Not Everybody’s a Critic: The Functions and Limitations of Performance in Elizabethan England

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In Elizabethan England, political participation required access to the queen. As a point of contact, performances staged for Elizabeth reveal how the queen engaged with her subjects. The nobility in both the court and country used shows to convey advice on affairs of state to Elizabeth, but they had to balance this council with confirmations of the queen’s authority so as not to anger her by undermining her power. While enacting affection and loyalty for their queen, the common people engaged in a more general dialogue with Elizabeth that mimicked the consultation of the nobility creating a political outlet in lieu of popular revolt. These political discourses generated through performances complicate the image of Elizabeth as an authoritarian queen by showing her level of engagement with her constituency.
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INTRODUCTION

“...in judging me, you judge more than me in it,” proclaimed the Lady of May at the end of Sir Philip Sidney’s 1578 masque, The Lady of May.¹ This masque asked queen Elizabeth I to choose a suitor for the title character. The Lady’s warning for the queen demonstrated the importance of performance in Elizabethan England. Sidney embedded political allegory and commentary with in his work elevating her selection to a decision that indicated her platform on foreign policy. This excerpt from Sidney’s masque demonstrates that performance was double edged political sword. Entertaining Elizabeth provided an occasion to communicate with her about political issues and concerns. These performances attempted to influence her course of action, thus acting as a mechanism of political participation. The same entertainments also strengthened Elizabeth’s authority by enacting proper deference and loyalty to her. These complex spectacles staged conversations between the queen and her subjects where the latter indicated their preferences about current political issues while simultaneously performing deference to the queen’s authority. These pageants and entertainments complicate an authoritarian view of Elizabeth’s government as they illustrate how participation extended beyond the queen and her advisors.

These entertainments that sought to advise Elizabeth provided a forum for political participation. In Tudor government, political power derived from access to Elizabeth, and performances offered one type of access.² The English Parliament had limited power in sixteenth century England, and while it could raise taxes, the monarch held the majority of political authority. The nobility exerted political power by consulting with Elizabeth, seeking to influence

her decisions, and currying favor so that she would appoint them to important positions, such as a member of the Privy Council or her Privy Chamber. Success depended on direct accomplish either of these goals required access to the queen’s person. A play or pageant offered such access. Capturing Elizabeth’s attention for the duration of a performance allowed authors ample time for addressing concerns while assuring her of the affection of her hosts and her subjects. These concerns included Elizabeth’s current marriage possibilities and the royal succession, the Dutch Revolt, religion, regional unrest, lingering doubts about the legitimacy of her rule, and social class tensions.

These performances varied in terms of venue and audience. The composition of the audience influenced the type of advice that entertainment promoted. While performances acted as a form of political participation, participation did not extend to all subjects. Although it was appropriate for the nobility to advise Elizabeth, the commoners had no right to do so. The nobility were peers of the realm while commoners had no recognized political role. Nobles comprised a similar social class as the monarch: those who ruled, located at the top of the social pyramid. Elizabeth should not need the advice of someone beneath her, and appearing to listen to such counsel would weaken her authority. Public performances, with commoners in the audience, lacked specific commentary on political issues seen in the private entertainments of the nobility. Instead these public pageants included general advice on aspects of good government that resembled a performed version of the mirror of princes genre, but did not allude to current problems or criticize Elizabeth’s decisions. The inclusion of any political advice, even more general suggestions, indicated at the minimum an illusion of political participation because the performance created a space for political discussion between Elizabeth, her hosts, and the rest of the audience. This political participation did not resemble modern democratic participation.
Rather Elizabeth’s subjects sought exert their own power by influencing her decisions on policy and appointments. The extent of one’s involvement in the government correlated directly with the specificity of the advice offered to the queen via performance: thus, looking at spectacles staged before Elizabeth sheds light on how different sections of society interacted with their monarch.

Performances for the queen also reflected the variations of political engagement between those residing at the court and those who lived in the country. In Tudor England, politics centered on London because the capitol functioned as the governmental center for the realm. Involvement in the government, however, extended beyond London. Elizabeth made frequent progresses during the summer where she uprooted her court and visited different parts of her realm. These visits offered her host access to her person and, by extension, an opportunity for political participation. The content of these performances demonstrates that politics were not completely limited to the nobility of London during Elizabeth’s reign.

This thesis examines four sets of entertainments and how they balanced advice and loyalty to communicate with the queen. It begins with Elizabeth’s pre-coronation procession in 1558 and then moves to three entertainments from 1578. These later pieces address similar concerns identified in 1558 and provide a snapshot of performance and political participation in that one year. This comparison demonstrates that politics were not limited to Elizabeth and her court. The country nobility employed performance to advise the in affairs of state, while the common people created general dialogue on good government and loyalty. These political discourses generated through performances complicate the image of Elizabeth as an authoritarian queen by showing her level of engagement with her constituency.
This examination of political performance reflects recent scholarship about Elizabeth’s reign. Mid-twentieth century scholarship viewed Tudor politics as an absolute government where monarchs dictated everything, including religion. In this system, only official institutions and rulers had the power to create or change history. Working within this framework, scholars portrayed Queen Elizabeth as an iconic and beloved monarch with an uncomplicated rule. Historians focused more on her personal life rather than using her reign to study the idea of queenship, religion, or gender in pre-modern Europe.

By the late twentieth-century, traditional political history had evolved to include cultural approaches. Social and gender history in particular have influenced current debates about Elizabeth. Having rejected the assumption that the Tudor monarchs ruled from on high, unaffected by other parts or people in society, historians now favor a concept of political culture where popular movements, such as Protestantism, intellectual frameworks, and individuals with less formal political power played an important and formative role in history. This multifaceted view complicates the study of political history, yielding new models and uncovering new sources for studying political power and its effects. The shift in emphasis toward political culture in the study of Tudor history raises the question in what constituted politics and who made decisions in Tudor government.

In her introduction to *Queenship and Political Discourse in the Elizabethan Realms*, Natalie Mears traces how recent scholarship rejects the earlier patterns of studying Elizabeth as beloved icon and instead considers the queen and her reign in more complex and sometimes

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5 Jones, “Mid-Tudor Politics and Political Culture” 1.
negative terms. This approach employs subfields including the studies of print culture and gender to explore these theories and Elizabeth's method of governing. My own research is guided by these current interdisciplinary methods as I examine performances before the queen and what they reveal about the political realm.

Several aspects of the performances fall into wider debates taking place in the literature from the end of the twentieth-century until the present day, including the interrelated discussions of the role of consultation, the extent of political participation, and the rise of a public sphere. As mentioned above, Mears advocates an expanded view of the public sphere based on the circulation of information and the extent of political discourse in Elizabethan England. In his article "Elizabethan Government and Politics," Historian David Dean stresses the significance of personal relationships and networks in Elizabethan politics, classifying the court as an informal political body rather than a solely social space, extending political influence beyond Elizabeth's advisors to all courtiers and to those who were connected to the court through a personal network. These scholars have expanded the traditional view of Elizabethan politics as confined to the queen and a few choice advisors.

Elizabeth's gender and the fabrication of her image reflect recent efforts to situate political questions in broader contexts. Kevin Sharpe examines performance as one of three important mechanisms for creating Elizabeth's image and maintaining her authority in his recent book Selling the Tudor Monarchy: Authority and Image in Sixteenth-Century England. He asserts that performances offered an opportunity to both praise and advise Elizabeth and claims that her reaction to the performances demonstrates her attentiveness to her people's suggestions.

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He argues that such performances created the illusion that she valued their input. While she made a show of listening to her people's advice, Elizabeth was not bound to follow their suggestions. Marie Hill Cole and William Leahy investigate processions, progresses, and entrances and their role in disseminating Elizabeth's authority among the common people and the country in The Portable Queen and Elizabethan Triumphal Processions, respectively. These works underscore performance as a political tool for image control and public opinion.

This thesis draws on four primary texts: a 1578 masque by Sir Philip Sidney, a description of Elizabeth's pre-coronation entrance into London in 1559, and two accounts of the queen's progress into Norwich in the summer of 1578. The description of the queen's pre-coronation entrance reveals themes and concerns present in the later entertainments and established that common people were relegated to general comments and proclamations of loyalty when interact with their queen. The Sidney masque, staged in the private gardens of the Earl of Leicester just outside of London, limited its audience to the court nobility and demonstrated the complex advice the court embedded in their shows for Elizabeth. In the two Norwich accounts, I use a pageant performed after a hunting trip and a masque staged after dinner to examine how political participation extended to the country nobility. The groups of elite comprised nobles and town officials from Norwich and the courtiers who accompanied the queen on her progress creating a hybrid audience of court and country. The queen's entrance into Norwich offers an example of a public performance staged in the country and confirms the restrictions placed upon what the humble masses may express to Elizabeth.

All of these performances were given a second textual life that further underscored their importance. Sidney's masque was printed after his death as part of a collection of his works in the early seventeenth century, and the three accounts of royal entries were printed in London in

8 Kevin Sharpe, Selling the Tudor Monarchy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 418.
the same year in which they occurred. The published accounts made the performances available to a geographically broader audience at home and abroad: nobles who did not attend Elizabeth’s progress through Norwich could now read about it. The text enabled them to access the political discussion contained in those entertainments. The printed accounts did not, however, extend the audience into the lower classes given the low literacy rates in the sixteenth century. The common people also lacked the disposable income to purchase these accounts even if they were literate.

The printed accounts of the performances allowed other nobles, rather than the common people, to remain connected with more distant regions of the realm and take stalk of public sentiment towards Elizabeth. They connected the nobility to the queen through print and reinforced bonds of loyalty despite distance from the court. The printed editions brought the queen’s presence into their lives reinforcing her authority by disseminating the affirmations of loyalty and representation of the strong bond of affection between sovereign and subject.

This thesis is divided into four sections. The first section looks at Elizabeth’s pre-coronation procession through London in 1558. This public performance identified concerns and themes that recurred throughout her reign, while also establishing the principle that the common people could only offer advice on or approval of decisions she has already made. The surviving account of this entrance emphasized bonds of mutual affection between Elizabeth and her common subjects that strengthened her authority.

The next section analyzes Sir Philip Sidney’s *The Lady of May*, a 1578 masque performed for Elizabeth during her visit to Wanstead, just outside of London. This performance confirmed that the court nobility used performances as an opportunity to advise their queen and to wield political power. In addition to offering an in-depth commentary on England’s possible responses to the Dutch Revolt, the masque emphasized Elizabeth’s authority and asserted the
loyalty of the nobles. The frequent affirmations of Elizabeth’s power to make all decisions demonstrated how consultation with the queen implicitly undermined her authority.

The third part moves from London to the country, examining two private entertainments for Elizabeth’s visit to Norwich in 1578 via two accounts of her progress that were also published in 1578. The pageant and masque commented on the queen’s possible marriage to the Duke of Anjou and advocated against direct intervention in the Low Countries demonstrating that political participation extended beyond London. At the same time the performances emphasized the loyalty of Elizabeth’s subjects and her own decision making power, reminding the rest of the audience of their proper relationship to the queen: loyal subjects.

The final section studies Elizabeth’s entrance into Norwich also from her 1578 progress. The descriptions were published in the same accounts as the entertainments in the previous section. The pageants celebrating her entrance employ similar types of general advice about the components of a strong commonwealth seen in Elizabeth’s pre-coronation entrance. A language of loyalty and affection permeate these entertainments. This affirmation again demonstrated the dual roles of performance because they both reassure Elizabeth of the loyalty of the people of Norwich and enact the proper devotion the people should have for their queen.

Performances before Elizabeth provided the nobility both in and outside of London with a vehicle for political participation. The commoners did not receive this opportunity, and instead were relegated to versions of Mirrors for Princes that offered general comments rather than input on specific situations. Nonetheless, the evidence suggests that even these general comments provided the illusion that the common people had some input into their government. Creating this illusion for the people recognized an implicit contract or bond between sovereign and subject. While performances offered some type of political participation to the hosts or audience,
they always enforced Elizabeth’s power through proclamations of loyalty and deference to her authority.
SECTION I. STAGING LOYALTY: ELIZABETH I'S PRE-CORONATION PROCESSION

On January 14th 1559, Elizabeth journeyed through London on her pre-coronation procession allowing the people of London to see and greet their next queen. Several pageants along her route celebrated the ascension of the next Queen of England. Robert Mulcaster, a member of Parliament, wrote an account of her procession detailing these performances and the interaction between Elizabeth and her subjects. While the pageants were arranged by members of the nobility, the commoners comprised a significant portion of the audience. Mulcaster's description demonstrated how the performances, although written by the nobility, acted as a conversation between Elizabeth and the commoners. One side of the dialogue reassured and instructed the commoners on Elizabeth's behalf, while the other part pledged the people's loyalty to their queen and reminded her to practice good government. Elizabeth's pre-coronation entrance addressed anxieties the people had about the legitimacy of their new monarch while illustrating aspects of good government for the soon to be queen. The entertainments demonstrated loyalty for Elizabeth and her people.

Our knowledge of this procession is based on an account written by Richard Mulcaster. Born near Carlisle in northern England, Mulcaster trained as a school teacher at Oxford and Cambridge and by 1559 he had moved to London to serve in Elizabeth's first Parliament as one of Carlisle's two representatives. He received 40 shillings for his work, which was included in a book given to Elizabeth. The London Corporation, the city's governing body, commissioned

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the work and their record of payment indicated that the queen received a copy. The London Corporation would have informed Mulcaster that they planned to present a copy to Elizabeth so he could write the account with the proper admiration for his queen.

At the dawn of her reign, legitimacy was an important theme in the pageants on Elizabeth's route through London. The entertainments addressed concerns about her gender and her claim to the throne. Even though Elizabeth would not be the first regnant female monarch, female rule remained a controversial topic in the sixteenth century. Mary's controversial and violent reign had only magnified concerns about female rule. In addition to concerns about her gender, Elizabeth's claim to the English throne was disputed. Anne Boleyn gave birth to Elizabeth in September of 1533, seven and a half months after marrying King Henry VIII before a priest and less than four months after Henry's marriage to Katherine of Aragon had been annulled. Anne Boleyn had likely conceived Elizabeth out of wedlock and certainly while Henry VIII was married to another women. This sequence cast doubt on Elizabeth legitimacy. Susan Doran points out in Queen Elizabeth I, that while Henry and Anne's public wedding took place after they conceived Elizabeth, in the sixteenth century, if a man and a woman privately exchanged vows and then consummated this relationship it was considered a legal marriage. Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn likely had a private ceremony that could legitimize Elizabeth's birth for Protestants; however, the Pope never accepted Henry VIII's annulment and if Henry and Anne were married when they conceived Elizabeth, then Henry was still married to Katherine of Aragon, committing polygamy.

Unfortunately for Elizabeth, her problems with illegitimacy did not end there. In 1536 Anne was executed for adultery and her marriage to Henry VIII was annulled, thereby relegating

13 Doran, Queen Elizabeth I, 10.
Elizabeth to the status of bastard. Although Henry VIII made Elizabeth third in line to the throne with the Act of Succession in 1544, Edward VI removed both Mary and Elizabeth from the succession in 1553. This act did not stop Mary from seizing power after Edward’s death, upholding Henry VIII’s original Act in 1544 and implicitly reinstating Elizabeth’s place in the succession. Elizabeth’s status as a bastard undermined the strength of her claim to the throne. These concerns about her gender and legitimacy occupied center stage in her pre-coronation procession. The first pageant asserted Elizabeth’s legitimacy as the successor to the Tudor throne while the fourth entertainment legitimized female rule by drawing on scripture.

The first pageant asserted Elizabeth’s legitimacy as the Tudor heir. On the stage sat King Henry VII and his wife Elizabeth of York with a red rose around Henry VII and a white rose around Elizabeth representing the union of the house of York and the house of Lancaster in the house of Tudor at the end of the War of the Roses. From the two roses a branch led up to the second platform where King Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn sat dressed as king and queen. Above them a person representing Queen Elizabeth sat enthroned on a third level of stage. This design traced Elizabeth’s family tree back through King Henry VIII to King Henry VII, confirming her as the legitimate heir. A child on the side of the stage gave a speech that underscored this message. He stated,

Both heirs to both their bloods, to Lancaster the king
The Queen to York, in one the two houses did knit,
Of whom as heir to both, Henry the eighth did spring,
In whose seat his true heir thou queen Elisabeth dost sit
Therefore as civil war, and shed of blood did cease
When these two houses were united into one
So now that air shall still, and quietness increasce,

14 Doran, Queen Elizabeth I, 13.
15 Doran, Queen Elizabeth I, 34.
We trust, O noble Queen, thou wilt be cause alone.\textsuperscript{16}

The first four lines affirm the dynastic succession from Henry VII to Elizabeth I. The second four lines of this passage remind the audience of how the union of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York secured the end of the civil war and brought peace to England.

The last line of the quotation above transferred this unity to Elizabeth I, proclaiming her duty and reminding her to uphold peace in the realm. It cautioned the nobles in the audience that should they attempt to place another person on the throne, they would meet resistance. The passage also indicated to the commoners in the audience that while Elizabeth’s legitimacy may have been questionable, her ascension would not bring bloodshed. This peace contrasted with the violence and persecution that Protestants suffered under Mary. Elizabeth’s ascension heralded a peace between the fighting Catholics and Protestants. Thus the pageant not only confirmed her legitimate succession, but also pledged her commitment to instill unity and peace in the reign.

The last pageant addressed concerns about Elizabeth’s gender by drawing on the Biblical figure of Deborah who provided scriptural precedent for strong female governance. Comparing Elizabeth to a biblical figure accomplished two goals. For both Protestants and Catholics, the Bible remained the authoritative text. On questions of political government, its examples carried weight. Second, people from all parts of society were familiar with the Bible. They knew the full story alluded to in the pageant. The use of Deborah also helped to distinguish Elizabeth’s reign from Mary’s. Deborah was not connected to the previous queen and hailed from the Old Testament, which Protestants placed greater emphasis on while Catholics looked towards the New Testament.\textsuperscript{17} This choice to connect Elizabeth to an Old Testament figure signaled to the audience that her rule was not only godly, but specifically Protestant rather than Catholic. In


\textsuperscript{17} William Leahy, \textit{Elizabethan Triumphal Processions}, 114.
selecting a female figure from the Old Testament, the authors of the pageant reflected hope that her reign would differ from Mary's particularly by supporting Protestantism.

In the show, a character of Deborah sat on stage surrounded by six other figures who represented the three estates: two for the nobility, two for the clergy, and two for the common people. And again, a boy gave a speech explaining the tableaux to the assembled spectators. He proclaimed, "The worthy Debora as judge among them [the people of Israel] sent./ In war she, through God's aid, did put her foes to flight,/ And with the dint of sword the band of bondage brast./ In peace she, through gods aid, did always maintain right/And judged Israel till forty years were past." This passage captured the analogy of heroic female rule specifically through leadership in battle. It asserted Deborah's ability to rule both in times of war and times of peace through the help of God. Her example legitimated the principle of divine right that reinforced Elizabeth's own rule. As queen, Elizabeth was also the head of the Anglican Church giving her a special relationship with God. This analogy suggested that just as God aided Deborah during her reign, so would Elizabeth benefit from divine aid. Additionally, as God's chosen representative on Earth, the people owed Elizabeth their loyalty and obedience. Elizabeth continued to cultivate the image of her special relationship to God throughout her reign. This relationship to God and association with Deborah were evoked in later performances to assure the common people of Elizabeth's qualifications as a monarch.

The six figures flanking Deborah represented an ideal of consultation as central to royal government. Mulcaster wrote that, "And before these personages was written in a table Debora with her estates consulting for the good government of Israel." By illustrating Deborah's use of consultation during her rule, the pageant implied that Elizabeth would also listen to the

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18 Nichols, ed., *Progresses of Elizabeth* v. 1, 53
suggestions of her people. This reception of advise again distinguished Elizabeth’s reign from Mary’s. Even if Elizabeth did not follow their advice, just acknowledging the suggestions of her people contrasted with her sister’s silence. 21 While Deborah surrounded herself with nobles, priests, and commoners, Elizabeth excluded this last group from advising her. She limited their interactions to general comments about the reign that expressed satisfaction, and proclamations of loyalty and devotion to their queen. Performances designed for the common people reflected the characteristics of a strong government rather than advising Elizabeth on specific issues, which was appropriate only in entertainments given by the nobility.

In addition to alleviating the audience’s concerns about Elizabeth’s legitimacy, the pageants also identified the principles and practices of a successful reign. The second pageant presented the image of good and bad commonwealths through its scenery and the gift of Truth. The stage contained two different hills, one barren and one green and lush. The first represented bad commonwealth and the latter good commonwealth, which promoted wealth and prosperity. Tables on each hill listed the causes of bad or good commonwealth for Elizabeth and literate members of the audience to read. These causes reappeared later in her route to reinforce this message. The causes of a bad commonwealth that the pageant asked Elizabeth to avoid included, “Want of the fear of God, blindness of guides, civil disagreement, and unmercifulness in rulers.”22 By contrast, the pageant identified several sources of a good government, “A wise prince, learned rulers, vice chastened, and virtue rewarded.”23 Unlike the first pageant, these contrasting scenes asked Elizabeth to govern in a certain way: different from Mary. The causes of a bad commonwealth critiqued Mary’s rule as ungodly and tyrannical because not only was she Catholic, but she forced this ‘ungodly’ religion upon her people. These suggestions highlight

21 Sharpe, Selling the Tudor Monarchy, 419.
the differences between Mary’s rule and Elizabeth’s rule, and although they were critical, they only target the previous queen not the current one.

These general guidelines for ruling mimic the advice books, or mirror of princes, so popular in the late medieval and renaissance periods. These books offered examples of both good and bad rulers as a form of general advice for kings and queens. These general examples did not criticize the current king or queen or any of his or her decisions. The books acted as educational or advisory material for a young ruler who was being groomed for the throne. By imitating the style of the Mirrors of Princes, this pageant advised Elizabeth without directly criticizing her. Through the examples of good and bad government, this pageant served as an instructional tool for both Elizabeth and her subjects. Pageants performed for Elizabeth on processions and entries addressed both the queen and her people.

In the pageant, an old man symbolizing Time and another figure representing the daughter of time, named Truth, came forth from the lush hill so that Truth could present Elizabeth with the Word of Truth, an English Bible.24 The boy narrating this pageant informed Elizabeth that, "We trust O worthy queen, thou wilt this truth embrace/ And since thou understands the good estate and naught/ We trust wealth thou will plant, and barrenness displace."25 This quotation indicated that a good commonwealth can be created or maintained by following Protestantism, since the Bible was written in English not Latin. While this request asked Elizabeth to uphold a certain religion, she was already a known supporter of Protestantism indicated by her clashes with Mary over religion.26 The more specific request confirmed Elizabeth’s own plans and gave her a reason for changing the national religion. This demand for Protestantism proceeded from the examples of good government. In order to flourish, England

26 Doran, Queen Elizabeth I, 34- 35.
needed Godly rule. This declaration for Protestantism could be included in the pageant, because not only was it the lynchpin of a strong English commonwealth, but as an extension of the example of a good commonwealth it was acceptable advice to give Elizabeth before her subjects.

One of the more pervasive themes in the staging of Elizabeth’s entrance was the love between the queen and her subjects. Mutual affection between Elizabeth and her subjects indicated their loyalty to her. This loyalty was important because while the common people were not permitted to participate in politics through consultation with the queen, she required their unconditional. Elizabeth’s half sister Mary seized the throne from Jane Grey because of popular revolt, and then in 1554 the Wyatt Rebellion threatened her reign. Elizabeth had witnessed firsthand the power of her humble subjects when they took up arms against the crown. Revolt threatened to her reign because of her disputed legitimacy and ongoing religious conflict. It was critical that Elizabeth inspire love in order to prevent a rival noble from staging a popular rebellion.

The opening oration of her entrance reassured Elizabeth of the people’s loyalty by describing their love for her, “The second [gift] is true hearts, which love thee from their root/
Whose suit is triumphed now, and rules all the game./ Which faithfulness has won, & all untruth
driven out,/ Which skip for joy, when as they hear thy happy name.” The “true hearts” indicated not only the affection but the fidelity of the people. This passage not only reassured Elizabeth, but also reminded the audience that they should feel these emotions for their new queen. Later in the procession the causes of good and bad commonwealths stated the importance of the people’s loyalty. One cause of a bad commonwealth was, “Rebellion in subjects” while a

27 Doran, *Queen Elizabeth I*, 34, 39-40.
cause of a good commonwealth was, "Obedient subjects". These verses not only reminded the people that they owed the monarch their loyalty and obedience, but placed on them partial responsibility for the success of the country. If the people disobeyed their monarch, then the competency or strength of the monarch was irrelevant, the commonwealth would fail. This mandate for submission tacitly acknowledged the power of the people, because they controlled the success of the realm. Other performances before Elizabeth and the common people also stressed both a language of loyalty towards the queen and the importance of obedience.

Mulcaster also described reactions to the various performances and speeches. After the opening oration, part of which is discussed above, he reported that,

At which words of the last line the whole people gave a great shout, wishing with one assent as the child had said. And the Queen majesty thanked most heartily both the city for this her gentle receiving at the first, & also the people for confirming the same. Here was noted in the Queen majesty's countenance, during the time that the child spoke, besides a perpetual attentiveness in her face, a marvelous change in look, as the child's words touched either her person or the peoples tongs and hearts.

In this passage, Mulcaster emphasized popular reactions. Like dutiful and loving children, they pledged their loyalty to Elizabeth. The second part of the description depicted the queen as an attentive and gracious audience. She appreciated what the boy was telling her and was visibly moved.

Accounts of performances before Elizabeth often depicted her as a responsive spectator. Her reaction became a secondary performance more important than the original pageant because her reaction to the performance indicated both her support for the suggestions it contained and the favor she bestowed upon city and people. This emphasis was evident in the account of the

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30 Nichols, ed., ed., *Progresses of Elizabeth*, v. 1, 40
queen’s entrance into Norwich in 1578 discussed later. Elizabeth enacted listening even if it was just for show to demonstrate a willingness to involve to her people. This willingness did not extend to the right of consultation, but rather constituted a gesture through which Elizabeth directed popular expression away from revolt.

Mulcaster also emphasized the people’s joy at seeing their next monarch and Elizabeth’s response to her subjects. When Elizabeth first entered the city, before any of the pageants, Mulcaster described the outpouring of mutual affection between the people and their next queen:

And entering the city was of the people received marvelous entirely, as appeared by the assemblies, prayers, wishes, welcomings, cries, tender words, and all other signs, which argue a wonderful earnest love of most obedient subjects toward their sovereign. And on the other side her grace by holding up her hands, and merry countenance to such as stood far off, and most tender & gentle language to those that stood nigh to her grace, did declare herself no less thankful to receive her peoples good will, than they lovingly offered it unto her.  

The people of London greeted Elizabeth with warmth and energy that indicated their “wonderful earnest love of most obedient subjects”. This language of love and mutual affection expressed a contract of loyalty. If the people loved their monarch, they would be loyal to that monarch. The second half of the passage recounted Elizabeth’s love and gratitude towards her people. In total, this section celebrated a love contract between the common people of London and their next monarch that also promised Elizabeth their loyalty. This good will between Elizabeth and the people strengthened her claim to the throne as it dissuaded other from inciting a popular rebellion.

Mulcaster’s account was published as a pamphlet nine days after the procession, and a copy was given to Elizabeth.  

32 Leahy, Elizabethan Triumphal Processions, 60.
preserve a record of the events, he may also have exaggerated the interaction between Elizabeth and the people. By depicting a loving bond between the queen and her people, Mulcaster emphasized that Elizabeth was a popular queen. This popular support or illusion of popular support deterred enemies or rivals from challenging Elizabeth’s power. Leahy reports that the pamphlet was soon reprinted, indicating its popularity.  

We can compare Mulcaster’s view to that of the Venetian Ambassador who wrote another description of Elizabeth’s entrance for the Castellan of Mantua. In his account, Il Schifanoya gave brief overviews of each pageant that corroborated Mulcaster’s in-depth version except that the letter contained no mention of the final pageant with Deborah. It seems unlikely that Mulcaster would add a fictitious pageant to his account when this would damage its credibility, hampering the document’s effectiveness as propaganda in favor of Elizabeth. The Ambassador’s report also did not mention any interactions between the queen and the commoners of London, and only described Elizabeth reaction to one pageant. At the end of the pageant about Time, Il Schifanoya reported, “[a lad] presenting her Majesty with a book generally supposed to be the New Testament in English, which the queen clasped in her arms and embraced passionately, returning thanks, &c.” This passage indicated Elizabeth’s support of Protestantism over Catholicism by her acceptance of an English Bible rather than a Latin Bible. Elizabeth’s religious preference had international implications in terms of wars and
alliances. If England returned to Protestantism, as this pageant indicated, that would disrupt ties to Catholic Spain. This reaction carried political significance and was important to report to the Castellan of Mantua. It is possible that Il Schifanoya did not include Elizabeth's reactions to other pageants, where she demonstrated her attentiveness to the requests and concerns of the people, because he deemed them irrelevant.

Elizabeth's pre-coronation procession addressed anxieties about her reign and reinforced the proper bonds of loyalty that tied the monarch to her subjects. Simultaneously the pageants instructed Elizabeth in how to create and maintain a flourishing country in contrast to the violent rule of her predecessor. While the performances contained political messages and suggested general courses of action to the queen, the only specific advice they offered Elizabeth was to uphold Protestantism as a source of godly rule, something she already did. This advice confirmed her choice rather than advising her on a decision she needed to make. Throughout her reign, performances continued to serve as a vehicle for enacting loyalty, addressing anxieties, and advising both the queen and other members of the audience. The composition of the audience dictated where the emphasis fell on these three objectives.

The next three sections of this work examine performances from 1578. Parts of these entertainments advised Elizabeth on situations in the Low Countries and her possible marriage to the Duke of Anjou. In 1578 there were several important political issues to discuss. Spain was marshalling its army to quell the Dutch Revolt. England was torn between the desire to aid the only other Protestant state and fear of an entangling war with Spain. At the same time, the queen initiated marriage negotiations with Francis, Duke of Anjou. This match provoked considerable opposition because Francis was both French, the historical enemy of England, and Catholic. Many people feared that a child from this union would be raised Catholic, like his or her father,
and could possibly also inherit the French throne. The Protestants did not want another Catholic ruler especially after the persecution they had faced under Elizabeth’s half sister Mary. Further complicating the situation, the Dutch had asked the Duke to aid them against the Spanish and he was considering it despite their religious differences. If she married Francis, Elizabeth could encourage him to intervene in the Low Countries with minimal risk of a Spanish-English war. Or, should Elizabeth decide it was in England’s best interest to help the Dutch states and develop a stronger alliance with them, she could persuade the Duke not to help the Protestant republic increasing its need for English support.

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37 Doran, Queen Elizabeth I, 93.
Philip Sidney’s masque, *The Lady of May*, illuminated the relationship between the court nobles and Elizabeth. The masque was performed before the queen at Wanstead, Earl Leicester’s estate just outside of London. In addition to Elizabeth, members of the court nobility comprised the audience. The venue’s proximity to London ensured that the nobles present hailed from the court rather than the surrounding country. As the queen and her company walked through the estate’s gardens they were met by a distressed mother who asked Elizabeth to help her daughter, the Lady of May, choose a suitor. Therion, a hunter, and Espilus, a shepherd, both courted the Lady and their competition had become a, “bloody controversy” and must be brought to an end. Each suitor embodied different characteristics. Therion was an active, passionate man, but his passion periodically erupted in violence. While he brought her gifts of venison from the forest, he was also poor. Espilus, in contrast, was even-tempered and mild. He neither brought the Lady of May gifts nor did he cause her any pain. He did possess more material wealth in his sheep than Therion, who only owned his hunting weapons. Each suitor presented his case and then Queen Elizabeth choice the best suitor for the Lady of May.

Before Elizabeth make her choice, the Lady of May reminded her that, “…in judging me, you judge more then me in it.” Through this line Sidney indicated to Elizabeth and the rest of the audience that the suitors whom the queen was choosing held deeper meanings. The masque acted as a mechanism through which Sidney and his patron Leicester could consult with the queen and try to influence her political decisions. While the performance offered political commentary, it also confirmed Elizabeth’s own power and authority through both the character’s praise of her and asking her to select the suitor. It was of paramount importance to support the

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38 Sidney, "The Lady of May." 329.
39 Sidney, "The Lady of May." 337.
queen's sovereignty even when advising her because the court nobility held the most political
d power other than Elizabeth herself. The masque illustrated this tenuous balance between
consultation and Elizabeth’s own authority.

Tudor government reflected the idea of consultation in its use of official and unofficial
advisory groups. Although the English Parliament had existed for hundreds of years, Elizabeth
used a Privy Council and other unofficial groups for advice to maintain her autonomy from
Parliament. She employed both the more official Privy Council, which kept a register, and other
private advisory groups. The queen used these two groups differently. Elizabeth convened
unofficial groups to discuss what she considered the most private issues of state, such as her
marriage, because they did not keep records, while she limited the Privy Council to
implementing policy. Membership in the Privy Council and unofficial groups often
overlapped. Both were comprised of men who were loyal to her through family ties like Sir
Richard Sackville, or other men who owed their advancement to her, like Lord Robert Dudley.

Although Elizabeth consulted her advisors on all matters, she always maintained sovereign
power in her own person. Thus, both advisors and other members of the court exercised power
through influence. Physical access to the queen was, therefore, an essential, not a tangential, part
of the political process. The court nobility had the greatest access to the queen at court, which
enhanced their political participation over the peripheral nobility.

Consultation simultaneously granted the advisor the opportunity to exert political
influence over the queen and to undermine her authority. Was Elizabeth making policy decisions
or were her advisors? Consultation was not a new development under Elizabeth's reign, but her
gender aggravated concerns about her authority and the proper role of consultation. Previous

40 Mears, *Queenship and Political Discourse in the Elizabethan Realms*, 34.
41 Mears, *Queenship and Political Discourse in the Elizabethan Realms*, 36
monarchs, including Henry VII and Henry VIII, had employed their own Privy Councils and other unofficial advisory groups during their reigns, as did many French kings including Francis I, Charles IX, and Henry IV. Elizabeth did not use advisory groups because she was a woman and needed the support of males to bolster her authority. Rather she used consultation because it was a successful tradition developed by her own family and rulers abroad. Her gender did, however, complicate the already delicate issue of advising a divine right ruler. The monarch has supreme authority from God, but deferring to others for advice, even peers of the realm, undermined this authority because it implies that the monarch was unable to rule on his own. People feared that as a woman, or the weaker sex, Elizabeth was more likely to succumb to outside influence than a king. Her gender intensified the challenge consultation presented to a monarch’s authority.

To combat these fears, Elizabeth always reminded her councilors that her authority superseded their own and that she was not bound to follow their advice. In her first speech to her councilors in 1558 Elizabeth states, “I give you this charge, that you shall be of my Privy Council and content yourself to take pains for me and my realm... to be assistant to me, that I with my ruling and you with your service may make a good account...” In this address, Elizabeth separated herself and elevated herself above the other nobles. She spoke about “my ruling” rather than ‘our ruling’ indicating that while she appreciated the advice of her nobles, authority resided in her person. Elizabeth also characterized consultation as a service performed on her behalf and that of England. Advising the queen was the nobles’ responsibility and duty, not a road to personal advancement. The court nobles had to package their opinions or

information in a way that supported and praised the queen because of the tension between advising Elizabeth and undermining her authority. *The Lady of May* demonstrated this balance through its simultaneous political commentary and affirmation of Elizabeth’s power.

Sir Philip Sidney, the Earl of Leicester’s nephew, wrote *The Lady of May* and his own political career and familial tie to the Earl influence the work. Sidney was well educated in his youth, attending Oxford and then traveling abroad for several years. In 1577 Elizabeth dispatched him to the courts of Rudolf II, Ludwig and Johann Casimir, and William of Orange to collect information on the religious and political situation on the continent and to garner support for a Protestant League.45 During the queen’s courtship of Francis, Duke of Anjou, Sidney was part of the anti-marriage faction along with his uncle, who in addition to being a favorite of Elizabeth had been a potential suitor since his first wife’s death in 1560. Sidney wrote the widely circulated manuscript *A Letter to Queen Elizabeth Touching her Marriage with Monsieur* in 1579 that denounced the Anjou marriage.46 These two episodes from Sidney’s life demonstrate that his foreign policy experience allowed him to comment on international affairs in *The Lady of May*, and that while the masque can also be read as presenting Elizabeth with a suitor, this suitor was Leicester not the Duke of Anjou given Sidney’s loyalty to his uncle and his criticism of the Anjou match the following year. The author’s loyalty to his uncle and previous experiences abroad are critical to interpreting the of *The Lady of May*.

In the masque, Therion and Espilus represent different responses to current affairs. Scholars, however, disagree over how to interpret these characters and what political issues they address. Some argue that one of the suitors represented Leicester who offered his final appeals in

his courtship of the queen. Others contend that the nature of each man represented a different type of foreign policy, particularly with regard to England’s involvement with the Dutch Republic with Therion symbolizing an active but high risk intervention and Espilus a safer indirect response.47 Considering the multiple levels of meaning present in performance in general and masques in particular, the text can be read as a comment on both issues. This layered meaning illustrates the nuanced messages contained in the performances of the court nobility.

A nuanced interpretation of the text does require a specific date for the performance. Most scholars date this masque to 1578, although some argue that it was not performed until 1579.48 Interpretations of the suitors as representatives of different types of foreign policy apply whether the masque was performed in 1578 or 1579. In contrast, specific readings of the text, such as Linda Shenk’s in Learned Queen, which is discussed later, and interpretations regarding the queen’s marriage do depend on an exact dating of the work.

While Shenk includes compelling reasons for dating the masque to 1578, the larger themes in the work indicated it was performed in 1578. The device focused on selecting a suitor. This topic would have been inappropriate if the masque had been performed in 1579. The Earl of Leicester was a long time favorite and suitor of Queen Elizabeth. It was clear by the mid 1560s that their marriage was unfavorable because marriage to a foreign royal would give Elizabeth both legitimacy and a way to end England’s growing isolation from the continent.49 A royal husband offered Elizabeth the international clout that she lacked given the timing of her birth and the dissolution of her mother’s marriage to King Henry VIII. Marrying Leicester would also

upset the balance of power between the nobles within the realm established after she suppressed
the Northern Rebellion in 1569. Even though Elizabeth knew that her marriage to Leicester was
a terrible political choice, his secret marriage to Lady Essex in September of 1578 greatly
angered her. To stage a masque for the queen less than a year later that revolved around marriage
would have been completely inappropriate. The theme would have angered Elizabeth and made
her unreceptive to any political advice. The masque then was performed before Leicester’s
marriage in 1578.

One line of interpretation equates the two suitors with different foreign policy agendas,
one which advocated intervention in the Netherlands, and one which did not. The Lady of May
describes her two suitors for the queen before they enter the scene:

...I like them both, and love neither, Espilus is the richer, but
Therion the livelier: Therion doth me many pleasures, as stealing
me venison out of the forests, and many other such like a pretty
and prettier services, but withal he grows to such rages, that
sometimes he strikes me, sometimes he rails at me. This shepherd
Espilus of a mild disposition, as his fortune hath not been to do me
great service, so hath he never done me any wrong... 50

Therion, the active suitor, represents an aggressive foreign policy including more direct
intervention in the Low Countries. Sidney admits, however, that this strategy was risky.
Intervention had the potential for great rewards, “pretty and prettier services”, including a
continental ally, the preservation of another protestant state, and preventing Spain from gaining a
foothold in northern Europe from which they could easily attack England. On the other hand,
Therion’s benefits came with potential dangers. His violent outbursts represented the possibility
of military failure in the Low Countries that would leave England vulnerable to Spain. Espilus by
contrast represents a conservative foreign policy of non-intervention. He does nothing but feed
his sheep and remains aloof from anything beyond his realm unlike Therion who goes out into

the woods. Although this policy was less risky, it also lacked the potential rewards. The Lady of May gained nothing from Espilus, just as England stood to gain nothing if troops did not intervene in the Dutch Revolt. Nevertheless, Espilus was the richer of the two suitors indicating the financial cost of aiding the Low Countries. Each suitor embodied both the positive and negative aspects of the two types of foreign policy: Therion for an active policy that put England in the thick of conflict and Espilus for a passive strategy that kept the real isolated and safe.

Shenk extends this line of interpretation of *The Lady of May* in her book *Learned Queen*. She argues that the two suitors corresponded to two important figures involved in the Low Countries. Therion represented Prince Johann Casimir, a German Protestant prince and important military leader in the Low Countries. By 1578 Elizabeth was already supplying funds for his military actions. Nonetheless, both Sidney and Leicester advocated more direct intervention and were also concerned that the queen might not send the next promised payment. According to Shenk, Sidney used *The Lady of May* to remind Elizabeth of her commitment to Casimir. Therion’s line, “Bound but to you, no wealth but you I would” is compelling evidence for Shenk’s argument as it alludes to Casimir’s financial dependence on the queen’s money to raise his army. Espilus in turn represented William of Orange, who employed a more defensive and diplomatic approach in contrast to Casimir’s military one.

At the time of the performance Sidney and Leicester both sought diplomatic positions in the Low Countries. This reading of the masque demonstrated their knowledge of the current political situation in the Dutch Republic strengthening their requests for diplomatic positions and explained why the suitors would map onto specific people rather than loosely organized foreign

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51 Shenk, *Learned Queen*, 60.
policy strategies. Shenk argues that Sidney contrasted Prince Casimir and William of Orange through the suitors in the belief that Elizabeth would confirm her aid for the former by choosing Therion for the Lady of May.\textsuperscript{55} Although Elizabeth ultimately selected Espilus, she still supported intervention in the Low Countries, albeit a less aggressive involvement.

Both of these interpretations of the masque presume detailed knowledge of current events by patron, author, and audience. Anyone seeking to advise the queen needed up to date news. The court nobility had access to information and news through written and oral transmission. Although official news was available in pamphlets and broadsides, news mostly circulated through family networks. Information was power for the nobles in the fierce competition for offices and appointments. Letters provided vehicles for disseminating information quickly throughout the family network and to their contacts.\textsuperscript{56} Oral news also played an important role. Servants and members of the queen's chamber were in positions that allowed them to overhear a great deal of news and what would today be considered gossip. This gossip, such as information on marriage negotiations or love affairs, qualified as news because politics were personal. It mattered who was sleeping with whom because these personal relationships formed the basis of political networks. Information on the personal lives of courtiers was weighted equally with information on foreign affairs or policy as it also conveyed a possible advantage to the family.\textsuperscript{57} The central elite's peripheral counterparts also used these sources to gather their own information, but because most of this information stemmed from London itself, the central nobility received their information more quickly and directly.

Another reading of the masque focuses on its connection with the delicate negotiations surrounding Elizabeth's marriage possibilities. In 1578 the queen considered reopening formal


\textsuperscript{56} Mears, \textit{Political Discourse in the Elizabethan Realms}, 113.

\textsuperscript{57} Mears, \textit{Political Discourse in the Elizabethan Realms}, 112.
marriage negotiations with Francis, Duke of Anjou while the Earl of Leicester secretly arranged his own marriage to Lady Essex. This masque may have represented his final appeal to Elizabeth to Mary him before either one or both of them committed to another person. As mentioned above, a marriage to Leicester would have been unpopular for many reasons. A marriage to any Englishman would have upset the political balance within the country. In addition, an international marriage offered to open England up to the rest of the continent, ending its political isolation. Marrying a prince or other royal would have bolstered Elizabeth’s own legitimacy. From this perspective, Sidney used the figure of Therion to present an appeal on his uncle’s behalf.

Therion portrayed both Leicester’s passion for the queen in his liveliness and his drawbacks. The Lady of May disclosed that Therion, in moments of rage, has hurt her in the past. This admission referred to the other affairs Leicester had, such as with Lady Douglas Sheffield in the 1570s. Yet the Lady of May remained attracted to Therion as a viable option and therefore, Sidney suggests, so too should Elizabeth still consider Leicester. In asking Elizabeth, “Now the question I am to ask you fair Lady, is, whether the many desserts and many faults of Therion, or the very small desserts and no faults of Espilus are to be preferred,” Sidney asked Elizabeth to decide whether her emotional attraction to Leicester could outweigh his faults. Espilus either represented a safe choice to an uncontested suitor who Elizabeth may meet in the future or a decision to remain unmarried. A suitor without drawbacks probably did not exist or if he did, offered no advantages such as an emotional or political connection.

Remaining unmarried was arguably controversial but safe given that Elizabeth had maintained

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her authority for twenty years, proving she could rule well without a husband. Marrying was a risk but one that might ultimately strengthen England’s international standing. Although Leicester was Sidney’s uncle and the host, Sidney presented the positive and negative aspects of his uncle’s suit for the queen and allowed her to make an informed decision.

By presenting the two options the masque mimicked the role of Elizabeth’s unofficial advisory bodies. These groups, which included Leicester, would have discussed the choices available to Elizabeth on different topics such as the Dutch Revolt or her marriage. By examining all options, the queen was able to make an informed decision and understood the arguments of her opponents. Sidney presented both suitors and their faults rather than just one who represented the foreign policy or suitor that he favored in an effort to influence Elizabeth. Shenk argues that Sidney thought Elizabeth would pick Therion rather than Espilus illustrating how even people and advisors close to the queen did not always know her mind and even their best efforts could backfire. Her decision reminded everyone that she was the sole and ultimate source of authority.

While the masque contained multiple levels of political commentary for Elizabeth to digest, it explicitly confirmed her full authority. Sidney recognized that advising and consultation could potentially undermine Elizabeth’s sovereignty. Advisors influenced the queen with their own opinions on political matters prompting the concern that they could gain too much influence and become the decision making power in England. Most obviously the masque confirmed Elizabeth’s authority by asking her to select the suitor. Sidney did not judge the contest but left that job to his queen. Both the Lady of May and her mother asked the queen to choose a man. When Rombus, the silly school master, began to announce the better of the two men, the Lady of May reminded him that it was not his decision to make, “No no, your ordinary trains shall not

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60 Mears, *Political Discourse in the Elizabethan Realms*, 35.
deal in that matter, I have already submitted it to one [Elizabeth], whose sweet spirit hath passed through greater difficulties, neither will I that your blockheads lie in her way.”  

Her reminder elevated Elizabeth above “ordinary” men. Although Rombus represented an educated man, the Lady of May confirmed the queen’s power to make a decision over his own affirming her authority even over her learned male councilors.

In addition to this affirmation of Elizabeth’s authority included in the plot of the masque, other dialogue frequently alluded to the queen’s power. At the beginning of the performance, the mother began each half of her supplication to Elizabeth by referring to her “state”. The first line reads, “To one whose state is raised over all” 62. The mother clearly asserted that Elizabeth’s rank as queen elevated her above all other subjects. In the first line of the second half of her supplication she continued, “your state is great, your greatness is our shield,” insisting on the power inherent in queenship. 63 The second half of the line affirmed Elizabeth’s power based on other’s dependency on her. Like Deborah protected Israel, Elizabeth shields England. This image placed the queen in a position of military leadership traditionally reserved for men. Although she could never take up arms to defend England, her reign protected the country.

Besides asserting Elizabeth’s social-political elevation over her subjects, the masque also emphasized her personal power. Later in the masque Therion sings, “But you I cannot hold” in reference to the Lady of May. 64 Yet, if we read the masque as Leicester’s final appeal to Elizabeth, then Therion’s speeches were addressed to both the Lady of May and the queen. This line affirmed Elizabeth’s control over their relationship and assured the queen that should she marry him, he understood that she still would maintain her authority. When discussing Therion

61 Sidney, “The Lady of May,” 337.
64 Sidney, “The Lady of May,” 334.
and Espilus, another woodsman named Rixus commented that Elizabeth was, "one as even with her eye only can give the cruel punishment..." Rixus not only affirmed the queen’s authority to allocate punishments, but it was an effortless authority requiring only a glance. The royal gaze represented power: Elizabeth saw everything and subdued with a glance. These affirmations were interspersed throughout the dialogue to affirm Elizabeth’s authority throughout the performance.

Although Sidney never declared his own opinion on political matters and repeatedly confirmed the queen’s power, his masque required her to make a decision. Elizabeth was known for stalling her decisions much to the frustrations of her advisors. This masque arguably criticized that practice by forcing Elizabeth to select a suitor as part of the concluding scene. In addition, at the beginning of the performance, the mother explained that “…each [of the suitors] have brought their partakers with them, and are at this present, without your presence redress it, in some bloody controversy;” The Lady of May’s inability to choose a suitor has led to each man consolidate his supporters and the situation has escalated into a violent conflict. Her indecisiveness fomented intrigues and rivalry that undermined peace and order. Although the majority of the masque confirmed Elizabeth’s power, Sidney did include this criticism.

Sidney presented the queen with two models of foreign policy and a final offer of Leicester as a suitor through Therion and Espilus. This depth of meaning highlighted the central elite’s sophisticated political discourse in performance. While offering this advice, Sidney simultaneously confirmed and deferred to Elizabeth’s authority. Rather than identifying his own opinion on the issues represented by the suitors, he presented the debates and the arguments on both sides. Then the protagonist asked Elizabeth to make the final decision, thereby affirming the

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65 Sidney, “The Lady of May,” 335.
66 Shenk, Learned Queen: The Image of Elizabeth I in Politics and Poetry, 60.
queen's sovereign authority. This confirmation was necessary because the central elite were the most politically powerful group in the country. They owned the most land and therefore had the most economic and political power. Thus, they were the greatest potential threat to Elizabeth's authority and so needed to be very careful not to cross the line from proffering advice to forcing her hand in decisions.
SECTION III. A VIEW FROM THE COUNTRY:
THE ENTERTAINMENTS FROM ELIZABETH’S 1578 PROGRESS AT NORWICH

Although the country nobles had less access to Elizabeth’s person than their courtly counterparts, they, too, used performance as a vehicle for communication with their queen. Since they lived outside of London, the country nobility could not interact with Elizabeth frequently. The queen traveled often, however, in order to increase access to her person beyond the court thus extending the theater for political participation. In the first half of her reign, Elizabeth went on progress almost every summer. The queen and her court traveled around a selected region of England visiting major towns and the country estates of nobles. On her 1578 progress, Elizabeth traveled through East Anglia stopping at both private houses and for several days in Norwich. The queen’s host always went to great lengths to entertain their distinguished guest. They arranged for masques and pageants to amuse Elizabeth during dinners and hunting trips. Hosting the queen offered access to her person, and therefore an opportunity to wield or gain political power, and constituted a great financial burden.

These performances shared many characteristics with the performances of the courtly nobility. Not only did they address current political issues, but they also demonstrated an awareness of the tension involved in advising the queen. The performances attempted to influence her decisions while simultaneously confirming her authority. These performances were more direct than their court counterparts. Instead of presenting both sides of an issue, the two entertainments in this section support one option and lack a plot device that allowed the queen to demonstrate her authority, like in *The Lady of May* when she selected a suitor. These differences demonstrated that while the country nobility had the privilege of advising Elizabeth, she did not consider them as great a threat to her power as the court nobility. Their distance from the court
minimized their access to her person, and thereby political power. It was permissible for the country nobility to use direct advice because they posed less of a threat to Elizabeth’s authority.

This section examines two entertainments performed for Elizabeth during her stay in Norwich from August 16th to the 22nd. The events included a pageant presented to the queen on Tuesday as she made her way back into the city after an afternoon ride. The second performance was a masque after dinner on Thursday. The pageant recalled Sidney’s The Lady of May, while the masque presented its advice more explicitly. Some parts of the progress were accessible for all to watch, but these two entertainments were written for a limited, noble audience. A description of the two performances and their texts survives in two printed accounts of the progress. One account, written by Bernard Garter, detailed the masque while the other, written by Thomas Churchyard, contained the pageant. Both accounts were published later in 1578 in London and circulated to members of the court who did not attend the progress. These manuscripts gave the entertainments in Norwich a second life that extended their impact in terms of audience and time.

Elizabeth visited Norwich while on progress, a staple of her reign. As part of her elaborate court ceremony, the queen went on a progress almost every year in the first half of her reign. A progress required the queen and court to pack up and traveled to different parts of the realm. Through these tours she could instill favor on different nobles by granting them access to her person through a visit. Progresses, however, were difficult affairs to manage because they involved transporting a great number of people and materials. The majority of the court traveled with Elizabeth on these progresses in order to maintain royal favor. In addition, the material possessions of queen and court had to travel with them, including furniture, clothing, and
kitchenware. Somewhere between 300 and 400 baggage carts carried all of these items, increasing the number of horses that needed to be stabled and fed to an estimated 2,400. Although progresses were logistically challenging, the political benefits for Elizabeth outweighed these logistical challenges.

The queen’s progresses served several practical and political purposes. By vacating her London residences in the summer Elizabeth avoided summer plagues and illnesses, while providing her servants time to clean the palace. Visiting different parts of the realm allowed Elizabeth to check the state of her country in person. The progresses also offered the people a chance to see their queen. Historian Lisa Hopkins argues that Elizabeth understood the power of her presence in securing their loyalty. A visit from the queen could function either as a reward for loyal nobles or a way of punishing dissenters. Hosting Elizabeth was a great honor and gave the host immense prestige through access to the queen, increasing his own political influence. She visited Lord Burghley, a trusted advisor, thirteen times throughout her reign. In contrast, staying with an untrusted noble provided Elizabeth and her advisors with the opportunity to monitor that person and burden them with the expense of housing the queen and court.

For the country nobility, Elizabeth’s summer progresses increased both access to her person and information. When the queen traveled about her realm, the court moved with her and continued to function. Many of the country nobles gained what was for them unprecedented access to the government when Elizabeth stayed in their home. Although a visit from the queen was a great honor, it was also very expensive to house, feed, and entertain Elizabeth and her

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69 Lisa Hopkins, Queen Elizabeth I and her court. (New York City, NY: St Martin’s Press, 1990) 137.
70 Hopkins, Queen Elizabeth I and her court, 135.
71 Hopkins, Queen Elizabeth I and her court, 135.
72 Hopkins, Queen Elizabeth I and her court, 138.
court. Hopkins reports that Lord Burghley spent £3,000, an enormous amount of money at the
time, on the queen’s visits.\textsuperscript{73} Towns, like individuals, also hosted Elizabeth on progress. Visiting
a town allowed the queen to inspire loyalty among the common people and monitor its governing
body. The Town of Norwich experienced the honor and burden of hosting their queen in 1578. In
addition to housing, feeding, and entertaining Elizabeth, the town made huge efforts to improve
its appearance, including regraveling entrances to the city, repainting the city center, and
requiring citizens to plaster the side of their house that faced the street.\textsuperscript{74} Although it was a
financial burden, the queen’s progress sparked an urban renewal in the towns she visited.

Norwich’s unique history made the city an attractive host for Elizabeth. The town was an
important economic center and therefore a good place to promote good will towards the crown
but it harbored a history of religious nonconformity that warranted a royal visit to assess the
situation. Norwich was the second largest city in England in the sixteenth century with a
population of roughly 8,500 inhabitants.\textsuperscript{75} The city’s wealth derived from the textile trade and to
a lesser extent, on moving and selling material goods.\textsuperscript{76} In 1565, Norwich received permission
from Elizabeth for a number of Dutch refugees with textile experience to settle in the city in an
effort to revive the declining textile industry.\textsuperscript{77} While the Dutch refugees did help improve the
textile industry in the city, there was intermittent local opposition to the immigrants.\textsuperscript{78} Elizabeth
and her advisors could monitor the important cloth industry and the immigrant population during
her visit.

\textsuperscript{73} Hopkins, \textit{Queen Elizabeth I and her court}, 138.
\textsuperscript{74} Dovey, \textit{An Elizabethan Progress}, 64.
\textsuperscript{75} Muriel C. McClendon, \textit{Quiet Reformation: Magistrates and the Emergence of Protestantism in Tudor
\textsuperscript{76} McClendon, \textit{Quiet Reformation}, 2.
\textsuperscript{77} McClendon, \textit{Quiet Reformation}, 212.
\textsuperscript{78} Dovey, \textit{An Elizabethan Progress}, 63.
Norwich also enjoyed a rare degree of autonomy for cities in Elizabethan England. In 1404, Henry IV made the city its own county, separating it from the government and judicial system of Norfolk; at the time only four other cities, including London, enjoyed such sovereignty. In addition twenty-four aldermen, sixty councilmen, two sheriffs, and a mayor governed the city, and all of these officials were elected to their posts. Although aldermen were elected not for a term but for life, and the voting population was limited to freemen, this minimal democracy contrasted sharply with Elizabeth’s authoritarian style of government. Dissent stemming from Norwich, regardless of its source, also carried a political connotation because the city’s government was more republican than the rest of the country. Reassuring Elizabeth of the city’s loyalty was therefore loaded with political significance.

Norwich had a long and difficult history of religious dissent that challenged the queen as well. Elizabeth demanded strict adherence to the Anglican Church in an effort to maintain stability within the realm. In the 1559 Act of Supremacy and Act of Uniformity, Elizabeth reestablished the Church of England as a Protestant church separate from the Pope and mandated that all of her subjects adhere to its practices, including mandatory attendance at mass. Neither Catholics, who had lost the legitimacy they had enjoyed under Mary, nor more radical Protestants were happy with the compromised Anglican Church. Norwich was known for religious nonconformity and harbored large numbers of Catholics and radical Puritans who refused to comply with the Anglican Church. The city government adopted a policy of religious toleration contrary to the Act of Uniformity that protected the rights of these dissidents.

79 McClendon, Quiet Reformation, 3.
80 McClendon, Quiet Reformation, 3.
81 McClendon, Quiet Reformation, 192.
82 McClendon, Quiet Reformation, 199.
Elizabeth and her Privy Council used their stay in Norwich to confront some of these lingering resentments and dissenting individuals personally.

Norwich was also the site of a minor rebellion in 1570. A number of local and nearby Catholics or Catholic sympathizers banded together in an attempt to start a revolution and overthrow Elizabeth. Although the participants were caught before they did anything and executed, this incident occurred right after the Northern Rebellion in a time when the queen’s anxiety over national uprisings was high. The thwarted revolt also demonstrated the potential for religious toleration to explode in political revolt even though, the city continued to ignore minor infractions of the Act of Uniformity. The queen’s progress was especially important for the nobility of Norwich to show Elizabeth that they would conform to her policies and to restore and improve the image of their unruly city.

_Direct and Reasoned Advice: The Triumph of Chastity_

One of the many entertainments Norwich arranged for the queen’s visit depicted Chastity’s triumph over Cupid, indicating Norwich’s desire that Elizabeth not marry the Duke of Anjou. The pageant explained to the queen why maintaining her virginity was the wisest choice but like Sidney’s masque, clarified that it was Elizabeth’s choice to make. On Tuesday, Elizabeth and members of the nobility took a ride outside of the city. Thomas Churchyard arranged a pageant to greet her upon her return to Norwich. Churchyard’s “hastily prepared” pageant drew a great number of “the common people” who followed Churchyard and the actors from the city to see the queen and entertainment. Although commoners comprised part of the audience for this pageant, they were an unplanned addition. Churchyard wrote the show for Elizabeth and the

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83 McClendon, _Quiet Reformation_, 224.
84 Nichols, ed., _Progresses of Elizabeth_, v. 2, 188.
nobles, both court and country, who accompanied the queen on her ride. The city of Norwich had hired Churchyard to write many of the entertainments for Elizabeth’s visit placing this performance within the realm of the country nobility even though members of other groups were present.

The dominant message of the pageant was the power of Chastity and her triumph over Cupid, criticizing the Anjou marriage. After a brief introduction, Chastity appeared and took Cupid’s coach, cloak, and bow clearly asserting her dominance over him. Chastity then approached the queen and spoke to her:

Dame Chastity is she that wins the field,
Whose breast is armed with thoughts of virtues rare,
Who to the fight doth bring no glittering shield,
But clean conceits, which pure and blessed are,
That strikes down lust, and tames the willful mind,
Maintains the just, and holds up learning both:
And wisdom great through me the sages find,
Philosophers the lovers of the truth.  

In this excerpt, Chastity declared her victory over Cupid and extolled her wisdom as an integral part of her authority. By disarming Cupid, Chastity demonstrated her physical prowess over him. Later in the pageant a Philosopher asked Cupid to prove that he had the power of a god and Cupid failed to do so further indicating his weakness. The Philosopher declared that, “Cupid’s art infects good minds, and cankers honest ears.”  

Chastity triumphed over Cupid and this demonstrated the power of continence to tame the passions represented by Cupid. The performance made a strong case for Elizabeth to remain a virgin and reject her marriage to the Duke. It suggested that chastity was a source of her intellectual and political authority.

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Churchyard reinforced this message by explaining the benefits of chastity and its role in good government. Related to overcoming sexual love, Chastity “tames the willful mind”. A strong monarch cannot be a slave to her own whims, but must act for the good of the nation. She also “holds up learning” and described herself as the source of wisdom. Education and wisdom were also important components to good government, as the king or queen needed to be intelligent and knowledgeable so that he or she could make good decisions. At the end of the preceding quotation, Chastity also declared that she “Maintains the just”, yet another important characteristic of a good monarch. In summary Chastity stated, “Yea all good gifts from Chastity doth rise.”

In addition to overcoming harmful sexual love, chastity enabled moral autonomy. By remaining chaste and not marrying the Duke of Anjou, Elizabeth protected her independence and that of her realm from a Catholic influence. This argument explained the reasoning behind the Norwich elite’s disapproval of the proposed marriage. By explaining the reasons for their preference they accomplished two things. Their advice to Elizabeth was more persuasive and the explanation characterized it as advice or suggestion rather than a demand or command. They explained to Elizabeth why it would be the best course of action so that she would have all of the information when she made her decision about the Duke, rather than stating their position directly.

In addition to emphasizing chastity’s relationship to wisdom, learning, and justice, the pageant also connected the virtue to military success. Towards the end of Chastity’s speech, she declared that, “Yea Kings and Queens by me work wonders still, Do conquer Realms, and wisdom do attain.” These lines asserted chastity’s influence in armed conflict. Not only does chastity lead to a wiser and more just leader, because it kept Elizabeth’s reasoning independent

from the influence of a Catholic husband, but also one more successful in war. This message both referred to the Dutch Revolt and linked the issues of the Low Countries and the Anjou marriage together. While the quotation did not advocate active involvement in the Dutch Revolt, it expressed the belief that any involvement would be successful. Through Chastity’s simultaneous support of this success and rejection of sexual love and marriage Churchyard denied one of the queen’s reasons for pursuing the Anjou marriage. By marrying the Duke of Anjou, Elizabeth hoped to control his involvement in the Low Countries, thereby ensuring they received support against Spain, but not directly involving England and possibly incurring Spain’s wrath. This pageant asserted that Elizabeth could be successful in the Low Countries without Anjou. In addition to their explanations for not supporting the Anjou marriage, Churchyard and the Norwich nobility also addressed one of Elizabeth’s reasons for pursuing the marriage. They thereby demonstrated their understanding of Elizabeth’s own thinking and offered a different opinion.

The pageant contained a clear and reasoned opinion on the Anjou marriage, like Sidney’s The Lady of May, but it also affirmed the queen’s authority in the midst of this advice. In Chastity’s speech declaring her victory over Cupid, she reminded the audience that, “Then this (oh Queen) chaste life is thus thy choice.”99 While chastity was a powerful virtue because it maintained the queen’s independence, it was a choice for the monarch to make, not a requirement. Elizabeth was fully within her power to ignore the advice of this pageant and marry the Duke. Later, Chastity presented Cupid’s bow to the queen as a gift saying, “Wherefore take here the bow, and learn to shoot/ At whom thou will, thy heart it is so clean,/ Blind Cupids bolts therein can take no root.”90 Both the legendary powers of Cupid’s bow and Chastity’s speech

confirmed Elizabeth’s authority to choose her own suitor. Chastity’s assertion that the same magic arrows would not work on Elizabeth again stressed the power of her will. These lines clarified for the queen that the Norwich elite understood that Elizabeth had no obligation to follow the advice they offered. The affirmations of Elizabeth’s power indicate the tension between advising the queen and undermining her authority. It was a delicate balance that had to be negotiated in each entertainment and carefully presented because like the court nobles, the country nobility risked overstepping their bounds and offending the queen.

This entertainment presented Elizabeth with direct and reasoned advice against marrying the Duke of Anjou. Unlike Sidney’s *The Lady of May*, Churchyard did not represent both options and then allow the queen to reach her own conclusions. This difference clarified what option the Norwich elite advocated and revealed the relative political weakness of the country elite caused by their distance from the court. To balance the direct advice offered in the performance, the characters confirmed Elizabeth’s own authority by emphasizing that their advice was a suggestion for her to consider. Given Norwich’s tumultuous history with religious conformity and a minor revolt, this pageant lacks the declarations of loyalty seen in Elizabeth’s pre-coronation entrance that would assuage any fears she had about the faithfulness of the city. This performance comprised one part of the entertainments for Elizabeth’s stay in Norwich and so contained only one part of the message Norwich presented its queen. A masque performed a few days later restated the political points of this pageant while emphasizing the city’s loyalty.

*A Second View of the Country Nobility: Assurances of Loyalty*

Several days after the pageant of Cupid and Chastity, the nobility of Norwich entertained Elizabeth after dinner with a masque. The performance consisted of music and a parade of
Olympian gods offering gifts and speeches to the queen. The masque, written by Henry
Goldingham, reiterated the advice about the Dutch Revolt and the Anjou marriage in a manner
that affirmed Elizabeth’s power. These messages, however, were more explicit than the
allegorical methods of the Sidney masque or the Cupid and Chastity pageant. The prevailing
theme in the masque, however, was neither the marriage nor the Dutch issues, but rather the
confirmation of the devotion of Elizabeth’s subjects seen through a pervasive language of
loyalty. This language responded to Norwich’s local issues including religious non conformity
and the short-lived rebellion earlier in the decade.

Goldingham’s masque praised Elizabeth’s virginity in order to deny the Anjou marriage
and affirmed England’s military prowess, continuing the message of Tuesday’s pageant. Her
body, like the kingdom itself, was sealed of to outsiders. An enclosed realm was a powerful one.
As Susan Doran points out, this masque first utilized the imagery of the Virgin Queen.91 In her
speech, Diana praised Elizabeth for her purity, emphasizing virginity as a positive and desirable
attribute, “Whoever found a body and a mind/ So free from stain, so perfect to be seen… Rare is
thy gift, and given to few or none.”92 In praising Elizabeth’s virginity, the elite of Norwich urged
her to remain single and use her virtue to strengthen her authority. Thus they voice their
opposition to the Anjou marriage in a similar manner as the pageant of Cupid and Chastity.

Missing from this masque, however, was the explanation of why virginity was desirable,
especially in a queen. The message that Elizabeth should not marry was more direct and
forcefully because it lacked reasoning to convince the queen. Norwich’s distance from London,
over one hundred miles, diminished the political threat of its inhabitances allowing them to
address Elizabeth more directly. This masque was hosted by the local mayor, further reducing

91 Susan Doran. "Juno versus Diana: The Treatment of Elizabeth I’s Marriage in Plays and
Entertainments, 1561 - 1581." 272.
the potential challenge to Elizabeth’s authority. The mayor was a member of the local elite rather than a noble land owner. Norwich’s bylaws limited his term as mayor, although he would serve as an alderman for life. His station below the gentry and transient position permitted him to engage in a more direct discourse with Elizabeth. Although the mayor himself did not pose a political threat to the queen, Norwich remained a powerful and important economic city in England. Even though the mayor himself was of lower social standing than the nobles of the court, as the representative of Norwich Elizabeth received his advise through this masque.

Speeches by Mars and Neptune promised to support English intervention in the Low Countries. This pledge offered an example of how the Norwich would prove its loyalty to Elizabeth given its dubious past. Mars also comments, “Where force doth fiercely seek to foster wrong,/ There Mars doth make him make a quick recoil,/ Nor can endure that he should harbor long,/ Where naughty wights manure in goodly soil.” This quotation deemed English intervention in the Dutch Revolt justified and morally correct. The Norwich elites believed that England had the military prowess and justification to intervene in the Low Countries.

It is important to note that the gods do not, however, demand war, but rather defer to Elizabeth confirming her power. Mars’s promised support was for when the queen needed it, rather than for a specific campaign that he advocated. He even called her a “Prince of Peace,” implying that it was equally acceptable to remain aloof from the Low Countries. Through Neptune and Mars, Norwich stated its confidence in and support of English aid to the Dutch Republic, however, it did not mandate it. Instead they left the decision in Elizabeth’s hands. Venus also confirmed Elizabeth’s authority at the beginning of her speech when she proclaimed,

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93 Dovey, *An Elizabethan Progress*, 81.
"In vain (fair queen) from Heaven my coming was,/ To seek t'amend that is no way amiss."\textsuperscript{96} Venus assumed that Elizabeth’s lack of husband reflected her lack of beauty. These lines clarified that the queen actively chose to remain unmarried. Every decision was Elizabeth’s to make indicating her supremacy.

The most important objective in this masque was confirming the loyalty of Norwich’s elite. In the masque, the issue of allegiance was addressed first by the king and queen of the gods, underscoring the importance of the issue. Although Mercury spoke first in the masque, Jupiter, the king of the gods, was the first to present a gift. His speech to Elizabeth was dominated by reassurances about the allegiance of the people of Norwich. His opening lines addressed the issue directly, "Fear not, oh Queen, thou art beloved so,/ As subjects true, will truly thee defend:"\textsuperscript{97} He acknowledged Elizabeth’s concerns about the loyalty of her people given their involvement in the earlier rebellion and the subsequent religious dissention in the area. The last line both promised Elizabeth that Norwich will defend her against any other threat and also reminded her that the city quelled the rebellion on its own, demonstrating the loyalty of the majority in the face of the treachery of a few. Jupiter then immediately proclaimed that although these fears were justified, they were needless because her people were loyal and would defend her, presumably from dissenters elsewhere. He later referred to her subjects as “loving” confirming their allegiance again, and ends the speech with a promise of their continued obedience, "I give thee here this small and slender wand,/ To show thou shall in quiet rule the land."\textsuperscript{98} The “quiet rule” signified one without rebellion, promising the queen that the people of Norwich would not revolt again.

In the next speech, Juno praised the wealth of Elizabeth and how far it surpassed her own. This wealth was not monetary, but rather the devotion of her people, “Thou art beloved of

\textsuperscript{96} Nichols, ed., \textit{Progresses of Elizabeth}, v. 2, 161.
\textsuperscript{97} Nichols, ed., \textit{Progresses of Elizabeth}, v. 2, 160.
\textsuperscript{98} Nichols, ed., \textit{Progresses of Elizabeth}, v. 2, 160.
subjects far and nye, Which is such wealth as money cannot bye.”99 Like her husband, Juno proclaimed the fidelity of the English people, specifically those of Norwich, for their queen. This quotation also indicated that the love of her people was the most valuable source of her power and prosperity. This sentiment recalled one of the causes of good government from the pre-coronation entry of 1559 that affirmed the obedience of her subjects. Like the earlier entertainment, this speech acknowledged the role of loyal subjects in a strong state. By affirming the loyalty of the people of Norwich first, the nobility indicated that allegiance was the most significant issue within the masque. They also needed to establish themselves as loyal subjects of the queen before they presumed to advise her.

This masque confirmed the advice of the earlier Norwich pageant, but focused on establishing the loyalty of the city’s elite. Both entertainments attempted to advise Elizabeth on current events indicating that the privilege of consultation extended beyond the court to the country nobility. The shows offered advice to the queen including arguments against marrying the Duke of Anjou. The direct language indicated that the country nobility posed a lesser threat to Elizabeth’s authority than their courtly counterparts. While Sidney presented two allegorical responses to the situation in the Low Countries, Goldingham and Churchyard advocated one option and then confirmed Elizabeth’s choice. Presenting the queen with specific advice undermined Elizabeth’s authority because should she follow that counsel it would be unclear if she was governing herself or if her advisors were governing through her. The court nobility held these advisory positions and greater political power than the country nobles because they had greater access to Elizabeth’s person. Sidney’s The Lady of May illustrated how the court nobility presented advice in a way that required the queen to make her own choice, thereby demonstrating her authority to balance their greater power. The country nobility, on the other

hand, offered Elizabeth direct advice and nominally confirmed her authority without giving offence because they did not represent the same threat to Elizabeth's power.
While both the court and country nobility used performances to advise Elizabeth on current political issues, the commoners did not enjoy the same privilege. Instead performances before the queen given on behalf of commoners functioned as ritualized affirmations of loyalty and affection towards the queen. They assured Elizabeth of the people’s loyalty while demonstrating the correct affection of subjects for their queen. Elizabeth permitted nobles, the peers of the realm, to consult with her, but receiving advice from a commoner was not part of the accepted practice of royal government. The common people did not need to confirm her power to make decisions, a theme that permeated the performances given by the nobility, because they had no recognized advisory role that might infringe on her authority. Instead, ceremonies offered general proclamations of loyalty and affection for their queen. Elizabeth knew that the common people could exercise power by rebelling against the crown. The affirmations of loyalty both assuaged any fears of this possibility and reminded the people that they were expected to remain faithful to their queen.

This section examines Elizabeth’s entrance into Norwich during her 1578 progress through East Anglia. The entertainments for her entrance included two main pageants and several speeches. The first pageant depicted the clothing trade and the other included speeches by individuals who represented female figures from the Bible. The text of the performances demonstrated the people’s loyalty to the queen by stating the popular affection for the monarch and conveying satisfaction with her rule thus far. The two accounts written by Bernard Garter and Thomas Churchyard also included descriptions of Elizabeth’s reaction to the shows and the
people's reaction to their queen depicting a good relationship between the monarch and common people.

The pageants for Elizabeth’s entrance were written by the authors of the printed accounts, Churchyard and Garter, who also composed the entertainments presented by the nobility. The performances differed from the others we have examined due to the presence of the commoners in the audience. When Elizabeth entered a city, she met the common people who lined the streets to greet her as she processed through the town. The pageants interspersed on her route, although written by members of the nobility, offered staged interactions between the queen and her humblest subjects. They represented the nobility’s vision of how the common people should relate to Elizabeth, rather than the commoners’ own conception of this relationship. These pageants and interactions demonstrate how the nobility allowed the commoners to participate in government through their limited access to the queen.

The lack of commentary on current events did not reflect a lack of political information. Both lower literacy rates among the common people and the price of a news pamphlet prevented them from obtaining their news through written means. Although literacy statistics are spotty for mid-sixteenth century England, historian David Cressy has compiled illiteracy rates based on occupation and location for the early seventeenth century. While the country nobility were 98% literate, members of other professions varied. Bakers were statistically the most literate at 73% while miners, women, and laborers attained 4%, 10%, and 15% literacy respectively. The price of pamphlets made them prohibitively expensive for members of the working populace. Although many bakers could read, they often lacked disposable income for buying pamphlets.

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100 Mears, *Queenship and Political Discourse in the Elizabethan Realms*, 173.
These rates alone do not reveal the world of sixteenth-century news and information because news also traveled orally. Norwich was the second largest city in England in the sixteenth century and an important economic center. Many people traveled through the city on business and brought news from other parts of the country. Also the nobility of the city gathered news through written means. The common people who worked for the gentry were in positions to overhear some of this news. The nobility would also share general information that did not give them an upper hand in their rivalries. Elizabeth also issued many proclamations throughout her reign that were read aloud in markets and town centers for everyone to hear. These announcements brought the word of the ruler to the people. They included reminders against breaking various laws and notices including the death or a monarch’s succession to the throne. The country commoners did not have as much an access to information as the nobility, but they still had channels for obtaining news, and would have been aware of current events.

The performances before Elizabeth for her entrance into Norwich did not comment on issues like the Dutch Revolt and possible Anjou marriage because the queen did not accept advice from the common people. Consultation between a monarch and members of the nobility was an accepted, even encouraged aspect of government, but commoners were expected to obey not advise. They had no recognized political role. Taking advice from someone so beneath her, would have weakened Elizabeth’s status. Also advice from ordinary subject could not be classified as consultation with the nobility, making this advice critical and subversive rather than constructive. While Elizabeth accepted the implicit criticism on the Anjou marriage conveyed in letters by Philip Sidney or Thomas Cecil, she arrested John Stubbe in 1579 for his critical pamphlet on the same topic. Mears explained that while Sidney and Cecil were members of

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103 Mears, *Queenship and Political Discourse in the Elizabethan Realms*, 125.
the court, Stubbe was a commoner and as such his criticism did not qualify as appropriate consultation, but rather sedition. Criticism from the humble masses was unacceptable as it challenged Elizabeth’s rule because it elevated them beyond obedient subjects to a role in the government and implied that the queen required their advice.

The performances at the queen’s entrance emphasized the love and loyalty of the people of Norwich thus reassuring Elizabeth of their faithfulness and reminding the audience of how they should feel towards their monarch. These declarations of love and joy by or on behalf of the common people were equivalent to the affirmations of Elizabeth’s authority made by nobility. There was less need for the performances of the common people to confirm the queen’s authority because they were not considered threats to her political power unlike the peers of the realm. The pageantry conveyed the people’s loyalty in a number of ways. They made explicit statements of the city’s joy at hosting its queen and the loyalty of the people. The second pageant drew upon biblical examples of virtuous female rulers and asked Elizabeth to continue her current policies and methods indicating their support of her reign. The message of loyalty both reassured the queen and instructed the people in their relationship to their monarch.

In the opening of the second pageant, the figure of the City of Norwich conveyed the city’s excitement and joy at hosting their queen. She proclaims that:

In admiration of thy grace, good Queen thou art welcome hither,  
More welcome than Terpsicore, was to the town of Troy.  
Sea-faring men by Gemini conceive not half my joy:  
Strong Hercules to Theseus was never such delight  
Nor Nisus to Eurialus as I have in this sight,  
Penelope did never thirst Ulysses more to see  
Than I poor Norwich hungered have to gain the sight of thee.  

104 Mears, Queenship and Political Discourse in the Elizabethan Realms, 126.  
This passage represented the excitement of the city and its people in three ways. First the City of Norwich emphasized the extent of the queen’s welcome in the city. Next she referenced the joy that the occasion brought the city by comparing it to the joy sailors experience in locating the constellation of Gemini. Finally she explained that the city’s desire to see their queen was a hunger greater than Penelope’s desire to see Ulysses after his long travels. These classical comparisons emphasized for Elizabeth the city’s love for her. For the audience they served as a reminder that that they should experience such strong feelings for their queen. While every member of the audience probably did not understand all of the classical references, the language of the passage clarified its meaning. Elizabeth was more welcome in Norwich than some other person was to another place. The town hungered to see her more than another woman thirsted for a long lost husband. The meaning was clear without knowing the significance of the references: Norwich was ecstatic to welcome its queen.

The final speech of the queen’s entry stated the loyalty of the people as a parting confirmation of their allegiance. After several musicians played to entertain Elizabeth, a boy on a scaffolding delivered the final speech that explained to the queen that the people hoped she was pleased with the welcome they provided for her at her entrance. In his final line he stated, “Thine own we are, in heart, in word, and deed.”106 This quotation declared the allegiance of the people of Norwich: they were loyal to her in every way. The line confirmed Elizabeth’s power over Norwich and their obedience to her. It reminded the people that they owed the queen not only their loyalty in their actions, but also in their thoughts and heart. As the final line uttered to the queen during her entrance this explicit message of loyalty carried great weight because it summarized the points and implications of the other pageants.

The performances also assured Elizabeth of the city’s loyalty by expressing its support of a female leader. The second pageant performed for Elizabeth on her entrance into Norwich featured speeches by the City of Norwich and four biblical women: Deborah, Judith, Ester, and Martia. Each woman spoke of her experience ruling or defending her country with God’s help. Judith proclaimed:

The rage of foes Betbulia did besiege,
The people faint were ready for to yield:
God aided me poor widow nethertheless,
To enter into Holofernes field,
And with this sword by his directing hand,
To slay his foe, and quiet so the land.
If this his grace were given to me poor wight,
If widows hand could vanquish such a foe:
Then to a Prince of thy surpassing might.
What Tyrant lives but thou mayest overthrow.\(^{107}\)

Even though Judith was a woman, through God’s help she successfully defended her people. This pageant recalled Deborah’s speech in Elizabeth’s pre-coronation entry. Judith illustrated an example of both a female leader and a divinely chosen ruler. She and the other women demonstrated that the people of Norwich had no concerns about Elizabeth’s ability to rule because she was a woman. Judith actively defended her people from their enemies, slaying her foe in battle. Norwich assured the queen that they supported her rule even though others questioned it based on her gender.

Judith and the other women’s examples of their own success did all stem from God’s support. Emphasizing God’s importance was not a directive for the queen about the role of religion in her rule, rather an affirmation of the relationship she already cultivated with God. Elizabeth believed that she had a strong relationship with God and that he supported her reign. In

\(^{107}\) Nichols, ed., *Progresses of Elizabeth*, v. 2, 147.
one prayer she wrote, "Thou art my God and King: I am thy handmaid."\textsuperscript{108} She understood her role as queen as a dutiful servant or handmaiden of God. The performance also instructed the common people in the crowd. It provided them with examples of strong female rulers from the bible, an authoritative source, and reminded them that God supported these women just as he supported Elizabeth. Through this pageant Norwich expressed its allegiance to the queen through affirmation of both Elizabeth's relationship to God and her gender while offering compelling examples of successful female leaders from the Bible.

Supporting the queen's current policies was another way that Norwich declared its loyalty to Elizabeth. It conveyed that the people were happy with their queen and had no reason to be disloyal. In the second pageant both Deborah and Ester asked Elizabeth to continue her current role with the people. Hester said, "Be still (good Queen) their refuge and their rock,"\textsuperscript{109} while Debon asked that Elizabeth, "Continue as thou hast begun"\textsuperscript{110} Asking the queen to maintain her policies and relationship with the people as they were asserted the city's satisfaction with the crown. The stage of the first pageant contained another affirmation of Elizabeth's good rule. Behind the scenes of various types of cloth production these words were written: "The causes of this commonwealth are, God truly preached. Justice duly executed. Idleness expelled. The people obedient. Labour cherished. Universal concord preserved."\textsuperscript{111} This inscription both commended Elizabeth's governance by listing what she had accomplished and gently highlighted what she should continue doing. It also underscored how the people of Norwich contributed to a strong commonwealth. The tableaux showed them working hard in the textile trade executing two of the seven causes: labor cherished and idleness expelled. These scenes contrasted

\textsuperscript{108} Elizabeth, \textit{Elizabeth I: Collected Works}, 136.
\textsuperscript{109} Nichols, ed., \textit{Progresses of Elizabeth}, v. 2, 148.
\textsuperscript{110} Nichols, ed., \textit{Progresses of Elizabeth}, v. 2, 147.
\textsuperscript{111} Nichols, ed., \textit{Progresses of Elizabeth}, v. 2, 143.
Norwich's industry as a source of peace and prosperity with idleness and dissent that led to civil unrest. The printed account of the entrance presented productive labor as a unifying force for the nation. This pageant demonstrated the people's understanding of the components of good government illustrating that while the common people were not allowed to advise the queen, they were allowed to judge the general effectiveness of the government.

Another important part of the two accounts were their description of Elizabeth's reactions to the entertainments and the people's responses to their monarch. In the accounts, Elizabeth made a show of listening to the entertainments. Her attention indicated it was important that the commoners felt that they had a chance to interact with the queen. This attention also gave an illusion of a reciprocal relationship between the queen and the people in place of the consultation that existed between the queen and members of the gentry. After the first pageant, Churchyard described Elizabeth's reaction: "This show pleased her Majesty so greatly, as she particularly viewed the knitting and spinning of the children, perused the Looms, and noted the several works and commodities which were made by these means: and then after great thanks by her given to the people, marched towards the market place."¹¹² According to Garter, Elizabeth showed great interest in the pageant and carefully examined the cloth making demonstrations on stage. Norwich highlighted its contribution to the English economy in this pageant, illustrating for Elizabeth how they served her. Her examination was an inspection of this wealthy that confirmed the people's importance to the country and demonstrated that the queen cared about what her people produced.

Churchyard also described the people's reaction to their queen. Their positive and boisterous response indicated their affection and a strong sense of loyalty for Elizabeth. These

responses were very important in assessing the common people’s feeling towards their monarch. When the queen first approached the city, he reported that the people cried out with joy.

Whether the Majesty of the Prince, which is incomparable, or joy of her subjects, which exceeded measure, were the greater, I think would have appalled the judgment of Apollo to define. The acclamations and cries of the people to the Almighty God for the preservation of her Majesty, rattled so loud, as hardly for a great time could any thing be heard...\footnote{Nichols, ed., \emph{Progresses of Elizabeth}, v. 2, 139.}

According to this passage, the common people of Norwich were overjoyed to see their queen. Their joy was “incomparable” and their cries were so loud that nothing else could be heard. This reaction demonstrated that the common people loved Elizabeth. This description in combination with Elizabeth’s attention to the pageants demonstrated a strong relationship between subjects and monarch. The loyalty and affection of the common people established Elizabeth as a popular ruler, one they would not want overthrown.

In a different report of the queen’s entrance written by the Spanish Ambassador, Elizabeth was not so gracious to her people indicating tension rather than affection between the queen and her people. He commented that, “When she entered Norwich the large crowds of people came out to receive her, and one company of children knelt as she passed and said, as usual, “God save the Queen”. She turned to them and said, “Speak up; I know you do not love me here.”\footnote{Calendar of State Papers (Spanish) (1568-79) 611.} This version of the entrance captured lingering hostility between the queen and her people. Elizabeth was not pleased by Norwich’s toleration of religious nonconformity and the local rebellion. Although the people greeted her respectfully, Elizabeth replied with antagonism. In this passage she is portrayed as a distant and intimidating monarch who cannot forget the recent challenges to her authority.
What is one to make of these two radically different accounts? It is most likely that neither account was completely accurate and free from bias. Churchyard and Garter as loyal subjects of the queen, portrayed the queen’s reception in as good a light as possible. The Catholic Spanish did not like the Protestant English, so their Ambassador may have highlighted fissures and unrest between the queen and her subjects that pointed to the potential for revolt. Churchyard and Garter’s description of the entertainments were designed as propaganda to present Elizabeth as the beloved monarch of a secure state. Their narrative of Elizabeth’s and the common people’s reactions could have been easily augmented or fabricated. The relationship between Elizabeth and her subjects may not have been as good as Garter and Churchyard’s accounts led its readers to believe, but it was still important to promote the idea that the queen and common people had a great deal of affection for each other. This idea strengthened Elizabeth’s rule. It gave the impression that past rifts had healed and that the people of Norwich were loyal to their queen and would not be swayed by a local lord or foreign organizer.

The entertainments for Elizabeth during her entrance into Norwich assured the queen of the common people’s loyalty and devotion, but they did not offer the people a chance to advise their monarch on current issues such as the Dutch Revolts or Anjou marriage, illustrating their limited participation in government. Rather, the entrance did more work to bolster Elizabeth’s stability. The ceremonies created a space for sovereign and subject to interact so that the common people experienced some communication with their queen. Although this discussion of good government did not advise Elizabeth on current political issues it provided an outlet for the tensions of commoners because it offered them some access to the queen. This purpose had particular significance in Norwich, as opposed to other towns, because of the city’s economic importance. The pageants emphasized the importance of production and enacted proper loyalty.
for their monarch to inspire the people to continue working hard for the benefit of the realm. The accounts of her entrance written by Thomas Churchyard and Bernard Garter, which were printed in London shortly after her summer progress, conveyed the commoners’ support of and devotion to Elizabeth to members of the nobility who were not present at the entrance. Although these accounts are likely more propaganda than truth, as the Spanish Ambassador’s report shows, they strengthened Elizabeth’s government through the demonstrated approval of the common people. Even though it was not appropriate for the common people to advice their queen, the importance of their loyalty or perceived support indicates the power they wielded as a group.
CONCLUSION

Performance provided a political outlet in Elizabethan England for all levels of society. The nobility both at court and in the country offered their queen advice on current affairs through entertainments. Sidney’s *The Lady of May* and the pageants and masque staged at Norwich expressed opinions about the Anjou marriage and the Dutch Rebellion that created a conversation through performance. Although the privilege of advising the queen did not extend to the masses, the royal entrances into London and Norwich provided the common people with a chance to glimpse and interact with their monarch. According to Mulcaster, Churchyard, and Garter, Elizabeth demonstrated affection for her subjects and appreciation for the pageants they presented. Through her progresses and public ceremony Elizabeth increased access to her person and created a space for political dialogue beyond her court. Even though this interaction did not effected political control more than political power, it still provided an alternative mode of communicating with the queen other than revolt. Thus, the performance created a perception of consultation even if it was not translated into actual power.

Shifting our gaze ahead several decades, the reign of King Charles I underscored the importance of this alternative space for dialogue. Charles failed to employ performances as a point of interaction with the common people. While many scholars assert that Charles distanced himself from his people, Kevin Sharpe argues that the king did travel throughout his realm with pomp and ceremony, but that he did not understand the importance of acknowledging his subjects until the end of his reign.115 Sharpe explains, “Apart from the occasional winning gesture, he did not charm his subjects with long speeches of thanks in return for their welcoming addresses.”116 Unlike his Tudor predecessor, Charles failed to demonstrate affection for his

subjects. His lack of comment on their performances contrasts with Elizabeth's reactions. In her reign, public pageantry acted as a dialogue on loyalty and affection between monarch and subject. Although this discussion did not affect political results, it allowed the common people to communicate and connect with their monarch. Charles's lack of reaction to public performances prevented a similar dialogue from taking place and led to increasing isolation from his people and his Parliament.

Eliminating this mode of interaction between subject and sovereign left both the common people and nobles who resided in the country away from the court without this political outlet. The masses had no recourse other than revolt to express any feelings to their King. This uprising came in the form of the English Civil Wars the second of which ended with Charles's execution. King Charles cultivated an authoritarian style and his attempt to restructure Parliament angered nobles who allied themselves with the ignored commoners, giving the people cause to rebel. Elizabeth also ruled with an autocratic hand and her nobles resented her refusal to marry or name an heir and only one major rebellion in the north and a few other minor uprisings marred her reign. She provided her subjects, especially the common people, with another outlet for political energy and through published accounts created an image of loyalty and affection between the queen and her people, deterring nobles or foreign governments from inciting revolts. By publicly responding to entertainments of her people, Elizabeth acknowledged that they had importance in the realm, not enough to warrant political power, but enough to deserve attention and respect from their monarch.
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