

**The French Connection:
How the French Wars of Religion Dismantled Two Dynasties and Sowed the Seeds of
Representative Government in England**

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It has been the consensus among Tudor historians that France's relationship to England during Elizabeth I's reign can only be understood as that of a neutralized threat due to its own debilitating French Wars of Religion. Indeed in R. B. Wernham's *The Making of Elizabethan Foreign Policy, 1558-1603*, France is mentioned only a handful of times while the rest of the book is devoted to the contentious relationship between England and Spain. When France is referenced, it is to describe its change of status from an English enemy to "more or less of a friend."¹ This reconfiguration was not borne of any change in the French outlook, but rather, of its focus on domestic hostilities. Moreover, the widespread interpretation of Robert Bucholz, Newton Key, and others that the French Wars of Religion "eliminated the French threat to England for a generation"² largely ignores the fact that the English and the French monarchs faced a number of similar dilemmas over the course of the second half of the sixteenth century and that, as a result, they adopted policies in response to them that at times were comparable, yet at others contrasted sharply. Taken together, this suggests that Elizabeth I may have studied and learned from the actions of the French monarchs in handling her own national problems.

Denying that the ally-enemy dichotomy was the only way that two kingdoms might have influenced one another gives rise to the possibility that France's Wars of Religion may have exerted a profound impact on England during the second half of the sixteenth century. As in France, Elizabeth faced tumultuous and longstanding religious tensions that had persisted for decades. The unprecedented exposure that Elizabeth I had to another kingdom in the midst of religious wars and a succession crisis provided invaluable insight and gave her an advantage in determining the manner in which she would choose to handle her own crises and, in particular, the question of succession.

For France, the late sixteenth century was a period of instability and anarchy. Brought on by the threat of a monarchical shift from traditional Catholicism to Protestantism, the French Wars of Religion culminated in one of the deadliest religious conflicts in history, claiming over 3 million lives.³ News of such chaos had reached the international sphere and served as a warning to other monarchical regimes. Acknowledging this tacitly, Elizabeth sought stability and peace in her realm. Thus it is hardly surprising that she privileged her experienced, Protestant male cousin, James I, over the other prospective successors, and indeed over any natural heir she might have produced with her principal Catholic suitor, the French Duke of Alençon. Under

¹ R. B. Wernham, *The Making of Elizabeth Foreign Policy, 1558-1603* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 1.

² Robert Bucholz and Newton Key, *Early Modern England, 1485-1714: A Narrative History* (Oxford, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 130.

³ Robert J. Knecht, *The French Religious Wars, 1562-98* (Oxford, U.K.: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 51.

other circumstances, James's aforementioned qualifications, namely his Protestantism and his male identity, would not have given him any advantage over the other possible successors with the same amount of Tudor blood. As Protestantism and male identity became more prized than pure royal blood in an English king, however, Elizabeth endeavored to avoid provoking the populace to revolt. Thus she allowed her royal prerogative to choose her own husband and successor to be restricted by the English people's repudiation of a potential Catholic ruler.

In this way, the civil and religious strife on the continent revealed to the monarchs of both France and England that the foundational underpinnings of their respective governments were changing even as the monarchs of both realms increasingly found themselves at the mercy of their subjects. Longstanding dynastic families such as the Valois were purged from rule at the hands of the French majority, which sent clear signals across Europe and, particularly, across the Channel. Thus with the French Wars of Religion serving as the catalyst, the Virgin Queen chose a Protestant heir, extinguished the Tudor dynasty, and tacitly acknowledged that the English people, as represented by Parliament, had at least a limited right to determine who might rule them – a concession which opened the door for debate about representative government in England.

In this paper, the definition of the English people is limited to elites since there is little or no documental evidence to support a claim of an increased political consciousness among the uneducated commoners during Elizabeth's reign. However, as Leticia Alvarez Recio has argued convincingly, what can be said for the lower classes is that the English identity was becoming conflated with Protestantism.⁴ Meanwhile, the noble, gentry and merchant classes were becoming more educated at this time; therefore, the number of English people who were knowledgeable about the law, government, and current events was expanding. This new knowledge led to fresh debate about the government, especially the concept of a contract between the people and the sovereign.

Another point in the argument that must be proved is the claim that this expanded group of educated English subjects not only was fully aware of, but also had a keen interest in, the events taking place in France after 1562 during the French Wars of Religion. One piece of such evidence is to be found in Anne Dowriche's *French Historie*, published in 1589, in which Dowriche makes use of Catherine de' Medici as a warning to Elizabeth not to act as a tyrant as her French counterpart had. Given that she was the daughter of member of Parliament, Anne's knowledge about current French affairs demonstrates that the French succession and religious crises were by no means unheard of within England. While her *Historie* is by no means an expansive one, it is concerned with recent "times for crueltie."⁵ In fact, Dowriche's *Historie* is comprised of only three historical events in which Huguenots were treated brutally by the French government: "the affair of the Rue St. Jacques, the martyrdom of Annas Burgeus, and the St.

⁴ Leticia Alvarez Recio, *Fighting the Antichrist: A Cultural History of Anti-Catholicism in Tudor England* (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2011), 12.

⁵ Anne Dowriche, *French Historie*, in *The Early Modern Englishwoman: A Facsimile Library of Essential Works: The Poets, I*, ed. Betsy S. Travitsky and Patrick Cullen (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), 1-38 at 18.

Bartholomew's Day Massacre."⁶ Such a selection reveals something of a growing anti-Catholic sentiment in England, but even more important is the fact that Dowriche was using current events in France to comment on the political situation within her own country. As Mihoko Suzuki has observed, "The proximity in the representation of Elizabeth and Catherine [Queen Mother of France] points also to a political proximity of which Dowriche would be critical: Elizabeth's government sought to preserve an alliance with the Catholic monarchy of France, engaging in lengthy negotiations over the proposed match with Alençon, which began in 1572, the year of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre and the general persecution of Protestants, and continued until 1579."⁷ Disguising such criticism with a discussion of French events, Dowriche subtly was able to attribute the blame for the heinous treatment of Huguenots to both the French and English monarchs. Although Elizabeth I "openly displayed her outrage [after the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre] . . . [she] simultaneously reiterated her goodwill so as not to jeopardize Anglo-French amity."⁸ Such a "nuanced reaction" from Queen Elizabeth stirred doubt amongst those committed English Protestants who expected the queen to defend "their Huguenot brethren across the channel."⁹

Galvanized by such a lackluster response, Dowriche reminded the queen of her "oath of Princelie vow" that she gave to her people, even though she did not refer to Elizabeth outright.¹⁰ In putting forth this statement as if it were a settled fact, Dowriche revealed the extent to which the concept of a "social contract" forged between the monarch and the people had taken root in the educated English class by 1589. Another important political development to be found within Dowriche's *Historie* was her belief that a monarch could "perjure" himself or herself and could commit "treason" against his or her own people.¹¹ The fact that Dowriche raised the possibility that a monarch might commit a crime demonstrates that the conception of a monarch who was above the law became less palatable when the monarch was deemed guilty of abusive treatment of his or her own citizens (as was the case in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre)..

During the early years of her reign, long before Dowriche's *French Historie* had been written, Elizabeth's lack of a natural heir and husband had been a source of much contention, in part because political instability was so often associated with an unestablished succession. In 1563, only five years after the queen had come to the throne and just one year after the Wars of Religion had begun in France, MP John Hales published *A Declaration of the Succession of the Crowne Imperiall of Inglande*. In it, "Hales fervently argued that the law clearly delineated Mary

⁶ Patrick Cullen, *The Early Modern Englishwoman: A Facsimile Library of Essential Works: The Poets, I* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), xi.

⁷ Mihoko Suzuki, "Warning Elizabeth with Catherine de' Medici's Example: Anne Dowriche's *French Historie* and the Politics of Counsel," in *The Rule of Women in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anne J Cruz and Mihoko Suzuki (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 183.

⁸ Nate Probasco, "Queen Elizabeth's Reaction to the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre," in *The Foreign Relations of Elizabeth I*, ed. Charles Beem (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 78.

⁹ Probasco, "Queen Elizabeth's Reaction to the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre," 77.

¹⁰ Dowriche, *French Historie*, 18.

¹¹ Dowriche, *French Historie*, 35.

Stuart's exclusion and that Catherine Grey and her heirs were, legally, the only rightful claimants. The law, not a politically inferior female monarch, had determined the successor."¹² That is, if Elizabeth continued to disregard her duty to produce a legitimate heir or choose a successor other than the Catholic Queen of Scots, then "a united Commons would present Elizabeth with its acceptance and determination of the legal successor," since the queen herself did not understand the importance of an established line of succession for the political stability for England. Although Hales was imprisoned as punishment for writing the pamphlet, such fervent criticism and calls for the election of the heir to the throne "perhaps by way of legislation" of Parliament did not bode well for maintaining Elizabeth's sovereign prerogatives.¹³ Although there is no way to quantify such a sentiment, it seemed that the English were fixated upon order and royal legitimacy to an uncanny degree.¹⁴ This obsession could have become even more potent with the civil war ensuing across the channel in France, especially when one considers the fact that the English Protestants "suspected those [Catholics] who did not [convert] as being disloyal to the crown."¹⁵ The anxiety must have only intensified with the knowledge that such violence was occurring in a country with five natural male heirs, while Elizabeth had none and appeared to have no intention of remedying that situation.

By 1572, it seemed that the last and best hope for the still-unmarried Elizabeth I's eventual marriage lay with the French Duke of Alençon, a brother to the King of France. Clearly such a match to a foreign Catholic nobleman posed a number of problems of its own. Indeed, Lord Burghley commented to the Admiral of France, "The marriage of the Queen is of more moment to the weal of this realm, and of Christendom for the benefit of religion, than he fears their sins will suffer them to receive, but trusts that God who has so mightily prospered their estate will bring his marvellous work to some further perfection."¹⁶ Here Burghley asserts that the well-being of the realm requires the Queen's marriage to one of her own religion, which might seem strange in light of the fact that the Duke of Alençon was a Catholic, but Lord Burghley was making the case that if the Duke were to choose to convert to Protestantism, then the possibility of "further perfection," namely, a union between France and England, might follow. In response, the French Queen Mother, Catherine de' Medici, expressed that ". . . the principal impediment in her opinion consisted in the difference in their ages, and the case of religion; the latter she hoped might be so accorded to the satisfaction of both parties."¹⁷ Although

¹² Victoria de la Torre, "'We Few of an Infinite Multitude': John Hales, Parliament and the Gendered Politics of the Early Elizabethan Succession," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 33 (2001): 557-582 at 574.

¹³ Victoria de la Torre, "'We Few of an Infinite Multitude': John Hales, Parliament and the Gendered Politics of the Early Elizabethan Succession," 579.

¹⁴ Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England, 1485-1714: A Narrative History*, 160.

¹⁵ Alvarez Recio, *Fighting the Antichrist: A Cultural History of Anti-Catholicism in Tudor England*, 71.

¹⁶ Lord Burghley, "Lord Burghley to the Admiral of France, 22 August 1572," *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/foreign/vol10/pp163-173> (accessed 29 November 2017).

¹⁷ Francis Walsingham, "Walsingham to Sir Thomas Smith, 5 August 1572," *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/foreign/vol10/pp163-173> (accessed 29 November 2017).

such an ambiguous reply could be construed as willingness on the part of the Duke to convert to Protestantism, it is unlikely that the religious impediment would be solved to the satisfaction of the English because, in the reply, the Queen Mother does not specify which of the pair would convert if the marriage had taken place. This response was made to Elizabeth's previous rejection of Alençon's suit in which she cited both "the difficulty of religion" and the "difference of age" as the major deterrents to marriage.¹⁸ Interestingly, though, the rejection does not seem to diminish the strength of the marriage negotiation, as only weeks later Lord Burghley assured that "if Her Majesty had not as good hope of more conformity in the Duke than was found in the Duke of Anjou, she would in nowise yield to have any more time therein spent."¹⁹ Religion then is the fulcrum on which the marriage balances, more so than age or any other impediment. Though Catherine de' Medici may have expected Elizabeth to convert to Catholicism, the English position was clear: the Duke had to conform himself to the Protestant religion as a prerequisite before being considered as a prospective husband to their Queen. The significance of such a requirement was revealed to Elizabeth, her councilors, and the English people when only days after these correspondences had been exchanged and these assurances made, the French Catholic threat to Protestants, both at home and abroad, was grotesquely brought to light.

Elizabeth's pause of the marriage negotiations with France following the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in August 1572 demonstrates Elizabeth's uncanny ability not only to placate the English people, but also to do so while maintaining diplomatic relations with France. Without such a pause in the ongoing negotiations for her hand in marriage, the English people, who were appalled at the way in which the Catholic King of France had murdered the Huguenots, might have doubted Elizabeth's motives. Was she more inclined to believe French royal propaganda in which Gaspard De Coligny the Huguenot Admiral of France was convicted "of high treason against the King's authority, and of being the principal deviser of the late conspiracy against his person,"²⁰ or the reports of the "great numbers of foreigners [Huguenots forced] to fly into England"²¹ after the massacre that presented quite a different scenario? Under such circumstances, it would have been unwise for Elizabeth to consider marrying a French Catholic when there was so much uncertainty surrounding French sentiments and intentions toward those of the Protestant faith. In a public demonstration of her outrage, Elizabeth I recalled her personal secretary, Sir Francis Walsingham, from Paris, where he had been acting as the ambassador. Walsingham's withdrawal not only afforded Elizabeth an opportunity to obtain "a very good account of what he had seen" firsthand, but also to indicate to both the French monarchs and her people that she did not believe the French royal accounts claiming that the

¹⁸ Elizabeth I, "The Queen to Walsingham, 27 July 1572," *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/foreign/vol10/pp163-173> (accessed 29 November 2017).

¹⁹ Lord Burghley, "The Answer to be Made to the French Ambassador, August 1572." *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/foreign/vol10/pp163-173> (accessed 29 November 2017).

²⁰ Parliament of Paris, "Decree of the Parliament of Paris, 29 October 1572." *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/foreign/vol10/pp186-200> (accessed 31 November 2017).

²¹ M. Haultain, "M. Haultain and others to Lord Burghley, 27 September 1572," *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/foreign/vol10/pp186-200> (accessed 31 November 2017).

massacre had been incited by the Huguenots.²² By doing so, Elizabeth I reaffirmed her devotion to the Protestants while making no overt moves to intervene militarily in France. Though Elizabeth's diplomatic punishment of the French may pale in comparison to "these treasons and horrible massacres which have been perpetrated in Paris," her response indicates that she and her ministers had misgivings about the French monarchy's commitment to peace with Protestant England.²³ "It is now thought that their cruelty will rather increase than assuage . . . None is so much threatened as poor England."²⁴ Although there was certainly no evidence to support the idea that English Protestants would be targeted by the French Catholics, the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre was a powerful reminder of the Catholic threat in a country that already identified deeply with the "discourse of [Protestant] victimhood or martyrdom."²⁵ Moreover, it also underscored the unlikelihood that the Duke of Alençon would convert to Protestantism even as a means to wear the Crown of England.

Even worse, the events that followed the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre were marked by increased oppression of the Huguenot population as they were denied the right to serve in the capacity of "officers, magistrates, and administrators of justice and finance . . . on account of the distrust with which they are viewed by . . . Catholic subjects . . . [unless they] conform themselves to the Roman religion."²⁶ Such an action certainly recalled to mind the various injustices that Protestants suffered under the rule of Mary I, when the very definition of what it meant to be "English" excluded Protestantism. The persecuted English Protestants no doubt rejoiced when Elizabeth ascended to the throne, and yet the threat of another Catholic marriage with a foreign prince must have engendered serious misgivings on the part of those who expected Elizabeth to be a defender of Protestants. By the same token, Elizabeth knew that the people's "opposition to . . . [Mary's] marriage went unheeded": a mistake that caused Mary problems for the rest of her reign and blighted her legacy.²⁷

The proposed match with the French Duke of Alençon posed a greater challenge to Elizabeth than Mary's marriage to Philip because the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre provided tangible evidence of a recent and still ongoing "conspiracy against those of the true religion" in France.²⁸ Presumably, then, it would be seen as a greater dereliction of duty for Elizabeth to marry François than it had been for Mary to have married Philip because the French royalty had already proved what they would do to those of the Protestant faith. Moreover, the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre had been memorialized in English culture with Christopher

²² Francis Walsingham, "Walsingham to Lord Burghley, 3 September 1572," *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/foreign/vol10/pp186-200> (accessed 29 November 2017).

²³ Junius De Jonge. "Junius De Jonge to Killigrew, 25 September 1572," *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/foreign/vol10/pp186-200> (accessed 31 November 2017).

²⁴ Francis Walsingham, "Walsingham to Lord Burghley, 30 October 1572."

²⁵ Alvarez Recio, *Fighting the Antichrist: A Cultural History of Anti-Catholicism in Tudor England*, 45.

²⁶ Charles IX, "Edict of Charles IX, 22 September 1572," *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/foreign/vol10/pp186-200> (accessed 28 November 2017).

²⁷ Alvarez Recio, *Fighting the Antichrist: A Cultural History of Anti-Catholicism in Tudor England*, 40.

²⁸ De Jonge, "Junius De Jonge to Killigrew, 25 September 1572."

Marlowe's play *The Massacre at Paris* (1593), which "enjoyed one of the greatest public successes of the last decades of Elizabeth's reign, with a total of eleven performances in the span of two years (1593 and 1594)."²⁹ More than two decades after the infamous event had taken place, the subject matter still drew large crowds, signaling that the English people had long memories when it came to the heinous treatment of Protestants. As one English contemporary noted in 1572, the English could hardly overlook "those enemies of God, whose design is to destroy, one after another, all those who have not on their forehead the mark of the whore of Babylon."³⁰ By framing the French threat as spiritual, national, and existential, the possibility of an Anglo-French marriage was portrayed as one that could only be seriously considered by an English monarch who cared little about the spiritual or physical well-being of his or her people.

Nevertheless, these warnings were only half-heeded by Elizabeth, who chose to resume marriage negotiations with François late in 1572. These negotiations were considered seriously by Elizabeth until 1579; indeed, the "evidence suggests that the queen was in love - if not, perhaps, with Alençon, then with the idea of marriage."³¹ Such a statement only adds to the mystery surrounding Elizabeth I's decision not to marry. Whereas in 1579 Elizabeth had penned "On Monsieur's Departure," in which she lamented the departure from England of the Duke of Alençon who can by "no means . . . [be] . . . rid from my breast," by the early 1580s she had resolved firmly never to marry.³² Beyond the death of the Duke of Alençon in 1585, this transition has been attributed, not insignificantly, to her growing acknowledgement that "she could not be simultaneously *under* a husband and *over* England . . . [without] licensing anarchy,"³³ as well as to the need to "privilege 'virtue' (defined, for [English] queens, as confessional conviction) in relation to blood – and to situate virginity as the antithesis, not of maternity but of tyranny,"³⁴ so as to "nullify Mary's [Queen of Scots] claim to political authority without simultaneously invalidating . . . her own."³⁵ However, it must also be noted that in "On Monsieur's Departure" she had written, "I love and yet am forced to seem to hate," as if the choice not to marry the Duke had been out of her hands.³⁶ This, of course, might be explained if the whole of Elizabeth's courtship with the Duke had been disingenuous from the start, merely a means of "convincing the Catholic powers that war might be unnecessary."³⁷

²⁹ Alvarez Recio, *Fighting the Antichrist: A Cultural History of Anti-Catholicism in Tudor England*, 135.

³⁰ De Jonge, "Junius De Jonge to Killigrew, 25 September 1572."

³¹ Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England, 1485-1714: A Narrative History*, 136.

³² Elizabeth I, "On Monsieur's Departure," *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44221/on-monsieurs-departure> (accessed 31 November 2017).

³³ William H Swatos, "Ave Virginia, Regina Terrae: The Power of Culture and the Culture of Power," in *Equal at Creation: Sexism, Society, and Christian Thought*, ed. Joseph Martosans and Pierre Hégy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 96-113 at 104.

³⁴ Anne McLaren, "Gender, Religion, and Early Modern Nationalism: Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots, and the Genesis of English Anti-Catholicism," *The American Historical Review* 107 (2002): 739-767 at 766.

³⁵ McLaren, "Gender, Religion, and Early Modern Nationalism," 745.

³⁶ Elizabeth I, "On Monsieur's Departure."

³⁷ Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England, 1485-1714: A Narrative History*, 136.

And yet, Elizabeth seemed to have real affection for the Duke. It must then not go unnoticed that 1579 also saw the release of a pamphlet by John Stubbs entitled, *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf Whereinto England is like to be Swallowed by Another French Marriage*, in which he used “the inherent hierarchy of the ‘head’ metaphor central to the Ephesian passages within the marriage vow as a means to challenge Elizabeth’s attachment to her sovereign prerogatives.”³⁸ This controversial pamphlet, over which Stubbs would be deprived of his right hand as punishment, revealed Elizabeth’s situation in a stark light. Marriage to the Duke might have solved Elizabeth’s long-standing succession problem, but it also would have deprived her of her right to rule independently. After all, Ephesians 5:22 required that “wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands.” Stubbs asked pointedly, “If the husband, which is the head, be drawn aside by the wife, over whom nevertheless he hath authority and rule, how much more easily shall the wife be perverted by her husband, to whom she is subject by the law of God and oweth both her awe and obedience?”³⁹ This question exposed the dangers of a woman who married a heretical man: the wife would be subjected to the demands of her husband (as was only fitting), including to his religious proclivities. With this application of the traditional marital expectations on the royal pair, Stubbs effectively demonstrated “how vain that promise is of theirs who say that Monsieur shall be instructed in our religion and drawn from his by going with our Queen to hers.”⁴⁰ The rules of marriage were the same for royalty and the commoner. As the head, the husband would determine the religious identity of the pair.

By illuminating the gender biases that surrounded marriage, Stubbs lucidly presented the fact that, “in marrying, the queen’s inferior position as wife generated serious dangers in the form of a wrong husband, since he was the senior partner in the relationship.”⁴¹ This conception of marriage clarifies why there was such vehement opposition to the marriage of Elizabeth and Francois, for although Elizabeth was the Queen, as a wife, she would be subservient to the will of her husband. A husband who was connected to the atrocities committed by Catholics in France, if not by virtue of his actions then by virtue of his connection to the royal family and his Roman Catholic faith, was most certainly a dangerous choice. It was with this work and the possible marriage’s “unpopular[ity] not only with her council but with her people as well”⁴² that another influence of the French Wars of Religion made itself known in England: the English people, especially its vocal population of zealous Protestants, would not be ruled by a monarch who did not share their religion.

³⁸ Drew Daniel, “Striking the French Match: Jean Bodin, Queen Elizabeth, and the Occultation of Sovereign Marriage,” in *Political Theology and Early Modernity*, ed. Graham Hammill and Julia Reinhard Lupton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012): 240-264 at 252.

³⁹ John Stubbs, *Gaping Gulf*, in *John Stubb’s Gaping Gulf with Letters and Other Relevant Documents*, ed. Lloyd E. Berry (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia): 1-93 at 11.

⁴⁰ Stubbs, *Gaping Gulf*, 11.

⁴¹ De la Torre, “‘We Few of an Infinite Multitude’: John Hales, Parliament and the Gendered Politics of the Early Elizabethan Succession,” 564.

⁴² Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England, 1485-1714: A Narrative History*, 136

This sentiment was proved all the more true when Henry of Navarre won the French throne by converting to Catholicism in 1594 – the first instance in which a French king yielded to popular opinion on the matter of religion. This certainly was not the impetus for the English to consider restricting the succession to include only Protestants, for Mary Queen of Scots had been executed in 1587 to avoid such a fate. However, it did confirm for the first time that a monarch might allow his or her actions to be directly directed by the will of the people.

In deciding to convert, Henry IV of France likely never claimed that “Paris is worth a Mass,” but his exact words are immaterial since “Henry’s decision to abjure was made for political reasons – to end the civil wars and to restore the authority of the monarchy.”⁴³ Although Henry was a Huguenot, he understood that now his Calvinist comrades posed a threat to the stability of his reign, and so he retreated to the time-tested French strategy to reunite “all French men and women under one religion, the Catholic faith.”⁴⁴ He did soften this apparent betrayal by issuing the Edict of Nantes in 1589, of which “neither Protestants nor Catholics were totally supportive.”⁴⁵ The Edict of Nantes established a means by which the king could rule what amounted to two different sets of citizens while maintaining “its ultimate goal . . . [of] religious concord.”⁴⁶ Even though Elizabeth I lamented Henry’s conversion in a letter of July 1593, Henry IV’s conversion was an important concession made by a savvy ruler who sought to walk a fine line and retain his power.⁴⁷ It also reveals that, although an absolute monarch of that era might choose to ignore his or her subjects’ views, he or she would do so at the peril of alienating them and meeting the end of his immediate predecessor.

Henry III, of course, had been murdered by “a Jacopin . . . desirous to execute his devilish intent . . . who, in making him a monastical reverence, with a knife which he held in his sleeve struck the King under the short ribs to have pierced his bowels.”⁴⁸ After the “attempt on [Henri III’s] royal person,”⁴⁹ many of his subjects celebrated with “demonstrations of rejoicing and exultations of divine will.”⁵⁰ The assassination of Henry III revealed the predicament of any monarch who did not conform to the norms of the society over which he or she reigned. Henry III was a Catholic monarch, yet he chose as successor the Huguenot or heretic King of Navarre after he “murdered the duke and Cardinal of Guise” and “arrested . . . a number of nobles sympathetic to the League” in order to “win back the initiative and authority” in the Catholic

⁴³ Mack P. Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 156.

⁴⁴ Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629*, 156.

⁴⁵ Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629*, 166.

⁴⁶ Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629*, 166.

⁴⁷ Rayne Allinson, *A Monarchy of Letters: Royal Correspondence and English Diplomacy in the Reign of Elizabeth I* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 151. Her brief began with the words, “What griefs, oh! What regrets, oh! . . .”

⁴⁸ William Lyly, “William Lyly to the Queen, 1 August 1589,” *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/foreign/vol23/pp393-411> (accessed 31 November 2017).

⁴⁹ William Lyly, “William Lyly to the Queen, 1 August 1589.”

⁵⁰ Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629*, 135.

League.⁵¹ After his power grab failed, Henry III had joined forces with Henry of Navarre. For this betrayal of the Catholic cause, Jean Boucher wrote *The Just Deposition of Henry III* which “justified tyrannicide, even regicide, on behalf of individuals.”⁵²

A justification for individual subjects, not simply magistrates as had been asserted by Calvinists,⁵³ violently to resist their monarch would reverberate throughout England where Elizabeth was still in the process of making the decision about who would succeed her with no male issue. The two peculiar factors impacting Henry IV’s ascension, namely, his nationality and his conversion to the majority religion, would also be mirrored in Elizabeth’s resolution of the succession crisis. The fact that Henry IV’s coronation went relatively smoothly following his conversion to Catholicism demonstrates, ironically, that religion played a more fundamental role in defining the people of France and England and their monarch in the late sixteenth century than did origin. Henry III’s unfortunate end and deathbed choice of successor not only shines light upon Elizabeth’s decision not to name a successor during her lifetime; it also explains why her heir presumptive, the future James I, was Protestant, albeit not English. This choice “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.”⁵⁴ Although James Stuart had royal blood, so too did other claimants to the throne. After the reigns of one Catholic and one Protestant Queen, however, Elizabeth’s councilors and Parliament much preferred a Protestant ruler with a “male identity.”⁵⁵

While the French Wars of Religion boosted the English economy through the resulting influx of Huguenot refugees and the monetary support of Henry IV, and also strengthened anti-Catholic sentiments throughout England while influencing English plays and poems that memorialized recent events across the English Channel, may it be claimed with any certainty that the French Wars of Religion spawned a reevaluation of the English hereditary monarchy or sowed the seeds of representative government in England? Traditionally, the argument has been viewed from one of two sides. On the one hand, there is Quentin Skinner, who argued that power in England originated from the top-down. On the other hand, Peter Lake, working from Patrick Collinson’s “The Monarchical Republic of Queen Elizabeth I,” finds that “. . . the vision of the polity central to the ‘republic’, was only dragged into the light of day, forced into formal articulation, by moments of real crisis, points at which the clique at the center of the regime

⁵¹ Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629*, 132.

⁵² Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629*, 134.

⁵³ John Witte, *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 113.

⁵⁴ Anne McLaren, “The Quest for a King: Gender, Marriage and Succession in Elizabethan England,” *Journal of British Studies* 41 (2002): 259-290 at 265.

⁵⁵ McLaren, “The Quest for a King: Gender, Marriage and Succession in Elizabethan England,” 283.

found themselves staring down the barrel of a popish succession.”⁵⁶ It could be seen then that by preventing Elizabeth from marrying the Duke, Elizabeth’s council had gained considerable ground by preventing a Catholic succession (an issue that heretofore had been seen as a matter of royal prerogative). However, the extent to which the council’s opposition actually prevented the match can be disputed, for reciprocally and just as validly, one might argue that Elizabeth had already chosen to remain a Virgin Queen by 1579.

However, it should be further noted that Elizabeth’s choice to remain unmarried not only left the succession question unsettled, but also introduced new problems that accompanied Elizabeth’s portrayal of herself as the spouse of England. Theodore Beza, an exiled French Calvinist living in Geneva, had conceived that, “like marital covenants, political covenants were solemn agreements sworn by rulers and the people before God . . . [which] required full and free consent . . . [and] could be annulled when those conditions for formation were violated.”⁵⁷ Therefore, rather than simplifying her relationship with her people, by refusing to marry a Catholic and constructing her relationship to the people of England as a “marriage”, Elizabeth’s subjected her reign to the understanding that like any marriage, in the Calvinist tradition, the relationship between ruler and subject might be dissolved if either party failed to uphold the “conditions for formation.” In this way, the choice to be a monarch freed from the bonds of marriage produced a more equitable relationship between ruler and ruled that could be broken by either party. In short, if marrying a Catholic king had portended a catastrophe, then Elizabeth’s singledom was not free from its share of pitfalls either.

It must also be recognized that new understandings of the English monarchy did not originate solely outside of England. An illustration of just how far this critique of government went could be found in Richard Hooker, a preeminent Anglican theologian and priest who influenced contemporary views about the roles of the monarch and Parliament through his *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Politie* (1593). In this work, he defended the idea that God “left men free to make choice of their own governor.”⁵⁸ Thus even a man of God who no doubt had encountered and comprehended divine right rhetoric denied that a monarch ruled by divine right; rather, he argued that a king rules through the consent of the people. To Hooker, the best government “emerged as the king-in-parliament. While the functions of the government were divided, it was there in parliament, that a unified supremacy of power seemed to lie.”⁵⁹ Although Queen Elizabeth was unlikely to agree that the best form of government emerged from a union between the monarch and Parliament, given her disdain for convening Parliament, the French Wars of Religion revealed that monarchs who neglected the will of their people, represented in England by Parliament, were not likely to remain monarchs for long. It was the tacit and, later,

⁵⁶ Peter Lake, “‘The Monarchical Republic of Queen Elizabeth I’ (and the Fall of Archbishop Grindal) Revisited,” in *The Monarchical Republic of Early Modern England: Essays in Response to Patrick Collinson*, ed. John F. McDiarmid (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007): 129-149 at 132.

⁵⁷ Witte, *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism*, 138.

⁵⁸ Howell A. Lloyd, “England: Hooker,” in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450-1700*, ed. J.H. Burns and Mark Goldie (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 280.

⁵⁹ Lloyd, “England: Hooker,” 281.

explicit acknowledgement of this development that ultimately transformed the English government into a true constitutional monarchy in 1689.

The French Wars of Religion influenced Elizabethan England in many subtle and overt ways because the wars' outcome suggested that subjects of a realm could, through insurrection, bring about the end of a royal dynasty. For most queens, the first priority after gaining the throne would be to secure it through marriage and the production an heir, yet the expectation that the English heir would be Protestant at least in part convinced Elizabeth instead to reject her Catholic suitor. Although Elizabeth could have ignored the wishes of her people and married a Catholic, doing so would have been a disservice to herself because it would have sown distrust among the English people who remembered the reign of Mary I and her Catholic husband. And yet, as an absolutist Tudor monarch, Elizabeth refused to admit that public pressure did have an impact on her decision to marry. That is why her persona, Gloriana, was the perfect way to mask her conformity with an imperious infallibility - a denial of the fact that the people's opinion did matter in government decision-making.

In the same way, the anti-Catholic sentiment of the majority of her subjects also influenced the final question of her reign: the succession. The French Wars of Religion demonstrated that the people would stomach many things in a monarch but not the rejection of the state religion. And since England was Protestant, it was the duty of the monarch to appoint a Protestant heir. However, Elizabeth would not concede to the people's will explicitly. As Gloriana lay in her deathbed, she did not disappoint. Refusing to name a successor, she maintained her royal dignity until the end. However, James's claim to the throne had been strengthened with the Treaty of Berwick of 1586 and with Parliament's acceptance of his claim in 1603. Notwithstanding Elizabeth's reticence to name a successor, the resolution of the succession question underscored the fact that the people's will would not be ignored in the future. Although Elizabeth I had made no overt effort to create a more representative government in her lifetime and the French Wars of Religion did not directly lead to a representative government in either France or England, the fact remains that the fundamental underpinnings of government were changing within England and France. The question was no longer simply what is the will of the monarch, but rather, how might the will of the monarch and the desires of the people be reconciled to create political stability. Whether the English monarchy was prepared for the change or not, the newborn conception of majority rule took its first toddling steps in Elizabeth's reign with the people's peaceful demands for a king who shared their religious values. In the next several decades, this infant would gain a voice that would demand even more concessions from the king and would grow teeth and claws to force the issue where agreement was not forthcoming.

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