

# MARRIAGE AND SUCCESSION: THE ANXIETY OF QUEEN ELIZABETH I

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## Abstract

*Queen Elizabeth I's speeches during her early reign present the anxiety of both her body politic and her body natural. As an unwed female ruler in the sixteenth century, she has been requested many times to marry and produce an heir, and as the Queen of England, she is expected to name a successor to the throne very soon. The subject of marriage and succession is presented best in Elizabeth's speeches in 1558, 1559, 1561, 1563, 1566, and 1567, which also portray the separation of her political body and natural body. As Elizabeth declares to have married England and claims her subjects as her children, the concept of motherhood towards the country as well as the throne is apparent in her speeches. This paper aims to investigate Queen Elizabeth's perception on these issues and how it affects her sovereignty in England by exploring the separation of the personal issues, such as marriage, into her body natural and the political issues, such as naming the successor, into her body politic. This paper will conclude that since Elizabeth is the 'mother' of the country, she focuses on defending her throne instead of expanding it, and that her refusal to either marry or name a successor can be read as the manifestation of her anxiety to keep the throne.*

**Keywords:** Elizabeth I; body politic; body natural; marriage; succession

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## A. Introduction

For Queen Elizabeth I, the subject of marriage and children has been the issue that always comes up in her speeches. Being crowned as a queen at the age of 25, Elizabeth is expected by the English subjects to marry and have kids as soon as possible to produce a male heir and replace her in the English throne. This issue goes on up until she is dying in 1603, to which she should name the successor to take up her throne as the king or queen of England. However, the first ten years of her reign (1557-1567) is when the subject of marriage and succession becomes the main issue in her speeches.

Unlike other monarchs in the sixteenth to seventeenth century, Queen Elizabeth focused on defending her throne instead of expanding it, especially seeing that she herself is a liability to the English throne. Her predecessor, Queen Mary I, has tried to reinstate England back into the Roman Catholic Church, and when she died, a lot of her supporters are still trying to replace Elizabeth with another catholic queen namely Mary, Queen of Scots, who also has a right to the English throne as the descendant of Margaret Tudor, sister of Henry VIII. Mary, Queen of Scots is everything that Elizabeth is not. She had had marriage with Francis II of France, to which she was widowed, and she is looking for another marriage to create alliance with another state or country. This, to the English subjects, is the ideal queen, yet what becomes the biggest problem for them seems to be that the country is ruled

by a woman. Queen Elizabeth then assured that her being a woman will not affect the way she rules the country by categorizing her personal affairs into a body natural, and her political affairs into a body politic. This body separation was first mentioned by Ernst Kantorowics (1957) who brought the idea of the king's two bodies. In Elizabeth's case, however, this separation is needed to be said because of the traditional belief of masculine authority. The body politics, therefore, become the masculine, and the body natural is the feminine. This categorization has previously been studied by Garrouri (2019), who argues that in Elizabeth's writings, she presents "three erratic depictions ... masculine and feminine, virgin and mother, and divine and human" (2019: 55). She states that Elizabeth intentionally creates paradoxical self-representation as a "strategic rhetorical device to overcome the social inadequacies" (2019: 58), and "to project her monarchy, impersonate various roles, and, thus, respond to all sorts of desires and demands" (2019: 64). She is, therefore, both masculine and feminine, virgin and mother, as well as divine and human. Garrouri comes to the conclusion that "through the rhetorical discrepancy, Elizabeth not only appropriated all identities, but also redefined the notion of sovereignty, power, and gender" (2019: 64). However, all of the three contradicting depictions that Garrouri mentioned can be traced back from the same root, which is the separation of the body politic and the body natural. Yet, the two bodies itself are already contradictory to each other. In another paper regarding the two bodies, Senasi (2020) argue about the relations of the names and bodies in early modern culture, as she says that "no body escapes naming, [but] the name regularly 'escapes' the body, exceeding and extenuating it ... produced forms that echo their material counterpart and ... come into competition with it" (2020: 1), which in line with what Edmund Plowden says, as quoted by Kantorowics (1957) that the incorporation of the two bodies in one person is the body politic in the body natural and not the other way around. The body politic and body natural in itself are already contradictory with each other, or if using Senasi's words, they are, in fact, in competition. When talking about identity, Laclau also states that "[t]o assert one's own differential identity involves ... the inclusion in that identity of the other" (1994: 10). Senasi, Plowden, and Laclau suggests that the body politic is superior than the body natural, and that the body natural is included in the body politic.

The marriage and succession are products of this body separation. As an unwed female ruler, she is expected to marry and produce an heir. For Elizabeth, however, marrying a man would affect her role with the body politic. As mentioned before, this political body is supposed to be superior, and marriage would mean she would have to submit to her husband, and that would disrupt the order of Elizabeth being the Monarch of England. Questions would arise that if the Queen herself is a subject to her husband, then what does that make him? Yet, as the Queen of England, she is also expected to soon name a successor. This becomes a conflicting issue not only for her body natural but also body politic. She is a queen without a successor, and her persona as the Virgin Queen complicates the issue even more. Therefore, she declares in her speech in 1559 as her answer to the Common's petition asking her to marry soon, that she is "already bound unto an husband, which is the kingdom of England..." (2002: 65), and in the same speech also answers the question regarding heir and succession that "every one of [her subjects], and as many as are English, are [her] children and kinsfolks" (2002: 59). With that statement, I would like to explore how marrying England and giving birth to (or adopting) the English subjects affect Elizabeth's sovereignty and her future statement regarding the issue of marriage and succession.

## **B. Anxiety of Authorship**

Gilbert and Gubar (1982) brought upon the term "anxiety of authorship" that women writers have regarding the fear of failure to define their own identity with their authority. In terms of the psychology of literary history, anxiety happens when they are confronted with "the achievement of their predecessors" and also "the tradition of genre, style, and metaphor that they inherit from such 'forefathers.'" (1982: 46). However, Gilbert and Gubar questions that "forefather" precedes the male poet, and the lack of "foremother" (1982: 47) to look up to makes the female poet "anxious" and, to

some extent, motherless. These women writers have no muse, no precursors, and no models. As Gilbert and Gubar points out, “the masculine authority with which they construct their literary personae ... seem to the woman writer directly to contradict the terms of her own gender definition.” (1982: 48).

Queen Elizabeth I is a queen just as she is a writer. She is the second, Mary Tudor being the first, queen of England that holds as the absolute monarch in England. As a queen, she does not have the “foremother” to look up to, and she consistently refers to her father, Henry VIII, when talking in her body politic. Gilbert and Gubar writes that “the female artist”, or in this case, the female ruler, “must first struggle against the effects of a socialization”, which, to Elizabeth, is her subjects constantly pushing her in regards to marriage and bearing an heir, “which makes conflict with the will of her (male) precursors seem inexpressibly absurd, futile, or even ... self-annihilating.” (1982: 49). Thus, leading to the separation of the two bodies to create the body politic as its own. However, the anxiety of Queen Elizabeth does not stop there. With her identity as not only a woman, but also a protestant, threats come to her and her throne. There are people who are against a female monarch, there are people who are against England being a protestant country, and there are people who are against both. This anxiety is presented in her speeches, especially when talking about marriage and succession, considering that both marrying and naming a successor could lead to overthrowing Elizabeth from her throne.

### C. The Early Reign

The earliest reference of Elizabeth separating her body is in her first speech in November 20, 1558 that happened before her coronation. In this speech that was addressed to her secretary and other lords, she expresses her thankfulness to God for allowing her to be the queen of England. She says:

“... and yet, considering I am God’s creature, ordained to obey His appointment, I will thereto yield, desiring from the bottom of my heart that I may have assistance of His grace to be the minister of His heavenly will in this office now committed to me. And as I am but one body naturally considered, though by His permission a body politic to govern, so I shall desire you all, my lords, to be assistant to me ...” (2002: 52).

As a religious protestant, it is no doubt that she refers to Him constantly in her speech. However, how she says “to obey His appointment”, “assistance of His grace”, and “by His permission”, right before she tells the lords to be of “assistant to her” and help her in ruling England, suggests that Elizabeth uses the religious belief of her lords to manipulate their belief that Elizabeth is worthy of the throne. And also, although she naturally has a woman body, she also has a body politic that is more masculine and therefore more fitting to the throne. As how she manipulates their religious belief, she also manipulates the lords’ patriarchal belief by saying that.

In 1559, petitions for Queen Elizabeth concerning marriage starts to arise, and she did a speech in February 10, 1559 before the parliament regarding those petitions. There are two versions of that speech, the first is from the Lansdowne manuscripts, which says:

“And whomsoever my chance shall be to light upon, I trust he shall be as careful for the realm and you—I will not say as myself, because I cannot so certainly determine any other—but at the leastways, by my goodwill and desire, he shall be such as shall be as careful for the preservation of the realm and you as myself.” (2002: 57-58).

Even when thinking about the future and possible candidates for her husband, she also thinks about the welfare of her country as well as her people, since her future husband would also be the future king of England. There is a possibility that choosing the wrong person would cost her the throne. The second version is from the Latin translation of this speech by William Camden. In this version,

however, Elizabeth, in her body politic, answers those petitions by declaring her marriage to England while showing her inauguration ring as the metaphorical wedding ring. And in both of the version, she ends the speech with the possibility of her tombstone if she does not meet the ideal husband to be the king of England. She says in the first version that her tombstone would be written with “a queen, having reigned such a time, lived and died a virgin.” (2002: 58), and not much different in the second version, “[h]ere lies interred Elizabeth / A virgin pure until her death.” (2002: 60). King (1990) argues that this statement was actually a prophecy, or plan, that Elizabeth made to herself that she would not ever marry. King’s argument makes more sense seeing Elizabeth’s history of being sexually abused by her uncle, Thomas Seymour (Norton, 2015). The tombstone itself, then, represent not only the anxiety but also the trauma of Queen Elizabeth I of ever getting married. When she declares England becoming her husband when she was coronated, the issue that I previously mentioned regarding the queen being a subject to her husband, is actually less of a problem. As a protestant queen of England, she was also the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, which means, even spiritually she was highest in the hierarchy of the English Monarchy, and her marriage to England means that she was a subject to England itself.

In 1561, the third year of Elizabeth’s sovereignty, Mary, Queen of Scots, sends a Scottish ambassador to England regarding the Treaty of Edinburgh that she has not signed and ratified yet. The treaty includes Elizabeth removing the English troops from Scotland, and in return, Mary has to recognize Elizabeth as the Queen of England. In the conversation with the Scottish Ambassador, it is revealed that instead of recognizing Elizabeth’s rights in the English throne, Mary wants to be named as the successor of the Queen of England. Elizabeth’s answer was: “As for the title of my crown, for my time I think she will not attain it. For so long as I live there shall be no other Queen of England but I...” (2002: 62). Elizabeth has made it clear that there will not be another queen of England to take her place, not even a king of England as her husband, as she suggests in the previous speech. She was reluctant if not unwilling to name a successor. She even mentioned some possible threats that might cause her to lose the crown, such as that her marriage with England was unlawful, and that she was a bastard, and so on. She is aware that people are still questioning her rights to the throne, even after three years of her sovereignty. When the ambassador told her about naming Mary as her successor, she says, “Think you that I could love my winding-sheet? Princes cannot like their own children, those that should succeed unto them.” (2002: 65). Elizabeth thinks that naming a successor is a death wish. Just as marriage would give access for people to replace her with the king, having an heir or naming other people to succeed her would also have the same risk. That statement comes from her own experience as the successor of her sister, Queen Mary I, when people would set a coup and put her in the position of the queen.

After petitions from the lords in 1559, the commons also set their own petition regarding the same matter in 1563. In her speech about that, she refers back into her body natural, “... being a woman wanting both wit and memory, some fear to speak and bashfulness besides, a thing appropriate to my sex.” (2002: 70) and “I know now as well as I did before that I am mortal.” (2002: 71). As I have previously mentioned in response to Gurrouri (2019) argument, that when Elizabeth refers to her being a woman and being a mortal, it was actually Elizabeth talking in her body natural and not as the Queen of England. In this speech, she acknowledges that the issue being problematized by the lords as well as the commons actually affects both of her bodies, as she says, “...who if the worst happen can lose but your bodies.” (2002: 71). She continues to speak, although seems to have switched her body into the political one again, still referring to the subjects as her children, that “although after my death you may have many stepdames, yet shall you never have any a more mother than I mean to be unto you all.” (2002: 71).

Still with the issues of marriage and succession, it seems that Elizabeth is getting tired and angry with people keep pushing her into naming a successor. In her speech in 1566, the speech is addressed to both the lords and commons. In terms of succession of the crown, she says distinctly that “wherein was nothing said for my safety, but only for themselves,” (2002: 96) which, again, addresses her fear of being dethroned. In the same speech, she refers to her father, Henry VIII, to assert her position that



she “[has] as good a courage answerable to [her] place as ever [her] father had.” (2002: 97). A year later in 1567, the same issues are still being talked about, and petitions regarding those issues are still present that even Elizabeth herself is tired of having to explain. It comes to the point that Elizabeth dissolves the parliament in January 2, 1567. It seems that the first ten years of Queen Elizabeth’s reign revolves around the issue of marriage and succession. And while it is true that Elizabeth did attempt to call in candidates to marry, she never doubts to ever name a successor. Especially in the speech to the Scottish Ambassador, where she mentions in detail reasons why naming a successor would give access to, or even lead, people to use it against her. After ten years of giving the same answer to the same question regarding the same issues, Elizabeth ends up dissolving the parliament in attempt to stop those petitions.

## D. Conclusion

From the discussions above, it can be concluded that from the very beginning of her reign, when Queen Elizabeth declares England as her husband, and the English subjects as her children, it was actually a statement that she is fully devoted into her country. Referring back to Gilbert and Gubar, Elizabeth does not have the “foremother” of being a queen, except for Mary I. But considering that Mary I’s reign only lasts for five years, while her father, Henry VIII, lasts for 36 years surely creates some sort of doubts for Elizabeth, causing her to create a masculine persona to match her father’s reign, thus appear the body politic. She was motherless, both literally and metaphorically in terms of not having another female monarch to look up to. So, she looks up to how people would replace Mary I, when she was the queen, with her, and how Henry VIII could last for a long time in the throne. Yet, the issue of marriage and succession becomes a threat that she responds, in her speeches, with rhetorical answer. She mixes her body politic and body personal to create a metaphor, an analogy, that her coronation is also her marriage towards England. Whenever the same issue comes up in the later speeches, Elizabeth keeps referring back into this metaphorical marriage, and seeing that either naming a successor or marrying someone, could lead to losing the throne, Elizabeth refuses to do both. This can be seen as an attempt of her being the ‘mother’ of the country to protect and defend her ‘children’. Therefore, her refusal was actually a manifestation of her anxiety, so to speak, to lose the throne.

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