used in the idealisation of the Queen. Her royal power was eulogized and she was turned into an icon of perfection. However, as King suggests, her representations differed at the beginning and through the halfway of her reign. Earlier in her reign, particularly around the 1560s Diana or Cynthia was avoided as the representations of the Queen because the perpetual virginity of the moon goddess might symbolically appear as a threat to the continuation of the Tudor dynasty. During this time the moon goddess Cynthia/Diana was symbolically used in masques and performances, not with the aim of representing the Queen, but rather for illustrating the ideas of chastity and virginity in general. Elizabeth was associated more with Athena to underline her wisdom and virtue (1990, pp. 43-44).²

¹ For an account of how the Virgilian Example (the progress of a poet from a simple and lower literary genre towards the highest and more sophisticated one) was practiced by the Renaissance poets, particularly by Edmund Spenser, see (Umunç, pp. 332-337).

² Referring to Strong’s remarks concerning the painting entitled *Queen Elizabeth and the Three Goddesses* (1569, attributed to Joris Hoefnagel), King also points out a similar manner of representation of the Queen in paintings (1990, p. 44). Strong states that the painting that is characterized as “earliest of allegorical paintings of Elizabeth” is “a celebration not of a triumphant virgin queen but of a ruler who was still expected to marry” (*Gloriana*, 1987, p. 65). It depicts the Queen with her coronation orb and sceptre in her hands, and she exceeds Juno, Minerva and Venus, see (Strong, *Gloriana*, 1987, pp. 65-69).

Following her coronation, concerns about the Queen's marriage and the succession marked her reign. On three occasions, on February 10, 1559, January 28, 1563 and November 5, 1566,³ Queen Elizabeth I replied to the petitions from Parliament concerning her marriage. In these speeches, although she evidently stated her personal preference to remain unmarried, she did not reject the idea of marriage if there would be a suitor who would comply with the political expectations of her country. In taking into consideration what Elizabeth said when she was in her thirties and forties, King believes that she "fashioned a public identity as an unmarried ruler who is eligible, indeed eager, for marriage to a politically *appropriate* husband" (1990, p. 40). With the failure of her last attempt at marriage with Francis, Duke of Alençon in the 1580s and onwards, particularly around the 1590s, King notes that there was a sudden shift in Elizabeth's representations. Her virginity was celebrated as a permanent condition through her associations with Cynthia, Diana and Venus-Virgo; the virgin goddesses (1990, p. 43).

Although Alençon was a Catholic, there were reasons related to the foreign policy behind this marriage negotiations, concerning the Anglo-Spanish relations "to support anti-Spanish forces in the Netherlands" (Levin, 1994, p. 61). During the marriage negotiations Alençon came to England twice; first in August 1579, then in October 1581 both to ask for the Queen's support in the Low Countries and to urge her to marry him – but it was certain on February 1582 that the marriage would not take place (Levin, 1994, pp. 63-64). Queen Elizabeth's poem "On Monsieur's Departure," thought to be written in 1582 in relation to Alençon's departure,⁴ is significant in the way the Queen, through the use of Petrarchan contraries, complains about the yearnings of her heart but acknowledges her duty to repress them and asserts her own choice to remain single, to become The Virgin Queen, despite all its consequences.

Despite the fact that the marriage did not take place, its possibility created great tension in the country among the Protestants, particularly among the Protestant lords of the Queen's Privy Council, for it was seen as a threat to the religious and political stability of the country. Voices were also raised from the public; particularly John Stubbs' pamphlet *Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf whereinto England is like to be Swallowed by another French Marriage*, published in August 1579, in a severe tone reacted against this marriage; and Stubbs lost his right hand as punishment (Coles, 2002, pp. 41-42; King, 1990, pp. 48-49; Levin, 1994, pp. 61-62). Sir Philip Sidney's, "A Letter Written by Sir Philip Sidney to Queen Elizabeth, Touching Her Marriage With Monsieur" is equally significant as it voices the common concern pertaining to this unapproved marriage – yet in a milder tone. Sidney in his letter stresses that the marriage would be "unprofitable" for the Queen and it is resembled to a "weary medicine" applied to "so healthful a body" (1973, pp. 46-47). He also underlines that with this marriage Catholics would be more powerful and it would cause a division in the country, and hence serve for the benefit of France and Alençon (1973, pp. 48-49). Sidney also emphasises that the Queen is stronger

³ For these speeches see (Elizabeth I, pp. 56-60; 70-72; 93-98).

⁴ For the poem and its sources see (Elizabeth I, pp. 302-303).

when she is alone. Her “standing alone” is bestowed on her by God and it grants her to be “the only protector of his church” (1973, p. 56).

Queen Elizabeth’s courtship, according to Johnson, also “preoccupied the group around the Earl of Leicester” and was thought to affect Spenser when he was completing *The Shepheardes Calender*. Thinking that Spenser shared the same concern with the ones who did not want a change after twenty years of Elizabeth’s peaceful reign, Johnson further argues that the poet created a new image of the Queen “as Elisa, whose fruitful virginity manifests itself as pastoral harmony” (1990, pp. 155-156). Similarly, with reference to the date of publication of *The Shepheardes Calender*, that is in 1579, during the marriage negotiations, King gives special emphasis to the “Aprill” Eclogue identifying it as “a borderline text” that can both be read as depicting the Queen as “eligible for marriage” and “as an appeal to remain unmarried” (1990, p. 32). Although Spenser’s style is not as direct as that of Sidney in his letter to the Queen, in the “Aprill” eclogue the idea of virginity is insistently emphasised in every compliment of Colin’s song for Elisa.

In the “Argument” of the “Aprill” eclogue it is stated that “*This Æglogue is purposely intended to the honor and prayse of our most gracious souereigne, Queene Elizabeth.*” Hobbinol is going to sing the song made by Colin “*in honor of her Maiestie, whom abruptly he termeth Elysa.*”⁵ Miller thinks that the lay in the “Aprill” eclogue is “Spenser’s first attempt to write Elizabeth as a symbol of England’s imperial destiny” (1979, p. 232). Elizabeth I’s central position in the song made by Colin and her association with the mythical deities are not only mere compliments but they all underline her virtues and power for peace and national unity.

The eclogue as stated in the final remarks of E.K. is modelled on Virgil’s Fourth Eclogue that prophesises the return of the mythical Golden Age⁶ with its goddess Astraea, the virgin goddess who represents justice and peace:

Now the last age of Cumae’s prophecy has come;
The great succession of centuries is born afresh.
Now too returns the Virgin; Saturn’s rule returns;
A new begetting now descends from heaven’s height. (Eclogue IV.4-7)

⁵ The reason why Hobbinoll, not Colin, sings the song is that, due to his unreturned love for Rosalind Colin is in deep plight and retreated into isolation. It is, therefore, quite significant that beneath the major task of celebrating the Queen, Colin as a poet is also honoured by his friends in reciting the poem he has written.

⁶ Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* Book I, talks about the four ages of man. The golden age under the rule of Saturn was an age of eternal spring. It was an age of security and there was no fear of punishment. It was also an age of prosperity for there was no fear of hunger; milk and nectar flowed in the streams and nature bountifully offered fruits and grains. However, there was a gradual decline from golden age to silver, brazen and iron ages due to the increasing corruption and violence among mankind. As a consequence of this decline “the maiden Astraea” the virgin goddess of the golden age “abandoned the blood-soaked earth” (1971, pp. 9-13). Yates states that Ovid took the story from Greek sources. The golden age tradition was used by Hesiod and was expanded by Aratos, the Greek astronomical poet, who explained that the virgin goddess left the world in the iron age and became the constellation Virgo (1947, p. 28).

The "Aprill" eclogue then presents a similar virgin, Queen Elizabeth I whose reign is celebrated as a new golden age, in a pastoral realm in spring time. Yates associates the golden age with the "imperial" idea during the reign of Elizabeth I, that is a period of national expansion, Protestantism and English Renaissance (1947, pp. 37-38). From the very beginning of the eclogue, by building the encomium on Virgil's model, Spenser's intention of praising Elizabeth as Astraea, the virgin goddess of the golden age is evident.

After a discussion of the plight of Colin with Thenot, Hobbinoll begins to sing Colin's "laye" that begins with calling the nymphs and muses to help him with a "worthy praise," for his subject matter is such a person that "in her sexe doth all excell" (33; 44-45). Colin's use of this conventional device of appealing to nymphs and muses according to Cain is his "declaration of authorial inadequacy before the subject" that is the Queen whose dignity and excellence is elevated (1968, p. 47). The Queen does not appear simply as a lady whose beauty, grace and virtues are to be celebrated in the Petrarchan fashion. Other than physical descriptions, Spenser's praise of Elizabeth is based on spiritual and monarchic qualities of an ideal ruler, and will be more evidently illustrated through the end of the eclogue, in the symbolic coronation of Elisa.

In the eclogue, the myth of Pan and Syrinx is used with an aim of denoting the heavenly origin of the Queen. The myth as E.K. states is not used in its traditional significance of poets and composition of poetry; Pan represents both Henry VIII and "Christ himselfe, who is the verye Pan and god of Shepheardes" (Spenser, 1969, p. 434). Such use of the myth makes the queen "in some sense the daughter of God" thus justifying the common idea that she is chosen by God as the ruler (Cain, 1968, p. 50). Her blessed person, princely quality, divine origin is emphasised, and moreover she is associated with spotless Syrinx, whose chastity is preserved when she was turned into reeds in escaping from the lust of Pan. The divinely ordained Queen with her virginity is celebrated:

Of fayre *Elisa* be your siluer song,
that blessed wight:
The flowre of Virgins, may shee florish long,
In princely plight.
For shee is *Syrinx* daughter without spotte,
Which *Pan* the shepheards God of her begot:
So sprong her grace
Of heauenly race,
No mortall blemishe may her blotte. (46-53)

Colin's statement that distinguishes and elevates the Virgin Queen as the "flowre of Virgins" in some sense sets the pattern of celebration of Elizabeth and prepares the ground for her further associations with the virgins of the mythical and Christian tradition. Cain states that Elizabeth's celebration through the qualities attributed to the Virgin result in

the “semi-deification” of Queen Elizabeth and furthermore, the symbolic use of the myth of Pan and Syrinx makes the birth of Eliza “a variety of Immaculate Conception” (1968, pp. 49-50). Wilson argues that Queen Elizabeth’s identification with the Virgin Mary was also commonly used in her representations, and all through her reign she “was the object of a love not dissimilar in quality from that which for centuries had warmed English hearts that looked to the virgin Queen of Heaven” (1939, p. 215). As an extension of such glorification and deification of the Queen, Yates suggests that some symbols like rose, star, moon, phoenix, ermine and pearl that are associated with chastity and the Virgin Mary were used in Elizabeth’s representations as the second blessed virgin who rules the earth (1947, pp. 72-75).

Elizabeth’s maiden state and its close connection with the unity and peace of the country is further emphasised in the colours of her dress. She is dressed in “Scarlot like a mayden Queene,” and in “Ermines white” that once again represent her maidenhood. On her head she wears a “Cremosin coronet” with “Damaske roses and Dafadillies” among which there are “Bayleaues” (57-61). The colours of her dress are suggestive of the red and white colours of the Tudor rose, and as E.K. underlines it praises the unifying power of the Queen (Spenser, 1969, p. 434). The emphasis on the whiteness of the dress as “Ermines white” is also quite symbolic, because in the Petrarchan tradition, the ermine is the symbol of purity, chastity and virginity.⁷

Both in her representations and in her self representations – particularly in her speeches – Queen Elizabeth I’s androgynous quality, her two bodies (her female “body natural” and “body politic” as the king)⁸ are commonly used. This androgyny can be observed in the sun and moon symbolism that is used to emphasize her royal power. With her “angelick face” and her “princely grace” Elisa appears like “*Phoebe fayre*” (64-66), the twin sister of Phoebus, who is later addressed as Cynthia. However, with her brilliance Elisa’s beams outshine those of the sun; seeing such brightness Phoebus is amazed and thinks that she is “another Sunne belowe” (77). Aptekar explains that the sun is a perfect symbol to represent the monarch “who embodies earthly justice” and who at the same time “mirrors the absolute sun: God” (1969, p. 72). Resembling the queen both to the sun and the moon respectively also represents the two imperial virtues of justice and clemency (Cain, 1968, p. 53).

Colin, then, immediately ceases to compare Eliza with the moon, for he thinks that she is far more superior to such comparisons:

⁷ Strong refers to what Yates earlier suggested in relation to the symbolic meaning of an ermine. In the illustration of *Triumph of Chastity*, from Petrarch’s *Trionfi*, an ermine with a golden collar adorned with topas was depicted on the banner that represents resistance against passion. In the Petrarchan tradition, an ermine (which would better die than stain its fur) metaphorically stands for chastity and it is commonly used in arms and medals as the symbol of purity (*Gloriana*, 1987, pp. 112-115).

⁸ For the doctrine of “King’s Two Bodies” see (Kantorowicz, 1957, pp.7-14) and (Axtion, 1977, pp. 11-13).

Shewe thy selfe *Cynthia* with thy siluer rayes,
and be not abasht:
When shee the beames of her beauty displayes,
O how art thou dasht?
But I will not match her with *Latonaes* seede,
Such follie great sorow to *Niobe* did breede.
Now she is a stone,
And makes dayly mone,
Warning all other to take heede. (82-87)

A similar strategy of praise – not exactly matching but suggesting – is also used by Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*. The Queen is presented as incomparable and unique, the greatness of whom hinders the poet to offer a precise picture. Not single but multiple representations would build the encomium, each epitomizing an aspect of the perfect whole. The power and authority that the Queen had possibly made Spenser cautious in his praise, for it is apparent that he did not want to end up like Niobe who was turned into a stone. Cain suggests another possibility of Colin's rejection to compare Elisa with Cynthia. He thinks that it lies in "the popular hope (and fear)" that the Queen would marry and "too overwhelming a comparison to Diana might not be thought appropriate" (1968, p. 53).

The solar and moonlike qualities of Elisa in the following lines leave its place to a rather more suggestive symbol; the Fourth Grace. The graces accompany Elisa in a dance and honour her as the fourth grace. Her participation makes the dance of the Three Graces as rather more harmonious and "euen" (113):⁹

She shalbe a grace,
To fyll the fourth place,
And reigne with the rest in heauen. (115-117)

Cullen believes that the Graces, "like Eliza, therefore, embody the ordering principles both of art and society. It is perfectly natural that Eliza should join them as a fourth Grace" (1970, p. 117). In taking Spenser's use of the fourth grace both in the "Aprill" eclogue and in *The Faerie Queene* into consideration, Snare believes that she has "rich symbolic value" and "subsumes the other three within herself" (1971, pp. 351-352). He further asserts that Spenser knew such a use, and the fourth grace appears "both as a compliment and as a characterization of Eliza in 'April'" (1971, p. 352). Once more Elizabeth appears as the embodiment of numerous virtues, and this multiplicity gathered

⁹ Snare talks about Spenser's use of the fourth grace in praising Elizabeth, and also notes that such comparison is common among the poets, artists and philosophers of the sixteenth century. He also states that although the graces were commonly accepted as three in number, in some ancient sources this number may vary; then he refers to some instances in literary works where the beloved is praised as the fourth grace (1971, pp. 350-351). For the classical and Christian significances of the Graces see (Wind, 1968, pp. 26-52; Snare, 1971, p. 352) and E.K.'s glosse (Spenser, 1969, p. 434).

in her character displays another picture of perfection.

Colin's song comes to its end with the gifts offered to her, a scene depicting a symbolic coronation of Elisa. Calliope and Muses offer her "Bay branches" (104), Chloris, the chief nymph brings her a coronal of "Oliue branches" (123). As E.K. glosses, these gifts represent "honour and victory," "Peace and quietnesse" respectively (Spenser, 1969, p. 434). Elisa appears as a "Princesse" (126) who brings wars to an end, and this part is called by Cullen to be "the climax of April's rites" where Elisa appears as the figure suggestive of the peace of the golden age (1970, p. 117). Moreover, the "shepherds daughters" give and adorn her with flowers (127-144). Snare believes that these gifts "suggest the nature of Elisa" with her "sovereignty, peace, learning, poetry, harmony, bounty, and comeliness" (1971, pp. 352-353):

Now ryse vp *Elisa*, decked as thou art,
 in royall aray:
 And now ye daintie Damsells may depart
 echeone her way,
 I feare, I haue troubled your troupes to longe:
 Let dame *Eliza* thanke you for her song. (145-150)

With this symbolic coronation, Elizabeth's picture is completed. "[F]ayre *Elisa*, Queene of shepherdes all" (34) at this moment becomes "*Eliza*." Montrose underlines the importance of this transformation and believes that the "text consistently distinguishes between Elisa as the subject of the song and Eliza as the subject to whom the song is offered, between the royal image of Colin's own making and the collective royal image embodied in the queen" (1986, n.36, p. 337).

In this symbolic coronation, according to Johnson, Elizabeth appears as a bride; and subsequently he suggests that "Spenser offered his queen an image of herself as the chaste or celestial Venus, whose virgin state engendered peace and plenty" (1990, p. 170). It is in this respect that Spenser's praise is a "veil through which he advised her, [. . .] that she needed neither husband nor child to assure her own immortality or her country's stability" (Johnson, 1990, pp. 170-171). Coles, similarly, maintains that with the "Aprill" eclogue what Spenser does is more than to "highlight the poet's ability to immortalize his sovereign; he directs his sovereign to the immortal image" (2002, p. 44).

The "Aprill" Eclogue ends with an image of Venus-Virgo as indicated in Thenot's and Hobbinol's "Emblemes." Their words, as E.K. glosses, are borrowed from Virgil's *Aeneid*, from the part where Aeneas fails in recognising "his mother Venus, appearing to him in likeness of one of Dianaes damosells" (Spenser, 1969, p. 435):

Thenots Embleme
O quam te memorem virgo? [O how may I recall you virgin?]
 Hobbinols Embleme
O dea certe. [O goddess certainly]

The eclogue which identifies the Queen with virtuous virgins concludes with her deification as Venus-Virgo which represents her as the Virgin Queen. Wind states that the most authoritative use of the composite figure of Venus-Virgo was in the *Aeneid*, and this figure was also used by the Renaissance Platonists "in their doctrine of the union of Chastity and Love" (1968, pp. 77-78). This contrasting and paradoxical imagery is commonly used in Elizabeth's representations "to reconcile the dual nature of royalty, divine and human, soul and body, mind and passions" (Strong, *The cult*, 1987, p. 47).

In the "Aprill" eclogue, Queen Elizabeth I appears as a single and perfect monarch who in her person unites all the superior qualities suggested through her representations. She is the sovereign appointed by God, most worthy virgin among the virgins of the mythical and Christian tradition, the perfect symbol of chastity and love, peace and order, the maiden queen married to her own country who is adorned with innumerable monarchic and spiritual virtues. Through an emphasis on virginity in each compliment, Spenser fulfils his aim of glorifying and honouring the Queen in this eclogue. With all her excellence the Virgin Queen of the "Aprill" eclogue promises a new golden age. In other words, as an embodiment of Astraea – the goddess of justice with whose return to earth the mythical golden age would be restored – Queen Elizabeth I is celebrated by Spenser as the new Astraea who will usher in the golden age for Tudor England; an age of national expansion, peace, unity, religious and political stability.

References

- Aptekar, J. (1969). *Icons of justice: Iconography and thematic imagery in Book V of The Faerie Queene*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Axton, M. (1977). *The Queen's two bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan succession*. London: Royal Historical Society.
- Cain, T. H. (1968). The strategy of praise in Spenser's "Aprill". *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 8 (1), 45-58. Retrieved May 3, 2007, from <http://www.jstor.org>.
- Coles, K. A. (2002). "Perfect hole": Elizabeth I, Spenser, and chaste productions. *English Literary Renaissance*, 32 (1), 31-61.
- Cullen, P. (1970). *Spenser, Marvell, and renaissance pastoral*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Elizabeth I. (2002). *Elizabeth I: Collected works*. L. S. Marcus, J. Mueller and M. B. Rose (Eds.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Johnson, L. S. (1990). *The Shepherdes Calender*. University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Kantorowicz, E. H. (1957). *The king's two bodies: A study in medieval political theology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- King, J. N. (1990). Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen. *Renaissance Quarterly*, 43, 30-74.

- Levin, C. (1994). *The heart and stomach of a king: Elizabeth I and the politics of sex and power*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Miller, D. L. (1979). Authorship, anonymity, and *The Shepheardes Calender*. *Modern Language Quarterly*, 40 (3), 219-236.
- Montrose, L. A. (1986). The Elizabethan subject and the Spenserian text. In P. Parker and D. Quint (Eds.), *Literary theory / Renaissance texts* (pp. 303-340). Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. (1971). F. J. Miller (Trans.). Vol. I. London: William Heinemann. 2 vols.
- Sidney, P. (1973). A Letter written by Sir Philip Sidney to Queen Elizabeth, touching her marriage with Monsieur. In K. Duncan-Jones and J. Van Dorsten (Eds.), *Miscellaneous prose of Sir Philip Sidney* (pp. 46-57). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Snare, G. (1971). Spenser's fourth grace. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 34, 350-355. Retrieved May 7, 2007, from <http://www.jstor.org>.
- Spenser, E. (1969). *The poetical works of Edmund Spenser*. J. C. Smith and E. De Selincourt (Eds.). E. De Selincourt (Int.). 1912. London: Oxford University Press.
- Strong, R. (1987). *Gloriana: The portraits of Queen Elizabeth I*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Strong, R. (1987). *The cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan portraiture and pageantry*. 1977. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Umunç, H. (2003). Vergilius örneği: Rönesans İngiliz edebiyatında tür ve üslup sorunu. *Frankofoni* 15, 327-340.
- Virgil. (1984). *The Eclogues*. G. Lee (Trans.). Middlesex: Penguin.
- Wilson, E. C. (1939). *England's Eliza*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wind, E. (1968). *Pagan mysteries in the Renaissance*. 1958. London: Faber and Faber.
- Yates, F. A. (1947). Queen Elizabeth as Astraea. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 10, 27-82. Retrieved May 3, 2007, from <http://www.jstor.org>.

