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The Quest for a King: Gender, Marriage, and Succession in Elizabethan England

Anne McLaren

Some translation and joining of realms may turn to much good, and the wealth and tranquillity of many. As if we had a King for your Queen, or you [Scotland] a King for ours, it had been a goodly translation: to have united both realms in dominion, regiment and law, as they be in nature, language, and manners. . . . If you and we had joined together: it had made no great matter, on which side the King had been, so he had been religious. . . . It is religion and likeness of manners, that join men together . . . Where there is one faith, one baptism, and one Christ: there is narrower fraternity then, if they came out of one womb. (John Aylmer, *An Harborowe for Faithful and Trew Subjectes*, 1559)¹

Me-thinketh it were to be wished of all wise men and her Majesty's good subjects, that the one of those two Queens of the isle of Britain were transformed into the shape of a man, to make so happy a marriage, as thereby there might be an unity of the whole isle. (Henry Killigrew to Robert Dudley, 31 December 1560)²

In 1559, John Aylmer responded to John Knox's *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* in order to win support for Elizabeth I's accession to the English throne. According to Aylmer, Knox identified as the "greatest inconvenience" of female rule the fact that the realm would be transferred to "strangers" when the

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¹ John Aylmer, *An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trew Subjects, agaynst the Late Blowne Blaste, concerninge the Government of Wemen* (London, 1559), *Short Title Catalogue (STC)* 1004, fol. M^r.

² Joseph Stevenson, ed., *Selections from Unpublished Manuscripts in the College of Arms and the British Museum Illustrating the Reign of Mary Queen of Scotland, 1543–1568* (Glasgow, 1837), p. 84.

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queen married, ceding to her husband, as her superior, the power that had been invested in her. Here we see Aylmer countering this powerful objection in a seemingly oblique fashion, by advancing a piece of counterfactual history: “If we had a King for your Queen, or you a King for ours,” he tells Knox, a godly union between England and Scotland would have been forged through their marriage. So godly, indeed, that “it had made no great matter, on which side the King had been.” In 1559, the facts of the case were these: Elizabeth Tudor wore the English crown, Mary Stewart the Scottish (but lived in France as the queen consort of Francis II). Thus there were two queens—each with roughly equal blood claims to the English throne—and no king, in a Europe in which the issue of which side fielded the king in any dynastic arrangement was very much a live one.

Given these facts, Aylmer’s counter to this “greatest inconvenience” could carry conviction only if his readers shared several presuppositions. These presuppositions take us to the heart of Elizabethan political culture. First, Aylmer intimates that reformation in Britain has transformed the inhabitants of England and Scotland into “brothers in Christ.” By this, Aylmer identifies a relationship of spiritual affinity similar to, but more binding than, the blood bond joining earthly brothers: “Where there is one faith, one baptism, and one Christ: there is narrower fraternity then, if they came out of one womb.” Second, he intimates that this transformation through grace has effected, through this spiritual brotherhood, a marriage between the two realms. Joined by “religion and likeness of manners,” only embodiment at the level of the crown is required to similarly harmonize “dominion, regiment, and law.” A king, product of the union and himself one of the brethren, will effect this fulfillment. And it is in this very specific context that his nationality is immaterial.³ Aylmer, we realize, was writing to prepare his English audience for a Scottish king of Britain, during a very small window of opportunity that opened at the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign. At that moment, it appeared that British union and full reformation would be secured, and a king constituted, by dint of Elizabeth’s marriage to a godly Scottish potential king, either James Stewart, the illegitimate but mili-

³ Aylmer, *Harborowe*, fols. L.4^v–M^v. See, also, the minute of the letter from the English Privy Council to the Lords of the Congregation in *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland, 1509–1603, and the State Papers Relating to Mary, Queen of Scots during Her Detention in England, 1568–87* (hereafter cited as *CSP Scottish*), 1:114: “Trust that their famous isles may be conjoined in heart as it is in continent, in one uniformity of language, manners, and condition.”

tantly Protestant son of James V, or the next in line to the throne, the Protestant James Hamilton, third earl of Arran.⁴

By December 1560, that window had closed. Francis II's death stripped from Mary Stewart the role and status of queen consort of France, restoring her primary political identity as queen of Scotland. This turn of affairs led to her return to Scotland in August 1561. If her incursion into British political life did not unleash God's enacted displeasure against Scotland (as Knox thought it did), it did at least scupper the marriage plans that informed Aylmer's tract.⁵ So there were two queens—now both ruling in Britain—and no king. How interesting that Killigrew, Marian exile and a diplomatic agent for the new regime, greeted this revolution in Anglo-Scottish affairs by, like Aylmer, proposing a marriage. Aylmer advanced a counterfactual marriage of a "king" and "queen," of England and Scotland, to image the alliance in Christ of the two kingdoms in the present and press for union in both kinds in the immediate future. Killigrew, writing when Mary's return to Scotland made Aylmer's vision appear inexpressibly remote, although no less fervently desired, could not see how that union might be effected without a miracle—the transformation of one of the two queens into a king—to secure the marriage.⁶ "God send our mistress a husband, and by him a son, that we may hope our posterity shall have a masculine succession," Elizabeth's chief councillor William Cecil prayed at the same time.⁷

These are serious political statements, and they need to be interpreted as such. They signal the intimate, and increasingly ideologically charged, connection between gender, marriage, and kingship in sixteenth-

⁴ *John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland*, ed. William Croft Dickinson, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1949), 2:8–10.

⁵ *John Knox's History*, 2:7. The dismay experienced by English councillors at Mary's impending return is clearly conveyed by the proposal, seriously debated at the highest levels, that Mary should either not be allowed to leave France or be intercepted and diverted to a destination sufficiently inhospitable to make her arrival on Scottish soil unlikely. Ireland was mentioned as a possibility, as was the west of Scotland, home of the next in line to the Scottish throne, the Hamiltons. See *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, Elizabeth, 1558–89* (hereafter cited as *CSP Foreign*), 4:203–5; and R. K. Hannay, "The Earl of Arran and Queen Mary," *Scottish Historical Review* 18 (1921): 267.

⁶ He may have hoped that one of the two queens—presumably Elizabeth—would, with God's grace, prove to be sufficiently virtuous to become a man. Contemporary Galenic theory held that women could turn into men if they began to generate sufficient heat to expel their genitals from their bodies, thereby overcoming the imperfection visited upon them in utero that relegated them to female identity. See Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), pp. 161–64.

⁷ William Cecil to Sir Nicholas Throckmorton, 14 July 1561, British Library (BL), Add. MSS 35830, fol. 159v.

century Britain. In this article, I want to consider the linkages between marriage and kingship as contemporaries understood them, in the circumstances of queenship and reformation in which they found themselves. I then want to explore their implications for Elizabethan politics. During the early modern period, when nations were conceived of as bodies politic, when monarchs were credited with two bodies in order to compensate for the deficiencies of their natural selves, marriage assumed important ideological as well as dynastic significance.⁸ It featured as a powerful analogy for relations between monarchs and their realms, modeling how two distinct corporations, king and commonwealth, could enact a unitary identity after the example of Christ and his church. It was a model predicated on the assumption that the head would be male. J. H. Burns has shown how the scholastic debate over monarchy of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries elevated the status of the monarch, whether pope or emperor, by reference to his reception of authority from, and hence identity with, Christ, the supreme head: “him by whom kings reign.”⁹ Increasingly, after the Reformation, that elevation served to legitimate the claims to empire of territorial and national monarchs. It also served to more overtly inscribe the marriage model as patriarchal, at the level of the crown and within the family.¹⁰ At first sight paradoxically, in view of Erasmian and Protestant idealizations of Christian marriage as a partnership between spiritual equals, the pressure to secure God-ordained order in a fractured European *corpus mysticum* advanced conceptions of marriage that insisted on male superiority. By the early seventeenth

⁸ Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, N.J., 1957). See, too, Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and Succession in Elizabethan England* (London, 1977). For a seminal consideration of the implications of early modern conceptions of the body politic for the sexual politics of Elizabeth's reign, see Louis Montrose, “‘Shaping Fantasies’: Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture,” in *Representing the English Renaissance*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley, 1988), pp. 31–64.

⁹ J. H. Burns, *Lordship, Kinship, and Empire: The Idea of Monarchy, 1400–1525* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 13–14, 97–100.

¹⁰ For this reinscription, its timing, and its significance for relations between men and women see, inter alia, Susan Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (New York, 1988); Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550–1700* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994); Lena Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994); Eileen Spring, *Law, Land, and Family: Aristocratic Inheritance in England, 1300–1800* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1993); as well as the standard works by Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge, 1983), chap. 7; Gordon J. Schochet, *Patriarchalism in Political Thought: The Authoritarian Family and Political Speculation and Attitudes Especially in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1975); and Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (abr. ed., London, 1979).

century, they also promoted “absolutist” conceptions of kingly authority.¹¹

The linkage between marriage and specifically kingly identity was therefore uniquely tight during this period, when, for contemporaries, so much hinged on the promise of religious reformation. The same pressure also, and by the same token, challenged traditional norms of dynastic inheritance and succession. Throughout Europe, Protestant reformation in particular was associated with the drive to enthrone godly kings and disallow female rule.¹² In England, this compound was apparent from the point when Henry VIII divorced England from Rome and proclaimed an imperial destiny.¹³ The subsequent career of the True Church in England and Scotland ensured that the desire for a king actually increased in intensity during Elizabeth’s reign, as committed Protestant men confronted the interrelated problems of female rule, resurgent Catholicism in Europe, and the seeming inevitability of a female Catholic successor, Mary Queen of Scots, to the last of Henry VIII’s direct heirs. The king envisioned by what Patrick Collinson has called the “Protestant ascendancy”—that powerful band of brothers in Christ who dominated Anglo-Scottish politics during the first decades of Elizabeth’s reign—would be a godly male monarch, ruling in tandem with his godly male councillors to promote the welfare of the whole isle, England and Scotland.¹⁴ He would be a warrior in God’s cause, uniting virtue and virility in his person and fighting to secure the True Church in Europe. Marriage repre-

¹¹ J. H. Burns, “The Idea of Absolutism,” in *Absolutism in Seventeenth Century Europe*, ed. John Miller (London, 1990), pp. 21–42. R. W. K. Hinton refers to the “plunge into analogy” that was so marked a feature of political debate in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: “As the father loved his son, the son honoured and obeyed his father, so kings and commonwealths were to be understood as comprising a single family.” See R. W. K. Hinton, “Husbands, Fathers, and Conquerors,” *Political Studies* 15, no. 3 (1967): 291.

¹² One need look no further than Scotland (where the brethren deposed two queens in ten years) and state formation in France during these years. For which, see Sarah Hanley, “The Monarchic State in Early Modern France: Marital Regime Government and Male Right,” in *Politics, Ideology, and the Law in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Honor of J. H. M. Salmon*, ed. Adrianna Bakos (Rochester, N.Y., 1994), pp. 107–20. Donald R. Kelley comments on the “intensely masculine” character of the reformation movement in his *The Beginning of Ideology: Consciousness and Society in the French Reformation* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 75–76.

¹³ Henry VIII famously argued that Catherine of Aragon’s failure to produce a male heir attested not only to the illegitimacy of their marriage but also to the illegitimacy of papal claims to spiritual supremacy. See, e.g., *Glasse of the Truthe* (London, 1530), sig. A3v. The supremacy legislation of 1534 was dominated by the linked issues of marriage and succession—as well as Henry’s newly imperial status.

¹⁴ Patrick Collinson, “Puritans, Men of Business, and Elizabethan Parliaments,” *Parliamentary History* 7, pt. 2 (1988): 187–211, esp. 190.

sented a powerful tool that could turn these apocalyptically tinged dreams into reality. With God's sustaining hand, it could secure a Protestant male succession for a British empire forged in grace.

Yet, from the very beginning, there were crucial ambiguities about the terms of this engagement. Was this outcome to be achieved immediately, in the person of the queen's consort, or through a (male) heir, product of their union?¹⁵ If the former, was nationality immaterial? How strong was the fraternal bond between the Scots and the English?¹⁶ How far outside the realm could one go, could marriages be contracted, before even Protestant brothers turned into "strangers"? A more troubling question arose: marriage to which queen—Elizabeth, or her cousin Mary?¹⁷ And what if marriage did not achieve this end? What if one or both queens proved to be loose cannons, in terms of their spousal choices or their determination not to marry at all? These ambiguities lay at the heart of Elizabethan politics. Over the course of Elizabeth's reign, failure to resolve them forced men to innovate in an attempt to secure godly male rule. Their response was to privilege Protestant virility in relation to royal blood, hence law and election in relation to established patterns of inheritance and descent. This recalibration also allowed for some elasticity in the definition of a "king"—some crucial room for maneuver in a situation complicated by the fact that kings who met Protestant selection criteria were, as Knox complained, "hard to find."¹⁸ It was a radical but not impossible step in a lineage society that featured a high degree of intermarriage among a numerically restricted elite defined, by blood entitlement, as peers of the realm. The consequences for subsequent British history were momentous. The attempt to conjure up a king in the context

¹⁵ For English willingness to accept the queen's consort as king in his own right, see Glyn Redworth, "'Matters Impertinent to Women': Male and Female Monarchy under Philip and Mary," *English Historical Review* 112, no. 447 (1997): 597–613.

¹⁶ For a persuasive analysis of the fraternal bond and its significance in political thought, see Carol Pateman, "The Fraternal Social Contract," in her *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism, and Political Theory* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 33–57.

¹⁷ Modern historians have gone badly wrong in assuming that the contemporaries understood or accepted the dichotomy between the two queens that we take for granted. Sir John Harington speaks to the insecurities that their inability to effectively differentiate caused, noting that right up until Mary's execution in 1587, "if one prayed for the Queen, even at his last breath, when there was no dissembling with God nor with the world, yet even then some would ask him, which Queen?" See *A Tract on the Succession to the Crown* (1602), ed. Clements P. Markham (London, 1880), p. 103. For the use of anti-Catholicism as a tool to categorically distinguish between the two queens, see my forthcoming article, "Gender, Religion and Early Modern Nationalism: Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots and the Genesis of English Anti-Catholicism," *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002).

¹⁸ Thomas Randolph and the earl of Bedford to Elizabeth, recounting a conversation with Mary Queen of Scots, 23 November 1564, BL, Cotton MS, Caligula BX, fols. 281–82.

of “two queens in one isle” inaugurated what proved to be a conclusive move away from belief in kingship as embodied essence to its abstract conceptualization as an office of state: one that was, in the last resort, divorceable from both the blood and the person of the king.¹⁹

Historians of Elizabeth’s reign have largely ignored or misunderstood this ideological dimension, however, at the cost of an informed understanding of the political dynamics of the Elizabethan polity. Susan Doran has charted Elizabeth’s numerous marriage negotiations in an attempt to shed new light on why Elizabeth did not marry. She takes issue with what she regards as the feminist-inspired orthodoxy voiced by Joel Hurstfield and Christopher Haigh: that Elizabeth refused to marry because she could not bear to be a “mere wife,” especially since that status would compromise her authority and power to rule. Doran concludes that she did not marry because her Privy Council could not agree on a bridegroom. Her reading presents us with the unconvincing image of a queen ready to marry, patiently waiting year after year for the all clear from a Privy Council almost farcically unable to cooperate on this all-important matter despite the high stakes. “Perhaps they were distracted,” she suggests, “bemused by the variety and number of Elizabeth’s suitors.” Perhaps their determination to consolidate their own positions, early in the reign, fatally undermined any incentive to present their queen with a husband: the first, essential step toward establishing a Protestant succession.²⁰ More recently, Stephen Alford has investigated the politics of succession in the years 1558 to 1569 from an Anglo-Scottish perspective. His account usefully highlights the centrality of marriage, particularly in connection with the threat posed to the Protestant regime by the status of Mary Queen of Scots as heir-in-waiting to an emergent British empire. Yet, by positing a stark antithesis between what he terms “dynastic” and “political” terms of reference, he casts the Elizabethan polity in a Whiggish mold—with Elizabeth’s chief councillor William Cecil in the role of a modernizing man of vision. For Alford, two choices were on offer during these years to secure British Protestantism and English

¹⁹ “Two queens in one isle” is the French duc de Guise’s phrase (*CSP Foreign*, 4: 357), aptly chosen by Alison Plowden as the title of her book *Two Queens in One Isle: The Deadly Relationship of Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots* (Brighton, Sussex, 1984). Quentin Skinner provides a magisterial account of the genesis of modern conception of the state in “The State,” in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, ed. Terence Ball, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson (1989; reprint, Cambridge, 1995), pp. 90–131—without, however, attending to this gender dynamic.

²⁰ Susan Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony: The Courtships of Elizabeth I* (London, 1996), pp. 1, 4, 6–7, 217, and “Why Did Elizabeth Not Marry?” in *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana*, ed. Julia M. Walker (Durham, N.C., 1998), pp. 30–59, 41–43.

imperial identity. Contemporaries could throw their lot in with the duke of Norfolk, representing the forces of aristocratic reaction, and support a backward-looking “dynastic solution”: marriage between England’s premier noble and the Scottish queen. Alternatively, they could commit to the forward-looking “political and constitutional” solution that William Cecil began to articulate as early as 1560. This solution was conveniently predicated (in Alford’s telling) on the assumption that the English queen, in contrast to the Scottish, was, in effect, an honorary male.²¹ Wallace MacCaffrey comes closest to the mark, in his work on Elizabethan high politics during the period 1558–71, notwithstanding the anachronistic flavor of his formulation. He insists first that “no one could envisage a kingless realm.” This remains a crucial recognition for any historian of the period and of the reign. Elizabeth must choose a husband to “give the shape and direction to English politics that only a man could provide.” Intriguingly, he then resorts to a very modern vocabulary of marriage in order to describe what he sees as the solution that contemporaries arrived at when the king did not materialize. The queen “acquired surrogate husbands.” “Her collaboration with Cecil and Dudley—and to a lesser extent with the whole Privy Council—served to fill out the missing dimension of effective leadership. . . . They [William Cecil and Robert Dudley] became in fact sharers in supreme power.”²²

These accounts are instructive. MacCaffrey is certainly right to identify the collective exercise of sovereignty as a key feature of Elizabeth’s reign. They are finally unsatisfactory, however, because they do not adequately historicize the meaning of marriage and succession in its early modern cultural context. They ignore how tenuous, how provisional, was Elizabeth’s hold on the crown, because of her sex, and how she and her councillors both used and altered dynastic terms of reference in order to forward their asymmetric goals: hers to retain unchallenged possession of the English crown during her lifetime; theirs to preserve Protestantism and English imperial identity in a realm that, kingless, was in important ways deemed to be acephalous.²³ From the moment when she was pro-

²¹ In fact his interpretation suggests that Elizabeth was little more than a cipher. Unity of the two realms was to be “achieved through treaty, underwritten by the imperial power of the English Queen as a British monarch, bound together by Protestantism, and linked to a strong council and parliament in Scotland”—a solution propounded at meetings that, according to Alford, Elizabeth did not attend. See Stephen Alford, *The Early Elizabethan Polity: William Cecil and the British Succession Crisis, 1558–1569* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 69, 96.

²² Wallace MacCaffrey, *The Shaping of the Elizabethan Regime* (Princeton, N.J., 1969), pp. 72, 310.

²³ A. N. McLaren, *Political Culture in the Reign of Elizabeth I: Queen and Commonwealth, 1558–1585* (Cambridge, 1999), esp. chap. 1.

claimed queen in 1558 until, at her death, the project to install James VI of Scotland as her successor in blood finally succeeded, English politics cannot be understood without foregrounding the determination of key elements of the political nation to acquire a Protestant king of Britain as a solution to the problem of female rule.

I want to make this case by investigating the politics of marriage and succession in the first two decades of Elizabeth's reign. Let me begin by providing a synoptic overview. We must first bring to center stage the realization that the men who dominated state affairs regarded themselves as being in a uniquely dangerous position during much of the reign because both rulers, not just the Catholic Mary of Scotland, were women. Marriage would counteract, if not obviate, some of the "inconveniences" attached to female rule, including, very importantly, women's assumed propensity to become tyrannical if not constrained in their exercise of political authority.²⁴ Subsumption of the two queens in the persons of godly Protestant husbands would nullify the effects of Mary's Catholicism—if it did not actually effect her conversion to Protestantism—and reinforce Elizabeth's commitment to the faith. Producing healthy male Protestant heirs was the concomitant of a godly marriage, as Henry VIII had asserted when attempting to legitimate the as-yet unborn children that he hoped God would grant him by Jane Seymour. If Elizabeth bore such heirs, this would annul Mary's immediate claim to the English throne; if Mary, and not Elizabeth, they would assure Scotland (and later England) of a Protestant succession.²⁵ Issue could also make Elizabeth's husband king in his own right, at least during his lifetime. The custom that confirmed the husband of a noble heiress in his possession of her dignity upon the birth of a child was applied to the crown in the mid-1550s, in Mary I's reign.²⁶ In the early years of Elizabeth's reign, then, marriage promised a solution to the problem posed by female

²⁴ Rebecca Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants: Political Thought and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990).

²⁵ See "Henry VIII's Second Succession Act (1536)," in *Tudor Dynastic Problems, 1460–1571*, ed. Mortimer Levine (New York, 1973), p. 155. In a roundabout way, of course, this is exactly what did happen with the succession of Mary's Protestant son James VI to the English throne as James I in 1603.

²⁶ John Gough Nichols, ed., *Narratives of the Days of the Reformation, Camden Society*, Camden Society old series, vol. 77 (London, 1859), p. 289. The precedent confirmed for other branches of the nobility in Henry VIII's reign is referred to in a letter from Robert Bertie to William Cecil, Lord Burghley, of 1580, given in John Strype, *Annals of the Reformation and Establishment of Religion, and other various occurrences in the Church of England, during Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1824), vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 589. Arguably, Henry VII acted in accordance with this custom when, at the death of Elizabeth of York, he continued in his role as England's king rather than ceding that role to his son.

rule. It offered a means by which Protestant rectitude and Tudor royal blood could be conjoined (through the marriage of either queen) and a king constituted, ambiguously through the marriage itself or through issue.

This understanding of marriage meant that Elizabeth's strongest card in her battle to remain an autonomous queen was her presumed fertility. This continued to be the case until the Anjou marriage negotiations of the late 1570s, when the combination of her age and her councillors' concerted anti-Anjou campaign terminally undermined it.²⁷ Only production of a male heir in the context of a Protestant marriage would satisfy the regime's ideological needs without overtly challenging existing patterns of blood inheritance and descent—without, in fact, directly challenging royal authority itself. This was an important consideration during revolutionary times. And Elizabeth's consent was necessary all along the line to achieve this desideratum, from accepting a potential suitor to acquiescing in his marital demands. "Be after a sort a Christ unto us," pleaded one of her councillors in 1562. "Mortify your own affections . . . and for our sakes, take the pains to bring forth princely children."²⁸ Her control of her own fertility meant that she could, paradoxically (and within limits), use the prospect of marriage to ensure that she never married—by finding fault with proposed suitors or by suggesting that she dearly loved and could only marry men deemed unsuitable, from Robert Dudley through to the French Catholic duc d'Anjou.

Elizabeth's ability to maneuver through playing the marriage card was always in tension with her councillors' determination to settle the succession. In 1566, William Cecil wrote a memorandum that signaled this divergence:

To urge both marriage and establishing of succession is the uttermost that can be desired. To deny both is the uttermost that can be denied. To require marriage is the most natural, most easy, most plausible to the Queen's Majesty. To require certainty of succession is the most plausible to all the people. To require succession is the hardest to be obtained both for the difficulty to discuss the right and for the loathsomeness in the Queen's

²⁷ See, e.g., Sir Francis Walsingham's letter to Elizabeth on the occasion of the Anjou marriage negotiations, which he vehemently opposed: "If you mean it, remember that by the delay your Highness useth therein, you lose the benefit of time which (if years considered) is not the least thing to be weighed. If you mean it not, then assure yourself, it is one of the worst remedies you can use, howsoever your majesty may conceive that it serveth your turn" (*The Letters of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. G. B. Harrison [London, 1935], p. 149); see also Wallace MacCaffrey, *Queen Elizabeth and the Making of Policy, 1572–1588* (Princeton, N.J., 1981), pp. 446–67.

²⁸ Strype, *Annals*, vol. 2, pt. 2, pp. 652–58, quotation on p. 657.

Majesty to consent thereto. . . . The loathsomeness to grant it is by reason of natural suspicion against a successor that hath right by law to succeed.²⁹

Clearly, Cecil could understand Elizabeth's fears. In Sir John Harington's words, Elizabeth was convinced "that if she should allow and permit men to examine, discuss, and publish whose was the best title after hers, some would be ready to affirm that title to be good afore her."³⁰ But Cecil could not be dissuaded from the main task: "Corollary: the mean betwixt these is to determine effectually to marry, and if it succeed not, then proceed to discussion of the right of the successor."³¹ This ambiguity—whether succession meant after her death, or immediately—continued to haunt Elizabeth throughout her reign, as we shall see.³²

But conciliar determination to settle the succession immediately, along with their willingness to accept Elizabeth's queenship, itself waxed and waned, depending on several factors. First of these was their perception of Elizabeth's sincerity in making good her often-floated promise to marry. Privy councillors' correspondence about the various marriage negotiations circles endlessly around this crucial variable.³³ In the early years, the drive to settle the succession subsided at points when it appeared most plausible that Elizabeth might be ready to take the plunge. Then there was the separate but related perception of the likelihood of marriage producing issue. This factor became increasingly significant as Elizabeth aged. Without the prospect of issue, marriage of a queen—whether by a "stranger" or a peer of the realm—came to look uncomfortably like conquest of the crown and the realm.³⁴ Both of these factors bore directly on a third factor: conciliar perceptions of the relative strength of Mary's claims to the throne. It is no coincidence that William Cecil wrote his memorandum after Mary had signally strengthened her dynastic claims to a conjoined crown by producing a male heir, although

²⁹ Quoted in Mortimer Levine, *The Early Elizabethan Succession Question, 1558–1568* (Stanford, Calif., 1966).

³⁰ Harington, *Tract on the Succession*, p. 39.

³¹ Quoted in Levine, *Early Elizabethan Succession Question*, p. 82.

³² *Leicester's Commonwealth: The Copy of a Letter Written by a Master of Art of Cambridge* (1584), ed. D. C. Peck (Athens, Ohio, 1985), pp. 105–6.

³³ William Cecil's response to the collapse of the negotiations for marriage to the king of Sweden was characteristically ambivalent. On the one hand, Elizabeth's rejection of the suit meant there was still hope for the Scottish marriage; on the other hand, it confirmed his suspicions that Elizabeth was "not disposed seriously to marry" at all. See *CSP Scottish*, 1:161; Philip Yorke, earl of Hardwicke, *Miscellaneous State Papers. From 1501 to 1726*, ed. Philip Yorke, 2 vols. (London, 1778), 1:174.

³⁴ The pamphleteer John Stubbs (ca. 1543–91) makes the linkage explicit in *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf Whereinto England Is Like to Be Swallowed by an Other French Marriage, If the Lord Forbid Not the Banes*, ed. Lloyd Berry (Charlottesville, Va., 1968), pp. 31–32, 37–38, 51, and 68–69.

she simultaneously compromised them (in the eyes of convinced Protestants) by accomplishing this feat through marriage to a Catholic husband. Finally, there was the need to ensure that any successor by law would be one of the brethren, prepared to enact the role of godly prince of the English nation. Increasingly, the exigencies of preserving Protestantism in England militated against an exogamous succession, with the tribe defined in national as much as spiritual terms. The question left pending after Mary's return to Scotland—in a history that lies outside the scope of this article—was whether the Scots were or were not part of the tribe.³⁵

Of course, Elizabeth did not marry. Of course, she was not deposed. Of course, a "true heir" came to the throne at her death, in the person of her cousin Mary's son, James VI of Scotland. But these verities should not blind us to the fact that during this period important elements of the political nation regarded themselves as confronting a double-bind situation, with no easy or certain way of securing that male Protestant succession for which William Cecil prayed. Their perception of the absolute necessity of male rule in these dangerous circumstances forced them to reinvent kingship. On the one hand, the struggle waged between the queen and her councillors over marriage and succession produced what Patrick Collinson has called a "monarchical republic." That innovative conception of the body politic identified godly men as possessing civic capacity by virtue of their Protestant commitment and (the factor that Collinson leaves out) their manhood.³⁶ But it was completed by, and the integrity of the body politic preserved by, a parallel abstraction. The monarchical republic devolved virility and martial competence, which were qualities deemed necessary to the enactment of godly rule, to a king figure: a zealous Protestant noble warrior, loyal to the queen through caste identity and personal bonds, affiliated to her godly councillors through spiritual affinity and national identity, and ruling, in tandem with both, in the service of the English imperial crown and international Protestantism. In the monarchical republic, two men played the role of king

³⁵ For a perceptive account of how the English reformation boxed the English into endogamous relations at the level of the crown and their cultural implications, see Bruce Thomas Boehrer, *Monarchy and Incest in Renaissance England: Literature, Culture, Kinship, and Kingship* (Philadelphia, 1992). John Knox influentially promoted the language of tribal identification in his explication of Old Testament history in *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558), in *The Political Writings of John Knox*, ed. Marvin A. Breslow (Washington, D.C., 1985), pp. 37–80. From Knox's point of view, of course, the Scots and the English were members of the same tribe if they were Protestant men.

³⁶ Patrick Collinson, "The Monarchical Republic of Queen Elizabeth I," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 69, no. 2 (1986–87): 394–424. For a gendered reading, see McLaren, *Political Culture in the Reign of Elizabeth I*.

figure: first, Robert Dudley, from 1564 earl of Leicester; later, after Leicester's death, his political heir, the earl of Essex.

The concept of a king figure as a solution to the problem of inadequate monarchs was first adumbrated in the reign of the minor Edward VI, developing in tandem with the career of Protestant reformation in England. It proposed a native godly man who would enact the role of king until a true king, a male figure in whom pure royal blood and virtue combined, occupied the throne. In one form, the king figure achieved its apotheosis during Oliver Cromwell's protectorate. At that point, commonwealth and monarchical identities fused in a man who wielded the sword in order to preserve British Protestantism and simultaneously advance the second coming. For a moment, the perceived imminence of Christ's kingship absolutely overrode the claims to political consequence of royal blood. Earlier, the identity was sustained by various interpenetrating sources of legitimation. In Elizabeth's reign, the king figure might be regarded as nearly a king already. On the basis of blood, zeal, and virility, men like the earl of Moray or, in England, the duke of Norfolk would qualify, needing only some tinkering behind the scenes, including marriage to one of the two queens, to become a king. But he would also qualify for this status on the basis of his own "virtue": a quality denoted by his noble lineage, but attested to above all by his manifest refusal to take it on himself to be king in his own person rather than acting as God's officer. In England, over the course of Elizabeth's reign, the criteria changed decisively, in ways that signaled a move from blood to election. We can date this to 1572, when the duke of Norfolk was executed on the disputable ground that he had aspired to marry the Scottish queen, not in order to forward Protestant reformation in the conjoined isles, but rather in order to himself become king.³⁷ In the context of two queens in one isle, marriage to either queen of a Protestant noble warrior who

³⁷ For Norfolk's status, see *Memoirs of His Own Life by Sir James Melville of Halhill, 1549–1593*, ed. Thomas Thompson (Edinburgh, 1827), p. 214. An abortive conspiracy of 1570 sought to make Norfolk king of England and Scotland. Lord Burghley's 1572 "Discourse of the State" highlighted the peril to Elizabeth's person posed by "such as esteem more of the Duke's [person] than of hers" (Samuel Haynes and William Murdin, eds., *A Collection of State Papers Relating to Affairs in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, From the Years 1571 to 1596* [London, 1759], p. 212). In 1569, William Cecil was still consulting Norfolk over means of combating "popish combinations." See Edmund Lodge, *Illustrations of British History*, 3 vols. (London, 1791), 3:46–48; Strype, *Annals*, vol. 1, pt. 1, pp. 309–10. For Norfolk's own statement of his Protestant commitment, see "The Arraignment of Thomas Howard Duke of Norfolk," in *The Harleian Miscellany: Or, A Collection of Scarce, Curious and Entertaining Pamphlets and Tracts, Found in the Earl of Oxford's Library*, 12 vols. (London, 1808–1811), 9:130. For Essex, see Paul E. J. Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, Second Earl of Essex, 1585–1597* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 389–404.

possessed his own blood claims to the crown proved too dangerous a prospect to countenance. In the monarchical republic, the role of king figure was therefore played by Leicester (and later Essex) not primarily because of their blood status but because they enjoyed the English queen's favor and, equally necessary, conciliar confidence in their rectitude. Finally, in Elizabeth's reign, the king figure acted in partnership with godly men in council to serve and constrain the queen, in a relationship predicated on their equality as brothers in Christ. The Elizabethan polity, it turns out, was, in important ways, both *regnum Cecilianum* and "Leicester's Commonwealth." Hostile contemporary polemic was more acute, more pointed, than modern historians have been prepared to recognize.³⁸

Now let us turn to the politics of marriage and succession in the first two decades of Elizabeth's reign. Examining this terrain in the cultural context that I have outlined will allow us to track the changing bases of Elizabeth's claims to legitimacy as a female ruler over those years and the gradual articulation of the monarchical republic as I have described it. I will begin by investigating the negotiations for Elizabeth's marriage to a prince of Scotland in the period before the return of Mary Queen of Scots from France extinguished the hope of creating a Scottish king of Britain. I will then examine the succession proposals advanced in England in the early 1560s, when doubts about the continuance of Scotland's career as a godly nation and co-partner of the British empire put a premium on a "mere English," or endogamous, masculine succession. I will conclude by considering the case of Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, as king figure in the Elizabethan polity.

* * *

In 1559, there was nothing new about the project of an Anglo-Scottish alliance designed to secure Protestant reformation on both ideological and pragmatic grounds and to be confirmed through a royal marriage. What was new was the historical context of this endeavor. In the 1540s, Henry VIII had attempted to match his son Edward VI with the infant Mary Queen of Scots.³⁹ In Edward VI's reign, Protector Somerset continued the commitment to a marriage between these two principals. He advanced the same proposals that had been floated in Henry VIII's reign, with more explicit emphasis on fulfilling God's purpose for the

³⁸ J. E. Neale, *Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments*, 2 vols. (London, 1957), 2:276. See, also, D. C. Peck's introduction to his edition of *Leicester's Commonwealth*.

³⁹ Also, to confirm the allegiance in those days of high infant mortality, he had attempted to pair the princess Elizabeth with the Lord James Hamilton, next in line to the Scottish throne (*CSP Scottish*, 1:43, 60).

whole isle and backed with the threat of war in the event that the Scots misread their providential history.⁴⁰ But very soon, as Knox recounted, God's "hot displeasure" was visited on the island, and reformation went into reverse. Mary Queen of Scots was sent to marry in France, leaving her French Catholic mother to take power as regent in 1554. "Light and darkness" competed for the realm of Scotland, with "darkness" gaining the upper hand as Mary of Guise consolidated her control. In England, Edward VI's untimely death in 1553 left the way open for Mary Tudor, "that idolatress Jezebel . . . of the Spaniard's blood" to ascend to the English throne to similarly fight against reformation in England. Knox concluded his historical survey by emphasizing the near-triumph of darkness from a British perspective: "And so thought Satan that his kingdom of darkness was in quietness and rest, as well in the one realm as in the other."⁴¹ Then, providentially, Britain was given a second chance, and in both realms. In England, Mary Tudor's unexpected death left the throne to her Protestant half-sister, Elizabeth, and political power to a coterie of committed Protestant advisers, very often men returning to offices and roles that they had occupied because of their religious convictions, and political ability, in the reign of Edward VI. In Scotland, only a few months later, "The Faithful Congregation of Jesus Christ in Scotland," better known as the Lords of the Congregation, deprived Mary of Guise of the office of regent. This was an outcome eagerly anticipated by, among others, Elizabeth's chief councillor, William Cecil.⁴² She was replaced by a select committee of leading Lords of the Congregation, including, in key positions, both of Elizabeth's aspiring bridegrooms: Lord James Hamilton, third earl of Arran, and Lord James Stewart, from 1562 the earl of Moray.

Against this ideological backcloth, the Scottish marriages proposed for Elizabeth in 1559 and 1560 are particularly interesting, not least because both were viable options, although historians customarily focus solely on the proposed match with the earl of Arran. This was the moment at which it looked as though God's plan to secure a Protestant Britain was naturally on the point of fulfillment. The threat posed to Britain by the accession of Francis II to the French throne could prove

⁴⁰ *CSP Scottish*, 1:61, 64, 66, 80, 81, 91.

⁴¹ *John Knox's History*, 1:117–18. I am using Knox's account as evidence of the mind-set of Elizabeth's chief councillors, as well as Scottish conviction Protestants, because of the English government's demonstrable involvement in its production. See, e.g., Thomas Randolph to Cecil, 23 September 1560, quoted in Dickinson's introduction to *John Knox's History*, p. lxxx. See, also, *CSP Scottish*, 1:485.

⁴² Dickinson's introduction to *John Knox's History*, p. xxxi; Maurice Lee, Jr., *James Stewart, Earl of Moray: A Political Study of the Reformation in Scotland* (New York, 1953), p. 50.

an opportunity in disguise, if godly men in both kingdoms kept their nerve. Mary's new status as French queen, her geographical distance from Scotland, and the death of her mother in June 1560 made it likely that she would accede to the coup that had brought the Lords of the Congregation to power, allowing them the exercise of their militant Protestantism in her and her husband's name, in a kingdom that she evidently regarded as both foreign and barbarous.⁴³ Her health was not good. Her successor, should she die or should the crown pass out of her keeping, would be a young Protestant male, either the earl of Arran or her illegitimate half-brother James Stewart (legitimated in 1551); throughout these years, rumors abounded about their interest in and claims to the crown of Scotland. The English queen was a young, unmarried woman who must be found a Protestant husband. This concatenation of circumstances could actually buttress the case, as it seemingly did for William Cecil, in correspondence with Knox, that God might choose to "transfer" rule of Scotland from Mary to a godly successor king (and "Scotsman in blood") if Mary proved unable or unwilling to safeguard British Protestant interests against French claims.⁴⁴ Perhaps unanimity on this point influenced the language in which the Lords of the Congregation couched their initial proposal for marriage between Elizabeth and Arran. With supreme ambiguity, they offered "him who being in the place of a king shall bring with him the friendship and force of a kingdom."⁴⁵

And how close was the earl of Arran to being king of Scotland? For English privy councillors, quite close indeed, having a slight edge, which was based on the conventional dynastic propriety of his claim to the throne, over his competitor for the queen's hand, Lord James Stewart. Both men were to be offered to Elizabeth, to see which might secure her favor, presumably on the understanding that either could function as a British king, depending on their commitment to the cause. Cecil, privy councillor Sir James Croft, and Knox determined, in early August 1559, that "Arran was to be conveyed to England; if misliked [by Elizabeth], then the prior of St. Andrews [James Stewart] was to be thought of."

⁴³ Jenny Wormald, *Mary Queen of Scots: A Study in Failure* (London, 1988), p. 22.

⁴⁴ *CSP Foreign*, 1:518–19. The blood issue is interesting, suggesting as it does that these men did not regard Mary as "Scottish in blood." There are two possible explanations for this peculiar formulation, neither of which would advantage her claims to either throne. They either regarded her as the product of her mother's French blood—because her nurture was exclusively French, because her father died in her infancy?—or as illegitimate. Certainly Knox did not hesitate to asperse Mary of Guise's chastity (and, hence, Mary Stewart's legitimacy). See *John Knox's History*, 1:322.

⁴⁵ Public Record Office, SP 52 State Papers, Scotland, series I, Elizabeth I, 5/49 (1560).

In November, Thomas Randolph confirmed to Sir Ralph Sadler and Croft that the Lord James and Arran were the “finest of all the Protestants in Scotland.”⁴⁶ Both men’s qualifications, in the eyes of English privy councillors, quite evidently owed as much to their determination to possess the Scottish crown as to their demonstrable Protestantism.⁴⁷ In August, Sadler, the English ambassador to Scotland, was instructed to find out if rumors that Lord James had designs on the crown were true. He was to be “encouraged” in this project if the Hamilton interest continued to be, as it was for the moment, “cold” in its pursuit. Potentially king of Scotland; through marriage, he could become king of England as well. In June of the following year, Cecil, in Edinburgh for the treaty negotiations, wrote to Elizabeth on two separate occasions to talk up the Lord James’s claims when Elizabeth, much to his annoyance, refused to go along with the proposed marriage to the earl of Arran. He was “not unlike either in person or qualities to be a king’s son,” Cecil informed her on 1 June. By 19 June, he had upped the ante: the “Lord James [was] not unlike to be a king soon. [He] hopes God will direct her to take choice of a husband.”⁴⁸

In these early years, Elizabeth’s legitimacy thus hinged, implicitly but immediately, on her willingness to marry, preferably a Scottish pretender to a British crown. Once Mary’s return to Scotland closed off this alternative, English men of affairs turned their attention to the possibility of transforming their own queen into the shape of a king. The reintroduction of Catholicism into Scotland at the level of the crown put a premium on protecting the English imperial crown and safeguarding Protestantism in the whole isle. These were national necessities that, in the early 1560s, in the eyes of committed Protestants, now required a “mere English” Protestant warrior king. As the Scottish option collapsed, councillors began to explore the potential of manipulating conceptions of dynastic succession to achieve this outcome. The impetus for this turn was strengthened by Elizabeth’s refusal to marry, combined with fears about

⁴⁶ Croft to Cecil, 3 August 1559, *CSP Scottish*, 1:115; Thomas Randolph to Sadler and Croft, *The State Papers and Letters of Sir Ralph Sadler*, ed. Arthur Clifford, 2 vols. (London, 1809), 1:536–37.

⁴⁷ Lord James Stewart’s own pioneering—but, as this discussion shows, not wholly eccentric—views on the succession are given by William Camden. See William Camden, *The History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princess Elizabeth Late Queen of England* (London, 1615), ed. Wallace T. MacCaffrey (Chicago, 1970), p. 62. Here Camden obviously follows the hostile account from Elizabeth’s reign, *The Copie of a Letter Written out of Scotland* (Antwerp, 1572), of which John Leslie, bishop of Ross and Mary’s leading controversialist, was the presumed author (*STC* 17566, fol. 31v).

⁴⁸ Cecil to Throckmorton, *CSP Scottish*, 1:427; Cecil to Elizabeth, *CSP Scottish*, 1:154.

England's inferior status in any marriage to a foreign king because "England" was figured by a queen.⁴⁹ The cogitation of the councillors bore fruit in proposals designed to identify this potential king: the man who would be called to the throne either in succession to Elizabeth, in the event of her death without male issue, or, the radical option, immediately. These proposals called into question the legitimacy of the Tudor royal line. They did so in order to disallow the status of Mary Queen of Scots as next legitimate successor in the Tudor line and simultaneously privilege male Protestant virtue as a criterion for kingship. They thus threatened Elizabeth's tenure of the throne not only because of her status as a single childless woman but also because her claims, like those of Mary Stewart, were rooted in possession of Tudor blood.

In the early 1560s, succession proposals centered on two main candidates: Henry Hastings, "the Puritan Earl" of Huntingdon, and Lady Catherine Grey, the impediment of her sex, partly, but not wholly, counterbalanced by her pedigree and her marital status.⁵⁰ In addition to his sex and noble status, Huntingdon offered staunch Protestant conviction combined with a double descent from Edward III. His sex was as important as these other credentials. In September 1560, the Spanish ambassador noted that "the cry is that they do not want any more women rulers, and this woman [Elizabeth] may find herself in prison any morning [for her alleged carryings-on with Robert Dudley, her Master of Horse]."⁵¹ Later, he stated that Cecil alleged that Huntingdon was the true successor to the crown on the grounds that Henry VII had usurped the realm from the House of York. If Cecil did indeed float this idea—one that challenged Elizabeth's legitimacy just as much as Mary's, and, by disallowing Tudor royal status, threatened to reopen the scars left by the Wars of the Roses—it dramatically illustrates both of the risks he was willing to run to ensure England's Protestant future, and his dynastic terms of reference. By March 1561, the Spanish ambassador Alvarez de Quadra was convinced that Elizabeth would name Hastings as her successor. Would this be as successor—or incumbent? Huntingdon certainly feared that he was at the mercy of a movement that would attempt the latter. He wrote a letter to Leicester that can be read in no other way:

⁴⁹ See, e.g., the astrological prophecy cast by Sir Thomas Smith in the early 1560s and heavily annotated by Cecil. This identifies a successful outcome as contingent on Elizabeth's prospective foreign husband dying first—although, of course, not without first having produced issue. Strype, *Annals*, vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 123.

⁵⁰ For Hastings, see Claire Cross, *The Puritan Earl: The Life of Henry Hastings, Third Earl of Huntingdon, 1536–1595* (London, 1966).

⁵¹ *Calendar of Letters and State Papers Relating to English Affairs of the Reign of Elizabeth possessed in, or originally belonging to, the Archives of Simancas* (hereafter cited as *CLSP*), 1:176.

How far I have been always from conceiting any greatness of myself, nay how ready I have been always to shun applauses both by my continual low sail and my carriage, I do assure myself, is best known to your Lordship, and the rest of my nearest friends; if not, mine own conscience shall best clear me from any such folly. Alas! . . . Will a whole commonwealth . . . forsake a Prince, both for excellent qualities, and rare virtues of nature, and of great hopes of an inestimable blessing by her princely issue, in reason of her youth, for a poor subject in years, and without any great hope of issue? No, no: I cannot be persuaded they would, if I should be so foolishly wicked to desire it, or that my mind were so ambitiously inclined. I hope her Majesty will be persuaded of better things in me, and cast this conceit behind her.⁵²

Lady Catherine Grey, like Huntingdon, possessed the requisite traits of Protestant zeal and distinguished Protestant lineage; she was the sister of the martyred Protestant queen Jane Grey. Nor did her sex entirely invalidate her claim, although undoubtedly it weakened it. For Lady Catherine, unlike Elizabeth, was married. Moreover, she was married to a man of impeccable pedigree, martial and spiritual, Edward Seymour, earl of Hertford. Hertford was the son of Lord Protector Somerset, the man who had preserved England's imperial crown and Protestantism during Edward VI's reign. Still more important to the men who supported her involuntary candidacy, in this instance, godly union had produced good fruit, and less equivocally than had been the case with Henry VIII's union with Jane Seymour. In 1561, the first of Catherine and Edward's two sons was born. Was it coincidence that Cecil changed horses at this point and began to argue for the legitimacy of Catherine's claims to the throne? The Spanish ambassador may have got hold of the wrong end of the stick—but he may not have—when he alleged that Cecil planned to imprison other claimants to the throne in the event of Elizabeth's death and pass the crown suddenly to Lady Catherine. Significantly, de Quadra believed that he would take this step less because of Grey's personal claims than because "London [was] so much in favor of the Earl of Hertford on the ground of religion."⁵³ Subsumed in her noble, virile Protestant husband, both brought up in a milieu where ideological purity outweighed constitutional nicety and herself demonstrably fertile, Catherine Grey's candidacy was strong enough to make Elizabeth weep with rage when it was floated by powerful figures among her chief advisors,

⁵² Henry, earl of Huntingdon, to the earl of Leicester, April 1563, *Miscellaneous State Papers*, 1:187–88.

⁵³ *CLSP*, 1:321; my emphasis.

including, at various points, Cecil, the earl of Arundel, and the duke of Norfolk.⁵⁴ Grey's instrumental status is also indicated by the fact that Hertford and his sons continued to be regarded as leading claimants to the crown long after her death.⁵⁵

Moreover, in this case, too, as with Huntingdon, a revisionist interpretation of England's past provided the basis for securing a Protestant future, this time by reassessing the Grey-Hertford claim to the imperial crown in preference to Elizabeth's. The first step was taken in 1559, in a memorial written by the militant Protestant Sir Henry Sidney, Philip Sidney's uncle and future privy councillor. According to Sidney's account, Elizabeth's councillors "discovered" evidence that disloyal bishops had engaged in unlawful practices during Edward VI's reign, with Mary Tudor's connivance, to advance the Catholic religion in England. The evidence was contained in letters and papers that had remained in Mary's chest at her death: "Which closet, upon her decease, (as is customary), was sealed up by order of her privy council, for the use of her present Majesty, her successor." Had these projects been discovered during King Edward's days, Sidney concludes, "it was thought it would have hindered Queen Mary's reign. For when [the incriminating documents] were read at council, those privy councillors who were instrumental for her coming to the crown *before* the Lady Jane Grey, were much amazed, having never heard of these things til now."⁵⁶ In 1559, this memorial obviously served two different purposes. On the one hand, it attempted to secure the bishops' compliance with the new regime by reminding them of its moderate character. They might, the subtext implies, have faced a "thorough" religious settlement that would threaten their estate, or face such in the future, should their intransigence align them with the disloyal bishops of Edward VI's reign. On the other hand, and arguably of more significance for political life during Elizabeth's reign, the memorial enhanced Jane Grey's claim to the throne. It implied that both women enjoyed nearly equal claims to the throne, Grey's godliness presumably nearly counterbalancing the blood advantage enjoyed by Mary. (Her devotion to the true religion or her marital status? In this cultural context the terms are self-reflexive.) Had Mary's perfidy been

⁵⁴ *CLSP*, 1:271–72, 173.

⁵⁵ Hertford and his two sons were arrested in 1595 after Robert Doleman's inflammatory *A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crown of England* (London, 1594) spectacularly reopened the succession question. Hertford was only released from the Tower at the beginning of January 1596 (BL, Harleian MS 6997, fols.156r, 158r). For the depiction of these claims in courtly language, see Curt Breight, "Realpolitik and Elizabethan Ceremony: The Earl of Hertford's Entertainment of Elizabeth at Elvetham, 1591," *Renaissance Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (1992): 20–48.

⁵⁶ Strype, *Annals*, vol. 1, pt. 1, pp. 208–9; my emphasis.

known, it would have tipped the scales and assured Grey's elevation to the crown. She would have been, not possibly next in line to the throne after Henry VIII's daughters (depending on how one regarded the claims of Mary Queen of Scots and the status that one accorded to Henry's last will), but rather the agreed successor to Edward VI, on the grounds articulated in the 1553 "Device for the Succession" that led to her nine-day rule.⁵⁷ And, at this point, we must remember that Jane Grey was advanced to the crown after her marriage to the son of England's Protector, the duke of Northumberland, but before the devoutly anticipated Protestant male heir arrived, only because of the unexpectedly rapid deterioration in Edward VI's physical condition.⁵⁸

The quest for a king thus brought the Edwardian regime's constitutionally innovative attempt to secure a male Protestant succession through a Dudley-Grey marriage back into political prominence, dragging the hapless Lady Catherine Grey in its wake and implying a short tenure of the throne for Elizabeth. For the arguments advanced to promote Protestantism at the expense of direct blood inheritance also privileged male rule over female with single-minded intensity.⁵⁹ According to Edward VI's Letters Patent, written to prepare the ground for the "Device," both Mary and Elizabeth were illegitimate, their mothers having been divorced by the king. But they were also excluded from succession on the grounds that, if they inherited, they might marry "strangers born out of the realm, who would then subvert true religion and replace English laws with those of his [*sic*] country."⁶⁰ Again, we see the significance of the fact that both Grey sisters were married to, hence subsumed in and constrained by, noble English Protestant males when their claims to the throne were under consideration. And the crown was to descend to them only as an instrumental measure, on its way to a king. This point was, understandably, made even more forcefully in the proclamation that announced Lady Jane Grey's accession to the throne, as England's first female ruler, than it had been in Edward VI's original Letters Patent:

⁵⁷ Dale Hoak, "Rehabilitating the Duke of Northumberland: Politics and Political Control, 1549–1553," in *The Mid-Tudor Polity, c. 1540–1560*, ed. Jennifer Loach and Robert Tittler (London, 1980), pp. 47–49. Hoak emphasizes Northumberland's determination to secure a male Protestant successor in order to preserve the Edwardian reformation.

⁵⁸ Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993), p. 203.

⁵⁹ For Henry VIII's dynastic arrangements, see Levine, *Tudor Dynastic Problems*, pp. 151–53, 155–56, 161–64.

⁶⁰ See "Edward's Letters Patent for the Limitation of the Crown," in Mortimer Levine, *Tudor Dynastic Problems*, pp. 167–68. Notably, the letters stress that both Elizabeth and Mary "be unto us but of the half blood" and therefore could not inherit, even if they had been legitimate (which he claimed they were not).

[In the event of Edward VI dying without issue his state] should remain, come and be unto the eldest son of the body of the said Lady Frances [daughter of Henry VIII's younger sister and Jane and Catherine's mother] . . . and to the heirs male of the body of the same eldest son lawfully begotten, and so from son to son . . . and, for default of such sons born in the world, in his [Edward's] lifetime, of the body of the said lady Frances lawfully begotten, and, for lack of heirs male of every son lawfully begotten, that then the said imperial crown . . . should remain, come, and be to us . . . and to the heirs male of our body lawfully begotten.⁶¹

Elizabeth regarded Catherine's candidacy with real alarm. As soon as her marriage to the earl of Hertford was discovered in 1561, it was declared illegal on the grounds that there had been no witnesses. Both parties were imprisoned. Edward was released from the Tower soon after. Catherine, more dangerous in her motherhood, yet more vulnerable because of her sex, languished there as she awaited the birth of their child. In 1562, Elizabeth managed to have the marriage officially declared invalid, and, hence, the elder of the two sons, at least, bastardized.⁶² But that was not the end of it, not with the Scottish queen back in her native land, the Scottish marriage plan aborted, and international Protestantism in the balance. In 1564, John Hales, whose radical Protestantism had been forged in company with William Cecil during the Edwardian experiment in government, was in disgrace with the queen for acting, seemingly on behalf of the Privy Council, to disallow the claims of Mary Queen of Scots to the crown. He wrote a book, timed to coincide with the 1563 Parliament, which followed the genealogy proposed by the "Device" that would make Lady Catherine Grey the rightful heir. Hales followed up the offense by seeking legal advice "from beyond the seas" to prove the legitimacy of her marriage. This was an infringement of the royal will that (not surprisingly) "offended the queen very much."⁶³ In 1565, it became apparent that Mary planned to strengthen her claim to the English throne through marriage. Her suitor was her cousin, the Catholic Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley, himself possessor of a plausible "mere English" claim through descent from Henry VIII's elder sister

⁶¹ See "The Proclamation of Lady Jane Gray's Title to the Crown," in Gilbert Burnet, *The History of the Reformation of the Church of England*, 3 vols. (London, 1679), 2:241. I deliberately leave Matilda out of account, as her example proved too disputable during the sixteenth century to serve as a reliable historical precedent for female rule.

⁶² Cecil told Throckmorton that "nobody can appear privy to the marriage, nor to the love, but maids, or women going for maidens," because the "Queen's Majesty thinketh . . . that some greater drift was in this" than simply a love match—telling evidence, incidentally, for early modern gender hierarchies. *Miscellaneous State Papers*, 1:177.

⁶³ Strype, *Annals*, vol. 1, pt. 2, pp. 117, 121.

Margaret Cecil, in despair, proposed some precautionary measures that would counter the Scottish queen's enhanced blood entitlement: a new drive against Catholicism and "some relaxation of the queen's displeasure towards Lady Catherine Grey."⁶⁴ The first, which was soon to become so characteristic of Elizabethan politics, duly took place; the second, so threatening to Elizabeth's queenship, encountered her obdurate refusal.

* * *

During this second phase, then, Elizabeth's best claim to rule stemmed from weaknesses in the claims of the proposed alternatives. These included Grey's sex, the prospect of renewed civil war that accompanied Huntingdon's claims, and, of course, the fear among the political elite that losing their existing queen, for whatever reason, might culminate in a horribly accurate replay of Mary Tudor's accession in 1553 on the basis of blood right, this time with Mary Queen of Scots in the role of rightful queen. As we have seen, Elizabeth tried to maintain her advantage by putting obstacles in the paths of these two near competitors. She kept Huntingdon impoverished and at a distance from his home territory (and the court); she imprisoned Grey and bastardized her children.⁶⁵ And, as is well known, she tried to forbid discussion on the two vital issues of marriage and succession—lest, I would argue, those debates lead to a resolution that invalidated her queenship.

At this juncture, however, a negative strategy carried its own considerable risks. Failure to renegotiate the relationship between blood and kingly status left the default position of blood inheritance intact, and with it the Scottish queen's status as Elizabeth's legitimate successor. Although this position may have been acceptable to the English political nation as a whole—as it was very evidently Elizabeth's preference—it was and remained utterly unacceptable to her zealous Protestant councilors.⁶⁶ Their fears of Mary's accession as a consequence of Elizabeth's (in)action and the resulting tensions between the queen and her councilors forced her to respond to the succession crisis brought about by her refusal to marry.

In 1562, on the occasion of her near-fatal attack of smallpox, she

⁶⁴ *CSP Foreign*, 7:384–87, 385, 387.

⁶⁵ Huntingdon's candidacy was weakened, too, by his own equivocal virility. He and his wife were childless, and his next youngest brother, George, inclined to Catholicism (Cross, *The Puritan Earl*, p. 105). Further evidence for the dynamic I am exploring comes from the 1582 conspiracy against Elizabeth that was mounted in Ireland. For the conspiracy, see Strype, *Annals*, vol. 3, pt. 1, pp. 203–4.

⁶⁶ For her continuing attempts to effect this outcome see, e.g., *CSP Scottish*, 2:844, 867.

put forward her own candidate for the succession, Robert Dudley. Dudley was the brother of Lady Jane Grey's husband, now restored to noble status as Elizabeth's favorite suitor and Master of the Horse. Apparently on her deathbed, Elizabeth begged her councillors to make him protector of the realm in the event of her death, with an income of £20,000 a year. Although she loved him dearly, she said, she swore that "as God was her witness, nothing unproper had ever passed between them."⁶⁷ Inevitably, given the ideological context that I have described, privy councillors began, once the queen recovered, seriously to consider Dudley not only as candidate for her hand but also as potential king. It is important to bear in mind that Dudley already had experience of both roles, in a context that we would be unwise to dismiss as mere playacting. Dudley had been chosen to rule the Christmas kingdom of the Inner Temple revels in 1561. The Templars used this occasion to urge Elizabeth to settle the succession and to present Dudley as the pattern of the perfect Protestant prince. *Gorboduc*, their play, and the even more evocative marriage masque that depicted Dudley as Prince Pallaphilos, were printed and reprinted throughout Elizabeth's reign (even after Dudley's death), respectively, in 1565, 1570, and 1590, and in 1562, 1568, 1572, 1591, and 1597.⁶⁸

Elizabeth's nomination inaugurated Dudley's career as king figure in the Elizabethan monarchical republic. He joined the Privy Council in October 1562, was ennobled as the earl of Leicester in 1564, and developed the role of warrior in God's cause at the level of the crown that was later to be assumed, with tragic results, by his stepson and political heir, Robert Devereux, earl of Essex. As early as the summer of 1563, according to Wallace MacCaffrey, "something like a balance" had been struck between Leicester and Elizabeth's councillors, including the man so often erroneously depicted as Leicester's bitter rival, William Cecil.⁶⁹ At his death in 1588, a patent was being prepared that would grant Leicester the unheard-of office of Queen's Lieutenant in the Government of England and Ireland.⁷⁰

Why did Elizabeth make this extraordinary move? Dudley was Protestant, yes, but his blood had been tainted by treason in the recent past, in part because of his father's attempt to elevate his son Guilford to the status of king through marriage to a queen.⁷¹ Moreover, because it was

⁶⁷ J. E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth* (London, 1934), pp. 117–18.

⁶⁸ Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies*, pp. 41–48.

⁶⁹ MacCaffrey, *Shaping*, pp. 99.

⁷⁰ Edmund Lodge, *Illustrations*, 3:308.

⁷¹ The Dudley family tried to have Guilford Dudley, as Queen Jane's husband, named king and co-ruler of England. See Susan James, *Kateryn Parr: The Making of a Queen* (Aldershot, 1999), p. 378.

read by contemporaries as sexual, Dudley's personal relationship with the queen itself challenged her standing, as we have seen in the Spanish ambassador's remarks. And what could she have meant? In 1562, reference to a Protector would have conjured up images of "good dukes" who had exercised supreme power in order to preserve the realm in circumstances of monarchical incapacity. As recently as 1559, this interpretation had been brought into the political mainstream, and given a forceful Calvinist slant, with the publication of the *Mirror for Magistrates*.⁷² Why would she propose an alternative model of governance—one with such positive resonances—as the solution to a succession crisis that her councillors regarded as being entirely of her own making?

Obviously, we shall never fully plumb the nature of the relationship between Elizabeth and Dudley that has so intrigued generations of students of Elizabeth's reign. No less a historian than J. E. Neale concluded that she had momentarily lost her political bearings. The request represented "an instinctive desire" that surfaced in her illness due to her "confused, uncritical state of mind."⁷³ But several points are worth bearing in mind when we consider the timing of Elizabeth's interjection. First, she made it after she had concluded that she would not marry Dudley, although her decision was not generally known.⁷⁴ Second, during the medical crisis, rumors flew throughout London that Dudley, in his martial capacity as Elizabeth's Master of Horse, had a large armed force under his control and was poised to declare for Huntingdon as king.⁷⁵ These rumors persisted even after Elizabeth's return to health, her brush with death mercilessly highlighting her single, childless status. (In the parliament summoned in its wake, Alexander Nowell, Dean of St. Paul's, told the queen that as Mary I's marriage had been "a terrible plague to all England . . . so now for want of your marriage and issue is like to prove as great a plague.")⁷⁶ And it was at this time that Cecil began to consider the possibility of resolving the succession crisis through recourse to a conciliar regency, with power to choose the next sovereign vested in it and parliament. Did Elizabeth propose Dudley to counter this two-fold

⁷² The good dukes were Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, regent during Henry VI's minority, and Edmund, duke of Somerset, regent during Edward VI's minority. For an illuminating discussion of the politics of the *Mirror for Magistrates*, see Andrew Hadfield, *Literature, Politics, and National Identity: Reformation to Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1994), esp. chap. 3, pp. 81–107.

⁷³ Neale, *Queen Elizabeth*, p. 118.

⁷⁴ Norman Jones, *The Birth of the Elizabethan Age: England in the 1560s* (Oxford, 1993), p. 228.

⁷⁵ Cross, *The Puritan Earl*, pp. 146–47.

⁷⁶ G. E. Corrie, ed., *A Catechism by Alexander Nowell*, Parker Society (Cambridge, 1853), p. 228.

threat? Dudley and Huntingdon were related through family ties, as brothers-in-law, as well as being, through spiritual affinity, brothers in Christ. The same affinal relationship bound Dudley to Grey, through his brother's marriage to her sister, Lady Jane Grey, in Edward VI's reign.⁷⁷ Did Elizabeth gamble that the strength of her and Dudley's "natural" affinity would attach him to her cause? Did she seek to defuse the threat of Cecil's "constitutional" solution by attaching a popular variant to Dudley in terms that simultaneously presented him as the man most likely to father a legitimate Protestant male heir of her blood through marriage? In this succession game, did he serve her needs precisely because his equivocal status made his candidacy, for her hand and for a commanding political role, *almost* impossibly difficult for her councillors to accept?

Whatever her reasons may have been, Dudley's promotion certainly strengthened Elizabeth's position as queen in her own right. Her stated commitment to Dudley as the official claimant to her hand, reaffirmed at intervals over the succeeding two decades, gave Elizabeth maneuvering room—the space of that "almost"—during her childbearing years. It allowed her to pursue, with remarkable tenacity and success, her primary political goal of securing unchallenged possession of the English crown. She also attempted (ultimately unsuccessfully) to preserve the political authority of her sister queen, Mary Queen of Scots, including her right to inherit the English crown after her own death. This policy became increasingly difficult but, from Elizabeth's point of view, even more necessary once Mary proved her fertility by producing a male heir, the future James I of England, in 1566.

Perhaps the best evidence for this interpretation can be seen in Elizabeth's attempt to use Leicester to forward these related goals. In the 1560s, English and Scottish councillors sought to marry the Scottish queen to a godly English peer of the realm, a plan known as the "marriage to England." "England" here figures as the noble Protestant man near enough to kingly status to become king through marriage to Scotland's queen: the English analogue to the proposed marriage of Elizabeth to a prince of Scotland in 1559. This endeavor ran parallel to the English succession proposals discussed above. Like them, it aimed to neutralize Mary's political authority, by promoting virility and godliness above blood claims, and it similarly threatened Elizabeth's own warrant to be queen. Her response, between 1563 and 1565, was to insist that the candi-

⁷⁷ For English affinal terms and their relationship to Christian marriage, see Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe*, pp. 269–70. I would like to thank Keith Mason for drawing my attention to Dudley's relationship to Catherine Grey.

date be none other than her own “suitor,” Robert Dudley.⁷⁸ Elizabeth’s offer of Leicester to her sister queen appeared to show her support for the “marriage to England” so doggedly pursued by her councillors, but, in reality, scuppered it. Even after his ennoblement as the earl of Leicester, the Scots would not accept Dudley as a marriage candidate because, as Kirkcaldy of Grange told Thomas Randolph, he was not from a “great old house,” and because “his blood [was] . . . once spotted.”⁷⁹ Here we see how Elizabeth could use Leicester’s equivocal noble status—on the one hand, England’s premier noble in his relationship to the queen; on the other, a “new man” of tainted blood—to strengthen her own position as queen. Given Elizabeth’s desire to maintain Mary as a credible successor to her crown while seeing off her direct claim, insisting on an impossible match had the additional advantage of keeping Mary in the same condition of disputable legitimacy as herself, unmarried and childless.⁸⁰

In England, throughout the 1560s, the Dudley option was contested, debated, and agonized over by councillors and leading men of affairs. It was difficult because it changed the terms of the debate over marriage and kingship in two ways. Unless and until Dudley married the queen, he had no blood claim to the crown that would elevate him above his peers; quite the contrary. As a consequence, his status, current and future, depended entirely on the queen’s favor, read as the likelihood of their marriage. In the early years, Dudley’s unique position thus threatened the prospect of an election in which the queen cast, if not the only vote, quite likely the deciding one, according to her own will and pleasure. Over these years, however, Leicester won his spurs through his demonstrable commitment to Protestantism, thereby effecting his transformation from exclusively the queen’s favorite to king figure in the monarchical republic. He proved his loyalty to the queen, to her councillors, and to international Protestantism. He also proved to be sufficiently disinterested in his exercise of political power to satisfy both parties—the queen and her councillors—that he would not take it upon himself to be king. On this reading, Leicester’s long-lasting, almost laughably inconclusive courtship of Elizabeth represented not relentless self-promotion but rather his unflagging commitment to the role. Leicester, as God’s officer, stood in place of a king by virtue of a personal relationship with (if not marriage to) England’s queen and his godly and collegial relations with fellow Protestant councillors of state.

⁷⁸ *CSP Scottish*, 1:191–92, 195–96, 200–202; 2: app., p. 825.

⁷⁹ *CSP Scottish*, 2:75.

⁸⁰ Wallace MacCaffrey concludes that Elizabeth forwarded Dudley to prevent Mary from marrying anyone. See MacCaffrey, *Shaping*, p. 165.

For Elizabeth's councillors, too, the Dudley option came to carry substantial advantages. It allowed a way out of the intractable conundrum that confronted men who wanted to preserve political order, the Tudor line (with, if possible, Elizabeth as queen), and the True Church, and who, in the 1560s, had feared that these were fundamentally incompatible outcomes. Leicester as king figure allowed them to trust to God and commit to their queen, deferring radical political action to secure a Protestant male heir, if need be, until the point of her death without issue. In his martial capacity, Leicester could ease the succession by protecting the country from anticipated foreign invasion at a vulnerable time. He also stood prepared, in the last resort, to be "seized" by the English crown, unless and until a true king could be identified and agreed on. The advantages of this political arrangement became more apparent over time, as the courtship maneuvers became ever more symbolic. Leicester's Protestant commitment and his intimate relationship with the queen came to represent the next-best alternative to her subsumption in a Protestant British king through marriage. And as long as Leicester monopolized the queen's natural body in this (symbolic) way, it meant there was no scope for an alternative claimant for her hand or for the crown, one who might not understand, or who might choose to ignore, the rules of the game—possibly at the behest of the queen.⁸¹

The arrangement also allowed Elizabeth's councillors to use Leicester to put pressure on the queen to forward their godly agenda. When they were at loggerheads, at pressure points in the reign, the queen's authority could stop her councillors from insisting, in her presence, on measures that she feared or disliked. But, according to the conventions that governed her and Leicester's relationship, she could not—indeed would not—want to prevent Leicester, her approved lover and second self, from expressing his convictions, which happened also to be those of her councillors. We can see evidence of this dynamic in a 1587 letter that Leicester wrote to William Cecil (now Lord Burghley) in the fraught months following the execution of Mary Queen of Scots. Elizabeth's anger on this occasion was fearsome to behold, and was directed specifically at her councillors.⁸² But councillors could not pursue the path of discretion at this juncture. They could not forbear proffering her unpalat-

⁸¹ This specter appeared to have materialized with the duc d'Anjou's courtship in the late 1570s and helps to explain its enormous political significance. See Blair Worden, *The Sound of Virtue: Philip Sidney's "Arcadia" and Elizabethan Politics* (New Haven, Conn., 1996).

⁸² Revealing of the chain of command in the monarchical republic is Elizabeth's attempt to find a scapegoat. See J. E. Neale, *Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments, 1584–1601* (London, 1957), pp. 137–44, esp. p. 138; Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, p. 102.

able advice concerning the necessity for a militant Protestant advance to preserve the brethren in the Netherlands. They could, however, use Leicester to finesse the situation, in a strategy that he felt utterly undermined his hard-won claims to conciliar rectitude. He wrote to Burghley to complain about his treatment at the hands of his fellow councillors, and Burghley in particular:

I know not for whence my hap hath it, but it hath fallen out sundry times, both contrary to my expectations, (and much less by any desert of mine), that I have found your lordship more ready to thwart and cross my endeavours than any other man's; especially in the presence of her majesty, and for such causes as I have been the more earnest in, when by your lordship's own allowance and opinion, it had been so resolved on by our conference before, as fit and meet advices to be given her majesty, for the best furtherance of her own services [especially regarding the Low Countries].⁸³

Assured of conciliar unanimity and support—Leicester hoped to be “assisted and comforted” by its expression in conferences with Elizabeth that they prepared for in advance—he could not understand why it failed to materialize in the council chamber. Instead he found himself alone in advancing the conciliar line that had been “before . . . debated and agreed upon.” What was this, he asked in anguished tones, “but to leave me, in her majesty's opinion, to be a man either affectionate, or opiniative in mine own conceits [?]”⁸⁴ In fact it was a ploy designed to persuade the queen to accept her councillors' agenda as her own, in terms that made her acceptance of their advice a function, not of their combined virility and virtue, but of her (queenly) favor.⁸⁵

Take another vignette, again related to the Netherlands. In 1586, Leicester accepted the governor-generalship of the Netherlands with the approval of his fellow councillors and against the queen's express command. In the face of the queen's towering rage, her councillors reacted much as we might expect. Sir Thomas Heneage, deputed to relay the queen's response to Leicester, volunteered, on his own responsibility, to tone down Elizabeth's sentiments lest her fury derail the cause. Burghley

⁸³ Strype, *Annals*, 2:ii, xliii.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ For the Netherlands campaign as a holy war, see esp. Simon Adams, “The Protestant Cause: Religious Alliance with the European Calvinist Communities as a Political Issue in England, 1585–1630” (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1972–73), chap. 1. The preacher Giles Wigginton revealingly prayed for “all her Majesty's faithful councillors and namely my Lord the Earl of Leicester in his expedition and warfare for the church and the gospel etc;” this is quoted in Patrick Collinson, “Thomas Wood's Letters,” *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London, 1983), p. 70.

offered the queen his resignation, not the enactment of her will.⁸⁶ Leicester, in the Netherlands, cast around for a means to symbolically express how it was that he served both God and the queen to a court of European opinion but even more importantly to the queen herself. He found it in a piece of theater enacted on at least one occasion, when he knighted a Dutch gentleman in honor of his commitment to this holy cause. In Utrecht, William Seagar tells us, “[Leicester’s] court was a fair and large house . . . in which was a very great hall, richly hung with tapestry.” At the upper end of this hall, “was a most sumptuous cloth and chair of estate for the Queen’s Majesty with her arms and styles thereon, and before it a table covered with all things so requisite, as if in person she had been there.” (By contrast, “on the left hand, almost at the table’s end, was my Lord’s trencher and stool, for he would have no chair.”) It was in this space, before “the state of her Majesty,” with “all degrees assembled,” that Leicester used his sword to increase “the number of [God’s] saints,” against Elizabeth’s will, and on her behalf.⁸⁷

* * *

Over the first two decades of Elizabeth’s reign, then, the desire to unite England and Scotland in the person of a Protestant king forced men to recast the grounds of monarchical legitimacy. They renegotiated traditional assumptions about marriage and dynastic succession, articulating blood to virility in ways that promoted the role of election—ambiguously of God and the male political nation—in the constitution of a king. As a result, the early years of Elizabeth’s reign witnessed a range of marriage and succession schemes regarding both queens. These were predicated on the assumption that marriage of one or both queens to a Scottish or English Protestant near-king was the most desirable, but not the only, means of securing the male Protestant succession deemed necessary to preserve the True Church, from Rome and from the threat posed by female rule. All reworked existing traditions of dynastic inheritance to widen the pool of potential candidates: men who could claim to be king, either in their own right or through marriage to one or the other queen. In all these options, conviction Protestantism constituted a powerful source of legitimacy and claim, or strengthened and legitimated a claim, to which male identity was vital, whether immediately or instrumentally.

In conclusion, I want to review the four options to secure a godly king in the 1560s that I have considered. First, Elizabeth’s councillors

⁸⁶ *Letters of Queen Elizabeth I*, pp. 170, 175–76.

⁸⁷ BL, Harleian MS 6353, fol. 35v, quoted in Adams, “The Protestant Cause,” p. 44.

proposed her marriage to a Scottish noble with blood claims to the Scottish crown, either James Stewart, the future earl of Moray, or James Hamilton, third earl of Arran. Mary's return to Scotland, and the consequent collapse of the Scottish option, put a premium on renegotiating conceptions of blood inheritance in terms that would promote the entitlement of a "mere English" candidate. This renegotiation threw into relief the claims of two contenders, the earl of Huntingdon and Lady Catherine Grey. The Grey option proposed Elizabeth's replacement as queen by a Protestant claimant whose blood claims to the crown were, in this context, validated by her marriage to a Protestant male of similar standing and by her status as the mother of sons (virility married to fertility). The Huntingdon option, still couched in dynastic terms, proposed the immediate accession of a Protestant male to the English throne on the grounds of his superior entitlement as scion of the House of York. It is important to remember that these proposals were advanced when Elizabeth's tenure of the throne was uniquely weakened by three factors: her failure to marry, Mary's assumption of political power in Scotland, and Elizabeth's near death from smallpox in 1562.

The Grey and Huntingdon options had manifest drawbacks, not least because they hinged, in the last resort, on men's willingness to act on new conceptions of blood entitlement by deposing their current ruler. At this point, Elizabeth changed the rules of the game. She put forward a fourth option, one that brought Robert Dudley forward as potential successor, as well as potential husband. The Dudley option, refined in terms that abstracted both claims over the next decades, stabilized Elizabeth's queenship and promoted the articulation of the monarchical republic. It did so by providing a king figure to compensate for the perceived deficiencies of female rule, at many points symbolically, at others (especially in relation to military affairs) actually. This level of abstraction in the understanding of kingly identity reflected a growing willingness on the part of the political nation to regard Elizabeth, and not Mary—the antithesis is important—as satisfactorily, if mystically, "married" to, and hence constrained by, her godly Protestant male subjects.⁸⁸ The resulting political arrangement was never unproblematic. It broke down entirely in the concluding years of Elizabeth's reign when the combination of a very aged queen, a hot-headed youthful king-figure in the person of the earl of Essex, and a polarized political climate made it unsustainable.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Anne McLaren, "Reading Sir Thomas Smith's *De Republica Anglorum* as Protestant Apologetic," *Historical Journal* 42, no. 4 (1999): 911–39.

⁸⁹ See M. R. James, "At a Crossroads of the Political Culture: The Essex Revolt, 1601," in his *Society, Politics, and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 443–45, 456.

But the arrangement did legitimate her personal rule as queen. It did so, in large measure, because it allowed Elizabeth's councillors to defer any prospect of radical political action to ensure an endogamous Protestant male successor to an indefinite future. In the meantime, they trusted that God would provide that successor in a way that would either validate, or at least not overtly challenge, social order, including existing conceptions of dynastic inheritance and succession.

That miracle appeared to have been effected with the accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne in 1603, as the candidate in whom blood, Protestantism, and virility combined. However, his accession also reintroduced a question that, latent during much of Elizabeth's reign, came to dominate political discourse in the seventeenth century: whether Stewart kings were or could be godly kings of England. The linkages among gender, marriage, and kingship that I have explored in this article is apparent in the terms James used to explain his kingship to his first parliament. These terms insisted on his preeminence, as king, in the body politic. The long-desired marriage of England and Scotland has at last been effected, he announced, in words reminiscent of those of Aylmer in 1559 with which we began. It is "manifest" that God has ordained this union: "Hath not God first united these two kingdoms both in language, religion, and similitude of manners?" But he then goes one crucial step further. He identifies the union as "made in [his] blood," hence created and sustained through his virility. The two formerly distinct countries have become, through "the right and title of both in my person, alike lineally descended of both the crowns . . . like a little world within itself," an island fastness presided over by James through his blood entitlement. "I am the husband, and the whole island is my lawful wife," he informed members of parliament. "I am the head, and it is my body." Chosen by God to fulfill this commanding position in the elect nation, now viewed as truly imperial, James used the language of blood legitimation to signal his superiority, as king, to his brethren in Christ.⁹⁰ He followed up with a statement that we are entitled to read as announcing his intention to dismantle the monarchical republic: "Precedents in the times of minors, of tyrants, or women or simple kings [are] not to be credited."⁹¹ In important ways, marriage, succession, blood, and kingship established the parameters of Jacobean political discourse, as they had defined Elizabethan politics.

⁹⁰ "Speech to Parliament of 19 March 1604," in *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 132–37.

⁹¹ This is quoted in J. P. Kenyon, "Queen Elizabeth and the Historians," in *Queen Elizabeth I: Most Politick Princess*, ed. S. L. Adams (London, 1984), p. 52.