

Language and gender - elizabeth (1998)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Kapur's 1998 film Elizabeth gives evidence to how composers use language to construct and perform masculine and feminine aspects of identity, investigating its contextual foundations by creating voices and characters to challenge language and gender codes. Language used in Elizabeth with double entendre and metaphor, combined with the language constraints of the film's context, allows for the subtle challenging of established gender roles as a part of identity. Kapur also plays with film devices in a manner as to give depth to a scene and draw focus on constructed aspects of identity fuelled by the concept of gender in order to investigate it. His portrayal of the early life of Queen Elizabeth I manipulates the contextual language structure in establishing views on gender as a part of identity by presenting the established contextual view and then challenging it. He balances this with use of visual symbology to give significance and to investigate other aspects of identity that are constructed. Kapur's Elizabeth thereby demonstrates how composers play with textual forms and features of language and gender to challenge, investigate and construct aspects of identity. Kapur's film Elizabeth uses language through the spoken word as well as visual cinema technique in order to investigate aspects of gender in forming identity. Kapur's film design is referred to by William Simon as "hyper-stylised baroque style" using dramatic shot angles constructed via cameras on cranes. This technique with a high angle shot, allows a scene in the opening of the film to establish the highly patriarchal society following through to Norfolk's interaction with Isobel who underlines this by demonstrating how in this society the loyalties of women are tied to men to ensure security. Early in Elizabeth Queen Mary's hysterical performance following on where she cries, " My sister was born of that whore Anne

Boleyn! She was born a bastard! She will never rule England! " establishes the perceived notion of emotional instability typical of being identified as female, constructing a natural aspect Queen Mary's identity. Elizabeth comes to counter this notion of feminine identity when an attempt is made upon her life and she says, " I am perfectly well, please do not fuss" asserting through her language, her confidence and stability challenging the traditional perception of her gender. Identity is formed through this use of language and gender codes, seen in the traditional, masculine and patriarchal presentation of Norfolk and the feeble, emotional Queen Mary. The societal context of gender is again seen in the patriarchal disregard for feminine authority is again shown in Norfolk's abrupt violation of her bedchamber showing utmost disrespect for Elizabeth with the mid-shot capturing her defenceless vulnerability. When Sir William says, " her majesty's body and person are no longer her own property. They belong to the state. " It underlines the notion that she has no identity of her own. The composed connotations of the language portrayed through spoken word in Elizabeth combine with Kapur's cinematography to challenge and investigate the role of gender in constructing aspects of identity. Kapur plays with textual forms and features in order to investigate gender roles as a performance, show aspects of identity to be constructed and to challenge the necessity of this play acting. Queen Mary addresses Norfolk and his men with " what news, my lords, of the rebellion against our authority" showing her acceptance of her role as a woman on the throne without contesting the patriarchal jurisdiction presiding over her reign as per the gender codes of the context of Elizabeth. Mary's line, " you speak with such sincerity! I see you are still a consummate actress" subtly introduces the idea of gender

being a learned aspect of identity instead of an inherent one, allowing gender to be seen as a performance. The high angle shot per Kapur's film style, of Elizabeth isolated up on the red throne seemingly surrounded by men in an amphitheatric arrangement to address the Bishops visually underlines her vulnerability and the importance of the scene. Her speech is constructed to play upon contextual patriarchal attitudes and nationalism, "how can I force you Your Grace? I am a woman..." this placates the Bishops and she wins the vote for the Act of Uniformity at the same time realising her limitations of being a female in her society and her need to perform a role in a subversive manner. Her dance with the disgraced Lord Dudley is shown with an air completely different to the previous time they danced, juxtaposing the change in Elizabeth as she recognises the aspects of her identity that are markedly different from those of a male in the standards available to her. She says, "I will have one mistress here. And no master!" England is seen to be her mistress, foreshadowing her line, "I am married to England". Kapur has constructed this aspect of her identity without capitulating on men. A close up shot of the cutting off of her hair, with her hair used in the film as an extended metaphor for Elizabeth's need to forge her own identity whilst maintaining her integrity, symbolises her sexlessness and she says to Kat, "Kat... I have become a Virgin". Her only means of establishing herself above patriarchy in the historical and social context of Elizabeth was to take on a genderless role as 'the Virgin Queen'. Elizabeth's character allows investigation into aspects of identity as performance of gender through Kapur's use of textual forms and features, used also to challenge this notion of constructed identity. Thus Elizabeth portrays an investigation through Kapur's use of textual forms and features to challenge

and construct aspects of identity in relation to context and gender roles.

Kapur's characterisation of Mary and Norfolk along with his ' hyper-stylised baroque' way of composing film and use of contextual language investigates the constructed nature of identity and challenges this through his portrayal of Elizabeth. Double entendre and tone, foreshadowing and the motif of role-playing introduce the notion of gender as a performance and as a central component of forming identity as an undertone throughout Elizabeth. Thus demonstrating how Kapur as the composer, challenges, investigates and constructs these aspects of identity through his use of textual forms and features.