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### Power, Perception, and Performance: The Courtships of Elizabeth I

An image of a teenage girl hangs in the drawing room of Windsor Castle. It would be easy to simply pass by the portrait; though beautiful, there are far grander objects to behold. But there is something compelling, even unusual about this young woman. The auburn haired figure stands holding a small book. Her pale, clear complexion is devoid of makeup or embellishment. Strands of white pearls shine brightly against the rich, red fabric of her embroidered gown. These luxuries indicate a wealthy, even royal status, but such objects hardly distinguish the image from the many sumptuous portraits throughout the castle. The young woman's determined expression captures the viewer. Her chin is held high, her gaze directed outward and she stares back at the viewer with confidence, even wisdom. Her downturned mouth indicates experience rather than the typical naivete of someone so young and seemingly privileged. Upon closer inspection, it is clear that *Portrait of Elizabeth I as a Princess* is an image of defiance.<sup>1</sup>

Did anyone suspect that teenager in the portrait would rule England for over forty years? The answer is no. Like the many tourists, workers and modern Royals who pass by the portrait each day, as a young girl, the future Elizabeth I was often neglected by the older, more powerful figures around her. As the daughter of Henry VIII and his second wife Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth was not even considered a legitimate child at the time of this portrait. To her father, his court, and even England itself, Elizabeth's mere existence was the embodiment of scandal, chaos, and disappointment. It is the negative circumstances of Elizabeth's birth, adolescence, and ascension that prepared the future Queen to navigate the most difficult aspects of her reign: her official courtships.

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<sup>1</sup> "Elizabeth I when a Princess," Royal Collection Trust Home. Accessed December 23, 2020. <https://www.rct.uk/collection/404444/elizabeth-i-when-a-princess>.

The official courtships of Elizabeth embody every conflict of her reign: religious conflict, international threat, and most importantly, Elizabeth's female gender. By the time of her ascension, Elizabeth could expertly maneuver herself both politically and personally. The precarious nature of Elizabeth's early life forced the future Queen to develop the skills of self-preservation and self-fashioning that she applied to her courtships. Elizabeth's lifelong friendship with Robert Dudley revealed Elizabeth's human need for personal gratification. However, Elizabeth engaged in marriage negotiations with Archduke Charles of Austria, Henry, Duke of Anjou, and Francis, Duke of Alencon in order to navigate the specific domestic and international crises of that time. Finally, Elizabeth defied the proscribed role for women of the Tudor era by consistently rejecting marriage and motherhood. Unlike her predecessors, particularly Catherine of Aragon and her own mother, Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth asserted her power and image by remaining unmarried and wielding her power as a potential bride. Though she put on a conciliatory guise at various points in her courtships, Elizabeth's early rejection of marriage captured in her 1559 Speech to Parliament embodied her lifelong mindset.<sup>2</sup> Determined to preserve her virginal state, Elizabeth navigated her courtships in order to obtain both political and personal benefits; however, Elizabeth refused to violate her personal stance against matrimony.

The precarious nature of Elizabeth's early life forced the Queen to develop the skills of self-fashioning and self-preservation which she applied to her courtships. Elizabeth wielded her power as a potential bride to secure political stability for England. Ultimately, Elizabeth's virginity was a source of power that secured political benefits for England. Additionally, the

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Tudor, "Queen Elizabeth's First Speech Before Parliament, February 10, 1559," In *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 56–58.

Queen recognized the power of harnessing her image and was able to cement her long term legacy as a virtuous, devoted monarch through celebrating her virginity in an impressive program of portraiture. Elizabeth's ability to turn her weaknesses—her gender, her unmarried status, and her childlessness—into celebrated symbols is a testament to her intelligence, dominance, and political mastery.

Born on September 7, 1533, a series of traumas defined Elizabeth's birth, childhood, and adolescence. Desperate for a male heir, Henry VIII divorced his first wife Catherine of Aragon in order to marry the clever, ambitious Anne Boleyn. Henry went to great lengths to procure the divorce; in 1534 he defied the authority of the Pope by declaring himself the Supreme Head of the Church of England. Now free to marry his pregnant mistress, the weight of his actions rested on the gender of her baby. To Henry's disappointment, Anne produced a healthy baby girl. Henry's eye inevitably wandered, and Anne was beheaded for false allegations of treason in 1536. Anne's execution was the first of many tribulations for her daughter Elizabeth. Throughout her teenage years, Elizabeth navigated abuse, suspicion, investigation, and isolation. Underestimated by the adults around her, the young Elizabeth managed to persevere.<sup>3</sup>

Against the odds, Elizabeth ascended the throne in 1558 and reigned until her death in 1603. Though the unusual length of her reign brought stability, Elizabeth's popular legacy rests on notable achievements including the Elizabethan Religious Settlement, the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, and the establishment of English colonies in North America. A rational, even cautious Queen, Elizabeth ruled moderately, especially compared the fluctuating reigns of her half-siblings. Elizabeth relied on a group of trusted advisors and confidants including William Cecil, Francis Walsingham, and Robert Dudley. Though dynastic anxieties

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<sup>3</sup> For further reading on the context of Elizabeth's birth, refer to works of Judith M. Richards including Judith M. Richards, *Elizabeth I*, Abingdon, Oxon :: Routledge, 2012.

and military failures plagued the later decades of her reign, Elizabeth's reputation benefitted from celebratory artistic depictions including portraiture, plays, and poetry. Such depictions praised seemingly problematic attributes of Elizabeth--especially her virginity. Once criticized for her failure to marry, this celebration of a Virgin Queen instead emphasized Elizabeth's purity, virtue, and devotion to her country. Well-known images of Elizabeth such as the *Armada Portrait* and the *Rainbow Portrait* present the Queen as an icon and continue to embody notions of English nationalism. The lifelike *Portrait of Elizabeth I as a Princess* depicts a young woman who would become a symbol even before her death.<sup>4</sup> Like the real-life Queen Elizabeth I, this portrait both upholds and defies gendered expectations. The fascinating contradictions within this image hint at Elizabeth's mysterious, often debated self-perception as well as her ultimate destiny. There is more than meets the eye, even regarding royalty.

As the daughter of a king, Elizabeth was expected to marry well and secure an alliance with a foreign power. Portraits such as *Portrait of Elizabeth I as a Princess* were sent to various suitors throughout Europe; it was vital to depict the Princess as an attractive candidate for marriage. Painted in 1546 by William Scrots, this image captures Elizabeth at age fourteen. 1546-47 was a tumultuous year in the life of Elizabeth, as her father died and the throne passed to Elizabeth's half-brother, Edward VI. In order to present Elizabeth as a worthy bride, the artist invoked traditionally female symbolism. The presence of pearls indicates the Princess' chastity, purity, and obedience. Moreover, the smaller and larger books can be interpreted as the Old and New Testaments, thus emphasizing Elizabeth's religious reverence.<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth's long, pale fingers delicately stroke the pages of the book, drawing attention to one of the Princess' loveliest

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<sup>4</sup> For more information on the legacy and portraiture of Elizabeth, refer to Roy Strong, *Gloriana: the Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I*, (New York, N.Y: Thames and Hudson, 1987) Print.

<sup>5</sup> "Elizabeth I when a Princess," Royal Collection Trust Home.

physical features. The silk fabric of her crimson and gold gown features a large pomegranate pattern woven together with threads containing gold, silver, and other precious metals.<sup>6</sup> This conscious display of wealth presents Elizabeth as an enticing candidate for marriage; her status and dowry would be a major asset for any foreign suitor.

Despite the intent of the artist, Elizabeth's accompanying letter to her brother counteracts the traditionally gendered symbolism of the portrait. Elizabeth placed the development of her "inwarde minde" over her youthful appearance. In fact, the princess displayed wariness towards artificial, impermanent beauty: "for the face, I grant, I might well blush to offer, but the mind I shall never be ashamed to present."<sup>7</sup> While this modesty was certainly expected of the young Princess, Elizabeth's wisdom cannot be overlooked; it is clear that Elizabeth challenged her predestined role from a young age. Aspects of the portrait subtly combat her status as a political pawn. While her sumptuous gown indicates wealth, depicting this extravagant fabric highlights Elizabeth's status as a member of the Royal House of Tudor. Due to sumptuary laws, only members of the Royal Family were permitted to wear luxurious fabrics and certain jewels.<sup>8</sup> Though she was included in the line of succession, Elizabeth was likely protesting her illegitimate status through donning this restricted fabric. By holding a book, Elizabeth offers her intelligence and capability to her brother rather than her mere obedience. Though Elizabeth's destiny remained unknown, this portrait contains clues which indicate the Princess' exceptional future as well as her self-perception. Despite her youth, lowly status, and proscribed gender role, Elizabeth attempted to portray herself as a different kind of young woman.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Tudor, "The Letters of Queen Elizabeth To King Edward the Sixth," *Luminarium*, [www.luminarium.org/renlit/elizlet2.htm](http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/elizlet2.htm).

<sup>8</sup> Strong, 49.

The creation of *Portrait of Elizabeth I as a Princess* may be seen as ironic because Queen Elizabeth I never married. Though she engaged with many notable suitors throughout her youth and middle age, the Queen ruled as an unmarried, female monarch--an inherent contradiction for the patriarchal society she governed. Scholars have debated and interpreted Elizabeth's reign, specifically regarding the issue of her marriage and courtships, for centuries. Elizabeth's earliest biographer, William Camden, chronicled Queen's reign in his 1615 work *Annales*. The simple title indicates Camden's desire to document each year of Elizabeth's reign with the same precision as the Roman author Tacitus.<sup>9</sup> According to Patrick Collinson in "Elizabeth I and the Verdicts of History," Camden's work did not exaggerate the accomplishments of the Elizabethan era. Though he praised the accomplishments of Elizabeth's government, Camden's Latin prose remained factual.<sup>10</sup> Collinson argues that Camden's translators created the first embellished account of Elizabeth's reign. Entitled *The History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princess Elizabeth, Late Queen of England: Containing All the Most Important and Remarkable Passages of State, Both at Home, and Abroad (so Far as They Were Linked with English Affairs) During Her Long and Prosperous Reign*, Abraham Darcie's 1625 English translation demonstrates nostalgia for the long, relatively stable reign of Elizabeth. Darcie heaped praises onto Elizabeth, referring to her as the "the most Religious, learned and prudent Emperesse that ever lived on earth."<sup>11</sup> The failures of the Stuart Kings contributed to the glorification of Elizabeth, particularly her foreign policy and religious settlements.

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<sup>9</sup>William Camden, *The History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princess Elizabeth, Late Queen of England: Selected Chapters*, ed. W. T. MacCaffrey (4th edn., Chicago and London, 1970).

<sup>10</sup>Patrick Collinson, "Elizabeth I and the Verdicts of History," *This England*, (Manchester University Press, 2013), 475-476.

<sup>11</sup> Collinson, 447.

In addition to Camden's translators, the legacy of Elizabeth benefitted from her inclusion in John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, also known as the "Book of Martyrs." Initially published in 1563, this popular work supported English Protestantism and was widely disseminated throughout Britain. Foxe documented the suffering of Protestant figures during the reign of Elizabeth's elder sister Mary I, also known as "Bloody Mary."<sup>12</sup> Unlike Camden, Foxe framed these narratives in order to fit a clear, pro-Protestant agenda. In addition to describing Elizabeth's mistreatment under Mary's Catholic government, the 1577 edition included an oration to the Queen that urged Elizabeth to adhere to the word of God.<sup>13</sup> Some scholars such as Susan Doran and Thomas Freeman argue that Foxe's work pressured Elizabeth to enact further religious reform.<sup>14</sup> Despite Foxe's motives, his work established Elizabeth as a Protestant heroine.

According to Collinson, Elizabeth's reputation as a heroic, brilliant monarch survived both the Tory and Whig agendas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the eighteenth century, British historians promoted historical interpretations favoring constitutionalism, scientific advancement, Protestantism, and liberal democracy.<sup>15</sup> Coined by British historian Herbert Butterfield, "Whig histories" frame Elizabeth as intelligent, beloved monarch and credit her with leading the country towards its current Enlightened state.<sup>16</sup> For example, the nineteenth century, Romantic poet Alfred Lord Tennyson praised the "spacious times of great Elizabeth."<sup>17</sup> However, Roman Catholic priest and historian John Lingard questioned the extent of Elizabeth's power in his work *The History of England, From the First Invasion by the Romans to the Accession of Henry VIII*. Meanwhile, Mandell Creighton's 1896 biography claimed that

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<sup>12</sup> Collinson, 478.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman, *The Myth of Elizabeth*, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History*.

<sup>16</sup> Collinson, 483.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Elizabeth's strength rested in her ability to capture the love of her people during both her lifetime and her death.<sup>18</sup> Overall, Elizabeth's reign embodied a high point of British political power, cultural achievement, and global prestige.

The formidable work of J. E. Neale and Roy Strong emphasized the glory of Elizabeth's reign. Neale's 1934 biography of Elizabeth shaped the dialogue surrounding her reign for the remainder of the century.<sup>19</sup> Considered the first comprehensive, researched analysis of Elizabeth's rule, Neale emphasized the power of the Elizabeth's Parliament and studied its interactions with the Queen. Ultimately, he framed Elizabeth as an empowered Monarch who successfully manipulated her Parliament, privy council, and courtiers.<sup>20</sup> Notably, Neale failed to adequately address the complications of Elizabeth's gender, a topic that will be explored in this thesis.

In the 1980s, art historian Roy Strong aligned with Neale's positive depiction of Elizabeth through his work *Gloriana: the Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I*.<sup>21</sup> Strong analyzes the role of imagery, pageantry, and ritual in the Elizabethan court. Additionally, Strong claims that planned, symbolic portraits of Elizabeth sought to solidify the Queen's legacy as a devoted female monarch, particularly after the 1570s. Strong promotes the notion of a "Cult of Elizabeth" that allowed seemingly detrimental aspects of Elizabeth's gender to be celebrated.<sup>22</sup> Strong's notion of a "Cult" refers to the many courtiers, artists, playwrights, and subjects who glorified Elizabeth's personal virtues—especially her virginity. For example, courtier Sir Christopher Hatton commissioned the 1583 *Sieve Portrait* in order to compare the Queen to the Vestal Virgin

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<sup>18</sup> Mandell Creighton, *The Age of Elizabeth*, 198–9.

<sup>19</sup> J. E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth*, (London: J. Cape, 1934).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Roy Strong, *Gloriana: the Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I*, (New York, N.Y: Thames and Hudson, 1987), Print.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*



Tuccia.<sup>23</sup> Analysis of gendered symbols in Elizabethan portraiture differentiated his work from Neale. For example, Strong's analysis of the *Procession Picture* explores the comparisons of Elizabeth to the goddesses Diana and Venus; Elizabeth was able to embody both purity and love in a single artistic depiction.<sup>24</sup> According to Christopher Haigh in *The Reign of Elizabeth I*, the careers of Neale and Strong aligned with the 1953 coronation of the youthful Elizabeth II. Additionally, their promotion of a powerful, colorful Elizabethan era contrasted with the gloom of post-war Britain.<sup>25</sup> Overall, both Neale and Strong constructed a positive, even glorified image of Elizabeth during the mid-twentieth century. However, this desire to glorify Elizabeth masks the complications of her reign. By disseminating images which promote the Cult of Elizabeth, what issues and anxieties did the Queen and her council hope to suppress?

Since Neale's defining work, subsequent historians have deconstructed specific aspects of Elizabeth's reign. Many scholars have challenged Neale's concept of the politically dominant, all powerful, even omniscient Elizabeth. Elizabeth's authority as Queen was certainly checked by political forces such as her privy council and parliament. Additionally, certain failures and anxieties of her reign, particularly during the 1580s and 1590s, puncture Neale's celebratory depiction of Elizabeth. By analyzing the last two decades of Elizabeth's reign, historians such as Christopher Haigh have departed from Neale's conception of Elizabeth as Gloriana. In his 1988 biography of Elizabeth, Haigh describes Elizabeth as a woman who "was putting on some sort of

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<sup>23</sup> Strong, 101.

<sup>24</sup> Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 1986) 47.

<sup>25</sup> Haigh, Christopher. *The Reign of Elizabeth I*. Macmillan, 1984. 13.

act.”<sup>26</sup> Haigh claims that the powerful forces of English Nationalism have subsequently framed Elizabeth as an exceptional ruler. In an attempt to deconstruct Neale’s version of Elizabeth, Haigh asserts that Elizabeth’s long reign secured her positive legacy rather than her political prowess. Conceding that the Queen was “a very smart woman,” Haigh nevertheless undermines Elizabeth governing skills and personal qualities.<sup>27</sup> Haigh focuses on political division during Elizabeth’s reign, specifically factionalism within the House of Commons and the Privy Council. Additionally, he claims that Elizabeth’s governing tactics, such as her tendency to delay decisions, rendered her ineffective.<sup>28</sup>

Rather than view Elizabeth as an untouchable icon, Haigh frames the Queen as a politician among a multitude of other powerful players.<sup>29</sup> Though he aligned with Neale in many respects, Patrick Collinson’s notion of a “Monarchical Republic” also undermines Elizabeth’s power by emphasizing the autonomy of her privy council.<sup>30</sup> John Guy’s notion of a “second reign” aligns with Haigh’s deconstruction of Elizabeth. Guy’s scholarship focuses on the turbulent decade of the 1590s in which the lack of an heir fostered anxiety among commoners and courtiers alike.<sup>31</sup> The unstable politics of Elizabeth’s later government complicate Neale and Strong’s promotion of Gloriana. Moreover, Guy’s negative assessment of Elizabeth’s “aging mind and body” contrasts to the eternally youthful, wise Queen depicted in Elizabeth’s portraits.<sup>32</sup> Haigh and Guy reject of the myth of Elizabeth and seek to present the under-

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Patrick Collinson, 'The Monarchical Republic of Elizabeth I' in *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 69, No. 2, pp. 394-424.

<sup>31</sup> J. A. Guy. 'The 1590s: the second reign of Elizabeth I?', in *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. J. A. Guy (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 1–19.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

represented, even unsatisfactory aspects of her reign. Meanwhile, David Loades seems to accept the gray area between Neale's praises and Haigh's deconstruction. In his 2003 biography, Loades does not question the Queen's abilities; rather, he acknowledges Elizabeth's political balancing act as well as the complications of her gender.<sup>33</sup> Unlike Haigh, Loades asserts that Elizabeth found power in indecisiveness, particularly in navigating her official courtships.

Beginning in the 1970s, social movements resulted in the study of Elizabeth's gender. Additionally, an increase in female scholarship has offered new perspectives with a growing emphasis on the effects of gender and sexuality in regards to the politics of Elizabeth's reign. Scholars have reassessed Elizabeth's reign by focusing on the complications of her unmarried, female status. Susan Bassnett's 1988 *Elizabeth I: A Feminist Perspective* frames Elizabeth's reign to support the recent women's movement as well as the sexual revolution. While not as factually precise as other works, Bassnett's unapologetic emphasis on gender would influence a breadth of scholarship in this area.<sup>34</sup> Carole Levin's *Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (1994) explores the ways in which Elizabeth presented her gender as well as how those around her responded to a female Monarch.<sup>35</sup> Though Levin's scholarship is infused with her "commitment to feminism," her work acknowledges both the successes and failures of Elizabeth's reign.<sup>36</sup> Levin asserts that Elizabeth expertly manipulated her gender by both capitalizing on her femininity and pushing the traditional expectations of her gender.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, by focusing on Elizabeth's eighteen days at Kenilworth, Susan Frye argues

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<sup>33</sup> Loades, D. M. *Elizabeth I*, (London: Hambledon and London, 2003). Print.

<sup>34</sup> Bassnett, Susan. *Elizabeth I: A Feminist Perspective*. Berg, 1988.

<sup>35</sup> Levin, Carole. *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power*. 2nd edition. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. Print.

<sup>36</sup> Levin, xvii.

<sup>37</sup> Levin, 1-2.

that Elizabeth controlled her gender within the “available terms” of her society.<sup>38</sup> In 1575, Sir Robert Dudley attempted to woo Elizabeth by dedicating an eighteen day pageant at Kenilworth Castle to the Queen. By analyzing this event, Frye sheds light on Elizabeth’s manipulation of her gender as well as control over the powerful men in her court.<sup>39</sup> In *Elizabeth I: the Competition for Representation*, Frye asserts that Elizabeth actively competed with political figures and social forces to control her image.<sup>40</sup> Refusing to surrender her power, the Queen rejected her assigned roles at Dudley’s 1575 Kenilworth entertainments. Levin and Frye’s studies of Elizabeth’s gender complicates the already messy question of her agency.

The growing emphasis on Elizabeth’s gender fueled new analysis of Elizabeth’s courtships. Influenced by women’s liberation Allison Plowden’s 1977 work *Marriage with My Kingdom: the Courtships of Elizabeth I* examines Elizabeth’s unmarried status through a lens of feminism, autonomy, and self-determination. Plowden claims that Elizabeth’s refusal to marry was rooted in her traumatic childhood; the Queen associated sex, marriage, and romance with death.<sup>41</sup> While this psychological diagnosis has been questioned, subsequent scholars have similarly explored the implications of Elizabeth’s romantic interactions.

Susan Doran assesses Elizabeth’s courtships and claims that while the Queen was open to marriage, an acceptable prospect never presented itself. In *Monarchy and Matrimony: the Courtships of Elizabeth I*, Doran rejects the notion that Elizabeth’s courtships were purposeless or automatically doomed. Rather, Doran analyzes the impact of each courtship and claims that Elizabeth never ruled out marriage.<sup>42</sup> Despite this claim, Doran also asserts that Elizabeth’s

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<sup>38</sup> Louis Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority, Gender, and Representation*, 2006.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Frye, Susan. *Elizabeth I: the Competition for Representation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. Print.

<sup>41</sup> Alison Plowden, *Marriage with My Kingdom: the Courtships of Elizabeth I*, (New York: Stein and Day, 1977)..

<sup>42</sup> Doran, Susan. *Monarchy and Matrimony: the Courtships of Elizabeth I*. London: Routledge, 1996. Print.

virginity provided the Queen with opportunities for self-fashioning; Elizabeth certainly understood the power of symbols.<sup>43</sup> Though the analysis of Elizabeth's courtships is imperative, Doran's argument seemingly deprives Elizabeth of autonomy by suggesting that Elizabeth awaited an ideal marriage which never materialized. Once again, questions of Elizabeth's autonomy contribute to the mystery and fascination of her single rule.

The depiction of Elizabeth's romantic interactions in film reflects continued fascination as well as a desire to shape the Queen's reign to contemporary ideas of womanhood, femininity, and values. Elizabeth's statements regarding her desire to remain unmarried indicate her personal and political stances. Though Elizabeth's participation in marriage negotiations resulted in diplomatic and political benefits, the Queen's single status preserved her ultimate authority over her Parliament, Privy Council, and country as a whole. Though her first portrait was likely created to aid courtships, Queen Elizabeth I never married. Her early air of defiance captured by Scrots reverberated throughout her reign both personally and politically.

This thesis assesses the personal and political implications of the courtships Elizabeth I's official courtships. The first chapter will analyze the tumultuous circumstances of Elizabeth's birth and places Elizabeth's life in context with other notable Tudor women, particularly Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn. Additionally, Elizabeth's early crises, most notably the Thomas Seymour scandal and Elizabeth's imprisonment in the tower are discussed. This background is essential in understanding Elizabeth's propensity for self-preservation as well as her desire for control. Chapter two will analyze the primary suitors of Elizabeth: Robert Dudley, Phillip II, Archduke Charles, Henry, Duke of Anjou, and Francis, Duke of Alencon. The ways in which Elizabeth engaged with these men also reveals her personal and political leanings at

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<sup>43</sup> Doran, 11.

particular moments in her rules. Furthermore, each courtship addresses a specific crisis in Elizabeth's reign. Finally, chapter three explores pageants and portraits as component of and response to Elizabeth's courtships. These artistic renditions of Elizabeth revealed her desired image and solidified her historical and mythical legacy.

### Chapter 1: Elizabeth's Birth, Upbringing, and Ascension

Analyzing the circumstances and consequences of Elizabeth's birth and early life sheds light on the proscribed gender roles that she would later mimic, adapt, and manipulate during her own reign. By studying the downfalls of Henry's first two wives, Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn, it is clear that elite women of this era who failed to produce sons suffered severe consequences including slander, banishment, and even execution. Catherine and Anne attained and lost power through very different gender performances. During Queen Catherine's twenty-year reign as consort, she both epitomized and prioritized traditionally feminine virtues. The Spanish princess garnered praise for her physical beauty as well as her charity work, devotion to the Catholic faith, and obedience towards her husband. Meanwhile, Anne Boleyn's rapid rise to power showcased her political aptitude and forceful personality. Rather than obey Henry, Anne wielded her sexuality against the King in order to achieve her goals. Despite their differing virtues and contrasting gender performances, Catherine and Anne's claim to power had a shared source: their marriage to Henry VIII. Because they did not produce a male heir, both women failed to perform their duty to the King, and by extension, England. Elizabeth's journey through various courtships and marriage negotiations offers a glimpse into her own gender performance. Though she rejected the institutions of marriage and motherhood, Elizabeth presented herself as a devoted wife and mother to her country. Though her power was not tied to a man, the

criticisms Elizabeth faced for her own failure to produce an heir mirror the experiences of Catherine and Anne. Additionally, the future Queen Elizabeth would inherit the many other chaotic ramifications of her father's reign, most notably religious upheaval and dynastic anxiety.

Elizabeth's birth in and of itself was an instance of defiance. After almost a decade of tension, division, and strife, the moment had come for Anne Boleyn to make good on her promise to Henry VIII and to England itself. Court astrologers assured the new Queen that she would give birth to a proper heir, a much desired son who could continue the Tudor line.<sup>44</sup> Henry's longing for a male heir, his obsession with Anne, and his reckless use of power resulted in a seven year political and religious battle which nearly ripped England at its seams. Henry's scorn spared no person or institution. Anne's pregnancy bore the enormous weight of geo-political tensions as well as a divided country. In addition to securing the line of succession, a male heir would justify the disruptive, even destructive actions of Henry, Anne, and their allies. However, on September 7, 1533, a healthy baby girl was born. The disappointment surrounding Elizabeth's gender shaped the path of the Princess' childhood and adolescence. Periods of neglect, traumatic episodes, and feelings of suspicion defined Elizabeth's upbringing. Even before taking her first breaths, Elizabeth Tudor became a symbol of division, dashed hopes and disappointment.

Henry's own marital escapades began long before his marriage to Anne Boleyn and would continue long after, impacting the early lives of all three of children, particularly Elizabeth. After the death of his older brother Arthur, the Prince of Wales, Henry unexpectedly ascended the throne at age seventeen. In order to maintain an alliance with Spain, Henry married his brother's widow, Catherine of Aragon. Despite being five years younger than his bride, the

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<sup>44</sup> For further reading on the context of Elizabeth's birth, refer to works of Judith M. Richards including Judith M Richards, *Elizabeth I*, (Abingdon, Oxon :: Routledge, 2012).

new King adored Queen Catherine. This marital harmony produced a stable, productive Royal court. Due to her previous marriage to Arthur, Henry had received a papal sanction to marry Catherine. Their marriage produced a healthy daughter, the future Mary I, as well as a son, Henry, who died at about six months old. Catherine suffered a series of miscarriages and stillbirths which disheartened the couple. Henry began to question the legitimacy of his marriage to Catherine, and courtly discourse on the nature of the King's marriage was common by 1527.<sup>45</sup>

Henry believed that his lack of sons was a sign of God's displeasure; in citing Leviticus 20:21, Henry claimed that his marriage to his brother's widow was illegitimate. The ancient Israelite law stated that "If a man marries his brother's wife, it is an act of impurity; he has dishonored his brother. They will be childless."<sup>46</sup> Though Henry and Catherine had not truly been childless, Henry declared that this law rendered his marriage illegitimate. While divorces terminate a valid marriage, annulments completely dissolve the foundation of a marriage. With an annulment, Henry's marriage to Catherine would be deemed legally invalid; therefore, he could remarry and produce a male heir with no repercussions from his first marriage. Henry's dynastic anxiety stemmed from his own status as a second son as well as his family's tepid claim to the throne of England. Henry's father, Henry VII, became King at the culmination of the Wars of the Roses through his defeat of the previous King. Henry feared courtly rivals with stronger bloodlines and even stronger ambitions. Additionally, the entire country feared the violence and disruption of another civil war. Therefore, a healthy, male heir would further consolidate power and solidify the continuation Royal House of Tudor.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> For more information on Catherine of Aragon, refer to the work of Giles Tremlett, *Catherine of Aragon: the Spanish Queen of Henry VIII* (New York: Walker & Co., 2010).

<sup>46</sup> Leviticus 20:21

<sup>47</sup> For more further reading on Henry VIII, refer to Jack Scarisbrick, including Jack Scarisbrick, "The New King." In *Henry VIII*, 3-20. Yale University Press, 1997. Accessed February 14, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1bh4bhn.6>.



The young King Henry VIII was renowned for his athletic prowess, intelligence, and even his artistry. This dynamic King engaged in a number of affairs, most notably his long term relationship with Lady Elizabeth Blount, the daughter of a minor courtier. As a male ruler, Henry's affairs were widely known, accepted, and expected. Henry fathered an illegitimate son with Blount by the name of Henry Fitzroy; Henry acknowledged the child and bestowed the Dukedoms of Richmond and Somerset, as well as the Earldom of Nottingham, onto his son. The name "Fitzroy," meaning, "son of a King," distinguished Henry as the King's child. Though Kings often entertained mistresses and fathered bastard children, Henry Fitzroy's existence and official acknowledgment served as a living symbol of Queen Catherine's failure. Though Mary Tudor was a healthy, intelligent child, she could not continue the Tudor line. Catherine's fall displays harsh repercussions for women who did not fulfill their predestined roles in society. Catherine's character, piety, and reputation faded through her failure to produce a son. Female royals such as Catherine, and later, Elizabeth were not afforded the romantic and sexual freedom enjoyed by her father.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to dynastic anxieties, Henry's obsession with Anne Boleyn fueled his desire for an annulment. After spending several years in the French court, Anne returned to England in 1522 with a sense of worldliness that set her apart from her noble counterparts. Educated in the game of courtly love, Anne enraptured Henry with her wit and passion.<sup>49</sup> Henry's wandering eye could not look away from the ambitious Anne. Despite their intense attraction and intellectual bond, Anne did not agree to consummate the relationship until marriage was within her grasp. Anne's strategy was likely influenced by Henry's affair with her more submissive sister, Mary Boleyn. Unlike her sister, Anne demanded the title of Queen in exchange for her physical body.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> E. W. Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn: "The Most Happy,"* (Blackwell Pub., 2004). 20.

Anne's ability to navigate the established political and social hierarchies of Henry's court certainly defied her expected gender role. Anne undoubtedly utilized her sexuality as a weapon against the awestruck King Henry; her defiance and independence deeply contrasted to traditional female values epitomized by Catherine. Anne's ability to "play the long game" by demanding marriage with Henry foreshadowed some of Elizabeth's courtship tactics.<sup>50</sup>

The length of Henry and Anne's courtship exceeded the expectations of courtiers and international dignitaries. Eager to marry the ambitious Anne, Henry tasked Cardinal Thomas Wolsey with procuring an annulment from the Pope. Pope Clement VII refused to grant Henry an annulment due to his imprisonment by the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, the most powerful ruler in Europe and a member of the Hapsburg family. As the nephew of the Queen, Charles sought to protect Catherine's title as well as Mary's claim to the throne of England. In 1531, the impatient Henry sought to override the Pope and implored Parliament to declare him the head of a separate, English Church. Powerful church figures objected to this heresy. Most notably, Sir Thomas More refused to renounce his loyalty to the Pope and was executed for treason in 1535.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Thomas Wolsey's failure to obtain an annulment alienated the Cardinal from the King. Cardinal Wolsey dominated the governance of state and church during the first decades of Henry's reign. However, his failure to negotiate with the Vatican allowed the Boleyn faction to outmaneuver the wealthy, powerful Wolsey. During this period, Anne served in political and diplomatic roles despite lacking the official title of Queen. Moreover, the growing Boleyn faction greatly disrupted the power balance of Henry's court; the once powerful

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<sup>50</sup> For further reading on Anne Boleyn, refer to the works of Eric Ives including *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn: 'the Most Happy'*. Blackwell Pub., 2009. As well as the works of Retha Warnicke including Warnicke, Retha M. *Wicked Women of Tudor England: Queens, Aristocrats, Commoners*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

<sup>51</sup> Ives, 122.

Cardinal Wolsey was stripped of his titles and died in poverty, his close relationship with the King a distant memory.<sup>52</sup>

The arrival of Anne Boleyn demolished Catherine's twenty years as Queen of England. The new Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, annulled Henry's first marriage and demoted Catherine to the title of Dowager Princess of Wales. Meanwhile, Henry banished Queen Catherine from court and impeded communication between the Princess Mary and her mother. Supporters of Catherine struggled to accept Anne's growing power at court; commoners and nobles alike clashed over this issue of loyalty. Catherine's banishment aligned with Henry's defiance of papal authority; papal loyalists rioted on behalf of their scorned Queen on numerous occasions. Widespread support for Catherine may reflect the gender standards of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. According to Constance Jordan, Thomas Elyot's wrote "Defense of Good Women" in 1540 to defend Catherine's legacy and combat the King's subsequent marriages. Jordan argues that the learned, imprisoned, pacifist Queen Zenobia, is modelled after the Catherine of Aragon.<sup>53</sup> Though this literary work criticized Henry and Anne's recklessness, it also propped up the desired ideal of femininity and womanhood through its benevolent depiction of Catherine. Though the English people had good reason to view Anne Boleyn as a disruptive usurper, Anne's political maneuvering and bold personal presentation also garnered resentment because it contrasted to the desired, appropriate idea of a Queen.

Despite intense pressure from Henry, Catherine swore that her marriage to Arthur was unconsummated, therefore upholding the religious and political legality of their marriage. In her final letter to the King before her death, Queen Catherine sought reconciliation by stating: "For

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<sup>52</sup> Ives, 130.

<sup>53</sup> Constance Jordan, "Feminism and the Humanists: The Case of Sir Thomas Elyot's Defence of Good Women," *Renaissance Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1983): 181-201, Accessed February 22, 2021.

my part, I pardon you everything, and I wish to devoutly pray God that He will pardon you also...Lastly, I make this vow, that mine eyes desire you above all things.”<sup>54</sup> Five years after her banishment, Queen Catherine died in 1536. Even on her deathbed, Catherine demonstrated traditionally female virtues. By forgiving the Henry and affirming her eternal love, Catherine maintains the role of the devoted, obedient wife. While she may have sought to uphold her reputation with this letter, it clearly displays the Queen’s priorities, virtues, and her desired image of womanhood. Moreover, Catherine had to affirm the legitimacy of her marriage in order to protect Mary’s claim to the throne.

Henry secretly wedded the pregnant Anne in late January of 1553. After Anne’s coronation, celebratory pamphlets declared that “when thou shalt bear a new son of the King’s blood; there shall be a golden world unto thy people.”<sup>55</sup> Even the King’s subjects demanded that Anne produce a son. The birth of a son could have rectified, or at least justified, the factional divides, death, and destruction which resulted from Henry’s quest for an heir. To Anne and Henry’s dismay, a healthy daughter was born to them at Greenwich Palace. Named for her grandmothers, Elizabeth Howard and Elizabeth of York, the baby girl was christened four days after her birth. Elizabeth replaced her older half-sister Mary as the heir presumptive, as Mary had been removed from the line of succession with the annulment of her parents’ marriage. The magnificent Christening tested the loyalty of conservative courtiers such as the Duchess of Norfolk; though she was a known supporter of Catherine and Mary, the noblewoman capitulated

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<sup>54</sup>“Letter of Catherine of Aragon to her husband, King Henry VIII, January 7, 1536,” (2015, March 19). Retrieved April 3, 2021, from <https://englishhistory.net/tudor/letter/letter-of-katharine-of-aragon-to-king-henry->

<sup>55</sup> Reproduced in *Tudor Tracts 1532– 1588*, ed. A.F. Pollard, first published 1903, pp.10– 27, p.17.

by accepting her role as Elizabeth's godparent. Henry accepted the birth of a healthy daughter with reservations; though disappointed, it signaled the potential for the birth of healthy sons.<sup>56</sup>

Elizabeth inherited both familial and international tensions. The infant Elizabeth's lavish headquarters at Hatfield house overpowered and absorbed Mary's own household. Forced to reside with her infant half-sister, Mary faced hostility from Boleyn loyalists as well as her own father. As Judith Richards points out, the baby Elizabeth likely could not comprehend the friction between herself and her half-sister.<sup>57</sup> However, Mary's ill-treatment during this period created a poor foundation for the relationship between the daughters of Henry VIII. Both Princesses embodied competing religious and political factions within England. While Elizabeth symbolized England's independence from Rome, papal loyalists rested their hopes in Mary, the devout Catholic granddaughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. Furthermore, Many foreign powers refused to acknowledge the false Queen Anne as well as her "bastard" daughter. Though King Henry's original goal was to solidify the Tudor legitimacy through producing a male heir, his second marriage to Anne actually undermined his authority and weakened England's relationship with foreign, Catholic powers.

Anne Boleyn's downfall and subsequent beheading cast doubt over Elizabeth's parentage, legitimacy, and even her personal character. After a tragic miscarriage in January of 1536, Henry began to doubt Anne's ability to produce an heir, again citing God's displeasure. Moreover, the King's eyes were now fixated on the demure Jane Seymour, the sister of the rising courtier Edward Seymour, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Somerset. Anne attempted to regain favor with the King; the once proud Anne pleaded with Henry by holding the infant Elizabeth in front of the King's

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<sup>56</sup> For further reading on the context of Elizabeth's birth, refer to works of Judith M. Richards including Judith M Richards, *Elizabeth I*, Abingdon, Oxon :: Routledge, 2012.

<sup>57</sup> Richards, 13.

window. Though historians have debated the case against Anne Boleyn as well as the question of her guilt, Eric Ives described her fall from grace as “short, but incandescent.”<sup>58</sup> In May of 1528, members of Anne’s faction including her personal musician Mark Smeaton, her brother George Boleyn, and courtier Henry Norris were arrested, interrogated, and even tortured by agents of the King, particularly Thomas Cromwell. Within a few weeks, Anne and her five alleged co-conspirators were tried and convicted of high treason, including charges of adultery and incest. While Anne was likely innocent of these charges, her enemies spread salacious facts and accounts after her death. Such rumors include the myth Anne Boleyn had a sixth finger, as well as the bewildering account of her birthing an amorphous, demonic child.<sup>59</sup>

Anne’s reputation and execution impacted the fortunes of Elizabeth, who was only two and a half years old at the time of her mother’s death. Henry was betrothed to Jane on the day of Anne’s execution; their marriage and Jane’s pregnancy swiftly followed. Meanwhile, Elizabeth suffered the same repercussions as her half-sister Mary. The pomp and lavishness which once defined the Princess’ household was stripped away, though Lady Margaret Bryan and Lady Katherine Ashley continued to oversee the daily life of Elizabeth. Elizabeth was removed from the line of succession, and death of Henry’s son Henry Fitzroy cleared the path for Jane’s child to inherit the throne. After giving birth to a son, the sickly Jane died due to complications from childbirth. As the future Edward VI filled Henry’s dynastic void, Elizabeth’s political importance dwindled during her childhood years; though the King acknowledged Elizabeth as his child, her

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<sup>58</sup>E. W. Ives, “Faction at the Court of Henry VIII: the Fall of Anne Boleyn,” (*History*, vol. 57, no. 190, 1972), 169. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/24407850](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24407850). Accessed 10 Apr. 2021.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

illegitimate status impeded the opportunity for marriage negotiations or any prominent role at court.<sup>60</sup>

Elizabeth spent her childhood years isolated from her father's Royal court. Though she made a few appearances as a member of Henry's family, little documentation exists about Elizabeth's day to day childhood. Henry attempted include the ten year old Elizabeth in marriage negotiations with Scotland, but her illegitimate status deterred interest from foreign ambassadors who sought an English betrothal. Elizabeth's lack of a title and absence from the line of succession limited her political capital. Meanwhile, Elizabeth interacted little with Henry's fourth wife, the German princess Anne of Cleves, or his fifth wife, the teenage Catherine Howard. While Henry's brief union with Anne resulted in divorce, Catherine Howard was beheaded on charges of adultery and treason.<sup>61</sup> The implications of her father's brief yet disastrous marriages to these women likely impacted the young Elizabeth, whose own mother was put to death under similar circumstances. Again, Elizabeth witnessed the dangers of attaching oneself to powerful, volatile men.

Henry's final marriage to Katherine Parr provided Elizabeth with some stability. Elizabeth enjoyed a friendship with Henry's sixth wife, who regarded her stepdaughter with affection. Katherine influenced Elizabeth's education and upbringing. Educated in the classical languages and religious learning, Elizabeth proved to be a precocious young woman. Elizabeth was fortunate to receive an extensive academic education in addition to lessons in sewing, music, and dancing. Eager to display her intellect, Elizabeth sent her father a translation of Katherine's

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<sup>60</sup> For further reading on Elizabeth's childhood, refer to works of Judith M. Richards including Richards, Judith M. *Elizabeth I*. Abingdon, Oxon :: Routledge, 2012.

<sup>61</sup> For more information on Henry VIII's marriages, refer to Jack Scarisbrick, including Jack Scarisbrick, "The New King." In *Henry VIII*, 3-20. Yale University Press, 1997. Accessed February 14, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1bh4bhn.6>.

own *Mediations* in French, Italian, and Latin.<sup>62</sup> Katherine's attention towards her neglected stepdaughters influenced the Third Succession Act of 1543, which included Mary and Elizabeth in the line of succession. Though she found some emotional comfort in Katherine, Elizabeth's unsteady relationship with Henry may indicate some level of distrust towards him; at a minimum, it affirms Henry's volatile aggression which increased with his age. In July of 1544, the banished Elizabeth wrote to her stepmother with great anxiety. Having been absent from court for a year, Elizabeth asked her stepmother to intervene with Henry on her behalf: "I have not dared to write him, for which at present I humbly entreat your most excellent highness that in writing to his majesty you will deign to recommend me to him."<sup>63</sup> The cause of Henry's displeasure towards Elizabeth is unknown; however, Elizabeth's tone indicates that the Princess was well aware of her outsider status.

Evidence of Elizabeth's insignificance can be found in artistic renderings of the Royal Family. Painted around 1545, *The Family of Henry VIII* celebrated the King's family while revealing the internal sibling hierarchy. After multiple marriages, Henry had managed to secure the Tudor line through the birth of a male heir, the future Edward VI. While Elizabeth was included in this image, she was removed from the central group of Henry, Jane Seymour, and the future Edward VI. Still considered illegitimate and largely absent from court, the young Elizabeth was cast aside in favor of her younger brother.<sup>64</sup> Frustrating as it is, it is impossible to gauge the extent to which Henry's reckless marital life and relative disinterest impacted Elizabeth's life. Despite her distance from court, Katherine Parr's influence provided Elizabeth

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<sup>62</sup> "Princess Elizabeth to King Henry VIII, Prefacing her Trilingual Translation of Queen Katherine's Prayers, or Meditations, December 30, 1545," *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 9.

<sup>63</sup> Elizabeth Tudor, "Princess Elizabeth to Queen Katherine, July 31 1544" *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 15.

<sup>64</sup> Strong, Roy, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (New York: Random House, 2003), 48.



with comfort and stability. Elizabeth's numerous surviving letters to Katherine demonstrate the presence of their mutual warmth and affection for one another.<sup>65</sup>

The death of Henry VII in 1547 destabilized Elizabeth's life. When the nine year of Edward was proclaimed King, his uncle, Edward Seymour became the young King's Lord Protector and Regent. Additionally, Edward's younger brother Thomas quickly courted and married the Dowager Queen Katherine only four months after Henry's death. The ambitious Seymour brothers had consolidated their political and social power with shocking speed. Katherine's remarriage sparked controversy due to her short period of mourning. Outraged, the Princess Mary encouraged her sister to display public disapproval towards Katherine. Though Elizabeth commented that their father had been "shamefully dishonoured by the queen, our step-mother" she was hesitant to scorn Katherine.<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth's affection for her stepmother likely influenced this decision; however, the shrewd Princess may have sought to protect herself during this period of shifting power.<sup>67</sup> Insulting the Seymour faction could have jeopardized Elizabeth's safety and standing. Elizabeth's dealings with her powerful elders, especially her sister, displays her ability to navigate court politics from a young age. Elizabeth was able to identify the powerful players at court, appease them, and obtain her desired outcome. Despite her comment to Mary, Elizabeth joined the Katherine and Thomas' household thereby securing a seemingly protected, even pleasant home for herself.

Elizabeth's lack of regard for his sister's advice contrasts to her warmth toward her younger brother, King Edward. In September of 1547, Elizabeth wrote to her sickly brother and prayed for "the protection of your majesty, and at the same time ask that He keep you safe and

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<sup>65</sup> For further reading on Elizabeth's childhood, refer to works of Judith M. Richards including Richards, Judith M. *Elizabeth I*. Abingdon, Oxon ;: Routledge, 2012.

<sup>66</sup> Richards, 21.

<sup>67</sup> Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, ed. M.A.E. Green, 3 vols (London, 1846), i., pp.193– 4.

sound for the longest possible time.”<sup>68</sup> Though she was the acknowledged daughter of a King, Elizabeth’s status as an orphan as well as her mother’s shameful execution left Elizabeth in an extremely vulnerable position. Without a father or a husband, Elizabeth’s position rested on maintaining favor with her brother. In order to maintain their bond, Elizabeth consciously projected acceptable, Protestant virtues. Though her letter seeks to uphold her favor with the young King, Edward himself seemed to prefer Elizabeth over Mary. Edward and Elizabeth’s closeness in age and religious practice separated them from the older, Catholic Mary. Protestant reform defined Edward VI’s brief reign. Eager to rid the church of Catholic excesses, Edward’s government enacted a number of religious reforms including the abolishment of the Catholic mass. Such reforms resulted in enormous tension between Mary and Edward; however, Elizabeth seems to have embraced her brother’s Protestant leanings.<sup>69</sup>

Elizabeth’s year with Katherine and Thomas resulted in a major scandal that would damage Elizabeth’s reputation. Beginning in 1547, Seymour aggressively inserted himself into the daily life of the Princess. During a 1549 investigation into Seymour, Kat Ashley, Elizabeth’s governess, recalled an incident in which Seymour used his sword to “cut her gown in a hundred pieces.”<sup>70</sup> When she asked Elizabeth what had happened, Elizabeth confessed that Katherine took part in the act by holding her down.<sup>71</sup> Despite her participation, Katherine’s discomfort heightened in conjunction with her husband’s boldness. In 1548, the pregnant Katherine removed Elizabeth from her household. Sometime after her swift departure, Elizabeth wrote to the Dowager Queen: “Although I could not be plentiful in giving thanks for the manifold kindness

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<sup>68</sup> Elizabeth Tudor, “Princess Elizabeth to King Edward VI upon his recovery from sickness, September 20, 1547,” 14.

<sup>69</sup> For further reading on Edward VI, refer to the works of Susan Doran, particularly Susan Doran, *Elizabeth I and Her Circle*, Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2015.

<sup>70</sup> “Katherine Ashley’s First Handwritten Deposition, late February 1549” *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 28.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

receive at your highness' hand at my departure, yet I am something to be borne withal, for truly I was replete with sorrow to depart from your highness, especially leaving you undoubtful of health."<sup>72</sup> Elizabeth may have praised the Katherine's kindness in an attempt to regain favor with her former stepmother; and yet, Elizabeth's uneasiness is apparent through her mention of her "departure" from Katherine's presence. Nonetheless, Elizabeth's letter displays an awareness of her fall from favor. The shrewd Elizabeth sought to reestablish her beneficial relationship with Katherine; however, the messiness of the incident left their relationship permanently damaged.

During a 1549 investigation, Ashley reported other suspicious incidents such as Seymour entering Elizabeth's bed chamber in the morning and tickling her. While Seymour viewed his actions as playful, this act was extremely improper as it violated Elizabeth's privacy on a number of levels. Though Lady Kat recounted these events, she attempted to protect Elizabeth's virtue by denying any wrongdoing on Elizabeth's part.<sup>73</sup> According to Ashley, Elizabeth was a passive recipient of Seymour's attention. The extent of Elizabeth's agency in the matter is unknown and often debated; while Judith Richards interprets these interactions as "mutually flirtatious," I would argue that Elizabeth suffered abuse at Thomas' hand.<sup>74</sup> Other historians such as Susan Doran acknowledge Seymour's lustful ambition but credit Elizabeth's "coolheadedness."<sup>75</sup> As an ambitious courtier, Thomas clearly capitalized on his access to the young, powerless, Elizabeth. Elizabeth did not confess her own interpretation of Thomas' behavior; however, her testimony contains fervent denials of any romantic interactions with Katherine's husband.<sup>76</sup> Whether or not Elizabeth enjoyed and engaged with the attention of a powerful, older man is not the primary

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<sup>72</sup> "Princess Elizabeth to Dowager Queen Katherine, circa June 1548," *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 20.

<sup>73</sup> "Katherine Ashley's First Handwritten Deposition, late February 1549," *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 25.

<sup>74</sup> Richards, 22.

<sup>75</sup> Susan Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony: the Courtships of Elizabeth I*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 15.

<sup>76</sup> "Elizabeth Tudor to Edward Seymour, Lord Protector, January 28, 1548," *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 22.

question of this scandal. Instead, it is necessary to analyze the ways in which Elizabeth attempted to mend her reputation and project her virtue.

The fallout from “the Seymour Incident” is arguably Elizabeth’s first attempt at damage control and self-fashioning. But does this scandal foreshadow Elizabeth’s future interactions with men? Certainly in some respects. This is the first instance in Elizabeth’s life in which her unmarried, unprotected status threatened both her physical body and her reputation. Similar rumors regarding sexual impropriety and even fornication would surround the future Queen at several times during her reign. Moreover, Seymour’s attempt to accrue power through pursuing Elizabeth demonstrates the motivations of later suitors. Here, Elizabeth likely honed her ability to discern the motivations of various power players.

Seymour’s aggression towards Elizabeth, as well as her dismissal by Katherine, fueled rumors of the Princess’ sexual impropriety. Though Thomas and Katherine would soon fade from prominence—Katherine died in childbirth in 1548 while Thomas was executed for treason in 1549—the stain of association lingered with Elizabeth for the remainder of youth. In a letter to Thomas’ brother Edward, Lord Protector, Elizabeth addressed the “shameful slanders” and again denies any romantic attachment to Thomas: “there goeth rumors abroad which be greatly both against mine honor and honesty, which above all other things I esteem, which be these: that I am in the Tower and with child by my lord admiral.”<sup>77</sup> Rumors of imprisonment and pregnancy out of wedlock echo the accusations which surrounded Anne Boleyn’s downfall, and notable courtiers were quick to judge Elizabeth by the actions of her mother. By directly acknowledging the scandal to the most powerful man in England, Elizabeth clearly communicated her helplessness, isolation, and most importantly, her innocence. Additionally, Elizabeth’s plea to

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<sup>77</sup> Lord Admiral refers to Thomas Seymour. “Elizabeth Tudor to Edward Seymour, Lord Protector, January 28, 1548,” *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 22.

Edward Seymour reflects the severity and prevalence of the rumors as well as the limits of her power at this time. Elizabeth had no foundation to rest on; she was the unwanted daughter of a lascivious King and a treasonous, usurper Queen. On its own, her virtue and honesty could not prevent the proliferation such harmful gossip. Her glaring lack of socio-political capital *forced* Elizabeth to turn to powerful men to defend her. Though the Lord Protector did not issue a public denial of these rumors, Elizabeth's subsequent letters displays her graciousness towards Edward Seymour and the "good will" of his Regency Council.<sup>78</sup> In other words, the scandal had died down at the will of powerful men.

The Princess' dedication to her education, both secular and religious, played a part in repairing her damaged image. In fact, Elizabeth would frequently utilize her learnedness as a tool during marital and romantic interactions later in life. Elizabeth certainly enjoyed receiving attention from suitors and rarely shied away from exhibiting her intelligence, cleverness, and impressive way with words. Despite the "weaker" nature of her gender, Elizabeth's education was a point of equality between herself and the suitor. Meanwhile, the young Elizabeth reported her educational progress to the King, himself a precocious, highly educated teenager. Elizabeth wrote in May of 1549: "I shall most humbly beseech your majesty that when you shall look on my picture you will witsafe to think that as you have but the outward shadow of the body afore you, so my inward mind wisheth that the body itself were oftener in your presence."<sup>79</sup>

Elizabeth's letter, and the gift of her portrait, is certainly a response to the recent scandal. It is clear that Elizabeth now recognized the vulnerability of her unpossessed, unmarried self. Here, the Princess downplayed her the beauty of her physical body and instead promoted the virtue of her mind. More specifically, Elizabeth attempted to recapture favor with her half-brother by

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<sup>78</sup> "Elizabeth Tudor to Edward Seymour, Lord Protector, February 21, 1549" *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 22.

<sup>79</sup> "Elizabeth Tudor to King Edward VI, May 1549," *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 35.

depicting herself as a pious, learned, pure young woman. This letter demonstrated the development of Elizabeth's ability to tactfully present herself to powerful men during her teenage years.

With Edward's death in 1553, Elizabeth entered one of the most precarious periods of her life. With her father and brother deceased, the illegitimate, unmarried Elizabeth lacked an attachment to a powerful man. Now, her only form of protection was her relationship with her older half-sister, the recently crowned Queen Mary. Edward had removed Mary and Elizabeth from the succession and named Lady Jane Grey as his heir; however, a popular uprising placed Mary on the throne. Catholic nobles ardently supported the new Queen, while common peoples viewed Henry VIII's eldest daughter as the most viable ruler of England. During her five year reign, Mary attempted to reverse Edward's reforms and return England to the Catholic faith. When Mary challenged Lady Jane Grey, Elizabeth claimed illness and did not show support for either woman, thereby removing herself from the tumultuous issue of succession.<sup>80</sup> This tendency to avoid conflict and delay decision making would certainly reverberate throughout Elizabeth's reign. Despite Elizabeth's absence from the military conflict, Mary granted Elizabeth a prominent place in her triumphal procession; however, this symbolic gesture did not represent the true nature of the sisters' relationship.

The Wyatt Rebellion, an attempted Protestant uprising, placed the life of Elizabeth in a precarious position. However, even before this attempted uprising, Elizabeth's shaky dynamic with Mary stemmed from the difficulties of Mary's own adolescence as well as their religious differences. Throughout her reign, Mary doubted Elizabeth's adherence to Catholicism and viewed her younger sister as a threat to religious reform. Furthermore, Mary doubted Elizabeth's

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<sup>80</sup> Richards, 27.

paternity on numerous occasions; a teenager during Anne Boleyn's reign, Mary recalled the rumors of Anne's infidelity quite clearly.<sup>81</sup> Mary's suspicions confounded with the Wyatt Rebellion, in which Protestant nobles sought to remove Mary and place Elizabeth on the throne. In March 1554, Elizabeth was imprisoned and interrogated regarding her possible connection to the conspirators. Writing to Mary from the Tower, Elizabeth claimed to be a "true subject" and begged her sister to release her due to a lack of evidence. She swore her allegiance to Mary: "and to this present hour I protest afore God (who shall judge my truth, whatsoever malice shall devise) that I never practiced, counseled, nor consented to anything that might be prejudicial to your person any way or dangerous to the state by any mean."<sup>82</sup> Elizabeth appealed to her sister's sense of logic and asked the Queen to disregard rumors, negative emotions, and Elizabeth's prior reputation. Similarly to the Seymour incident, Elizabeth expertly presented herself to the power figure and preserved her own life. Here, Elizabeth presented herself as an upright, honorable woman by honestly recognizing the fractures in their relationship. By acknowledging the weight of past grievances, Elizabeth was able to humble herself before Queen Mary and gain the mercy of her sister.

Released from the tower in May, Elizabeth was placed under house arrest at Woodstock Palace. Here, Elizabeth turned to poetry as a means of expressing her fear and professing her innocence. Using a diamond, Elizabeth inscribed the following onto a window: "Much suspected by me, nothing proved can be, quod Elizabeth the prisoner."<sup>83</sup> The irony here is striking. Despite her outward privilege (she writes this poem with a gemstone), Elizabeth's isolation and unwanted status have never been more apparent. Elizabeth's period at Woodstock offers a rare

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<sup>81</sup> For further reading on the reign of Mary I, refer to the works of Susan Doran, particularly "Mary Tudor" from *Elizabeth I and Her Circle*, Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2015.

<sup>82</sup> "Elizabeth Tudor to Queen Mary, March 17, 1554," *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 41.

<sup>83</sup> "Written with a Diamond at Woodstock," *Elizabeth I: The Collected Works*, 46.

glimpse into her inner mind; it is clear that she understands the effects of her scandalous birth poor reputation. Even as a twenty three year old woman, Elizabeth could not escape her status as the unwanted, isolated second daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. Despite these setbacks, Elizabeth displayed a strong sense of self-awareness and professed confidence in her innocence. Elizabeth's ability to derive self-esteem from her own inner virtue and morality would allow the future Queen to rise above rumor, gossip, and judgement. Elizabeth's ability to navigate multiple scandals is a testament to her intelligence and her confidence.

As the first female regnant of England, Mary set a number of important precedents for Elizabeth's own ascension. Additionally, analyzing Mary's focus on marriage and dynastic succession uncovers a similar narrative to the Tudor women who came before her. By linking herself to a powerful man, Mary diluted her own agency and was ultimately considered a failure to her husband and her country. Mary's marriage to Phillip II of Spain provided an unappealing model of an arranged royal marriage. Mary wed Prince Phillip of Spain at the age of thirty-seven. This political marriage solidified an alliance between England and Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor. While there was hope for an heir, many doubted Mary's ability to produce a child due to her age and bouts of poor health. Phillip's long absences did not aid in the production of an heir and certainly contributed to Mary's mental anguish. The dysfunctional nature of Mary and Phillip's marriage, as well as the deep resentment from English Protestants and Catholics, likely influenced Elizabeth's impression of marriage. Foreign matches brought a multitude of complications, and it seemed impossible to please a majority of Englishmen. English nobles resented the power of Phillip's Hapsburg family; with Phillip's influence, England could fade into the vast Hapsburg empire rather than stand on its own.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> For further reading on the life of Mary I, refer to the works of John Edwards, specifically John Edwards, *Mary I*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011.



Moreover, Phillip proved to be an emotionally uninvested husband. Excluded from his own marriage negotiations, Phillip resented his time in England and preferred to remain on the continent. Additionally, his mistresses and children from a previous marriage distracted Phillip from the needs of Mary and her English courtiers. This marriage model proved unappealing to all involved, particularly Mary, who could not produce a child. Her frustration, and possibly mental illness, resulted in a “phantom pregnancy” in 1556. Like her own mother, Catherine of Aragon, and the many royal women before her, the enormous pressure of producing an heir took an toll on Mary’s mental and physical state. Desperate to produce a Catholic heir, Mary viewed her false pregnancy as a sign of God’s displeasure. When doctors revealed that Mary was not pregnant in 1555, Elizabeth’s chances at succeeding the throne seemed stronger than ever.<sup>85</sup>

## Chapter 2: Elizabeth’s Primary Courtships

Elizabeth I famously remarked that she had no desire to make “windows into men’s souls.”<sup>86</sup> Though she was speaking on the matter of one’s personal religion, this quote sheds light on Elizabeth’s philosophy for many facets of life. More importantly, it is clear that the Queen desired the same shroud of mystery for herself which she granted to her subjects. However, Elizabeth was afforded no such privacy throughout marriage negotiations and personal relationships. The issue of marriage plagued Elizabeth throughout her reign, and her shifting, often malleable responses to the matrimonial question reflect Elizabeth’s contradictory nature. The scandal of Elizabeth’s birth as well as her tumultuous adolescence resulted in a steely, even calculating young woman. This controlled outer persona presents itself in official speeches,

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Levin, 64.

letters, and portraits, all of which were meant to be consumed by the public.<sup>87</sup> Despite Elizabeth's blatant image-crafting, these sources contain a variety of perspectives, reasonings, and feelings regarding the question of marriage. While Elizabeth's responses connected to a number of broad issues such as religion and geo-politics, Elizabeth's speeches and statements regarding marriage also indicate her personal sentiments. Elizabeth's marriage negotiations expose the human side of Queen; the genuine affection she showed toward certain courtiers and suitors served both a political and personal purpose.

Elizabeth's major suitors possessed unique motivations for their pursuit of the Queen. However, each man failed to overcome at least one of the following barriers: religious difference, domestic unpopularity, poor personal reputation, or age difference. More importantly, each candidate failed to officially woo Elizabeth, a woman once described by an ambassador as possessing a "hatred" for matrimony that was "most strange."<sup>88</sup> Elizabeth was no easy conquest. The newly ascended Queen radiated this sense of resiliency through shunning marriage and even reprimanding her demanding Parliament.<sup>89</sup> Elizabeth's early speeches evoke a sense of youthful defiance. As Elizabeth grew older, her skill at adaptation and public relations remained sharp; yet she seemed to enjoy the attentiveness of her suitors more than ever. Seemingly paradoxical, Elizabeth's desire for companionship and affection revealed the human side of a Queen who had spent most of her life under intense scrutiny. Elizabeth engaged with male attention throughout her life while still professing a desire to remain unmarried. As a young Queen she blossomed in the company of the handsome, athletic Dudley; in her middle age her flourishing, affectionate letters to the Duke of Alencon reflect her need for emotional reciprocation in addition to her

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<sup>87</sup> Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power*, (2nd edition, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.) 97.

<sup>88</sup> Levin, 93.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 95.

political savvy. Elizabeth's portraiture demonstrates that the Queen understood the power of her image. While her popular legacy has accepted this glorified, two-dimensional version of the Queen, inspecting Elizabeth's interactions with men such as Dudley and Alencon provide a fuller view of a real woman. While Elizabeth's desired, symbolic image lives on forever, the human Elizabeth Tudor experienced a life full of mortal complications. Assessing Elizabeth's emotions does not undermine her propensity to govern. However, the courtships of Dudley and Alencon are particularly important as they best reveal the human Elizabeth, the woman behind the portrait.

Upon her ascension, Elizabeth was under enormous pressure to accept a husband. In 1559, 1563, 1566, and 1576, Parliament petitioned Elizabeth to marry and produce an heir as quickly as possible.<sup>90</sup> Though marriage and reproduce would provide an easy fix to dynastic anxieties, these petitions also revolved around gendered notions of female rule. Though Elizabeth was expected to rule England, most also assumed that she would serve a husband as well as her country. The complicated dynamics of such an arrangement produced a number of opinions. The Scottish Reformer John Knox published an entire treatise that criticized the shortcomings of female rulers. According to Knox, a Queen Regnant was "repugnant to God."<sup>91</sup> Not all men took such an extreme stance, but Knox's 1558 treatise coincided with Elizabeth's ascension and certainly influenced the powerful men of Parliament and the privy council. Furthermore, the issue of marriage plagued Elizabeth in both informal and formal settings. In addition to Parliament's blatant begging, courtly performances presented the Queen with tales of matrimony.<sup>92</sup> The shrewd, defiant Queen viewed these attempts to harness her power with

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<sup>90</sup> Susan Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony: the Courtships of Elizabeth I*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 3.

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Knox, "First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women," [gutenberg.org/files/9660/9660-h/9660-h.htm](http://gutenberg.org/files/9660/9660-h/9660-h.htm)

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

transparency; her exceptional rejection of marriage is evident in both her Parliamentary speeches and personal interactions.

The male dominated institutions of Parliament and the privy council were not the only men who attempted to harness Elizabeth's power as monarch. Early suitors flung themselves at the unmarried Queen in attempts to seize power. Phillip II's brief yet scandalous pursuit of Elizabeth displays the overarching political implications of royal marriage. As his wife Queen Mary grew gravely ill, Phillip II's ambassador inquired after the availability of the Princess Elizabeth.<sup>93</sup> Mary had neither produced nor named an heir, so Elizabeth appeared to be the next Queen. Elizabeth and her circle swiftly rejected Phillip's inquiry for a number of reasons. His Catholicism was an immediate detraction as it conflicted with Elizabeth's personal religious expression and would continue to connect England to Rome. Additionally, Phillip's previous marriage to Elizabeth's sister rendered him an inappropriate match; the English Tudors did not marry as closely within the family as Phillip's Hapsburg clan. Moreover, despite Mary's refusal to elevate Phillip to King Regnant, his influence over England during Mary's reign had been extensive and unbeneficial.<sup>94</sup> As one of the most powerful rulers in continental Europe, Phillip viewed England as merely a portion of his own empire rather than a separate political entity. Indeed, Phillip's motivation behind a match with Elizabeth was merely to maintain his political influence over England. Phillip's disinterest in England as well as his wife would be no different with Elizabeth than with her sister.

The weight of Elizabeth's long, complex relationship with Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester impacted the Queen more than any single courtship. Contrasting to Phillip's physical and emotional distance, Elizabeth's relationship with Dudley provided the Queen with a great

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 9.

deal of emotional satisfaction. While relations with Elizabeth's other major suitors align with specific issues of her reign, Dudley's presence prevailed regardless of the triumphs and failures of the court. Often described as the Queen's "favourite," Dudley served the Queen until his death. Though Elizabeth first bonded with Dudley as a young adult, a famous allegorical tale claims that the pair were friends as children. The myth even goes so far as to claim that Elizabeth told Robert that she would never marry from a young age.<sup>95</sup> It is tempting to assume that the exceptionally strong willed Elizabeth displayed a preference for the single life at such a young age. This would neatly explain her unmarried status and condense the living Elizabeth into the worshipped icon of her portraiture. However, the story's apparent moral undermines itself as it emphasizes the lifelong presence of a male counterpart: Dudley. This tale embodies the contradictions of Elizabeth's legacy as it embraces Elizabeth's symbolic image while simultaneously promoting her personal relationship with Dudley. Despite the historical inaccuracy of the tale, its prevalence reveals the depth of the pair's bond. Additionally, it indicates the public's fascination regarding the nature of their relationship that lingers today.

A blend of genuine affection and deep seeded ambition fueled Dudley's desire for Elizabeth's hand. Dudley's charismatic, boastful persona likely compensated for his regrettable family history. Dudley's father and grandfather had been executed for treason; the stigma of this public shame sullied Dudley's reputation and garnered suspicion from competing nobles.<sup>96</sup> Like Elizabeth, Dudley was imprisoned in the tower under Mary I due to his father's treasonous plotting.<sup>97</sup> Elizabeth likely empathized with Dudley's unfortunate family drama, especially given her own difficult upbringing. Additionally, Elizabeth sought to restore Marian exiles to positions

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<sup>95</sup> Susan Doran, *Elizabeth I and Her Circle*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated 2015) 41.

<sup>96</sup> Susan Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 40.

<sup>97</sup> Doran, *Elizabeth I and Her Circle*, 119.

of power. As a result of both her personal and political interests, Elizabeth appointed Dudley Master of the Horse in 1559, a prestigious position which allowed extensive access to the Queen. Robert accompanied Elizabeth on hunting trips and riding lessons, and he soon earned a prominent place at courtly entertainments.<sup>98</sup> Dudley possessed a number of enticing personal qualities which captured Elizabeth's attention. The young nobleman impressed Elizabeth with his athletic and artistic prowess. In addition to his abilities as an equestrian, Dudley formed his own acting troupe in 1559 and dedicated performances to Elizabeth. Additionally, the two shared many interests including the study of languages, dancing, and gambling.<sup>99</sup> During the first two years of her reign, Elizabeth spent most of her leisure time with Dudley; it is clear that the joy of their friendship provided an escape for Elizabeth's often burdensome life as Queen. Though her public persona was still forming during these initial years, it is clear that Elizabeth was able to shed the weight of her Queenly duties in Dudley's presence.

Dudley's scandalous origins as well as his unrivaled proximity to Elizabeth resulted in court gossip beginning in 1559. However, his family history was not the only factor that invited criticism; Robert Dudley's pre-existing marriage to Amy Robsart formed the true heart of the scandal. Married as teenagers, Amy and Robert lived separate lives and shared no children. Amy suffered from a terminal illness throughout the 1550s; her husband's perpetual absence from their home certainly did not aid her mental or physical health.<sup>100</sup> Many speculated that Dudley hoped to marry Elizabeth upon Amy's death. Others wagered that Dudley's ambition would drive him to expedite her demise.<sup>101</sup> Dudley's married status further disparaged his reputation and fed the widespread disapproval towards his relationship with Elizabeth. Salacious gossip

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<sup>98</sup> Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 41.

<sup>99</sup> Doran, *Elizabeth I and Her Circle*, 199.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Levin, 97.

spread throughout England and Europe; everyone from the Spanish ambassador to the local drunkard seemed to believe that Robert Dudley and Elizabeth shared a sexual relationship.<sup>102</sup> Though courtly gossip typically centered around the “private” life of the monarch, the critical language surrounding Elizabeth’s behavior would have never been applied to her Father, a man with a record of reckless sexual and marital endeavors. For example, the ambassador from Austria grew concerned about a potential match between Archduke Charles and the Queen, who he described as a “notoriously loose woman.”<sup>103</sup> Applying such a criticism to a male monarch was unthinkable. Kings were expected and even encouraged to conduct affairs; Elizabeth’s father displayed no sense of discretion. Despite her ruling status, Elizabeth’s early relationship with Dudley made it clear that she would not be afforded the same personal or romantic liberties as her male predecessors.

Elizabeth’s initial response to the rumors of an inappropriate relationship with Dudley seemingly contrasts to her responses to previous crises. In the midst of the Thomas Seymour and Wyatt Uprising investigations, Elizabeth proclaimed her innocence to the Edward Seymour and Queen Mary, the ruling powers at those particular times. However, Elizabeth seemed unbothered by the Dudley rumors and made little attempt to quiet them. Susan Doran claims that Elizabeth’s love for Dudley inhibited her typical propensity for damage control.<sup>104</sup> While Elizabeth’s response certainly contrasts to earlier episodes, Caroline Levin assesses the situation differently. Elizabeth understood the controversy; whatever affection she possessed for Dudley did not impede her judgement.<sup>105</sup> However, I assert that impossibility of a sexual relationship between the two fueled Elizabeth’s initial indifference towards the rumors. Constantly surrounded by her

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>105</sup> Levin, 106.

ladies in waiting, maids, servants, and counselors, it would have been impossible to organize secret meetings with Dudley. Though she disguised herself at times, Elizabeth's ladies in waiting possessed full knowledge of her plans and whereabouts.<sup>106</sup> Additionally, Elizabeth had been the subject of gossip and scandal since her very birth; she likely realized that as the new, young Queen she would be the subject of more judgement than ever before. Combatting each and every harmful rumor would be a waste of time. Furthermore, Dudley's prideful, boastful nature rendered him incapable maintaining an illicit affair. Dudley constantly bragged about his gifts, titles, and outings with the Queen; surely he would have discussed the sexual component of their relationship had there been one. Confident in her own purity, the Queen neither succumbed to the rumors nor adhered to the advice of her councilors.

Despite the absence of a sexual relationship, Dudley and Elizabeth's attachment faced almost universal disapproval. Even Elizabeth's ladies maids spoke critically of Elizabeth's open favoritism towards a married courtier.<sup>107</sup> At Elizabeth's court, it was impossible to separate the personal from the political. The rumors of inappropriate sexual behavior inevitably affected matters of state. Foreign ambassadors endlessly ridiculed the Queen's displays of affection; Elizabeth's impropriety could have confirmed these men's negative stereotypes about female rulers. William Cecil, the Queen's closest advisor, resented Dudley's brazen ambition and feared his influence over Elizabeth. Cecil criticized Elizabeth for granting lucrative monopolies, grants, and lands upon Dudley. According to Cecil, England's resources were being bestowed upon disliked, married man of scandalous origin.<sup>108</sup> Additionally, Cecil feared the loss of his own

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<sup>106</sup> Anna Whitelock, *The Queen's Bed: an Intimate History of Elizabeth's Court*, (First American edition. New York: Sarah Crichton Books, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 58.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 119.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 121.



powerful position; Dudley's opinion of Cecil could resonate with Elizabeth.<sup>109</sup> Cecil's suspicion was not unwarranted. During his early years with Elizabeth, Dudley attempted to gain Hapsburg support for his courtship of Elizabeth.<sup>110</sup> Dudley's willingness to ingratiate himself with England's chief political and religious rival reveals the depth of his personal ambition. Indeed, marriage to Elizabeth offered endless benefits to the eager courtier. In addition to power, prestige, and wealth, this royal marriage would permanently restore Dudley's family name. Though Elizabeth's virginity strengthened her indifference towards the gossip, her stubbornness fueled her refusal to set Dudley aside as well as her determination to remain unmarried. Susan Doran argues that Elizabeth did have a strong desire to marry Dudley, but his unpopularity and alienation at court prevented her from acting on her desires. Additionally, Doran claims that Elizabeth's interactions with early suitors such as Archduke Charles and Prince Eric of Sweden was merely "distractions" from her desired, even eminent marriage to Dudley.<sup>111</sup>

The length of Elizabeth and Dudley's friendship confirms their mutual affection for each other, but Elizabeth made her thoughts on marriage clear during the height of their relationship. In February 1559, Elizabeth addressed parliament: "I have already joined myself in marriage to a husband, namely the kingdom of England. And behold...the pledge of this my wedlock and marriage with my kingdom."<sup>112</sup> Elizabeth's youthful determination was on full display, and she knew it. Possibly reacting to the frustrating faces of her Parliament, she adds that "Although my youth and words may seem to some hardly to agree together, yet it is most true that at this day I stand free."<sup>113</sup> Here, Elizabeth hopes to quiet her demanding parliament by emphasizing her

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<sup>109</sup> Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 45.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>112</sup> Elizabeth Tudor, "Queen Elizabeth's First Speech to Parliament, February 10, 1559," *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 56.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

union with England. Additionally, the young Queen certainly exhibited some fearlessness by broadcasting her desire to govern England as an unmarried woman.

Carole Levin argues that Elizabeth uses the language of matrimony as a metaphor; the Queen's political body was wedded to England while her physical self remained free.<sup>114</sup> However, I posit that the defiant nature of her statement speaks to its personal veracity as well its as political function. It is strange to accept that Elizabeth was able to deliver such a blow to her hopeful, marriage-obsessed Parliament while simultaneously yearning for Dudley's hand. Additionally, Elizabeth went beyond the typical language of political matrimony by declaring the following: "this shall be for me sufficient that a marble stone shall declare that a Queen, having reigned such a time, lived and died a virgin."<sup>115</sup> Elizabeth's desire to preserve the virginal state of her physical body transcended any language of monarchical devotion. This statement is far bolder and far more explicit than any metaphor. Elizabeth undoubtedly adored Dudley and defied public expectation by enjoying his attention. However, her intent to marry Dudley seems scant when paired with her scathing declarations to Parliament.

Accounts of more intimate interactions with Elizabeth corroborate the content of her Parliamentary speeches. Elizabeth's remarked to the Spanish ambassador in March 1565: "There is a strong idea in the world that a woman cannot live unless she is married, or at all events that is she refrains from marriage she does so for some bad reason... But what can we do?"<sup>116</sup> Though she still engaged with Dudley's attention, Elizabeth's personal stance seems to have changed little since 1559. Once again, her defiant attitude indicates the genuine nature of her comments to the ambassador. On the other hand, it can be argued that Elizabeth contradicted her

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<sup>114</sup> Levin, 110.

<sup>115</sup> Elizabeth Tudor, "Queen Elizabeth's First Speech to Parliament, February 10, 1559," *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 58.

<sup>116</sup> Levin, 110.

own statements through displaying a public affection for Dudley. However, affection and attention did not guarantee marriage. Moreover, Elizabeth was not afraid to remind Dudley who was in charge. For example, the Queen once reprimanded her favourite for claiming ownership of her servant. This public humiliation reminded Dudley of his inferior status; the ambitious courtier was as far from royalty as ever.<sup>117</sup> Judging from this interaction, it was clear that Elizabeth could not accept an obedient role as Dudley's wife. Marrying Dudley would contradict Elizabeth's stubbornness and propensity for defiance; this huge personal toll only compounded with the negative political implications. Though Dudley's presence permeated the early years of Elizabeth's reign, her statements about marriage cast serious doubt on her desire to take Dudley as her husband.

Whether or not Elizabeth ever intended to marry Dudley, the mysterious death of Amy Robsart in 1560 further inhibited Dudley's pursuit. According to the coroner's report, Amy was found dead at the bottom of a staircase; her death could have been the result of an accident, a murder, or a suicide.<sup>118</sup> The timing of her death as well as its tragic, mysterious nature sent shock waves through Elizabeth's court. According to the Spanish ambassador, the entire court believed that Dudley was involved in his wife's death; his love for the Queen and unbridled ambition made this conspiracy fathomable.<sup>119</sup> Whether or not Elizabeth suspected her favorite of foul play is unknown; however, this tragedy forced the Queen to distance herself from Robert for the first time. Elizabeth removed Dudley from court and destroyed the patent which would elevate him to

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<sup>117</sup> Levin, 121.

<sup>118</sup> "Amy Robsart Coroner's Report." *The National Archives*, The National Archives, 11 Mar. 2021, [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/elizabeth-monarchy/coroners-report/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/elizabeth-monarchy/coroners-report/).

<sup>119</sup> Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 43.

the nobility.<sup>120</sup> More importantly, Elizabeth began to entertain marriage negotiations with Archduke Charles of Austria in January 1561. Though Dudley's scandal continued to dominate court gossip, Elizabeth shrewdly navigated the situation by turning her attention to another man. Amy's death solidified the dangers of her affection for Dudley, and Elizabeth finally attempted some damage control as a result. Banished to his country estate, Dudley publicly mourned his wife by staging an elaborate, expensive funeral.<sup>121</sup> Though his shock and sadness could have been genuine, Dudley's tendency to overcompensate was likely at play in this situation. Amy's death permanently damaged Dudley's already shaky reputation. Additionally, the rumors of foul play provided Dudley's enemies with additional ammunition. Powerful lords, the privy council, and Parliament were united in their opposition towards Dudley.

Elizabeth's reaction to Amy's death is not recorded, and she never explicitly mentioned the statement in speeches or letters. However, a conversation with the Scottish Ambassador in October of 1561 offers a glimpse into Elizabeth's mindset at this time. William Maitland, Laird of Lethington spoke at length with the Queen in order to promote peace between England and Scotland. Elizabeth expressed dissatisfaction towards Lethington's mistress Mary, Queen of Scots due to her lack of correspondence. After offering excuses on behalf of Mary, Elizabeth reveals the true source of her anger: Mary's interest in the English throne. Ceasing with politeness, Elizabeth declares to Lethington that "for as long as I live there shall be no other Queen in England but I...for the matter of the succession of the crown is a matter I will not meddle in."<sup>122</sup> Elizabeth firmly asserted her dominance as Queen of England and refused to

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>122</sup> "Queen Elizabeth's Conversations with the Scottish Ambassador," *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 66.

name Mary as a possible heir. Elizabeth likely avoided naming an heir in order to prevent competition during her lifetime. However, this statement could also apply to the notion of marrying a foreign Prince or even an ambitious Englishmen. Elizabeth places the governing powers of England solely within herself. Moreover, at a later meeting, Elizabeth again dismissed Mary's attempts at inserting herself into the English succession: "so many doubts of marriage that I stand in awe myself to enter in marriage, fearing the controversy. Once I am married already to the realm of England when I was crowned with this ring."<sup>123</sup> While these conversations directly pertained to the relationship between Elizabeth and her rival, they shed light on her attitudes towards succession and marriage. Here, Elizabeth insisted that her focus is not on marriage or the production of an heir, but rather the act of governing. Furthermore, Elizabeth's vague statements regarding the "controversy" surrounding marriage as well as her "many doubts" could reveal the emotional toll of Amy's scandalous death. In 1861, Elizabeth seems exhausted by the burden of marriage and would rather avoid the discussion altogether.

Though Amy's death forced Elizabeth to distance herself from her favorite, it did not thwart Dudley's pursuit. Dudley promoted his pursuit of the Queen through sponsoring the production artistic and literary works.<sup>124</sup> In 1561, Dudley recruited Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville to produce *Gorboduc*, a play which displayed the destructive consequences of a successional dispute. The fictional King Gorboduc divides England among two heirs rather than selecting one future King; his decision results in civil war, murder, and foreign invasion.<sup>125</sup> Because subjects could not openly criticize the Queen, opinions were often presented through artistic, metaphorical means. This plot mirrored the concerns of Elizabeth's court; with no heir

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>124</sup> Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 53-55.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 55.

apparent, the country was incredibly vulnerable. Previous successional divides resulted in the destructive, chaotic Wars of the Roses. Memories of this civil war lingered in the minds of Elizabeth's subjects. Meanwhile, the growing power of Hapsburg Spain seemed poised to swallow the weaker English isle. Performed for the Queen in January of 1562, the play offered a blatant warning to Elizabeth: "Hereoto it comes, when kings will not consent to grave advice, but follow wilful will."<sup>126</sup> This line chastises Elizabeth for her failure to follow the advice of her privy council and Parliament. Though the court was divided on the candidacy of Dudley, the entire country yearned for their stubborn Queen to take a husband, produce an heir, and secure the English succession.

*Gorboduc* promoted the Dudley match through its depiction of disorder and destruction. Though marrying a courtier would complicate the social hierarchy of the Tudor court, a domestic match would allow England to remain independent from the interests of Hapsburg Spain or Catherine de Medici's France. More importantly, Elizabeth would produce an undoubtedly English heir, thereby securing the succession and alleviating anxiety for the future of the realm. Dudley and his posse utilized this argument for their own benefit. Dudley made his interests known in the final act of the play in which a major character declares:

Such one, my lords, let be your chosen king,  
Such one so born within your native land;  
Such one prefer; and in no wise admit  
The heavy yoke of foreign governance.<sup>127</sup>

Dudley's literary self-promotion coincided with a revived effort in Parliament to secure a husband for the Queen. Though the MPs had urged Elizabeth to marry upon her ascendance, the state papers of 1563 reveal a desperate, even aggressive Parliament. Thomas Norton, the co-

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<sup>126</sup> Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackeville, *Gorboduc: Or, Ferrex and Porrex*, ed. by Homer Andrew Watt, (United States: University of Wisconsin, 1910), 33.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

author of *Gorboduc* and an ally of Dudley, penned a speech which mirrored the themes of his play. Delivered by Speaker of Parliament Thomas Williams, the speech highlighted the dangers of civil wars and “seditious, ambitious” foreign princes.”<sup>128</sup> Williams implored Elizabeth to take a husband and stressed her duty as Queen to produce an heir: “take for yourself some honorable husband whom it shall please you to join you in marriage. Whomsoever it shall be that your majesty shall choose, we protest and promise with all humility and reverence to honor, love, and serve as to our most bounden duty shall appertain.”<sup>129</sup> Despite the demanding nature of the speech, Parliament’s willingness to accept any candidate seems strange, especially given the recent death of Amy Robsart. Here, it seemed that Parliament offered Elizabeth an opportunity to marry her beloved courtier. Despite his many scandals, Dudley was an English Protestant of noble birth; his base identity garnered appeal from certain factions. Indeed, a marriage to Dudley far outweighed the fear of civil war or foreign invasion.<sup>130</sup> However, their apparent open-mindedness resulted from Elizabeth’s recent illness rather than Dudley’s appeal.

In late 1562, Elizabeth suffered from a severe bout of smallpox. The effects of her illness resonated in permanent scarring and hair loss; these physical markers served as a reminder of the Queen’s mortality. More importantly, the severity of Elizabeth’s illness strengthened Parliament’s plea for marriage. If Elizabeth died without a clear successor, England could fall into anarchy.<sup>131</sup> In her response, Elizabeth graciously thanks her Parliament for their concern and even acknowledges “the weight of greatness of this matter.”<sup>132</sup> However, the Queen delayed her

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<sup>128</sup> “The Commons Petition to the Queen at Whitehall, January 28, 1563” *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 72.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 77.

<sup>130</sup> Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 64.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>132</sup> Elizabeth Tudor, “Elizabeth’s Answer to the Common’s Petition that She Marry, January 28, 1563,” *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 70.

response official response to Parliament's question of marriage. Additionally, Elizabeth claimed that she needed to receive further advice before selecting a husband. Elizabeth appealed to the gravity of the situation and explains that "so great a demand needeth both great and grave advice."<sup>133</sup> Unlike her 1558 speech, Elizabeth did not declare a preference for the single life, nor did she blatantly disregard the suggestions of Parliament. Here, Elizabeth demonstrated avoidance rather than defiance. Elizabeth's performative, Queenly self certainly adapted her response to fit the concerned, imploring mood of Parliament. However, Elizabeth's sickness forced the Queen to concede that "I know as well as I did before that I am mortal."<sup>134</sup> Though she adapted herself to address the situation, Elizabeth's case of smallpox allowed the Queen to consider her stance on the issues of reproduction and succession. Elizabeth's youth could not sustain itself; her opportunity to bear an heir to throne only dwindled with time. However, this statement did not really reveal a change of heart. The experienced Elizabeth knew exactly how to navigate unfortunate circumstances. She concluded her response to Parliament by re-emphasizing the gravity of her martial decision: "I will not in so deep a matter wade with so shallow a wit, yet have I thought good to use these few words, as well to show you that I am neither careless nor unmindful."<sup>135</sup> Here, Elizabeth mirrored the serious tone of Parliament while manipulating their rhetoric for her own benefit. By finally acknowledging the important issue of marriage, the Queen was able to delay her response.

The House of Lords followed the House of Commons in its persistent pleas for marriage. In February of 1563, the upper house approached the issue with a different tactic. Though the

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 70-71.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 72.



House of Lords spoke addressed the Queen with deference, their speech emphasized the natural role of motherhood to Elizabeth:

Scriptures hath declared succession and having of children to be one of His principal benedictions in this life; and of the contrary He hath pronounced otherwise. And therefore Abraham prayed to God for issue, fearing that Eleazar his steward should have been his heir, and had promise that kings should proceed of his body. Anna, the mother of Samuel, prayed to God with tears for issue; and Elizabeth (whose name your majesty beareth), mother to John Baptist, was joyful when God had blessed her with fruit, accounting herself delivered thereby of a reproach.<sup>136</sup>

The tension between Elizabeth's identity as Queen and her female gender was on full display. Though the sovereign Elizabeth possessed the power to call and dismiss Parliament at her will, these men expected Elizabeth to perform her womanly duty by bearing an heir. Additionally, many of Elizabeth's councilors believed that taking a husband would relieve Elizabeth's weaker, female mind and body of the burden of governing.<sup>137</sup> Bishop John Alymer attempted to categorize Elizabeth's public and personal persona in "A Harborow for Faithful and True Subjects."<sup>138</sup> Here, Alymer asserted that Elizabeth could govern England while fulfilling her role as a wife and mother: "I grant that so far as pertaineth to the bands of marriage and the office of a wife, she must be a subject, but as a magistrate she may be her husband's head."<sup>139</sup> Compared to other influential men such as John Knox, Alymer took a progressive stance by defining Elizabeth's two roles. Though Elizabeth must serve her husband, her status as a wife would not prevent her from governing.

Though Elizabeth's illness could have softened her views on marriage, her desire to govern England independently never waned. Though Alymer's compromise appears ideal,

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<sup>136</sup> "The Lord's Petition to the Queen, circa February 1, 1563," *Elizabeth I: The Collected Works*, 81.

<sup>137</sup> Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, 108.

<sup>138</sup> John Alymer, "An Harborow for Faithful and True Subjects, 1559," *Internet History Sourcebooks*, [sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1559Alymer-haborowe.asp](http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1559Alymer-haborowe.asp).

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

Elizabeth seemed disinterested in serving any husband, even in a private, familial sphere. Moreover, Elizabeth did not possess a truly private space; constantly surrounded by her ladies, guards, and courtiers, the Queen lived her life in the open.<sup>140</sup> Elizabeth maintained a conciliatory stance in a statement to the House of Lords. In her response, Elizabeth admitted that she would “bend my liking to your need,” meaning that she would consider marrying out of duty to her country.<sup>141</sup> Here, Elizabeth acquiesced to the will of her government, though her reluctance and hesitation overpower her attempts at appeasement. Despite this conciliation, Elizabeth concluded by deferring her decision, again pointing to the “greatness of the cause.”<sup>142</sup> It should also be taken into account that Elizabeth did not deliver this statement in person; though she signed off on its contents, Nathaniel Bacon delivered the speech on behalf of the Queen. It was not unusual for sovereigns to send officials and representatives in their place. However, this particular circumstance indicates that Elizabeth’s offer to compromise was a governing tactic rather than a true, internal change. As usual, Elizabeth expertly navigated instances intense pressure through appealing to sources of power.

Parliament was not the only powerful body which demanded a royal marriage. The Privy Council, led by Elizabeth’s lifelong advisor Sir William Cecil, also placed pressure on the Queen to select a husband and produce an heir. In a 1564 letter, Cecil laments Elizabeth’s unmarried status: “as now thynges hang in desperation, I have no comfort to live.”<sup>143</sup> Elizabeth’s contemporaries could not fathom the reign of an unmarried Queen, and Elizabeth’s brashness and avoidance placed an enormous burden on the members of her government. The desperate

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<sup>140</sup> Levin, 109.

<sup>141</sup> Elizabeth Tudor, “Elizabeth’s Answer to the Lord’s Petition that She Marry, April 10, 1563” *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 80.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> Levin, 110.

Cecil seized this overlap of Parliamentary aggression and Queenly conciliation by spearheading negotiations with Archduke Charles of Austria. Emperor Ferdinand has previously offered his son Charles as a marital candidate, though widespread opposition to a Catholic match caused the initial negotiations to simmer.<sup>144</sup> Though Susan Doran characterizes Cecil as a “champion of English Protestantism,” Cecil wholeheartedly endorsed the union of Queen Elizabeth and the Catholic Charles.<sup>145</sup> Cecil believed that Charles would publicly align himself with the English Church; his private beliefs and practices did not matter. Moreover, Elizabeth and Charles’ children would be raised as Protestants. To Cecil, the solidification of the succession through a Catholic male outweighed the dangers of no succession at all.<sup>146</sup> Cecil’s reasoning did not satisfy many English Protestants who feared the power of an absent, foreign, Catholic consort. Phillip II’s scornful influence loomed in the memories of Parliament and the privy council. Elizabeth could not repeat her sister’s mistakes.

Cecil’s personal contempt for Robert Dudley further influenced his promotion of the Archduke. Though Parliament seemed resigned to the idea of the Dudley match in 1563, Cecil acted quickly to prevent this development. Though Dudley’s status as an English Protestant was appealing, Cecil and his faction detested the courtier’s blatant ambition.<sup>147</sup> One of Cecil’s closest confidantes Nicholas Throckmorton wrote in 1561: “If that marriage [between the Queen and Dudley] should take place, I know not to what purpose any advice or council should be given. For as I see into the matter, none would serve...I see our fate is in great danger of utter ruin and destruction”<sup>148</sup> It is clear that Cecil and his faction viewed a potential marriage with Dudley as

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<sup>144</sup> Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 74.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>147</sup> Doran 71.

<sup>148</sup> “Philip Yorke Hardwicke, ed., *Miscellaneous State Papers: from 1501 to 1726* (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1778), I, 174” 122.

disastrous. Elizabeth stooping to marry a scandal-laden courtier would bring dishonor to England. Additionally, Dudley's ambition would certainly push Cecil, Throckmorton, and their faction out of power. Though Cecil viewed the Austrian match as politically beneficial, it would also block the ascendance of Dudley. Dudley combatted Cecil and attempted to thwart negotiations with Archduke Charles beginning in 1563. In addition to plotting with the French Ambassador, Dudley aligned himself with Protestant activists in Parliament who opposed Charles on religious grounds.<sup>149</sup> Elizabeth's courtships threatened the balance of her entire court. Though the men around her demanded that she marry, the candidacy of men such as Charles brought issues of power, religion, and gender roles to the forefront. In addition to her personal dislike of marriage, it easy to see how the burdens of these conflicts caused Elizabeth to resort to tactics such as defiance and avoidance.

In the midst of the negotiations with Archduke Charles, Dudley reemerged as a martial candidate; but this time, to a different queen. In 1564, Queen Elizabeth shocked her entire court by offering the hand of her favorite, Robert Dudley, to her chief religious and political rival, Mary, Queen of Scots.<sup>150</sup> To those who expected the Queen to marry, Elizabeth seemingly disqualified Dudley from her own marital race. This action could have reflected a personal shift within Elizabeth. The weight Amy Robsart's death, Cecil's strong distaste, and severe factional divides likely influenced Elizabeth's offer. In 1564, Elizabeth endowed Dudley with a new title: the Earl of Leicester.<sup>151</sup> This promotion would make him a more suitable match for Mary. Given her continued favoritism towards Dudley, it is clear that the political implications of this action far outweighed the personal. Elizabeth sought a union between Scotland and England; by

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<sup>149</sup> Doran, 66.

<sup>150</sup> Doran, 78.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

marrying her favorite, the Queen of Scots would ingratiate herself with Elizabeth and potentially inherit the English crown. The potential match benefitted Elizabeth as well; placing a close courtier by Mary's side would increase Elizabeth's presence in Scotland. Beyond the political benefits, Elizabeth offered Dudley to Mary because she herself never desired him as a husband. Though Mary would soon wed her cousin Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, Elizabeth's offer of Dudley displayed her power over her courtier as well as her dismissal of marriage.

Though Cecil desperately wanted the Queen to take a husband, he was not willing to settle for anyone. Cecil hoped that a foreign suitor could bring prestige, wealth, and protection to England. Moreover, the Austrian match was ideal for a number of reasons. By marrying Charles, Elizabeth could ally England with the dominant Hapsburg family. Additionally, Charles was similar to the Queen in both age and pedigree; though he was not a king, many surmised that the Archduke could one day be elected Holy Roman Emperor. Finally, Charles would permanently reside in England, thus assuaging concerns regarding the Archduke's loyalty.<sup>152</sup> However, supporters of France as well as English nativists lobbied against the Austrian match. The French Ambassador argued that England would waste funds on Austrian military interests. Additionally, Dudley's cohort argued against the Archduke's Catholic faith.<sup>153</sup> Ultimately, religious concerns from both parties terminated negotiations in 1566. Charles' brother, Emperor Maximilian, insisted that his brother be allowed "free exercise of religion...Divine Service must be celebrated for him and his Courtiers by his Catholic priests according to Catholic ritual without let or hindrance."<sup>154</sup> The Emperor's firm stance abolished Cecil's hope for outward Anglican

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<sup>152</sup> Doran, 80.

<sup>153</sup> Doran, 80.

<sup>154</sup> Doran, 81.

conformity. Moreover, if the Archduke was permitted to practice Catholicism freely, it could undermine Elizabeth's Protestant religious settlements and feed fear of a Catholic conspiracy.

Cecil in particular was disappointed by the failure of the negotiations. Some historians such as Christopher Haigh have argued that factional divisions ruled Elizabeth's government. In particular, Haigh points to William Cecil as the chief mastermind of the court rather than Elizabeth herself.<sup>155</sup> It is true that Elizabeth and Cecil worked closely for the majority of Elizabeth's reign. However, Elizabeth's participation in Cecil's Austrian marriage scheme complicates this theory. It is clear that Elizabeth thwarted the Austrian negotiations due to religious differences. In July of 1565, Elizabeth directly informed the Austrian Ambassador that she could not cohabit with a man who did not share her religious preferences.<sup>156</sup> However, Cecil displayed his power by continuing to negotiate with the Austrians despite Elizabeth's clear disinterest. Cecil's willingness to ignore Elizabeth's statements could point to the dominance of the privy council. The continuation of the negotiations resulted in a failed diplomatic mission to Austria by the Earl of Sussex in 1567.<sup>157</sup> However, Elizabeth merely played along in order to dispel criticism from Parliament and distract her privy council. As usual, the Queen navigated the Austrian negotiations and achieved her desired outcome: a delay. Elizabeth's government grew impatient with Elizabeth's delays and disinterest. Indeed, in 1566 Elizabeth pushed back against her Parliament, who accused the Queen of failing to consider the interests of England:

Was I not born in the realm? Were my parents born in any foreign country? Is there any cause I should alienate myself from being careful over this country? Is not my kingdom here? Whom have I oppressed? Whom have I enriched to others; harm? What turmoil have I made in this commonwealth, that I should be suspected to have no regard to the same?<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup>J. A. Guy, 'The 1590s: the second reign of Elizabeth I?', in *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. J. A. Guy (Cambridge, 1995), 1–19.

<sup>156</sup> Doran, 81.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Elizabeth Tudor, "The speech of the queens majesty had the next Parliament following, the Tuesday after All Hallowen Day," *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 94.

Here, Elizabeth addresses her Parliament with genuine incredulity. Accusations that Elizabeth placed her own desires above England's proved highly insulting. To Elizabeth's disdain, the precarious balance between Elizabeth's gender and status as Queen was pressed once more.

In 1566, Parliament's continuous debate and open outrage on the topic of the Queen's marriage caused Elizabeth to dismiss the body altogether. Recorded by a member of the House of Lords, Elizabeth berated the men: "But do you think that either I am unmindful of your surety by succession, wherein is all my care, considering I know myself to be mortal? No, I warrant you. Or that I went about to break your liberties? No, it was never my meaning, but to stay you before you fall into the ditch. For all things hath his time."<sup>159</sup> A highly frustrated Elizabeth was forced to remind her Parliament that she too prioritized the needs of England. Parliament viewed marriage and succession as a stabilizing factor, yet their factional divisions surrounding the candidacies of Dudley and the Archduke failed to settle the issue. Outside of Parliament, the Catholic Duke of Norfolk and Earl of Sussex supported the Austrian match and ardently combatted the self-interested, Protestant Dudley.<sup>160</sup> Elizabeth's felt trapped by the fault lines in her own court. Nevertheless, her decision to dismiss Parliament allowed the Queen to delay negotiations with the Archduke.

In 1567, marriage negotiations with the Archduke officially ended after Sussex failed to negotiate with Charles' brother, Emperor Maximilian. Journeying to the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, Sussex suffered delays and was largely ignored. When the Earl did manage to negotiate with Maximilian, the Emperor insisted that his brother be allowed to attend Catholic Mass in private.<sup>161</sup> Though members of the Privy council agreed to this arrangement, Elizabeth

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<sup>159</sup> Elizabeth Tudor, "Speech 10, Version 2," *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 107.

<sup>160</sup> Doran, 94.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

feared that a Catholic consort would anger her Protestant constituents and even incite popular rebellion. Leicester and his Protestant faction strongly opposed the marriage on religious grounds, though his personal ambitions also fed this antagonism. Elizabeth again delayed the negotiations by insisting on a visit from Charles, as she could not marry a man she had not laid eyes on.<sup>162</sup> Ultimately, Elizabeth ordered Sussex to end the negotiations and return home. The weight of the religious issue was too great to draw out the negotiations. Domestic concerns regarding the succession incited the Austrian negotiations; yet factional divides in both Parliament and the Privy Council quashed the potential match. Additionally, the religious issue demonstrated the growing anti-Catholic sentiment in England. While the Austrian Hapsburgs felt humiliated by the dissolution of the negotiations, the Spanish feared the solidification of Protestantism in England.<sup>163</sup> As the 1560s ended, Elizabeth would navigate courtships based off of international crises in addition to domestic concerns.

Elizabeth's French courtships display a clear departure from earlier pursuits. For one thing, Elizabeth was on the outer edge of what was considered to be childbearing years. In 1572, the Queen was thirty nine; while there was still some hope for the production of an heir, dynastic anxieties strengthened with each passing year. One may question the point of a middle aged Queen partaking in courtships. Misogynistic opinions have weighed in on this issue since Elizabeth's own reign. The prominent courtier, Sir Christopher Hatton commented that the Queen was "greedy for marriage proposals."<sup>164</sup> Meanwhile, twentieth century historians such as Haigh paint a portrait of an aging, even desperate Queen.<sup>165</sup> It is true that Elizabeth actively partook in the French negotiations of the 1570s and 1580s; her language of courtly love is

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Doran, 94.

<sup>164</sup> Levin, 64.

<sup>165</sup> J. A. Guy, 'The 1590s: the second reign of Elizabeth I?' 1–19.



preserved in her letters to Francis, Duke of Alencon, her final suitor. However, Elizabeth's involvement in these courtships served clear political purposes. These decades featured a number of political and religious crises; by entertaining the attentions of powerful suitors, Elizabeth was able to direct resources and wield influence over these specific situations. It is fair to say that these marriage negotiations served a personal purpose in Elizabeth's life. However, negative, gendered assumptions about the mindset of a middle aged woman are not useful and should be dispelled.

International and domestic tensions with Spain fueled Elizabeth's brief negotiations with Henry, Duke of Anjou. With Mary, Queen of Scots recently deposed and residing in England, many feared that the Spanish would aid an uprising against Elizabeth.<sup>166</sup> The Catholic Mary possessed allies in Spain as well as a strong claim the throne of England. The failed 1569 rebellion of the Northern Earls confirmed these fears of an internal, Catholic threat. Led by the Earls of Westmoreland and Northumberland, the English troops quickly thwarted the attempted uprising.<sup>167</sup> However, the combination of international and domestic threats brought marriage to the forefront of debate. As usual, many members of the government urged Elizabeth to marry and produce an heir. However, Henry's Catholicism as well as his young age were detrimental factors from the start. Henry's powerful mother Catherine de Medici favored the match despite the fact that her son was seventeen years younger than Elizabeth.<sup>168</sup> The powerful Catherine desired royal crowns for each of her children; this would garner prestige and expand the French influence.

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<sup>166</sup> Doran, 102.

<sup>167</sup> Doran, 103.

<sup>168</sup> Levin, 127.

In 1571, Elizabeth sent Francis Walsingham to negotiate at the French court. Walsingham questioned Elizabeth's seriousness regarding the negotiations and feared that the French would take offense. Writing to Walsingham, Elizabeth attempted to display her sincerity: "we would commend our heart to be directed by Almighty God, to follow that which might be to the comfort of our loving Subjects... So may you for more assurance of our firm determination to marry, affirm to them that have judged doubtfully of us."<sup>169</sup> Elizabeth claimed that she would be willing to marry the Duke if it would comfort her subjects. Compared to previous writings, Elizabeth made a significant concession by documenting her willingness to marry. The wellbeing her subjects was, as always, her first priority. However, Elizabeth sought to display sincerity in order to win short term agreements with France and ease tensions at home.<sup>170</sup> By providing the possibility for marriage, the English could better negotiate with the French regarding other matters. Additionally, obvious detriments, most notably Henry's Catholicism, allowed an easy out for Elizabeth, who had previously rejected Archduke Charles and Phillip II on the grounds of religion.

It is paradoxical that marriage to a Catholic prince could have solved domestic religious tensions as well as the threat from Spain. The incompatibility of the match further indicated that these brief negotiations were a guise from both sides.<sup>171</sup> Elizabeth was not the only person who feigned interest in marriage. Henry himself was disgusted by the possibility of marrying the much older Elizabeth.<sup>172</sup> Ultimately, the marriage negotiations dissolved, but the Anglo-French alliance known as the Treaty of Blois was secured by 1572. Essentially, France and England

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<sup>169</sup> Elizabeth Tudor, "Queen Elizabeth to Sir Francis Walsingham, 1571," *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 205.

<sup>170</sup> Levin, 127.

<sup>171</sup> Wallace MacCaffrey, *Queen Elizabeth and the Making of Policy: 1572-1588*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press) 329.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

agreed not to aid each other's enemies. United by an alliance against Spain, the French also agreed to remove themselves from Scotland.<sup>173</sup> Though brief and personally insincere, Elizabeth successfully navigated this instance of matrimonial diplomacy. Though many members of her government considered Elizabeth's unmarried status to be England's greatest weakness, Elizabeth successfully wielded her power as a potential bride to France. By offering the possibility of marriage, Elizabeth was able to open negotiations on a broad range of topics and acquired a beneficial agreement between the two countries. Though Parliament and the Privy Council promoted marriage and reproduction as stabilizing processes, Elizabeth understood the broader opportunities of remaining unmarried.

Elizabeth's extensive negotiations with Francis, Duke of Alencon contained many personal and political facets.<sup>174</sup> The 1570 Papal Bull of Excommunication as well as the 1571 Ridolfi Plot forced Elizabeth to continue negotiations with France. While Elizabeth engaged with France primarily out of political necessity, her correspondence with Francis reveals the possibility of personal satisfaction within these marriage negotiations. In 1570, Pope Pius V issued the Papal Bull of Excommunication "Regnans in Excelsis" against the Queen. Referring to Elizabeth as "the pretended Queen of England," Pope Pius railed against Protestant heretics.<sup>175</sup> Additionally, the Pope released Catholic subjects from service to Elizabeth: "We charge and command all and singular the nobles, subjects, peoples and others afore said that they do not dare obey her orders, mandates and laws. Those who shall act to the contrary we include in the like sentence of excommunication."<sup>176</sup> Though England did not answer to Rome, the Pope still

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>174</sup> Alencon later received the title of Duke of Anjou which was previously held by his brother, Henry III. Here, Francis will be referred to as Alencon.

<sup>175</sup> Pope Pius V, "Regnans in Excelsis," Retrieved April 1, 2021, from <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius05/p5regnans.htm>

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

wielded power over many Catholics in England. While Elizabeth demanded outward conformity to the Church of England, many Englishmen possessed internal Catholic leanings.<sup>177</sup> Therefore, the Pope's Bull increased the possibility of a Catholic uprising; now, English Catholics were forced to choose between the Pope and the Queen.

The failed Ridolfi plot stemmed from Pope Pius' authorization of uprising. According to the plan, the Spanish Duke of Alva would send six thousand troops to England, incite a Catholic uprising, and rescue Mary, Queen of Scots from her imprisonment. Additionally, Mary, Queen of Scots would marry the Catholic Duke of Norfolk and depose the Protestant Elizabeth, thereby returning England to Rome.<sup>178</sup> Elizabeth's government discovered the plot in the fall of 1571. In an effort to save his own life, the Duke wrote to Queen Elizabeth: "I am emboldened with a most penitent and sorrowful heart to make this, my trembling hand, to offer to your highness my most humble and lowly submission, having no other means to ease my oppressed mind."<sup>179</sup> Cecil and the Privy Council urged the Queen to eliminate this attempted usurper. Fearing further retaliation, Elizabeth hesitated to execute the Duke, but eventually signed his death warrant in June of 1572.<sup>180</sup> Mary denied any part in the plot and continued her imprisonment.

The Bull of Excommunication and the Ridolfi plot placed Elizabeth in a precarious position; maintaining a positive relationship with France was essential to the safety of England. Elizabeth's communication with Francis was a direct product of these crises. Catherine de Medici also understood the importance of maintaining an alliance with England. When marriage negotiations with Henry dissipated, Catherine offered her youngest son Francis as a candidate.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Levin, 135.

<sup>178</sup> Levin, 360.

<sup>179</sup> Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, "Letter of Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, to Queen Elizabeth, September 10, 1571," *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 128.

<sup>180</sup> Levin, 135.

<sup>181</sup> Levin, 134.

Another compelling, powerful Queen, Catherine's views on marriage could not have been more different from Elizabeth's. In a conversation with the English Ambassador to France, Catherine exclaimed: "doth not your mistress see that she should always be in danger until she marries?"<sup>182</sup> Catherine believed that the production of heirs would remove any threat to Elizabeth's throne. Catherine herself garnered power from manipulating the marriages and movements of her many children. Despite Catherine's willingness to engage with the English, the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre placed negotiations on hold. After Catherine ordered the murders of thousands of French Protestants, English opposition halted any progress towards a French marriage until later in the decade.

In the mid 1570s, the Alencon match was revived, and in 1579 Elizabeth agreed to a visit from the Duke. Tensions in the Low Countries motivated the reintroduction of Alencon. Together, France and England hoped to contain the aggressive Spanish presence.<sup>183</sup> Moreover, Phillip II had recently claimed the throne of Portugal, thereby obtaining the vast collection of Portuguese colonies, ships, and treasures. With Catholic Spain possessing more power and influence than ever, Elizabeth believed that negotiations with the French could fend off the Spanish threat.<sup>184</sup> On top of these international pressures, Dudley's actions influenced the advancement of negotiations. After learning of Dudley's secret marriage to Lettice Knollys, Elizabeth was outraged.<sup>185</sup> Dudley had not asked for Elizabeth's permission to marry the beautiful, wealthy noblewoman; not only had he undermined the Queen's authority to approve marriages, but he had also insulted the foundation of his deep friendship with the Queen. After banishing Dudley and his new wife from court, Elizabeth expedited Francis' visit to England.

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> MacCaffrey, 252.

<sup>184</sup> Doran, 154.

<sup>185</sup> Levin, 137.

This was the first time a suitor had journeyed to England to meet the Queen. Though unusual on the surface, the match benefitted France in several ways. By marrying a Protestant Queen, Alencon's brother, Henry III, would gain the loyalty of the French Protestants. Again, a mutual distaste for the aggressive presence of Phillip II in the Netherlands also fueled the negotiations.<sup>186</sup>

Elizabeth's apparent enthusiasm for the Alencon match signaled a departure from previous negotiations. However, the veracity of Elizabeth's "love" for the Duke is uncertain; Doran refers to the Alencon courtship as a "masterpiece of protracted dalliance."<sup>187</sup> The correspondence of the late 1570s and early 1580s could indicate the development of romantic feelings, or at least a sense of affection, between the Elizabeth and Francis. Some argue that Elizabeth's eagerness stemmed from the realization that this was her final courtship.<sup>188</sup> When the negotiations concluded unsuccessfully in 1581, Elizabeth was in her mid-forties. Though Elizabeth's fear of aging may have fed her enthusiasm, the negotiations furthered to her overarching political goals. Ultimately, playing the part of the blushing "bride to be" aided Elizabeth's foreign policy goals. Elizabeth's display of emotion may have signaled a change in the Queen, but the Alencon negotiations were not necessarily the "intensely personal drama" that Wallace MacCaffrey described.<sup>189</sup> Whatever level of personal satisfaction Elizabeth gleaned from the negotiations did not detract from her political mission or ability to maneuver. However, Elizabeth's initiative and enthusiasm are evident in her letters to Alencon, whom she referred to as "Monsieur," and even her "frog." In a 1581 letter, Elizabeth wrote warmly to her suitor: "I pray to grant you all the honor and contentment in the world, entreating you always to hold me in

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<sup>186</sup> MacCaffrey, 253.

<sup>187</sup> Doran, 130.

<sup>188</sup> MacCaffrey, 252.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 254.

your good graces.”<sup>190</sup> Additionally, she profusely thanked the Duke for his generous gifts.<sup>191</sup>

This language is common among the surviving letters to Alencon. Though the level of warmth contrasted to her previous courtships, Elizabeth likely sought to appear interested in the match in order to further the Anglo-French alliance.

Francis demonstrated his enthusiasm for the match by visiting England twice, once in 1579 and once in 1581. Like his brother Henry, Francis’ Catholicism and youth were obvious detriments. Parliament, the Privy Council, and even public citizens opposed this French match. In 1579, Cambridge Professor John Stubbs released the widely read pamphlet “The Discovery of a Gaping Gulf whereinto England is likely to be Swallowed.”<sup>192</sup> Stubbs professed concern for the French match, as the foreign Prince could dominate the power of Elizabeth. Additionally, Stubbs feared that the Queen was too old to safely produce an heir.<sup>193</sup> Though Stubbs captured the sentiments of many Englishmen, Elizabeth reacted harshly to Stubbs’ pamphlet by ordering his right hand to be cut off.<sup>194</sup> Stubbs was certainly motivated by concern and devotion to his Queen as well as his Protestant leanings; the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre loomed in the memories of many devout Protestants. However, his paternalistic language would not likely have been applied to a King. Moreover, Elizabeth’s extreme reaction could indicate her emotional attachment to the Duke. However, Stubbs’ punishment likely stemmed from Elizabeth’s frustrations as well as her desire to control her image. After decades of pressure to marry, Elizabeth was now faced criticisms that she was too old and too vulnerable to enter into matrimony. Stubbs claim that Elizabeth would be “led blindfold as a poor lamb to the slaughter”

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<sup>190</sup> Elizabeth Tudor, “Queen Elizabeth to Monsieur, March 17, 1581,” *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 249.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> Levin, 360.

<sup>193</sup> John Stubbs, *Gaping Gulf, with Letters and Other Relevant Documents*, (Charlottesville: Published for the Folger Shakespeare Library by the University Press of Virginia).

<sup>194</sup> Levin, 361.

by Alencon was highly insulting to a woman of her status and experience.<sup>195</sup> The Queen clearly disliked being portrayed as a delicate object to be protected; she had governed England alone for almost twenty years by this time.

Despite this immense backlash, Francis managed to develop a warm, affectionate relationship with Elizabeth; the Duke “wooed” the Queen in the traditional sense of courtly love. By analyzing the surviving letters and poems of Elizabeth, it is clear that she was receptive to Alencon’s pursuit in both a personal and a political sense. In a 1581 letter, Elizabeth was grateful that nothing could “shake the constancy of your affection, of which I confess myself very unworthy for any perfection that I possess.”<sup>196</sup> Here, Elizabeth reciprocated the typical language of courtly love; the Duke constantly offered his high praises while Elizabeth feigned modesty and delicacy. In many respects, Elizabeth played the part of the object; though this contrasted to her usual self-perception and performance, this tactic benefitted her politically. Elizabeth’s affection for the Duke translated into their interactions. During the Duke’s first visit, Elizabeth accompanied the Duke to balls and banquets; there was little talk of politics or religion.<sup>197</sup> The performative aspects of Elizabeth’s behavior derived from her political priorities. However, her obvious warmth and affection from the Duke could have stemmed from the realization of her age, Dudley’s marriage to a younger woman, or simply the excitement of engaging with an attentive, intelligent man.

The same defiance which had lead Elizabeth to reject marriage outright in the first years of her reign lead her to prolong the Alencon negotiations. Elizabeth enjoyed the attentions of the Duke as well as the political security offered by an alliance with France. Despite the widespread

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Elizabeth Tudor, “Queen Elizabeth to Monsieur, January 17, 1580,” *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 245.

<sup>197</sup> Doran, 163.



opposition to the match, Elizabeth prolonged her communications with Alencon and urged him to return for a second visit. Elizabeth wrote to the Duke:

And believe that I will not be annoyed if at each hour I were to receive a letter. They are so heartwarming that you are to have no scruple about sending them to me, because otherwise I will think myself dead in your opinion, where I will merit to preserve myself sure and spotless. As God knows, to whom I pray to preserve you from every evil and to give you one hundred years of good life, commending myself a thousand times to the little fingers.<sup>198</sup>

Despite Elizabeth's fond, even romantic language, the Queen vacillated greatly on whether to accept Alencon's proposal. In 1579, Elizabeth became furious with her Privy council, who, with the exception of Cecil, opposed the match on religious and political grounds.<sup>199</sup> In a departure from her previous courtships, Elizabeth agreed to allow the Duke to attend Catholic mass in private during preliminary talks.<sup>200</sup> The Privy Council argued that a Catholic husband could incite rebellion and undermine Elizabeth's religious reforms. Additionally, if Elizabeth were to die without issue, the French could attempt to seize the English throne.

Elizabeth's enthusiasm for the match could have been purely performative. After the Duke's second visit to England in 1581, Elizabeth ultimately declined his proposal on religious grounds. Weeping at his departure, the Queen penned the poem "On Monsieur's Departure." At first glance, the poems captured Elizabeth's sadness for the loss of her beloved "frog." However, the poem could also pole fun at Elizabeth and Alencon's long, drawn out game of courtly love.

The final stanza reads:

Some gentler passion slide into my mind,  
For I am soft, and made of melting snow;  
Or be more cruel, Love, and so be kind.  
Let me or float or sink, be high or low;  
Or let me live with some more sweet content,  
Or die, and so forget what love e'er meant.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Elizabeth Tudor, "Queen Elizabeth to Monsieur, c. June, 1582" *Elizabeth I: The Collected Works*, 251.

<sup>199</sup> Doran, 174.

<sup>200</sup> Doran, 175.

<sup>201</sup> Elizabeth Tudor, "On Monsieur's Departure, c. 1582," *Elizabeth I: The Collected Works*, 302.

Creative and intelligent, this was not the first time Elizabeth turned to poetry to express her emotions. Here, Elizabeth appears to grieve the loss of love; she wishes to die rather than to live with the pain of the failed negotiations. However, describing herself as “soft” and made of “melting snow” completely contradicted the language which the Queen typically used to describe herself. Six years later, Elizabeth would boast at Tilbury that she possessed the “heart and stomach of a king.”<sup>202</sup> Though this may in fact be a deeply personal poem, Elizabeth could have been displaying her mastery of the game of courtly love. Additionally, she could have lamented the end of viability as a wife for both personal and political reasons. Though Elizabeth reaped the political benefits of an alliance with France during the Alencon negotiations, the dissolution of the relationship between the Duke and Elizabeth, as well as the Duke’s death in 1584, brought England closer to a conflict with Spain. Phillip II increased the Spanish presence in the Netherlands without fear of English retaliation.<sup>203</sup>

Alencon’s departure and death signaled the end of Elizabeth’s official courtships. While Dudley’s omnipresence stemmed from the Queen’s personal affection, the courtships of Phillip II, Archduke Charles, Henry, Duke of Anjou, and Francis, Duke of Alencon arose from specific domestic and international crises. While Parliament and the Privy Council urged Elizabeth to marry and secure the succession, these Catholic suitors faced opposition due to their religion and status as foreigners. This backlash indicated the solidification of England’s status as a Protestant nation with rising xenophobia. More importantly, the ways in which Elizabeth engaged with her suitors indicates her personal and political stances at that particular time. By showering attention on Dudley, Elizabeth defied the wishes of her government. Instead of marrying and reproducing, Elizabeth invested her pleasure time in a man who, due to status, scandal, she could never marry.

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<sup>202</sup> Levin, 18.

<sup>203</sup> Doran, 194.

Moreover, Elizabeth's speeches from this period reveal her distaste for marriage and explicit desire to maintain her virginity. By engaging with the Austrians, Elizabeth attempted to stave off the criticisms of her Parliament and Privy Council, ultimately refusing the marriage on religious grounds. While the French matches stemmed from domestic and international crises, Elizabeth's game of matrimonial diplomacy garnered resources and protections for her country. Though the depth of her feelings for Alençon remain a mystery, the Queen's political goals were always at the forefront.

### Chapter Three: Elizabeth's Self-fashioning through Portraits and Pageants

Images of Elizabeth reconciled conflicting aspects of the Queen's reign and promoted Elizabeth's desired image of herself. Elizabeth's public and private selves were inseparable; even she admitted that she lived her life in the open.<sup>204</sup> The Queen's courtships and marriage negotiations were played out on a public stage and appealed to specific circumstances. However, her speeches, letters, and conversations conveyed a continuous thread of Elizabeth's inner rejection of marriage. However, these writings also displayed the various facets of her self-fashioning: youthful defiance, delaying conciliation, and even performative romance. The portraits and pageants of Elizabeth I further revealed her efforts to self-mythologize. As the scandalous product of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn's ill-fated marriage, Elizabeth learned to maneuver through court politics and personal crises from a young age. Her ability to navigate only strengthened with age and experience. Portraits from the early years of Elizabeth's reign are uncommon and do not reveal much about Elizabeth's power or projection. However, Elizabeth's deep seeded rejection of marriage displayed itself at the 1575 Entertainments at Kenilworth. Moreover, the treatment of Elizabeth's virginity at Kenilworth would soon be repossessed by

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<sup>204</sup> Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, 97.

Elizabeth through portraiture. As Elizabeth reached middle age, it became clear that she would not marry nor would she produce an heir. By harnessing the power of portraiture in the later decades of her reign, Elizabeth reframed her virginity as a symbol of purity and power.

Elizabeth was not the only Tudor who utilized portraiture as form of propaganda. Images of her father, King Henry VIII, projected stability through depicting his line of succession. As previously discussed, *The Family of Henry VIII* (c. 1543) places the King, his third wife, and his son at the center while relegating Mary and Elizabeth to the corners of the frame. Though she had passed away by the time of this portrait, Jane Seymour receives an honorable place in the portrait as the mother of the heir apparent.<sup>205</sup> Here, Elizabeth is literally separated from her father and brother by a column; this isolation and insignificance differs greatly from her own body of royal portraiture. Like Henry, Elizabeth's body of portraiture would replicate aspects of Catholic iconography. *The Family of Henry VIII* mimicked the common renaissance trope of "Virgin and Child enthroned flanked by standing saints."<sup>206</sup> A key example of this was Jan Van Eyck's 1436 painting *Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele*. The enthroned yet demure Virgin Mary presents the infant Jesus to an image of the painting's donor, Joris van der Paele. The central group is flanked St. George and St. Donation. In addition to reflecting the structure and composition of this painting, *The Family of Henry VIII* seeks to characterize Henry and his family with the same reverence to that of Mary and Jesus.<sup>207</sup> Here, the security of the succession was dominate.

Elizabeth's half-siblings replicated the tactics of Henry VIII during their brief reigns. Edward VI inherited Henry's taste for pageantry and ritual; he required his subjects to bow six

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>207</sup> Guy Bauman, "Early Flemish Portraits 1425-1525," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 43, no. 4 (1986), 22. doi:10.2307/3269088.

times in his presence.<sup>208</sup> In a 1550 portrait by William Scrots, the young King copied the physical stance of Henry VIII by Hans Holbein. Edward's attempt at intimidation paled in comparison to his enormous father. Like Elizabeth, Mary Tudor ascended the throne unmarried and childless. However, despite her female gender and shaky ascendance to the throne, Mary's portraiture attempted to project a harsh sense of dominance. Her 1544 portrait by Antonis Mor captured the severity and intensity of the Catholic Queen through a hyper-realistic image.<sup>209</sup> The assertive glare of Queen Mary also recalled the famed Holbein portrait of Henry VIII; the enormous King stands firmly, eyes blazing at the viewer.<sup>210</sup> These portraits of Mary and Henry sought to instill fear and submission into the hearts of their subjects; however, Henry's projection of masculinity combined with his established line of succession better achieved this sense of control. Meanwhile, Mary's portrait struck a sense of fear as well as vulnerability; the force of her personality was frightening, yet the sadness and destruction of her reign failed to support her portrait's claims of confidence.

Elizabeth's ascendancy brought forth a different image of the Tudors. Whether by suitors, courtiers, or subjects, Elizabeth's image was made to be worshipped, not feared. Unlike her sibling predecessors, Elizabeth did not attempt to replicate the exact qualities of her father's portraiture. Though her images attempted to project stability, Elizabeth emphasized beauty and majesty over fear and intimidation. Moreover, Elizabeth could not rely on the stability of the succession at any point in her reign; her unmarried, childless status led to the development of a distinct array of symbols. Few early portraits of Elizabeth survive. Prior to the 1570s, portraits of

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<sup>208</sup> David Howarth, *Images of Rule: Art and Politics in the English Renaissance, 1485-1649*, (University of California Press, 1997) 94.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.* 101.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

Elizabeth I were not noteworthy, the paintings attempted to capture the physical likeness of the Queen and were produced at a typical rate.<sup>211</sup> However, a drafted 1563 Proclamation indicated the poor quality of Elizabethan portraiture, as well as the Queen's desire to maintain a certain image. In the first five years of Elizabeth's reign a certain image of Elizabeth, painted by an unknown English painter, circulated throughout Europe.<sup>212</sup> Eager to behold the new, young Queen, rival courts probably laughed at the poor quality of the portrait. In fact, the quality was so poor that Catherine de Medici, the mother of two of Elizabeth's French suitors, offered to send her own court painter to England.<sup>213</sup> This extremely unflattering portrait of Elizabeth likely resulted in the draft Proclamation of 1563. This was the first attempt by Elizabeth to control her image. Painted shortly after Elizabeth ascended the throne, the image fails to capture her beauty and power. Elizabeth followed up on this proclamation in the 1590s; the Queen decreed that many unattractive images such as this be burned or destroyed; this was a blatant attempt to control her legacy.<sup>214</sup> Elizabeth's attempts to destroy unflattering images such as this demonstrate the importance of portraiture as a tool. By harnessing the power of her image, the aging Elizabeth could redact unflattering depictions while solidifying her desired reputation.

Elizabeth's reaction to the entertainments at Kenilworth also revealed her desire to control her image and perception. Kenilworth represented a moment that was not strongly within Elizabeth's grasp; her longtime favorite, Robert Dudley, planned the entertainments in the Queen's honor.<sup>215</sup> The entertainments embodied an epic clash between the more seasoned Queen and her ever-ambitious favorite, Robert Dudley. The charming Dudley's lifelong pursuit of

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<sup>211</sup> Roy Strong, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (New York: Random House, 2003), 41.

<sup>212</sup> *Portrait of Elizabeth by an Unknown English Artist, National Portrait Gallery*, Accessed Apr 10, 2019. <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw02071/Queen-Elizabeth-I>

<sup>213</sup> Strong, 59.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>215</sup> Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I: the Competition for Representation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 61.

power, wealth, and status made him a consistent presence at the court of Elizabeth. Despite numerous personal scandals, most notably the mysterious death of his first wife, Dudley managed to win the Queen's attention and favors. Dudley's serious courtship of the Queen seemed to have subsided in the mid 1560s due to factional divides, scandal, and Elizabeth's own dislike of marriage. Dudley's sought to increase his own personal power through the 1575 festivities at Kenilworth.<sup>216</sup> However, the nature of the pageanties, as well as the commissioned portraits, suggested that Dudley had not given up his marital hopes. Here, Dudley imposed his desired view of the Queen onto the guests as well as Elizabeth herself. It is important to analyze the ways in which Elizabeth reacted to the pageanties; her ultimate dismissal of Dudley displayed her desire to maintain control and authority. Through Kenilworth, it is clear that the Queen viewed herself as an autonomous monarch no need of male partnership.

Dudley's geo-political ambitions played a large part in the execution of the festivities. Having aligned himself with militant Protestants in Parliament, the Earl of Leicester sought to win recognition fighting for Protestants in the Netherlands.<sup>217</sup> Also known as the Low Countries, the Netherlands were a hotbed of religious conflict; the Spanish Hapsburgs, lead by ardently Catholic Phillip II, refused to relinquish control over this area of Northern Europe. Meanwhile, Protestants in the region looked to the English for military and financial support.<sup>218</sup> Seeking to advance himself, Dudley hoped that the Queen would provide funding for him to lead English troops against the Spanish. Therefore, the Kenilworth Entertainments sought to dazzle the Queen with a display of wealth, power, and prestige; with enough praises, surely Elizabeth would provide her consent. Fearing excessive spending and political backlash, Elizabeth opposed an

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 65

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Susan Doran, "Juno versus Diana: The Treatment of Elizabeth I's Marriage in Plays and Entertainments, 1561-1581," *The Historical Journal* 38, no. 2 (1995): 263.

incursion into the Netherlands throughout the 1570s.<sup>219</sup> As usual, Dudley and his faction faced opposition from more conservative members of government, particularly Cecil.

The Kenilworth Entertainments revealed the precarious and contradictory power dynamic between Queen Elizabeth and her courtier. In preparation for Kenilworth, Dudley was rumored to have spent over twenty thousand pounds, an incredible sum of money.<sup>220</sup> As the eminent courtier of Elizabeth, Dudley expected Elizabeth to accept his attention and admiration. As Frye points out, Elizabeth enjoyed engaging with her male courtiers and was often the subject of poetry, plays, and music.<sup>221</sup> Additionally, as a woman, Elizabeth was expected to receive male attention with grace and joy. However, the typical, gendered dynamic of the situation was reversed, as Elizabeth herself was the source of Dudley's prosperity. Through Elizabeth, Dudley was created the Earl of Leicester, appointed to the Privy Council, and awarded countless properties, monopolies, and treasures. Ironically, Elizabeth granted Kenilworth Castle, the site of the festivities, to Dudley in 1563. How could Elizabeth be truly impressed by Dudley's efforts when Kenilworth belonged to her in the first place?

Dudley dared to present himself as a worthy, equal counterpart to Elizabeth through the commissioning of dual portraits by Frederigo Zuccaro. Commissioned in preparation for the 1575 entertainments, Zuccaro's chalk sketches were never completed. A renowned Italian painter, Dudley first encountered Zuccaro in the Netherlands and convinced him to travel back to England. Ironically, Zuccaro created several Counter-Reformation works in Rome before accepting the patronage of the Protestant Dudley.<sup>222</sup> As usual, Dudley was willing to contradict his political and religious stances in order to garner prestige. Failing to achieve a sustainable

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<sup>219</sup> Frye, 70.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid. 71,

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Howarth, 107.



business, Zuccaro left England after only three months and did not complete the portraits.<sup>223</sup> The surviving black and white sketches depicted complementary, full length images of Robert and Elizabeth.<sup>224</sup> Neither image shied away from symbolism. Elizabeth's body is positioned with arms crossed in front of her; a rather demure pose for the reigning monarch. Additionally, her face projects a placid smile while a small dog rests in the background. A symbol of fertility and fidelity, this symbol could suggest Dudley's interest in making a wife out of the Queen. The coordinating sketch presents a Dudley as a princely match for the Queen.<sup>225</sup> Dressed in armor, Dudley's weapons rest in the background. These objects demonstrated the Earl's military ambitions and his desire to defend English Protestantism. Dudley clearly pictured himself as the ideal masculine counterpart to Elizabeth; though he may not be King, Dudley sought to fame and honor on behalf of his Queen. Dudley's decision to commission these complementary portraits was bold; despite rises and falls, scandals and victories, Dudley had not relinquished his hope of marrying Elizabeth. At a minimum, Dudley hoped to further his achievements in through the most traditionally masculine means: war.

Elizabeth's reaction to the preliminary sketches is unknown; however, her reaction to the pageants at Kenilworth displayed her unwillingness to head Dudley's demands. The festivities at Kenilworth cast Elizabeth as the object of Dudley's gallant, romantic quest. "The Laneham letter," also known as the "Langham letter," documented each of the nineteen days at Kenilworth. Attributed to Robert Laneham, a mercer of the privy council, the true authorship of

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Frederigo Zuccaro, *Queen Elizabeth I*, Retrieved April 09, 2021, from <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw126414/Queen-Elizabeth-I>

<sup>225</sup> Frederigo Zuccaro, *Robert Dudley*, Retrieved April 09, 2021, from [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_Gg-1-418](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_Gg-1-418)

the work continues to be questioned by historians.<sup>226</sup> Though this account captured the glamour and spectacle of Dudley's pageants, a critical tone overshadows the festivities. Dudley's ambition was on full display, providing his enemies with ample ammunition for criticism. Laneham's letter disparages the excessive ritual surround Elizabeth's arrival; after being greeted by various jesters, an Arthurian character known as "the Lady of the Lake" recounted a constructed history of Dudley's claim to Kenilworth.<sup>227</sup> Rather than acknowledge Elizabeth's gift, the character credited Dudley's mythical lineage by tracing his lineage back to King Arthur. Laneham recounts Elizabeth's clever response: "we had thought indeed the Lake had been ours, and do you call it yours now?"<sup>228</sup> Elizabeth reminded onlookers of her gift to Dudley. Additionally, Elizabeth clearly did not appreciate being greeted as Dudley's equal. Elizabeth claimed responsibility for Dudley's prosperity and likely felt insulted by his claims to Arthurian greatness. By invoking medieval tropes, Dudley attempted set the stage for his quest. However, this inauspicious start characterized the dynamic for the majority of the entertainments.

Dudley commissioned the production of "The Masque of Diana and Iris," also known as "Zabeta" in order to depict the triumph of marriage over celibacy.<sup>229</sup> Written by George Gascoigne, the elaborate performance of the masque was cancelled, likely due to poor weather.<sup>230</sup> This production demonstrated that Elizabeth's virginity was depicted as an inferior state as late as 1575. This narrative would be shifted quite quickly in the coming years. Zabeta, a virgin nymph, clearly served as a stand-in for Elizabeth. Praised for her "learned brain" as well

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<sup>226</sup> Frye, 66.

<sup>227</sup> Frye, 67.

<sup>228</sup> Robert Laneham and Frederick James Furnivall, *Robert Laneham's Letter: Describing a Part of the Entertainment Unto Queen Elizabeth at the Castle of Kenilworth in 1575*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1907) 5.

<sup>229</sup> Frye, 78.

<sup>230</sup> Susan Doran, 263.

as her beauty, Zabeta preferred a life of celibacy.<sup>231</sup> Meanwhile, the character of “Deep Desire” represented Dudley and indicated his passionate love as well as his political ambitions. Like Dudley, “Deep Desire” sought to possess the woman who “surpassed all the rest for singular gifts and graces.”<sup>232</sup>

Despite the allegorical nature of the production, the masque possessed an obvious marriage proposal. Determined to hear Elizabeth’s answer, Dudley sent Gascoigne to chase after the departing Queen. The author warned the Queen about the dangers of rejecting suitors, explaining that Zabeta “obstinately and cruelly rejected” the proposal of Deep Desire.<sup>233</sup> Unfortunately for Dudley, Elizabeth dismissed the proposal of marriage and simply rode away. Laneham added that “her majesty that never rides but alone.”<sup>234</sup> Though the author described Elizabeth’s athletic skill, her actions demonstrated her rejection of Dudley and desire to maintain an independent life. Furthermore, Elizabeth refused to allow troops into the Netherlands, thereby dispelling Dudley’s ambitions. The failure of the Kenilworth Entertainments fueled Dudley’s marriage to Lettice Knollys; after almost fifteen years of courtship, Dudley retired from Elizabeth’s alleged marital race.<sup>235</sup> Elizabeth’s reaction to the 1575 Kenilworth Entertainments demonstrated her preference for the single life. Elizabeth viewed herself as superior to her courtier and refused to be treated as Dudley’s equal. Dudley’s blatant attempt to harness the love and prestige of the Queen failed.

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<sup>231</sup> George Gascoigne, *The Complete Works of George Gascoigne*, (Evanston, Illinois: The University Press), 117.

<sup>232</sup> Gascoigne, 124.

<sup>233</sup> Gascoigne, 123.

<sup>234</sup> Laneham, 11.

<sup>235</sup> Frye, 85.

As Elizabeth's reign reached the 1580s, a shift towards more allegorical images occurred for two key reasons. *The Darnley Portrait*, *The Sieve Portrait*, and *The Armada Portrait* celebrated Elizabeth's virginity while promoting the success of her reign. Elizabeth promoted the dissemination of these images because they presented a desired *idea* of the Queen. While her unmarried, childless status was often the subject of criticism and concern, Elizabeth could celebrate her virginity through developing a body of common symbols. By this time, the English people were beginning to accept that Elizabeth was not going to marry and therefore could not produce an heir to the throne. In 1584, Elizabeth's final set of marriage negotiations ended with the death of the Duke of Alencon. While the likeliness of Elizabeth producing an heir seemed sparse, the likeliness of war with Spain only increased.<sup>236</sup> These two factors created a sense of anxiety within Elizabeth's realm, and she began to use portraiture as a tool to recapture attention. Elizabeth needed to exude a sense of stability and confidence despite an uncertain future.

Commonly known as *the Darnley Portrait*, this 1575 painting of Elizabeth is a transitional image.<sup>237</sup> Created during the same year as the Kenilworth Entertainments, the *Darnley Portrait*, signaled a shift into more symbolic depictions of the Queen. Additionally, the facial pattern was used in subsequent portraits throughout the 1570s and 1580s. Unlike later images, the portrait is fairly lifelike and true to the Queen's natural facial features. Nevertheless, her flawless, smooth complexion portrays a sense of ageless beauty. This is further emphasized through the contrasting, dark background which creates an ethereal atmosphere.<sup>238</sup> This portrait is an early example of the "mask of youth;" an attempt to portray Elizabeth as youthful rather than capture the true likeness of her features. This "mask of youth" isolated Elizabeth from the

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<sup>236</sup> Doran, 168.

<sup>237</sup> *The Darnley Portrait*, Photography, *Encyclopædia Britannica ImageQuest*. Accessed April 9, 2021. [https://quest.eb.com/search/300\\_2280063/1/300\\_2280063/cite](https://quest.eb.com/search/300_2280063/1/300_2280063/cite).

<sup>238</sup> Strong, 88.

portraiture of previous Tudors; Mary's intimidating, stern wrinkles were clearly depicted in her portraiture and invoked a sense of fear.<sup>239</sup> Meanwhile, this mask of youth functioned to provide a sense of stability to Elizabeth's reign. By 1575, Elizabeth was an unmarried monarch in her early forties. Hope for her to produce an heir was dwindling, and a feeling of uncertainty would only increase as Elizabeth aged. Images which portrayed a stable, unchanging monarch sought to address and appease this dynastic anxiety. The Queen's clothing also evokes a sense of independence and stability. The high, ruffled collar and dublet were typically worn by men and project masculine confidence.<sup>240</sup> Additionally, the crown and scepter in the background reinforce Elizabeth's divinely ordained rule. While typical, feminine symbols such as the pearl necklace, bejeweled tiara, and ostrich fan are featured, the juxtaposition of these symbols with Elizabeth's more masculine garments projects both beauty and power. The blending of different gendered symbols embodied Elizabeth's own reign. At Kenilworth, Dudley attempted to woo the Queen through medieval flattery and the promotion of matrimony. Meanwhile, the contemporary portrait depicted the stern yet beautiful Elizabeth in masculine clothing. Clearly, Elizabeth preferred the version of herself depicted in the *Darnley Portrait* over her objectification at Kenilworth.

The 1583 *Sieve Portrait* by *Quentin Metsys the Younger* was a celebration of Elizabeth's personal attributes as well as her loyal court of subjects, known as the "Cult of Elizabeth." Coined by art historian Roy Strong in the 1950s, this "cult" refers to the ritualistic worship of Elizabeth by courtiers and subjects.<sup>241</sup> In this image, Elizabeth's dark attire and serious expression greatly contrasts to the background, which captures a merry scene of Elizabeth's favourites. Here,

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<sup>239</sup> Howarth, 101.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 1986) 31.

Elizabeth turned her back on the frivolity of court; this one scene served as a metaphor for her rejection of suitors. As the sole Monarch of England, Elizabeth prioritized the function of her government over courtly entertainments; at least, that was what she desired her subjects and rivals to believe. Elizabeth did in fact govern the country with great devotion for over forty years. However, the Queen certainly enjoyed engaging with her male courtiers. Sir Christopher Hatton, one of Elizabeth's most famous courtiers, can be identified in the court scene behind her.<sup>242</sup> Hatton was a major proponent of imperialism and exploration; this detail sheds light over the symbolism within this portrait. Here, the Queen is framed by a column, representing stability, and a globe, representing her budding imperial ambition.<sup>243</sup> As the concerns with succession and Spain increased, Elizabeth attempted to promote her own achievements and portrayed herself not only as Queen of England, but also as the ruler of a budding empire. Moreover, the sieve in Elizabeth's right hand alludes to "Triumph of Chastity," a Petrarchan poem which celebrates the deeds of a vestal virgin.<sup>244</sup> Because Elizabeth would not marry, she sought to promote her chaste lifestyle through allegory and symbolism. *The Sieve Portrait* is a stunning combination and celebration of Elizabeth's court, stable reign, imperial pursuits, and personal morals.

*The Armada Portrait* celebrates what is arguably Elizabeth's greatest achievement: the defeat of the Spanish Armada. The famous battle is depicted in the background of the painting: one side depicts the sending of English fire ships while the other captures the shipwreck of Spanish ships in Scotland.<sup>245</sup> The English victory was viewed not only as a military victory, but also as a sign of God's favor towards Protestant England. Elizabeth, an unmarried, Protestant Queen, sits between the scenes, claiming responsibility for the victory. Elizabeth's 1588 Speech

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<sup>242</sup> Strong, 101.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Strong, *Gloriana*, 131.

at Tilbury, which occurred shortly after the victory, revealed her attitude towards her gender. The Queen admits to having the "weak and feeble" body of a woman but proudly claims to possess the "heart and stomach of a king."<sup>246</sup> This portrait reconciled Elizabeth's gender and power by presenting a hyper-feminine physical appearance against the backdrop of a battle. Again, "the mask of youth" was present through the Queen's flawless complexion while her enormous pink and black dress sports countless bows and pearls, clear symbols of Elizabeth's pure virginity. In a development from *The Sieve Portrait*, the globe now rests beneath her hand. Additionally, the imperial crown sits above the globe, showing that Elizabeth rules over an expanding empire. The Roanoke Colony had been founded by the time of this portrait; this combined with the victory over the Spain solidified England's burgeoning status as a major power.<sup>247</sup> Here, Elizabeth appeared larger than life; her physical depiction now symbolized the success and prestige of England.

The dissemination of these allegorical portraits allowed Elizabeth to reframe her unmarried, childless, status as celebration of virtue, virginity, and power. Additionally, the symbolism within these portraits embodied the Queen's desired image of herself. At Kenilworth, Elizabeth rejected the depiction of herself presented by Dudley; the unfinished Zuccaro portraits embody the courtier's hunger for power and status. Additionally, Elizabeth refused to subscribe to her role in the "Zabeta Masque" which criticized her celibacy and unmarried status. Elizabeth's personal distaste for marriage as well as her skill at self-fashioning and maneuvering prevented the Queen from succumbing to Dudley's depiction. Beginning with the *Darnley Portrait*, Elizabeth embraced portraiture as a tool for self-projection. Transcending the tropes of

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<sup>246</sup> Elizabeth Tudor, "Queen Elizabeth's Armada Speech to the Troops at Tilbury, August 9, 1588," *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 326.

<sup>247</sup> Strong, *Gloriana*, 133.

her Tudor predecessors, Elizabeth embraced symbolism and beauty rather than fear. The lasting impact of these images attests to the power of portraits.

### Conclusion

The courtships of Elizabeth I embodied challenges of her reign as well as the exceptional aspects of her life and character. The scandalous nature of Elizabeth's existence in some ways predestined Elizabeth's tumultuous youth. Additionally, the reckless marital escapades of her father, Henry VIII, undoubtedly impacted Elizabeth's life. The shifting succession and revolving door of stepmothers did not provide Elizabeth with a sense of purpose or acceptance. The failures of Henry's first two wives Catherine of Aragon and Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn, displayed the severe consequences faced by Royal women who failed to perform their childbearing duty. Though their paths to power deeply contrasted, Catherine and Anne both accrued power and status through their marriage to Henry. By failing to produce male heirs, both women faced severe criticism and ultimately died as exiles. The example of these earlier Tudor Queens as well as Elizabeth's tragic, scandal-laden youth prepared the future Queen to navigate the trials and crises of her reign. Elizabeth understood that the circumstances of her birth as well as the downfall of her mother scarred her reputation. Additionally, the abuse inflicted upon the fourteen-year-old Elizabeth by Thomas Seymour forced Elizabeth to realize that her reputation was vulnerable and malleable. In this first instance of scandal, Elizabeth navigated the situation by appealing to the current powers and emphasizing her virtue.

Elizabeth would continue to maneuver through scandal during the reign of her sister, Mary I. Facing suspicion of treason, Elizabeth successfully appealed to her sister and saved herself from execution. While such traumas were unwarranted, Elizabeth's early experiences



created a steely, tactful young woman. The ascendant Elizabeth did not suffer from naivete. Additionally, Mary's unsuccessful marriage to Phillip II of Spain demonstrated the detrimental effects of a foreign consort. Phillip's cultural differences, absence, and disinterest in England displayed the challenges of arranged, diplomatic matches. Queen Mary's failure to produce an heir resulted in mental and physical upheaval; the value she placed in traditional female duties such as marriage and motherhood yielded no positive results for England.

Rather than follow the path of her sister, the young Elizabeth emphasized marriage with her country in her early Parliamentary speeches. Immediately upon her ascension, Elizabeth faced backlash from her Parliament and Privy Council, who viewed marriage and succession as the quickest way to garner stability and prestige for England. However, Elizabeth the radical language of Elizabeth's speeches transcends any metaphor of monarchical devotion; by speaking her desire to live and die a virgin, Elizabeth referred to her own physical body in addition to the body politic. Moreover, Elizabeth's relationship with Robert Dudley defied the wishes of her government. Confident in her virginity and ability, Elizabeth did not hesitate to engage in an affectionate friendship with a compelling, exciting man. However, the mysterious death of Amy Robsart forced Elizabeth to perform damage control while reaffirming the precariousness of her personal virtue. Additionally, Dudley's ambition and desire to make a wife out of Elizabeth demonstrated itself at Kenilworth. Elizabeth's rejection of Dudley's bold advances displayed her desire to control her image. Despite his detriments, Elizabeth's lifelong friendship with Dudley attested to the personal needs of the powerful monarch.

Elizabeth's early courtship reflected domestic tensions and ongoing pressure from the English government. Phillip II's brief interest in Elizabeth demonstrated that powerful, foreign rulers coveted the throne of England. However, Phillip's unappealing, unsuccessful marriage to

Elizabeth's sister as well as his Catholicism quickly eliminated his candidacy among Elizabeth's government. Pressure from Parliament and the Privy Council forced Elizabeth to engage in marriage negotiations with Archduke Charles of Austria. Additionally, Elizabeth's bout with smallpox reaffirmed the morality of the Queen and the precarious position of the English government. This dynastic anxiety fueled negotiations with Charles; however, domestic factionalism continuously threatened the negotiations. Constructed and promoted by Elizabeth's chief advisor, William Cecil, these negotiations displayed the inherent differences between Elizabeth's vision of her reign and the opinions of the men around her. Ultimately, through conciliation and delay, Elizabeth distracted her concerned Parliament through engaging with Charles, yet ultimately dismissed his candidacy on religious grounds.

Elizabeth's French courtships reflected the political needs of the moment. Wielding her unmarried status as a tool, Elizabeth maneuvered through crises by engaging with powerful members of the French Royal Family. Elizabeth's brief negotiations with Henry, Duke of Anjou were ultimately a guise under which England secured an alliance with France. Stimulated by fears of a Catholic uprising as well as the growing power of Spain, Elizabeth and her government were able to secure the Treaty of Blois, thereby removing the French from Scotland and strengthening their barrier against Spain. The Anjou negotiations are the most obvious example of matrimonial diplomacy. Though Elizabeth's letter to Walsingham feigns interest in marriage, Henry's status as a younger, foreign, Catholic made the marriage impossible from the start. Elizabeth's ability to play along would carry forth to her final courtship with Henry's brother Francis, Duke of Alencon.

The relationship between Elizabeth and Francis demonstrated the gray area between matrimonial diplomacy and personal satisfaction. During the 1570s, crises such as the Papal Bull

of Excommunication as well as the failed yet frightening Ridolfi Plot increased anxiety. Furthermore, tensions in the Netherlands increased fear of the Spanish threat. Additionally, as Elizabeth reached middle age, hope for the production of an heir dwindled, creating an environment of fear and confusion. Elizabeth's courtship with Francis functioned to ease these domestic fears while continuing England's beneficial alliance with Spain. However, matters were complicated by the language of courtly love evident in Elizabeth's correspondence with Francis. While Elizabeth may have felt personally vulnerable due to Dudley's marriage and her ascendance into middle age, she ultimately rejected the Duke of Alencon. Francis' Catholicism and French nationality made him a highly unpopular candidate. Popular backlash to the marriage, particularly from John Stubbs, illustrated the difficulty of Elizabeth's position. Throughout her reign, Elizabeth faced pressure to marry and was criticized for failing to produce an heir. However, when Elizabeth did engage with a suitor, male citizens felt entitled to inform the Queen that she was too old and too fragile to marry and produce an heir. Ultimately, Elizabeth's distaste for marriage and desire to preserve her power reaffirmed her decision to decline Alencon's proposal. However, the Alencon negotiations demonstrated that Elizabeth's choices regarding marriage and reproduction could never please her government, courtiers, or even her citizens.

Elizabeth's response to the 1575 Entertainments at Kenilworth demonstrated her desire to maintain her personal authority and control her image. Through the unfinished Zuccaro portraits as well as the Zabella Masque, Dudley attempted to cast Elizabeth in the role of the lover, the object of his affections. Elizabeth's negative response to Dudley's attempts reaffirmed her independence and distaste for matrimony which had been present since her earliest Parliamentary speeches. Beginning in the 1580s, widely disseminated, highly allegorical portraits of Elizabeth

revealed her desired view of herself. Reconciling contradictory aspects of her reign such as her gender, power, and virginity, these images have lived on in popular memory and attest Elizabeth's skill as self-fashioning and self-mythologizing.

The celebration of Elizabeth's exceptionalism has reverberated through centuries of cultural depictions. Since the dawn of the women's movement in the twentieth century, artists and directors have molded Elizabeth and her reign to embody contemporary notions of feminism and womanhood. Elizabeth's romantic life and courtships take center stage in Shekhar Kapur's 1998 film *Elizabeth*. Here, Cate Blanchett depicts the young Elizabeth's journey from naive, love-struck princess to calculating, careerist Queen.<sup>248</sup> Torn between love and duty, third wave feminists could align with this fictional Elizabeth's struggle to set aside her emotional desires and accept her powerful yet lonely calling. In a striking scene, the Queen orders her disgraced former lover—a fictionalized Robert Dudley--to dance with her. As he attempts to explain his infidelity, Elizabeth dramatically detaches herself from his embrace and declares to the court: "I am not your Elizabeth. I am no man's Elizabeth, and if you think to rule me you are mistaken. I will have one mistress here, and no master!"<sup>249</sup>

Though far less subtle than the 1546 portrait, Elizabeth's defiance is a key facet of both depictions. In addition to rejecting love and marriage, Kapur's Elizabeth relegates male nobleman and advisors to a subservient role; she is undoubtedly the most powerful woman in the court. Independent and self-actualized, the film portrays Elizabeth as a hero for contemporary feminist women. While empowering, such depictions obscure Elizabeth's complexities as a woman and as a ruler. Additionally, these depictions often operate based off of cultural

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<sup>248</sup> *Elizabeth*, directed by Shekhar Kapur, (1998, Channel Four, Polygram, Working Title, 1998).

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

assumption rather than historical detail. Exploring the line between the woman and the Virgin Queen is a fascinating pursuit; however, directors such as Kapur have muddled facts and timelines in favor of interpreting her historic reign through an ever changing contemporary lens.

The manipulation of Elizabeth's courtships to suit popular discourse has reflected across several different centuries, beginning during the Queen's reign. Dudley's Kenilworth Entertainments promoted Dudley's desired view of Elizabeth that was shaped by his own ambitions and gendered notions. In recent depictions, these gendered notions have shifted in an attempt to celebrate Elizabeth's independence. From Bette Davis' aging Elizabeth in *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex*, to Cate Blanchett's self-sacrificing, career woman Queen in *Elizabeth*, to the recent portrayal by Margot Robbie in *Mary, Queen of Scots*, Elizabeth's representation embodies the continuous debate of what an empowered woman should and can be. Modern fascination, interpretation, and exploration is a testament to Elizabeth's success at self-fashioning, particularly during the later years of her reign. While the Elizabeth from Kapur's film is aspirational, Elizabeth's unmarried, childless status was criticized for much of her reign. Elizabeth faced opposition from her Parliament, her Privy Council; men who, despite their inferior rank and birth, felt entitled to impose marriage and reproduction onto their monarch.

The courtships of Elizabeth I reveal the personal and political sides of the Queen. However, the separation between Elizabeth the monarch and Elizabeth the woman is often difficult to discern; Elizabeth would agree, as she reminded her court that she lived her life in the open. Ultimately, Elizabeth's letters, speeches, and portraits revealed a common thread. Elizabeth rejected marriage from her earliest speeches and confirmed her preference for virginity through disseminating allegorical, celebratory portraits towards the end of her reign. This image of a devoted, virtuous Queen seems ideal, even aspirational when viewing the portraits of

Elizabeth. Additionally, modern interpreters favor this image of a powerful, single Queen. However, Elizabeth's courtships reveal the constant pressure and criticism which came with being an unmarried, childless monarch. However, Elizabeth possessed an exceptional skill at personal and political maneuvering that she wielded throughout her reign. Developed in her youth through a series of traumas, Elizabeth's political prowess called the Queen to wield her unmarried status as source of power. This starkly contrasted to her predecessors Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, and Mary I, who placed much of their value in the traditional feminine pursuits of the time: marriage and motherhood. The young Elizabeth depicted in the portrait at Windsor Castle shattered expectations at her birth, and she carried this defiance throughout her courtships.

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