1. The Politics of the Past. Perceptions of Elizabethan Queenship and the moulding of intellectual traditions

In several of his remarkable and influential works on English Ancient Constitutionalism, Pocock has vividly indicated two general sources for the edification of the *common law mind*, conceived as the endemic mentality which contrasted in many respects with continental conceptions and ideologizations of European legal tradition: Humanism and English Ecclesiology. Discussing the matter in a critical perspective, Glenn Burgess has contributed to innovate significantly the scientific debate for at least three important reasons. First of all He has brought to light the rhetorical valence of the expression itself “ancient constitution” and its misleading extent, so to react to a fictional and mythified image of a fixed constitution, which existed sometime in the past. In the renewed view, what is under scrutiny is not a frozen set of practices and events, but the complex bulk of relations between the past and the present and its strategic administration by selected elites with a legitimating intent. Secondly, Burgess has emphasized the inherent ambiguities that lay behind the formal structure of the concept of “common law mind”, the preconceptions which together gave form to it and their fundamental role to the ways in which political matters were discussed. Finally, he has clarified that the study of past ideas must always be in part a process of defamiliarization and, in this direction, he has underlined the need to add a supplemental item to the sources traced out by Pocock, namely the intellectual tradition of the common law itself.
On this ground, my aim is to discuss the perceptions of Elizabethan queenship and the conceptualization of Elizabethan policy-making according to the competing paradigms used to construct legal traditions. As a comparatist scholar, I think that the main issue is not, or not only, the understanding of Elizabethan public discourse and of its characterization – and consequently it does not involve exclusively problems of methodology and interpretation –, but rather the relevance assumed by the skilful representation of sovereignty in the process of building an undisputable national autonomy – and therefore it compels a systemological analysis on the living bodies of contending customs and memories, artfully condensed in a canonical content of commemoration. The proclaimed self sufficiency of English Law and Constitution, through the strenuous defence of the Elizabethan settlement, was at the centre of juridical and geopolitical tensions, which ultimately came to disrupt the asserted unity of the Western Legal Tradition. At this regard I’ll move from the reflections developed by H.J. Berman in his famous Law and Revolution, sharing with this critical account a theological approach to political and jurisprudential analysis, but at the same time I intend to stress the motives of dissimilarity and divergence much more than the only apparent (in my opinion) parallelism among the revolutions which transformed the Western Constitution (that is the structural and composite nexus of nationhood, order, power and legitimation).

Having clarified the context of my analysis, the main issue I’ll try to confront with, in the following lines, deals with the governance and administration of Elizabeth’s representations. In particular I’ll examine:

- how the contending movements, respectively of contestation and appropriation of Elizabeth’s body and behaviour were settled and composed through the medium of intellectual traditions of thought;

- how this cunning negotiation provoked and incited theoretical discussions on the nature and the extent of authority;
- how the “Elizabethan issue” was at the heart of legal and ecclesiastical antiquarianism, the scholarly movement which, in substance, constructed the plot (both legal and narrative, as I’d like to point out) of Ancient Constitutionalism.

All these questions are strongly related with the seminal arguments debated by Pocock and Burgess, insofar as they claims for a deeper investigation on the entangled structure of the common law mind, in order to unveil even its unspoken implications on the morphology of the English system. At the same time, they embrace the mutual relationship between rival languages – conceived as a mentalité - and fighting traditions - considered as willed and intentional, repositories of monuments and ideas taken up deliberately - as the fundamental formants of every legal systems. In this perspective, the Elizabethan public portrait was displayed by means of different languages, each one with proper terms and concepts, and especially the language of the law, which made use of terms like custom, prerogatives, liberties, precedent, rights; the language of theology, which introduced words like God, providence, order, grace; the language inherited from classics and, in homeopathic doses, to quote Holdsworth’s witty sentence, from Roman Law, which became the privileged way of expression of a nationalistic kind of neo-humanism. This polyglot framework was also enriched by a variety of sublanguages, like idioms, rhetorics, distinguishable language games, of which each might have its own rules, preconditions and implications, tone and style. My purpose here is to understand how these multifarious languages were combined and put together in the structure of a tradition and how this process was a theorizing and intellectual work. In my view, the emphasis must be placed on a hybrid “master language”, implied by professional corporations (respectively legal, literary, theological and ecclesiastical corporations) capable of articulating the practices which made their speech authoritative and preeminent on the others. These leading groups endowed historical facts with aesthetic forms; participated actively to a battle of memories to dispute and decide it; fought against the arch-enemy, that is oblivion; provided the English audience with genealogies; mingled educational with propagandistic designs; and above all devised a ritual of
commemoration. Briefly they conducted the liturgical repetition of a selected past into a codified and legitimated present.

2. Representation and cultural negotiations. The onto-juridical threshold between Elizabeth’s Flesh and the Body of Sovereignty

According to the original approach I’ve proposed, I’m going to interpret the visibility of Elizabeth’s fascination and the pivotal role played by what she emblematized in giving substance to English memory. At this aim I’ll put at the centre of the scene two key concepts: the concept of representation, with its powerful insight on a methodological level, and the threshold between Elizabeth’s flesh and the Body of Sovereignty, whose governance and disposition comes to be a cultural device apt to capture and articulate the numerous tensions existing across different fields of human experience. In my personal understanding, in Tudor time and especially during Elizabeth’s reign, the subtle nexus between representation and corporeality is the main issue when approaches the construction of English public identity and, consequently, the legal imagination of the national past. In this perspective, on the one hand, Elizabeth’s Flesh, that is her natural, physical, female and even sexual consistence, is the medium through which the words and terms I’ve mentioned above, originally predicated to different and autonomous fields, are mingled, transposed and transferred from one dominium to another, and specifically from Theology to Law with the mediation of literary texts. On the other, the embodiment of Elizabeth’s Flesh, or the secular transfiguration of the feminine physique into the body of sovereignty, is shaped, refined and fashioned in dialogue with contending interests. The transubstantiation of the Flesh into the Body, which recalls the Christian dogma although with a reversal of grounds, is the proper subject matter of representation: more precisely it traces the line of possible division between self-presentation (that is the ways in which Royalty and Queenship were portrayed and promoted by the Sovereignty itself and by the Courtiers) and re-presentation (that is the figurative and narrative presentification of the image of authority proposed or, much vigorously, exhibited in different contexts), consequently producing the
emergence of a public sphere where perceptions and reactions (conforming or dissenting with the official discourse) are located. Moreover, it discloses the alliance of the acts of repetition and remembering in the making of political legitimation and it entails the question of the complete communicability of the “mysterious majesty”. In this way, the Body – as other than natural flesh – could be viewed as the privileged site of a 'competition for representation and counter-presentation', and its exposure marks the limits of the admitted revelation, fixing the canon of what can be ostensible, manifest, visible, perceptible and what, on the contrary, has to remain secret. The latter argument is of particular importance for the proper comprehension of legal traditions in general, and of the English Legal Tradition in particular, insofar as it deals with the ontological Excess, enshrined behind the phenomenological appearance of every legal system. Furthermore, it justifies and supports the conventional statement according to which Elizabeth is an (or rather the) icon of the Nation, renewing its proper significance. In fact, what is under investigation here is the metaphysical nature of the icon, the typical device which allows penetrating the invisible. “The icon does not result from a vision, but provokes one. The invisible seems in a semblance which however never reduces the invisible to the slackened wave of the visible” (Marion). The icon breaks with the figured allocation of the visible in the perceptible face for the invisible. My inquiry on the liminal, onto-juridical threshold between Elizabeth’s Flesh and the Body of Sovereignty is therefore strongly correlated to a specific methodological approach I’ve introduced in the field of comparative law. At this regard, my interest is to combine the historical perspective and the connected narratological accounts with the symbolic morphogenesis of a given system of law: the genealogical and archaeological perspectives are mutually interwoven with aesthetic dimension, so to discover the heterogeneous forms of presentification selected in diverse times and spaces, their correspondence or their fracture, finally the aesthetic traces of resemblance or difference. This view is also oriented towards laying bare the relics of the ‘unmasterable past’, that is the past that doesn’t pass away because it has not been either comprehended or exorcized, and consequently whose presentification has been denied.
3. Katechontic Elisabeth. The oppositional ways of salvation as systemological markers within the boundaries of the Western Legal Tradition

Moving from the premises I’ve developed above, I’d like to emphasize the discontinuity between Elizabeth’s self-perception and self-presentation, based on her constancy and immutability and stigmatized in the motto taken from her mother “Semper eadem” (Always the same) and the multiple, even contrastive representations offered in the public sphere. As it has been noted “Elizabeth acquired different aspects as she was required to fulfil various symbolic needs” (Hackett, Virgin Mother). This sort of gap or dissociation lays at the basis of a plot of ambiguity and contest, which could be defined as the law of the narrative of the English Legal Tradition (as a whole composed of Literature Law, Iconography and Arts): a rhetoric of stability, permanence and steadiness was countervailed by a rhetoric of erratic, alterable, irresolute projection and symbolization.

My scientific aim is to analyse the impact of the complicated performance of Regality and Sovereignty on the proper structure of English Literature and English Law. Privileging an interdisciplinary approach, I think that it’s possible to appreciate a chiasmic epilogue for the morphological perceptibility of these two fields. In particular, the administration of what I’ve called the onto-juridical threshold between Elizabeth’s flesh (as the objective correlative of self-perception) and the Body of sovereignty (as the objective correlative of external representation), on the one hand, contributed to individuate, define and articulate different literary genres; on the other was intellectually managed in order to assert an undisputable and unitary Order, personified by one and only one central authority. While Literature mirrored the antagonistic views through the polymorphous strategies of literary composition, Law claimed for a statement of unity, uniformity and consistency, therefore the legal elites (and especially, as I have previous recalled, the legal antiquarianism as a cultural movement) were responsible for the selective amalgamation of practices and discourses into a coherent framework. Literature did not solve conflicts and rivalries, quarrels and dissensions; on the contrary Law - or better legal thought - mythicized a univocal portrait. In this perspective we can say that Literature
came to unseal the ontological - and consequently representational - Excess beyond the Law. In the first direction, the radical interrogation of sovereignty gave birth to satire, as a new genre, which became a fashion in the later years of Elizabeth’s reign. The theatre was the literary device apt to traduce the discontinuities in the processes of symbolizing and signifying; the proper locus for the staging of cultural anxieties and for the creation of an embodied mediation, considered as a transaction from physical bodies (including the Queen’s Body) to aural impression and, conversely, from fantasmatic characters to corporeal beings; the site where it was performed the presence of an absence. Moreover, the poetics of Gloriana, Astrea, Cynthia and Belphoebe didn’t eradicate a darker discourse of disrespect and dissent, deliberately provocative if not outrageous: the godly purity of a Virgin Queen was dismantled by a pornographic literature, and the textual exposure of sexual inclinations or of the female genitalia of Queen Elizabeth disrupted the mystical secret defended by the royal body, blaspheming the theological act of revelation.

In the second direction (with reference to the legal domain), the omnipresent and celebrated cult of the Virgin Queen was the strategic means through which jurisdictional aspects were definitively regulated. It was functional to the fulfilment of Henry VIII’s programme, and especially to the assertion of national independence and autonomy from the authority of the Roman Church. On this ground I will introduce an original characterization of Elizabeth in terms of “Katechontic Elizabeth”, in order to present the legal understanding of Elizabethan Queenship according to an approach of political theology.

At this aim I’ll discuss three main issues:

- the attraction of theological arguments into the legal and political domain for re-signifying Elizabethan virginity,

- the hermeneutic revolution induced by Reformation and, as its specific effect, the new explication of the act of representing;

- the contending strategies implied by the Roman Church and the Anglican one to settle the relationship between ‘a’ Sovereign Authority (secular, theological or hybrid) and the Authority of
the Sacred Book. At this level it will be interesting to note the mutual compositions of the places assigned respectively to different kind of corpora – a physical body, that is a ‘vested human flesh’, or a material body, that is a book – within a theo-juridical order.

All these arguments come to justify the syntagm I have introduced as the main core of my paper, "Katechontic Elizabeth", as it is based on the adjectival use of the word katechon, with its strong theological ascendancy, in order to qualify the theo-political transubstantiation of Elizabethan Flesh into a doubled Sovereign Body. In this perspective, I could suggest a more pondered reflection on Kantorowicz’s theory about the king’s two bodies and a more incisive emphasizing of the peculiarities of English Majesty.

To understand my theoretical construction, we have to remind that Elizabethan ecclesiology was one of the most significant sources of the English Ancient Constitutionalism; the most notable common lawyers are clearly associated with the most famous theologians in the process that led to the assertion of English exceptionalism. Brilliantly John Guy has remarked that “St. German did for English Common Law what, a generation or so later, John Jewel and Richard Hooker did for Anglican Church”. In this framework I will deeply reflect on the multifarious devices used to substantiate the Cult of the Virgin Queen or, more incisively in my personal view, to transform a virginal flesh into a body of salvation, evocatively into a katechontic body. They fundamentally were: an apocalyptic narrative, an apologetic plot, the projection of a millenaristic order and a redundant iconography.

First of all, the historical autonomy of England in religious affairs was asserted by means of the construction of a national apocalyptic (Pocock). In the intellectual tradition of ecclesiastical antiquarianism the apocalyptic thought acquired a political dimension, supporting the break with Rome. The main issue was to select evidences of the early Christianization of Britain, so to establish a pedigree for the Church of England that antedated the growth of the Holy See, the see of Rome. John Bale, Matthew Parker, John Foxe, John Jewel – among the others – were the authors of a new, reformed history of a corresponding re-founded nation. Even with different accents and declensions, the apocalyptic narrative was developed around these main themes.
Britain (as the genealogical ancestor of England) was properly Christianized and part of the true, primitive church. This pristine, perfect state was gradually altered and destroyed by the illegitimate usurpation of the Bishop of Rome, the Catholic Pope, who extended both his power, and the clerical jurisdiction especially at the expense of the English Crown. This master narrative was instrumental to the rejection of the Catholic claim that the Church of England was in a state of schism from the true church and to the matchless identification of the Roman Pope with the Antichrist. The proofs of such onto-metaphysical coincidence were recognized in the Popes’ defiance of Christ’s teaching and, in particular, in their historical ambitions and their strong desire for worldly power; in their scandalous behaviour and in the falsity of their magisterial doctrines. According to the main tenets of the apocalyptic story, Reformation was interpreted as the struggle between good and evil, Christ and Antichrist, holy martyrs and satanic persecutors. As a consequence, England was construed as the new Israel, as the new paradigm of the Elect Nation, as a sacralised, redeemed, godly nation. It could be rather declared that Israel was viewed as the prefigurement of England, its destiny finding resolution in England’s one. In the same narrative and legitimating context, English monarchs personified ancient prophets and patriarchs: Henry VIII was recognized as a new Hezekiah, Edward as a new Josiah and Elizabeth as a new Deborah. This personification was not presented in the form and substance of a mere reincarnation: English Rulers repeated the same role of their natural ancestors in the historical palingenesis of the Eternal Church.

According to English Apocalypticism, Elizabeth was depicted as the godly force providentially destined to fight the Antichrist. John Aylmer had spoken of Elizabeth as an apocalyptic agent, who “may many years carry the sword of our defence and therewith cut off the head of that Hydra, the Antichrist of Rome in such sort that it may never grow again in this realm of England”. In the last speech of John Bale’s King John, while Nobility claims that Elizabeth is the Apocalyptic angel, the character of Civil Order makes manifest her wishes for Elizabeth’s long reign with these words “Pray unto the lord that her grace may continue / The days of Nestor to our souls’ consolation, / and that her offspring may live also to subdue / the Antichrist, with his
whole generation / in Elias’ spirit to the comfort of this nation, / also to preserve her most honourable counsel / to the praise of God and glory to the Gospel”. In his The Shepheardes Garland, Drayton presents Elizabeth as the biblical Eva who defied the snake and as the Apocalyptic woman who won the dragon with seven heads. Thomas Becon calls Elizabeth as the noble conqueror of the Antichrist. These textual portraiture, wholly considered, made Elizabeth the literal figuration of the Redeemer, whose kingdom was a millenarian paradise on earth.

On this ground I think that Elizabeth’s natural and physical body was transfigured not only into a mere political body of sovereignty, but also into a theological katechon. This word refers to a controvertible figure we can find in the second letter to the Thessalonians, where Paul warns about Christ’s imminent coming. Here He affirms that the coming of Christ is imminent, but it will be preceded by signs: more precisely Christ will come again only after the Antichrist has usurped God’s place in the Temple. Since the precise time of Christ’s latter coming is not known, Paul introduces the figure of the katechon, a sort of delayer or restrainer, whose mission is to defer the unbinding of the Antichrist, to prevent the arrival of Evil. The difficulty in interpreting 2 Thess. lays on the fact that the same word is used in two different forms and genders: in verse 6 it is used in the neutral form, as a kind of impersonal power (what is restraining), whereas in the successive verse 7 it is conjugated as a verbal form, as the present participle of the verb katecho, masculine gender, so to denotes ‘he’ who now is restraining. From a theological perspective it has been argued that the neuter could be referred to the word of God, while the masculine form could be used to denote the Holy Spirit: the former could be the means through which the latter, as an agent, performs his task, or his proper mission and ministry. But, from the very origins of the intellectual debate on the possible meanings of this contending word, the figure evocated has been enriched with a political connotation. Tertullian is the first to identify the katechon with the Roman Empire and the Roman Emperor (tantum qui nunc tenet teneat, donec de medio fiat – quis, nisi romanus status, cuius abscessio in decem reges dispersa antichristum superducet? – et tunc revelabiturs
iniquus); at a later period, John of Damascus confirms this interpretative solution (trad. *The withholding power means the Roman Empire. When that is finished, the Antichrist will come*). In this way, the secular space of the Political as such is shaped as a ‘steered space’, as a space intrinsically aimed to prevent the Antichrist’s reign and consequently the end of the mundane world. Throughout the centuries this was the favourite view, which had consigned, as I’d like to say, a katechonic structure of history. Only to mention the most famous adaptation in modern times, in Schmitt, even the definition of the state of exception as *Frist* is a function of his arch-Catholic conception of the Katechon, a pattern in which history takes place in the space of time between the present and the coming of the Antichrist: without the katechon time itself would long ago have ended. These arguments make me more reflective on the theological foundation of the Western Legal Tradition. What I’d like to highlight is that there is a concurrent level of inquiry with respect to the one analysed by H.J. Berman. Beyond the claims for jurisdictions, consequent to the so called Papal Revolution which established the modern form of the Western Church (as a visible, corporate and legal structure) and its relation to the secular authority; and again beyond the mutual borrowings of terms, concepts and practices, I think it’s of particular importance to pay attention to the soteriological dimension, to the various interpretations which have been given to the nexus between history and salvation. As it has been brilliantly pointed out: “The history of Christianity is a history of expectations, or more exactly the constant anticipation of the End of the World on the one hand and the continual deferment of the End on the other. While the materiality of such expectations varied from one situation to another, the basic figure of the End remained constant” (Koselleck). In a systemological perspective – as one of the sub-disciplines of comparative law – it could be of great relevance to understand how legal order reacted to the theological promise of human salvation, in which different manners the legal experiences, coalesced into the supposed unitary Western Legal Tradition, were confronted with the mysteries of the End Times. Consequently, the oppositional instruments for salvation, propagandised even by political agents, can be viewed as systemological markers apt to trace differences and dissimilarities within the
boundaries of the Western Legal Tradition. At this regard Koselleck’s thought on the strategic use of the lecture of history made by the Church and on its internal criticalities is illuminating: “The Church utilized the imminent – but future End of the World as a means of stabilization, finding an equilibrium between the threat of the End on the one hand and the hope of Parousia on the other. The unknown Eschaton must be understood as one of the Church’s integrating factors, enabling its self-constitution as world and as institutions. The Church itself is eschatological. But the moment the figures of the Apocalypse are applied to concrete events or instances, the eschatology has disintegrative effects. The End of the World is only an integrating factor so long as its politico-historical meaning remains indeterminate”. The mythical investment of the Apocalypse was historically adapted to different situations. According to this approach the literary qualification of Elizabeth as the mundane force destined to resist and to fight against the Antichrist allows us to identify Elizabeth as the English katechon. This trans-historical equation was supported by an apologetic deification of Elizabeth’s carnal virginity, was implemented through the means of a new concept of representation, introduced by the Reformers and gave new shape to the geopolitical assets. In the first direction, the celebration of virginity associated with Reformist doctrines changed the overall bundle of references to emblematic figures of godly and faithful women used from medieval time with a legitimating function. Marian typology was invoked to justify the secular power of the queens and it was coherent with the conception of the time, insofar as Queens were merely consorts who never ruled in their own right and therefore were considered as royal mediators, like the Blessed Virgin, who governed only indirectly by means of mercy or motherly love. The urgent need to present Elizabeth as an independent monarch disrupted Marian veneration and was nourished by the Protestant belief according to which Christ is the sole intercessor between Humane and Divine. As a result, the attention paid to a sexual and natural status of Elizabethan flesh (that is her virginity) produced a dislocation of the sacred prototypes of Christianity: while the Virgin’s epithets (for ex. Virgin, Mother, Bride, Queen), as traditional devotional forms, were held in support of Elizabeth’s regime, the Elizabeth’s identification with
godly women was moulded recalling other scriptural models, such as the Virtuous Woman of the Proverbs, the Five Wise Virgins, the Woman Clothed with the Sun. Royal narratives and royal iconography were totally re-substantiated. John N. King has properly remarks that “Tudor apologists skilfully concealed or transformed a complex relationship to imagery associated with the Virgin Mary as Queen of Heaven when they addressed the unprecedented problem of defending the authority of a regnant queen. Because Elizabeth’s virginity further complicated an already difficult political problem, apologists adapted late medieval iconography, which hailed queens consort as intercessors with imperious husband-kings, to offer instead emblematic variations that praised Elizabeth as a powerful monarch who could govern in the absence of any consort”. This process culminated with the theological diversion from the Marian typology to a Christological model: because Elizabeth was both the only Godly Ruler of the Secular Reign and the Head of the Church of England, she had been considered an earthly figuration of Christ, as John Foxe’s Introduction to the second Edition of the Acts and Monuments clearly testifies.

With a powerful insight we can argue that the passage from the symbolization of the first edition of Foxe’s Book of Martyr, where Elizabeth is presented as a new Constantine, to the allegorical meaning of the second one, where she is blessed as a new Christ, marks the literary and iconographic connection between the themes of katechon, in its classical interpretation, and the time of the Second Coming.

As I’ve anticipated above, the original view of a ‘Katechontic Elizabeth’ has to face with a new concept of Representation introduced by the Reformation. The main determination of the Reformers was the sacramental replacement of physical divine presence, moving from a strong contestation of the literalization of Christ’s metaphor as it was institutionalised by Roman Church. Papal tyranny collapsed the distinction between signifier and signified, so to assert the real presence of God in Eucharistic liturgy. On the contrary, the figurative reading of the words “hoc est corpus meum” (in the proper sense “hoc significant corpus meum”) became the main concern of the Reformers with an explicit, political intent, in order to dismantle the monopoly in interpretation asserted by the Church of Rome. The decline of the transubstantiatory doctrine
introduced a fracture among possible and different meanings of the act of representing, and especially between representation as presentification of an absence in onto-theological terms (make visible and existent what is invisible and absent), and representation as repetition and remembrance. Sacraments were considered as symbols, as significant covenantal stories whose truth is evidence through repetition and reception: “the bodily incarnation of Christ was relocated not in the elements, but in the community of believers that partook of them interpretatively […] Remembrance, faith and thanksgiving – all enjoined of each individual participant at the very moment of reception – replace divine immanence as the essence of the Eucharist” (Rosendale). On this renewed framework, I think that the contending meanings of representation could be viewed not only as the clivage within the theological matrix of Western Legal Tradition, but also as a source of the historical complexity of the English Legal Tradition. The cult of Elizabeth – in my personal understanding – absorbed the first concept of representation, introducing the Eucharistic dynamic in the field of Politics: the immanent power of the medieval signs were desacralized in the theological domain and simultaneously were resacralized in the political field. Moreover the Reformation determined an asymmetric relation among the corpora of authority, namely between the these oppositional couple: The Pope and the Bible on the one hand and Elizabeth and the reformed Bible with annexed the Book of Common Prayer on the other, each of them with a proper aesthetics. The first was construed upon the central role of the Roman Catholic Pope, as the sovereign who decides the authentic interpretation of the Sacred Book, and was aesthetically communicated through the proclaimed unknowability of God’s Word - therefore expressed in a hieratical declension of Latin -, a closed and reserved form of liturgy, performed exclusively by clergy and choir with the exclusion of the congregation, and the importance of the mediating institution, which historically affects the absolute difference between Divine and Human, so to actualize the only one form of possible relation. The second was based on the individual access to Scripture and correlative on the subjective task of interpreting the Sacred Word and it was aesthetically communicated through a programmatic structures of worship, a polemical choice expressed for the vernacular with the
linguistic shift from Latin to English, and the fair access to liturgy for everyone. The complete eradication of extra-national jurisdictions and the suppression of Roman authority were clearly illustrated by the iconographical title pages of Henrician and Elizabethan Bibles. The inclusive depiction of the Sovereign Body within the pages of the Book marked the undivided and unbroken integrity of the two corpora iuris (the secular and the divine law) as the main facet or guise of English Tradition.

There is another corollary that derives from my understanding of Elizabeth as ‘Katechontic Elizabeth’. It entails the history of geopolitical traditions. First of all, the providential mission of Elizabeth as the historical restrainer transformed the space of England into a space of salvation, geographically bounded. The theological perspective was, once again, transposed and dislocated at a different level, specifically at a geopolitical level. The onto-theological fight against the Antichrist was at the same time a geographical and political fight against the assumed universality of Catholic Church: the soteriological discourse became a pattern of English nationhood. At this regard Pocock’s arguments are really clarifying and evocative: “The vision of England as occupying a moment of apocalyptic election entailed the vision of England discharging a special role – largely identical with the maintenance of an autonomous jurisdiction – throughout church history. Archbishop Parker, as well as John Foxe, labored to recover the details of this history, in which Joseph of Arimathea, Constantine, King John, Wyclif, and Elizabeth all played important parts; and the idea of England’s uniqueness in sacred history culminates in Milton’s much quoted remark that God revealed himself ‘as his manner is, first to his Englishmen’”. The history of the Common Law Jurisdiction was transfigured into a nationalized sacred ontology. This was the intellectual and political process that metamorphosed theological tenets and assumptions and fashioned what I’d like to name as the ‘English canon’. At the same time the Anti-Catholic stereotype became the criterion measure to set and evaluate the boundaries of the new paradigm of Protestant orthodoxy. In this way the line between ‘friend’ and ‘enemy’ was even internalized and nationalized: the antagonism with
respect to the canonical orthodoxy was the traditional means used to stigmatize an ‘internal other’, who had been born and lived in England.

4. Contentious Traditions. Divested symbols and reformed iconographic frameworks

The qualification of Queen Elizabeth’s sovereign body as the English katechon can be also justified examining visual representations. At this level of inquiry I’d like to select those iconographic signs, symbols and icons which were associated with different traditions, with the aim to analyse the strategic and cultural negotiation of their meaning. As I’ve argued elsewhere, the body of law is shaped by an indissoluble concurrence of ontological questions, aesthetical responses and narrative accounts. Therefore the issue at stake is how the politics of Revelation and the apocalyptic ascendancy of Queen Elizabeth were framed in accepted images and communicated to subjects by the means of pictorial and contextual metaphors.

First, Foxe’s presentation of Elizabeth, in the dedicatory introduction of his Book of Martyrs, is an inescapable reference. In the first edition (1563) Elizabeth is viewed as the fulfilment of a divine plan: after suffering as a potential martyr for her Protestantism under Mary I, Elizabeth came to reign and to restore true faith and religion in England. For these reasons Foxe parallels her figure to Constantine, the Emperor who established the union of Church and Empire for the sake of the true Christianity. The dedicatory Epistle begins with an ornamental, great C, as the beginning of the word Constantine, with inscribed the body of Elizabeth portrayed as the ‘Queen enthroned’, who dominates the defeated body of the Roman Pope. More specifically, Elizabethan’s flesh, transfigured into the body of Sovereignty, surmounts the nullified body of the Bishop of Rome, who is entwined with demonic serpents beneath her feet. The celebrated victory of the Woman of Faith against the Antichrist is depicted through the battles among their respective emblems of power: the English Crown, supported by the sword and the sphere of dominium, wins over the Tiara and the annihilation of papal tyranny is testified by St. Peter’s broken keys. At the same time the assertion of royal authority over Church and State is
expressed “by fusing the sword’s traditional meaning of Justice with the image of the divine
Word, as the sword of the Spirit”. The signs and symbols iconographically condensed into the
initial C of the Book of Martyrs became a figural canon. The theological foundation of
Elizabethan queenship is even more sumptuously exhibited in the title page woodcut of John
Dee’s General and Rare Memorials Pertayning to the Perfect Arte of Navigation (1577). In this
representational context, Queen Elizabeth commands a ship identified as Europe by its Greek
inscription and the mythical figure of Europa riding the bull. Two personified characters come to
signify Elizabeth’s voyage: St. Michael, the apocalyptic angel, descending from Heaven with the
Protestant emblems of the sword of justice and the shield of faith, and Occasion, who stands on
a fortress. In the upper right corner of the image, the Tetragrammaton bestows divine blessings
on the ship, illuminating Elizabeth as the Governor of the Imperial Ship of Christendom.

Other relevant insights are offered by the title pages of the Bishop’s Bible, which
appeared in 1568 in a magnificent folio volume and displaced the Great Bible as the official
Bible of the English Church. In the woodcut frontispiece of the first edition, an enthroned
Elizabeth is represented between the female personifications of Faith and Charity. Few words
are added to the image: they reproduce the epigraph from Romans 1:16 (Non me pudet
Evangelii Christi. Virtus enim Desi est ad salutem Omni credenti”) with the specific intent to
make clear that the Queen is elected to complete St. Paul’s triad of Theological Virtues by
personifying the Hope brought by Gospel faith. In the following edition (dated 1569), Elizabeth
incarnates once again the Woman of Faith with the royalist emblems of the Sword and the Book
and is the clear summation of the Virtues standing in the corners of the woodcut: Justice, Mercy,
Prudence and Fortitude.

The most important aspect, from a systemological point of view, is the reappraisal of
images and symbols derived from other traditions, namely from the Classical (Latin and Greek)
tradition and from the Christian one. The figural devices used to project a specific representation
of English sovereignty were the same as those of these other experiences, but their
amalgamation and the objectives to be defended were substantially reversed. As Kevin Sharpe
has vividly argued: “Memory, like tradition, involved invention as well as selection; the repositories of memory combined history and invention to validate present persons and policies through representations and performances that connected the present to an actual and imagined past”. What I’ve expressed is also demonstrated by the analysis of the ‘Sieve Portrait’. Here the sieve, as the symbol of the vestal virgin Tuccia, denotes the device used to separate wheat from chaff, then allegorically good from bad and becomes the symbol of judgement and discrimination. If we recall that in some emblem literature the sieve represented the Last Judgment and the separating of the elect from the damned, its attribution to Elizabeth could be read and interpreted as another propagandist presentation of a katechontic body.

The wise and learned composition of claims and pretensions forged a new order (both political and juridical order) by heralding Elizabeth as a godly champion, defender of the nation and founder of English Empire, within whose boundaries the theatricalization of monarchy was combined with a history of salvation.