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Personal and Political Nexus:

The Letters of Queen Elizabeth I to the Duke of Anjou

Varga Laura Dana

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the primary reasons for the failure of marriage negotiations between Elizabeth I and Francis, Duke of Anjou, conducted in the 1570s and 1580s. It focuses on the correspondence authored by Queen Elizabeth to the Duke, her final and one of the most significant marital candidates. The research specifically examines nine letters, analysing them alongside their historical context for a comprehensive understanding. Based on the investigation of Elizabeth's writing style, rhetorical strategies and the expression norms of the era, the paper highlights the specific circumstances and significant reasons behind the prince's rejection.

Thus, the thesis analyses a total of nine letters originally written in French between 1579 and 1584, based on the aforementioned aspects and their historical context. Although a limitation of the research is that the letters written by the duke to the queen are not available, the letters that are accessible still aid in understanding the thesis's ultimate conclusion: that the rejection by Elizabeth was not due to a lack of personal attraction, but rather that the political risks associated with the marriage—related to Elizabeth's independence, financial matters, or religious differences—were too significant.

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Introduction

Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland from 1558 until her death in 1603 emerged as a pivotal figure in English history often referred to as the ‘Virgin Queen’ – a title that not only became emblematic of her reign and political strategy but also signified her reluctance to marry, mostly due to her desire to maintain sovereignty. Elizabeth rebuffed numerous marriage proposals as her suitors’ romantic overtures and political ambitions usually contradicted her own strategies. Francis, the Duke of Anjou was no exception in this regard. Negotiations for a potential marriage between the Queen and the Duke commenced in the 1570s and proved to be a blend of political alliance and personal intrigue, but the Duke’s ambitions to win the hand of the English monarch never materialized.

The events of the Elizabethan era and its turbulent political landscape is a well-researched period of history. This thesis aims to shed some additional light on a lesser studied exchange of letters between Elizabeth I and the Duke of Anjou, and broadens the general understanding of the letters by looking at analysis concluded so far on – among others – the specific chronology, language and rhetoric employed by the Queen. Although existing studies interpret the broader themes of the aforesaid letters, this paper focuses on their in-depth analysis while building on the historical context of the sixteenth century. Therefore, the relevance of this paper lies in the examination of the specific primary sources of the examined period and the employment of both historical and textual analysis. Overall, this thesis argues that the letters composed by Elizabeth I and addressed to the Duke of Anjou clearly display the specific factors which likely contributed to the lack of eventual marriage, the most decisive ones being the problems of religion, the Duke’s operations in the Netherlands and his pressing need for financial aid from the Queen. However, the sometimes specifically intimate and persuasive language of the letters imply a fundamental, deeper and more personal reason for delaying a later not materialised princely match.

In total, nine letters exchanged between Elizabeth I and the Duke of Anjou between 1579 and 1584 will be examined from stylistic, historical, and personal perspectives. The number of the relevant letters is limited to nine, to those selected as authentic by the editors of the *Collected Works* of Elizabeth I who omitted “routine and formulaic” letters that were written

in her name or letters that have an uncertain provenance.¹ The same nine letters are included in a previous collection of Elizabeth's works of 1935 edited by G. B. Harrison.² Originally written or dictated in French by the Queen, the letters will be quoted throughout the paper in translation which are included in the aforementioned volume of Elizabeth's works.³ The French originals published in the *Autograph Compositions and Foreign Language Originals of Elizabeth* edited by Janel Mueller and Leah. S. Marcus⁴ depict not only the original spelling, but also the corrections within the text showing Elizabeth's comments, corrections or additions while proofreading. Only two of the letters, one of 1579 and of 1581 are autograph, using Elizabeth's italic hand, highlighting their personal importance withing the correspondence. However, this does not mean that the other letters were not dictated by her.

The political and personal dimensions of the relationship between Elizabeth I and Francis, Duke of Anjou has been the subject of considerable scholarly attention. In her pioneering book on Elizabeth I's courtings, *Monarchy and Matrimony: The Courtships of Elizabeth I* (1996), Susan Doran analysed the broader implications of the Duke's courting in the political climate of the sixteenth century.⁵ While she argued that the marriage negotiation was a tool for political manoeuvre to forge an alliance that could deter potential threats, she offered another perspective in saying that Elizabeth's relationship with Anjou fulfilled a personal need as much as a political one. Other key texts in this area, for instance Carole Levin (2017)⁶, Judith M. Richards (1999)⁷ and Natalie Mears (2000)⁸ also discuss the nature and significance of the relationship, they argue that this exchange of letters provides insight into Elizabeth's diplomatic strategies and her complex feelings regarding this marriage and alliances, however, none focuses profoundly on analysing her correspondence to the Duke of Anjou. Although the contemporary editions of the correspondence provide valuable commentary on the texts through both their introductions and footnotes, they do not offer a profound analysis of the Queen's style in these specific letters written to the Duke of Anjou.

¹ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), xiv–xv.

² Elizabeth I, *The Letters of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. G. B. Harrison (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1935).

³ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*.

⁴ Elizabeth I, *Autograph Compositions and Foreign Language Original*, ed. Janel Mueller and Leah. S. Marcus (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁵ Doran, Susan, *Monarchy and Matrimony: The Courtships of Elizabeth I* (London: Routledge, 1996)

⁶ Levin, Carole, *The Reign of Elizabeth I* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017)

⁷ Richards, Judith M, "Love and a Female Monarch: The Case of Elizabeth Tudor", *Journal of British Studies* 38.2 (1999), 133–160.

⁸ Mears, Natalie, "Love-Making and Diplomacy: Elizabeth I and the Anjou Marriage Negotiations, c.1578–1582" *History* 86. 284 (2001)

James Daybell's works⁹¹⁰ serve as a valuable resource for understanding the conventions of early modern women's letter writing, while Paul E. J. Hammer's seminal research¹¹ provides essential insights into the political context of the letters.

However, the intimate nature of the Queen's letters to Anjou remains largely unexamined, probably because historical analysis prioritizes political narratives over personal correspondence. Anyhow, these letters conducted between 1579 and 1584 are exquisite examples of her striking phrasing, her lines showing her wisdom and erudition intertwined rhetorical strategies and emotional expressions. The analysis of the letters will be organized around three fundamental pillars. Initially, a comprehensive overview of the historical context will be provided that will introduce the reader to the background of the Duke's courtship. This will be followed by a thorough inspection of the nine letters, exploring a range of exquisite figures of speech, the stylistic, structural features and the frequency, the purpose and the chronologically evolving tendencies of the works. The third part of the paper will delve into the three principal issues contributing to the eventual failure of the marriage negotiation between Elizabeth I and the Duke of Anjou, that is, the question of religion, the Duke's operation in the Netherlands, and the financial dilemmas. Overall, this paper will conduct a detailed exploration of the interplay between the historical context and the principal challenges addressed in the letters, with an emphasis on their multi-layered nature, thereby illuminating the complexities of the correspondence.

⁹ Daybell, James, ed, *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1450–1700* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

¹⁰ Daybell, James, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹¹ Hammer, Paul E. J., *Elizabeth's Wars: War, Government and Society in Tudor England, 1544–1604* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).



The Duke of Alençon [Facsimile of a pencil portrait by François Clouet, from 1572, preserved at the BNF] by Clouet, François, 151?—1572.

<https://archive.org/details/EST812RESP43B>

The Historical Context of the Courtship of Francis, the Duke of Anjou

Elizabeth I is famously known as the Virgin Queen. She never married, nor had children, nonetheless, she remained an attractive marriage proposition for decades to European royalty. Her reign is marked by numerous suitors, although none succeeded in winning her hand in marriage. A wide range of domestic and foreign matrimonial candidates lined up during Elizabeth's queenly years. The Duke of Anjou's courtship was at the end of a long list of suitors, and he had perhaps the most chance to win the hand of the Queen of England. First the notable cases of suiters will be introduced, then the Duke of Anjou's courtship and life, and lastly, his courting will be examined.

One of the most important suiters of Elizabeth I was Robert Dudley, serving not only as a childhood companion but also as a favoured confidant and close advisor. Their relationship was complex and fraught with challenges, yet it was characterised by a deep and enduring affection that persisted until Dudley's death in 1588. However, Dudley, created Earl of Leicester in 1564 lost his wife under ambiguous circumstances in 1560, just in time of his matured intention to marry the Queen, their union was ultimately off chance.¹² Elizabeth would not risk allying herself with someone implicated in murder, additionally, marrying a subject could undermine her sovereignty and authority, making such a union strategically unwise.

In the 1560s, two further notable suitors negotiated the hand of England's queen, namely King Eric XIV of Sweden and the Archduke Charles of Austria. The match with the Protestant and already established king of Sweden would have bolstered the Protestant coalitions in Europe, leading to the unification of two powerful nations under a common religious banner. The union with the Catholic Archduke would have eased tensions between Spain and England, while befitting Elizabeth's notion to marry withing the rank of princes. The negotiations, however, eventually ceased due to the lack of interest in the first, and religious differences in the second case.

Reaching the 1570s, the noncommittal, and aging Elizabeth was faced with a decrease in the number of marriage prospects. Establishing a dynastic connection with France appeared to be one of the most beneficial options, including the last seriously considered marriage

¹² Loades, David Michael, *Elizabeth I* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2011), 141.

proposal by Francis, Duke of Anjou. Interestingly, Francis was not the first Duke from the House of Valois with whom serious and long-drawn negotiations were conducted. Although without consequence, King Charles IX had already expressed interest in a marriage alliance with Elizabeth in 1565, and between 1570–1571, Henry, Duke of Anjou, eighteen years Elizabeth's junior, was also contemplated as a potential husband to the neighbouring monarch. Although highly beneficial for England, the probable marriage was never seriously discussed, mainly due to the difference in religion and the disparity in age between the parties, as Henry would not hear of a match with a heretical queen, especially if she was more than twice his age.¹³

With Elizabeth running out of options, age difference became less important, which is shown by the fact that François, Duke of Alençon between 1555–1584, and Duke of Anjou between 1566–1584 after his brother's Henry's accession to the French throne, also intended to marry Elizabeth I. As a royal scion, Francis fitted in with Elizabeth's notion of choosing her partner from royal circles, but his Catholicism proved a significant problem based on previous experience. Francis, however, was much more willing to compromise than his brother, by then Henry III of France. Another aspect was that the age difference between the Queen and the Duke was even greater, but both courts tried to ignore it. As time went on, the English also had to increasingly consider the last option of marriage with the French, which was perhaps the last that could have been considered in Elizabeth's time. This is why it is interesting to analyse this relationship, because a vast amount of effort and time was devoted to it by both parties.¹⁴

Referred to as 'Monsieur' by Elizabeth in the nine letters, an introduction of the Duke is necessary to highlight why he is remembered as one of the most significant candidates for husbandry for Queen Elizabeth. Born as the third and youngest son of King Henry II of France and Catherine de' Medici of the Valois dynasty, Francis became the Duke of Anjou in 1576, a title that positioned him as a potential heir to the French throne¹⁵. However, his political ambitions extended beyond France, and he became involved in the complexities of the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648) in the Netherlands, of which he became sovereign in 1580. His short-lived sovereignty was marked by instability and military challenges: His forces faced logistical difficulties and resistance from both Spanish troops and local factions. He struggled to gain the level of support necessary for a successful campaign, and he faced criticism for his leadership.

¹³ Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 100.

¹⁴ The Duke of Anjou wrote twice as many letters to Elizabeth as she did. See Elizabeth, *The Letters of Queen Elizabeth*, 96.

¹⁵ He also held the titles Duke of Berry and Duke of Touraine.

By 1584, Francis returned to France, and abandoned his ambitions in the Netherlands. Shortly after his unsuccessful military campaign, he died at the age of 29, likely from typhoid fever in 1584. As the last male heir of the Valois dynasty, death had significant implications for the French succession. His passing laid the foundation of the rise of the Bourbon dynasty, thus marking a decisive moment in French history.

Francis formulated a marriage proposal out of political interest to Elizabeth, as she was under pressure by her subjects to marry and produce an heir, and a union with the Duke would have also strengthened ties between England and France. Despite the potential political advantages, Elizabeth was reluctant to marry the Catholic Duke, which is understandable given the religious unrest in Europe. However, Francis' proposal in 1579 could have been beneficial for England by weakening anti-Protestant sentiment in France and countering the growing French influence in the Netherlands, not to mention the profits of a defensive alliance with France. Discussions of the match began as early as 1572, but the massacres of the Huguenots that started on August 23 of that year – traditionally known as St. Bartholomew's Day – halted the consultations, and no official progress was made until 1579.¹⁶ The French posed the same impossible demands that were proposed when Henry was courting still as a duke in 1570 regarding among others his pension, the free exercise of the Catholic religion and his authority as a ruler. These demands were as unacceptable to the English court in the case of Francis as they were then. Although Monsieur wanted by no means to relinquish the prospect of the union and was willing to make concessions on financial and political authoritative ground and dropped many of his demands, the question of religion seemed still unsolvable and uncompromising. In response, Elizabeth followed a diplomacy, according to which she considered the preferences and interests of her subjects. She usually alluded to this in cases of postponements of the hanging discussions or even in the event of the termination of the negotiations by arguing that the marriage is not feasible, if she cannot obtain her people's consent to it. However, she continued to offer hope to Monsieur throughout the year 1580¹⁷, but in the spring of 1581, it became obvious that Elizabeth would not conclude the marriage.

It is noteworthy that Monsieur personally visited Elizabeth I – contrary to custom – on three distinct occasions: once in secrecy in 1579 and twice officially in 1581. The purpose of

¹⁶ Doran, *The Courtships of Elizabeth I*, 138.

¹⁷ [The marriage of Elizabeth] "seems to me like the weaving of Penelope, undoing every night what was done the day before and then reweaving it anew the next, advancing in these negotiations neither more nor less than has been done and undone countless times without reaching a conclusion one way or the other." The duke of Parma, 3 October 1580, quoted in Charles Wilson, *Queen Elizabeth and the Revolt of the Netherlands* (1970), p.75. quoted in Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 211, n. 7.

these visits was to persuade her to consider marriage with him. Monsieur's first visit in England is vaguely reported in English contemporary documents, but still offers an insight into Elizabeth's sentiment and enthusiasm regarding the match. After reaching Greenwich on 17 August 1579, Monsieur' stay was uneventful, balls and banquets were followed by sensuous conversations, and he did not conduct discussions with Elizabeth's councillors – the emphasis was on entertainment. The supporters of the match reported the visit to be a great success. The Duke and the Queen understood each other and were satisfied with each other's appearance without being hindered by the age difference between them. During the visit and afterward Elizabeth presented herself as a woman in love, although the authenticity of her feelings remains in the dark.¹⁸ This secret and the official visits of the Duke of Anjou in England throughout the year 1581 are a highly significant factor in the prolonged marriage negotiations.

However, Elizabeth's positive view of the match with the Duke of Anjou was not shared by most Protestant subjects. Most of her key advisors and favourites opposed the union. They were distrustful of the French, and they believed that the marriage would jeopardise the ban on Catholic religious observances in England. Additionally, with Henry III's childless marriage, the Duke was considered to be the direct heir to the French throne making the position of England's sovereignty precarious. Various potential scenarios were drawn up should the marriage be formalised. The possible death of Elizabeth in childbirth was a significant concern given her advanced age,¹⁹ on which occasion England would have been left with the Duke as a potential foreign ruler.²⁰ Moreover, on the death of both Elizabeth and Henry III without any offspring could have meant the formation of a dual monarchy, with Francis withdrawing to the French court and leaving England in the hands of a viceroy. Furthermore, Elizabeth's advisors opposing the match kept reminding her of the numerous martyrs burnt as a result of Mary's union with a foreigner.²¹ In early October 1579, members of the Council openly voiced their objections to the French marriage, but failed to deliver a firm resolution and returned the burden of decision-making to Elizabeth.²² As a number of premier courtiers were against the French match, they made a Council declaration of support for the match impossible. Sir Francis Walsingham, principal secretary to the queen was one of the members of the opposing party, alongside with Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester – although he initially supported the case –, and Sir Henry Sidney, a prominent courtier serving the Queen in Ireland and father to the

¹⁸ Doran, *The Courtships of Elizabeth I*, 162.

¹⁹ Elizabeth reached the age of forty-six in 1579.

²⁰ Erzsébet Stróbl, *I. Erzsébet: Egy mítosz születése* (Budapest: L' Harmattan, 2022), 160–162.

²¹ Mary concluded marriage with Philip II of Spain in 1554.

²² Doran, *The Courtships of Elizabeth I*, 173.

English poet, Philip Sidney. One notable supporter of the match was the Lord Chancellor of England, Sir Christopher Hatton. But none of the Queen's councillors was fully convinced about whether to support or oppose the match. Such duality characterized the position of William Cecil, 1st Baron of Burghley, an instrumental advisor of Elizabeth. On the one hand, he composed a highly intimate and encouraging letter addressing Elizabeth in 1579, delivering fatherly advice on the loneliness of a life without marriage.²³ On the other hand, he was strongly hesitant regarding the union with France. Detailed records are available from a conference of the Council on the Queens marriage in 1579, which contains a list of the arguments and consequences for and against the match, as well as the leading opinion that its establishment would entail more dangers than benefits. The following factors are elaborated on: the "Assistance on the Religion in France", "The discontentment of the people to be governed by a stranger", and "The comfort which may redownde to the Realme by the blessed fruit of hir Mat^{ies} body".²⁴

With regard to the public opinion of the people, it may be stated that the era was marked by a generally widespread xenophobic sentiment. From August 1579, a surge of pamphlets, ballads, and Latin verses were published that opposed the marriage, with generally focusing on the Duke's religion, nationality, Elizabeth's age, and the risks of marrying "the brother of childless France"²⁵. The popular opposition against the Duke ultimately doomed the marriage negotiations. Elizabeth's potential union was even likened to her sister Mary's marriage to Philip II of Spain, and raised fears of another violent persecution of Protestants. Numerous pamphlets were released criticising the plans, including John Stubbs' *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gvlf*, which viewed the marriage as a threat to the entire Protestant Church of England²⁶. In response

²³ "Letter 45, Additional Document A: William Cecil, Lord Burghley, to Queen Elizabeth, 1579" in Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*.

²⁴ Egerton, Francis Henry, *The Egerton Papers*, ed, John Payne Collier (London: Camden Society, 1840), 78–80.

²⁵ Doran, *The Courtships of Elizabeth I*, 163.

²⁶ John Stubbs, *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gvlf whereinto England is like to be swallowed by an other French mariage, if the Lord forbid not the banes, by letting her Maiestie see the sin and punishment thereof* (London: H. Singleton, 1579).

to this pamphlet, the court imposed a ban on the open discussion of the Queen's marriage and enforced punishments,²⁷ labelling the book as seditious.²⁸

Although Elizabeth's final and arguably most significant marriage proposal ultimately failed, it is noteworthy that both she and her court approached the matter with earnestness, trying to bridge their numerous differences. This commitment is underscored by the Duke's three visits to England, and the existence of a unique element in Queen Elizabeth's Girdle Prayer Book – as it contained beside the affectionate devotions Anjou's and Elizabeth's miniature portraits.²⁹ Furthermore, the significance of this relationship is underlined in a prominent verse, composed by Elizabeth herself. This affectionate masterpiece was born on Monsieur's last departure from England's shores, thus commemorating the painful and definitive separation of the two. This Petrarchan sonnet-like verse is without a title, but is known under the appellation *On Monsieur's Departure*³⁰, and incorporates contrasting phrases such as "grieve," "love," and "hate," which contribute to the overall effect of a lover's monologue.³¹

The subsequent chapter will explore their correspondence, which provides valuable insights into the complexities of their relationship, also showcasing the effort made to attain the marriage.

²⁷ The fear of punishment boosted the creativity of the opponents of the match with regard to utterances of their sentiments. Although at court frog jewellery – as Monsieur's nickname given by Elizabeth was "Frog" – became a popular solution for flattering the queen, the usage of the words 'frog' and 'toad' in a pejorative way lived its heyday in all kinds of published works during Monsieur's courting. These references were tools for coded malice against the match in works like the song *The Moste Strange Wedding of the Frogge and the Mouse*, or another example was the Latin poem *The Battle of the Frogs and Mice*, both published in 1580. For frog jewellery see J. Arnold, *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlocked* (Leeds, 1988), pp.75–6. For the unusual cluster of pejorative references to frogs or toads, see D. Adler, "Imaginary Toads in Real Gardens", *English Literary Renaissance* 11 (1981), pp.235–60.

²⁸ *Proclamation of the Queene against the Gaping Gulf, 1579* (London: Christopher Barker, 1579).

²⁹ See pages 20–21 .

³⁰ See pages 28–29.

³¹ Szönyi, György E., "CROSS-DRESSING THE TONGUE: PETRARCHIST DISCOURSE AND FEMALE VOICE IN QUEEN ELIZABETH'S 'SONETTO'" (*Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 2005), 77–91.

Style and Language

Letters of Elizabeth I to the Duke of Anjou analysed in the paper

Date	Location	Type	State	Source
Feb. 14, 1579	Westminster	Copy		PRO, State Papers, France, Elizabeth 78/3/9, fol. 21r.
Dec. 19, 1579	Westminster	Autograph		Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 135/23, fol. 40.
ca. Dec. 1579–Jan. 1580		Copy in a secretary's hand with one (and possibly a second) local correction in Elizabeth's hand.		Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 149/24, no foliation.
Jan. 17, 1580		Copy in a secretarial hand with one local correction in Elizabeth's hand.		Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 149/25, no foliation.
March 17, 1581	Westminster	Autograph, with remnants of two seals.		Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 135/21, fol. 36.
ca. June 1581		Copy		Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 149/31, one recto page, no foliation.
May 14, 1581		Copy		Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 149/36, no foliation.
May 24, 1582		incomplete copy with one (and possibly a second) local correction in Elizabeth's hand.	Fragment	Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 149/38, no foliation.
Sep. 10, 1583		Copy		Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 149/40, no foliation.

Before examining the selected letters of Elizabeth I written to the Duke of Anjou between 1579 and 1583, the style and language of Elizabeth requires a closer analysis, as the letters potentially contain hidden or euphemistically conveyed admonishments or criticism. However, her language is carefully crafted for navigating delicate political matters, therefore, it demonstrates her ability to handle such subtle issues as marriage with tact. Despite the conventionally acceptable, formal nature of her letters, she includes personal sentiments in which she expresses her sustained loyalty and devotion to the Duke. Looking at the letters chronologically, a tendency for heightening emphasis and intimacy is detectable. Furthermore, she uses a persuasive tone in her communication, gently urging Monsieur to consider her position and requests. She presents her arguments with excellence in logic and diplomacy, and aims to influence his decisions assertively, the frequency of which peaks as time progresses. Elizabeth's correspondence can be read at the same time as the writing of a ruler who is deeply in love but

maintains her authority, or as a simple, tactical but somewhat bitter game with the hidden portrayal of a young man's childlike pride.

Elizabeth and the Duke of Anjou began their correspondence in the late 1570s, which around 1579, especially after the Duke's first visit in August, developed into a more affectionate conversation and took on a more personal tone. As the acquaintance deepened, there was a significant shift in style to a personal, witty and affectionate tone, even as the topics discussed marked the beginning of political tensions and pressures regarding their union. Later on, Elizabeth's voice became more and more disappointed and expressed unfulfilled hopes, and after 1582, the letters grew to be less frequent, and the correspondence gradually dwindled with the last letter dating 1583.

Elizabeth's greetings are of a simple nature, sometimes containing just the name of the addressee. Otherwise supplemented with "dear", "right trusty" or "our beloved", or very prudently as "friend" or "cousin", although "friend", in French "amie" could also connote "beloved". The writer's personal pronoun contributes to the fact that the early letters work as less informal than the latter ones, because of the usage of the first plural form of the personal pronoun referring to the writer. Later on, this changes to the first person, providing a more intimate invocation. Furthermore, as time progresses, the "we" [nous] pronoun receives a new meaning instead of referring to Elizabeth and her countrymen and is refurbished with a reference to Elizabeth and the Duke themselves. Furthermore, the 'our' [nostre] possessive pronoun changes to 'my' [mon] in the greetings thereby creating the later usual "my dearest" [mon trescher] collocation.

It is a general phenomenon that the queen concludes her letters with long-drawn felicitations, frequently with requests to the addressee and her indispensable prayers such as "the Creator knows, to whom I will not cease to pray that He will protect you from those who do not esteem you and that He will do all that will be the best for you, Monsieur",³² or in a letter of 1580 "As the Creator knows, whom I pray to give you a hundred years of life. With my very affectionate commendations".³³ Elizabeth, being a strongly religious individual by nature and status, was known for her religious writings, including prayers, exemplifying her personal faith and devotion towards the Almighty. From time to time, these religious sentiments were meant to reinforce her authority, and to convey divine guidance regarding her and others' choices. The queen incorporated in almost all her letters written to the Duke relatively short – usually

³² Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 233.

³³ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 247.

paragraph-long – prayer, dedicated mainly to his health, safety, and long life ahead. However, prayers were very often used as expressions of her own concerns and hopes, adding a strong feeling of hidden advice or even command to be accepted.

Elizabeth's letters to Monsieur adopt the elegant and peculiarly Elizabethan style of English writing, and transposes it into the French language. Associated with the prose romance of John Lyly, euphuism is characterised by the excessive use of literary devices such as balance, antithesis, alliteration, similes, repetitions or rhetorical questions. Elizabeth's texts are also seasoned with this elaborate and ornate style, her intricate sentence structures often utilize the metaphors and extended comparisons – showcasing the embellished euphuistic style and its rich selection of imagery and aesthetic popular in England in the late 1570s and early 1580s. Queen Elizabeth's style of writing is characterised by very long, elaborately phrased sentences, many inserted subordinate clauses and back-references, and a strongly elevated and highly distinctive use of language with an unusually long sentence-structure. One of the metaphors of the Queen is the "rock in a storm", where the rock symbolises the love and affection in their immovably steady relationship which is besieged by those who oppose their match, or the circumstances which hinder the sealing of the marriage. This figure of speech recurs altogether three times during the correspondence, always adapting to the various situations. Once, the "bright rock" – the heroic Monsieur – stands against the storm of evil tongues and false persuasions besieging her persona.³⁴ In this statement, Elizabeth incorporates an often recurring sense of gratitude for his affection and modesty. In her letter of 1581, the "steady rock" symbolises Elizabeth herself persuading Monsieur of her eternal affection, "If your trust to such a rock, all the tempests of the sea will be far from shaking it, nor will any storm on the earth turn it aside from honoring and loving you."³⁵ Elizabeth calls Monsieur to be a good astronomer, stating: (...) "that you could judge of the future and clearly know where they are tending, for fear that in avoiding Scylla you fall into Charybdis."³⁶ Scylla and Charybdis are sea monster figures from Greek mythology, featured in Homer's *Odyssey*, who together represent a state of being and choosing between two treacherous alternatives on sea.³⁷ Scylla is usually depicted as a multiple-headed monster snipping off sailors from the passing ships and Charybdis as a whirlpool swallowing everything in its vicinity. By this classical metaphor Elizabeth refers to the evil councillors

³⁴ "I present to you my most humble thanks for having shown us a bright rock from which neither the tempests of false persuasions nor the storm of evil tongues has had the force to shake the constancy of your affection (...)" in Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 245.

³⁵ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 249–250.

³⁶ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 251.

³⁷ Homer, *Odyssey*, translated by: A. T. Murray (London: William Heinemann 1927), 12. 235.

residing in France that keep unsettle Monsieur's trust in and affection for her, or as she stated in a letter of 1580, "[they are] setting you [Monsieur] up as the target of their arrows".³⁸ The same letter to the Duke also references Solomon the Wise by wishing Monsieur the wisdom of the biblical figure when "it is so difficult (...) to know the difference between seeming and being", so that he can "separate the false ones from the true ones".³⁹ But not only commissioners are being referred to through these rich phrases. In the letter of 1581, after the fortunate occasion of Monsieur having evaded his brother's and mother's efforts to prevent him from an act pleasing to Elizabeth, she labelled the King and Mother Queen of France as "a vintage from so evil a harvest."⁴⁰

Moral and philosophical reflections are also present in Elizabeth's letters, exemplified by a statement incorporated in her request for God to protect Monsieur from deceitful advice and to allow him to associate with those who hold him in higher regard than themselves. Politeness and respect were key foundations for these aphorisms to be built on, and loyalty and virtue are frequent topics discussed in her texts. The following passage reflects, for instance, her mature mindset as she comments on delays in the negotiations: "I have used time, which ordinarily accomplishes more than reason does." Also, she continues her "lecture" to Monsieur, "Many people go away repenting of having made rash judgements at the first stroke, without having weighed in a better balance the depth of their opinions, I assure myself that some, upon hazard of their own lives, wish not to be so foolishly governed."⁴¹

In every letter, there are loving and private statements. An array of endearing expressions work as garnish and blandishment, such as in a letter of 1581: "I will not be annoyed if at each hour I were to receive a letter,"⁴² or when assuring the Duke that "affection is not diminished by absence, nor cooled by persuasions".⁴³ Frequent expressions of gratitude for any benevolent actions performed by Monsieur are evident, such as the sending of his affectionate letters regularly. These sentiments function almost as greetings throughout her correspondence, and may directly work as salutations, such as in the opening sentence in the letter of 1581: "The honor you bestow upon me by frequently sending your letters is indeed significant; however, the comfort I derive from them far surpasses this honor."⁴⁴ Another time, as an expression of her love, she informs Monsieur that till her body decomposes into dust, she will continually

³⁸ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 245.

³⁹ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 245.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 250.

⁴¹ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 243.

⁴² Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 251.

⁴³ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 244.

⁴⁴ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 249.

carry the weight of the hardships endured by Monsieur for her sake.⁴⁵ It is also common for her to “court” Monsieur with excessive kindness, to which concept the following example serves as the most pertinent illustration: “Your rare virtues and sweet nature, accompanied with so many honorable parts that I cannot recite them for their number nor dare to make mention of them for the length of time that would take me.”⁴⁶

In her correspondence with Monsieur, Elizabeth employs an array of imaginative figurative language, prominently featuring the motif of flowers. In her letter of 1581, she juxtaposes this motif with a synecdoche element, stating, “sweet flowers culled by the hand that has the little fingers that I bless a million times.”⁴⁷ This imagery serves to evoke a sense of tenderness and intimacy, as the flowers are described as maintaining their freshness, “as if they had been culled in the same instant.”⁴⁸ This freshness is analogously linked to Monsieur’s “verdant affection” towards her, suggesting a parallel between the vitality of the flowers and the depth of his feelings. Furthermore, Elizabeth expresses her devotion by declaring, “Monsieur, I have taken care not to lose a leaf or a flower, despite all the other jewels that I have.”⁴⁹ This statement underscores her commitment to preserving the emotional significance of their relationship, and her second letter of 1581 culminates this floral imagery, concluding with the evocative phrase, “commending myself to the little fingers.”⁵⁰ While the themes of affection and reverence that permeate her writings depict her deep emotional connection to Monsieur, in the last text she composed to Monsieur in 1583, strong sentiments darken her imagery seasoned concluding sentences: “As long as God does not permit such a pact, so long will I never cease honoring, loving and esteeming you like the dog who, often beaten, returns to his master.”⁵¹

A peculiar aspect of Elizabeth’s style is her practice of assigning affectionate nicknames to her favoured individuals. Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester was fortunate enough to receive the nickname ‘Eyes’, whereas Jean de Simier,⁵² intermediary between the English and French

⁴⁵ “(...) it pleases you to tell me at length of the hazards, losses, and machinations that you have endured for my sake. The which I cannot forget, having them engraved in my soul, where, until its separation from my body, I will not leave to recognize and be pained by them always.” in Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 254.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 243.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 249.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 249.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 249.

⁵⁰ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 251.

⁵¹ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 260.

⁵² Jean de Simier arrived in England in January 1579 to woo the Queen in the Duke of Anjou’s name. He quickly became an accomplished courtier, with whom the Queen did not talk about politics, or even about the terms of a possible agreement. Instead, he attended feasts and masques with Elizabeth, thus becoming an attractive favourite to her. See Loades, David Michael, *Elizabeth I*, 208.

court was presented with the name 'Ape'. Monsieur was no exception, and the nickname 'Frog' was used by Elizabeth in reference to him, possibly stemming from or resulting in a frog brooch in gold with vermeil and precious stones, included in the jewellery of her majesty.⁵³ However, the name presumably originated in Monsieur's little fingers, which were unlike Elizabeth's very long ones.⁵⁴ Elizabeth's use of the nickname reflects primarily the playful yet intimate nature of their correspondence, while showcasing her wit, as one must take into account the possibility that this name could have been given to Monsieur based on his childish, pock-marked face and short appearance. If so, this case would be pivotal in understanding the depth of their intimacy as, this possibly insulting descriptor stuck with the Duke.⁵⁵ By all means, the nickname presents those, who oppose the possibility of love between the parties a complicated situation.

A further factor shedding light on the complicated nature of the relationship between Elizabeth and Monsieur is the matter of truthfulness. Elizabeth continuously provides insurance for Monsieur of her uninterrupted sincerity and the fact that her writings are true and without gloss. Since her credibility was often attacked abroad, she habitually integrated reinforcing statements, such as "God is my witness that I never use subtleties or stratagems to do myself good at your expense."⁵⁶ In her letter of 1582 she explains in detail: "Remove (...) my dearest Monsieur any thought that I stand to blame for the passion of anger that gives you offense because your constancy should be doubted. (...) [Because I] have never said nor thought it, whatever opinion others may have had of it. (...) I purge myself of the calumnies imputed to me, in France and elsewhere, of having used subtleties or changefulness in what I promised you."⁵⁷ As time progresses, a tendency is detectable for the occurrence of these weary statements, as in her last letter: "(...) the queen mother (...) put on me the fault that I have never committed, having always looked to the king to perfect that which I can no longer do more than mention, except to entreat you to do me so much right as to exculpate me even by the sentence of your ministers, who themselves know my innocence. (...) I cannot bear such an injury – that they bite and weep at my affection with regard to you."⁵⁸

The letters exhibit a unique dynamic between Elizabeth and Monsieur that can be interpreted as having a mother-son relationship, particularly regarding their tone and style. Elizabeth often exhibits a protective and deeply caring attitude towards the Duke. Being an

⁵³ Doran, *The Courtships of Elizabeth I*, 163.

⁵⁴ Elizabeth I, *The Letters of Queen Elizabeth*, 96.

⁵⁵ Doran, *The Courtships of Elizabeth I*, 154.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 250.

⁵⁷ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 254.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 260.

already established queen in her mid-40s with considerable experience, Elizabeth showed an almost motherly helpfulness towards Anjou in which there is a general tendency, according to which there is always someone else to blame and Monsieur can be absolved. The following sentence in her letter of 1583 serves as a revealing illustration: “Whoever they are who have given you the advice on this have thought to make a spot on our friendship, or to break it altogether in order by the same means to achieve their designs and reclaim you to their life.”⁵⁹

Elizabeth often mentioned her age in a candid and usually playful manner. Her statements like “time runs on and I with it, which renders me unfit to please as I would wish”⁶⁰, reflects her acknowledgement regarding the pressure to produce an heir and the issue whether her hand would still be desirable in marriage. In her letters, she openly and somewhat outspokenly deals with her aging. By mentioning her own biggest weakness, her age, her vulnerability is clearly depicted, however, this, does not prompt the reader to feel sorry for her, rather it highlights her power embedded in her maturity. Elizabeth is conscious of her strengths and weaknesses and therefore exploits all her potential. Claiming that “(...) I am almost in agreement with the opinion of those who do not quit reminding you of my faults”⁶¹ she showcases her clear vision and sharp mind, almost victimizing herself, as in her following statement: “Monsieur, my dearest grant pardon to the poor old woman who honors you as much (I dare say) as any young wench.”⁶²

Although, Elizabeth held the highest rank in England and her ability in her doings exceeded that of every fellow Englishman, she – following the custom of the age – assumed a humble style of addressing Monsieur or other peers and favourites. For instance, in order to satisfy Monsieur’s self-esteem with the use of flattery: “I confess that there is no prince in the world to whom I would more willingly yield to be his than yourself”.⁶³ By degrading herself, she showcased her modesty, as in her statement in a letter of 1579: “forgive me the curiosity that holds me to your actions” or “I give you now a fair mirror to see there very clearly the foolishness of my understanding.”⁶⁴ However, this custom shows a decreasing trend with time and examples become increasingly rare. On the contrary, Elizabeth’s voice grows more assertive and critical, as in her letter of 1580: “I (...) believe that you doubt too much of a woman’s silence”⁶⁵, which contains a sharp reprimand. The climax of this tendency is the short

⁵⁹ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 259.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 238.

⁶¹ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 238.

⁶² Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 251.

⁶³ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 243.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 238.

⁶⁵ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 244.

statement: “There is my opinion”⁶⁶ included as her concluding sentence of the main body of her text, – very plainly stated and without any further explanation.

Elizabeth needed to be particularly cautious in her choice of words, as her political interests were intertwined with her relationship with Monsieur. In a patriarchal society, it was generally considered unconventional for a woman to instruct or advise men, regardless of her status. Furthermore, the situation in France was even more stringent; under Salic Law, the notion of a woman ascending to the throne was inconceivable, as succession was strictly determined through the male line according to the principle of primogeniture. Nonetheless, Elizabeth often gives indirect advice to Anjou in her texts, as such, she is assuring herself that Monsieur will act in the most favourable or appropriate manner, or sometimes asking God to give Monsieur a clear mind to realize the possible falsehoods. In her letter of 1581, she writes: “Set a distance, I pray you, such evil counsels from the favor of your ears and believe that, whatever the evil deserts that others will bear you, it is for a prince always to resemble himself.”⁶⁷ Again, “assuring herself” of Monsieur’s capability, in the 1582 letter she conveys another piece of advice to him: “I do not doubt that you keep always in memory, of what nature the vulgar are in all countries, and will place your trust according to the occasion that I present you with, desiring nothing more than the continuation of our contentments, and cursing (my charity being very cold in this regard) all who overturn our good designs.”⁶⁸ Here too, the shorter and more direct wording of the last letters is noticeable. In the same letter Elizabeth formulates simply the following when providing her opinion on a matter: “I will take the boldness of enlightening you (...)”.⁶⁹

Elizabeth’s correspondence addressed to Monsieur can be analysed from multiple perspectives. Her euphuistic style exemplifies her intellectual wit and extensive humanistic education, characterized by a rich variety of figures of speech that she tailors to various contexts. A notable technique she employs in advising the Duke, despite her established expertise in diplomacy, is her deliberate self-degradation; she positions herself subordinate to him in order to communicate her wisdom without risking offense. Furthermore, Elizabeth’s letters reveal a profound affection and almost maternal concern for the Duke, which may be attributed to the significant age difference between them. Ultimately, Elizabeth’s meticulously

⁶⁶ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 260.

⁶⁷ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 250.

⁶⁸ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 253.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 254.

crafted and stylistically sophisticated letters serve as a reflection of the constantly changing political landscape, and offers valuable insights into her responses to both domestic and foreign political developments, as well as personal matters.

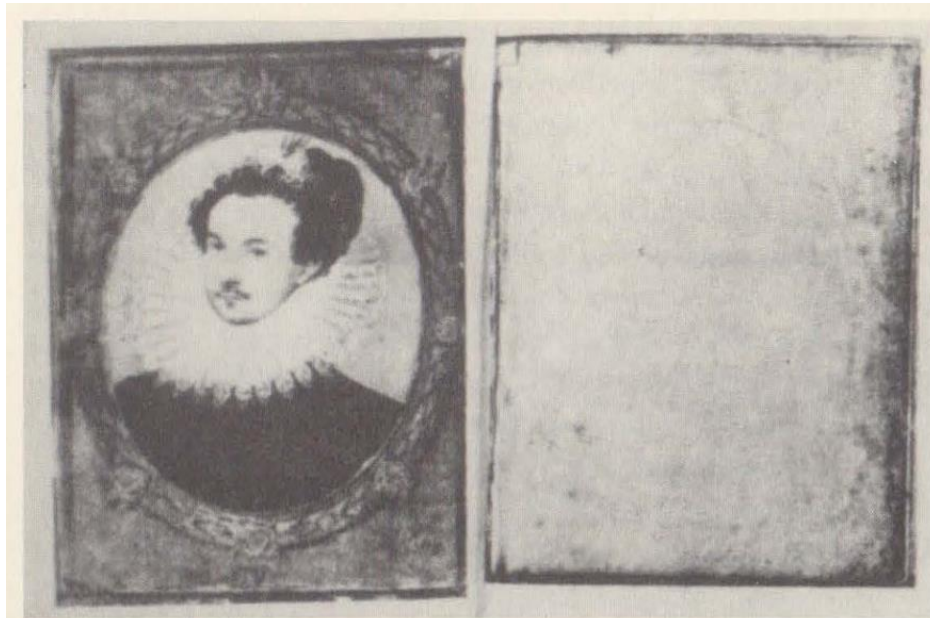


FIGURE 13 Miniature of the duke of Alençon from Queen Elizabeth's Prayer Book, BL, MS Facsimile 218, sig. 1v. Reproduced by permission of the British Library.

Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 312.

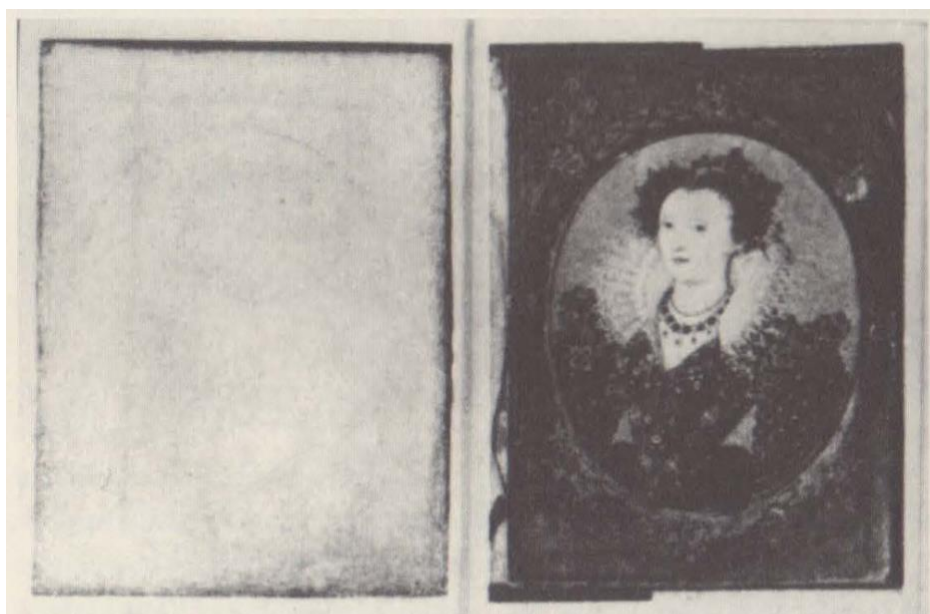


FIGURE 14 Miniature of Queen Elizabeth from her Prayer Book, BL, MS Facsimile 218, sig. 38r. Reproduced by permission of the British Library.

Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 320.

Significant Themes Addressed in the Correspondence

The letters of Elizabeth I to the Duke of Anjou address the three significant themes that reflect issues that potentially prevented the success of the marriage negotiations. These include the question of religion, the Duke's military operations in the Lowlands, and his pressing requests for financial support from the Queen. Although the style of the analysed letters reveals the intimate relationship that developed between Elizabeth and the Duke, these issues were not resolved, remaining as obstacles to the realisation of the match.

The Question of Religion

A greatly problematic topic and major point of conflict discussed at the court of Elizabeth and in her letters to the Duke of Anjou, was their difference in religion. Behind the rejection of many of her previous suitors, the issue of religion was often in the first place. Furthermore, this is the only topic in the letters about which Elizabeth states clearly and strictly that if Monsieur does not give in to her demands, the marriage negotiations will be stopped immediately.

In the 16th century, Europe was undergoing serious religious transformation due to the Protestant Reformation. In the case of monarchs, a Protestant-Catholic union could strengthen ties or eliminate conflicts between rival countries, but such marriages were commonly criticised and disapproved of, which could also lead to uprisings and increasing domestic tension. The question of the successor's faith could also be an epicentre of controversy, as it could lead to serious shifts in government.

In England, within the span of four generations, the population was compelled to switch religions three times, from Henry VIII's establishment of the Church of England to Mary I's persecution of Protestants, and finally to the Protestant rule of Elizabeth. Elizabeth sought to create a compromise through the Elizabethan Religious Settlement, a series of legislative measures aimed at reconciling these divergent faiths.⁷⁰ However, her efforts were continuously met with persistent challenges, primarily from Philip II of Spain, who sought to destabilize her Protestant regime.

⁷⁰ Loades, David Michael, *Elizabeth I* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2011), 133.

Consequently, it must be taken into account that England, having encountered difficulties that Mary I's Catholic husband posed, might not have been prepared to deal with another Catholic co-ruler, as Monsieur intended to be one. His rule would have reignited the religious tensions in England and alienated Elizabeth's Protestant supporters both countrywide and abroad. Furthermore, Elizabeth, in the pursuit of the Act of Supremacy had already been excommunicated by the pope in 1570.⁷¹ Thus, her marriage would have shaken the foundation of the Anglican Church.

By the year 1580, letters from Elizabeth to the Duke began to address the question of religion. Elizabeth strictly followed her court's program according to which no compromise could be made regarding the topic. However, one of Monsieur's demands as a prospective co-ruler was that his Catholic religion was allowed as an accepted and freely practised state religion. Based on this, Elizabeth made reference to the prohibition of the open exercise of the Catholic faith, and the indisputable nature of the decision: that – it was an either-or situation. If not adhered to, they part ways and remain – as she refers to themselves – faithful, yet only diplomatic friends: “I do not want this negotiation to trouble you thus any more, that we may remain faithful friends and assured in all our actions, unless it pleases you to make other resolution than the open exercise of religion.”⁷²

The problem of religion was accordingly more significant than the “friendship” with Monsieur and posited a significant obstacle to the marriage. This, she writes in the most respectful and courteous manner, notwithstanding the severity of the issue. By the same token, Elizabeth touches on the most problematic topics one after another and articulates her opinion and wish in all controversial matters. Although remaining strict and unmoveable in the matter, she refers to the wishes of her people as both a consolation and an excuse, to which she adds the statement, according to which religion is “a thing so hard for the English to bear”.⁷³

I promise you on my faith, which has never yet sustained a spot, that the public exercise of the Roman religion sticks so much in their hearts that I will never consent to your coming among such a company of malcontents without your being pleased to consider that the commissioners loosen the strict terms that Monsieur Simier offered us.⁷⁴

Not wanting the negotiations to run aground, Monsieur tried to make several concessions during 1580 and 1581, but his hands were tied by the French king and the Queen

⁷¹ Levin, Carole, *The Reign of Elizabeth I* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 20.

⁷² Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 244.

⁷³ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 243.

⁷⁴ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 243.

Mother, and there was no question of his conversion to the Protestant faith – a deed that probably would have been very pleasing to the English. In conclusion, there was no clear solution regarding the topic of religion as neither party intended to compromise on their terms. Thus, the letters of Elizabeth show that this was one of the most important if not the most essential problem that hindered and ultimately destroyed the possibility of the royal union.

The Netherlands

Another contributing factor leading to the failure of the princely marriage was the operation of the Duke of Anjou in the Netherlands, in line with Elizabeth's strongly expressed opposition to "marrying into war".⁷⁵ In the late 1570s, the Duke of Anjou became involved in the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648), a conflict between the Spanish Empire and the Dutch provinces seeking independence. In 1580, Monsieur was appointed as the sovereign of the Netherlands in order to unite the Protestant factions against the Spanish. The Duke attempted to lead military campaigns against the alien forces, but his efforts were met with mixed success. The Eighty Years' War emerged after the Protestant Reformation, as the majority of the Dutch population converted to Protestantism while Spain remained under the strict governance of Philip II. Additionally, heavy taxation also contributed to the protracted rebellion against Spanish control.

Initially, Elizabeth was sympathetic to the Dutch struggle for independence from Spanish rule as they both represented the Protestant faith and, England – having Spain as its most significant rival – intended to weaken the Spanish through financial aid and military assistance offered to its opponent.⁷⁶ Therefore, the Queen supported the Duke's involvement in the conflict, hoping that he would be capable of uniting the Protestant factions, but his acceptance of the sovereignty of the region reversed the situation. This act of the Duke acted in was contrary to the wishes and expectations of the Queen. In a letter from 1582, Elizabeth rebuked the Duke for accepting the supreme governorship of the Netherlands: "What more can I do, you having taken on such state as you have?"⁷⁷ The Queen expressed also her disappointment that Monsieur continued to expect her financial help while ignoring her advice

⁷⁵ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 250. n. 2. This expression is Elizabeth's own formulation, addressing the French ambassador and referring to Monsieur's acceptance of the sovereignty and the consequences of that act she would be faced with as "rib" of the Duke. Such disaster could be a Spanish attack on England, or, as she articulately writes, the possibility of ruining English trade with the Continent.

⁷⁶ Doran, Susan, *Elizabeth I and Foreign Policy, 1558-1603* (London: Routledge, 2000), 37.

⁷⁷ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 252.

and requests. Moreover, a little earlier, – as we can deduct from Elizabeth's letter – Anjou had promised the Queen to renounce any further interest in the situation in the Netherlands. Despite this, he did not keep his word, even assumed the position of a sovereign.

The Queen believed that such developments could lead to the fragmentation of the Protestant factions, and potentially to transforming some into Catholic ones, thereby alienating her supporters both in England and the Netherlands. This concern was fundamentally one of trust as the Queen feared the implications of a French Catholic prince governing a region characterized by rebellion, which could alter the balance of power in favor of Catholicism. Elizabeth's apprehension constituted the main topic of the final letter exchanged between them.

Significantly, already the first letter from Elizabeth to Monsieur discusses the deteriorating situation in the Netherlands, in which Monsieur claims that the reason for his leaving the Low Countries was that he was in need of seeing his loved one. This, nevertheless, might not have been true, as the conditions in the area were worsening in success and his army began to desert its master providing him with “abundant motivation”⁷⁸ to leave the Netherlands. Yet in 1579, Elizabeth still supported the prince's actions. However, in a much bitterer context, the issue of the war in the Low Countries became one of the most significant issues raised in their final correspondence.

In conclusion, Elizabeth's letters to Monsieur convey her concerns about the stability of the region, highlighting its strategic importance to England and her apprehension regarding the spread of Catholicism, as she feared that such acceptance would legitimize Spanish control and undermine the Protestant cause. The tone of the Queen's letters on this subject is increasingly serious and at the same time disappointed. This problem continued even after Elisabeth had already decided against the marriage with Monsieur, in which the situation in the Netherlands also played a major role.

Financial issues

The third instrumental issue mentioned in the letters was the matter of financial resources. As time progressed, the Duke pressed the Queen with increasing urgency for financial aid, furthermore, from early on he expressed a strong motivation in making his place in the marriage powerful and based on a valuable annuity. Francis Henry Egerton's manuscript writing about these years provides an insight into this matter: The people shalbe more taxed than heretofore,

⁷⁸ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 232. n. 2.

which they will murmur at, the rather because it is by the means of a stranger.⁷⁹ Later, in order to maintain the possibility of marriage, he sought compromises and softened some of his initial requests, but the issue of money – mainly in connection with the situation in the Netherlands – burdened the relationship between the two courts.

It is a fair question to ask why England's Queen should be the main provider to a yet foreign Duke whose Catholic faith, could with reason be feared to connote trouble in England. In addition, the Duke of Anjou's military interventions were far from England, and could have easily harmed English interests. At this point, it was highly questionable whether a diplomatic compromise could be made at all, and if so, whether it was worth the trouble. The main issue was therefore, why the Queen should give aid to the Duke with whom no official match has yet been made, and whose primary financial support should have come from the King of France and the Queen Mother. Henry III, however, displayed no intention to support his brother's endeavours in the Netherlands. Therefore, the Duke could only secure the essential resources to fund an army and restore his credibility with William of Orange and the provinces engaged in the ongoing conflict against Spain by marrying Elizabeth.⁸⁰

In the midst of 1581, Elizabeth's opinion fluctuated on the issue of marriage. On November 22 the negotiation seemed to have been settled as the Queen reportedly notified among others, Francis Walsingham, her principal secretary, that the marriage would take place after all as she had exchanged rings with the Duke. This development, however, was overridden by the disaffection caused by Monsieur's extreme requests pressing for money. The tension caused by the disagreement regarding finances persisted well into middle of December 1581, when Elizabeth "promised Monsieur a loan of £60,000, virtually a bribe to get him to leave England."⁸¹ Nevertheless, the conflict remained potentially unresolved, and on February 1 the Duke of Anjou left England's shores one last time also marking the very last personal encounter between him and Elizabeth I. Their affectionate history was, however, not concluded at this point. Further devoted letters were dispatched from their places of residence, and Monsieur did not relinquish to press her for funds. Eventually, hearing about his disastrous campaigns which peaked at his attempt to acquire Antwerp in 1582, Elizabeth ceased to deliver her payments of loan ad infinitum.

⁷⁹ Egerton, *The Egerton Papers*, 80.

⁸⁰ Doran, *The Courtships of Elizabeth I*, 154.

⁸¹ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 251–252, n.1.

Elizabeth's stance in her letters to Monsieur on the question of money may be considered also as a defence mechanism or an alibi not to commit herself to any aid. In accordance, Elizabeth repeatedly claims that she will follow her counsellors' wise decisions on financial matters because the latter are the most qualified and reliable in this question. Therefore, she states, that she is not the person responsible for decisions, and she would not interfere into the business of her courtiers who – according to her – are more capable of handling such financial matters. As she writes: "If you bring up the subject of money, I am so poor an orator for my profit and like so little to play the housewife that I give charge of this to such as are wiser than I."⁸² At the same time, Elizabeth secures Monsieur about her dowry and promises that she would not detract from it for the sake of the country.⁸³

In spite of the tensions aroused by the issue of subsidy and aid, the letters do not lack utterances conveying affection and assurance of the continuance of love, which, all the same, take on a new, somewhat bittersweet quality with the time passing. Elizabeth's lines are expressive, and her style is characterised by lucidity and intensity. The emotionally charged, but honest letters do not require the reader to be prepared for ambiguity, at this point, the text reflects a deep understanding and friendship between them, for which reason the continuance of the pressing matter of finances caused much delusion for the Queen:

Then he [the French ambassador] tired me with language that seemed very strange to me: that you desired to know what will be the aid you will give for the preservation of the Netherlands, saying to me that you are assured by the king that he will aid you the same as I do. My God, Monsieur, how unfortunate you are to believe that this is the way to preserve your friends, by always debilitating them!⁸⁴

Elizabeth's voice reflects dissatisfaction concerning the actions of the French king and Monsieur's decision to opt for her aid. Her annoyance is clear, and her tone completely changes in her last letter of 1583 to Monsieur. The diplomatic milieu is fully discharged, and she expresses doubt about and even questions the French king's judgement. Elizabeth characterises him as feeble, and she argues that he is not able to defend his own brother without the aid from neighbouring kingdoms. She believes that the king wishes her to provide funds instead of him, and offers only a pledge that he will in the foreseeable future do the same. Elizabeth surmises

⁸² Elizabeth I. *Collected Works*, 255.

⁸³ Elizabeth I. *Collected Works*, 256.

⁸⁴ Elizabeth I. *Collected Works*, 259.

a trap behind this diplomatic proposal and expresses her suspicion about the king wanting her ruin, “while he is not lacking in better means by way of less inconvenience”⁸⁵.

Elizabeth’s letter of condolence of 1584 to Catherine de Medici, Queen Mother of France and mother to the Duke of Anjou following his death marks the definite end of the Monsieur-era in the Queen’s life. The Duke of Anjou died at the age of twenty-nine, and Elizabeth, who by then had ended her courtship with the Duke, offered her condolences to the slightly older Catholic mother of the deceased. The letter serves as a moderately cynical reflection of her views on the issue of aid so often mentioned in her letters to the Duke. Her argumentation unfolds in reasoning against accusations from the French court, which implied that the King of France and the Mother Queen would have sent aid to the Duke had he lived longer, even if it was known by them that his military efforts in the Netherlands were failing.

Darkened by bitter sentiments about Monsieur’s deeds, Elizabeth’s letters foreshadow the imminent consequence of issues of money on their relationship. Looking at the correspondence, this theme stands out as the third major issue obstructing or at least hindering the success of the princely match. Although the financial conflict of interest and the question of the situation in the Netherlands could have been resolved, or at least overcome, the religious differences already predicted the destiny of the relationship between the Duke and Elizabeth.

⁸⁵ *Elizabeth I. Collected Works*, 259.

Conclusion

The relationship and the negotiations between Elizabeth and the Duke of Anjou was signified by an interplay of personal sentiment and political strategy, although the term “protracted dalliance”⁸⁶ might be just as good a wording as the former ones. As this analysis demonstrated, letters, as a critical primary source were pivotal for the elucidation of the multifaceted factors that contributed to Elizabeth's reluctance to enter into matrimony with the Duke of Anjou.

The analysis of Queen Elizabeth's letters to the Duke between 1579 and 1583 sheds light on their relationship, and illuminate both the depth of Elizabeth's affection and the unique dynamics operating between them. As highlighted in the letters, the challenges posed by religious divisions, the Duke's military endeavours in the Netherlands, and his persistent requests for financial support from the Queen stand out as pivotal matters that led to the breakdown of the marriage negotiations.

The subtle and somewhat personal language used in Elizabeth's letters indicates that there is a deeper, personal reason for her hesitation to formalize a marriage and to keep the title of the “Virgin Queen”. Nonetheless, the relationship with the Duke of Anjou was with great value to Queen Elizabeth. This is demonstrated by the following poem attributed to her and commonly known by the title of *On Monsieur's Departure*, which has endured in various versions and was composed following her final encounter with Monsieur.⁸⁷

I grieve and dare not show my discontent;
I love, and yet am forced to seem to hate;
I do, yet dare not say I ever meant;
I seem stark mute, but inwardly do prate.
I am, and not; I freeze and yet am burned,
Since from myself another self I turned.

My care is like my shadow in the sun –
Follows me flying, flies when I pursue it,
Stands, and lies by me, doth what I have done;
His too familiar care doth make me rue it.
No means I find to rid him from my breast,
Till by the end of things it be suppressed.

⁸⁶ Doran, *The Courtships of Elizabeth I*, 130.

⁸⁷ Although there are no known manuscript versions of this poem from Elizabeth's lifetime, it is very likely that it was written by her in connection with Monsieur's departure in 1582, in Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 302, n. 1.

Some gentler passion slide into my mind,
For I am soft, and made of melting snow;
Or be more cruel, Love, and so be kind.
Let me or float or sink, be high or low;
Or let me live with some more sweet content,
Or die, and so forget what love ere meant.
*Elizabetha Regina.*⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 302–303.

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