

Catholicism and Protestantism in the Elizabethan Era in Selected Works of Alison Weir

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Bachelor's Thesis
2022

 **Tomas Bata University in Zlín**
Faculty of Humanities

Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně
Fakulta humanitních studií
Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

Akademický rok: 2021/2022

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

Jméno a příjmení:	Daniela Poláchová
Osobní číslo:	H190334
Studijní program:	B7310 Filologie
Studijní obor:	Anglický jazyk pro manažerskou praxi
Forma studia:	Prezenční
Téma práce:	Katolicismus a protestantismus v alžbětinské době ve vybraných dílech Alison Weir

Zásady pro vypracování

Shromáždění materiálů k tématu
Studium odborné literatury
Formulace cílů práce
Analýza prací od Alison Weir
Vyvození a formulace závěrů práce


Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**
Jazyk zpracování: **Angličtina**


Seznam doporučené literatury:

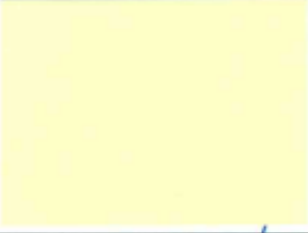
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Shell, Alison. *Catholicism, controversy and the English literary imagination, 1558-1660*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Vedoucí bakalářské práce: **Daniel Paul Sampey, MFA**
Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

Datum zadání bakalářské práce: **8. listopadu 2021**
Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **9. května 2022**


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ABSTRAKT

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat střet dvou náboženství, katolicismu a protestantismu, ve Velké Británii šestnáctého století. Práce charakterizuje dvě královny z Tudorovské dynastie – Marii I a Alžbětu I, přičemž každá vyznávala odlišnou víru. Další částí bakalářské práce popisuje literaturu a divadlo alžbětinské doby, především dva přední autory Williama Shakespeara and Edmunda Spensera. Analytická část práce se zaměřuje na rozepře dvou královských sester, a jaký dopad měla na Alžbětu I náboženská povstání. Analýza se zabývá knihami autorky Alison Weirové, a to jejími fikcemi *Princezna Alžběta* a *Nevinná zrádkyně*, a literaturou faktu *The Life of Elizabeth I*.

Klíčová slova: reformace, protestantismus, katolicismus, Tudorovci, William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, Alison Weir, *Princezna Alžběta*, *Nevinná zrádkyně*, *The Life of Elizabeth I*.

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis aims to analyse the clash of two religions, Catholicism and Protestantism, in the United Kingdom in the sixteenth century. The work characterizes two royal sisters of the Tudor dynasty – Mary I and Elizabeth I, who professed different religious beliefs. Another part of the thesis describes literature and theatre in the Elizabethan period, highlighting the authors William Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser. The analytical part of the thesis focuses on the quarrels between the two sisters and the impacts of religious uprisings on the life of Elizabeth I. The analysis is based on works of the author Alison Weir, namely her fictions *The Lady Elizabeth* and *Innocent Traitor* and the non-fiction *The Life of Elizabeth I*.

Keywords: reformation, Protestantism, Catholicism, Tudors, William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth*, *Innocent Traitor*, *The Life of Elizabeth I*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Daniel Sampey, MFA, for his guidance, patience, and devotion. The thesis would not have been possible without his valuable advice and encouragement. I would also like to thank my family and friends for their endless support and confidence in me.

I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's/Master's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

The Tudor dynasty has always been a fascinating topic for the public. Literary and media adaptations, especially those depicting the Elizabethan period, do not always depict the royal family in a historically correct reality.¹ Alison Weir, the best-selling woman historian in the United Kingdom,² specializes in the Tudors and aims to present all the figures and events in her historical works as accurately as possible. In her non-fiction book *The Life of Elizabeth I*, published in 1998, Weir describes the reign of Elizabeth I from her accession in 1558 until she died in 1603, with all the information provided based on historical records. The book also focuses on the critical events preceding Elizabeth's reign, namely those involving her family members Henry VIII, Mary I, and Edward VI. On the other hand, in two of her fictions, *Innocent Traitor* (2006) and *The Lady Elizabeth* (2008), Weir reacts to depictions of the royals in popular series and documentaries, e.g., the BBC series *The Tudors* (2007-2010). Alison Weir has admitted that in her novels she sometimes lets her imagination prevail over the facts themselves to provide the reader with a more enjoyable story.

The thesis intends to analyse all these elements in three books by Alison Weir: *Innocent Traitor*, *The Lady Elizabeth* and *The Life of Elizabeth I*, using relevant academic references and citations from the books themselves. The focus is first on the historical-cultural background of religious reformation under the reign of Henry VIII and Edward VI, the Counter-Reformation of Mary I, and then the long-lasting governance of the Protestant Elizabeth I. The thesis also characterizes the two most prolific and well-known authors of the Elizabethan era, William Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser, with regard to religion as well as another crucial element in Elizabethan literature – erotization. Edmund Spenser is well-known for his epic poem *The Faerie Queen*, which is dedicated especially to Elizabeth I and deals with the theme of religion, e.g., in terms of the queen's marriage. William Shakespeare's plays were highly appreciated by Queen Elizabeth, especially *Henry IV*, and on account of this play, Shakespeare wrote his *The Merry Wives of Windsor* to Elizabeth's commandments. Elizabeth was enthusiastic about the theatre and, in 1583, even created her own company, The Queen's Men, who performed for her and her court. However, by the end of sixteenth century the Puritans had gradually begun to gain power; these extremely fervent Protestants were strictly against theatre and did their best to ban it.

¹ Hilary Jane Locke, "Go too far on Tudor-speak, all hey-nonny-nonny, [and] you'll alienate your readers': Alison Weir, and Historical Fiction, and the Representation of Tudor," *Parergon* 37, no. 2 (2020): 156.

² Robinson, Ian. "Home," Alison Weir, accessed on April 20, 2022. <http://www.alisonweir.org.uk>

This effort was ultimately successful, as the Puritan-dominated “Long Parliament” made theatre illegal in 1642, forty years after Elizabeth’s death.

**I. THEORETICAL AND
HISTORICAL/CULTURAL
BACKGROUND**

1 THE REFORMATION

To properly comprehend the concept of the social and religious changes in England during the Elizabethan period, a deeper look must be taken at the preceding historical events within Europe. These are associated with one massive movement, the Protestant Reformation. More precisely, this is represented by a series of reformations all over Europe in the sixteenth century to recover various visions of Christian faith and practice.³ The movements were generally in rebellion against the perceived tyranny and corruption of the Roman Catholic Church, which had dominated Europe throughout the Middle Ages.

The precursor and anticipatory reformer of all the changes in Europe was one man – Jan Hus of Bohemia, who was mainly active during the fifteenth century.⁴ To illustrate his trail throughout Europe, there are many extant treatises written by Hus which caused controversy, such as *Of Schism and the Unity of the Church* or *Of Evangelic Perfection*. One of these treatises, *Of the Abomination of Priests and Monks in the Church of Jesus Christ*, in particular focuses on the odiousness of Catholic clergy⁵ and can be found in *Letters of John Hus*.⁶ The followers of Hus and their criticism of the Catholic Church were more profound than that of Martin Luther 100 years later. Hus was invited to be a part of a debate assembled by the Roman king Sigismund. This invitation turned out to be a deception, and Jan Hus was eventually tried and condemned by the Council of Constance, resulting in his burning at the stake in 1415. This prompted a series of rebellions in Bohemia and Poland, known as “The Hussite movement.”⁷

The main initiator of the Protestant Reformation was Martin Luther and his 95 theses of 1517. He believed that all Christians should behave directly according to what is written in the Bible to achieve salvation. John Calvin, who believed in a theocracy, i.e., that Church and state should be one, is also worth mentioning.⁸

The Reformation itself was not only about the Catholic faith but rather about the practices of the Church, e.g., in collecting financial payments called indulgences from

³ Thomas Fudge, “In Praise of Heresy,” *Journal of Religious History* 43, no. 1 (March 2019): 25.

⁴ Trevor O’Reggio, “Jan Huss and the Origins of the Protestant Reformation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* (February 2017): 100.

⁵ Trevor O’Reggio, “Jan Huss and the Origins of the Protestant Reformation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* (February 2017): 104.

⁶ Jan Hus, Emile De Bonnechose, Martin Luther, *Letters of John Huss, Written During His Exile and Imprisonment* (Edinburgh: William Whyte & Co: 1846), 219.

⁷ William A. Pelz, “The Other Reformation: Martin Luther, Religious dogmatism and the Common people,” in *A People’s History of Modern Europe* (London: Pluto Press), 18.

⁸ William A. Pelz, “The Other Reformation: Martin Luther, Religious dogmatism and the Common people,” in *A People’s History of Modern Europe* (London: Pluto Press), 20.

those who could pay them in the hopes of spending less time in purgatory.⁹ From the very beginning of Christianity, the main form of government was undemocratic and politically intolerant, based for example on the example of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), who believed that the Church has authority over states and its people. The Protestant Reformation permanently altered this view of the world and its functionality by breaking of the monopoly of the Catholic Church.¹⁰

The Reformation, which took place in England, was not only one specific action with a precise date; it was a long and complex process, as it also was in the other nations. Contrary to other countries such as Germany or Scotland, which nearly swept away ultimately the institutions of the Middle Ages, the aim of the English Reformation was not to break the continuity of Christianity itself.¹¹ Its main goal was to break away from the supremacy of Rome and obedience and the whole Roman Catholic Church with the Pope at its head. These changes were enforced from the centre by deliberate governmental action: the people were persuaded to accept new policies by a carefully orchestrated campaign of preaching and printed propaganda, with encouragement to conform provided by a sharpening of the treason laws.¹²

The subsequent history of the Church of England, as it is known nowadays, was affected by the historical process of the Reformation. It mainly led to the establishment of the Church of England of which was Henry VIII himself declared supreme head.¹³ Being married to Catherine of Aragon, who did not produce him a son as a relevant heir, the king was inclined to marry Anne Boleyn. The Pope stood in the way of Henry's intention; the Pope could not be convinced to approve a legal divorce. This disagreement started in 1534 when Henry VIII was declared Supreme Head of the Church of England, which was understood as the official and formal rejection of Papal supremacy.¹⁴ The Church of England dramatically departed from Christianity by suppressing the monasteries, pruning the cult of saints, and publishing the Bible in English.¹⁵ The Church of England was from

⁹ William A. Pelz, "The Other Reformation: Martin Luther, Religious dogmatism and the Common people," in *A People's History of Modern Europe* (London: Pluto Press), 19.

¹⁰ Brăilean, Tiberiu and Plopeanu, "Christianity and Political Democracy," *Human and Social Studies* 2, no. 2 (July 2013): 121.

¹¹ William Robinson Clark, *The Anglican Reformation*, (New York: Christian Literature Co, 1897), 1.

¹² Christopher Haigh, "The Recent Historiography of the English Reformation," *The Historical Journal* 25, no. 4 (December 1982): 995.

¹³ William A. Pelz, "The Other Reformation: Martin Luther, Religious dogmatism and the Common people," in *A People's History of Modern Europe* (London: Pluto Press), 20.

¹⁴ Gary O. Garner, "Evolution of the English Reformation Phase I (Henry VIII) and Phase 2 (Elizabeth I)," *Bible Collage of Queensland* (January 2003): 3.

¹⁵ Richard Rex, "The Religion of Henry VIII," *The Historical Journal* 57, no. 1 (March 2014): 2.

then represented by Anglicanism, which became one of the major branches of the Reformation and included features of both Protestantism and Roman Catholicism.¹⁶

The Reformation was carried much further under the reign of Edward VI, son of Henry VIII, with the imposition of Protestant liturgy, the destruction of Catholic belongings, and a preaching campaign to carry the Gospel into the villages – by 1553, England had become closer to being a fully Protestant country.¹⁷

1.1 The Bible

The Bible is undeniably associated with the establishment of the Protestant faith and the Church of England. The Bible was essential to religion and English literature itself as well due to its influence on English grammar and speech, which can be recognized in several areas and genres of literature. One of these is the effect on language in terms of the strong echo of Biblical phraseology in everyday speech, for instance the commonly used phrases “Thank God / Thank goodness” and “God bless you” rooted in the lexicon of English-speaking people.¹⁸ Another influence of the Bible is upon the content of literature, as the noble directness and idyllic charm of the Scriptural narratives appealed to many literary artists until the 20th century. Compelling examples include John Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667), which is based on the episodes from the book of Genesis, and his closet drama *Samson Agonistes* (1671), in which the Old Testament story of Samson is the choice of subject.¹⁹

The translation of the Bible into the English language is critical in particular. Early translators of the English Bible, such as John Wycliffe and William Tyndale, created a tradition that is counterposed to Roman Catholic hagiography.²⁰ John Wycliffe (1328-1384) was recognized for his protest against professionalism in religion; his plea was that religion should be more mindful of the human soul.²¹ He condemned clerical officials for the luxurious lives they lived in contrast to the poverty and the spirituality of Jesus and the

¹⁶ Encyclopedia Britannica, “Anglicanism,” accessed on October 18, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Anglicanism>.

¹⁷ Christopher Haigh, “The Recent Historiography of the English Reformation,” *The Historical Journal* 25, no. 4 (December 1982): 996.

¹⁸ Spheres Gjergji, “phraseological expressions borrowed from the biblical language with religious features: an integrative view between English and Albanian,” *European Journal of Research and Reflection in Arts and Humanities* 3, no. 4 (2015): 31.

¹⁹ William Gilmer Perry, “English Literature’s Debt to the Bible,” *The North American Review* 198, no. 693 (August: 1913): 228.

²⁰ Su Fang Ng, “Translation, Interpretation and Heresy: The Wycliffite Bible, Tyndale’s Bible, and the Contested Origin,” *Studies in Philology* 98, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 315.

²¹ John S.P. Tatlock, “Chaucer and Wycliff,” *Modern Philology* 14, no. 5 (September 1916): 257.

apostles.²² Wycliffe's Bible may be the natural source of the speech of modern England, for John Wycliffe wrote not only for middle-class Englishmen but also touched the lives of the poorest peasants. He believed every system should be brought back to simplicity, and the church was brought back to it during the Reformation. Wycliffe set the way for the Reformation a century and a half earlier as Protestantism grew inside him. He could be regarded as the champion of the state against the church.²³ The two Bibles that bracket the period when vernacular scriptures were perceived as heretical in England are Wycliffe's translation from the 1390s and Tyndale's translation around the 1530s. The latter one was placed in every church in England in September 1538 by royal edict. These Bibles are essential landmarks in English religious and legal history; they mark a slow shift into Protestantism and the initial and the final points of the period of heretical vernacular scriptures. However, Tyndale's translation differs from one of his predecessors since he had the opportunity to disseminate his work through the new technology of print. Not only did this technology help spread the Bible, but it also made the suppression of it harder, considering that books were easier and cheaper to obtain.²⁴ Sir Thomas More regarded William Tyndale as "the captain of our Englyshe heretike."²⁵

The turning point in Tyndale's literary activity came around August 1526 when an Episcopal Conclave condemned William Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament from 1526 to be burnt. Within the next two months, all copies of the book were gathered, and at the end of October, a few copies were burnt at St. Paul's Cross. After this symbolic burning, the clergy oppressed his translations and persecuted Tyndale himself. He tried to persuade the rulers, including Henry VIII, to cease the persecution of the reformers and the instigation of the clergy with the argument that it was in their worst interest.²⁶ In the late 1530s, a new policy about reading the Bible was permitted, and it could be said it was even encouraged. The previous repression campaign had a significant impact on shaping Protestant conceptions of the English Bible, the book being burned in public bonfires during this period. It is a conventional notion of English history that the

²² Chad O. Brand, "The English Bible before Tyndale," *SBJt* 15, no. 4 (2011): 40.

²³ John S.P. Tatlock, "Chaucer and Wycliff," *Modern Philology* 14, no. 5 (September 1916): 257.

²⁴ Su Fang Ng, "Translation, Interpretation and Heresy: The Wycliffite Bible, Tyndale's Bible, and the Contested Origin," *Studies in Philology* 98, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 317, 337, 320.

²⁵ Rainer Pineas, "William Tyndale's Use of History as a Weapon of Religious Controversy," *The Harvard Theological Review* 55, no. 2 (April 1962): 122.

²⁶ Rainer Pineas, "William Tyndale's Use of History as a Weapon of Religious Controversy," *The Harvard Theological Review* 55, no. 2 (April 1962): 128.

English Reformation created a unique biblical religion and culture, a religion that excluded almost entirely other religious practices by the late sixteenth century.²⁷

²⁷ Avner Shamir, "Bible Burning in Reformation England," *Historisk Tidsskrift* 113 (2014): 368.

2 OVERVIEW OF THE ELIZABETHAN ERA

2.1 MARY TUDOR

Before the beginning of the Elizabethan era, England was ruled by the Queen Mary I of England, also called Mary Tudor, the daughter of Henry VIII and Kathrine of Aragon. Mary was the first female English monarch, and she only ruled England for five years, from 1553 to 1558, leaving England in debt. It was primarily her husband Philip II of Spain, Europe's premier Catholic ruler, and his eternal Spanish foreign wars that are to blame for the indebtedness of England, one of those being a war with France in 1557.²⁸ Contrary to Mary's father and his actions, Mary was a fervent Catholic and did not agree with her brother Edwards VI's establishment of the Protestant faith. Mary's resolve to restore the Catholic faith in England was a failure because she did not bear any children with her husband, Philip of Spain.²⁹ Mary could not pass on her mission to restore the Catholic faith because she did not have any heirs and with the succession of the Protestant Elizabeth I, her attempt to make England a Catholic country was utterly ruined. Her devoted work is referred to as the Marian Counter-Reformation. Mary even imprisoned Elizabeth during her reign since Elizabeth had many sympathizers as a possible future queen and liberator of Protestantism. Elizabeth spent three months in the Tower, a prison situated in London, for she was suspected of complicity in Sir Thomas Wyatt's 1554 rebellion.³⁰ Bloody Mary is the nickname that refers to the true nature of Mary I because under her rule, she persecuted the Protestants, reintroduced the laws against heresy, and burned three hundred English Protestants at the stake.³¹

A Spanish author, Juan Luis Vives, is linked to Mary I and her reign. He was one of the three significant figures of the early sixteenth-century humanist movement, among Erasmus and Budé. Vives focused on the women's education, and Garrett Mattingly regards his ideas as revolutionary because they seem to trite to the twentieth century. Juan Vives focuses on the curriculum and texts that should be presented to girls and whether they should be the same as boys' studies courses. The best text illustrating his attitude towards the education of women is *The Instruction of a Christian Women*, which was dedicated to Queen Catherine of England in 1523 as a guide for the education of Princess

²⁸ P. G. Matthews, "Portraits of Philip II of Spain as King of England," *The Burlington Magazine* 142, no. 1162 (January 2000): 15.

²⁹ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 2.

³⁰ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 16.

³¹ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 2.

Mary. He encourages the proto-feminist idea of maids to be educated such as men; however, at the end of chapter 4, he states:

But I give no license to a woman to be a teacher, nor the authority of the man but to be in silence. For Adam was first made, and after Eve, Adam was not betrayed, the Woman was betrayed into the breach of the Commandment. Therefore because a Woman is a frail thing, of weak discretion, and that may lightly be deceived. Therefore a woman should not teach, lest when she hath taken a false opinion.

The passage reveals considering many women who educated their own children in the Elizabethan era, e.g., Lady Anne Bacon, a mother to the famous Francis Bacon, who also helped her father with the education of the young king Edward VI. Also, Catherine Parr played a crucial role in the education of Lady Jane Gray, a famous learned woman of her century, who was sentenced to death by Mary I in 1554. Lady Jane Grey is, according to author Alison Weir, the so-called innocent traitor, because Jane Grey was innocent and still died - Weir named and dedicated her book *Innocent Traitor* after Lady Grey.³² Catherine Parr also directed the early education of Elizabeth I.³³

2.2 ELIZABETH TUDOR

The brief reign of Mary Tudor weakened the position and recognition of women as capable monarchs, and many were awaiting what the next Tudor queen would bring to England. The Elizabethan era began when Elizabeth I became the ruler of England in 1558. Queen Elizabeth I, daughter of Anne Boleyn and Henry VIII, ascended the throne as a successor of her half-sister Mary I. The reign of Mary only slowed down the process of Reformation, and with Elizabeth's accession, the new queen re-instituted much of the reforming legislation by Henry VIII and Edward VI.³⁴ The England that Elizabeth inherited was in a somewhat decaying phase; many people had not only lost faith in the government since Mary and Phillip had left England in debt of £266,000, but were they also unconvinced of the capability of women to rule, especially after the experience with Mary.

Moreover, it was a patriarchal age when it was seen as against the laws of God and Nature for a woman to hold dominion over men.³⁵ John Calvin, the Protestant theologian, stated: "The dominion of women is no less than slavery, one of God's punishments for the

³² Alison Weir, *Innocent Traitor* (London: Arrow Books, 2006).

³³ Gloria Kaufman, "Juan Luis Vives on the Education of Women," *Signs* 3, no. 4 (Summer 1978): 891, 892, 893, 894.

³⁴ Gary O. Garner, "Evolution of the English Reformation Phase I (Henry VIII) and Phase 2 (Elizabeth I)," *Bible Collage of Queensland* (January 2003): 14.

³⁵ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 4.

Fall.” The good marriage of the new queen was the subject of widespread discussions among the parliament, the court, and her people, yet she chose to rule as a virgin queen and proved herself to be one of the ablest rulers of England. Her success and religious devotion went back to her infancy when she acquired the ability to function on a masculine level. Elizabeth was nearly three years old when her mother, Anne Boleyn, was sentenced to death as a traitor and beheaded in 1536, and from then on, her second “mother” was her maid Lady Margaret Bryan who was truly affectionate towards Elizabeth. No one dared to talk about Anne Boleyn because of Henry VIII’s outbursts of anger, so Elizabeth had to suppress her grief and forget her mother for good. When her half-brother Edward was born, she understood maleness was what counted – both Lady Bryan and Henry VIII focused all their attention on her male sibling, considering he was the dreamt-of heir and the next king of England. This life experience and the link between marriage, children, and death – as her father had many of his wives executed – probably forced Elizabeth to decide to govern only by herself. Sir James Melville (1535–1617), a Scottish diplomat, told Elizabeth: “You think if you were married, you would only be a queen of England, and now ye are king and queen both.”³⁶ As far as Elizabeth’s love life is concerned, there are a few notes on her affair with Thomas Seymour, her stepfather and husband to Queen Katherine Parr, which caused her many troubles, and she was subsequently sent away from Katherine’s household. Elizabeth maintained a lifelong affectionate friendship with Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, whom she decided not to accept his proposal to marry him thought. All these life experiences formed Elizabeth into the renowned queen she had become during her long reign.

Religion represents one source of philosophical continuity between Henry VIII and Elizabeth I; like her father, she intervened in doctrinal disputes and continued the policy of economic exploitation of the church. Elizabeth’s actions prove that she defended the ecclesiastical hierarchy – so-called “holly ordering,” authority is exercised by the bishops – despite various protests, she was convinced that her subject had no business in the matter of religion. Elizabeth resisted a doctrinal formulation precluding belief in the Real Presence until 1571, when it was nearly impossible to evade the matter because the Pope and parliament were urgently demanding her to make further decisions. How

³⁶ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 151.

Elizabeth herself saw her position to God and her people can be best illustrated by her prayers – she carried all her subjects in God’s presence and acted as their representative.³⁷

Elizabeth was no fanatic Protestant and, in reality, did not support the Puritans and their views on the world.³⁸ Despite Puritan efforts to ban the theatres, Elizabeth’s great passion for the theatre and drama persisted and during her reign, there were no further threats to the theatre.³⁹ Drama was and still is a popular art in a special sense which cannot be applied to any of the other literary forms. Especially since the author receives almost immediate and direct response from his audience at the exact time of the performance. Elizabethan age was the time of the very heyday of theatres and many of them are still being used even now in the 21st century.⁴⁰ The audience during the 16th century gathered in the theatres such as the Blackfriars, the Fortune, or the Shakespeare’s Globe – all of them are in London. The Globe Theatre was first open in 1599 and was built by the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, it is believed that the first play performed there was *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare.⁴¹ Elizabeth even created her own company of players known as The Queen’s Men in 1583 as an act of political will. The Queen’s Men monopolized professional performances at court, and it was due to the commercial success in London – to favour of court – that they were protected from the City of London authorities who wanted to take theatres down. The kinds of plays which were performed were affected by the Privy Council because the performances served as commercial, and it had to fulfil the role of spreading messages across the country – approach to the history was anti-Catholic and had a specific Protestant style consisting of truth and plainness.⁴²

³⁷ Larissa J. Taylor-Smith, “Elizabeth I: Psychological Profile,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 48, 50, 51, 54, 64, 71.

³⁸ Walter Cohen, “The Artisan Theatres of Renaissance England and Spain,” *Theatre Journal* 35, no. 4 (December 1983): 505.

³⁹ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 57.

⁴⁰ Moody E. Prior, “The Elizabethan Audience and the Plays of Shakespeare,” *Modern Philology* 49, no. 2 (November 1951): 101.

⁴¹ Shakespeare’s Globe, “Globe Theatre,” accessed on November 20, 2021, <https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/about-us/globe-theatre/>

⁴² Richard Dutton, “Review,” Review of The Queen’s Men and Their Plays by Scott McMillion and Sally-Beth MacLean. *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 364, 365.

3 ELIZABETHAN LITERATURE

The Elizabethan era was a period when English culture flourished enormously, not only in literature, but in the general life, architecture, and education in England, primarily in London. The English people, living on the periphery of European life, were highly patriotic, and so was their queen. Thanks to the introduction of printing in the 1470s, books and reading likewise became immensely popular. The number of schools exponentially rose after the 1550s, as a wider spectrum of the public began to passionately care about education. It was during the first half of the sixteenth century when “gently born” girls started to attend school as their brothers did. For women, their educational program, which included reading, writing letters, painting, drawing, fine needlework, and music, was tasked with finding them a suitable husband. All these things laid the foundation for English literature and culture; in addition to the poetry of Edmund Spenser, who dedicated much of his work to his queen, the 1580s and 90s were the age of William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Christopher Marlowe – the age of drama.⁴³

Georgia Brown, a lecturer at Lincoln College Oxford and Fellow and Director of Studies in English at Queens’ College Cambridge,⁴⁴ and in her 2004 book *Redefining Elizabethan Literature* she suggests that the writers of the late sixteenth century, a so-called “a generation of shame,” put themselves in opposition to the elite cultural and political status and they actively produced shame. It was even before the second half of 16th century until the writers tried to defend literature as the core of political and moral truth, and it was the concept of shame that prompted a new kind of defense for the literary texts. The authors considered literature a separated part of culture with its own rules and therefore they challenged the idea that literature should be the vehicle for historical, political, and religious truths.⁴⁵

3.1 EDMUND SPENSER

Along with William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser has been regarded as a major author of the sixteenth century – Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, the first genuine modern English epic, gave him a lifetime of success and thank to this epic poem, Edmund Spenser was placed in the canon of many schools and universities.⁴⁶

⁴³ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 7.

⁴⁴ Georgia Brown, *Redefining Elizabethan Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1.

⁴⁵ Georgia Brown, *Redefining Elizabethan Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 6.

⁴⁶ Thomas P. Roche Jr. “The Faerie Queen on Exhibit: Celebrating Four Centuries of Edmund Spenser’s Poetry,” *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 52, no. 1 (Autumn 1990): 11.

Spenser devoted some of his works to the theme of marriage, which was an important theme in the life of Elizabeth I. Elizabeth's reluctance to marry and be controlled by a male partner was widely known. Since Queen Elizabeth is the model for the main character in *The Faerie Queene*, Edmund Spenser chose the wedding theme, which was a delicate theme for the whole of England. At least four of his significant works contain this topic, including *The Faerie Queene*, *Amoretti*, *Epithalamion*, and last but not least *Prothalamion*. There is little evidence about other important Elizabethan authors who would share Spenser's interests, though marriage was an important topic in the Elizabethan age. The work already mentioned, *The Faerie Queene* (1590), tells the story of betrothed couple Red-Cross Knight and Una. Here the significant fact is that the Knight does not want to get married, considering he is more eager to be away on a quest. The description of their betrothal ceremony is of a traditional one, composed of various elements that have been known for many years, Catholic in its nature. The main character, Una, is described as a pure person associated with white which should remind the reader of a saintly figure from the medieval church or perhaps some Pilgrim. The reader comprehends that this couple has little in common and their future is anything but shared considering Una is the perfect example of virginity and the Knight is quite the very opposite. The gap between the couple reveals how far the church was from understanding the needs of their people. Another point made by Spenser is the Red Cross Knight is destined to marry Una at the end of time and this should mirror how far The Reformation must go in England. Edmund Spenser wants the readers to grasp or rather remind them that the process of forming deep post-reformation in England must take a considerable amount of time such as the marriage of the two characters does because you cannot transform thousand years of Catholic rule into Protestant faith overnight. The story of the first book ends with the engagement and not the marriage to represent that the Reformation must be absorbed.⁴⁷ Elizabeth I herself knew she would have to give time to her people to take Protestantism as their official religion. That is why in 1599, together with her parliament, Elizabeth published a document called the "Act of Uniformity," which was intended to accommodate a wide range of their citizens.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Andrew Hadfield, "Spenser and Religion - Yet Again," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 51, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 29-32, 33-35.

⁴⁸ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 63.

3.1.1 THE EROTIZATION OF ELIZABETHAN LITERATURE

According to Georgia Brown, Elizabethan literature is a literature of shame as much as it is literature obsessed with sex. One of the concepts Brown analyses in her book is the fact that literature of the second half of the 16th century, especially the 1590s, is obsessed with sex and any sexual motives.

It is important to again mention Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen* in relation to the eroticization of literature in Elizabethan times. *The Faerie Queen* is in a form of poem consisting of twelve books, each book develops one of the twelve moral virtues.⁴⁹ In the Book 3, the main focus is on Elizabeth's conceptualization in terms of Chastity. Female virginity was regarded as powerful and magical in the 16th century, a view which coincided with Spenser's assertion that women are vulnerable and therefore must be protected and possessed by men.

Elizabeth I also presented herself as a figure representing Chastity – she teased many of her lovers and allowed certain liberties, but at least publically this never became anything more than innocent coquetry, and she was empowering this virtue throughout her whole reign. The symbol of Virginity became a matter of state policy; Elizabeth felt invincible in the persona of the Virgin Queen; therefore, any sexual act, which would make her seem subservient to a man and thus lose authority, was out of the question.⁵⁰ During her adolescence and the childbearing age, she did negotiate numerous potential marriages, e.g., the one with the duke of Anjou was regarded as the most promising one, however, none of these negotiations were successful in the end. Apart from her image as the Virgin Queen, Elizabeth was afraid of bearing a child – two of her stepmothers died during childbirth, causing Elizabeth great distress, and this irretrievably altered her attitude towards motherhood.⁵¹ Elizabeth stated in 1559: “in the end, this shall be for me sufficient, that a marble stone shall declare that a queen, having reigned such a time, lived and died a virgin.” Although especially since the 20th century debates have occurred as to whether the queen actually had secret sexual affairs, in the sixteenth-century Edmund Spenser attempted to confine Elizabeth I's chastity within male control in Book 3 of his poem and particularly in the last two cantos.⁵²

⁴⁹ Lawrence Blair, “The Plot of the Faerie Queene,” *PMLA* 47, no. 1 (March 1932): 82.

⁵⁰ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 51.

⁵¹ Larissa J. Taylor-Smith, “Elizabeth I: Psychological Profile,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 57.

⁵² Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*. (London: William Ponsonbie, 1596)

3.2 SHAKESPEARE'S *THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR*

William Shakespeare lived during the reign of Elizabeth I when the Protestant faith prevailed – it is impossible to say with certainty with which faith William identified with more. However, if he had leaned toward Catholicism, he could not have made it publicly known. According to certain information, Shakespeare regularly attended church visits, as those who did not do so were cited, and this was never his case. Of course, while this does not prove his true faith, it is quite possible that he was a Catholic attending a Protestant church, for the times demanded it. He had to appear to be part of the Protestant mainstream, no matter what he may have believed, as Catholicism was heavily suppressed by the government of the time. Most scholars agree that Shakespeare's religion and how he based his works on it is very complex, so according to literary scholar John W. Cox the final argument must be that the plays are both Catholic and Protestant.⁵³

The Merry Wives of Windsor is the one play directly associated with Queen Elizabeth I. It is believed that after the performance of the history play *Henry IV* in the court in 1597, Elizabeth was so pleased with the character of Falstaff that she commanded Shakespeare to write one more play in which is Falstaff in love. Despite the speculations of many theatre historians, e.g., T.W. Craik⁵⁴ and Kenneth Muir, about the truthfulness of this story, William Shakespeare soon created the comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.⁵⁵ It was composed during the last decade of Elizabeth's reign and the play represents intertextuality between fictional pageants and Elizabethan pageantry, with "progress entertainments" comprising a genuinely popular form.⁵⁶ The play was designated to be performed to Elizabeth I and her knights of the Order of the Garter on St. George's Day in 1597.⁵⁷ This so called "garter ceremony" was an occasion which attracted the English nobility as well as foreign royalty – it served to entertain the Queen and her knights along with esteemed visitors from abroad.⁵⁸

⁵³ John D. Cox, "Shakespeare and Religion," *Religions* 9, no. 343 (2018): 1-3.

⁵⁴ Leslie S. Katz, "The Merry Wives of Windsor: Sharing the Queen's Holiday," *Representations*, no. 51 (Summer 1995): 77.

⁵⁵ A.L. Bennett, "The Source of Shakespeare's Merry Wives," *Renaissance Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (Winter 1970): 430.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Zeman Kolkovich, "Pageantry, Queens, and Housewives in the Two Texts of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 328.

⁵⁷ Leslie S. Katz, "The Merry Wives of Windsor: Sharing the Queen's Holiday," *Representations*, no. 51 (Summer 1995): 77.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Zeman Kolkovich, "Pageantry, Queens, and Housewives in the Two Texts of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 331.

The Garter and its emblem itself represent each knight's oath to defend the virtue and resplendence of the Queen, as far as it is known, the origin of this chivalry goes back to the reign of Edward III. Once again, sexual content can be found in the Elizabethan literature; in the Shakespeare's play, the character of Falstaff has lecherous thoughts, and threatens to violate the meaning of the Garter; the motive of eroticizing Falstaff was made to satisfy the Queen's desire – Shakespeare paid suit to Elizabeth through Falstaff. The Order of Garter also became a religious tool; as already stated, founded by Edward III in the fourteenth century, maintained during the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI, and reversed by Mary I in 1553. Queen Elizabeth used the concept of the Order to reconcile Catholic imagery to Protestant readings – it was a visual way of Queen's "religious ambiguity." Protestant reforms required using the English Litany in the procession, as well as vernacular communion service in the place of High Mass, yet the knights arrayed themselves in the collars of medieval Order and arranges themselves in *tableaux vivants* of the Catholic ceremony.⁵⁹

After Edmund Spenser identifies his "Faerie Queen" Elizabeth as the most excellent and glorious person, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* continues this element, praising Elizabeth as a paragon of virtue in scene in which the Fairy Queen leads a singing circle of fairies. As *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was published at the end of Elizabeth's reign when her image of the Virgin Queen was already developed and accepted, the play offers Elizabeth subtle compliments.⁶⁰ Moreover, the play reflects on the theatrical events then penetrating everyday conversation, and it serves as Shakespeare's memorization of Falstaff within the Elizabeth's private theatre.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Leslie S. Katz, "The Merry Wives of Windsor: Sharing the Queen's Holiday," *Representations*, no. 51 (Summer 1995): 78, 80, 81.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Zeman Kolkovich, "Pageantry, Queens, and Housewives in the Two Texts of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 353.

⁶¹ Leslie S. Katz, "The Merry Wives of Windsor: Sharing the Queen's Holiday," *Representations*, no. 51 (Summer 1995): 77.

II. ANALYSIS

4 ALISON WEIR

4.1 Biography

Alison Weir is a public historian and British author who had primarily written non-fiction history books on Tudor themes since the 1980s, becoming famous for her historical accuracy. With the publication of *Innocent Traitor* in 2006, she changed her field of work to the historical fiction of the Tudor dynasty. She remains aware of her position as a historian, and therefore, she heavily relies on the factual evidence even in her fiction and makes readers even more attracted to Tudor history with the additional effect of the trust in her presentation of it. Her novels demonstrate the impact of postmodernism on historical fiction and how Weir positions her texts concerning history. In this case, postmodernism asks whether a distinction between historically acknowledged truths is any different from fictional history since the boundaries between genres are now seen as much more fluid. Presenting written history can be perceived as unreliable, mainly because historians might be biased and prefer one account or person over another in harmony with their interests.⁶² There is an apparent distinction between history and fiction, with Weir's name among the first to be associated with the term "historical fiction," a genre that emphasises the documentation of facts and events supported by evidence. Alison Weir aims to challenge the portrayal of Tudors as can be seen in television series and films, which are generally focused on the sexuality of those times.⁶³

Weir was a student of English Literature, Art, and History at the City of London School for Girls. This educational institution is now religiously nondenominational, although characterized by certain Christian features. Annually, the students and the junior and senior choirs of the schools, participate in the Carol Service in the neighbouring St Giles's Church, Cripplegate.⁶⁴ St Giles's is a medieval Anglican church closely linked to 16th century England, as many famous residents throughout history came to live in the Barbican estate built around St Giles, e.g., Sir Martin Frobisher – knighted by Elizabeth I, Lancelot Andrews – one of the translators of the King James Bible, and William Shakespeare, the namesake of the Shakespeare Tower. Moreover, John Foxe gave

⁶² C. Behan McCullagh, "Bias in Historical Description, Interpretation, and Explanation," *History and Theory* 38, no. 1 (February 2000): 39.

⁶³ Hilary Jane Locke, "Go too far on Tudor-speak, all hey-nonny-nonny, [and] you'll alienate your readers': Alison Weir, and Historical Fiction, and the Representation of Tudor," *Parergon* 37, no. 2 (2020): 154.

⁶⁴ City of London School for Girls, "Music," accessed on April 10, 2022, <https://clsg.org.uk/learning/curricular/music/>

Protestant sermons at this church during his life, and after his death in 1587, he was even buried there.⁶⁵ Among his famous sermons are *Sermon on Christ Crucified* and *Reformatio legum ecclesiasticarum*, with the latter compiled during the reign of Edward VI.⁶⁶ Foxe was an English martyrologist known for his *Book of Martyrs*, also called *Acts and Monuments*, published in 1563, which deals with the imprisonment of Elizabeth Tudor during the reign of her elder sister Mary. Foxe divides his book into three main sections; (1) Mary's falling out with Elizabeth, (2) the denunciation of Henry VIII and Edward VI by court preachers, and (3) the imprisonment of Elizabeth in the Tower.⁶⁷ The first and the last themes are also widely covered in Weir's *The Lady Elizabeth*, and Alison Weir even uses John Foxe and his *Acts and Monuments* as a source in the non-fiction *The Life of Elizabeth I*.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ St Giles Cripplegate Church, "History of St Giles'," accessed on April 10, 2022, <https://www.stgilesnewsite.co.uk/history/>

⁶⁶ John T. McNeil, "John Foxe: Historiographer, Disciplinarian, Tolerationist," *Church History* 43, no. 2 (June 1974): 291.

⁶⁷ Thomas S. Freeman, "As True a Subject Being Prisoner": John Foxe's Notes on the Imprisonment of Princess Elizabeth, 1554-5," *The Historical English Review* 177, no. 470 (February 2002): 104, 105.

⁶⁸ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 494.

5 THE SHIFT IN RELIGION AND THE VIEW OF QUEENS

This analysis is based on three books by Alison Weir: *Innocent Traitor* (2006), *The Lady Elizabeth* (2008), and *The Life of Elizabeth I* (1998). The first of these books, *Innocent Traitor*, is a fiction about the life of the Protestant Lady Jane Grey, who died during the reign of Mary I. The other two books both deal with the life of Elizabeth I. *The Lady Elizabeth* is a fiction mainly about Elizabeth's childhood and ends in 1558 when she ascends the throne. *The Life of Elizabeth I* is a non-fiction biography about the life of Elizabeth I after her accession to the throne, but there are also retrospective elements, e.g., the book refers to the events of her childhood, such as the execution of her mother.

The sixteenth century was full of changes and upheavals, from the religious reformation of Henry VIII, the death of the young king Edward VI, the nine-day reign of Lady Jane Grey, the establishment of Catholicism during the rule of Mary I, to the Protestant regime under Elizabeth I. The two queens Mary and Elizabeth Tudor were sisters, yet they were different in almost everything – Mary's desire for marriage and her conviction of Catholicism in opposition to the Protestant Elizabeth, who never intended to marry. The question of religion had always been a burden to their relationship and often resulted in heated arguments and disputes, for instance, Elizabeth's imprisonment due to the 1554 rebellion to which she was indirectly linked. Just as in reality, in Alison Weir's *The Lady Elizabeth* the Lord Chancellor Bishop Gardiner along with Simon Renard, the ambassador to Spain, play a crucial role in many events; the reason for Renard's arrival was the potential marriage between Mary and Philip II. However, Elizabeth obstructed this union between the two monarchs. In the novel, Gardiner and Renard both deliberately portray Lady Elizabeth in the negative light to Queen Mary:

Madam, you are goodness itself, too good to see fault in others. Do you know why your sister will not go to Mass? It has nothing to do with scruples, I am sure, but everything to do with her wanting to be seen as the Protestant heir, the hope of those who would obstruct your Majesty's sacred duty.⁶⁹

The efforts of the two men to thwart the relationship between the two sisters were not in vain; John Foxe shows the evidence of Mary's estrangement at the time:

⁶⁹ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 317.

Quen Mary when she was first queen, before she was crowned, would goo on whether [whither] but she would have [Elizabeth] by the hand [and] sent for her to dyner and souper. As soone as she was crowned, she never dynd nor soupted with afterm but kept her aloofe of [sic] from her.⁷⁰

These events set the foundation for Elizabeth's governance, as the young lady believed it was God's will that she be queen of England, which gave her the strength to endure hardships, such as her imprisonment in the Tower. *The Life of Elizabeth I* contains such references in the introduction, "She identified herself with her people," and "For this, she believed, God had preserved her life."⁷¹ Also, in *The Lady Elizabeth*, Elizabeth had just learned that her sister had died, and Elizabeth was her successor – Alison Weir observes, "All the troubles, terrors and obstacles that had beset her... She survived them all, and to this purpose. What else could this be but God's will?"⁷²

Alison Weir also provides the reader with an insight into the beginnings of Elizabeth's reign in the non-fiction *The Life of Elizabeth I*; the subjects were in sort of distress for they "having lived through a quarter-century of Reformation and Counter Reformation, were now divided by deep religious differences."⁷³ No one was sure which religion the Queen would choose, for she was crowned with all the old Roman Catholic ceremonies. Briefly after her coronation, however, she made the restoration of the Church of England abundantly clear with the publication of the Act of Uniformity in 1559.⁷⁴ Weir suggests in *The Life of Elizabeth I* that it was already at that time Elizabeth tried to accommodate all her subjects,

Both Catholics and Calvinists would have liked the legislation to have gone further, in different directions, and bitterly criticized it, but the Queen was determined on following a middle road, which the majority of her subjects seem to have wanted. [...] the Anglican settlement of 1559 was highly successful that it offered a moderating stability in an age of violent religious change and debate.⁷⁵

For the first time in November 1570 Accession Day started to be celebrated on November 17 in the kingdom as a tribute to their queen; Weir in *The Life of Elizabeth I* states:

⁷⁰ Thomas S. Freeman, "As True a Subiect Being Prisoner": John Foxe's Notes on the Imprisonment of Princess Elizabeth, 1554-5," *The Historical English Review* 177, no. 470 (February 2002): 107.

⁷¹ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 10.

⁷² Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 482.

⁷³ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 3.

⁷⁴ John F. Hurst, "The Elizabethan Settlement of the Church of England," *The American Journal of Theology* vol 3, no. 4 (October 1899): 679, 682.

⁷⁵ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 63.

Eleven years of peace and stable government, [...], had securely established Elizabeth in the imagination of her people as an able, wise and gracious ruler.⁷⁶

All in all, Elizabeth proved to be a capable ruler to England and a great leader to the Church of England; moreover, she won the hearts of many of her subjects. Elizabeth's attitude towards her people and her rule was influenced by an troubled childhood and disputes with her sister. She saw how Mary I would allow herself to be influenced in her decision-making, and so Elizabeth decided not to rule like this. Elizabeth believed that it was God who allowed her to survive her imprisonment and put her on the throne. She knew that her people had gone through hard changes during the past decades, so she decided not to be strict with religion. Her Act of Uniformity was supposed to satisfy everyone of any faith.

5.1 The effects of sisterhood on Elizabeth I's marriage and reign

In Weir's fiction *The Lady Elizabeth*, Mary and Elizabeth's sisterhood is described as purely harmonious until Mary ascends the throne of England, when Mary begins to see Elizabeth as a rival. Both in historical reality and in the book, Elizabeth's observations of Mary's marriage caused a significant personal change in her; Elizabeth not only knew the perils of marriage, she witnessed many of her father's marriages which ended up with death. She feared childbirth because two of her stepmothers – Jane Seymour and Katherine Parr – had died as a consequence of giving birth. All the events of her childhood were reflected in her adolescence, and her attitude on marriage and maternity were set by her fifteenth year.⁷⁷ Alison Weir describes this fear of Elizabeth in *The Lady Elizabeth*:

There was something more, something darker and more sinister, something all bound up with the horror of Queen Katherine's beheading and her mother's. They had both died for doing that naughty thing. And there was another reason to fear, too, for had not Queen Jane died bearing a child?⁷⁸

Therefore, she "had expressed her desire to remain single, most people put this down to maidenly modesty. Hardly anyone took her at her word."⁷⁹ The controversy over Elizabeth's future betrothal and wedding was a crucial issue during the first decade of her

⁷⁶ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 217.

⁷⁷ Larissa J. Taylor-Smith, "Elizabeth I: Psychological Profile," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 58.

⁷⁸ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 92.

⁷⁹ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 25.

reign.⁸⁰ Weir explains the substantiated attitude of Elizabeth's subjects in *The Life of Elizabeth I*. In this non-fiction book, Weir takes great interest in the topic of marriage and heirs; everyone – the Council, the Parliament, and her subjects – knew it is important that the Queen marries and produces an heir at the earliest convenience:

Without that child, Elizabeth stood alone, unguarded against foreign invaders, traitors at home, and the constant fear of assassination.⁸¹

Nonetheless, Elizabeth's marriage tactic was to prolong the formalities for as long as it was possible so that she does not antagonize the country; based on historical evidence, Weir depicts marriage negotiation with Monsieur Francis, the Duke of Anjou and Alençon, in *The Life of Elizabeth I*, "[...] it was important that the marriage negotiations be prolonged in order to keep the French friendly and the Duke under control."⁸² These negotiations were never brought to a successful end, and the queen remained unwedded until her death in 1603. During her reign, Elizabeth regarded England as her husband and she was a mother to her people; as cited by historian Larissa J. Taylor-Smith, Elizabeth addressed this issue in her speech to the first Parliament:

“I have already joined myselfe in marriage to an husband, namely the kingdome of England. [...] Doe not upbraid me with miserable lacke of children; for every one of you, and as many as are Englishmen are children, and kindsmen to me.”⁸³

Elizabeth considered her coronation ring to be also her wedding ring, as Weir states in her non-fiction *The Life of Elizabeth I*, “[...] the ring that symbolically wedded her to her people was placed upon the fourth finger on her right hand.”⁸⁴ Alison Weir also describes how one Spanish envoy – Wier does not specify which one – observed Elizabeth's attitude towards her people, “She is very much wedded to her people and thinks as they do.” then Weir continues with facts, “She had their interest at hearth and her instinct told her what was best for them.”⁸⁵ The loving attitude towards her subjects contributed Elizabeth I to become one of the influential and admired monarchs in England – in *The Life of Elizabeth I*, William Cecil claims:

⁸⁰ Larissa J. Taylor-Smith, “Elizabeth I: Psychological Profile,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 65.

⁸¹ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 215.

⁸² Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 329.

⁸³ Larissa J. Taylor-Smith, “Elizabeth I: Psychological Profile,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 65.

⁸⁴ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 39.

⁸⁵ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 219.

She was the wisest woman that ever was, for she understood the interests and dispositions of all the princes in her time, and was so perfect in the knowledge of her own realm, that no councillor she had could tell her anything she did not know before.⁸⁶

The mistakes of Elizabeth's sister reinforced even more Elizabeth's belief in the Protestant faith and her right to reign.⁸⁷ For instance, Mary was genuinely optimistic, even vehement, about converting her subjects to the Catholic faith from the beginning of her reign; in the fiction *The Lady Elizabeth*, Mary declares:

It is my dearest wish that my people return to the Catholic fold. It is for this, I believe, that God sent me a victory I am to be the instrument through which His will is to be accomplished.⁸⁸

However, after some time Mary realised this would not work without pressure and threats, and therefore the laws against heresy were reintroduced, and nearly three hundred Protestants were burned at the stake – the year 1555 is connected with “The burnings have begun.”⁸⁹ In *The Lady Elizabeth*, Weir provides the reader a plausible explanation why Mary chose burning as a form of punishment:

They do not think they are being cruel; they think they are doing a kindness. What is short time in earthly flames compared with an eternity spent roasting in Hell? That is their logic Yet it seems to me that those who order this – and I do not name names – have put mercy behind them. It is this new allegiance to Spain that has brought these cruelties.⁹⁰

Opposed to Mary's attitude to her subjects, Elizabeth says in the same novel: “The voice of the people is the voice of God!”⁹¹ Elizabeth as portrayed in the novel maintains a kind-hearted attitude towards her subjects throughout her whole reign. Elizabeth identifies herself with her people and brings stability and peace to the troubled kingdom.⁹² Nevertheless, as Weir's non-fiction book *The Life of Elizabeth I* indicates, she also had Catholics put to death, although the reason for Elizabeth's executions could have been slightly different: “The persecution for which her reign became notorious was prompted by political necessity, not religious fanaticism.” “The priests who were executed had committed crimes against the state and were perceived as a very real threat to national security.”⁹³ As indicated by theologian John F. Hurst, during Elizabeth's reign 204 Catholics were burned

⁸⁶ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 487.

⁸⁷ Larissa J. Taylor-Smith, “Elizabeth I: Psychological Profile,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 59.

⁸⁸ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 316.

⁸⁹ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 425.

⁹⁰ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 425.

⁹¹ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 311.

⁹² Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 10.

⁹³ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 58, 59.

at the stake, compared to 286 Protestants under Mary.⁹⁴ Still, Elizabeth was no fanatic, unlike Mary. Weir's decision to tell the story in two ways is based on the fact mentioned earlier that at the beginning of her fiction career, Alison Weir let her imagination overrule her concern for facts. Hilary Jane Locke compares two of Weir's fictions - *Innocent Traitor* (2006) and *The True Queen* (2016):

Weir has shifted her perception of herself, as a novelist, from one who uses fiction to invent and play with the historical characters she has examined, to one who attempts to reproduce facts on the page and apologize for any invention that may be present.⁹⁵

When it comes to the question of Elizabeth's denomination, she was not the fervent Protestant she is believed to be, e.g., there were crucifixes in her private chapels.⁹⁶ Weir mentions in *The Life of Elizabeth I* that the display of this Catholic symbol was "much to the disgust of her stricter Protestant subjects."⁹⁷

The friendship between the two royal sisters deteriorated, as was examined earlier, with Mary's accession to the throne. Elizabeth was known for being a devoted Protestant during her early years, which was perceived as heretical between the years 1553-1558. Due to her stubborn nature, Elizabeth had suffered many punishments, e.g., Mary's imprisonment of Elizabeth in the Tower in 1554. Moreover, Mary's attempts to marry Elizabeth off to the foreign prince Emmanuel Philibert, Duke of Savoy – *The Lady Elizabeth* describes this attempt to side-line Elizabeth: "I have thought of a solution,' Mary said suddenly. 'Elizabeth shall be found a Catholic husband abroad. That will curb her ambitions.'"⁹⁸ Mary then discussed this issue with the Spanish King Philip II:

[Mary I] "If I died, there would be civil war, make no doubt of it," Mary said bleakly. "The heretics would espouse the cause of the Lady Elizabeth. The only remedy is to marry her to a Catholic prince faithful to your Highness. There was some talk of the Duke of Savoy."
[Philip of Spain] "Steady as a rock, and an excellent choice."⁹⁹

Until her own accession, Elizabeth remained "converted" to the Roman Catholic faith; she attended masses and read good Catholic books. However, in the fiction *The Lady*

⁹⁴ John F. Hurst, "The Elizabethan Settlement of the Church of England," *The American Journal of Theology* vol 3, no. 4 (October 1899): 286.

⁹⁵ Hilary Jane Locke, "Go too far on Tudor-speak, all hey-nonny-nonny, [and] you'll alienate your readers': Alison Weir, and Historical Fiction, and the Representation of Tudor," *Parergon* 37, no. 2 (2020): 165.

⁹⁶ Larissa J. Taylor-Smith, "Elizabeth I: Psychological Profile," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 64.

⁹⁷ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 58.

⁹⁸ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 344.

⁹⁹ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 428.

Elizabeth, some, such as Simon Renard and Bishop Gardiner, knew she was only trying to cheat the Queen Mary. Gardiner states “She is a hypocrite. One day she knows nothing about the Catholic faith, the next day she realises she has been in error. She is clever, but not that clever.”¹⁰⁰ On the grounds of this religious ambiguousness, it was not clear which course she was to pursue. In the historical reality, after her coronation she restored the Church of England to its former purity.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, as stated above, Catholicism had a particular influence on her perception of faith.

Religion had always played a big role in Elizabeth I’s life - it was the source of her dispute with Mary I and also one of the things she had in common with her father, Henry VIII. During her older sister’s reign, she knew she had to switch to Catholicism in order to survive. Thanks to Mary I, she also found out that marriage and motherhood would be nothing for her – she hated being influenced by someone and she saw what “love” was doing to her sister, as it overshadowed her judgment.

5.2 Religious uprisings

Also Lady Jane Grey – a devoted Protestant and a cousin of Edward VI – ruled England, though it was only for nine days. Her father, Henry Grey, the Duke of Suffolk, along with John Dudley, the Duke of Northumberland, plotted to take the throne from Catholic Mary, a lawful heir. Therefore, the counsellors, one of them being Dudley, made Edward VI sign a document changing his father’s will and naming Jane Grey his heir shortly before he died.¹⁰²

In the novel *Innocent Traitor*, Edward VI is seated in his bed and talks to John Dudley, whose son is now husband to Jane Grey:

[Edward VI] “Your Grace,” he announces, “we have decided to agree to your proposal that the Lady Jane should succeed us. Have our clerks draw up our Will, or whatever document is required, and then bring it here for us to sign.”¹⁰³

On July 6, 1553, Edward VI died. In the *Innocent Traitor*, John Dudley gathers the Lord Mayor of London, his alderman, and sheriffs and announces to them:

¹⁰⁰ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 336.

¹⁰¹ John F. Hurst, “The Elizabethan Settlement of the Church of England,” *The American Journal of Theology* 3, no. 4 (October 1899): 679.

¹⁰² Michael A.G. Haykin, “Faith only justifieth: The Witness of Jane Grey, an Evangelical Queen,” *Haddington House Journal*, (2017): 167.

¹⁰³ Alison Weir, *Innocent Traitor* (London: Arrow Books, 2006), 288.

The King's Majesty, God rest his soul, has departed this life. On his deathbed, wishing to preserve the true Protestant religion in this realm, he drew up a new Device for the succession, and named his cousin, the Lady Jane Grey, as heiress apparent. Very shortly, gentlemen, she will proclaimed Queen.¹⁰⁴

Lady Jane was proclaimed queen on July 10, 1553, yet she was reluctant to accept the crown, which she felt did not belong to her; she even fainted from the pressure put on her during the ceremony.¹⁰⁵ This scene is described in the fiction *Innocent Traitor*; after recovering from the fainting, Jane Grey says: "The crown is not my right. This pleases me not at all. The Lady Mary is the rightful heir."¹⁰⁶ As soon as Mary got acquainted with the news, she marched to London with her army and was proclaimed the Queen of England on the afternoon of July 19. Northumberland and the rest had to admit their defeat and acknowledge Mary as their queen. Jane in *Innocent Traitor* is familiarized with the fact from her father, "Jane, you are no longer Queen, London has declared for the Lady Mary."¹⁰⁷ Jane Grey is later imprisoned in the Tower, and the Spanish ambassador Renard persuades Queen Mary to sign Jane's death warrant. As it is examined in another novel, *The Lady Elizabeth*:

[Renard] warned her Majesty that Prince Philip would never set foot in England while the Lady Jane lived, for he would feat too much for his safety and for the security.¹⁰⁸

Both of Alison Weir's novels, *The Lady Elizabeth* and *Innocent Traitor*, suggest Jane had few face-to-face encounters and discourses with Elizabeth I. When was Elizabeth staying with Queen Katherine and Thomas Seymour, Katherine presented Jane to Elizabeth, "My Lady Elizabeth, your cousin, Lady Jane Grey, is here."¹⁰⁹ However, there is no clear historical evidence to support this hypothesis. During her reign, Elizabeth was not fond of the Greys, despite their shared Protestant religion, and according to the non-fiction *The Life of Elizabeth I*, remarked to Katherine Grey, Jane's sister, that "she could not abide the sight of her."¹¹⁰ Perhaps this is because the Greys had succession pretensions,¹¹¹ and Elizabeth was aware of this being a possible problem as early as 1553. In addition to Mary, Jane Grey was another woman whom Elizabeth had to fight against to

¹⁰⁴ Alison Weir, *Innocent Traitor* (London: Arrow Books, 2006), 306.

¹⁰⁵ Michael A.G. Haykin, "Faith only justifieth: The Witness of Jane Grey, an Evangelical Queen," *Haddington House Journal*, (2017): 167.

¹⁰⁶ Alison Weir, *Innocent Traitor* (London: Arrow Books, 2006), 312.

¹⁰⁷ Alison Weir, *Innocent Traitor* (London: Arrow Books, 2006), 344.

¹⁰⁸ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 362.

¹⁰⁹ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 197.

¹¹⁰ Alison Weir, *Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 41

¹¹¹ Alison Weir, *Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 41.

become queen, and therefore it is unlikely that Elizabeth would be a part of Northumberland's attempt to put Jane on the throne.¹¹² In *The Lady Elizabeth*, Elizabeth gets to know that Jane has been tried and condemned, and she realizes Jane's faith does not have to be so different from her own; Protestants supported the Grey's plot, Elizabeth's name might be associated with some other religious uprising, she starts panicking during a conversation with William Cecil – her surveyor and mentor:

“She [Jane] is not yet safe” Elizabeth said, her heart pumping in her breast. “And neither am I, William! I too might be the focus of a Protestant plot. I have not been over-zealous in embracing the Roman faith, and I have made it clear I go to Mass under duress. So if the Queen can condemn a girl of sixteen, who is her own flesh and blood, to death, then she can condemn me. And something tells me that, if Renard had his way, she would.”¹¹³

Not long after the plot associated with Greys, The Wyatt plot against the Catholic queen aroused on January 21, 1554. It was partially the result of the religious disagreements between Catholics and Protestants, and apart from the religious motives, the rebellion had been on the grounds of Mary's foreign marriage to Philip of Spain. Her subjects and the House of Commons criticized this betrothal during their Parliament session in 1553. These debates prompted a few gentlemen, e.g., Sir William Pickering, Sir Thomas Wyatt, and Henry Grey (father to Jane Grey), to plot the 1554 uprising.¹¹⁴ Elizabeth I was dragged into this rebellion, without her consent, through the marriage with Courtenay; in the novel *The Lady Elizabeth*, Weir depicts this situation in the following dialogue:

[Elizabeth] “Another letter from our friend Wyatt.”

[Kat] “This is treason!”

[Elizabeth] “I know. They want me to marry Courtenay, and to what purpose? To unite the royal blood of Plantagenet and Tudor and place us on the throne. So much for Wyatt protesting he meant no harm to my sister.”¹¹⁵

Elizabeth further states:

“I will not involve myself in any way. I will destroy this letter, and keep my own counsel. There are hideous consequences when one intrigues against princess. My enemies would rejoice to see me condemned for treason. I have no intention of giving them that satisfaction.”¹¹⁶

¹¹² Lisa Hopkins, “Elizabeth I Amongst the Women,” *UCLA Historical Journal* 14, (1994): 208.

¹¹³ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 348.

¹¹⁴ Malcolm R. Thorp, “Religion and the Wyatt Rebellion of 1554,” *Church History* 47, no. 4 (December 1978): 363, 365, 366.

¹¹⁵ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 353.

¹¹⁶ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 354.

Despite her efforts, Elizabeth was committed to the Tower and imprisoned there for three months¹¹⁷; from there, Elizabeth was then held in Woodstock under house arrest.¹¹⁸

In the same year, Mary published a document proclaiming Catholicism as the only permitted religion, and it strictly forbade the preaching of Protestantism and dissemination of heretical literature.¹¹⁹ In *The Lady Elizabeth*, this persecution of heretical literature is represented by Elizabeth's dialogue with Sir Henry Bedingfield – a member of the council who became Elizabeth's custodian after her release from the Tower – based on actual historical events from 1554¹²⁰:

[Elizabeth] "Perhaps if I could have a copy of St Paul's Epistles – even if you won't allow me my English Bible?"

[Sir Henry Bedingfield] "The epistles you may have," he told her, "but the English Bible never. The government is now proceeding more harshly against the reformed religion than ever before. Possession of such a book would not only be wrong, it would be mightily dangerous. If I were you, my lady, I should forget I ever owned a copy."¹²¹

Protestants were against returning to the old worship service, and some decided to leave the country,¹²² e.g., Sir William Drury, who was, according to Weir's *The Life of Elizabeth I*, later in the reign of Elizabeth, sent to Tower charged with attempted murder.¹²³ In the novel *The Lady Elizabeth*, William Cecil, who decided to leave the court in 1553, is specifically mentioned. He states, "There is no place for me here anymore. My Protestant views are too well-known, and it is remembered that I served the former government."¹²⁴ Despite the danger during the Marian Counter-Reformation, William Cecil decided not to leave the country, and he was gradually actively participating in the court life.¹²⁵

Elizabeth's elder sister was madly in love with her husband, Philip of Spain, influencing her decision-making ability. Mary did everything in her power to please her husband and even went against the interests of her people; in *The Lady Elizabeth*,

¹¹⁷ Alison Weir, *Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 16.

¹¹⁸ Thomas S. Freeman, "As True a Subject Being Prisoner": John Foxe's Notes on the Imprisonment of Princess Elizabeth, 1554-5," *The Historical English Review* 177, no. 470 (February 2002): 106.

¹¹⁹ Malcolm R. Thorp, "Religion and the Wyatt Rebellion of 1554," *Church History* 47, no. 4 (December 1978): 365.

¹²⁰ Thomas S. Freeman, "As True a Subject Being Prisoner": John Foxe's Notes on the Imprisonment of Princess Elizabeth, 1554-5," *The Historical English Review* 177, no. 470 (February 2002): 105, 114.

¹²¹ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 422.

¹²² Malcolm R. Thorp, "Religion in the Wyatt Rebellion of 1554," *Church History* 47, no. 4 (December 1978): 364, 365, 366

¹²³ Alison Weir, *Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 86.

¹²⁴ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 323.

¹²⁵ Miroslav Beneš, "William Cecil a jemu přisuzované politické role v britských pramenech raného novověku," *Historický Ústav, Filozofická fakulta, Univerzita Hradec Králové* 21, no. 2 (2018): 140

Elizabeth thinks to herself, “Yet surely the influence of her husband, King Philip, must be in part responsible for the burnings. Had she lost her wits so far as to risk the love of her people?”¹²⁶ This attitude towards her people was something Elizabeth was resolved never to let happen, as she said “there is no Prince that loveth his subjects [more].”¹²⁷ In *The Lady Elizabeth*, Weir writes as the continuation of the previous quotation, “the love of her people, which Elizabeth knew to be the most precious thing a sovereign can have?”¹²⁸

Mary was seen to have failed in her duty as a monarch and this strengthened the opinion that women are not suitable for such positions; Queen Elizabeth successfully shattered this stereotype during her forty-five-year reign. After her accession, Protestant subjects were grateful that the true religion could advance unimpeded. She took a lot after her father, and as a result, she knew how to rule as a man – as Weir states in *The Life of Elizabeth I*, “she dealt with others in a straightforward manner and would stand by ‘the word of prince.’”¹²⁹ Unlike her sister, Elizabeth was resolved to rule without any foreign interference in the English government; she was “a monarch worthy of respect,” Weir claims, “She had wisdom, common-sense, staying power, integrity and tenacity, along with the ability to compromise, a hard-headed sense of realism, and a devious, subtle brain.”¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 426.

¹²⁷ Larissa J. Taylor-Smith, “Elizabeth I: Psychological Profile,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 65.

¹²⁸ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 426.

¹²⁹ Alison Weir, *Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 17.

¹³⁰ Alison Weir, *Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 17.

6 ELIZABETH'S PASSIONS

Throughout her life, Elizabeth I was very fond of all sorts of arts, and one of her greatest hobbies was undoubtedly theatre. She loved the theatre so much that she had her own company – The Queen's Men. In addition of drama on stage, Elizabeth adored literature; throughout her childhood she had the best tutors, who opened new horizons of knowledge, translated Greek and Latin texts with her, and debated together on books by well-known authors, such as Marcus Tullius Cicero. Last but not least, Elizabeth liked to talk about things with sexual themes, but as historical documents explain reality to us, sexual intercourse as such did not fit into her passions.

6.1 The theatre and William Shakespeare

When it came to arts, Queen Elizabeth's true passion was the theatre, and she protected it from Puritans during her reign. In *The Lady Elizabeth*, Elizabeth says to Sir Thomas Pope, "I love nothing better than a good masque or play!"¹³¹ London became the first and only town in England to have a permanent playhouse; the Theatre opened in 1576, and in succeeding years, precisely in 1599, The Globe was opened. Allison Weir, thanks to the historical records, precisely describes London in the Elizabethan age in *The Life of Elizabeth I*, "under Elizabeth it became a thriving commercial centre. [...] On the Surrey shore, were to be found brothels, later, the first theatres, among them Shakespeare's Globe."¹³² The Puritans were the most significant arising opposition to theatres, they soon found allies in the City Fathers of London. Walter Cohen, in his article from 1983, states that the Lord Mayor of London appealed to Archbishop Whitgift that as a result of the theatre, "the prentizes & seruants [were] withdrawen from their woorks."¹³³ As much as it is known nowadays, it was only the royal and aristocratic patronage who helped the survival of the London theatres.¹³⁴ Alison Weir describes Elizabeth's discovery that, "the renowned Coventry cycles of mystery plays had been banned by Puritan authorities in that city, she ordered them to be restored."¹³⁵

¹³¹ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 453.

¹³² Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 6.

¹³³ Walter Cohen, the Lord Mayor of London quoted in "The Artisan Theatres of Renaissance England and Spain," *Theatre Journal* 35, no. 4 (December 1983): 505.

¹³⁴ Walter Cohen, "The Artisan Theatres of Renaissance England and Spain," *Theatre Journal* 35, no. 4 (December 1983): 504.

¹³⁵ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 57.

“Puritans were heartily disapproved by Elizabeth,”¹³⁶ Weir claims in *The Life of Elizabeth I*, and while was the Queen enjoying the plays at the private house in Whitehall – the Court preferred these over the public ones¹³⁷ – the Corporation of London closed the theatres on the Surrey shore. And after other disputes, also considering The Queen’s Men, Elizabeth became furious and “There were no further threats to the theatre in her reign.”¹³⁸ Weir observed. The Queen’s Men was a company created by Elizabeth herself and Alison Weir mentions in *The Life of Elizabeth I* that, “her [Elizabeth’s] favourite performer was the comic actor, Richard Tarleton.”¹³⁹ Weir also describes the reality that Elizabeth enjoyed their performance so much that she “bade them take away the knave for making her laugh so excessively.”¹⁴⁰

According to Weir and the evidence that the history *The Life of Elizabeth I* is based on,

Elizabeth

was also a great lover pageants, masques and dramas, and many plays, including some written by William Shakespeare and Ben Johnson, were performed at her court, usually at the average cost of £400.¹⁴¹

When it comes to William Shakespeare himself, in *The Life of Elizabeth I* Alison Weir pictures a conversation between Elizabeth I and Shakespeare:

Tradition has it that after 1597 production of *The History of Henry IV* [...], Elizabeth was so taken with the character of Falstaff that she asked Shakespeare to write a play in which Falstaff was in love. The result should have been *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, said to have been hurriedly written in a fortnight, but much enjoyed by the Queen.¹⁴²

Leslie S. Katz in a 1995 article claims that a situation very analogous to this one had really happened, but she also cites T.W. Craik, who warns that any one of the informants may have invented it.¹⁴³ The whole plot of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* relates to Elizabeth’s favourite pageants – Alison Weir mentions many occasions when Elizabeth was a part or a

¹³⁶ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 56.

¹³⁷ Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean stage, 1574-1642* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 107.

¹³⁸ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 57.

¹³⁹ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 250.

¹⁴⁰ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 250.

¹⁴¹ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 249.

¹⁴² Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 249.

¹⁴³ Leslie S Katz, “The Merry Wives of Windsor: Sharing the Queen’s Holiday,” *Representations*, no. 51 (Summer 1995): 79.

spectator to pageants, such as when there were five pageants on Elizabeth's coronation day:

The City was a bastion of Protestantism, and its pageants and tableaux all incorporated meaningful references to the bad days of Queen Mary that were now past and the good things that were hoped for from her successor.¹⁴⁴

As the name of the play already indicates, there are multiple references to the Windsor castle, e.g., the Queen and the Windsor's citizens were contesting the authority and ownership – the community does not claim of the forest, but they profess the ownership of town's governance.¹⁴⁵ Weir describes the Windsor castle in her fiction *The Lady Elizabeth*: "At Windsor, [...], Elizabeth was treated with every courtesy. In the morning, the crowds were lining the streets as she made her departure."¹⁴⁶ And another remark about the castle is in the non-fiction *The Life of Elizabeth I* "In April, she would go to Windsor for the Garter ceremonies on St. George's Day."¹⁴⁷ The Garter ceremony is another element of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* considering the play opens in the Inn at Windsor which is filled with guests who came to see the Garter proceedings. Moreover, the whole play is staged inside a Garter holiday, serving to entertain the Queen and her knights.¹⁴⁸ Alison Weir links up the Garter in *The Life of Elizabeth I*:

Although the worship of saints was abhorrent to Protestants, she [Elizabeth] encouraged the popular cult of St George, who was revered as a national symbol and the patron of the Order of the Garter.¹⁴⁹

William Shakespeare wrote the comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in two weeks and included all the elements dear to Elizabeth in the plot in order to please her and her knights during the Garter ceremonies.¹⁵⁰

As mentioned above, Queen Elizabeth loved theatre and even had one play written on demand by William Shakespeare. This game is known as *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. The Puritans were against her passion, closing theatres all over London, for London was the centre of all theatres. However, Elizabeth knew that she was the sovereign of England

¹⁴⁴ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 36.

¹⁴⁵ Elizabeth Zeman Kolkovich, "Pageantry, Queens, and Housewives in the Two Texts of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 337.

¹⁴⁶ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 407.

¹⁴⁷ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 248.

¹⁴⁸ Leslie S Katz, "The Merry Wives of Windsor: Sharing the Queen's Holiday," *Representations*, no. 51 (Summer 1995): 80-81.

¹⁴⁹ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 58.

¹⁵⁰ A.L. Bennett, "The Sources of Shakespeare's *Merry Wives*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (Winter 1970): 430.

and therefore no one could go against her decision; thanks to her, the theatres could continue.

6.2 Literature

Elizabeth was from her early years tutored by the best teachers in the country, such as William Grindal, and thanks to them, she displayed great knowledge of classical Greek and Latin literature – as the Weir’s fiction *The Lady Elizabeth* shows “Lessons with Master Ascham, for Elizabeth, were a joy. She was delighted to discover that his favourite Latin author was Cicero.”¹⁵¹ In *The Life of Elizabeth I*, Weir presents an example of Elizabeth’s “intellectual satisfaction of theological literature that appalled to her,” Weir continues, “She knew that literature well, informing Parliament in 1566, that she studied nothing but divinity till she came to the Crown.”¹⁵²

With regard to literature and Puritans, Weir mentions this in *The Life of Elizabeth I*:

Meanwhile, the talk in London was all of the French duke’s ostentatious courtship of the Queen, which left many people, notably Puritans, scandalised, and inspired the poet Edmund Spenser, under Leicester’s patronage, to write a satire entitled *Mother Hubbard’s Tale*.¹⁵³

According to Alison Weir’s non-fiction *The Life of Elizabeth I*:

All of this [grammar schools] laid foundations for the flowering of English literature – and, in particular, drama – that took place in the 1580s and 90s, the age of William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser and Christopher Marlowe.¹⁵⁴

Weir then refers to Edmund Spenser, as she had in *The Life of Elizabeth I*, that he “did the most to promote the cult of Elizabeth.”¹⁵⁵ Weir even named one whole chapter “Gloriana” after a character from Spenser’s epic poem *The Faerie Queen* dedicated to Elizabeth. In the book, *The Life of Elizabeth I* is a remark in connection to William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Sir Walter Raleigh, who “called her [Elizabeth] Cynthia or Diana, Diana being the virgin huntress, ‘chaste and fair.’”¹⁵⁶ Alison Weir then continues with the topic of these appellations regarding celebrations at Whitehall – the Golden Day – where contestants were appearing in costumes, often on mythological themes:

¹⁵¹ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 215.

¹⁵² Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 54.

¹⁵³ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 325

¹⁵⁴ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 6, 7.

¹⁵⁵ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 223.

¹⁵⁶ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 223.

Often the Queen would appear in the guise of Astraea, the virgin goddess of justice, or Cynthia, “the lady of the sea,” or Diana the huntress, Belphoebe, or, in the later years, as Gloriana, the Faerie Queen.¹⁵⁷

Not only was literature one of Elizabeth I’s passions, but she herself was a muse to some of the authors of the Elizabethan era. For example, the famous Edmund Spenser based the main character on her in his poem *The Faerie Queene*.

6.3 Sexuality

Alison Weir’s first novels, such as *Innocent Traitor*, are all heavily influenced by popular TV shows with history represented with imagination, sexualization, and less concern for facts.¹⁵⁸ Jane’s bedding scene in *Innocent Traitor* represents the theme of sexuality well: “Suddenly he leans up on one forearm and pushes my leg apart with his free hand. His fingers boldly explore the secret place between them.”¹⁵⁹ In Weir’s another fiction, *The Lady Elizabeth*, the situation is quite analogous; the Lord Admiral – at the time a husband to Queen Katherine – “was forcing himself hugely within her, thrusting backwards and forwards with increasing vigour.”¹⁶⁰ In this fiction, *The Lady Elizabeth*, is also a perfect example of the influence of Weir’s imagination; Alison Weir completely invented the sexual affair and furthermore Elizabeth’s pregnancy. The historical records are only concerned with Seymour’s early morning visits to Elizabeth’s bedchamber but none of them mentions sexual intercourse between the two.¹⁶¹ Alison Weir writes in her Author’s note, “I firmly believe that Elizabeth I was the Virgin Queen she claimed to be, since the historical evidence would appear to support that.”¹⁶² She then continues with further explanation:

There were rumours and there were legends, and upon them I have based the highly controversial aspect of this novel, Elizabeth’s pregnancy. I am not, as a historian, saying it could have happened; but as a novelist, I enjoy the heady freedom to ask: what if it had?¹⁶³

As far as the non-fiction *The Life of Elizabeth I* is concerned, no influence is visible contrary to Weir’s fictions considering no sexual content appears in the book; it only deals

¹⁵⁷ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 218.

¹⁵⁸ Hilary Jane Locke, “Go too far on Tudor-speak, all hey-nonny-nonny, [and] you’ll alienate your readers”: Alison Weir, and Historical Fiction, and the Representation of Tudor,” *Parergon* 37, no. 2 (2020): 156.

¹⁵⁹ Alison Weir, *Innocent Traitor* (London: Arrow Books, 2006), 276.

¹⁶⁰ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 226.

¹⁶¹ Larissa J. Taylor-Smith, “Elizabeth I: Psychological Profile,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 57.

¹⁶² Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 485.

¹⁶³ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 485.

with the fact that Elizabeth was interested in sex in historical records and as Weir states, Elizabeth “demonstrated a vicarious pleasure in talking about it.”¹⁶⁴ According to Elizabeth’s psychological profile constructed by Larissa J. Taylor-Smith in 1984, Elizabeth’s sexuality was interconnected with her masculine identification; this identification was a result of her relationship with Henry VIII, her father. Elizabeth followed in her father’s footsteps, especially in his understanding of religion and sovereignty.¹⁶⁵ Alison Weir depicts a real correspondence between Philip of Spain and de Feira in her *The Life of Elizabeth I* – “Her Majesty seems to be incomparably more feared than her sister, and give her orders and has her way as absolutely as her father did.”¹⁶⁶

Elizabeth’s presumable aversion to any intercourse is represented in the psychological profile by Larissa J. Taylor-Smith as well as in both books by Alison Weir – in *The Life of Elizabeth I* with regard to Sir John Harrington, Elizabeth’s Godson, “Elizabeth might have confided to Harrington the fact she had mental aversion to sex – although this is by no means certain – but he was purely speculating as to the physical condition.”¹⁶⁷ In the fiction *The Lady Elizabeth*, Weir describes Elizabeth opinion on sex after she had experienced it with the admiral:

Were women meant to enjoy such intercourse? How could they, when it was both undignified and messy, and had left her feeling strangely unsatisfied and completely unmoved? In short, she felt used – used to gratify a man’s illicit lust.¹⁶⁸

Even though Alison Weir seems to have become carried away with modern elements of fiction about the Tudors, she makes it clear in her non-fiction that Elizabeth I certainly did not classify sex as her passion. Weir herself acknowledges that there is no historical basis to confirm any sexual affairs in Elizabeth’s life. Throughout the centuries there has been a lot of gossip, but little historical evidence has been published.

¹⁶⁴ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 49.

¹⁶⁵ Larissa J. Taylor-Smith, “Elizabeth I: Psychological Profile,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 54, 62.

¹⁶⁶ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 30.

¹⁶⁷ Alison Weir, *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 49.

¹⁶⁸ Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), 227.

CONCLUSION

The aim of background of this bachelor's thesis is to analyse the clash of two contradictory religions in sixteenth-century England, Catholicism and Protestantism, and how it affected Elizabeth I. It was essential to primarily characterise the reformation in Europe started by John Hus of Bohemia in the fifteenth century and then the continuation by the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther King, and his 95 theses of 1517. The Protestant Reformation in England was a complex process. From the beginning, the motives were rather political than religious – Henry VIII intended to break from the supremacy of Rome and the Pope. In 1534 was Henry VIII declared Supreme Head of the Church of England. On the grounds of this act, England officially rejected the papal supremacy. Moreover, the document undeniably connected to faith and to the English literature and language itself was the Bible – in the thesis, the description of the most prolific translations and historical events related to the Bible are presented.

The two most important historical figures in this thesis are Mary Tudor and Elizabeth Tudor, the two royal sisters. Catholic Mary I strongly disagreed with actions of her father, Henry VIII, and during her reign Protestantism and its adherents were not well understood. Even her marriage to the Spanish Philip II did not add to her popularity, she was easily influenced by his opinions, and at his instigation began the mass punishment of Protestants. During her reign, between 1553 and 1558, there were many uprisings, among the most famous we include Lady Jane Grey's declaration as Queen of England and also Sir Thomas Wyatt's rebellion. All these uprisings were based on religion - Lady Jane Grey was a Protestant and after the death of Edward VI she was the most suitable choice for the government of the time.

Elizabeth I is one of the main topics in this bachelor thesis, she was and still is considered one of the most important – if not *the* most important – monarchs of England. She was primarily known for her status as “Virgin Queen,” as she never married and never gave birth to a child. During her reign of 1558–1603, religious disputes were calmed down as Elizabeth tried to accommodate all her citizens. Knowing that nothing was more important than the trust of the subjects in their sovereign, she decided to “marry” England and its people. The Elizabethan era is also considered to be a time of heyday, whether we take into account education, literature or theatre. Some of the greatest literary figures of all time were writing in this age: Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe.

The analysis is preceded by a section containing basic information about Alison Weir and her literary activities. As for her works, which began with non-fiction on the Tudors in the 1980s, Weir devoted attention to historical accuracy, for which she became well-known among academic historians. Weir has chosen not to discuss her own religious beliefs, but in her youth she attended a school that was characterized by Anglican elements. For example, the students annually visited St Giles's Church, which is associated with the name of John Foxe, from whose works Weir draws information in her book *The Life of Elizabeth I*.

The analysis itself begins with disputes between Mary and Elizabeth, which have a religious basis. At the beginning of Mary I's reign, Sir Thomas Wyatt's rebellion took place in 1554, with Elizabeth said to be one of the accomplices. It was believed that Elizabeth wanted to get to the throne at any cost. However, after a brief imprisonment, Elizabeth was acquitted and stripped of all charges for lack of evidence. Alison Weir's fiction *The Lady Elizabeth* details Elizabeth's anguish associated with this period, such as the one occasion when Elizabeth was denied reading the Bible because this was considered dangerous in those times. Later during Mary's reign, Elizabeth had to pretend to convert to Catholicism, but this was soon revealed by Mary's advisers. Many Protestants were burned at the stake during Mary's reign, and after Elizabeth I ascended the throne in 1558, her older sister came to be called "Bloody Mary" or "Tyrant." The sisters' relationship was full of tension, distrust, and rivalry. Mary I was not as confident compared to her younger sister. Mary desired a marriage and kids with Philip of Spain but unfortunately her wishes did not come true; she had many miscarriages and died alone and sad because her husband spent most of his time in Spain. As described in Weir's biography *The Life of Elizabeth I*, all these events associated with Mary Tudor formed the basis of Elizabeth's reign. Elizabeth firmly believed that it was God who helped her to the throne. She also did everything in her power to identify with her citizens — something her older sister Mary had never mastered.

Concerning Elizabeth's passion, the analysis deals primarily with theatre and William Shakespeare, whom Alison Weir mentions in *The Life of Elizabeth I*. With regard to this non-fiction, the thesis analyses a situation when Elizabeth demands Shakespeare to write a new play in which the character of Falstaff falls in love. As historians argue about the origin of this story, it is sure that Shakespeare wrote the play *The Merry Wives of Windsor* for Elizabeth I, and in a couple of days; the play consists of many elements close to the

Queen. For instance, it depicts her favourite form of entertainment, the pageants, and also her castle Windsor. This period gave rise to the theatre Globe which was built by Shakespeare and his Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1599. London became the centre of theatres, and the Puritans were a stumbling block because they tried to close most of London's theatres. Nonetheless, Elizabeth I was sharply opposed to this; she founded her own company, The Queen's Men, and thus there was a heyday for drama and theatre in Elizabethan times.

Elizabeth's second passion was literature, and there is no doubt that she had very broad educational options because she had access to the best scholars of the time. Not only was she a lover of literature, she herself became a model for some works. Alison Weir mentions one author in particular: Edmund Spenser. That is a name tightly connected to sixteenth-century literature, mainly thanks to his *The Faerie Queene*. One of the most important features in this epic poem was the idea of marriage, and no other Elizabethan authors shared such a strong interest in this topic. It is evident that this pointed to Elizabeth and the theme of her wedding, considering the work was dedicated to her, to the "fairy queen." In addition, the theme of marriage was delicate to Elizabeth, as throughout her reign she was empowered by the position of the Virgin Queen and she refused to marry. Alison Weir names one chapter in the book *The Life of Elizabeth I* "Gloriana" – the character of *The Faerie Queene* who represents Elizabeth I.

Both in the works of the Spenser and in the works of Alison Weir we can find erotic elements. In Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, the topic of erotization has been analysed in connection to the character of Serena, through whose body Spenser created sexual tension. The sexual elements were frequent in Elizabethan literature and could have been spotted in most works. Alison Weir includes titillating scenes in two of the analysed books in this thesis, *Innocent Traitor* and *The Lady Elizabeth*. In both Weir's fictions, one can see the impact of her beginnings in creating fictional stories. She let her imagination prevail and, as Weir herself states in the last part of *The Lady Elizabeth*, some situations she completely invented. Alison Weir's novel thus contains elements of post-modernism through her deliberate manipulation of fact and fiction.

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