Elizabeth on Paper

Elizabeth I Viewed through Her Writings and Public Addresses

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INTRODUCTION

When examining people's lives in history it is an established fact that the historian is limited to interpreting past events and guessing at long forgotten motives. One can say that nearly any personal or historical record is made with the idea that it will be read at some point in the future; therefore we find the events and views we are meant to find, the views the author wants us to see. Even when presented with a private record, the historian is still limited to what the subject chose to record. Any private record is subject to scrutiny due to its one-sided view, as well as the motives for the record itself. Only the most private diary, which was recorded for the sole use of its subject, can shed the most light on an individual and the events of their life. Elizabeth I left no such diary.

Over the centuries, there have been many biographies written about Queen Elizabeth I. Regardless of their individual merit, each routinely covers the major events of Elizabeth's life through a timeline that includes her father, Henry VIII, the unfortunate end of her mother, Anne Boleyn, and a chronological succession of the trials she faced throughout her early years and during her reign as queen. Elizabeth is then disseminated to future generations through these events and her reactions to them. As Elizabeth left no personal diaries or journals, nothing addressing her private thoughts or impressions, these very public events of her life are our only means to view her experiences and contributions to history. The only direct or personal records we are left with are the correspondence, writings and speeches from her life, which cannot be described as casual or particularly insightful on a personal level. However, I believe that what would normally be viewed as an impediment to discovering a truly personal view of Elizabeth could be the key to seeing her in a more realistic environment – the environment in which she lived and functioned as queen.

To begin, it is necessary to understand the records that will be examined, at the same time giving us a foundation on which to view Elizabeth's environment. One very important factor to take into account is the type of records themselves. We need to consider the extant or existing records in relation to the actual writings that would have been produced during Elizabeth's lifetime, which could have potentially amounted to thousands of records. Therefore, we must understand that we are only able to examine a relatively small cross section of Elizabeth's literary works. Despite this fact, the records which have survived the centuries are extremely important as they are our only direct link to Elizabeth, as well as the period in general. Writing was the primary means of communicating over any distance, great or small, for any purpose, personal or business. This was true of any literate person of the time. In the case of Elizabeth, writing was an even more integral part of her life. Due to this fact, I believe we can find a great deal of her in her writing, regardless of the intended function or recipient of the communication. I think this especially true because we are never her intended audience.

A fairly wide variety of Elizabeth's writings have survived the centuries, including: prayers, poems, letters, essays, and speeches. Her prayers and poems were written for a variety of purposes throughout her life, surprisingly for both personal and public reasons. Letters were written or dictated to conduct personal and political business at home and abroad. Speeches were also prepared for specific purposes and target audiences. They were generally meant for public consumption, and were crafted to that end. The same is true for a very large portion of Elizabeth's correspondence. Overall, there are a considerable number of examples of her writings from throughout her lifetime; however, I will not categorize these many writings chronologically, even though her earliest writings date back to her childhood. What is more interesting than the quantity and variety of her writing is its evolution through her life and what she had hoped to accomplish with it.

I suggest that by examining Elizabeth's writings it is possible to find a more human view of the individual and what she thought of issues such as God, responsibility, justice, and mortality. Although these selections did find their way into the public domain at some point, they were not all intended for general circulation, especially the personal prayers written by Elizabeth herself.[1] Except for certain letters and essays, nearly all of these selections would have been written by Elizabeth, and most likely in relative privacy. As such, these selections seem the most appropriate place to begin, with the writing that Elizabeth did just for herself. Surprisingly, these selections represent the smallest number of writings and were written well into her reign, not at the beginning of her literate life when we would assume she would have had more privacy. The selections in this group are exclusively prayers. Although Elizabeth wrote many prayers throughout her lifetime, there were a small number which she wrote for her own "private meditation". (May, 2004) These prayers seem to have been written in connection with specific events. The earliest recorded prayer of this type was written in August, 1574 entitled "On Progress at Bristol". Although the prayer does not specifically mention the Spanish or the Treaty of Bristol, signed in August 1574, it does give us an indication of what Elizabeth thought about the nature of the journey and other trials she faced during her life.

Elizabeth's prayers were always extremely pious, and the Bristol prayer is no different. She gave her thanks to God throughout the entire prayer, but more importantly, in lines 5 through 12, she specifically addresses her current circumstances, as well as her past troubles.

> "But specially for thy mighty protection and defence over me in preserving me in this long and dangerous journey, as also from the beginning of my life unto this present hour from all such perils as I should most justly have fallen into for mine offenses hadst not Thou, O Lord God, of thy great goodness and mercy preserved and kept me." Lines 5-12 (May, 2004: 246)

By the time that this prayer was written, Elizabeth would have had to deal with Northern Rebellion of 1569-70, as well as the Ridolfi Plot against her in 1571, and although some time had passed, these events would appear to have still weighed on her thoughts. It would also seem that she was very conscious of the uncertainty of the future. In lines 19 through 21, Elizabeth prays for future divine protection from those that would act against her.

Elizabeth wrote a somewhat similar prayer in August 1588, after the failed invasion of the Spanish armada. The prayer is labeled as "Queen Elizabeth's Prayer of Thanksgiving for the overthrow of the Spanish navy, sent to invade England, Anno 1588." (May, 2004: 249) In this prayer, Elizabeth attributed much of the success over the Spanish to divine intervention (lines 2-6).

> Stretch forth, O Lord most mighty, thy right hand over me and defend me against mine enemies that they never prevail against me. Lines 19-21 (May, 2004: 246)
>
> …when it seemed most fit time to thy worthy providence to bestow the workmanship of this world's globe, with thy rare judgment thou didst divide into four singular parts the form of all this mould (world), which aftertime hath termed elements (earth, air, fire, and water)… (May, 2004: 249)

[1] May, Stephen W. 2004. *Queen Elizabeth I: Selected Works*. New York, NY: Washington Square Press.

While in this prayer, as in the Bristol prayer, Elizabeth wrote of her trials with her enemies, she also wrote of the issue of being a woman. In lines 11-20, she again gives credit to God for protecting her, as well as compensating for the fact that she was female.

> I most humbly with bowed heart and bended knees do render my humbliest (most humble) acknowledgements and lowliest thanks. And not the least for that the weakest sex neither my people need find lack by my weakness nor foreigners triumph at my ruin.
>
> Such hath been thy unwonted grace in my days as, though Satan hath never 'made holiday in practicing' (taken time off from plotting) for my life and state, yet thy mighty hand hath overspread both with the shade of thy wings. (May, 2004: 249)

What makes this particular passage interesting is the fact that Elizabeth describes herself as "the weakest sex". Of course she was known to have done this on many occasions when it served her purposes to do so, such as when dealing with men who would naturally see her as inferior; however, to see this kind of statement in a private prayer, which was meant only for her, would make one wonder if she truly thought of herself as inferior to men. If Elizabeth did feel herself to be truly inferior, the very idea would create a sharp contrast to her historical image as the self-assured queen, who seemed to have a gift for manipulation and a confident determination. How would we view her actions if we learned that at a very basic level she felt she was inferior, regardless of her royal heritage?

Elizabeth's other private prayers were in much the same vain as the two presented. They were written for specific events, such as the 1591 expedition to France; the success of the expedition against Spain, June 1596; and for the success of the 1597 navel expedition against Spain. Of these, the prayer written in June 1596 was distributed to her generals before the expedition by Sir Robert Cecil, who supposedly came by the prayer accidentally, and with the understanding that the generals were to keep it "in strict confidence". (May, 2004: 255) Conversely, a copy of the prayer written in 1597 somehow found its way into the hands of Archbishop John Whitgift, who added it to a volume of prayers written for the same expedition. When Elizabeth was informed of its publication, she commanded that it be removed from any volumes it had been printed in. (May, 2004: 258-59) These prayers represent a very small portion of Elizabeth's writings that were meant for just her, which means that the majority of her writing was on some level "public", which would definitely give a more broad meaning to the idea of "personal" or "private".

From here, the next step would be to look at what might be considered "semi-private" writing. This category would include personal letters, such as those written to relatives or acquaintances, and various poems. This group of writing would encompass her entire literate life.

PERSONAL LETTERS

Elizabeth has been credited by many sources with having been quite learned at a fairly young age. She was literate in several languages and spent many hours translating texts from these languages into English and then back again as part of her education. She was known for her beautiful italic penmanship and was also known to routinely give her handwritten translations as gifts; however, it is the accompanying correspondence from Elizabeth that give the first personal glimpses of her thoughts and impressions.

Elizabeth's earliest surviving letter was written to Queen Katherine Parr, December 31, 1544. (May, 2004) Although Elizabeth was only eleven years old at the time, the letter gives an indication of her thoughts on education and her understanding of the translated text she presented to the queen.

> "…but knowing also that pusillanimity and idleness are most repugnant unto a reasonable creature, and that (as the philosopher sayeth) even as an instrument of iron or of other metal waxeth soon rusty unless it be continually occupied, even so shall the wit of a man or woman wax dull and unapt to do or understand anything perfitly unless it be always occupied upon some manner of study…" (May, 2004: 94)

Elizabeth later described the translated text, originally written by the Queen of Navarre, and the idea that the subject of the text "can do nothing that good is or prevaileth for her salvation unless it be through the grace of God, whose mother, daughter, sister, and wife by the scriptures she proveth herself to be." (May, 2004: 95) Although she was only eleven, if we take note of the text which Elizabeth chose to translate for Parr and the ideas she chose to highlight from that text in her accompanying letter, we might consider if Elizabeth had already formed an impression of the position and responsibility of queen and a connection to God.

Over the course of her adolescence, Elizabeth wrote many letters, of which a significant portion was sent to her family. When writing to Katherine Parr, and on the rare occasion when she would correspond directly with her father, her letters were always those of the dutiful child, ever aware of her circumstances as an illegitimate daughter of the crown. It was not until after Henry's death that Elizabeth's letters changed from being pleasant communications to a means of damage control. With Henry's death, Elizabeth moved into the constantly swirling sea of political maneuvering, not necessarily as a main player, but as a potential pawn or threat.

After Henry's death, Elizabeth's correspondence had turned to letters of self-preservation. By mid-1548, Elizabeth corresponded regularly with Sir Edward Seymour, duke of Somerset and Lord Protector while her brother Edward VI reigned. The letters between Elizabeth and the Lord Protector dealt with her possible involvement with his brother, Thomas Seymour, the Lord Admiral. Elizabeth was called upon to explain her relationship with the Lord Admiral and what she knew of his plans to possibly wed her. Also at this point in time, her governess, Kat Ashley, and her treasurer, Thomas Parry, had been taken to the Tower of London for interrogation regarding their possible involvement. Through her correspondence with the Lord Protector, Elizabeth gave an account of her actions, as well as the part played by Kat Ashley and others. In these letters we can see that Elizabeth had adapted her writing to cajole the Lord Admiral while actively defending herself, as well as the members of her household.

> My Lord,
>
> Your great gentleness and goodwill toward me as well in this thing as in other things I do understand, for the which, even as I ought, so I do give you most humble thanks. And whereas your Lordship willeth and counseleth me, as a earnest friend, to declare what I know in this matter, and also to write what I have declared to Master Tyrwhitt, I shall most willingly do it. (May, 2004: 102)

A recurring issue in the letters to the Lord Protector was Elizabeth's concerns regarding rumors being spread about her and her conduct that could damage her image among the people. In the same letter written to the Lord Protector on January 28, 1549, Elizabeth remarked "Master Tyrwhitt and others have told me that there goeth rumors abroad which be greatly both against mine honor and honesty, which above all other things I esteem…" (May, 2004: 104) In a similar letter to the Lord Protector dated February 21, 1549, Elizabeth wrote:

> But if it mought (might) so seem good unto your Lordship and the rest of the Council to send forth a proclamation into the countries that they refrain their tongues, declaring how the tales be but lies…" (May, 2004: 108)

Elizabeth was already conscious of the importance of the view the people had of her and she was concerned that scandal would damage her image. In many letters which Elizabeth sent to the Lord Protector, and later to her sister Mary, she was always concerned how she was viewed by others. She seemed to feel it was important to be viewed honorably by her peers, the people, and even those outside England.

> And seeing they make so evil reports already, shall be but a increasing of their evil tongues, howbeit you did write that if I would bring forth any that had reported it, you and the Council would see it redressed, which thing I can easily do it, I would be loath to do it for because it is mine own cause, and again that should be but a breeding of the evil name of me that I am glad to punish them and so get the evil will of the people, which thing I would be loath to have.

After this period of upheaval in her life, Elizabeth's letters returned to her ordinary correspondence, such as those to her brother, Edward VI, inquiring after his health. In one such letter to Edward, written September 20, 1547, Elizabeth noted the precarious nature of life in the sixteenth century when she stated that, "Nothing is so uncertain or less enduring than the life of man… And as Homer says, earth nurtures nothing more fragile than man." (Marcus, Mueller, & Rose, 2000: 14)[2]

Elizabeth often wrote to Edward during his short reign. The subjects of her letters were always cordial, usually regarding his health or to ask forgiveness for not coming to see him. She also sent him occasional gifts such a portrait of herself on May 15, 1551 in which she added:

> For the face, I grant I might well blush to offer, but the mind I shall never be ashamed to present. For though from the grace of the picture the colors may fade by time, may give by weather, may be spotted by chance, yet the other nor time with her swift wings shall overtake, nor the misty clouds with their lourings may darken, nor chance with her slippery foot may overthrow. (May, 2004: 115)

It appears that even though Elizabeth may not have been terribly confident about her appearance, she was definitely proud of her keen intellect. And despite her difficulties in 1548-49, Elizabeth seemed to spend the remainder of Edward's reign in relative peace.

It was not until her sister Mary came to the throne that Elizabeth found it necessary to defend herself again from allegations of conspiracy and treason. Elizabeth's letter to Queen Mary on March 17, 1554, illustrates what dire circumstances she found herself in.[3]

> I most humbly beseech your Majesty to verify it in me and to remember your last promise and my last demand that I be not condemned without answer and due proof, which it seems that now I am, for that without cause proved I am by your Council from you commanded to go unto the Tower, a place more wonted for a false traitor than a true subject which, though I know I deserve it not, yet in the face of all this realm appears that it is proved, which I pray God I may die the shamefullest death that ever any died afore I may mean any such thing,
>
> I have heard in my time of many cast away for want of coming to the presence of their prince, and in late days I heard my Lord of Somerset say that if his brother had been suffered (allowed) to speak with him he had never suffered (death), but the persuasions were made to him so great that he was brought in belief that he could not live safely if the Admiral lived, and that made him give his consent to his death. Though these persons are not to be compared to your Majesty, yet I pray God as evil persuasions persuade not one sister again the other." (May, 2004: 127)

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[2] Marcus, Leah S., Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose. (eds.). 2000. *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

[3] I have included a substantial portion of this letter because I believe that it is necessary to show the full scope of Elizabeth's attitude toward her situation.

Throughout this letter, Elizabeth urged her sister to give her a chance to see her so she could defend herself in person. It is not hard to see how Elizabeth would feel that her life was in jeopardy. This would not have been the first time an innocent person was condemned without just cause or a life was lost because they were denied access to the one person who could have saved them. People were tried, convicted and executed with remarkable swiftness and rather questionable justice during this period. And although Elizabeth was the Queen's half-sister, that fact would not guarantee her security. What easier way to deal with a threat to the throne, real or invented, than to remove that threat. Mary's closest advisor, Simon Renard, echoed the same concerns toward Elizabeth that had been raised against Thomas Seymour, she was too dangerous to let live.[4] Within the vast collection of Elizabeth's letters, I would venture to say that her letters to Mary during her reign were her most animated, her most vehement, and thereby might be considered the most personal. Her letters after this period, when she was queen, seemed to have gained a degree of reserve more in line with her position. I would image this came in part from finally dealing from a position of power, rather than her defensive and precarious position as next in line to the throne.

The only other writing which gives some indication of Elizabeth's attitudes in a somewhat personal manner would be her poems. Although one might assume that her poetry would be considered private writing, actually very few examples of truly private poems exist, which have already been addressed. Much of her poetry was what I would consider either semi-private, where it was assured that someone else would read it or completely public, meaning it was written with the express intent of being distributed to the masses. Like her private prayers, Elizabeth's most animated writing corresponded to specific events in her life, and quite often these were very personal events, rather than events that would affect the entire realm.

Elizabeth's more public poetry dates back to the period of her imprisonment under Mary's reign. The first two examples of her poems were both written during her time at Woodstock Manor, 1555. Because the poems were written in a manner that would guarantee that they would be read at some point, I would categorize them as "semi-private". Poem 1 was found written in charcoal at the manor, while Poem 2 was apparently etched with Elizabeth's diamond into a window at the manor.

Poem 1, Woodstock Manor, 1555

Thou caused'st the guilty to be loosed *Line 5*
From bands where innocents were enclosed,
And caused the guiltless to be reserved,
And freed those that death had well deserved.
But herein can be nothing wrought,
So God send to my foes as they have thought. *Line 10* (May, 2004: 2)

In Poem 1, Elizabeth clearly shows her resentment at being unjustly treated while others, who she felt deserved such treatment (lines 5-8), were allowed to go about freely. Poem 2 was also written the same year and it continues the same theme of being wrongfully accused.

Poem 2, Woodstock Manor, 1555

Much suspected by (about) me
Nothing proved can be.
Quod (quoth) Elizabeth the prisoner. (May, 2004: 4)

These two pieces were written well after the Thomas Seymour incident and a year after her letters to her sister, in which Elizabeth asked not to be tried unjustly. It is easy to see from these two entries that Elizabeth was

[4] Collinson, Patrick. 2004. "Elizabeth I (1533-1603), queen of England and Ireland." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Oxford University Press.

extremely angry with her situation, but surprisingly, she does not allude to any fear in her precarious position. Given the circumstances and the outcome of the Seymour incident, namely Seymour's execution, one would expect to see some hint at even the smallest concern for her life, instead of the complete indignation that we find.

After these two entries, Elizabeth's poetry appears to come from a period after her ascension to the throne. As with her personal letters, Elizabeth would have been writing from a new perspective, the decidedly more favorable and secure position as queen. However, with her improved position, her poetry seems to be filled with what we might consider to be the "unsatisfactory" side of being queen. Along with the power of her position came the pressures of ruling, and the ever present demands regarding marriage and succession, which her unmarried status continually fueled. The ambiguities of her relationships appear to have been at the heart of many of her poems.

The following poem is not dated, which makes it difficult to determine who Elizabeth was referring to; however, some have associated the piece with the parting from François, the Duke of Anjou. (May, 2004: 12)

Poem 6, "Sonetto"

I grieve and dare not show my discontent; [line 1]
I love and yet I 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 is turned. [line 6]

Some gentler passion slide into my mind, [line 13]
For I am soft and made of melting snow;
Or be more cruel, Love, and so be kind,
Let me or (either) float, or sink, be high or low;
Or let me live with some more sweet content,
Or die and so forget what love e'er meant. [line 18]

The entire first verse of this poem illustrates the contradictions that Elizabeth felt she must live with: to grieve, but be unable to show her sadness, to love someone and not be able to admit that love. I believe that this poem shows that Elizabeth felt that her outward life was completely contrary to her personal desires. The final three lines of the piece (lines 16-18) seem to truly illustrate how deeply these feelings affected Elizabeth. In these lines she was asking to be allowed some measure of certainty, whether good or bad. "Let me float or sink...let me live with...sweet content or die and so forget love..." One can see that she was asking to be allowed to live happily or remove all possibility of it so she would not regret its loss.

Obviously, because the piece is not dated we can only guess at the timeframe in which it was written, however, if it was written after the separation from Anjou, it would place the piece in the late 1570s. The idea that the piece was in response to the relationship with Anjou fits with the tone of the poem. The circumstances between Elizabeth and François involved so many outside factors that made a potential marriage unlikely, if not impossible, and to know that those considerations would have to take precedent over her own feelings would definitely explain the mood of the piece.

It was also not uncommon for Elizabeth to write poems in correspondence with other people, where the poem was the correspondence, such as the companion poems she exchanged with Sir Walter Ralegh. (May, 2004: 14-17)

Sir Walter Ralegh to the Queen - A Sonnet

Fortune hath taken thee away, my love.
My life's joy and my soul's heaven above;
Fortune hath taken thee away my princess,
My world's delight and my true fancy's mistress. [lines 1-4 of 24]

The Queen's answer

Ah silly pug, wert thou so sore afraid?
Mourn not, my Wat, nor be thou so dismayed;
It passeth fickle Fortune's power and skill
To force my heart to think thee any ill.

No Fortune base, thou sayest, shall alter thee;
And may so blind a wretch then conquer me?
No, no, my pug, though Fortune were not blind,
Assure thyself she could not rule my mind. [lines 1-8 of 24]

These poems were fairly typical love sonnets between the pair, complete with pet names and endearments which Elizabeth seemed to approach in a very carefree, almost dismissive manner. The sonnets by Ralegh did make their way into general circulation supposedly around 1587, fairly soon after they were written, during a time when Essex was outshining Ralegh in the queen's favor; however, Elizabeth's part of the sonnets did not make it into the public arena until 1604, after her death. (May, 2004: 17)

Along with pieces that were definitely written by Elizabeth, there are also some possible compositions which were attributed to Elizabeth, such as the following poem that gives another view of Elizabeth's relationships. (May, 2004)

Possible Poem 2 – No date[5]

When I was fair and young then favour graced me,
Of many was I sought their mistress for to be,
But I did scorn them all and answered them therefore,
Go, go, go, seek some otherwhere, importune me no more. [line 4]

How many weeping eyes I made to pine in woe,
How many sighing hearts, I have not skill to show;
But I the prouder grew, and still this spake therefore;
Go, go, go, seek some otherwhere, importune me no more. [line 8]

Then spake fair Venus' son, that brave, victorious boy,
Saying, 'You dainty dame, for that you be so coy,
I will so pull your plumes as you shall say no more:
Go, go, go, seek some otherwhere, importune me no more. [line 12]

[5] This piece could also possibly be attributed to Edward De Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, written from the female perspective, however, May feels that the evidence more strongly points to Elizabeth due to the language used.

As soon as he had said, such change grew in my breast
That neither night nor day I could take any rest;
Wherefore I did repent that I had said before:
Go, go, go, seek some otherwhere, importune me no more. [line 16]
Finis ELY

(May, 2004: 26)

If this piece was written by Elizabeth, she seemed to give a rather harsh and somewhat unfeeling view of herself in lines 1 through 8, suggesting that while she was young and beautiful she was sought after by many men, but she had grown too used to the attention and would dismiss suitors out of hand. In lines 9 through 12 it seems that a suitor finally pointed out her callous behavior to her, causing her to regret her words. If this piece was written by someone other than Elizabeth it would illustrate how other people may have viewed her romantic tendencies. Again, this piece has no date associated with it so it would be very difficult to determine the motivation behind it.

However, not all of Elizabeth's poems dealt with love or injustice. Many addressed various events, such as the Northern Rebellion (Poem 4) and the Spanish Armada (Poems 8 & 9) and often found their way into the public arena.

Poem 4

The doubt [fear] *of future foes exiles my present joy,*
And wit me warns to shun such snares as threatens mine annoy,
For falsehood now doth flow, and subjects' faith doth ebb,
Which should not be if reason ruled or wisdom weaved the web. [line 4}

But clouds of joys untried do cloak aspiring minds,
Which turns to rain of late repent by changed course of winds.
The top of hope supposed, the root of rue [regret] *shall be,*
And fruitless all their grafted [implanted] *guile as shortly you shall see.* [line 8]

Their dazzled eyes with pride, which great ambition blinds
Shall be unsealed by worthy wights [persons] *whose foresight falsehood finds.*
The daughter of debate, that discord aye doth sow
Shall reap no gain where former rule still peace hath taught to know. [line 12]

No foreign, banished wight [persons] *shall anchor in this port;*
Our realm brooks no seditious sects, let them elsewhere resort.
My rusty sword through rest shall first his edge employ
To poll their tops who seek such change or gape for [eager to obtain] *future joy.*
[line 16]

(May, 2004: 7-8)

Throughout the poem, Elizabeth wrote of ambitious plots against her quiet realm, which she indicated would ultimately fail in lines 8, 10, 13 and 14. The poem was supposedly circulated after a lady of the court, Lady Willoughby, copied it from the Queen's tablet.[6] (May, 2004: 8) I feel this would have been unlikely for a lady of the court to risk taking a private writing of the queen when Elizabeth was able to command that it not be circulated, even after publication. However, this explanation may have simply been an excuse for how the poem found its way into the public sphere, where it undoubtedly encouraged the people to find the Queen eager to defend her country. This method of disseminating Elizabeth's writings to the public would not be unheard of as there were at least two poems

[6] May specifically uses the word "tablet" in his comments regarding this poem.

that were written by the Queen around 1588, which eventually became popular songs sung as prayers to God for success against the Spanish, and were meant to inspire the English people in a time of great national concern. (May, 2004) This fact leads us to another category of Elizabeth's writing, her public writing. When Elizabeth became queen she moved from her semi-private environment to become the most public individual in the realm. The scope of her interactions increased dramatically, as did her writing. There was business of every kind to conduct and much of that business was conducted on paper.

ROYAL CORRESPONDENCE

The writing is this category was meant to serve as a record for every kind of official and personal business conducted by the Queen. Letters exist from Elizabeth to her relations and counselors, her parliaments and foreign heads of state, her friends and enemies.

Some business which Elizabeth conducted through these letters was of a rather mundane nature. One example is a letter she wrote to Edward Stanley, Earl of Derby, June 4, 1560. The letter contains advice to the earl regarding the status of his marriage to his third wife. Although the earl was a member of Elizabeth's Privy Council, as well as the privy councils of both Edward VI and Mary, the matter of a dysfunctional marriage would seem beneath the Queen's concern. However, the letter was drafted in William Cecil's hand and sent on behalf of the Queen.

> We greet you well. Hearing sundry wise of some unkindness or strangeness of late of your part towards your wife, whereof for both your parts we were sorry, and being informed that no matter can be understand (understood) by her friends and kinfolks of her desert, but upon some misliking conceived against her by your children, you should by them be occasioned to deal strangely with her and in other sort than you were accustomed or than is convenient, we, being very sorry to hear of this alteration (considering we know how well you esteemed her and we ourselves having always had very good estimation of her, both for her good parentage and for her own discreet behavior)… (Marcus, Mueller, & Rose, 2000: 111)

The purpose of the unusual letter seemed to be that Elizabeth had heard the earl was mistreating his new wife by slandering her or not supporting her when slandered by others, based on his children's dislike of their new stepmother. Elizabeth "required" the earl to refrain from his unwarranted behavior and treat his wife as he had before or he was to provide the queen and council with information which might support his attitude toward his wife. Regardless of his decision, Elizabeth demanded that he send her a letter in response.

This seemingly trivial letter was not typical of the majority of what has survived of Elizabeth's royal correspondence. It is hard to imagine just how many letters Elizabeth would have written or dictated throughout her reign. There would have been letters concerning all manner of domestic issues throughout the realm, letters dealing with problems outside England, a considerable number of letters would have been exchanged regarding potential marriage negotiations. From the very beginning of her reign, there were always crucial issues to be dealt with. In the early 1560s, Elizabeth's correspondence routinely involved her cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots, with Mary either being the subject of the correspondence or the intended recipient, such as in 1564, when Elizabeth corresponded with William Cecil, regarding possible marriage negotiations for Mary.

> In such a manner of labyrinth am I placed by the answer that I am to give to the queen of Scotland that I do not know in what way I will be able to satisfy her, since I will not have given her any answer for all this time, nor do I know what I now should say. Therefore let there be found something good that I will be able to put into Randol's[7] written instructions and show me your opinion in this matter.

[7] Thomas Randolph was one of Elizabeth's representatives who worked on the marriage negotiations for the queen of Scotland. (Marcus, Mueller, & Rose, 2000: 115)

The correspondence between Elizabeth and Mary became considerably more strained after the marriage of Mary and Elizabeth's cousin, Henry Stuart, the earl of Darnley in 1565, ended in the murder of Darnley, and the subsequent marriage of Mary to James Hepburn, who was later identified as one of the conspirators in Darnley's murder.

> And insomuch as my nature compels me to take his death to the extreme, he being so close in blood, so it is that I will boldly tell you what I think of it. I cannot dissemble that I am more sorrowful for you than for him. O madame, I would not do the office of faithful cousin or affectionate friend if I studied rather to please your ears than employed myself in preserving your honor. However I will not at all dissemble what most people are talking about: which is that you will look through your fingers [pretend to ignore] at the revenging of this deed, and that you do not take measures that touch those who have done as you wished, as if the thing had been entrusted in a way that the murderers felt assurance in doing it." (Marcus, Mueller, & Rose, 2000: 116)

In this particular letter, dated February 24th, 1567, just two weeks after Darnley's murder, Elizabeth professes to be Mary's friend concerned only with Mary's honor; however, in the section above, as well as in later sections of the letter, Elizabeth stated that people were talking about Mary and suggesting that she either was unwilling to find the culprits responsible for the murder or perhaps she was even somehow involved, such as when Elizabeth alluded to the closeness between Mary and James Hepburn later in the selection. In this letter, Elizabeth voiced her opinions, but in a very vague and roundabout way. This was not always the case. There were many instances in which she was very direct and demanding and I believe these letters are examples of her efforts to manipulate those around her.

During her reign, there would have been scores of letters written to Elizabeth's relations and counterparts throughout Europe. For example, during the latter half of the 1580s, when Elizabeth's problems with Mary, Queen of Scots were mounting, the letters between Elizabeth and King James VI of Scotland were some of the most important exchanges, and some of the better examples of Elizabeth's constant political maneuvering. The following are only a few examples of the many letters Elizabeth sent to James VI.

Elizabeth to King James VI of Scotland, January 1585:

> I mind not deal, my dear brother, as wise men commonly counsel, to try my trust with trifles first and thereby judge of like event (similar outcome), but have agreed to make my first assay (trial) of your many promises and desires that you might know the way to please me most. And therefore do require that a question may, upon allegiance, be demanded by yourself of the Master Gray, whether he knoweth not the price of my blood, which should be spilled by bloody hand of a murtherer, which some of your near-kin did grant. [lines 1-10]
>
> But I beseech you, let it not seem to come from me, to whom I made no semblance but ignorance. Let him suppose that you received it elsewhere. [lines 13-15]
>
> As this toucheth me nearest, so use it with best commodity (advantage) and let the answer be speeded after a three or four days after his return. It may please you ask it no sooner lest he suspect it come of me from whom, according to trust, let it be kept. [lines 18-22]
>
> Your most assured sister and cousin.
> God ever keep you from all dangerous attempts, and grant you many years to live and reign. [lines 23-25] (May, 2004: 155)

In this letter, Elizabeth was essentially telling James that if he wanted to prove his friendship and good intentions to her, he should lie to obtain information for her about the plot against her life. Shortly after this letter,

another letter was sent to James indicating that Elizabeth had received his response and was definitely not satisfied with the information she received, therefore she demanded that he try harder, admonishing "I hope I may stand you in better stead (maintain you in better circumstances) than that you will shew you uncareful (yourself not mindful) of such a treason." (May, 2004: 157)

The situation concerning Mary, Queen of Scots continued to be a paramount concern for Elizabeth until it reached its climax in the fall of 1586. There are several letters from this period of time, not only to James VI, but to individuals within Elizabeth's cohorts. The following is a letter written to Sir Amias Paulet from mid-August, 1586. Paulet had been an ambassador to France prior to being appointed as guardian of Mary, Queen of Scots and a member of the privy council. He was an integral part in the efforts to uncover the plot against Elizabeth.

> Amias, my most careful and faithful servant,
>
> God reward thee treblefold in the double for thy most troublesome charge well discharged. If you knew (my Amias), how kindly besides dutifully my grateful heart accepts your double labors and faithful actions, your wise orders and safe regards, performed in so dangerous and crafty a charge, it would ease your travail (hard work) and rejoice your heart. [lines 1-7]
>
> But let your wicked murtheress know how that with hearty sorrow her vile deserts compel these orders. And bid her from me ask God forgiveness for her treacherous dealings towards the saver of her life many years, to the intollerable peril of our own and yet, not content with so many forgivenesses, must fall again so horribly, far passing a woman's thought much less a princess's... [lines 16-23]
>
> Let repentance take place and let not the fiend possess her so as her better part be lost, which I pray with hands lifted up to Him that may both save and spill. [lines 25-28]

In this letter, Elizabeth expressed her heartfelt gratitude to Pauley for his efforts on her behalf in lines 1-7. We can also see how angry she was with Mary for her actions, which she described as low even for a woman; "much less a princess" in lines 16-23. Throughout the letter, Elizabeth seemed outraged when she referred to Mary, and even in the last few lines when she mentioned "repentance", one isn't sure exactly what she was praying for. Line 28 reads that Elizabeth was asking God to save Mary, but it is unclear what she meant by "and spill". Could it have meant spill Mary's blood, or perhaps "spill" whatever evil Elizabeth thought possessed Mary to cause her to act as she did?

Based on the letters that survive this period, I would say that the circumstances surrounding Mary and the plots against her own life represented the most stressful period of Elizabeth's reign. The many intrigues involved showed in many of Elizabeth's letters, such as the following letter written to William Cecil and Sir Francis Walsingham in October 1586.

> Sir Spirit mine and you, Master Moor,
>
> When I considered that the prisoner king may perchance delay utterly to answer and that I remember that you mean notwithstanding to proceed to judgment, methinks very convenient that some competent member went to his chamber and read some principal points of his charge. And if {s}he will not answer yet {s}he shall not say that {s}he denied not to answer those things that {s}he heard not. I pray God it be no slander in the world that the sentence be given without an answer. [lines 1-10]
>
> And so when a fool hath spoken, {s}he hath all done. [line 14]
>
> (May, 2004: 179)

The names in the salutation of the letter were Elizabeth's nicknames for Cecil, Lord Burghley and her secretary, Walsingham. In the letter, Elizabeth referred to the "prisoner king" which was done on purpose as a means for the letter to look like it referred to someone other than Mary, thereby removing Elizabeth from any involvement in the process. Her scribe later went through the letter and removed the letter "s" from the word "she", changing it to he to correspond with the "prisoner king". Regardless of the effort to conceal the subject of the letter, Elizabeth wrote of her great concern that Mary would be tried without addressing the charges against her, the repercussions of which Elizabeth feared would be felt around the world (line 9-10).

Although many of the letters written during this troubled time were fairly secretive and only divulged to a few people, the topic of debate was a matter of national and international importance. And although the correspondences were private, the outcome of the incident spread far beyond the confines of the page.

THE PUBLIC ARENA

In this final section, we look at the most public expressions of Elizabeth, her royal speeches, in which her words and her presence were the mediums to reach those around her. Many of Elizabeth's public addresses are considered records of what she said rather than actual speeches written in the hand of the Queen, although I would venture to guess that at least some speeches were written out prior to the public address. I would also offer that, regardless of the physical production of any given speech, the queen would prepare for her addresses on a scale far beyond that of any letter or general discussion. And I believe that this was the arena where she truly excelled.

Elizabeth was a skilled public speaker. She knew her audience, whether it was 20 members of Parliament, a military camp full of soldiers, streets lined with the common man, or a single individual, Elizabeth knew how to reach out to them. She understood what they needed to hear and how to manipulate them to her greatest advantage. This was a skill she had crafted from her adolescence and "in this lay much of the queen's understanding of public opinion, her great popularity, and the insight with which she manipulates men and events."[8]

Even before Elizabeth ascended the throne she was always conscious of what people thought of her. Her image among her people and those outside England was something she crafted and coveted, as previously illustrated in her letters to the Lord Protector, Edward Seymour, duke of Somerset. But more than just knowing the image the people had of her, Elizabeth also knew the people themselves. She understood their concerns and had shared, if not their actual struggles, a common English history, having lived during the reign of the previous three sovereigns. She was keenly aware of the issues facing England, and from the very beginning, she set out to secure the people's favor, such as during her speech on the way to her coronation in 1558 "And persuade yourselves that for the safety and quietness of you all, I will not spare, if need be, to spend my blood. God thank you all." (Rice, 1966: 63)

Throughout Elizabeth's collection of public speaking there were specific themes that were routinely included. The first of these was religion. In every form of communication, be it spoken or written, God is mentioned. In most cases, Elizabeth gave thanks to God at the beginning of nearly all of her speeches. On the rare occasions when she did not, it was mentioned before the end without exception. She gave thanks to God for her health, her position, her protection, her successes, her enemies' failures; nearly every aspect of her life was given to the grace of God.[9] (Rice, 1966: 34)

Another recurring theme was Elizabeth's professed love of her people and her willingness to do whatever she could secure their "safety and quietness". These ideals were of great importance for Elizabeth to portray and she mentioned them often, such as in one of her most famous speeches, called the Golden Speech of 1601.

[8] Rice, George P., Jr. 1966. The Public Speaking of Queen Elizabeth: Selections from Her Official Addresses. New York, NY: AMS Press, Inc. pg. 25.

[9] I do not provide examples of the religious aspects of Elizabeth's speeches because they are so numerous and they are not necessary to provide any additional understanding to the text already given.

> There is no jewel, be it of never so rich a prize, which I prefer before this jewel, I mean your love for I do more esteem it than any treasure or riches, for that we know how to prize, but love and thanks I count inestimable. And though God has raised me high, yet this I count the glory of my crown, that I have reigned with your loves.
>
> There will never queen sit in my seat with more zeal to my country or care to my subjects and that will sooner with willingness yield and venture her life for your good and safety than myself. And though you have had and may have many princes more mighty and wise sitting in this seat, yet you never had or shall have any that will be more careful and loving. (Rice, 1966: 106)

This speech was given very late in her reign, at a time when her popularity was waning, but this type of, for lack of a better word, propaganda, was present from the very beginning of her reign. From the time she was an adolescent, Elizabeth knew that the impression the people had of her would directly affect the success of a sovereign. She had witnessed Mary's unpopularity and she worked hard to avoid the same fate. However, not all of Elizabeth's speeches were designed merely to endear her to the people. On many occasions she would address pressing issues facing the nation or her reign. One issue that needed to be addressed from the moment she became queen was the issue of her potential marriage and the inevitable affect on the succession to the throne. This subject was one that Elizabeth was loath to see continually raised and in a 1563 speech to the Commons, she spoke her mind with regard to their demands that she marry.

> Williams, I have heard by you the common request of my Commons, which I may well term (methinketh) the whole realm because they give, as I have heard, in all these matters of Parliament their common consent to such as be here assembled. The weight and greatness of this matter might cause in me, being a woman wanting both wit and memory, some fear to speak and bashfulness besides, a thing appropriate to my sex. But yet the princely seat and kingly throne wherein God (though unworthy) hath constituted me, maketh these two causes to seem little in mine eyes, though grievous perhaps to your ears, and boldeneth me to say somewhat in this matter, which I mean only to touch but not presently to answer. For this so great a demand needeth both great and grave advice. (Marcus, Mueller, & Rose, 2000: 70-71)

In this section of her speech, she addressed the fact that what the parliament considered of extreme importance, she considered a rather trivial thing that would require a considerable amount of thought if she were to address it. We can also see in the text where she points out that she felt embarrassed by the fact that she was forced to discuss such a subject, but we should note that she was not cowed into accepting an unsatisfactory choice because she was outnumbered in an uncomfortable position.

As mentioned previously, I believe that Elizabeth was in her element when she was giving a speech, but that is not to say she was not just as at home in a one-on-one situation. In individual discourse Elizabeth could demonstrate the quickness of her intellect and her grasp of the bigger picture. I would imagine that she would have been able to hold her own in any such situation. An excellent example of this would be her interview with a representative of Mary, Queen of Scots in 1561, named Maitland.

Maitland had been sent to England to meet with Elizabeth to convey the good wishes of Mary and to press Elizabeth for a more definitive stance regarding Mary and the English succession. Maitland was not only in England on Mary's behalf, he was also there on behalf of the Scottish nobility, and for the same purpose. Maitland's visit lasted several days and what follows are portions of the discussion between Elizabeth and Maitland once he made the purpose of his visit known.[10]

[10] All of the passages from Elizabeth's discussion with Maitland have been taken from Rice, George P., Jr. 1966. *The Public Speaking of Queen Elizabeth: Selections from Her Official Addresses.* New York, NY: AMS Press, Inc. pages 64-70.

Elizabeth:

> I marvel that your queen should forget how, before her departure out of France, after long importunity, at last she promised to ratify and confirm the conditions of peace concluded at Leith; and that, so soon as she should return into her realm, I should hear from her concerning that matter. I have now been delayed long enough; it is now time (if you bear an eye to the honor of your queen) that words should be seconded with effects.

To this Maitland informed Elizabeth that Mary had returned to Scotland only a few days before he'd been sent to England and she was still in the process of re-acquainting herself with her Scottish court and nobles. To this Elizabeth replied that securing peace was no less important than settling the matter of succession, and if Mary could send him on an errand to decide succession, the issue of peace could be dealt with in the same manner.

> Is it of greater moment to confirm a league than to assure succession? What? Will you rather claim courtesies than discharge debts? Are you desirous to have your queen acknowledged an heir, and shall she not acknowledge herself a friend. Assuredly, it is reason, that by ratifying the league, she first declare herself a friend, before you require her to be declared an heir.

Maitland had no response to this, other than to say that he had not been instructed to deal with the matter of the league. To this Elizabeth continued the debate.

> Well, you see what a stop doth lie in your way. And yet, to speak somewhat of the main head of your message, you have declared at large that your queen is descended of the race of the kings of England, and that, by a natural obligation, I am bound to love her as being nearest unto me in blood. All this I neither will nor can nor must deny. Yea, I have manifested to all the world that I have never acted or attempted anything against her safety or the tranquility of her state. And many who are privy to my most secret intentions do know right well that when she gave me just cause of offence by assuming the arms and title of my kingdom, I would never be induced to believe that the seeds of hatred were cast rather from other than herself. But howsoever she is descended, I suppose that during my life she will not wrest the scepter out of my hand.

Maitland's responses to Elizabeth's points were limited at best and the following are Elizabeth's explanations why it was illogical to assume that because Mary was related to her, she should be pleased to declare Mary her heir.

> I am well acquainted with the nature of this people. I know how easily they dislike the present state of affairs. I know what nimble eyes they bear to the next succession. I know it to be natural that more, as the saying is, do adore the rising than the falling sun.

> …if the affection of our people grow faint, if their minds change upon hearing a moderate hand in distributions of rewards and gifts, or upon some other cause more light, what may we look for when evil-minded men shall have a foreign prince appointed the certain successor to the crown, to whom they may carry all their complaints? In how great danger shall I be, do you think, when a prince, so powerful, so near unto me, shall be declared my successor? To whom so much strength as I shall add by confirming her succession, so much security shall I detract from myself.

In this meeting Maitland was unprepared for Elizabeth's grasp of the situation at hand, the potential consequences of her actions, and her ability to counter his every response. It is important to note that at the time of the meeting, Elizabeth was 28 years old and had only been queen for three years. Regardless of these facts, Elizabeth

was able to hold her ground; meanwhile Maitland left England after several conversations with Elizabeth had failed to make any progress with respect to the matter of succession.

Elizabeth's greatest skill was her ability to understand her environment and how best to maneuver within that environment to achieve the desired results. Rice used her famous speech at Tilbury to illustrate this skill, remarking "She knew she was speaking at Tilbury, for instance, for the honor and glory of England; she knew that in a time of national peril her words and actions could exhort the people to greater effort; she was aware of the great symbolic value of her name and presence." (Rice, 1966: 40)

Elizabeth drew on this "symbolic value of her name and presence" when she spoke to members of Parliament in her "Reply to the Petition urging Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, November 12, 1586."

> Nay, if England might by my death obtain a more flourishing condition and a better prince, I would most gladly lay down my life.
>
> For, for your sakes it is and for my people's that I desire to live. As for me, I see no such great reason (according as I have led my life) why I should either be fond to live or fear to die.
>
> While I call to mind these things past, behold things present, and look forward to things to come, I count them happiest that go hence soonest. Nevertheless, against such evils and mischiefs as these, I am armed with a better courage than is common in my sex, so as whatsoever befalls me, death shall never find me unprepared. (Rice, 1966: 89)

In this speech, Elizabeth demonstrated the qualities that she worked so hard to portray as queen of the realm: an enduring love for her people and country, the willingness to die to secure a better future for the nation, and uncommon courage in the face of adversity. I believe in this speech Elizabeth reached what I can only describe as a "Hollywood-like" performance. She was resolute, brave, and self-sacrificing for the good of the people and the nation, and whether she believed everything she was saying or not is irrelevant; she only needed to convince her audience that she believed it. And I think it was this ability that was always her greatest strength.

Elizabeth has been viewed in many different ways over the centuries, from a skillful politician, with the ability to read and manipulate people and her environment to her best advantage, to an indecisive and sometimes erratic ruler, who survived the challenges of her reign on nothing more than luck. And after 400 years, this debate will continue regardless of anyone's efforts; however, I would offer that through Elizabeth's writings and speeches we can see that she had an innate ability to evaluate her ever changing circumstances and a considerable talent for making the most of her situation. She often accomplished this by being able to see the bigger picture and the potential consequences of her actions and "spin" them to the best possible advantage. Whether by sidestepping the issue, such as removing herself from the judgment and execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, which could be viewed as indecisiveness, or by meeting it head on, such as her firm stance with regards to her reign, possible marriage and the succession, which could be seen as stubbornness or irresponsibility, Elizabeth seemed to take a very active role as Queen of England, even if that role was to "not act". Through the many records that have survived from Elizabeth's life I think we can safely say that, regardless of how successful or unsuccessful any given incident in her life was, her writings show a very intelligent, calculating, and perceptive individual and she lived quite an extraordinary life that has made a lasting impression for 400 years.

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