The Occult and Elizabeth I: How the Virgin Queen Used Magic As a Political Tool

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The Occult and Elizabeth I:
How the Virgin Queen Used Magic As a Political Tool

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Introduction

Elizabeth I: ‘High and Mightie’

On May 28, 1555, Dr. John Dee was arrested and taken to one of the most infamous prisons in British history: The Tower of London. He was arrested under suspicion of violating the Treasons Act of 1534, which outlawed predicting the death of the monarch, the consort, and any heirs. Why would an Oxford-educated, catholic man of the gentry possibly risk death in predicting the outcome of Queen Mary I’s pregnancy? Because Lady Elizabeth, the heir presumptive, hired him to do so. This fourth month-long incident was Elizabeth I’s first forte into the realm of political magic, and it almost certainly would not be her last. Her relationship with John Dee would span decades, and her early reign would also be plagued with pretenders and potential usurpers using magic to target her and her reign. In turn, she would use the law to target those who targeted her.

Lady Elizabeth was born “The high and mightie princess of England.”¹ The daughter of King Henry VII and Queen Anne Boleyn, the one true Tudor heir. Though her sex was indeed a disappointment to her father, he remained hopeful that surely a

son would follow her birth shortly, and the break with Rome, the bastardization of her elder sister, and all of the political and religious upheaval would be worth it and the Tudor dynasty would, at last, be secure.\(^2\) However, quite infamously, the story of Henry, Anne, and Elizabeth did not play out that way. Just two short years later, she found herself with a new title, not one of glory but rather one of demotion. The once high and Mightie Princess Elizabeth was now Lady Elizabeth, the King’s bastard, and her mother was no longer queen but a recently executed traitor to the crown, adulterer, and witch.\(^3\)

Elizabeth I’s early life was full of upheaval and constant change. She went from being the sole heir to the throne to bastard and removed from the line of secession to being reinstated as a potential heir to the throne following her younger brother and older sister while remaining a bastard, all before the age of twelve.\(^4\) She lost her governess to her younger brother upon his birth and was repeatedly shunned from court. In one of her oldest surviving letters, Elizabeth wrote to her stepmother Kathier Parr at the age of eleven;

> Wherefore I now humbly pray you most Excellent Highness, that, when you write to [Henry VII], you will recommend me to him, praying ever for his sweet benediction, and similarly entreating our Lord God to send him best success… so that your Highness and I may, as soon as possible rejoice with him on his happy return.\(^5\)

\(^2\)Doran, *Elizabeth I and Her Circle*, 13-16.
\(^4\)Doran, *Elizabeth I and Her Circle*, 13-16
Eleven-year-old Elizabeth had not seen her father or stepmother in over a year when she wrote this letter, and it only further proves that her rise to become the legendary Queen of England, “Gloriana,” was not one without strife and controversy. Including insecurity for her life when her catholic elder sister Mary I ascended the throne and quickly appeared to be pregnant upon her marriage to the prince of Spain. Elizabeth’s life became a threat to the throne.

Upon Elizabeth’s accession to the throne, her reign was constantly challenged by those who wished to overthrow her, using prophecies to support their claims. Though Elizabeth became more secure on her throne later in life, she faced challenges such as economic struggle and the lack of an heir. Like her forefathers, Elizabeth I utilized all the tools in her arsenal to promote her political agenda and secure her place on the throne. One of these tools that Elizabeth wheeled was magic.

The Structure of the Paper

Chapter one of this thesis will focus on the nature of magical belief in the sixteenth century. Magic and the understanding of magic were quite different from the modern conceptualization. People in the early modern period fully believed in magic, and it was a very real factor in everyday life. People used it in medicine, cultural
practice, and even for love or revenge. Though magic was central to life in Elizabethan England, the class division in English society affected people's different interactions with it. This chapter will explain the intricacies and realities of magic in this period. To understand Elizabeth’s interactions with magic, it is important to understand the magical beliefs at the time.

Chapter two will explore one of the most important figures when it comes to the Elizabethan regime and its magical interactions: John Dee. John Dee appears in almost every magical incident involving Elizabeth, starting years before Elizabeth came to the crown and going well into her reign. Dee aided her when she needed horoscopes and when she faced what was thought to be magical attacks against her life. Dee and his relationship with Elizabeth were essential in Elizabeth and the court’s utilization of political magic.

Chapter three centers on the economic role magic took in the Elizabethan court. Through Elizabeth and her most senior advisor, Willam Ceciel’s employment of multiple alchemists who climbed so they could create gold to fill the treasury demonstrates the centrality of magical belief in the court of Elizabeth and in their political decisions and goals. This becomes even more clear in the efforts to pursue an alchemist at the court of Rudolf II, former English subject, Edward Kelley. The lengths that Elizabeth would

\[\text{David J. Collins, } \textit{The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West: From Antiquity to the Present,} \text{ New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 303-392}\]

\[\text{Ibid.}\]

\[\text{Francis Young, } \textit{Magic in Merlin’s Realm: A History of Occult Politics in Britain} \text{ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 161-189.}\]

\[\text{Ibid, 166.}\]

\[\text{Ibid, 183.}\]
go through to obtain Kelley show how important magic and magicians truly were to the monarch's political aspirations.

The fourth and final chapter of this paper will explore the final years of Elizabeth’s life and how she and her court became more desperate in their use of political magic in an effort to cool the anxiety about Elizabeth’s mortality. Elizabeth’s lack of an heir led to uneasiness about the future, and this saw a rise in accusations of diabolical magic.¹¹

These chapters will demonstrate that Elizabeth I’s interactions with magic throughout her reign were inherently political. Elizabeth used magic as a tool to navigate the political landscape of early modern Europe.

Chapter One: Magical Belief in Early Modern Britain

Introduction

What is magic? What practices fall into the category of magic? What were the beliefs surrounding magic? These three questions are important to answer before one can truly understand the role magic played in the political reality of the Elizabethan court.

In Medieval and Early Modern Europe and Britain, belief in magic fell into three overarching categories: common magic, learned magic, and diabolical magic. Common magic was a practice that was widespread and primarily practiced by the lower classes. However, there is evidence that elite peoples sought out common practices such as love magic for their own ends, and some of whom were members of the Stuart court. Learned magic could be considered “elite” magic as those who practiced this form of magic were more often than not wealthy or at least of the “middle class” as they had to have access to not only primary education through tutors but also, in many cases, attend University. Many of these “magical” practices fall into occult arts and sciences, such as alchemy, and were used to achieve the goals of answering the mysteries of nature, predicting the future, and summoning spirits and angels.

Lastly, diabolical magic was what many, including the church, considered all magic to fall under. Though it wasn’t until the late Middle Ages and the early modern period that this claim would be pressed. The core of the belief in this form of magic was the principle that magic, all forms of it, were interactions with demons and figments of hell. This ideology, rooted in fourth-century Christian theology, was the catalyst for the infamous sixteenth and seventeenth-century European and North American witch

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12David J. Collins, The Cambridge History of Magic
13Young, Magic in Merlin’s Realm, 215.
hunts.\textsuperscript{16} This section will mainly focus on the first two aforementioned forms of magic as they relate to each other and how they could be perceived at times as diabolical.

Common Magic

\textit{Charms}

Common magic is perhaps the most important of these three categories to understand, as it was so intrinsic to the cultures of both England and Scotland. The common practice found its origin in the pre-Christian pagan period of Britain.\textsuperscript{17} A perfect example of the pre-Christian origins of common magic are charms. Charms were often sayings that were recited multiple times in a row or in specific manners that usually invoked important figures in Christianity. However, in many cases, the charms had a much older origin, and the Christian figures replaced similar Pagan ones or were even placed alongside them in the charm.\textsuperscript{18} Charms were an important tool used to ward off evil, witches, or bad health.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid, 361.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid, 311.
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid, 312.
Health and its role in common magic.

Health was a key aspect of common magic. Due to the rampant social and health inequality in the early modern period, those who could not afford a physician or if one could not be located in times of health crisis, common magic practitioners known as cunning folk were relied on.\(^{20}\) In the case of Scotland, the cunning folk often used the fey, or faeries, in their work, which channeled the unique culture of Scotland as it relates to magic. Though cunning folk were important figures, they could be accused of witchcraft. In cases where health did not improve or took a turn for the worse, it was thought that their magical knowledge could cause harm, especially when love magic was involved.

Love Magic.

As mentioned previously, love magic was a subcategory within common magic and was practiced at all levels of society. Love magic was also one of the most dangerous forms of common magic. If the magic believed to be performed led to a miscarriage, separation, or infertility; accusations of witchcraft would soon follow. Love magic, with its use of physical representations such as wax figurines, could also be

confused for maleficarum (harmful magic).\textsuperscript{21} Which did happen when love magic was confused for magic against the crown (Elizabeth I). \textsuperscript{22}

Learned Magic

Learned magic was a form of magical belief birthed from common practices rooted deep within European culture as well as the classical philosophers such as Aristotle. Learned magic only grew as a practice during the high Middle Ages with the advent of manuscript culture and later printing.\textsuperscript{23} Those who practiced learned magic often had the patronage of nobles or even the crown. This aspect of learned magic contributed to the relationship between the monarchies of Britain and magic, in particular, the English Throne. Almost every monarch that held the throne employed a magus, natural philosopher, astrologer, or alchemist of some kind, including Elizabeth I.

Much like common Magic, within the broad umbrella term of “learned magic,” there are a plethora of subcategories. The four following categories will be focused on in this section: natural magic, summoning, astrology, and alchemy. Though, as previously mentioned, alchemy is considered an occult science not necessarily a form of magic by

\textsuperscript{21}Francis Young, \textit{Magic as a Political Crime}, 133,
\textsuperscript{22}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23}Collins, \textit{Learned Magic}, 334
modern academics. Many of its practitioners participated in other forms of learned magic, such as John Dee, the famous Elizabethan alchemist, who practiced angel summoning, which greatly contributed to his work as an alchemist.\textsuperscript{24}

\textit{Natural Magic}

Natural magic, at its core, was about the belief that natural aspects of the world, such as gems, animals, and plants, are connected through occult means. By understanding the ways in which these are all connected and the powers they hold, one could exploit them and produce outcomes such as invisibility, gaining unknown or untold wisdom, or even producing storms, according to one medieval manuscript.\textsuperscript{25}

Some facets of natural magic may be perceived as diabolical, such as the ability to control the weather as the conjuring of storms was often attributed to witches.\textsuperscript{26}

\textit{Summoning}

\textsuperscript{25}Collins, “Learned Magic,” 333-335
\textsuperscript{26}ibid.
The act of summoning was perhaps the most controversial practice within the field of learned magic. The goals of summoning such entities as spirits, angels, and even demons were oftentimes only known by those who were doing the conjuring, while other times the goal was to simply summon anything.\textsuperscript{27} Summoning was almost always perceived in a negative light and gained the moniker of “necromancy” from the church who saw it as a crime against god.\textsuperscript{28} The Medieval and Early Modern definition of necromancy is not the same as our contemporary one; it was not about communing with the dead but rather with demons who were very much alive in their belief. To be accused of necromancy was an early example of magical crimes being tried in Medieval Christendom, which predated the witch hunt craze of the Early Modern Period.

Though many perceived summoning as inherently diabolical, it was not always the case. Summoning angels was also a key aspect of this form of learned magic. Angel summoning gained in popularity during what became known as the Renaissance period due to heightened interest by European monarchs and scholars in Jewish mysticism, which heavily featured angelic aspects. This interest can be seen in the cases of Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II, who held an audience with renowned Jewish mystic Rabbi Judah Loew to discuss such matters and the aforementioned Alchemist John Dee.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, 348-355.
Alchemy

As mentioned twice before, Alchemy tends to fall into the category of occult rather than magic, and though this is the case, there is certainly some overlap between the two. Alchemy was what many consider to be the predecessor to modern chemistry. Its focus was on the transformation of natural substances and was derived from ancient and Muslim philosophy.\(^{30}\) Alchemists focused on the transmutation of metals and the common goal of obtaining the “philosopher’s stone,” and the “elixir of Life.” \(^{31}\) Alchemists were employed by almost every royal court in Europe, including those of Elizabeth I and the aforementioned Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II.\(^{32}\) Elizabeth’s employment of alchemists started before she ever ascended the throne and continued well into her reign with her disputes with Rodulf II. Elizabeth and Rodulf both employed the alchemist Edward Kelly with the belief that he had discovered both the elixir and stone. These supposed discoveries led to a feud between the two due to the requests by Elizabeth for Kelly to return to England.\(^{33}\) Alchemy not only played a pivotal role in British politics but also in international relations.

Alchemy also took on a medical role, much like common magic. Learned magic also concerned itself with health, as plagues were not so distant in memory and often

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\(^{31}\)Ibid.

\(^{32}\)Young, Magic in Merlin’s Realm, 185.

recurring in the early modern period. Many of those who employed alchemists did so for their perceived medical expertise.

Conclusion

To conclude this brief summary of magical belief in the Late Medieval and Early Modern period, it is important to understand how central to everyday life these beliefs truly were. In times of crisis, many turned to magic whether they were common or noble, educated or not. Magic was almost always the solution, whether it be for love, health, or simple curiosity. Magic was also culturally significant in almost every country in Britain. Each had cultural myths that were intrinsic to their own practices of magic. For England and Wales, this mythos was Arthurian, especially for royals. The English Monarchy colonized Wales in 1277 under Edward I and aimed to emulate the mythical great Welsh King Arthur and, in turn, often employed practitioners to be their Merlin.\textsuperscript{34} Magic was in the very much air in Early modern Britain.

Though magic was a part of everyday life, this was especially true at court. As mentioned above, English monarchs throughout history aimed to emulate King Arthur. However, the Tudor Dynasty, which Elizabeth I belonged to, particularly focused on this due to their dubious biological claim to the English throne and also to their Welsh origins.\textsuperscript{35} Elizabeth herself not only aimed to carry on this national myth through her


\textsuperscript{35}Young, \textit{Magic in Merlin’s Realm}. 
reign but also aimed to secure her power, authority, and economic security through the use of magic and magical belief.\textsuperscript{36}

One cannot deny the utmost importance of magical belief played in everyday life and court politics. The remaining sections of this paper will explore the relationship between magic and monarchy, their court, and politics, both national and international.

\textbf{Chapter Two: The Alchemist Dee}

\textbf{Introduction}

In medieval Randorshire on the border of England, Walse lived a family named ‘Ddu.’ This family was not of noble birth, no matter what some later descendants have claimed. No, they were simple cattle farmers.\textsuperscript{37} They would leave the Walse in the 15th century and move to London as minor merchants, with the accession of a Welshman to the English throne, King Henry VII.\textsuperscript{38} Like Henry VII, whose name was anglicized from Tewdr to Tudor, Ddu was anglicized to Dee, and much like the Tudors, the Dees would also claim descent from the legendary King Author to provide legitimacy to their family, who was in a much higher place in society than their origins by the 16th century.\textsuperscript{39} One

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39}Ibid.
of these men from the family Dee, who rose to great societal heights, was John Dee, known as the Queen’s conjuror for Elizabeth I by some of his contemporaries.  

Dee rose to such heights due to his father, Roland, who served as a personal servant to Henry VIII and, after years of service to the king, as a high customs official with the title of Packer to the Strangers. Roland’s proximity to the court allowed his son to connect with important families that would last well into adulthood, such as William Cecil, whose father also served Henry VII alongside Roland Dee.

These connections also facilitated Dee’s education at Cambridge, studying logic, mathematics, and alchemy. Dee became well known for his alchemy and astronomy studies, making him an even greater asset to the Tudor court. He would be one of the main sources of occult knowledge for the Elizabethan court and would be turned to time and again to solve magical problems the court faced. The first issue would arise before Elizabeth I was ever crowned Queen.

Queen Mary I’s Allegations of Treason.

Like almost all previous English monarchs, Elizabeth I employed alchemists and astrologers, and she did so before she ever reached the throne. In 1555, with

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40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
uncertainty looming large over Elizabeth’s head, she employed John Dee for the very first time. Elizabeth sought out Dee for his skills as a “seer” because her position and life were on the line, as they had been so many times before in her young life.  

Her sister, Queen Mary I, was seemingly pregnant. Pregnancy in the 16th century was dangerous, especially when it was the monarch who was with her child. If Mary and the child both died, Elizabeth would be heir. However, if that occurred, it seemed likely that Mary’s husband, Philip II of Spain, would press his claim to the throne with a military invasion with foreign aid as well as the support of some English nobles.

To prepare herself for the possible future, Elizabeth had John Dee predict the futures of Mary, Philip, and herself. Employing a seer to predict the health and future death of the monarch was treason under English law according to the Treasons Act of 1534 enacted by Mary and Elizabeth’s father after the incident with Elizabeth Barton, the Holy Maid of Kent, who predicted his death. The Treasons Act read:

Be it therefore enacted by the assent and consent of our of high sovereign lord the king, and the Lords spiritual and temporal, treason, and Commons in this present Parliament assembled,

\[\text{--------------------------}\]

\(^{44}\)Ibid, 30-31.

\(^{45}\)Parry, The Arch Conjuror of England, 30-31

and by the authority of the same, that if any person or persons, after the first day of February next coming, do maliciously wish, will, or desire, by words or writing, or by craft imagine, invent, practice, or attempt any bodily harm to be done or committed to the king's most royal person, the queen's, or their heirs apparent...47

Young Elizeth Tudor utilized magic in a possibly treasonous manner to not only feel secure in her place in the line of succession and perhaps in her eyes to save her life. However, she and Dee did end up finding themselves accused of treason for performing astrological prophecies about the reigning monarch and her heirs. Dee was arrested on May 28, 1555, and held at the infamous Tower of London, not only accused of treason but also conjuring and witchcraft.48 There were attempts to connect Dee with others close to and related to, such as Christopher Carye, a pupil of Dee and a relative of Elizabeth's through her mother's family. Marry and her privy counsel attempted to draw these connections to secure a treason charge for Elizabeth.49 By drawing a connection to her mothers's family, many of whom were already seen as traitors due to their association with Anne, would have given the accusations against Elizabeth even greater weight. However, once it became apparent that Mary had a phantom pregnancy, Mary's Privy Council dropped all attempts to charge Elizabeth with treason. As Mary

recognized Elizabeth as her heir, Dee and the others connected to him and Elizabeth were released from the Tower on August 29, 1555, four months after their arrest.⁵⁰

Elizabeth’s and Mary’s use of magic, in this instance, provided clear evidence of just how useful it was in political dealings in the Tudor period. Elizabeth’s use of magic as self-preservation and to prevent being seen as a traitor and Mary’s twisting of Elizabeth’s intent shows just how volatile the mixture of politics and magic can be. This may have been one of the first times Elizabeth used magic for political reasons; however, it most certainly would not be her last. She would go on to integrate it heavily into her court, use it for economic reasons, and use it in her imagery. This integration of learned magic into the Elizabethan court carried through to her courtiers such as Robert Dudley, who employed alchemists, astronomers, and conjures, as well as William Cecil, the Queen’s Treasurer, spymaster, and closest and most valued advisor. Cecil employed alchemists to transmute metals in order to fill the empty treasury.⁵¹

Early Reign

On November 17, 1558, Mary I of England, at the age of 42, died from an illness that experts now think to have been uterine cancer.⁵² Her younger sister, Elizabeth, rose to the throne after Mary’s death, becoming Elizabeth I of England. Mary left Elizabeth and England in a state of internal unrest and at war, once again, with France. These

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⁵¹Ibid.
circumstances lead to two conspiracies to arise simultaneously against the new queen, one from the French and one from her catholic subjects.\textsuperscript{53} At the advice of her trusted advisors, Elizabeth once again turned to the alchemist John Dee. Though the last time Elizabeth had turned to Dee, it ended in suspicion of tears and the four-month imprisonment of Dee and others. This time, it would end in royal favor for Dee and a more secure reign for Elizabeth.

As Elizabeth rose to her new station, she brought magical politics and study to the forefront of her court. In this section, I will show through analysis of the early days of her reign that, once again, Elizabeth’s relationship with magic is inherently political. Even when she is combating the magic of others, she leans on her own alchemist to support her political authority.

\textit{The Prestall Plot}

Within days of the death of Mary I, Elizabeth I’s inheritance of the monarchy in their ninth act, the privy council arrested three men, Anthony Fortescue, Thomas Kele, and most infamously, John Prestall.\textsuperscript{54} These three men were arrested for attempting to install Arutur Pole on the throne in place of Elizabeth.\textsuperscript{55}

The Pole family was central to this plot, as Anthony Fortescue served as the comptroller to the Archbishop of Canterbury Regional Pole under Mary and was married

\textsuperscript{55}Young, \textit{Magic as a Political Crime}, 91-93.
to his niece. The Pole family had a strong claim to the throne as descendants of George, Duke of Clarance, the brother of King Edward IV, and the great-grandfather of Elizabeth I. The conjuring of John Prestall and Thomas Kele powered this Pole conspiracy. Prestall and Kele produced horoscopes that predicted a short reign and a quick death for Elizabeth.

Elizabeth and her privy council could not prosecute Kele, Prestall, and Fortescue under secular law for conjuring due to the 1443 Witchcraft Act being repealed during her brother’s reign, so the men were turned over to the Bishop of London, a Catholic appointed by Mary I, who seemingly did not punish these men. Prestall lived the rest of his life waging magical attacks against Elizabeth. Though, at this point in time, she did not imprison him when he returned to England, a few years later, he was held at the Tower of London for treason.

Though Elizabeth did not have any legal recourse to attack her attackers at the time, she did have access to astronomers of her own to combat them, as well as a horoscope created by the French.

**The French Plot**

Mary I went to war with France in 1557, followed by a plot to remove Mary I from the throne backed by the French. In this invasion, Mary lost the last English foothold on the continent, Calais. This loss was her dying regret, and she left this war in France to

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56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
her sister as well as the role of the monarch when she died. Upon the accession of a Protestant Queen to the throne, the Catholic French began a smear campaign against Elizabeth, citing the prophecy of Nostradamus, which claimed a bloody end to Protestant England and instability under Elizabeth I. These claims were meant to spur resistance to Elizabeth's accession by the Catholics in England and to squander the already weak support for the war in France.

The Response of the Crown

The prophecies of John Dee disputed the claims of Nostradamus, along with the previously mentioned Prestall/Pole attacks. Though Dee had previously worked for the Queen, she was not hand-picked for this task but rather by his Patrone and Favorite of Elizabeth, Robert Dudley, who was known for his patronage of occultist and alchemist. They hired Dee to make an electionary prediction for Elizabeth. According to the Historian Glyn Parry, Dee did not choose the date of her coronation as popularly believed, but instead predicted that it would be a glorious event and that Elizabeth’s reign would be long and just as glorious. Elizabeth used Dee’s horoscope not only to contradict the one produced by her enemies but also as a political tool to bolster her

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61 Devine, John Prestall: A Complex Relationship, 54.
63 Ibid.
reign and secure her place as the Queen of England. Elizabeth would continue to use
the belief in magic to secure her rule including through parliament.

*Acts of parliament*

Due to the acts of magical espionage against Elizabeth during her first
parliament, the 1559 Conjuring and Witchcraft Bill was proposed in direct response to
Prestall and the Pole conspiracy. Though this bill fell to the waist side due to more
pressing matters of state, it was resurrected four years later in 1563 under the name
“Act against Conjurations Enchantments and Witchcrafts.”

This act closed the political
loophole left by Edward VI and granted the secular courts the power to once aging try
those accused of conjuring and witchcraft and no longer left it in the hands of the church
as the law read:

> For REFORMACION wherof bee it enacted by the Quenes Majestie with the
assent of the Lordes Spirituall and Temporall and the Commons in this presente
Parliament assembled,and by the authoritee of the same, That yf els if any
person or persons after the said first daye of June shall use practise or exercise
any Withecrafte Enchantment Charme or Sorcerie, wherby any person shall
happen to bee killed or destroyed, that then as well every suche Offendor or
Offendors in Invocacions and Conjuracions as ys aforesayd, their Concellors &
Aidours, as also every suche Offendor or Offendors in Withecrafte
Enchantment Charme or Sorcerie whereby the Deathe of any person dothe
ensue, their Aidours and Concellors, being of either of the said Offences lawfully
convicted and attainted, shall suffer paynes of Deathe as a Felon or Felons…

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64 Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England.*
65 1563: 5 Elizabeth 1 c.16: An Act against Conjurations, Inchantments and Witchcraft,” *The Statutes Project* (blog), November 6, 2018.
This act not only made the deed of conjuring illegal but also a felony, putting greater political pressure on anyone who threatened the Queen again with magical espionage. If they did, they would face death. Elizabeth used the law and her political power to target diabolical magic.

**Conclusion**

Elizabeth’s first encounter with political magic in her own right was aided by John Dee. His divination provided security not for Elizabeth’s reign as she had not yet assented to the throne but for her life. Dee was able to provide security for Elizabeth at this time, and though the direct aftermath of Dee’s prediction led to more strife, Elizabeth would continue to wield magic as a political weapon throughout her reign when she did come to the throne.66 This was very much the case in the early parts of her reign. When faced with negative prophecies about her and her reign, she turned to Dee to create horoscopes of her own to counter those against her.67 These early incidents in Elizabeth’s reign and her own counter through the law and magicians of her own show how Willin Elizabeth was to use magic and the belief in magic to her advantage.

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67 Ibid.
Chapter Three: Making Magic for the Economy

Introduction

In the late 1560s, with the royal coffers running low and their interest in alchemy and learned magic at an all-time high, Elizabeth I and her loyal advisor William Cecil turned to two alchemists to create the Philosopher’s Stone. One of these Alchemsit was sourced from quite an unlikely place: The Tower of London.68 John Prestall would return to the attention to the attention of Elizabeth and her Privy Council, and for a short period of time, it was not due to a plot he took part in to replace the Queen with one of her Clathicol relatives but rather to put gold in per pocket. Another would be the infamous scryer and associate of John Dee, Edward Kelley, who, through espionage and cunning, Elizabeth and Ceceil attempted to remove from the Grasps of Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II.69 Elizabeth and her privy council would go on to once more use magic for political gain, this time in the economic sphere.

68 Young, Magic in Merlin’s Realm, 166.
The de Lannoy Affair

Cornelius de Lannoy

In 1565, with the country in a dire financial state, Elizabeth I and William Cecil turned to the Dutch alchemist Cornelius de Lannoy to solve their economic woes. The alchemist received a pension of almost $65,000 in modern USD, a ten-year exclusivity contract with the crown, and was given a laboratory in Somerset House where he was to conduct his process of transmutation.70

After several months of no results, de Laynnoy began to claim that it was due to the poor quality of English glass and had new and expensive glassware imported on the crown’s dime.71 Though with his new glassware, there were still no results, and with reports from those close to de Lannoy that he had the ability to create gold but was keeping it for himself, de Lannoy’s laboratory was moved to the Tower of London and was placed under strict supervision. De Lannoy was given a 31-day time frame to produce results and make a return on the Queen’s investment. When de Lannoy ultimately failed to do so, he was moved to a cell in the tower.

70Devine, “John Prestall A Complex Relationship,” 73.
71Ibid, 74.
The Return of Prestall

John Prestall’s reputation has been well established. He was a traitor to the crown, exiled, and foolishly returned to England only to be captured and held in the Tower of London after being found guilty of treason under the Witchcraft Act of 1563 championed by both Elizabeth and Cecil.\textsuperscript{72} During his time in the Tower, Prestall was in correspondence with the Eral of Pembroke, who sought his alchemical and medical expertise and advocated for him to William Cecil.\textsuperscript{73} Prestall offered on previous occasions his services in producing gold for the crown over de Lannoy in exchange for a royal pardon, but it wasn’t until de Lannoy’s failure was evident and with the Eral’s advocacy that Cecil finally took notice of his alchemical talents.\textsuperscript{74}

Prestall would receive his pardon on January 6, 1567, and would go on to work for both the Eral of Pembroke and the crown for some time. However, within a few years, Prestall seemingly returned to his traitorous ways.\textsuperscript{75} Prestall to on a central role in the Norfolk-Marry Queen of Scotts marriage plot.\textsuperscript{76} This plot was driven by the Clathlioc Lords in northern England and aimed to have Thomas Howard, the Fourth Duke of Norfolk, wed Mary Queen of Scotts to secure the succession of a Caltlioc to the throne following Elizabeth I’s death.\textsuperscript{77} The Catholics in question are Mary and her and Norfolk’s children.\textsuperscript{78} Both sides of thoes involved in this plot invoked seers to predict its outcome.

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{72} Ibid, 71.
\bibitem{73} Ibid, 75-76.
\bibitem{74} Ibid, 79-85.
\bibitem{75} Ibid.
\bibitem{76} Ibid.
\bibitem{77} Ibid.
\bibitem{78} Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
Prestall seemingly created horoscopes, solidifying the marriage between the pair. He also was part of a group that attempted to free Mary from her imprisonment. The plot turned to one of fully replacing Elizabeth and quickly fell apart. Following this incident, Prestall spent the rest of his life in exile, in prison, and/or in massive amounts of debt.

Edward Kelley and Rudolf II

Rudolf II

Rudolf II was born on July 18, 1552, to the Holy Roman Emperor Maximillan II, and upon his father’s death as the oldest surviving child of his parents, he was crowned Holy Roman Emperor himself in 1557 after already being king of Hungary and Bohemia for five and two years respectively. Upon his accession to the role of Emperor, he moved the court from Viena to Pruage, and there, he created an environment that revolved around art, architecture, and, of course, magic.

Rudolf, much like Elizabeth, took a great interest in the occult. He hired and met with many who he believed could help him understand the mysteries of nature, like, for

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79Ibid.
example, Rabbi Judah Lowe, the Rabbi of Pruage. They did not meet to discuss the treatment of Jews in the empire but rather alchemy, magic, and Jewish Mysticism, also known as Kabbalah, which many Christian scholars, alchemists, and rulers began to take an interest in in the early modern period. One of these scholars who also held an interest in Jewish mysticism was John Dee, who would come in contact with Rodulf II and, in the 1580s, would see patronage from the Emperor along with his associate Edward Kelley.

Edward Kelley and Dee

Once again, John Dee returns to the narrative though this time he is not the main character. Edward Kelley entered the Service of John Dee under a false name, that of Edward Tallbot. He chose to hide his true identity due to his past convictions and received punishment in the form of having his ears cropped. What crime Kelley committed is not clear, but having one’s ears cropped was a common punishment for many crimes in early modern England.

In Dee’s service, Kelley acted as his scryer or medium. Dee had faced many accusations of conjuring throughout his adult life, all of which he vehemently denied. However, he did indeed conjure, though not demons or dark spirits that he had been accused of, but angles. Dee and Kelley Practiced this angle conjuring as a duo. Dee

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84 Ibid.
85 Harkness, John Dee’s Conversations with Angels, 5.
87 Ibid, 8.
would ask the spirits questions, and Kelley, looking through a “show stone,” would translate what the angles said.\textsuperscript{88} Dee and Kelley worked together in England in efforts for the queen and court for eighteen months, but when their efforts to convince Elizabeth to adopt a new calendar using their conversions with angels as an encouragement to keep on this path.\textsuperscript{89} However, their plans fell through, and they lost the patronage and favor of the queen, who refused to provide a pension for Dee.\textsuperscript{90} It became clear that they would no longer be successful in their endeavor in England. The pair followed a Polish nobleman to the content by the name of Albrecht Laski, who would introduce them to the court of Emperor Rudolf.\textsuperscript{91}

\textit{Kelley in the Empire}

Edward Kelly had a long and complicated life in the Holy Roman Empire, living there for fourteen years after settling there with Dee in 1584.\textsuperscript{92} The pair settled in Poland but quickly went to the capital city of the empire, Prague. Kelley claimed he and Dee were called by angles to seek favor with Emperor Rudolf II.\textsuperscript{93} Dee had one meeting with Rudolf, who did employ after Dee confirmed that he could create the Philosopher’s stone but only communicate to them through proxies.\textsuperscript{94} While in the employment of the Emperor, the two men continued their work, summoning angles and communicating with

\textsuperscript{88}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89}Parry, \textit{The Arch Conjuror of England}, 147-160
\textsuperscript{90}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{91}Ibid, 161.
\textsuperscript{93}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{94}Ibid, 33.
spirits. However, this summoning would be to their ultimate detriment. Representatives of the Catholic church, as well as Rudolf, got word of their angelic communications and were required to meet with a representative from the church.95 The meeting went well at first, but Kelley critiqued the Catholic Church whilst in the meeting.96 The two men were found guilty and forced to burn all their records, though they seemingly did not burn them and eventually were found guilty of necromancy by Rudolph II and banished from the Empire.97

Though Kelley, Dee, and their families were banished from the empire, they did not go far settling in southern Bohemia.98 Whilst in their new housing, Dee and Kelley’s working relationship became strained as Kelley refused to continue to perform as Dee’s medium.99 Kelley began to gain notoriety for transmuting metals at this time, and he and Dee gained the patronage of Vilém Rozmberk, one of the hights ranking nobles in the empire and a close friend of the emperor.100

At the same time, Dee was seemingly summoned to return to England by the Quee herself after he congratulated her about the Spanish Armada.101 Through the systems of spies Elizabeth and Cecil had across the content, they had discovered Kelley’s newfound alchemical abilities and wanted to take advantage of them themselves to increase the revenue of the Kingdome.102 Though the economic state of England was not nearly as bad as it was almost three decades earlier, the recent stress

95Ibid.
96Ibid.
97Ibid, 36.
98Ibid, 40.
99Ibid.
100Ibid, 36.
101Ibid, 47.
102Ibid.
of the Spanish armada and just the funds it cost to run a country made the prospect of an Englishman who could transmute metals very appealing.

Dee returned to England in 1589 and was greeted with favor from the Queen as she used Dee and her good treatment of him to lure Kelley away from the continent and back to Britain.\footnote{Young, \textit{Magic in Merlin's Realm}, 185.} However, these attempts would not be fruitful, and later that year, Kelley would be granted a title of nobility in Bohemia, becoming a Barron. Kelley was granted lands as well as a coat of arms and became a bohemian citizen, rejecting all loyalties to England.\footnote{Wilding, "Biography of Edward Kelly, Alchemist - 3rd Edition," 48.} Elizabeth continued to pursue Kelley, sending courtiers like Matew Roydon and Edward Dyer to Prague to attempt to bring him back to England, but these attempts were unsuccessful, as were the numerous letters written between Cecil, Elizabeth, and Kelley, who refused to leave his excellent accommodations in bohemia.\footnote{Ibid, 64.} This shared interest in Kelley would lead to heightened tensions between the two monarchs as they had other disputes in the past.

Conclusion

Elizabeth and Cecil’s attempts at solving the poor economic condition in England through magic were unsuccessful and, in fact, appear to be counterintuitive. The pair sunk money into the experiments of Cornelius de Lannoy, who asked for much and gave little in return.\footnote{Devine, “John Prestall A Complex Relationship,” 73.} When de Lannoy failed, they turned to known traitor John Prestall,
who, unsurprisingly, when granted his freedom, would turn against the crown once again, leading to political unrest.\textsuperscript{107} Though in this case, Elizabeth and her courtier’s use of magic as a political and economic tool did not lead to successful results, it is evident that magic was a very real way Elizabeth aimed to solve any of her issues in her reign and would continue to do so as she moved through her reign and navigated both domestic and international politics.

Edward Kelley’s supposed ability to turn metals into gold reignited the alchemical method of filling the treasury nearly thirty years later.\textsuperscript{108} The fact that he was employed by Rudolf II led to espionage between the two courts and Elizabeth’s attempts to use John Dee to convince Kelley to return to England.\textsuperscript{109} This dispute between Elizabeth and Rudolf II proves that magical life and its use in politics transcended borders for Elizabeth. Her use of Dee as a lure for Kelley proves that Elizabeth used magic and “magicians” as tools for her own political gain.

\textsuperscript{107}Ibid, 81.  
\textsuperscript{108}Young, \textit{Magic in Merlin’s Realm}, 185.  
\textsuperscript{109}Ibid, 183.
Chapter Four: Magical Insecurity Towards The End

Introduction

As Elizabeth I aged, her reign solidified itself as a long, glorious, and prosperous one. Art and literature flourished with poets and playwrights like William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe rising to prominence. The country itself fully cemented itself on the international stage with Elizabeth encouraging and funding exploration. The first English colony in America was established and named after her: Virginia.\(^{110}\) The colony was named in reference to Elizabeth’s perpetual virginal status. Though her image as the Virgin Queen was one that garnered respect, it also led to a great deal of anxiety. There was no clear answer as to who would succeed Elizabeth, and as her health declined in the final few decades of her life, fears of the queen’s death were heightened as wars of succession were far from unheard of in England.\(^{111}\) The last war of secession led to Elizabeth’s grandfather becoming king, and it was a very real possibility that another war could follow.\(^{112}\) As the anxieties rose, so did the fears that the queen’s life was actively threatened by magical attacks.

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\(^{111}\) Young, Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England, 146.

Wax Effigies

In 1578, as Elizabeth and her court were on a Royal procession through the north of England, a farmer just outside of London discovered three wax figurines in a pile of animal feces.\textsuperscript{113} A discovery such as this would typically not be brought to the local magistrate and certainly would not have been brought to the Queen herself. Except these wax figurines were not toys a child had misplaced; no, they were seen as something much darker.\textsuperscript{114} One of the figurines had the name “Elizabeth” inscribed on it, and the two other figurines found along with it were seemingly dressed like courtiers.\textsuperscript{115} The fact that the figurines also had various other symbols etched into them was further incriminating.\textsuperscript{116} The figurines were rushed to the Queen and her council near Norwich, and there they called upon John Dee to examine the effigies.

John Dee rode for likely forty hours straight to meet with the queen.\textsuperscript{117} Once he arrived, he was shown the figures, determining that they were indeed objects of harmful magic and were created with the purpose of killing the queen. Dee performed his own countermagic on the figurines, likely an exorcism.\textsuperscript{118}

Following the discovery of the figurines, Robert Dudley took the opportunity to paint Catholic rivals and Catholicism as a whole as a religion of sorcery. Dudley produced propaganda comparing the Catholic use of idols in their religious observance

\begin{footnotes}
\item[113] Young, \textit{Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England}, 119.
\item[114] Ibid.
\item[115] Ibid.
\item[116] Ibid.
\item[117] Ibid, 123
\item[118] Ibid, 125-128.
\end{footnotes}
to the wax effigies, saying that they, too, contained evil magic. In his attempted witch hunt, Dudley took the reins of the investigation into the Wax effigies and had five men arrested.

The five men arrested were John Prestall, his brother-in-law Vincent Murphyn, a father and son from the village where the effigies were discovered, and the vicar from the same village.\textsuperscript{119} All five of these men were catholic and were all tortured and held in brutal conditions in the Tower of London. The Queen had been ill since the figurines were discovered, and her health had not improved. Dudley and other courtiers believed that the effigies were the cause for the Queen's poor health.\textsuperscript{120} While this was far from the first time Prestall was held in the tower, ironically, this stint in the tower would be his longest, and it was for a crime he did not commit.\textsuperscript{121}

In 1579, a young man came forward admitting to hiring the man who created the effigies, Thomas Elkes, a known magician.\textsuperscript{122} Elkes created the effigies to make three women fall in love with the young man, not to kill the queen or her courtiers. In fact, even in the intended goal of love magic, Elkes and his effigies were unsuccessful, and the young man in question demanded his money back. As a result of the stunning truth, the government, embarrassed, let the father, son, and the vicar out of the tower, and removed the death sentence they had signed for Prestall, though he remained in the tower.\textsuperscript{123} Though this was the first and most well-documented supposed magical attack against Elizabeth’s life, it would not be the last, and they would persist as her health declined.

\textsuperscript{119}Ibid, 131-132
\textsuperscript{120}Ibid, 146.
\textsuperscript{121}Devine, “John Prestall A Complex Relationship,” 130.
\textsuperscript{122}Young, Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England, 133.
\textsuperscript{123}Ibid, 133.
The Last Decade

As the sixteenth century came to a close, puritanism became even more prominent and extreme. One of these extreme sects followed a man named William Hacket, who proclaimed himself the messiah sent to overthrow Queen Elizabeth. Hacket and his followers met in a crowded market in London and defamed the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lord Chancellor. While speaking, he noticed a portrait of the queen and slashed it where her heart would have been. This act was seen as less metaphorically and more as a magical misdeed and an attempt on the queen’s life with the scare of the wax effigies still on the minds of the privy counselors. Hackett and one of his followers were arrested, though Hacket was the only one tried and was eventually sentenced to death for saying and doing the following:

“that her Majestic was no longer Queene of Englande, but deposed and deprived by the spirrite and the dyrector of the crowne of Englande ; the same spirrite referred to the absolute disposicion of the saide Hacket," and that he " did trayterouslie debruze and deface her Majestie's armes in one Kaye's house, by London Bridge, inveighinge then and there byterlie againste her Majestic, in most trayterous and despitefull manner." Hacket was found guilty under the “1580 act Against seditious words and rumors.”

Which not only made sedition against the crown a felony but also established the following;

And for that divers persons wickedlye disposed, and forgetting their Duete and

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126 Ibid.
Allegiance, have of late not only wished her Majesties Deathe, but also by dyvers meanes practised and sought to knowe howe longe her Highenes should lyve, and who should raigne after her Decease, and what Chaunges and Alterations shoulde therebye happen; To the entent that suche Mischeifes and Inconveniences as maye therebye growe in the Comon Weale, to the greate Disturbance of the same, maye be cut of and prevented; Be yt also enacted by the authoritie aforesaid.\textsuperscript{127}

This law, passed directly after the effigy scare, banned the divination of the Queen’s future and the divination of who would succeed her, but it also made it a felony to wish the Queen dead, which, through Hacket’s display, he did. The Hacket incident is just one example. Another example would be Jane Shelly, who paid for the prediction of the day of the Queen’s death and who would become monarch after her.\textsuperscript{128} Jane was just one of many people at the end of Elizabeth’s reign who would pay for these kinds of actions and harbor these anxieties. As Elizabeth’s life was drawing to a close, the number of witchcraft accusations grew and would soon boom after her death during the reign of the next dynasty.\textsuperscript{129}

Conclusion

“The Virgin Queen” was a title of admiration bestowed upon Elizabeth I by the middle point of her reign when it became clear that she would not marry or have children. However, by the 1590s, the Queen’s virginity became a cause of great anxiety

\textsuperscript{128} Young, Magic as a Political Crime, 146.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid, 138.
for courtiers and peasants alike.\textsuperscript{130} With no heir to the throne, the future was unclear, and as the Queen’s health began to decline, fears about her mortality only grew.\textsuperscript{131} With these fears came a rise in magical threats against the queen’s life or rather, the fear of magical attacks against the queen’s life by her government.\textsuperscript{132}

The embarrassment of the Wax Effigies Affair was sparked due to the queen’s poor health as well as the constant fear of catholic cousins of Elizabeth taking the throne. This led to the imprisonment and torture of five innocent men when, in actuality, there was no threat to the Queen’s life.\textsuperscript{133} Fears of magical attacks were heightened by the wax effigies, however, and this led to others such as William Hacket and Jane Shelley who faced legal consequences for defacing a portrait of the queen and predicting the queen’s death.\textsuperscript{134}

These examples show that even at the end of her reign, Elizabeth used magic and magical beliefs as political tools, though these later instances of political magic appear more frantic and bassless than those of her earlier reign. The fear of her own mortality appears to have heightened her sensitivity to perceived magical threats.

\textsuperscript{130}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131}Ibid, 146.
\textsuperscript{132}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{133}Devine, “John Prestall A Complex Relationship,” 120-121.
\textsuperscript{134}Young, Magic as a Political Crime, 146.
Conclusion

Magic and politics were inherently intertwined in not only Tudor history but throughout English history, however, during the Elizabethan period, this relationship became all the more prominent.¹³⁵ As Elizabeth navigated the political landscape of early modern England starting in her youth years before her accession to the end of her life and reign, magic became a tool she relied upon.

Elizabeth’s relationship with the alchemist John Dee was key in Elizabeth’s ability to utilize magic in the way she did. Though some historians argue that Dee was not nearly as important to Elizabethan politics as he has traditionally been portrayed, I would disagree.¹³⁶ Dee was fundamental in almost every interaction Elizabeth I had with political magic. Though Dee was not a member of the private council or even a close acquaintance with Elizabeth, he was able to provide much-needed security directly before and during her reign. Dee was able to provide reassurance to Elizabeth when her safety was threatened by her Elder sister and again when Elizabeth was faced with harmful prophecies only days after her reign began.¹³⁷ Elizabeth’s relationship with Dee proves Elizabeth’s utilization of magic as a political instrument and her ability to do so even from the earliest point in her reign.

As Elizabeth became more secure in her reign, her attention moved away from harmful prophecies about the economic situation of her realm to adding gold to the royal

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¹³⁵Young, Magic in Merlin’s Realm, 161.
¹³⁶Ibid.
¹³⁷Ibid.
treasury. This endeavor involved three different Alchemists, the first of which was Cornelius de Lannoy, who utterly failed in his promise. He blamed the quality of English glass for this lack of success and, even with his large pension, asked for the Queen to sink more money into his experiments. The second alchemist, John Prestall, was a known traitor who was released from the Tower of London to create gold for the treasury; however, he took his release as another opportunity to overthrow Elizabeth.

The third alchemist, Edward Kelley, did not come to the attention of Elizabeth until well after he had left England after unsuccessfully attempting to gain Elizabeth’s favor. Kelly rose to prominence in the court of Rudolf II. Kelley received lands and a title from the Emperor for his alchemical talents, but this did not stop the pursuit by Elizabeth. The queen sent at least two courtiers to Prague to retrieve Kelley as well as sending him letters herself. Despite their attempts, Kelley did not return to England, not wanting to abandon his comfortable accommodations in the Empire. Though Elizabeth’s economic pursuits were unsuccessful, her use of alchemists to boost the economy further proves Elizabeth’s use of magic as a political tool.

As Elizabeth aged, anxieties about her death created a rise in accusations and perceived threats of diabolical magic. Elizabeth’s courtiers, like Robert Dudley, feared for her health along with her mortality, which led to the witch hunt for those who created diabolical wax effigies which, in reality, were objects created out of love magic. A few

139 Ibid, 76-78
141 Ibid, 68.
142 Ibid, 65.
143 Young, Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England, 133.
years later, a law was passed criminalizing doing magic for or about the Queen, which saw people like Willam Hacket and Jane Shelly legally punished for doing just that.\textsuperscript{144} These two were not trained alchemists or members of the gentry; they were common folk caught up in the fears of the upper class.\textsuperscript{145} These cases show that even in her later years, Elizabeth used magic in a political manner, though in this case, the persecution of it. In her later years, the use of magic was once again driven by anxiety.

From youth to the end of her life, Elizabeth not only expressed an interest in magic but used magic and her belief in magic to her political advantage. The Virgin Queen embraced the occult like no other English monarch before her.\textsuperscript{146} The queen’s use of political magic allowed her to secure her reign, and much like John Dee predicted on her first day on the throne, Elizabeth would go on to have a long and glorious reign.\textsuperscript{147} Elizabeth would be given several nicknames by her subjects, including Gloriana and Good Queen Bess, alluding to her successful reign. A reign that would last nearly fifty years and was in part facilitated by Elizabeth’s willingness and ability to adapt and use magic and magicians when politically necessary.

\textsuperscript{144}Young, \textit{Magic as a Political Crime}, 146.
\textsuperscript{145}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{146}Young, \textit{Magic in Merlin’s Realm}, 161.
\textsuperscript{147}Parry, \textit{The Arch Conjuror of England}, 47-49.
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