

NO PAWN IN HER GAME: THE TROUBLED
RELATIONSHIP OF PHILIP SIDNEY
AND QUEEN ELIZABETH

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Introduction

In the autumn of 1579, Philip Sidney stood at the center of various political intrigues and alliances sparked by the twenty-four year old Catholic Duke of Anjou's renewed courtship of the red-haired, forty-six year old Elizabeth who visibly expressed her favor and affection toward her French "frog"¹ before the watchful eyes of her court and its ardent courtiers. Earlier, in January 1579, Anjou's close friend, Jean de Simier, assigned to negotiate the marriage in his master's place, arrived in England, and Simier successfully ingratiated himself with the Queen. Simier proved to be an expert wooer and "a refined courtier, who was exquisite in the delights of love, and skilful in the ways of courtship" (qtd. in Duncan-Jones 159). To the jealous dismay of the Queen's courtiers, Simier's skills in the art of love successfully evoked in Elizabeth desires to relinquish her virginal state and strongly consider a marriage with the French duke. Simier's constant presence at Elizabeth's side and the Queen's public professions of affection for Anjou further increased the fears of Sidney's fervently Protestant family, notably her long reigning favorite Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and allies like Secretary Francis Walsingham who felt his main duty as a loyal subject involved diplomatic and behind-the-scenes maneuverings to protect England's precarious standing as a Protestant state surrounded by Catholic enemies.

Mindful of her father Henry VIII's unfortunate marriage to Anne of Cleaves, Elizabeth refused to commit to a marriage contract until she witnessed herself the Duke's attributes in person, and plans were made for the Duke's secret arrival to the English court. At the time of Anjou's entrance into England, Puritan lawyer John Stubbs, inspired by his loyalty and duty to his Protestant Queen, printed and distributed a

thousand copies of his pamphlet *The Discovery of a Gaping Gulf* in which he warns of the devilish intentions of the French and likens Anjou to Satan himself: "They have sent us hither, not Satan in body of a serpent, but the old serpent in shape of a man, whose sting is in his mouth, and who doth his endeavor to seduce our Eve, that she and we may lose this English paradise" (Stubbs 3-4). Nevertheless, Queen Elizabeth did not respond favorably to her subject's protective warnings, and quickly ordered the confiscation and burning of Stubbs's seditious text and the amputation of his right hand. The Queen's wrathful reaction to Stubbs's directness alerted those who longed for an end to marriage negotiations that more delicacy would be required if Elizabeth's affection for Anjou was to be thwarted.

During late August 1579, after the Duke of Anjou's arrival in England on August 17 to personalize his courtship of the Queen, Sidney attended a secret meeting at Baynard's Castle, his brother-in-law the Earl of Pembroke's residence. There he conferred with his father Sir Henry Sidney, Walsingham, Leicester, and Sir Christopher Hatton on a plan of action to prevent the French match. Despite the risk of the Queen's ire and probable punishment, Sidney, in consultation with members of his group, composed *A Discourse of Syr PH. S. To The Queenes Majesty Touching Hir Mariage with Monsieur* to dissuade her. This letter to Elizabeth would become the last direct plea to the Queen from a subject outside her counsel, but what is less clear is whether it played a significant role in Sidney's career as a statesman and later development as a poet away from the confines of court. For many critics², the letter is linked to the contents of the *Arcadia*, although such arguments tend to ignore the letter's literary merit and its

demonstration of Sidney's rhetorical skill. This thesis intends to remedy this oversight by concentrating on how Sidney's letter functions as a literary text in its own right.

To convey its literary importance, this study will first examine the historical events that led to the letter's composition. With this historical context in place, a study of Sidney as a rhetorical craftsman will then answer questions concerning his motivations for addressing the Queen on a personal matter. Does the letter, for instance, treat its sensitive subject matter effectively? Was it, in fact, prompted by Sidney's concerns or those of others? Answers to questions like these are not readily available, but an assessment of Sidney's position as a courtier and his relationship with the Queen both before and after the letter's creation and delivery can furnish evidence to formulate a plausible theory. That theory will necessarily examine the standing of the Sidney family and Protestant faction in court; Philip Sidney's relationships with the Earls of Oxford and Leicester and Sir Francis Walsingham; his knowledge of John Stubbs's fate; and his decision to retire to Wilton in the year following the letter's composition and delivery to Elizabeth. The Sidney who emerges from such events is a complex combination of willfulness, ambition, creativity, and conformity. He may not yet be the future author of the *Arcadia*, but his letter to the Queen furnishes the initial evidence of the career that was to come.

The Inconstancy of Fortune

The Sidney family's status at court in the years prior to his letter to the Queen captures the turbulent nature of court life when fortunes relied upon Elizabeth's inconstant pleasure. To achieve both political and social goals, a courtier had to maintain an astute awareness of the ever-changing political and social machinations that involved the Queen's variable character and discerning eye, rival courtiers well versed in the art of flattery, and adversarial families plotting against each other for the few scraps Elizabeth threw from her table. Sidney's bold undertaking as marriage counselor calls into question his reverence for such a hierarchal system with Queen Elizabeth at its head. As a young man from a family whose branches survived political upheavals, bloody transitions of power, and executions, Sidney inherited an understanding of the uncertain conditions of court life. Elizabeth's apparent inclination to marry the Catholic Anjou underscored such uncertainty and placed Sidney, his family, and his allies on alert. An examination of the Sidney family's position at court before and during the marriage negotiations, notably Sir Henry's and Leicester's standing with the Queen, along with that of their political ally Walsingham, reveals the personal and political influences that figured into Sidney's seemingly rash, political decision to compose the letter.

In the years directly before Anjou's renewed courtship, the Sidney family suffered drastic blows to their political and personal fortunes stemming from Henry Sidney's duties as Lord Deputy of Ireland. The blows were felt by family members who remained at court. Earlier, in 1577, Sir Henry had struggled with exacting the cess, a tax on plough-land to aid in the funding of his administration because the Irish Lords of the Pale, an area of land near Dublin "loyal" to England, refused to pay and rejected

compromises the Lord Deputy offered them. Consequently, Sir Henry further alienated himself from the Irish aristocracy by imprisoning some of the Lords in Dublin Castle. Elizabeth's desire for her favorite, the Earl of Ormond, to receive an exemption from the tax additionally impeded Sir Henry's efforts to enforce the cess and maintain the appearance of impartial rule. Walsingham advised Henry Sidney to allow Ormond the exemption because the Earl would make a strong friend in Ireland, but Sidney apparently rejected Walsingham's advice to preserve the impartiality of his government (Wallace 191). Not surprisingly, his decision angered Ormond, who spread rumors of Sir Henry's corrupt administration at court, and Elizabeth, irate that Sir Henry refused to fulfill her request, considered the Lord Deputy's removal from Ireland.³ Relations between Sir Sidney and the Earl of Ormond were already strained; previously Sir Henry supported the Earl of Desmond, Ormond's rival (Duncan-Jones 136). Adding to his struggles, Sir Henry, heeding talk of an invasion by the rebel James Fitzmaurice, requested more funds from the royal purse, a request that confirmed in Elizabeth's mind Sir Henry's misuse and overspending of the Crown's money.

The family's struggles impacted Philip Sidney's position at court in the midst of rumors of his father's corruption and led to behavior that would affect his relationship with the Queen. The son's actions at court to defend his father's maligned name reveal a young man who allowed his pride and quick temper to control his behavior. Concern that a favorite had a hand in his father's dishonor also may have played a part in Sidney's disruptive behavior at court. Upon those occasions when Sidney crossed paths with the Earl of Ormond, the young courtier quickly expressed his disdain for his family's enemy.

Edward Waterhouse, Sir Henry's agent in London, recounts one such meeting between the two courtiers in his September 16th, 1577 letter to Sir Henry:

Some little occasions of discourtesies have passed between the Earl of Ormond and Mr. Philip Sidney, because the Earl lately spake unto him and he answered not, but was in dead silence of purpose, because he imputeth to the Earl such practices as have been made to alienate her Majesty's mind from your Lordship. . . . The Earl of Ormond saith he will accept no quarrels from a gentleman that is bound by nature to defend his father's causes, and who is otherwise furnished with so many virtues as he knows Mr. Philip to be; and on the other side Mr. Philip hath gone as far, and showed as much magnanimity as is convenient, unless he could charge him with any particularities, which I perceive he yet cannot. (qtd. in Wallace 191-92)

Surrounded by rumors of his father's dishonesty in Irish affairs, Sidney undoubtedly struggled to sustain the calm and collected demeanor Elizabeth expected from her rivaling courtier. As in his later dispute with Earl of Oxford during the marriage negotiations, Sidney's brush with authority demonstrates his inability to accept the socio-political hierarchy of Elizabeth's court and foreshadows his later, audacious address to the Queen. One cannot find fault in Sidney's loyalty to his father and the family cause in the face of adversity, but Sidney's standing at court and his representation of the family name relied upon careful social and political maneuverings. Perhaps Sidney allowed his open distaste and disrespect toward Ormond to surface in order to satisfy a hotheaded, young courtier's thirst for swift and violent justice. Even if such was the case, such

behavior served little purpose in a court where the Queen demanded a sense of order among her courtiers and strongly abhorred duels among those who sought her favor. As a higher-ranking courtier and one of the Queen's favorites, the Earl of Ormond could not dignify Sidney's conduct with a challenge; instead he forgave Sidney for the young man's familial pride and lower rank. The Earl's indulgent response must have increased Sidney's irritation, but Philip accepted the dictates of rank and proper, courtly conduct and sought a more constructive and less violent means to support his father's administration in Ireland by composing "The Discourse of Irish Affairs."

Sidney's encounters with the Earl of Ormond, however, led to further instances in which he, in his attempts to defend his family's honor, reacted to situations in a heedless, impassioned manner. When Sidney discovered that his correspondence to his father had fallen under the eyes of the slanderous Earl of Ormond, he mistakenly concluded that his father's secretary, Edward Molyneux, had betrayed the family trust: "I asure yow before God, that if ever I know yow do so muche as reede any Lettre I wryte to my Father, without his Commaundement, or my Consente, I will thurst my Dagger in to yow. And truste to it, for I speake it in Earnest" (Collins 256). Instead of allowing a cool head to help him discover the true culprit, Sidney hastily promised a violent end to a servant who had provided his family with loyal service. His heated letter to Molyneux in May 1578 was met with the secretary's bewildered, yet patient, reply to Sidney's hastiness: "But Since it is (I protest to God) without Cawse, or yet just Grownde of Suspicion you use me thus: I bear the Injurie moore patiently for a Tyme, and mine Innocencie, I hoope in the Ende, shall trie mine Honestie: and then I trust you will confesse you have done me Wronge" (Collins 256). Once more Sidney sought a destructive and injudicious solution

for his family's misfortunes at court, displacing his anger at Ormond toward an undeserving target. The watchful eyes of the court and its perceptive Queen must have noted such repeat behavior.

Like her son, Lady Mary Sidney sought with little success to maintain her court standing earned by loyal service to the Queen. When her struggles to obtain a room for her husband at court met with little avail, she bitterly wrote in a letter to Molyneux, "When the woorst is knowne, old Lord Hary and his old Moll, will do as well as the cann in partinge lyck good Friends, the small Porsion allotted our longe Servis in Courght; which, as lytle as hit is, seams somethynge to mooche" (Collins 272). Sir Henry had incurred personal debt to fund his Irish administration, debts the Queen refused to repay. Such misfortunes clearly display a family in peril; the family's precarious status at court required careful political finesse to regain the Queen's good graces and thus strengthen the family status and fortune. Why then would Sidney make a political move that could further weaken the already unstable position of his family at court?

Sidney's uncle, the Earl of Leicester, stood as a significant factor in Philip's composition of the letter, not only because of his own struggles at court, but also due to their shared political and religious sentiments. As Philip matured, his uncle instilled in Sidney a fervent desire to embrace the Protestant cause in England and the Continent (Berry, *Making* 32-34). When Sidney entered court, Leicester immediately found his nephew's poetical talents useful in aiding him to attain his own political and personal desires. In May of 1578, a year before heated debates concerning the French match, the Earl of Leicester commissioned Sidney to produce a country-house revel, a May game in the form of a dramatic masque traditionally used as a vehicle to influence or manipulate

the Queen's decisions. In *The Lady of May*, Sidney invites the Queen to make a choice between two suitors, the shepherd, Espilus, and the forester, Therion: the former "suitor is thus rich, passive, harmless, and prone to poetic complaint; the [latter] is poor, active, dangerous, and of great service" (Berry, "Sidney's" 254). Rhetorically, Sidney structured *The Lady of May* to encourage Therion as the Queen's choice, and with the May game's "bias toward vitality, virility, and misrule, even Therion's more problematic attributes are appealing" (Berry, "Sidney's" 254). Furthermore, Sidney crafts the forester into the symbolic representation of Elizabeth's ardent and seemingly hopeful suitor, Robert Dudley. The Lord of May, traditionally depicted as Robin Hood, subtly hints at Elizabeth's endearing nickname for Leicester, her "sweet Robin." As Edward Berry notes, Leicester may have given up the prospect of obtaining Elizabeth's hand, yet hoped the desired choice of Therion by the Queen would entail a stronger, more free relationship between the two in light of his future marriage to Lettice Knollys in the late summer of 1578 ("Sidney's" 256). Despite the "failure" of Sidney's May game, and the savvy Elizabeth's choice of the other suitor, Espilus, Leicester still found his nephew's ardent nature and poetic prose useful in the aftermath of his exposed marriage and fall from Elizabeth's favor.⁴

It became crucial for Leicester and his allies to act when, in July 1579, Jean de Simier, believing the Earl had instigated an assassination attempt against his person, revealed to Elizabeth Leicester's secret marriage with the widowed Lettice Knowles. Leicester, who had long enjoyed the position of Elizabeth's darling and favorite, now suffered the Queen's jealous wrath. Under threat of imprisonment in the Tower, Leicester retired to his home at Greenwich Castle, banished from court and dishonored.⁵

Leicester's disgrace made Anjou a more favorable suitor in the Queen's eyes. A letter from Mary, Queen of Scots, to the Archbishop of Glasgow, states that Leicester's marriage "hath so offended this queen, it is thought she has been led upon such discontentment to agree to the sight of the Duke of Alençon" (qtd. in Wallace 212).

One can only surmise how Sidney felt toward his uncle's marriage. Leicester's marriage to the pregnant Lettice displaced Sidney as the heir to his uncle's wealth. It dashed Philip's hopes for future fortune, and the chance to revive his family's finances after father's debts incurred in Ireland (Duncan-Jones 156-57). Despite the animosity Sidney may have felt toward the Earl of Leicester's marriage and the unborn child that led to the union, Philip kept his uncle's secret from Elizabeth as family loyalty and necessity required; the wedded Leicester maintained his reign as court favorite until Simier's disclosure. With it, Sidney's personal position at court became more dependent upon Elizabeth's favor, a dependency unfamiliar to a courtier expecting to be the heir of a rich uncle. His success as a courtier now could determine his future fortune; writing an unflattering letter to the Queen could threaten his success.

Although Leicester may have indeed placed his nephew in peril for his own ends, Sidney may have been bound to obey an even stronger, more influential figure present at the meeting held at Baynard's Castle, Sir Francis Walsingham. Circumstantial evidence exists to suggest that Walsingham played a part in not only Sidney's composition of the letter, but also John Stubbs's more incendiary *The Gaping Gulf*. Collateral evidence involving rumor, speculation, striking coincidences, and veiled meaning further points to Walsingham as an influence upon the letter's composition and its contents. Even though Walsingham may have discovered a kindred spirit in Sidney and admired the young

man's intelligence and promise of brilliance, he found him a most valuable pawn in his political interests, a mouthpiece through which the Queen's secretary could speak to protect his political scheming in the Low Countries and his already unsteady position at court during the French marriage negotiations which had resulted from his own outspokenness against the marriage.

Upon his return to court in October 1578, after a failed diplomatic mission in the Low Countries to create a Protestant League, Walsingham found that he no longer possessed the Queen's favor; he also discovered Anjou's renewed courtship threatened his political desire to unite Protestant powers across the Continent, and thereby strengthen England's standing as a Protestant leader in the face of Spain, France, and Rome. In a letter to Lord Hatton, Walsingham expresses his frustration that Anjou's marriage proposal has thwarted his aims and made the Queen reluctant to commit England to the aid of rebels in the Low Countries. More pointedly, he acknowledges his inability to dissuade the Queen from the match:

I would to God her Majesty would forbear the entertaining any longer the marriage matter. No one thing hath procured her so much hatred abroad as these wooing matters, for it is conceived she dallieth therein. I have discharged my duty in that behalf, but in very temperate sort, for that she hath been heretofore jealous of my liking of her marriage; and therefore I cannot speak so frankly as others may. (qtd. in Read 2: 6)

Silenced by the Queen's displeasure, Walsingham had to seek others to achieve his own ends. Susan Doran remarks that the Walsingham-Leicester faction so effectively organized an anti-marriage campaign that London preachers sermonized against the

marriage and ballads lampooning the match quickly spread amongst the populous (49). After Anjou's visit to court in August, rumors abounded in France that Walsingham had commissioned Stubbs to write *The Gaping Gulf* to further instill distaste for the marriage among Elizabeth's subjects. Although Walsingham left John Stubbs and his distributor William Page to their fates, he pled for leniency on behalf of Hugh Singleton, the publisher of *The Gaping Gulf*. Such a plea reveals that while Walsingham acknowledged that he possessed little power in sparing Stubbs and Page, he felt responsible enough to persuade Elizabeth to show mercy to Singleton. Despite his exploitation of Stubbs in his campaign against the marriage, Walsingham's furtive maneuverings did not remain unnoticed, and he received his share of the Queen's wrath for his role in the matter. In a discussion with the Queen about the marriage, Elizabeth accused Walsingham of conspiring against her, "swearing that the only thing he was good for was as a protector of heretics" (Read 2: 22). Upon the Queen's command, Walsingham retired from court under the dark cloud of Elizabeth's displeasure, not to return until the end of the year. Her anger may have arisen, as Walsingham historian Conyers Read suggests, from her knowledge of Walsingham's commission to Stubbs to write *The Gaping Gulf*, "heretics" being a reference to Stubbs and his conspirators (2: 22). Despite the Queen's quick campaign to gather and destroy the widely distributed copies of Stubbs' inflammatory pamphlet, *The Gaping Gulf* had successfully reached a broad readership outside the Queen's court. Walsingham no doubt sought a candidate to stir up dissension among the intimates inside that court.

As Walsingham utilized Stubbs to write and circulate an incendiary pamphlet to a wide, public readership, he, and those of his party, found in Sidney the ideal tool to stage

an anti-marriage attack within the Queen's inner circle. The close reading of the letter in the following chapter will clearly reveal Walsingham's direct influence on the composition's contents. Specifically, relevant areas of Sidney's letter bear striking similarities to Walsingham's earlier memorandum to the Queen. Such similarities demonstrate Sidney's collaboration with Walsingham. In composing the letter, Sidney may have also fallen under Walsingham's indirect influence as well. Katherine Duncan-Jones notes that "common ground between the Letter and *A Gaping Gulfe* suggests common origins in the Leicester-Walsingham circle, or the influence of one on the other" (162). Such commonality indicates that Sidney carefully read Stubbs's pamphlet and assimilated key argumentative points (points that originated from the Queen's secretary) into his own composition.⁶ Philip Sidney, faced with the task ahead, became one of many integral elements in his friend's propagandistic machine against Elizabeth's marriage to the Duke of Anjou. His close relationship with Walsingham and the two men's shared religious and political views made him a willing tool in dissuading the Queen, and Sidney may have felt confident with the support of Walsingham in such a risky undertaking.

Despite the personal and political pressures placed upon Sidney to compose the letter, his own standing as a courtier and his relationship with Elizabeth may have made him more of a participant and less of a pawn in his uncle and Walsingham's hands. Upon his return to court in 1577 after a moderately successful assignment as ambassador to Germany,⁷ he reluctantly settled into life at court with its dalliances and constant entertainments designed to curry the Queen's favor. His diplomatic mission instilled in Sidney a taste for a more active life, a life at odds with the leisurely amusements at court.

The young courtier must have felt that his inactivity at court suppressed his masculine ambitions for action and combat in order to please a Queen who denied his political and personal aspirations. Elizabeth, astutely aware of Sidney's political aim for active campaigns in the Low Countries, demonstrated her control over a courtier who refused to play the deferential and flattering role his position at court required. In 1578, the German Duke Casimir, whom Sidney had met during his ambassadorial duties in the Low Countries, pushed for Sidney's appointment as a co-commander to aid the Dutch rebels, but Elizabeth refused to grant permission, fearing that Philip's action would signify England's official involvement and disrupt "her cautious balancing policy" between the French and Spanish forces in the Low Countries (Howell, *Sir Philip* 56). Duncan-Jones adds that Elizabeth's "general reluctance to commit herself definitely to the Dutch struggle for independence was compounded by extreme anxiety about how Sidney, in particular, might exploit such an opportunity. The very eagerness with which he was asked for seemed suspicious" (153). The Queen's anxiety over Sidney's success abroad and her suspicions over his allegiance to the Dutch cause would later impact her reaction to the courtier's highly politicized letter against her marriage.

In July 1578, the Queen threw Sidney a small bone and assigned to him a less active, diplomatic mission to deliver letters in which the Queen expressed England's neutral position regarding the Netherlands, an expression contrary to Sidney's hope for a committed alliance. Although Elizabeth granted Sidney leave, she perhaps unkindly made him the tool in circumventing England's assistance to a cause dear to his heart. Such news delivered by Sidney would have struck a blow to allies like Casimir, who overestimated Sidney's political influence and viewed the courtier as the means to gain

English support. The Earl of Leicester, loath that his nephew should be the messenger of disappointing news to their friends in the Netherlands, dissuaded Sidney from leaving court and the young man grudgingly complied (Wallace 198-200).

Although a visit from Casimir and Languet in early 1579 may have placated Sidney, the reunion with his overseas friends may have further increased his frustrations from his lack of appointments and England's neutral stance in assisting the Dutch rebels. Languet, in a letter to his friend soon after his visit to the English court, touches upon the unsuitable nature of court life and its revels for a young man like Sidney whose attributes demanded a more active lifestyle:

To speak plainly, the habits of your court seemed to me somewhat less manly than I could have wished, and most of your noblemen appeared to me to seek for a reputation more by a kind of affected courtesy than by those virtues which are wholesome to the state, and which are most becoming to generous spirits and to men of high birth. I was sorry therefore, and so were other friends of yours, to see you wasting the flower of your life on such things, and I feared lest that noble nature of yours should be dulled, and lest from habit you should be brought to take pleasure in pursuits which only enervate the mind. (Pears 167)

The marriage negotiations would represent a call to action for Sidney, and his charge to write a strategic letter to the Queen would present a challenge worth his days at court. Armed at last with a sense of purpose, Sidney took his role as spokesman seriously and during the secret writing of the letter, he publicly expressed his disdain for those who favored the marriage. Soon after the anti-marriage faction's meeting at the Earl of

Pembroke's castle, Sidney quarreled at the tennis courts with the Earl of Oxford, a strong supporter of the French marriage and a court favorite, in front of the French delegation who had audience with the Queen.

Angered by the Earl of Oxford's insulting behavior toward him, Sidney challenged his rival to a duel, and in a significant clash between the two leading spokesmen for those in support for and against the marriage, Sidney refused to back down despite Oxford's higher rank. In his August 28th letter to Lord Hatton regarding the confrontation, Sidney expressed his ill will toward his rival:

As for the matter dependinge between the Earle of Oxford and me, certainly, Sir, howe soever I mighte have forgiven hy, I should never have forgiven my self, yf I had layne under so proude an injurye, as he would have laide upon me, neither can any thinge under the sunne make me repente yt, nor any miserye make me goo one half worde back frome yt: lett him therefore, as hee will, digest itt: for my parte I thincke, tyinge upp, makes some thinges seeme fercer, than they would be. (Feuillerat 3: 128)

Due to Sidney's unwillingness to concede to Oxford, the Queen intervened and admonished his refusal to acknowledge "the difference in degree between earls and gentlemen; the respect inferiors owed to their superiors; and the necessity in princes to maintain their own creations, as degrees descending between the people's licentiousness and the anointed sovereignty of crowns" (Greville 68). Elizabeth's intervention in the dispute to prevent a duel clearly conveys her preference for the Earl of Oxford, and the Queen renders painfully apparent to Sidney his place as a lower-ranked courtier who

must acknowledge the power his superiors hold over him. In his description of the quarrel, and Elizabeth's reprimand, Sidney's friend and biographer Fulke Greville focuses on the correctness of Sidney's behavior, despite his refusal to respect the authority of those who possess a higher rank than he: "Again, he besought her Majesty to consider, that although he [the Earl of Oxford] were a great Lord by birth, alliance, and grace; yet hee was no Lord over him: and therefore the difference of degrees between free men, could not challenge any other homage than precedency" (68). Regardless of Elizabeth's dressing-down of Sidney and her publicly displayed preference for Oxford, Sidney continued on the course of action more than likely discussed during the meeting at Baynard's Castle just after Anjou's visit; he delivered his letter to the Queen. Because the Oxford affair would appear to be a cautionary event predictive of the Queen's reaction to Sidney's marriage advice, certainly his discussion to go forward raises questions as to his judgment during a period at court when his family struggled to maintain its social and political standing.

Before delivering his letter, Sidney may have gauged Elizabeth's reaction to his address concerning her personal affairs and speculated upon the possible dangers that could ensue. As the spokesman for his party, the Protestant state of his country and his family's fortunes weighed heavily on his shoulders. His quarrel with the Earl of Oxford so soon after the assignment of his task must have further instilled a sense of gravity in Sidney's undertaking. Considering his previous brushes with authority and his awareness of his position as a Sidney and a Dudley, Sidney may have composed the letter in a spirit of indignation and arrogance: Elizabeth had failed to acknowledge his lineage and the favors it deserved. In light of the significant confrontation between the two leading

spokesmen for the marriage and anti-marriage factions, how could he remain silent?

Elizabeth's preference for Oxford not only predicted the Queen's support for those at court who urged her to marry, but also conveyed indirectly her support for Anjou as a bridegroom. The Queen's choice may have made the anti-marriage group feel desperate, leading to Sidney's conclusion that the prospect of a French marriage required swift and decisive action.

In the opinion of Sidney's biographer and friend, Fulke Greville, neither arrogance nor familial pride played a part in the letter. His account underscores the young man's loyalty to the Queen and his duty as a subject. Greville asserts that Sidney carefully examined the possible advantages and outcome of a French match and reached the conclusion that such an alliance would not profit England because of religious differences, Elizabeth's standing as a wife and not a Queen, the abuses English subjects would suffer under French rule, French interests in the Netherlands, and the change of government (Greville 45-60). Because of his duty as a loyal subject and his love for his Queen, Sidney spoke honestly and straightforwardly in his letter: "These (I say) and such like threatening probabilities made him joyn with the weaker party, and oppose this torrent; even while the French faction reigning had cast aspersions upon his Uncle of Leicester, and made him, like a wise man (under colour of taking physick) voluntarily become prisoner in his chamber" (60). Such "loyalty," especially in the face of stronger, opposing forces, should be admired in a courtier whose ambitions were thwarted by a ruler who confined Sidney to court and its idle pursuits despite his desires for a more active life.

Although Greville's portrait of Sidney highlights the qualities many readers desire their literary heroes to possess, such a portrait, like the many other flattering tributes that arose after Sidney's death, denies the flaws and complexities that made Sidney human and inevitably vulnerable to the fickleness of a monarch's desires. Greville, as a close friend, naturally would want to portray his departed friend in a complimentary light; his own personal bias calls into question the reliability of his account.⁸ Sidney, in light of his family's troubles and his own ambitions, may have found motivation to compose the letter from less noble grounds.

Additionally, his combative behavior may not have arisen solely from his disregard of courtly conduct, but, as Maureen Quilligan suggests, from his consciousness of the erotic dynamic between the Queen and courtiers who expressed their love for her. Despite Elizabeth's God-granted sovereignty, Sidney's dominant sex permitted him to address his Queen. In his addresses to the Queen during the Oxford affair and the letter, "Sidney was . . . using some liberties he believed he held by a far older right. By right of his sex" (Quilligan 176). Indeed, the prospect of Elizabeth's marriage to Anjou not only threatened the Protestant cause in England and the Sidney family's position at court (dependent upon the Earl of Leicester's standing as the Queen's favorite), but the idealized relationship of an unmarried monarch with her subjects. As Louis Adrian Montrose notes, "The relationship between courtier-poets and queen is idealized as a love purified of physical desire; its erotic energy has been transformed into art and service" (4). As an unmarried queen, Elizabeth employed her femininity to her advantage in the flirtatious and romantic dealings with the amorous courtiers who sought her favor. For those who refused to acknowledge the erotic and political power she possessed, Elizabeth

denied advantageous political appointments, titles, and the necessary wealth to solidify one's status at court. However, a poet's skill granted Sidney an advantage as well in a system that relied upon courtship of the Queen; Sidney himself employed his own ability as a writer to achieve a political end under the guise of love and service. Although Sidney does not overtly touch upon his ruler's gender in the letter, his courtly intimacy with the Queen permits him to discuss a private matter, and key discussions of Anjou in his letter suggest that Elizabeth's future marriage would destroy the intimacy between the Virgin Queen and her courtiers. As a subject courting the Queen's favor, Sidney's belief that his relationship to Elizabeth allowed him to discuss a private matter as a court intimate adds a more personal motive for Sidney's letter.

Despite Sidney's disruptions at court, his inept courtiership, and lack of success in convincing Elizabeth to provide aid to the Protestant cause in the Netherlands, he stood as the lone spokesman for the anti-marriage faction and protector of Protestantism in England. With Leicester's disgrace and Walsingham's ill-received outspokenness against the Queen's marriage, the anti-marriage faction did not contain a stronger candidate. As critic Roger Howell observes, Sidney's earlier education instilled in him a strong devotion to the Protestant cause, and his family and Protestant tutor Hubert Languet groomed Philip to assume a principal role as protector of Protestantism and leading proponent for the Protestant League ("Sidney Circle" 31-33). Sidney's actions at court and public support of a Protestant League with the Netherlands reflected a forthright individual willing to demonstrate his loyalty to England with active participation in the Protestant wars on the Continent; however, Elizabeth withheld her support for either side embroiled in the political turmoil in the Low Countries. The desperation of his uncle's

position as Elizabeth's favorite and his family's weakened position at court no doubt play a part in Sidney's letter, but mindfulness of previous disappointments during his career should have made him wary of relying solely on his own rank at court, even if familial pride and arrogance marked his interactions with fellow courtiers.

Owing to these setbacks which affected the family's status and Sidney's personal confrontation with Oxford, the importance of timing in the delivery of the letter to the Queen cannot be understated. The time seems limited. First there is Elizabeth's proclamation, *Denouncing Stubbs' Book, The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf*, issued 27 September. In her proclamation Elizabeth orders the Lord Mayor of London to confiscate the pamphlet. The Proclamation describes it as a

lewd, seditious book of late rashly compiled and secretly printed and afterwards seditiously dispersed into sundry corners of the realm, and considering it manifestly containeth, under a pretense of dissuading her majesty from marriage with the Duke of Anjou, the French king's brother a heap of slanders and reproaches of the said prince bolstered up with manifest lies and despiteful speeches of him, and therewith also seditiously and rebelliously stirring up all estates of her majesty's subjects to fear their own utter ruin and change of government, but specially to imprint a present fear in the zealous sort of the alteration of Christian religion by her majesty's marriage. (Berry 148).

Elizabeth's proclamation clearly points to the danger of publicly discussing the Queen's personal affairs, and its barely contained fury against Stubbs would put an end to any direct addresses against Anjou and the French match. On November 3, 1578, Elizabeth

exacted punishment upon her rash subject, and Stubbs suffered the loss of his right hand for his disloyalty to the Queen. With such a brutal display of the Queen's wrath against Stubbs, Sidney, despite his position as a gentleman of the court, would not have taken such a foolish risk as to deliver the letter under these circumstances. More likely the letter was delivered to the Queen before the proclamation but after Sidney's clash with Oxford.

Fortified with the hopes of his family and allies, Sidney composed his letter to the Queen, interweaving arguments belonging to those of his party along with his own sentiments against the marriage. Although Sidney collaborated with those of his party, incorporating Walsingham's and Stubbs's arguments along with his own, the courtier brought his own style and skill to his plea. Sidney fashions his faction's earlier arguments into a more sophisticated, subtle approach that deftly discusses a delicate matter without bluntly touching on sensitive issues as previous attempts had done. He himself could only hope that his skill with words would fall upon receptive ears and achieve a desired result.

Advice to the Queen

The letter's opening demonstrates the struggles Sidney experienced in his courtiership, his difficulties in striking the perfect balance between the flatterer's subservience required for courtly favor and his own personal pride and ambition:

Most feared & beloved, most swete & gracious Soveraine. To seke out excuses of this my boldnes & to arme the acknowledging of a faulte with reasons for it might better shewe, I knew I did amisse then any whitt diminish the attempt especially in your judgement who able lively to discerne into the nature of the thing done, it wer folly to hope with laying on better colours to make it more acceptable. (Sidney 3: 51)

Wisely, Sidney begins his appeal to the Queen with the necessary acknowledgement of her rank in flattering terms, as well as an apology for his own presumptiveness in offering advice in personal matters concerning which the Queen knows her own mind and heart. Despite an opening coated with flattering words, Sidney quickly lays aside a purely deferential tone. As Edward Berry observes, the letter's tone exemplifies "Sidney's apparent inability to submerge himself in the rhetorical conventions of the courtier" (*Making* 56). Indeed, Sidney may not have found it difficult to put aside a completely deferential stance in his letter in light of his frustrated ambitions and unsuccessful courtiership in the recent years leading into the letter's deliverance. But his letter surprisingly possesses restraint and control over a heated issue. Since he has gained little reward for his attempts to curry the Queen's favor to further his career, Sidney informs Elizabeth that he will not cloak his advice in ingratiating terminology, but speak to her directly as his love and protectiveness of his ruler require:

Therefore carrying no other olive branches of intercession, but the lying myself at your feete, nor no other insinuacion either for attention or pardon but the true vowed sacrifice of unfeigned love, I will in simple & direct termes (as hoping they shall only come to your mercifull eyes) sett down the over flowing of my minde in this most important matter importing as I think, the continewance of your safety, & as I know the joyes of my life. (Sidney 3: 51)

In the letter's opening, Sidney presents to the Queen his own awareness that he faces her alone, with "no other olive branches of intercession," unprotected by the superiors who ordered him to compose the letter and, as Languet suggests, "who either did not know into what peril they were thrusting you, or did not care for your danger, provided they effected their own object" (Pears 188). To maintain his position as an intimate, Sidney acknowledges that he has previously established a private dialogue between himself and Elizabeth concerning her marriage: "And because my wordes I confesse shallow, but coming from the cleere wellspring of most loyall affection have already delivred unto your gracious cares, what is the general somme of my traveyling thoughtes" (Sidney 3: 51). Notably, no record exists of any earlier exchange between Elizabeth and Sidney regarding the French affair, only Greville's discussion of Sidney's composition and deliverance of the letter to the Queen. Conceivably, Sidney's acknowledgement of prior admonishments against the marriage may allude to sentiments professed by members of his faction, namely those expressed by Walsingham. Such intimations of familiarity with Elizabeth perhaps reveal Sidney's recognition of John Stubbs's presumption that

although an outsider, he still possessed the right to address the Queen and openly discuss private matters.

In contrast, Walsingham's *Arcana Aulica*,⁹ a text that contains "prudential maxims for the statesman and the courtier," reveals that Walsingham believed that he and the anti-marriage faction did not needlessly thrust Sidney unto a dangerous path, that Philip, because of his rank and relationship with those close to the Queen, possessed the right to address his ruler: "There are those for whom the Splendor of their Family, the Authority of their Office, or Convenience of their employment (whether it be high, or low, come unto them by inheritance, or got with money) hath prepared an access unto the Prince's person" (2). To assert a close, private relationship between himself and the Queen, Sidney further assures Elizabeth that he composed his letter for her eyes only and that his confidence would remain private; yet, despite his assurance, the letter circulated among the court's intimates, and in a letter to Sidney, Languet marvels "how your letter about the Duke of Anjou has come to the knowledge of so many persons" (Pears 187). Not only was Sidney faced with the task of crafting a letter that would dissuade the Queen, but he also understood his letter would likely fall under the eyes of court intimates. Sidney and his party saw it to their advantage to circulate the letter and garner support for their cause and perhaps admiration for Sidney's strong argument against the marriage. Such support of the anti-marriage faction would no doubt add fuel to the already fiery debates at court. More importantly, should Elizabeth accept the match, her decision would require Parliamentary acceptance for the union. No doubt Sidney carefully sought the most appropriate approach to dissuade the Queen and members of her court from the marriage.

To get in touch with his audience, Sidney favors convention and introduces his argument with the conventional metaphor of Elizabeth's kingdom as a physically healthy body and the French marriage as an unnecessary prescription, a metaphor developed in Walsingham's and Stubbs's arguments against the match. With the use of this metaphor Sidney immediately moves his argument away from personal discussions concerning Elizabeth's physical body and instead focuses on the Queen's body politic. The basis of his argument raises the question as to why Elizabeth would want to marry with the state of the realm healthy and strong:

So truly to you indued with felicities byond all others (though shorte of your desertes) a man may well aske, what maketh you in such a calme to change course, to so helthfull a body to applye such a weary medecine? What hope can recompense so hazardous an adventure? Hazardous indeed, if it were for nothing but the altering a well mainteined & well approved trade. For as in bodies naturall any soudain change is not without perill, so in this body politick wherof you are the onely head, it is so much the more as there ar more humours to receive a hurtfull impression. (Sidney 3: 52)

Sidney suggests that his monarch effect no sudden change in the state of her country. With the Queen's publicly expressed affection for Anjou and her apparently serious consideration for the marriage, Sidney and his party found critical action, such as the letter's composition, more than necessary because of their inability to predict the Queen's conduct. Only after the marriage negotiations dragged on with little progress did his party realize that Elizabeth once again approached political alliances with a "wait and

see" attitude, and that she truly understood that sudden change and action would lead to peril. Queen Elizabeth no doubt found Sidney's metaphor a familiar line of reasoning against her marriage to Anjou and perhaps suspected that Sidney stood as an agent of a silenced Walsingham because of the letter's similarity to Walsingham's earlier memorandum. In his memorandum to Elizabeth titled "A Consideration of the diseased state of the realm and how the same may in some kind of sort be cured," Walsingham utilizes the metaphor of domestic and foreign problems in relation to the marriage as diseases that attack Elizabeth's state (Read 2: 14). Stubbs, in *The Gaping Gulf*, more bluntly also likens Anjou to a disease attacking Elizabeth's healthy state: "This sickness of mind have the French drawn from those eastern parts of the world, as they did that other horrible disease of the body and, having already too far westward communicated the one contagion do now seek notably to infect our minds with the other" (3); in Stubbs's case, however, he more directly focuses on the Queen's physical body alongside a discussion of the political body.

With his utilization of Walsingham's and Stubbs's metaphorical examination of the Queen's two bodies, Sidney also includes Walsingham's views regarding a ruler's incautious actions in political matters; in his advisory text *Arcana Aulica*, Walsingham instructs the courtier that it remains his duty to dissuade a ruler from sudden action, "shewing withal, that *Sudden* undertakings, are full of *hazard*, and *difficulty* . . . [and] that things should be done *Slowly* with security, then *Rashly* with the ruine of his Master" (26). Sidney, perhaps mindful of Walsingham's instructions and the sentiments in his memorandum, cautions the Queen against desires that oftentimes cause a body to seek needless remedies. Although the heart of Elizabeth's sovereignty lies in her status as

God's appointed head of His church, Sidney maintains that as Elizabeth bestows her Protestant subjects with strength as their spiritual guide, their faith in her as a Protestant leader endows her with strength in return: "These therefore as their sowles live by your happy government, so are they your chefe, if not sole, strenght. These howsoever the necessity of human life make them looke, yet cannot they look for better condicions than they presently enjoye. These how their hartes will be galed, if not aliened, when they shall see you take to husband a Frenchman & a papist" (Sidney 3: 52). Because Elizabeth's main strength lies in the loyalty of her Protestant subjects, the Queen must proceed with care and prudently consider whether her kingdom requires any physic that may poison her realm. Sidney warns that her abhorrent match with Anjou would "weaken" her loyal subjects' affections and after the weakening of her realm Elizabeth would think the marriage "an evill preparative for the patient (I mean your Estate) to a greater sicknes" (Sidney 3: 53). With his attention on Elizabeth's subjects as the foundation of her strength, Sidney solidifies the foundation of his argument with his examination of the French treatment of their Protestant subjects.

To demonstrate how Elizabeth's marriage to "a Frenchman & a papist" would alienate her subjects' affection for their Queen, Sidney discusses the deceitfulness and violent inclinations in Anjou's family and in the Duke himself as reflected in his participation in the massacre of French Protestants:

Very common people will know this that he is the sonne of that Jezabel of our age: that his brothers made oblation their owne sisters mariadge, the easier to make massacres of all sexes: That he himself contrary to his promise & against all gratefullnes, having had his liberty & principall

estate chiefly by the Hugnotes meanes did sack la Charité & utterly spoiled Issoire with fire & sworde. (Sidney 3: 52)

Although Sidney later tempers his discussion of Anjou, he cannot conceal his hatred of Catherine de Medici. With his association of Catherine with Jezebel, Sidney portrays the French Queen Mother as an idolatrous murderer of God's prophets. Jezebel's evil influence over her sons calls attention to Catherine's immoral control over her own children who commit atrocities to satisfy their mother's murderous desires. Despite the recent alliance formed by the marriage of Huguenot Henri de Navarre to Marguerite de Valois on August 18, Charles IX, armed with his mother Catherine's suggestions of Huguenot rebellion, ordered the slaughtering of thousands of Huguenot men, women, and children during the week of August 24, 1572. Sidney's allusion to the massacre serves as a reminder that a marriage between those of two different religions would do little in strengthening Elizabeth's political body. Sidney highlights the Huguenot and French Catholic troubles to illustrate England's own internal struggles between Protestant and Catholic.

Just as Henri de Navarre's marriage to Marguerite de Valois served little to bridge the religious gap in France, Sidney alludes that Queen Elizabeth's marriage to Anjou would further increase religious turmoil by giving hope to the Papists in her realm and despair to her loyal, Protestant subjects. Sidney warns that if Elizabeth accepts the match, she would add strength to the Catholic faction, "some in prison & disgrace, some whose best frendes are banished, practisers, many thinking you an usurper, many thinking the right you had disannulled by the Popes excommunicacion, all greved at the burdenous weight of their consciences" (Sidney 3: 53). Although Elizabeth occupies a

vulnerable position as a Protestant ruler in the midst of Catholic enemies, the pressure to marry would only add to England's vulnerability by affecting the Queen's main strength, her Protestant subjects: "If then the affectionat have their affections weakened, & the discontented have a gapp to utter their discontentacion I think it will seeme an evill preparative for the patient (I meane your Estate) to a greater sickness" (Sidney 3: 53). Her unmarried status would maintain the balance between the two factions in her country and the happiness of her loyal subjects.

Sidney also touches upon a personal note by alluding to the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, which occurred during his presence in Paris as his uncle's representative. Notably, Sidney's arrival in Paris in June 1572 marked the development of his relationship with Walsingham. Under instructions from Leicester, Walsingham, then ambassador at the French court seeking tolerance for the Huguenots, served as a surrogate father to Sidney, and as biographer Alan Stewart notes, "The appointment of Walsingham *in loco parentis* was perhaps the most significant to date in influencing Philip's adult life" (72). In August of 1572, Sidney and Walsingham would witness the heightening tension between the French Royals and the Huguenots. Before the king posted a royal guard at Walsingham's Paris residence to protect the potential of a future alliance between England and France, Walsingham and his entourage had to hide from a crazed mob (Stewart 87). Undoubtedly, Sidney's witnessing of the massacre and the loss of newly made friends instilled in him a desire to protect the Protestant faith on the Continent, a desire he shared with Walsingham. In his memorandum, Walsingham beseeches the Queen to "let the dolorous success of the King of Navarre's marriage teach us, of which most horrible spectacle I was an eye witness" (qtd. in Read 2: 16). In more

colorful terms, Stubbs raises the question of how the English can trust the French “if intermarriages amongst themselves in their own family cannot stay this fury of theirs, but that for religion only and none other quarrel their very pity is cruelty even upon their own bowels, murdering and massacring one another by thousands and ten thousands, how shall any marriage make them friends to us” (40)? Significantly, Sidney’s letter contains his only comments on the massacre, a dreadful occurrence that linked him with Walsingham as a fellow Protestant forced to watch helplessly the murder of their allies in religion.

Sidney further warns that Anjou’s youth may enhance the murderous strain he inherited from his family. Wisely, Sidney does not explicitly discuss the disparity between Elizabeth’s and Anjou’s ages, as did Walsingham and Stubbs, but his study of Anjou subtly implies that the Duke’s character, not only determined by his morally corrupt family, is also guided as well by the intemperance of youth, infidelity, and rebelliousness:

His will to be as full of light ambition as is possible, besides the French disposition, & his owne education, his inconstant attemptes against his brother, his thrusting him self into the low countrey matters, he sometime seeking the king of Spaine daughter sometime your Majesty are evident testimonies of a light mind carried with every wind of hope, taught to love greatnes any way gotten & having the motionners & ministers of his minde onely such yong men as have shewed (they thinke) evill contentment a sufficient ground of any rebellion. (Sidney 3: 54-55)

Lightly treading on dangerous territory in regard to the Queen's vanity, Sidney maintains that Anjou's interest in her as a bride arises not out of affection for Elizabeth but as a ploy to instigate a match with Spain and strengthen a Catholic alliance. Walsingham, in his memorandum, contends that "the show of a match with England would be the best way to advance his hopes of a match with Spain" (Read 2: 15). If Anjou did truly possess a sincere interest in a match with England, the incompatibility of Elizabeth's virtuous and wise nature with the Duke's inconstant and "light mind" would make the marriage an unhappy one.

In consideration of the Duke's excessive nature, Sidney, fearing that England will fall under French control, asks, "Is it to be hoped that he will be contained in the limites of your condicion," and expresses the fear that Anjou will seize power from the Queen, not "content to be second person" (Sidney 3: 54). With the attainment of Elizabeth's power, Anjou's destructive and ambitious nature would utilize England's strength "to helpe him aswell for old revenges as for to diverte him from troubling France, & to deliver his owne countrey the soner from evill humours," a notion Walsingham himself puts forth in his memorandum (Sidney 3: 54). Building on his earlier argument that the Queen's marriage would divide and not heal England's internal strife, Sidney entreats Elizabeth to regard the current health of her reign and how her unmarried state represents constancy:

But thinges holding in the state present, I think I may justly conclude that your countrey being aswell by long peace & frutes of peace, as by the poison of division (wherof the faithfull shall by this meanes be wounded & the contrary enabled) made fitt to receave hurt. And Monsieur being

every way apt to use the occasion to hurte, there can almost happen no worldly thing of more evident danger to your Estate Royall: for as for your person (indeede the seale of our happiness) what good there may come by it, to ballance with the losse of so honorable a constancie.

(Sidney 3: 54)

Once more Sidney emphasizes that the marriage is not a cure-all for any trouble in Elizabeth's realm, but rather a poison that would corrupt the balance between the two existing factions under the Queen's rule. As Elizabeth represents constancy, Anjou stands for infidelity and treachery that would destroy the peace England has enjoyed under the Queen. Such constancy would be harmed when, upon their marriage, Anjou would reduce Elizabeth to no more than wife and rule in her stead and Elizabeth would be forced to "deliver him the keyes of your kingdom & live at his discretion" (Sidney 3: 55).

Despite his earlier attacks on Anjou and his family, Sidney now promises Elizabeth that he will refrain from personally attacking the Duke's character, but his rhetoric barely conceals his distaste for the French race: "I will not shewe so much malice, as to object the universall doute of all that Races unhealthfulness, neither will I laye to his charge his aguelike manner of proceding sometimes hotte, sometimes colde in time of pursute which allwayes likely is most fervent. And I will temper my speeches from any other irreverent disgracings of him in particular *though they be never so true*" (Italics mine) (Sidney 3: 55). In a carefully crafted rhetorical move Sidney prefaces his attack on Anjou with irony in his "refusal" to specifically mention Anjou's sexual proclivities and rumors that the Duke, scarred from small pox, contracted syphilis, the French pox that plagues his nation and clearly indicates the immorality of his country.

Sidney informs the Queen that he stands above such easy attacks of character, although these assaults arise from a true understanding of Anjou's base attributes, which accomplish little in endearing him to Elizabeth's subjects and lay bare his unworthiness as a bridegroom. Such a rhetorical move displays Sidney's ability to argue his points subtly and avoid the pitfall that had trapped the more directly spoken Stubbs. His allusion to Anjou's contraction of syphilis, followed with a discussion of the production of an heir, also implies that the Duke would infect not only Elizabeth, figuratively and literally, but also the Queen's royal line and her progeny. Not only would the Duke infect Elizabeth's political body with discord, but he would literally infect her physical body with disease as well.

The possibility that Elizabeth's union with Anjou would result in pregnancy instilled in counselors and subjects alike an immense fear that their forty-six year old Queen would not survive the dangers of childbirth. Walsingham, in his memorandum to the Queen, warns of that likelihood: "The danger that women of her Majesty's years are most commonly subject unto by bearing of children, and so it may fall out that Madonna may prove morbe deterior" (qtd. in Read 2: 16). In *The Gaping Gulf*, Stubbs identifies the distinct possibility that the Queen would not survive childbirth as one of the particularly devious motives for a match between Elizabeth and Anjou: "Methinks it must needs come first of a Very French love to our Queen and land to seek this marriage even now so eagerly at the uttermost time of hope to have issue, and at the very point of most danger to Her Majesty for childbearing" (51). Once again, Sidney finds a more restrained approach to express his points. Instead of hearkening Elizabeth to the dangers of childbirth as did Walsingham and Stubbs, Sidney focuses on Anjou as father, a focus

that removes the discussion away from the Queen's age and the physical concerns that her age entails. Like his earlier arguments centering on England's current strength as a nation without ailments, Sidney informs the Queen that a marriage with Anjou would add little to her already great kingdom:

Nothing can it adde unto you but the blisse of children, which I confesse were an unspeakable comfort, but yet no more appartaining to him then to any other to whome that height of all good happes were allotted to be your husband. And therefore I think I may assuredly affirme that what good soever can folowe marriage is no more his then any bodies: but the evilles & dangers are particularly annexed to his person & condicion. (Sidney 3: 55)

The marriage offers little in regard to England's power, aside from the personal joy of children. So, too, Anjou himself presents little as a bridegroom. If Elizabeth desires children, Sidney purports, any man would suffice. Anjou's breeding and status as heir to the French throne remain irrelevant in the face of his Catholicism, which lies at the heart of his evil intentions and poor condition. Katherine Duncan-Jones contends that Sidney's discussion of the more clinical functions of the Queen's marriage "sounds as if Sidney himself (not yet twenty-five) would have liked to marry Elizabeth" (162). Such a suggestion, while implying that a female sovereign represents an ambitious courtier's highest aim, reduces Philip's argument to unrequited love and ambition. As Maureen Quilligan observes, Sidney "reduces marriage to the bare business of biological reproduction" and relegates Elizabeth to the woman's role of breeder (177). Yet this viewpoint as well fails to acknowledge the political impact of Elizabeth's marriage upon

her court. Sidney thinly veils his disdain that Anjou should father any children upon the Queen and insinuates that even a commoner who does not possess the French Duke's rank would perform his duty just as well. More importantly, this passage reveals Sidney's understanding of the erotic relationship between the Queen and her courtiers. Elizabeth's union with Anjou would disrupt a delicate system in which ambitious courtiers vie for their unmarried Queen's favor and their own advancement.

In a clever rhetorical move, Sidney includes in his argument Elizabeth's public unwillingness to marry and relinquish her virginal state, implying that her affections for Anjou are foreign to her predilections. Sidney further qualifies himself as an intimate who knows the Queen's mind in personal matters, an access to her thoughts that permits him to discuss with her delicate subjects she has previously mentioned in his presence. He reminds Elizabeth, as does Walsingham in his memorandum, of her past aversions to marriage: "Often have I heard you with protestation say: No private pleasure nor self affection coulde leade you unto it" (Sidney 3: 55). He also touches upon her publicly expressed fear of an unprotected England surrounded by a sea of Catholic forces: "Now resteth to consider what be the motions of this soudaine change as I have heard you in most swete wordes deliver. The feare of standing alone in respect of forraine dealings, & in home respectes doubtles to be contemned" (Sidney 3: 55). Touching upon her greatest fear as a Protestant leader, Sidney acknowledges that Elizabeth's professed inclination for the marriage does not solely arise from personal affection or "the easing your Majesty of your cares," but also involves the significant concern of the balance of Protestant power upon the Continent and assailing Catholic forces. He quickly assures the Queen that England's solitary stand remains a source of strength: "Those buildings being most ever

strongly durable which leaning upon no other remaine firme upon their owne foundation” (Sidney 3: 55). Once again, Sidney builds upon the foundation of his argument with repeated attention on England’s Protestant strength. An alliance with France would only shake England’s strong, uniform foundation with the discord caused by the conflicting interests of the allied nations. As Stubbs observes in *The Gaping Gulf*, “For whereas all these kinds of alliances with realms are contracted for mutual support, this alliance presently in talk hath no such hope” (37). In his letter, Sidney discusses how Stubbs’s argument would prove particularly true should Elizabeth ally England with France upon her marriage to Anjou, differences in religion naturally being the main bone of contention as well as Anjou’s own political aims and activity in the Low Countries: “He of the Romishe religion, & if he be a man, must nedes have that manlike propertye to desire that all men be of his mind: you the erector & deffendour of the contrary & the onely Sunne that dazeleth their eyes. He Frenche & desirous to make Fraunce great: your Majesty English & desiring nothing lesse then that France should be great” (Sidney 3: 56). The clear differences between England’s and France’s political reasons for the marriage in themselves should dissuade Elizabeth from such a union, lest her nation become a tool in French hands to attain French ends. As with his earlier allusion to the French massacre of Huguenots, and discussion of Henri de Navarre’s marriage, Sidney stresses the inability to surmount two countries’ religious and political disparities. The differences shine so clearly that “any eye may see” (Sidney 3: 57). Because Elizabeth cannot view herself, Sidney offers her his sight and counsels that England’s solitary state would grow stronger upon the longevity of the Queen’s reign.

Returning to the problem of succession should Elizabeth's marriage to Anjou produce children, Sidney introduces the prospect that her motherly bliss may be short-lived, that her progeny's French heritage would work its base influence and cause harm to herself and her realm: "Many Princes have lost their Crownes, whose owne children were manifest successours: & some that had their owne children used as instrumentes of their ruine. Not that I denye the blisse of children, but onely meane to shew religion & equity to be of themselves sufficient stayes" (Sidney 3: 58). Because of their Catholic father, Elizabeth's children may fall prey to their father's political manipulation, and as Stubbs warns in *The Gaping Gulf*, Anjou would create stronger French allegiances with the marriage of a daughter to a Catholic prince or through a Catholic son establish a French court in England (52). Sidney admits that motherhood possesses its joys, but Elizabeth's faith encompasses mightier rewards. Only through embracing her religion can Elizabeth, armed with her religious duty as head of the church, overcome her biological impulses. Her obligation to her subjects as their spiritual mother would insure her own bliss as a Protestant ruler as well as her "children's" happiness and prevent any insurgence in her kingdom.

To allay any further fears Elizabeth may have concerning succession, Sidney focuses on the example of Queen Mary's marriage with King Philip of Spain. Despite Mary's union with a Protestant enemy and her own Catholicism, the end of her childless reign resulted in Elizabeth's succession to the throne:

For [Mary] was the oppressour of that religion which lived in most mens hartes: you were knowen to be the favourer. By hir was the excellentest Princesse in the whole world to succede, by your losse all blindnes light

upon him that seeth not our fatal misery. Lastly & most to this purpose she had made an odious mariage with a stranger which is now in question whether your Majesty should doe or no. So that if your subjectes doe at this present looke to any after chaunce, it is but as the Pilote doth to the ship boate if his ship should perishe, driven by extremity to the one, but as long as he can, as his life tendring th'other. (Sidney 3: 58)

With his metaphor of Elizabeth as a pilot of a ship in rough waters, Sidney reiterates that any sudden action would toss her ship against a rocky and hostile shore, leading to destruction. Sidney also emphasizes the religious symbolism of Elizabeth as "Pilote" and the religious guidance she provides her people to aid them in maintaining the right course. Should Elizabeth choose to make an "odious mariage with a stranger," her decision would have a detrimental effect on the subjects who require her guidance and make any future course for her realm uncertain.

Sidney assuages the Queen's fear of standing alone in foreign affairs with his acknowledgement that she stands alone as defender of the true Protestant faith; therefore, Elizabeth possesses the power and glory that God protects her kingdom as does she protect his Church:

I do with most humble hart say unto your Majesty, that (laying aside this dangerous helpe) for your standing alone you must take it as a singular honour God hath done you, to be indeed the onely protectour of his Church: & yet in worldly respect, your kingdome very sufficient so to doe: if you make that religion upon which you stand to carrye the onely strenght & have abroade those who still mainteine the same cause, who (as

being as they may be kept from utter falling) your Majesty is sure enough
 from your mightiest enemies. (Sidney 3: 60)

Sidney also informs the Queen that she need not stand alone or decide upon a rash alliance with a French Papist to protect England from evil Spanish intentions. Sidney asserts, instead, that Elizabeth as protector of God's only church possesses the power to unite Protestant forces throughout the Continent. Such a cause would strengthen England's Protestant standing amongst its Catholic enemies, benefiting Elizabeth's kingdom both politically and spiritually. Elizabeth, as God's chosen guardian of the Faith, would also achieve the status of a savior sent to rescue the persecuted members of her faith, such as the Dutch rebels in the Low Countries suffering under Spanish persecution. Naturally, Sidney's proposed alliances with Protestant allies coincide with the anti-marriage faction's political attempts to persuade Elizabeth to aid the Dutch rebels in the Netherlands and establish a Protestant League. Like a true courtier, Sidney not only composed the letter as a loyal, protective subject of the Queen but also to more specifically exact the goals of his political party.

In his concluding remarks, Sidney entreats Elizabeth to heed the advice of her loyal counselors, namely himself, the Earl of Leicester, and Sir Francis Walsingham, the latter two silenced because of their honesty to the Queen in the French affair despite Elizabeth's publicly displayed affection for Anjou and the presence of an entourage of flatterers who tell the Queen what they believe she wants to hear:

Let those in whome you finde truste & to whome you have committed
 trust in your weighty affaires, be held up in the eyes of your subjectes:
 lastly doing as you doe, you shalbe as you be: The example of Princesses,

the ornament of your age, the comfort of the afflicted, the delight of your people, the most excellent frute of all your progenitours, & the perfect mirroir to your posterity. (Sidney 3: 60)

Her support of trusted men like Walsingham and Leicester reveals to her subjects the Queen's wisdom in surrounding herself with wise and honest men. Perhaps Sidney insinuates that he himself should be held up as a man deserving of the Queen's trust and favor because of his risk in honestly speaking out against the French match. In one last effort to appease Elizabeth because of his presumptiveness in discussing a personal affair, Sidney ends the letter with flattering remarks about Elizabeth as the best of her family's line, the champion of her Faith, and the benevolent ruler of her subjects. Interestingly, despite his earlier comments concerning children, Katherine Duncan-Jones interprets Sidney's mention of "posterity" as a prediction that Elizabeth will safely produce an heir and solve the ongoing concern about succession (163). However, considering Sidney's earlier comments, "posterity" more plausibly represents Elizabeth's Protestant subjects and highlights her role as parent to her people. As the Queen's main strength, her subjects will inherit Elizabeth's gifts and bask in the glory of her reign. Sidney could only trust that his sovereign would inherit his letter's own prescription for her political body and the strength of his words.

Aftermath

Sidney's previous interactions at court may have presented him as a hotheaded young man, but the letter's delicacy in discussing sensitive issues belies such a portrait. In his letter, Sidney skillfully suppresses the bluntness that previously marked his career and assumes the role of sensitive counselor to the Queen. Indeed, Katherine Duncan-Jones remarks that "Sidney served his party brilliantly. The case against the marriage could not have been more adroitly made" (163). Such a comment suggests Sidney's letter to the Queen was successful. The opposite, however, may be closer to the truth. Despite the letter's adroitness, its success could only be measured by the Queen's reaction, not its rhetorical finesse. Learning of Sidney's admonishment to Queen Elizabeth, Languet praises Sidney for his action, but quickly cautions his young friend of the consequences:

I admire your courage in freely admonishing the Queen and your countrymen of that which is to the States' advantage. But you must take care not to go so far that the unpopularity of your conduct be more than you can bear. Old men generally make an unfair estimate of the character of the young, because they think it a disgrace to be outdone by them in counsel. Reflect that you may possibly be deserted by most of those who now think with you. For I do not doubt there will be many who will run to the safe side of the vessel, when they find you are unsuccessful in resisting the Queen's will, or that she is seriously offended at your opposition.

(Pears 170)

Languet correctly surmises the letter's aftermath, and he emphasizes the displeasure and isolation that await Sidney. Not only had Sidney chosen an unpopular position at court, his only allies were men already silenced by the Queen, men who saw it to their advantage to allow Sidney to face Elizabeth's reaction alone. After the letter's deliverance, Elizabeth appeared even more inclined to marry, and marriage negotiations continued for two more years. The letter became one more failed attempt of the anti-marriage faction to advise the Queen against the French match. Apparently unable to dissuade his Queen, did Sidney incur her anger in the process?

In his selective and undated biography of his close friend and fellow poet, first published in 1652 twenty-four years after Sidney's death, Fulke Greville discusses Sidney's letter to the Queen and asks a similar question: "And if any judicious Reader shall ask, Whether it were not an error, and a dangerous one, for Sir Philip being neither Magistrate nor Counsellor, to oppose himself against his Sovereigns pleasure in things indifferent" (61-62)? If one believes Greville, Sidney's bold undertaking elicited only a mild reaction from the Queen and "that howsoever he seemed to stand alone, yet he stood upright; kept his access to her majesty as before" (63). Indeed, in Greville's narrative, Sidney had nothing to fear from a sovereign who "was not (subject-like) apt to construe things reverently done in the worst sense; but rather with the spirit of anointed Greatness (as created to reign equally over frail and strong) more desirous to find waies to fashion her people, than colours, or causes to punish them" (62). Significantly, Greville omits any mention of Sidney's absence from court during 1580, and by doing so sets up the basis for two camps of critics, those who believe Sidney's relationship with the Queen deteriorated from this point, and those who believe it remained essentially unchanged.

As the writing of a personal friend, and an observant courtier active in court life, Greville's contemporary document justifiably holds clout with historians and critics. One cannot help but admire the heroic figure Greville portrays. In his answer to his question regarding Sidney's motives, Greville highlights the qualities that contribute to Sidney's noble character: "That his worth, truth, favour, and sincerity of heart, together with his reall manner of proceeding in it, were his privileges" (61). It would appear that Greville's aim in undertaking the biography lies not wholly in the presentation of accurate fact, but in the development of a mythic figure who possesses all the admirable qualities of an Englishman. Instead of a man who possesses flaws, ego, warts, and lapses in judgment, Greville portrays an extraordinary figure with qualities few humans possess—the bold hero who, wounded and thirsty after battle, unselfishly offers his drink to another captures the point memorably.

Acknowledging Greville's account of Elizabeth's reaction to Sidney's letter, later biographers and critics such as Carol Levin, Henry Warren, Alan Stewart, and Mack Holt echo Greville's belief that the letter caused little to no recourse and that no evidence of the Queen's animosity exists. Others are not so sure. Malcolm Wallace contends that the letter's "naïveté" may have amused the Queen, but "Sidney had boldly opposed her will and was the spokesman of the Leicestrian faction: it was not Elizabeth's wont to let such an act pass without punishment, and for some months Sidney tasted a mild degree of the disfavour which Dudleys and Sidneys alike were experiencing" (219). Katherine Duncan-Jones shares Wallace's view that Sidney may have received a certain degree of Elizabeth's displeasure; while Elizabeth did not severely punish Sidney for his presumptuous letter, the pairing of his letter with the Oxford affair made court an

uncomfortable environment for Sidney: "Though he was not explicitly banished from Court, he was tied up, if not muzzled, and had for the time being to abandon hopes for advancement in rank or posting abroad" (167). Although his short departure from court suggests a mild punishment for his boldness, Sidney would have to bear the weight of silence and thwarted ambition.

But did Sidney himself decide to leave court for a more congenial environment after his delivery of the letter? Dorothy Connell alleges that Elizabeth's anger over the letter's circulation at court, not its contents, "brought Sidney to the point of choosing between exile or rustication" (107). Despite Sidney's assurances of the letter's private nature, even Sidney's tutor Languet possessed knowledge of the letter's circulation: "I am glad you have told me how your letter about the Duke of Anjou has come to the knowledge of so many persons." Languet hints that those whom Sidney was forced to obey distributed the letter for their own benefit (Pears 187). Quilligan focuses on the uncertainty of Sidney's rustication, whether it was forced by the Queen or self-imposed, and Edward Berry maintains that Sidney's rustication not only involved the Queen's ire but the poet's frustrations from court life as well.

A combination of factors, augmented by Elizabeth's reaction to the letter, may have led to Sidney's departure from court. Sidney quickly discovered that he was subject to the same displeasure that his uncle the Earl of Leicester and Walsingham experienced from their outspokenness against the French match. Undoubtedly, Sidney's own "outspokenness" served little in endearing him to a sovereign who had previously frustrated his ambitions. Sidney's association with influential men at court, namely Walsingham and Leicester, and his letter's similarities to Stubbs's pamphlet and Sir

Francis's memorandum, warranted Elizabeth's concerns over a faction comprised of courtiers in powerful positions. The letter's bluntness may not have arisen from its rhetoric, but rather from its apparent association with Walsingham. Perhaps the Queen took advantage of Sidney's forthrightness, to further suppress not only any opposition to the French match but power plays at court marked by the letter's circulation.

Although Elizabeth did not claim Sidney's hand because of his letter's directness, she settled upon a sharper means to injure Sidney that would cut him more severely than Stubbs's punishment. By withholding lucrative appointments that would grant Sidney the active life he desired and secure his fortune, Elizabeth clearly demonstrated to her errant courtier that he was no more than a pawn in her hand; Queen Elizabeth, in her demonstration of power over Sidney, brought about his political death. Sidney, who had incurred huge debts to moneylenders, found his impoverished condition amplified by the Queen's displeasure. With no hope for future fortune from Elizabeth, Sidney struggled to maintain the lifestyle befitting a courtier of his lineage, and he found it to his advantage to vacate his lodgings at court and seek refuge at his sister's house at Wilton. Rumors that his rival and Elizabeth's favorite, the Earl of Oxford, planned to murder Sidney in his bed may have also motivated the courtier to leave the perils of court behind.¹⁰

Protective of his young charge, Languet offered advice as to how Sidney should proceed in a period of his life fraught with discord and animosity: "Persevere as long as you can do any thing that may benefit your country; but when you find that your opposition only draws on you dislike and aversion, and that neither your country, your friends, nor yourself derive any advantage from it, I advise you to give way to necessity, and reserve yourself for better times" (Pears 170). Sidney, heeding Languet's advice,

would never publicly speak against the marriage again, and busied himself with more contemplative and intellectual pursuits away from court. Whether real or not, Sidney's rustication may be seen as a blessing in disguise; it marks his transformation into a more dedicated poet who wrote not for his own personal gain at court but to achieve the highest form of poetic art. As Levy observes, "When, through his overzealous advocacy of a league of Protestant states and his overblunt discussion of her proposed French marriage, he overstepped the bounds of Elizabeth's tolerance and she no longer found him useful as a diplomat, he turned to poetry" (3). It remains unclear, however, how much solace Sidney gained from his contemplative existence at Wilton and whether he considered his stronger dedication to poetry a blessing at the cost of an active career abroad. A letter that Sidney wrote during his rustication, dated August 1580, to his uncle, the Earl of Leicester, suggests that the courtier felt his disgrace dearly:

For my selfe I assure yowr Lordeshippe upon my trothe, so full of the colde as one can not here me speake: whiche is the cawse keepes me yet from the cowrte since my only service is speeche and that is stopped. As soone as I have gotten any voice I will waite on yowr Lordeshippe if so it please yow. Althoughe it be contrary to that I have signified to her Majestie of my wante, I dowl not her Majestie will vouchsafe to aske for me, but so longe as she sees a silk dublett upon me her Highnes will thinke me in good cace. (Feuillerat 3: 129)

Sidney apologizes to his uncle that he cannot return to court because of his health, but in the context of his disgrace, Sidney uses his physical ailment as a metaphor for the state of his current relationship with the Queen and her own coldness. Bitterly, Sidney

acknowledges Elizabeth's financial control over his status and her refusal to grant him the funds that would raise him out of his impoverished state and lead to his return to court. Only with difficulty would Sidney be able to overcome the Queen's coldness and her lack of concern for his condition.

When he made his return to court in New Year 1581, Sidney acknowledged to Elizabeth that he had overstepped the bounds of his position as revealed by his New Year's gift. As a reminder of his transgression, Elizabeth had Sidney placed at the very end of the New Year's gift role. Significantly, his presentation to the Queen of a whip with a jeweled handle unmistakably shows his awareness of Elizabeth's power over him. The whip visibly suggests that Sidney thought deeply of his actions, and it represents "a sign of his recognition of Elizabeth's absolute power over him, a witty, coded self-abasement, an acceptance that such power was the necessary accompaniment of a royal favor" (Minogue 555). With such a present Sidney reconciled disruptive and independent behavior at court with the Queen. In the ensuing years, a chastened Sidney played the part of the submissive courtier, and regardless of his distaste for Anjou, he even took part in a tournament as a member of the Duke's party (Quilligan 181). As did Walsingham and Leicester, who later urged the Queen to accept the match for her safety, Sidney accepted what he could not change. And yet in spite of his reconciliation with his Queen, Sidney would never receive the courtly privileges deserving of his lineage as a Sidney and a Dudley. Despite its competent style, the letter marks a pivotal failure of Sidney as a courtier, his inability to reconcile his personal motives with those of the Queen he presumed to advise. It remains unfortunate that one cannot separate the letter's skill from its author's political disappointments.

However, in an attempt to raise Sidney above his apparent, political failures, Sir Robert Naunton, in his *Fragmenta Regalia or Observations on Queen Elizabeth, Her Times & Favorites*, does add a peculiar note to discussions of Sidney's courtiership. He describes Sidney as a courtier who "attracted the good opinion of all men and was so highly prized in the esteem of the Queen that she thought the court deficient without him" (58). In regard to Sidney's inability to gain Queen Elizabeth's permission and support for overseas ventures, Naunton explains that the Queen "refused to further his preferment, not out of emulation of his advancement but out of fear to lose the jewel of her time" (58). Such an observation denies the struggles Sidney met with as a courtier whose personal behavior and fervent Protestant views did not coincide with the Queen's more conservative approach, and Naunton's discussion of Sidney as a favored courtier only added to the Sidney cult that arose from the young man's heroic death. All mythology aside, it seems clear that Elizabeth's lack of favor kept Sidney as no more than a diamond in the rough with only the potential to attain brilliance as a statesman. Sidney's letter to the Queen, combined with his party's push for a Protestant alliance, made Elizabeth hesitant to support a young man who desired actions she did not wish to follow. As Levy observes, Elizabeth possessed "no desire to act as the leader, and paymistress of every Protestant state in Europe," and due to the zealousness of Sidney and his faction's Protestantism, the Queen "used them where she could, she showered minor favors on them, but she did not trust them" (4, 10).

A final challenge to this assessment comes from Stephen May who calls attention to several documents that record sums of money Elizabeth granted Sidney; May also points to Sidney's earlier appointment as cupbearer and his knighting in 1583 (although

he fails to note that Sidney inherited his position of cupbearer from his family and that his knighting did not arise from any special favor from the Queen, but more out of decorum). Casimir, the German duke for whom Sidney sought English support, appointed Sidney as a stand-in for his installation into the Order of the Garter, and Philip's role as proxy required his advance in rank (Wallace 288). Despite the few tokens of favor Sidney received from Elizabeth, the young man struggled throughout his short career with debt; it was only eased through his marriage to Walsingham's daughter, Frances, in September 1583. In spite of the promise his career held upon his entrance to court and the moderate success of his ambassadorial duties in 1577, Sidney the courtier gained advancements only with great effort after his deliverance of the letter to Elizabeth.

In the end, the letter's significance lies less in its demonstration of a courtier's attempts to assuage the Queen from marriage and protect his family's status at court than in its unexpected aftermath. Sidney's letter to Elizabeth leads to his change from a statesman whose writings served immediate personal purposes (the flattering of a monarch for his advancement and favor) to a poet intent on creating art and utilizing poetic language and metaphor to explore his relationship with the Queen. This is not to say that the letter lacked the skill of Sidney's fictional works; with the unpleasant atmosphere at court fresh in his mind, Sidney took refuge in contemplation and embraced a life opposed to the active one sought as a courtier, a soldier, and explorer. This life included the poet's exchange of the letter's candid, yet subtle, rhetoric for a more guarded genre where he could couch his examination of Elizabeth as ruler in double meanings and veiled language. It remains unclear whether Elizabeth would have reacted more favorably to a more subversive attack against the marriage, especially in light of her

purposeful reaction to Sidney's *The Lady of May*. During Anjou's courtship, derogatory references to frogs appeared in literary pieces, such as the rhyme "The Moste Strange Wedding of the Frogge and the Mouse" (in its later form "A Frog He Would a Wooing Go") and the "Battle of the Frogs and Mice," which involves a frog accidentally drowning a mouse when coming to her aid. These veiled attacks against Anjou reworked commonly known folklore against frogs and presented different layers of meaning (Adler 245-46). Sidney's colleague, Edmund Spenser, employed by Leicester and possibly present at the Baynard's Castle meeting, used a more creative approach to discussing the Queen's possible marriage.

In December 1579, Hugh Singleton (incidentally Stubbs's printer) published a more artistically sophisticated attack of the marriage in Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*, which explores the woes of Leicester and his faction and the French marriage's eminent threat to Protestantism. Specifically, in the November and February eclogues, Spenser explores Leicester's struggles at court as a Protestant leader and the marriage's threat to the true religion (MacCaffrey 264-65). Significantly, Spenser dedicated the *Shepherd's Calendar* to Sidney, identifying Philip as the Protestant hero, the Shepard Knight. Yet Sidney's own heroic, more rhetorically straightforward attempt resulted in the last direct attack against the Queen's marriage. As the author of a highly politicized letter to the Queen, Sidney could not hide behind any metaphorical language open to interpretation; instead, he wrote directly; his only shelter from the Queen's wrath was the skill with which he pled his case. Only after his retreat from court would the fallen Protestant hero of the Walsingham-Leicester circle discover more subversive methods to express his animosity toward Elizabeth's marriage; nevertheless, poetic vehicles like his romance,

The Arcadia, which offered him more freedom of expression, possessed their own limitations. As Richard McCoy observes, Elizabeth's limitation of her subjects' thoughts, through her own censure and removal of favor, still maintained a hold on Sidney; his exit from court and Queen Elizabeth's frustration of his political aims made a lasting impression:

Even when he retired from court, escaping its immediate pressures, Sidney could not escape its inner, ideological inhibitions. In his fictive exploration of the problems of sovereignty, obedience, and autonomy, he was blocked in his thinking. His major poetry and prose all present some conflict with authority, a clash between individual impulse and social order, between freedom and submission. (26)

Such insight reminds us that the Queen's control over individual writers not only entailed the censoring of inflammatory passages and the enacting of punishment--the extreme example of Stubbs' lost hand and that of Sidney's rustication--but also extended to the psychological effects Elizabeth's power had on Sidney as courtier and poet. Physical distance was not enough to separate Sidney from the court's psychological control.

Although Sidney took advantage of the freedom poetry and prose had to offer him when voicing criticism of the Queen's personal and political decisions, he could never fully overcome his desire for an active, political life at court and his need for affirmation through the Queen's favor and its ensuing advancements of rank and fortune. At the cost of his contemplative life from which Sidney's creative power sprung, necessity drew him back into the confines of court and the role of a courtier more mindful of his sovereign's power. Although, upon his return to court, Sidney became a more obsequious courtier

(though not as sycophantic as his rival Oxford) he still remained true to the Protestant cause that controlled the sentiments he expressed in his letter to Elizabeth. In a letter to his father-in-law Sir Francis Walsingham, when Philip had finally achieved his chief ambition to aid the Dutch in the Low Countries, Sidney writes of his role of Protestant Protector. Even after the end of marriage negotiations, he questions Elizabeth's support of her church, the support for which he asked in his letter to the Queen:

Before God Sir it is trew [that] in my hart the love of the caws doth so far overbalance them all that with Gods grace thei shall never make me weery of my resolution. If her Majesty wear the fowntain I woold fear considering what I daily fynd that we shold wax dry, but she is but a means whom God useth and I know not whether I am deceaved but I am faithfully persuaded that if she shold withdraw her self other springes woold ryse to help this action. (Feuillerat 3: 166)

Despite the hardships Sidney had experienced, he accepted that his true role did not involve his standing as a courtier or a poet, but as a Protestant hero. Although he has found Elizabeth to have a more lukewarm approach toward her Protestantism, as demonstrated by her attitude toward the struggles of Protestants in the Low Countries, Sidney consoled himself with the faith that others who shared his commitment to the cause will join the fight. Having at last achieved the true status as Shepherd Knight, Sidney finally acknowledged that although God works through Queen Elizabeth as head of the English church, he himself has gained sovereignty in his dedication to Protestantism. Regardless of the letter's injury to his career, Sidney remained true to the sentiments he expressed in his address to the Queen. Upon Sidney's death, the letter

itself attains a mythic quality amplified by its author's short life. As biographer John Buxton notes, "And, in the end, he threw away his life by the heroic but unnecessary gesture of going into battle without his cuisses, because Sir William Pelham was without his. Such faults as he had were thus the product of his idealism, of his impatience with the world as he found it, of the eagerness with which he gave himself to the task of the hour" (37). Undeniably, Sidney required as little prodding to wage war against the French match as he needed to ride into battle. Philip Sidney's letter embodies such idealism, that a young courtier may dare to dissuade a Queen with the power of his prose.

Endnotes

1. Elizabeth affectionately referred to Anjou as her “frog.” See Adler’s discussion of Anjou’s nickname and its various connotations.
2. Connell, Pigeon, Popham, Worden, and McCoy view the letter as a catalyst for Sidney’s *Old Arcadia*. Edward Berry (“Sidney’s May”) compares the letter to Sidney’s *The Lady of May*.
3. Although Elizabeth recalled Sir Henry to court in February 1578, he did not return until September 1578 to ensure stability in Ireland before his departure.
4. Critics such as Stewart and Holt assert that the Earl of Leicester urged his nephew to compose the letter because of Sidney’s direct manner of speech. On a darker note, McCoy identifies Leicester as manipulating his nephew and “exploiting, in his typical fashion [Sidney’s] high-minded eloquence for his own selfish aims” (2). Similarly, Worden alleges that Sidney was “required to risk political suicide on his uncle’s behalf” (48).
5. Elizabeth allowed the Earl of Leicester to return to London in mid-August after which he attended the secret meeting at Baynard’s Castle.
6. Offering an opposing view, Worden contends that the similarity between *The Gaping Gulf* and Sidney’s letter exists because “Stubbs had read Sidney carefully,” and therefore places the letter’s composition in “the late summer, during the swelling of opposition to the match in and around August that also produced the *Gaping Gulph*” (112). Worden, however, does not fully take into consideration the meeting at Baynard’s Castle and Walsingham’s relationship with both Stubbs and Sidney.

7. For a discussion on Sidney's ambassadorial attempts to form a Protestant League and Elizabeth's political relationship with the Palatinate, see Raitt.
8. McCrea believes that Greville's biography "scarcely qualifies as a 'life' of Sidney at all, and in any case doesn't really purport to be one" (299).
9. Walsingham's *Arcana Aulica* is not a direct comment upon Sidney's letter or his own role in marriage negotiations; however, *Arcana Aulica* enticingly illustrates the struggles Sidney experienced as a courtier vying for the Queen's favor, and it also informs the reader of the code of conduct Sidney may have followed in delivering his letter to the Queen.
10. The Earl of Oxford, while intoxicated, announced that he planned to "murder Sidney in his bed" and "make away Philip Sidney" (qtd. in Duncan-Jones 166).

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