

DRAMA, POLITICS AND NEWS IN THE EARL OF SUSSEX'S
ENTERTAINMENT OF ELIZABETH I AT NEW HALL, 1579*

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In September 1579, at the height of an intense political debate over her prospective marriage to the duke of Anjou, Elizabeth I visited New Hall, the country seat of the match's greatest supporter within England, Thomas Radcliffe, third earl of Sussex. Her entertainment on that occasion, hitherto completely unknown, was described in a letter, printed here, from one Norfolk gentleman, Sir Edward Clere, to another, Bassingbourne Gawdy. The letter describes the dramatic performances and other entertainments provided for the queen, which included coded but unmistakable encouragements for her to proceed with the marriage. This article discusses the ways in which this was done and their consequences for our knowledge of the Anjou marriage debate as a political episode, suggesting that Sussex sought to use the entertainment to boost the participation of more conservative members of the nobility in government. It also explores how this evidence affects our picture of Elizabethan courtly entertainments, and particularly their non-dramatic elements. Finally, it discusses Clere's letter itself as an insight into the nature of gentry news culture, particularly with regard to matters of high politics.

For several years in the 1570s and early 1580s, Queen Elizabeth I seriously considered the possibility of a marriage with Francis, duke of Alençon and Anjou (1555-84), son of Henry II of France and brother of Francis II, Charles IX and Henry III. This was both the longest running of Elizabeth's foreign marriage prospects, and also one of the most intense and hard-fought policy debates of the reign, within the privy council, the court and indeed the nation at large.¹

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For the Protestants in the regime, a Catholic consort could lead to significant change in both the policy and personnel of government: perhaps toleration for Catholics, perhaps changes to the religious settlement, and certainly significant implications for foreign policy. There was real scope for reshaping the direction of the regime, even twenty years into the queen's reign; in Collinson's words, this might have been 'a real palace revolution, the infusion of new and hostile blood into the Council'.²

Historians, too, have used the debate as a central exhibit in examining the structures of power and influence within the regime: how far did Elizabeth maintain control over the debate? How far was she free to determine policy over a topic that was simultaneously deeply intimate and personal to her, and freighted with intense political significance for the whole nation? To what extent was her freedom of action constrained by her counsellors, or the opinions of an emergent 'public sphere'? In interpreting this debate, historians have considered the role of virtually the full range of late sixteenth-century political communication, as we shall see.

The document printed here provides an account of a reception and entertainment for Queen Elizabeth laid on by Thomas Radcliffe, 3rd earl of Sussex, at New Hall, his country seat near Chelmsford in Essex in September 1579, at the height of the debate over the marriage. This entertainment appears to be otherwise completely unknown.³ It provides one of the clearest

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¹ For accounts of the Anjou episode, see Susan Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony: the courtships of Elizabeth I* (London, 1996), pp. 154-94; Conyers Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham and the policy of Queen Elizabeth* (3 vols., Oxford, 1925), II, pp. 1-117; idem, *Lord Burghley and Queen Elizabeth* (London, 1960); W. T. MacCaffrey, 'The Anjou match and the making of Elizabethan foreign policy', in Peter Clark, Alan G. R. Smith and Nicholas Tyacke, eds., *The English commonwealth 1547-1640: essays presented to Professor Joel Hurstfield* (Leicester, 1979), pp. 59-75; idem, *Queen Elizabeth and the making of policy, 1572-1588* (Princeton NJ, 1987), ch. 11; Mack P. Holt, *The Duke of Anjou and the politique struggle during the Wars of Religion* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 109-25; for a very full account of the political worldview of the forward Protestants with regard to the match, see Blair Worden, *The sound of virtue: Philip Sidney's Arcadia and Elizabethan politics* (New Haven and London, 1996).

² Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan puritan movement* (Oxford, 1967), p. 200.

³ The visit to New Hall is very briefly noted in E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan stage* (4 vols., Oxford, 1923), IV, p. 96, and Susan Doran, 'The finances of an Elizabethan nobleman and royal servant: a case study of Thomas Radcliffe, 3rd earl of Sussex', *Historical Research* 61 (1988), p. 294 n. 53. The Spanish ambassador noted on 25 September 1579 that Sussex had 'grandly entertained' the queen and the French ambassadors: Martin A. S. Hume, ed., *Calendar of letters and state papers relating to English affairs preserved principally in the archives of Simancas* (4 vols., London, 1892-9) (hereafter *CSP Spanish*) II, p. 700.

examples yet found of the political use of drama in royal entertainments; the political context of this entertainment, combined with the fragments of information we have about the participants (and the absentees), gives a remarkably vivid sense of how court festivals and hospitality could be used for deeply sensitive political ends.

The document takes the form of a personal letter from Sir Edward Clere (1536-1606) of Blickling to Bassingbourne Gawdy (d. 1590) of West Harling, two wealthy and prominent members of the Norfolk gentry elite. Clere was probably the wealthiest gentleman in Norfolk and very well-connected: he was a second cousin of the queen through the Boleyns and part of the great clientage network of the 4th duke of Norfolk, executed in 1572. He was primarily a ‘country’ figure, an active local governor who served twice as sheriff and later as deputy lieutenant. He also kept close relations with London, however; he owned a house in Holborn and had some standing at court, being one of very few county gentry to regularly exchange New Year’s gifts with the queen. In 1578, he was knighted at Norwich and a few days later entertained the queen and court at his house at Thetford.⁴ The recipient, Bassingbourne Gawdy, was another leading Norfolk gentlemen and county official; in 1579 he was serving as sheriff of the county. As a young man, however, he had been a courtier, and he maintained links with the court, not least through his son Philip’s newsletters.⁵ Hassell Smith placed Clere and Gawdy on opposite sides of the factional divide which, he argued, split Elizabethan Norfolk, with Gawdy identified with the godly ‘country’ group and Clere with the more conservative ‘court’ party. This letter, however, clearly demonstrates cordial personal relations as well as collaboration in local affairs, and there is other evidence of their friendship.⁶

⁴ P. W. Hasler, ed., *The history of Parliament: the House of Commons 1558-1603* (3 vols. London, 1981), I, pp. 612-13; A. Hassell Smith, *County and court: government and politics in Norfolk, 1558-1603* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 160-3. On the visit to Thetford, see John Nichols, ed., *The progresses and public processions of Queen Elizabeth* (3 vols., London, 1823), II, 214; Zillah Dovey, *An Elizabethan progress: the queen’s journey into East Anglia, 1578* (Stroud, 1996), p. 102. On the house in Holborn, see Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Report on the manuscripts of the family of Gawdy* (London, 1885) (hereafter *HMC Gawdy*), pp. 12, 13. On the New Years Gifts, see Nichols, *Progresses*, I, p. 381 (1574); II, pp. 77, 88 (1578), pp. 258, 269 (1579); III, pp. 10, 19 (1589), 454, 463 (1600).

⁵ Hasler, *Commons*, II, p. 176; I. H. Jeayes, ed., *Letters of Philip Gawdy of West Harling, Norfolk, and of London to various members of his family 1579-1616* (Roxburghe Club, London, 1906). *HMC Gawdy*, p. 14.

⁶ Smith, *County and court*, ch. 8; their friendship: *ib.*, pp. 160-1; *HMC Gawdy*, pp. 12-13.

Clere's letter describes events he witnessed over two days while the court was at New Hall. In September 1579, Elizabeth made a short, late progress into Essex; although the evidence does not allow of complete certainty, the visit to New Hall probably took place on 17 and 18 September, with Clere's letter written a few days later on 22 September.⁷

I

Before turning to these events, some political background is called for. The question of Elizabeth's marriage had of course been prominent from the very beginning of her reign, and throughout the intervening two decades. The duke of Anjou (formerly known as duke of Alençon) had certainly been one of the more plausible candidates, and the prospect of a marriage had been on the table since mid-1572, without being pursued very actively; Elizabeth, in Susan Doran's words, 'used matrimony simply as a diplomatic tool' in this period.⁸ Negotiations resumed more seriously in May 1578, mainly owing to the demands of foreign policy, specifically the English desire to support the Dutch rebels in their war for independence against Philip II of Spain, whilst avoiding open warfare. As an ambitious free agent, Anjou had already intervened on behalf of the Dutch, and perhaps hoped ultimately to win a throne for himself. If he succeeded, the outcome could be a Catholic-dominated regime in the Netherlands, or even a French acquisition of some or all of the territory; either would be problematic for England. The marriage, therefore, could be used to maintain English influence over Anjou, even to use him as

⁷ Mary Hill Cole, *The portable queen: Elizabeth I and the politics of ceremony* (Amherst MA, 1999), pp. 192, 222; a number of documents are dated from the house on 17 or 18 September: HMC, *Calendar of the manuscripts of the Marquis of Salisbury* (24 vols., London, 1883-1976), II, p. 267; J. R. Dasent, ed., *Acts of the privy council of England* n.s. (32 vols., London, 1890-1907), XI, p. 268; The National Archives SP 46/31, fo. 300). Some confusion surrounds the 1579 progress. Nichols gives a detailed itinerary for a progress through Essex beginning on either 16 July or 5 August (both dates are given); this clearly represents plans which were abandoned, presumably because of Anjou's visit to court in August. Nichols, *Progresses*, II, pp. 285-7. The queen was at Greenwich throughout July, aside from a short excursion to Wanstead, and left on progress on 9 September: see Cole, *Portable queen*, p. 192; the council's records (APC XI, pp. 197-260), Mendoza's despatches (*CSP Spanish* II, pp. 682-97) etc.

⁸ Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony*, pp. 130-53.

an agent of English policy, allowing Elizabeth to avoid war and maintain equilibrium in north-western Europe.⁹

However, although the resumption of negotiations for the marriage may have been a matter of political pragmatism, Elizabeth unexpectedly became genuinely enthusiastic and optimistic about it, so unlike previous marriage projects, when the initiative had been taken either by prospective husbands or by the queen's councillors, this time Elizabeth herself drove forward the project. Her enthusiasm was encouraged by the arrival in England of Anjou's representative Jean de Simier in January 1579 and in March she directed her council to begin considering the matter in detail. This entailed both negotiations with Simier over the terms of the marriage, and also consideration among the councillors about whether the project was in itself advisable or politically feasible; these discussions continued over the spring and summer.¹⁰ In August, Anjou visited court at Greenwich, theoretically in secret, thus satisfying Elizabeth's longstanding insistence on meeting Anjou before making a final decision.¹¹

These developments initiated a widespread debate over the merits and the consequences of the marriage. The match offered a potential future for the dynasty and a final settlement of the uncertainty about the succession, a problem complicated by Mary, Queen of Scots's presence in England. Equally importantly for many, it offered the hope of allying with France against the other great Catholic power of western Europe, Habsburg Spain; it could give England a much stronger hand in preventing the Spanish from re-conquering their Dutch rebels, who were seen as ideological allies of England.

A key problem, however, was religion, since Anjou was unwilling to abandon his Catholicism. On both sides of the confessional divide, it was thought that a Catholic consort would act as a focus for English Catholics both at court and in the country, and would make *de*

⁹ See MacCaffrey, *Making of policy*, esp. pp. 252-3; on Anjou's activities, see Holt, *The duke of Anjou*.

¹⁰ Read, *Walsingham*, II, p. 13; Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony*, pp. 157-8.

¹¹ Read, *Walsingham*, II, pp. 13, 19-20. This visit probably accounts for the progress occurring so late in the summer. Although intended to be secret, the visit is mentioned in the proclamation of 27 September: P. L. Hughes and J. F. Larkin, eds., *Tudor royal proclamations, volume II. The later Tudors (1553-1587)* (New Haven and London, 1969), pp. 445-9, at p. 447.

facto toleration almost inevitable, blowing open the still-fragile English religious settlement.¹²

Francis Walsingham feared that the controversy would lead people to be ‘carried into some doubt of change and alteration of religion’; Burghley’s fear of a Catholic resurgence is evident in his repeated reminders to Elizabeth about the need to keep down the Catholics down; whilst Robert Persons later wrote that ‘at this time great hopes were entertained by Catholics in England of some improvement or mitigation in matters of religion ... it was inferred that the duke, being a Catholic prince, could not do less than either cause a change of religion or procure some toleration for Catholics’.¹³ This was potentially a great turning point.

All this being so, the question split the regime (not least given the effect the marriage might have on the careers of various leading figures). The forward Protestants prioritised the religious purity of the regime, preferred Protestant internationalism to alliance with Catholic France, and thus opposed the marriage; among their leaders, Leicester had not long before abandoned his hopes of marrying Elizabeth himself, and Walsingham was deeply concerned about the religious consequences. Those more concerned about national security, above all Sussex, supported the match in spite of the domestic religious consequences; many of the leaders of this group were relatively conservative councillors who hoped for an improvement in their political fortunes. Lord Burghley’s position was ambiguous, and has been contested by historians. Publically, he was in favour of the match, and historians such as Blair Worden and Susan Doran see him as a strong supporter.¹⁴ Others are more sceptical, however: Simon Adams argues that Burghley’s support was unenthusiastic, and Stephen Alford states that he was ‘not convinced’. Natalie Mears points out that Burghley’s support was dependent on a satisfactory religious compromise,

¹² See Sir Walter Mildmay’s comments on this point: William Murdin, ed., *A collection of state papers relating to affairs in the reign of Queen Elizabeth from the year 1571 to 1596* (London, 1759), p. 332.

¹³ Harris Nicolas, ed., *Memoirs of the life and times of Sir Christopher Hatton* (London, 1847), pp. 200-1; Murdin, *State papers*, pp. 325-6, 331; J. H. Pollen, SJ, ed., ‘Father Persons’ Memoirs (*Concluded*)’, *Miscellanea IV* (Catholic Record Society publications, 4, London, 1907), p. 23.

¹⁴ Worden, *Sound of virtue*, pp. 97-8, 108-9; Susan Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony*, pp. 157, 172-3. On his support, see e.g. *CSP Spanish II*, p. 702; also his son Thomas Cecil’s support, which one would expect to echo his father’s views: below, n. 24.

which in Peter Lake's view was unlikely to be achieved.¹⁵ Nevertheless, there is no evidence of Burghley actively opposing the match, and given that other senior councillors did just that, it is difficult to see why Burghley could not have done so too, if this was his view. Burghley also had a clear record of support for comparable plans, such as the Archduke Charles match of the 1560s and earlier plans for marriage to a French prince.¹⁶ Whatever the truth, it is clear that in 1579, the debate was very much ongoing, and the outcome was far from certain.

At the point in question, September 1579, Anjou himself had not long left England after his visit, leaving his agent Simier at court.¹⁷ The visit had been a great success, and the marriage looked perhaps more likely than at any other point. The issue of religion remained to be settled, however, and some form of toleration of Catholicism had not been ruled out.¹⁸ Elizabeth was also very reluctant to proceed without the support of her councillors. The drift of opinion within the council was not favourable; just a few days after this letter was written, between 2 and 7 October, the council debated the matter in a series of sessions, and declared their views to the queen. Only four offered their support: Sussex, Burghley, the secretary of state Sir Thomas Wilson, and Lord Hunsdon – news Elizabeth received 'not without shedding of many tears'.¹⁹ The final decision was Elizabeth's, of course, but it may be that at the end of September, Sussex realised what the council was likely to conclude, and seized what appeared to be a rapidly closing window of opportunity to impress his views on the queen.

If opinion within the regime was split, the prospect of a Catholic consort was of interest to wider groups too, raising as it did the prospect of a significant shift in the direction of the regime. Many of the political elite, both at court and in the country, would welcome a Catholic

¹⁵ Adams, *Leicester and the court*, p. 6; Stephen Alford, *Burghley: William Cecil at the court of Elizabeth I* (New Haven CT and London, 2008), pp. 234-5; Natalie Mears, 'Counsel, public debate, and queenship: John Stubb's *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf*, 1579', *Historical Journal* 44 (2001), pp. 629-50, at p. 636; Peter Lake, 'The politics of "popularity" and the public sphere: the "monarchical republic" of Elizabeth I defends itself' in Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, eds., *The politics of the public sphere in early modern England* (Manchester, 2007), pp. 59-94, at pp. 74-5.

¹⁶ Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony*, pp. 74, 80-2, 87-8, 91, 95, 98.

¹⁷ Simier returned to France in November. Read, *Walsingham*, II, p. 27.

¹⁸ Elizabeth told Anjou in January 1580 that she could not grant toleration: Read, *Walsingham*, II, pp. 28-9; Simon Adams, 'Dudley, Robert, earl of Leicester (1532/3-1588)', *ODNB*.

¹⁹ Read, *Walsingham*, II, p. 21; Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony*, pp. 172-3; Simon Adams, Alan Bryson and Mitchell Leimon, 'Walsingham, Sir Francis (c.1532-1590)', *ODNB*. HMC *Salisbury*, II, pp. 272-3.

figurehead and protector, and many argued that such a prospect would reconcile the queen with loyal Catholic subjects who at present were alienated by her Protestant councillors. Catholics at court, such as the earl of Oxford, were doing whatever they could to further the match. Some years later, it was claimed that Lord Henry Howard, brother of the executed duke of Norfolk and by this stage a secret Catholic, had ‘advised Cymiers [Simier] to procede by the papists to establysh his master here, & to purge Religion by the blood of sondry of our grettest howses in England, & that he sholld stand stowttlye to have the artycle of fredom for Religyon grawnted, for that her majestie he sayd, was nott resollved of what Religyon yett to be of.’²⁰ The uncertainty and tension at court led to ugly incidents between supporters and opponents of the marriage, notably a blazing row on the tennis court between Oxford and Philip Sidney in August, and another between Sussex and Leicester’s ally Lord North the previous November.²¹

The matter was debated in the country at large too. William Camden wrote (much later) that ‘most men presaged that it would be the overthrow of [Protestant] religion’.²² Catholics were optimistic; Leicester sourly noted from Warwickshire in October that ‘since Q marys tyme the papistes werr never in that jollytye they ar at this present in this countrey’.²³ The apparent momentum in favour of the match may have helped to prompt the first Jesuit mission to England, that of Edmund Campion and Robert Parsons.²⁴ The issue was aired in a wide range of forums and media.²⁵ Alongside private counsel by ministers and counsellors, Elizabeth was

²⁰ John Bossy, ‘English Catholics and the French marriage, 1577-1581’, *Recusant History*, 5 (1959), pp. 2-16; BL Lansdowne 39, fos. 189r-92v (William Herle to Lord Burghley, 15 November 1583); Herle, an enthusiastic Protestant partisan, is not wholly reliable, but this is a plausible statement.

²¹ See D. C. Peck, ed., *Leicester’s commonwealth. The copy of a letter written by a Master of Art of Cambridge (1584) and related documents* (Athens, OH, 1985), p. 18; HMC *Salisbury* II, p. 224; E. Lodge, ed., *Illustrations of British history, biography, and manners, in the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, and James I* (London, 1791), II, pp. 197-9 (Sussex to Burghley, 4 and 5 November 1578).

²² Quoted in MacCaffrey, ‘Anjou match’, p. 65.

²³ BL Harleian MS 6992, fo. 112r (Leicester to Burghley, 20 October 1579).

²⁴ Thomas M. McCoog, ‘The English Jesuit mission and the French match, 1579-1581’, *Catholic Historical Review* 87 (April 2001), pp. 185-213; Lake, ‘Politics of “popularity”’, pp. 83-6.

²⁵ For discussions of counsel in this context, see Natalie Mears, ‘Love-making and diplomacy: Elizabeth I and the Anjou marriage negotiations, c. 1578-1582’, *History* (2001), pp. 442-66; Mears, ‘Counsel, public debate, and queenship’; Patrick Collinson, ‘Pulling the strings: religion and politics in the progress of 1578’ in Jayne Elisabeth Archer, Elizabeth Goldring and Sarah Knight, eds., *The progresses, pageants and entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 122-41. For the debate as an instance of the ‘public sphere’, see Lake, ‘The politics of popularity’.

offered written advice by members of the wider political community, including Philip Sidney, Richard Cox, bishop of Ely, and Sir Thomas Cecil.²⁶ There were hostile sermons, both at court and in the country.²⁷ The marriage was commented on by letter-writers²⁸ and in libels and ballads.²⁹ Spenser's *Shepheardes Calendar* (published in December 1579) makes heavy reference to the issue.³⁰ Most notoriously, it stirred up a Protestant backlash in the shape of a scandalously frank piece of anti-Anjou advice to the queen, John Stubbs's *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf whereinto England is like to be Swallowed by another French Marriage*, the publication of which may well have been encouraged by anti-Anjou members of the regime. This emerged in early August 1579, and at New Hall the political world was still reeling from the controversy; Elizabeth was furious. The book was banned by a royal proclamation issued five days after Clere's letter was written.³¹

II

The autumn of 1579, therefore, saw the debate at its height, with a good deal of momentum in favour of the match but heavyweight opposition also building. This brings us to events at New Hall. New Hall, also known as the Palace of Beaulieu, had belonged to both Henry VIII and the Boleyns before being granted to the earl of Sussex in 1573. It could thus be seen as having a

²⁶ Katherine Duncan-Jones & Jan van Dorsten, eds., *Miscellaneous prose of Sir Philip Sidney* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 46-57; Worden, *Sound of virtue*, passim; Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony*, p. 160; Murdin, *A collection of state papers*, pp. 338-42.

²⁷ MacCaffrey, 'Anjou match', p. 64; MacCaffrey, *Making of policy*, p. 255; *CSP Spanish II*, pp. 658-9; Lodge, *Illustrations*, II, pp. 212-13; Peter McCullough, *Sermons at court: politics and religion in Elizabethan and Jacobean preaching* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 67-8; on attempts to repress them, see Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony*, p. 160; Nicolas, *Memoirs of Hatton*, pp. 200-1, which is misdated to 1581. On public comment on the marriage, see W. J. Sheils, *The puritans in the diocese of Peterborough 1558-1610* (Northamptonshire Record Society, 30, 1979), p. 123.

²⁸ E.g. letters from Gilbert Talbot and others to the earl of Shrewsbury: Lodge, *Illustrations*, II, pp. 205, 212, 217-18, 221-3.

²⁹ MacCaffrey, 'Anjou match', p. 64; Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony*, pp. 164, 168-9; for an example, see F. J. Furnivall and W. R. Morfill, eds., *Ballads from manuscripts, II* (Hertford: Ballad Society, 1873), p. 114.

³⁰ MacCaffrey, *Making of policy*, pp. 264-5.

³¹ John Stubbs, *The discoverie of a gaping gulf whereinto England is like to be swallowed by another French marriage, if the Lord forbid not the banes, by letting her Maiestie see the sin and punishment thereof*, STC (2nd edn) 23400 (London, 1579); Lloyd E. Berry, ed., *John Stubbs's Gaping gulf with letters and other relevant documents* (Charlottesville VA, 1968); MacCaffrey, *Making of policy*, pp. 255-61; Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony*, pp. 164-6. For the case that Stubbs was acting on his own initiative, see Mears, 'Counsel, public debate and queenship'; for the case that councillors were involved, see Lake, 'Politics of "popularity"', pp. 74-6. On the proclamation, see Hughes and Larkin, *Tudor royal proclamations II*, pp. 445-9; also Berry, *Gaping gulf*, pp. 147-52. On the council's efforts to suppress it, see MacCaffrey, 'Anjou Match', pp. 64-5.

symbolic association with fruitful royal marriage and the continuation of the Tudor line, although whether Sussex was trying to invoke this is unclear, since New Hall was his principal country house and thus the obvious location for an entertainment such as this anyway. Sussex, a privy councillor since 1570, was a senior, trusted member of the government, and undoubtedly the most vocal advocate of the queen's marriage. During the 1560s he had been central to discussions over a marriage with an Austrian Habsburg archduke.³² Throughout the 1570s he was the leading proponent of the Anjou match, writing an important statement of the arguments in its favour in a letter to the queen of 28 August 1578.³³ Less determinedly Protestant than many of her councillors, he did not see a potential husband's Catholicism as an insuperable obstacle.³⁴ Indeed, earlier in September, Anjou had himself written to Sussex, expressing his attachment to the queen.³⁵

Sussex is remembered primarily as a military and political figure, but he had a genuine interest in drama: he maintained a company of players, 'one of the most long-lived of the theatrical organizations of Elizabeth's time', which regularly performed at court, and as Lord Chamberlain he took an active part in organising court revels.³⁶ He also commissioned drama: in 1566, his sister's wedding at his Bermondsey house featured a masque-oration which 'celebrated in verse the superiority of marriage over chastity', written by Thomas Pound, a relative of Sussex.³⁷ Since Elizabeth was present, this has been interpreted as a piece of counsel to her,

³² Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony*, ch. 4.

³³ HMC *Salisbury* II, p. 195; Lodge, *Illustrations* II, pp. 177-86; see also Hatton's copy: Nicolas, *Memoirs of Hatton*, pp. 81-9; Mildmay's notes from it: J. Payne Collier, ed., *The Egerton papers. A collection of public and private documents, chiefly illustrative of the times of Elizabeth and James I* (Camden Society old ser., 12, 1840), pp. 74-8.

³⁴ Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony*, pp. 78-98, esp. 82, 90-1

³⁵ BL, Cotton MS Titus B VII, fo. 360 (Anjou to Sussex, 13 September 1579).

³⁶ Chambers, *Elizabethan stage*, II, pp. 92-6. Susan Doran, 'The political career of Thomas Radcliffe, 3rd earl of Sussex (1526?-1583)' (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, London, 1977), pp. 321-2, 400.

³⁷ Susan Doran, 'Juno versus Diana: The treatment of Elizabeth I's marriage in plays and entertainments, 1561-1581', *Historical Journal* 38 (1995), pp. 257-274, at p. 264 (quotation). Pound's niece married Sussex's brother Henry Radcliffe, later 4th earl of Sussex. Pound might thus have written the New Hall entertainment, but there are reasons to think not: in a 1580 letter to Hatton he referred to his authorship only of Kenilworth entertainments, which Chambers surmises to be those of 1568, since after 1570 Pound was imprisoned as a recusant: Chambers, *Elizabethan stage*, III, pp. 468-9; Michael Pincombe, 'Two Elizabethan masque-orations by Thomas Pound', *Bodleian Library Record* 12 (Oct 1987), pp. 349-80. In any case, the actual author of entertainment texts was usually less significant than his patron: Gabriel Heaton, *Writing and reading royal entertainments from George Gascoigne to Ben Jonson* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 33-4, 96-7.

which, like the New Hall entertainment, ‘coerces Elizabeth with superior “Olympian” authority’.³⁸

The 1579 entertainment echoed this theme. According to Clere’s description, Elizabeth was greeted on her arrival at New Hall by her host and other noblemen (a point to which we shall return). The queen was escorted through the normal processional route of sixteenth-century palaces, though the courtyard,³⁹ the great hall and successive chambers of the state apartments, accompanied by music throughout.

The central part of the entertainment, however, took place early on, ‘at the cumming towards the hall’, presumably in the courtyard, where a stage had been erected. Clere’s account appears not to follow a clear chronological order here, and his description is ambiguous in several places, making it difficult to offer a clear interpretation of the drama. The apparently very straightforward plot suggests that it was relatively short, which was no doubt appropriate for an audience weary from travelling.

Elizabeth was greeted by sound effects representing a great thunderstorm, whereupon Jupiter appeared to explain the disturbances in the heavens, which were caused by the arrival of the queen, a person who was godlike or almost godlike herself. He therefore consulted with his fellow gods as to whether they should accept her into the divine realm or not, but it was eventually decided that the queen should remain ‘in earth’. Although Clere does not make it entirely clear how (being less interested in the drama as literature or spectacle than in its political import), this was steered round to encouraging the queen to ‘admitte sicke a matrimoniall conviction as were meete’ – that is, marry.

The drama seems very much to fit into what was by then a well-established tradition of Elizabethan entertainment performances, often dealing with the topic of marriage (and implicitly the royal succession) in one way or another. Such entertainments had been mounted from very

³⁸ Marie Axton, *The queen’s two bodies: drama and the Elizabethan succession* (London, 1977), p. 1.

³⁹ Puzzlingly, Clere describes ‘the Utter court [and] the Inner court’, yet New Hall had only one court (leaving aside service yards etc). Clere may have misremembered or misunderstood what was described to him by others, or the ‘Utter court’ may be intended to mean ‘outside the court’, i.e. outside the front gatehouse.

early in the reign, to support the desirability of marriage in general as well as promote particular claims, such as those of Robert Dudley (most famously *Gorboduc*) or of a Habsburg archduke. One 1565 entertainment paralleled New Hall by depicting (according to the Spanish ambassador) ‘the question of marriage, discussed between Juno and Diana, Juno advocating marriage and Diana chastity. Jupiter gave a verdict in favour of matrimony’.⁴⁰ The earl of Leicester famously put on entertainments at Kenilworth and Woodstock in 1575, asking first for the queen’s hand and then for his freedom to go overseas and fight.⁴¹

By the end of the 1570s, however, a change in tone is discernible; matrimony was downplayed and celebrations of virginity and the Virgin Queen emerged. This can be seen in, for example, the ‘sieve’ portraits of the queen, in entertainments such as those authored by Thomas Churchyard for the queen’s reception at Norwich in 1578, and in literature such as Spenser’s *Shepherd’s Calendar*. Historians increasingly argue that this shift should be seen less as a long-term programme to create a virginal identity as a reaction to short-term political contingencies, such as Elizabeth’s increasing age, and Protestant responses to the Anjou match itself.⁴² The New Hall entertainment, whilst clearly favouring marriage, also commends purity and virginity, suggesting that the image of Elizabeth as virgin may have become too powerful to ignore.

In many ways, New Hall took an unproblematic line, straightforwardly advocating the benefits of marriage. It might even be interpreted as an attempt to puncture the depictions of Elizabeth as a goddess, reminding her that in spite of her near-divinity she was a mortal and a woman, and could, even should, marry. So far as we can tell, it did not engage with the foreign affairs issues which had initially prompted the marriage or the domestic political implications; in

⁴⁰ On *Gorboduc*, see: Doran, ‘Juno versus Diana’, pp. 260-3; Henry James and Greg Walker, ‘The politics of *Gorboduc*’, *English Historical Review*, 110 (Feb., 1995), pp. 109-121; Norman Jones and Paul Whitfield White, ‘*Gorboduc* and royal marriage politics: an Elizabethan playgoer’s report of the premiere performance’, *English Literary Renaissance* 26 (Jan. 1996), pp. 3-16. On the 1565 entertainment, see *CSP Spanish I*, p. 404; Doran, ‘Juno versus Diana’, pp. 264-5; Paul Whitfield White, ‘Patronage, protestantism and stage propaganda in early Elizabethan England’, *Yearbook of English Studies 21: Politics, Patronage and Literature in England 1558-1658 Special Number* (1991), pp. 39-52, at p. 49.

⁴¹ Doran, ‘Juno versus Diana’, pp. 266-8.

⁴² John N. King, ‘Queen Elizabeth I: representations of the Virgin Queen’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 43 (Spring, 1990), pp. 30-74; Doran, ‘Juno versus Diana’, pp. 270-4; Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony*, pp. 170-2.

this sense, it could have been performed at any point in the first twenty years of the reign. One sensitive issue it did touch upon, however, was the queen's well-being, and particularly her health. Elizabeth was then a woman of 46, and there was widespread concern that the physical demands of marriage, and especially childbirth, could be dangerous or even fatal. Jupiter's assurance that Elizabeth 'sholld find all the divine powers bent to make it fortunate', that the gods would guarantee her a safe and successful marriage, raises the intriguing speculation that it might reflect Sussex's personal knowledge of the queen's concerns. This is a point he had dealt with before, assuring Elizabeth in 1578 that 'it is also moste lykly, & a mattre certenly to be expected, that yf God wyll encline your hart to marryage, he will also blysse you with chyldren'.⁴³ It also adds weight to historians' beliefs that Elizabeth's initial focus on security issues had given way to more personal interest in Anjou.

This initial drama was of course simply the first phase of the New Hall entertainments, as Clere goes on to describe. The next day the queen was entertained with conventional progress activities, involving tilting, hunting and the presentation of gifts. Finally, we read about a slightly cryptic episode with a maiden. This introduces a second entertainment featuring an enchanted knight who could only be released by water sprinkled by a virgin queen. This is curious, since it seems to undermine the previous day's entertainment by highlighting the queen's virginity. The most obvious way to explain this would be to identify the knight with Anjou: his predicament may suggest that he was enchanted with love for Elizabeth, and that he would obtain release by marrying; or alternatively that he needed the Virgin Queen to empower him to embark on military feats. In either case, the virginal status of the queen made her an appealing bride rather than a permanent spinster, and her sprinkling of water suggests a powerful, perhaps even quasi-priestly function.⁴⁴

The dramatic performance proper was only part of a much wider tableau played out by the host and his guests, however; there were other messages here, the importance of which is shown

⁴³ Lodge, *Illustrations*, II, p. 181.

⁴⁴ See King, 'Representations of the Virgin Queen', p. 32.

by the fact that Clere mentions this first. He describes how Sussex greeted the queen with ‘a marveyulous trowpe of those that bene accompted his wellwillers’, mentioning Lord Burghley, the earls of Northumberland, Rutland and Surrey, Viscount Montague, and numerous other unnamed lords and knights, along with a magnificent show of attendants. Leaving aside Lord Burghley, the named participants decidedly represent the more conservative end of the religious-political spectrum (and it must be assumed that those unnamed did too). Some were quite openly Catholic, others were strongly associated with conservative religious policies, but all of them had religious views very alien from those of most of Elizabeth’s leading councillors. They represent a strong turnout of members of the peerage (especially if other, lesser nobles were also present), and particularly of the ‘ancient nobility’ who were not frequent attendees of the court. The presence of the earl of Rutland, for example, is striking; although favoured by the queen, he was rarely at court and played no part in high politics.⁴⁵ Virtually all of them favoured the marriage and had links with Catholic or conservative courtiers, such as Oxford and Henry Howard, who did so too (Clere suggests that Oxford was only prevented from attending because of illness).⁴⁶ Further conservative-leaning courtiers were prominently featured in the tilting, including (probably) William Tresham, brother of the noted recusant Sir Thomas Tresham.⁴⁷ The New Hall entertainment unmistakably starred the conservatives, in contrast to more cross-confessional courtly events such as the well-known court performance of 1581, the ‘Four Foster Children of Desire’, which featured two Catholics, Arundel and Lord Windsor, alongside two prominent Protestants, Philip Sidney and Fulke Greville.⁴⁸

Sussex had, therefore, gone to great lengths to assemble senior aristocrats who, like him, supported the marriage; as Clere said, they had all ‘traveiled of purpose to do him then that honour’. Contrary to what might be assumed by both contemporaries and historians, this shows

⁴⁵ Sybil M. Jack, ‘Manners, Edward, third earl of Rutland (1549–1587)’, *ODNB*. Rutland turned down high office as lord chancellor in 1587, shortly before his death.

⁴⁶ Read, *Walsingham*, II, p. 5; Bossy, ‘English Catholics’, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Bossy, ‘English Catholics’, pp. 2-3.

⁴⁸ Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony*, p. 181.

that support for the marriage within the aristocracy was much more broad-based than a relatively small clique of court Catholics, figures who might easily be dismissed as lightweight.⁴⁹ The appearance of figures such as Rutland opened the prospect of much wider support among the conservative nobility in the country, such as the earls of Derby, Shrewsbury and Worcester, men whose loyalty was (mostly) assured but who retained very close links with many Catholics. These were powerful figures, in many ways the ‘dogs that did not bark’ of Elizabethan politics. Several of the noblemen at New Hall dabbled in treason as a way of achieving changes in the regime’s personnel and religious policy. By appearing at New Hall, they made a very prominent statement of their support for Sussex and the marriage. The event also had the effect of bringing figures like Rutland to court, to take part in the debate, potentially offer his (hopefully encouraging) advice, and try to create momentum behind the policy.

This statement of conservative support for Elizabeth’s desire to marry Anjou was all the more powerful since it effectively dealt with the key problem with the marriage, which was not the foreign policy implications or the suitor himself, but the implications for domestic policy, and especially for Elizabeth’s government as presently constituted. As we have seen, opinion in the council was moving against the marriage. Elizabeth would soon learn this, but she must have guessed it already, and her relations with some councillors became highly strained.

Indeed, Sussex must have known this too, and his demonstration at New Hall could be interpreted as telling Elizabeth that, in effect, she had no need of such nay-sayers. If she wanted support to proceed with the marriage, here it was: powerful, well-established nobles, currently excluded from the heart of the regime, but clearly capable of serving. Sussex was not proposing a revolution or palace coup, but perhaps a more balanced regime, centrist and conservative rather than actually Catholic, reminiscent of the composition of the council in the 1560s, when forward Protestant ‘new men’ like William Cecil and Nicholas Bacon were balanced with more conservative nobles, who, as now, had continually urged Elizabeth to marry and avoid a disputed

⁴⁹ The equation of the pro-marriage group with the Oxford circle is evident in Bossy, ‘English Catholics’, Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony*, p. 161; McCoog, ‘The English Jesuit mission’.

succession leading to a civil war. This balance had collapsed in the events of 1569-72 leaving a government that could be perceived as narrow, *nouveau*, religiously extreme and unrepresentative of the nobility and the nation.

The notion that Sussex was hinting at a change in the council is supported by several reports that around this time Elizabeth contemplated doing just that: reshaping her regime by bringing four Catholics into her council (Sussex may well have known this, of course). If the council would not support her policy, after all, she had two options: change the policy, or change the council and proceed with the policy. At least two of those putative councillors, Montague and Northumberland, were at New Hall.⁵⁰ This demonstration by the nobility, therefore, was in many ways the most important political statement of the whole occasion (especially as it would presumably be accompanied by further, more pointed speech in private), and may indeed explain the apparently fairly cursory dramatic performance.

The prominence given to the conservative nobles is matched by the apparent exclusion of opponents of the marriage, especially the more aggressive Protestants. Most privy councillors were present, but the fact that Clere does not mention them suggests they played little part in the proceedings. Whether that was Sussex's decision or their own is unknown; they may have been occupied or delayed elsewhere by council business, which was not uncommon.⁵¹ The absence of leading Protestant courtiers is equally striking: Clere describes how, after he left New Hall, he met two prominent allies of Leicester and opponents of the marriage, the earl of Pembroke and Philip Sidney, with 'a greate trowpe with them'.⁵² Again, whether they had not been invited or

⁵⁰ The others were Sir William Cordell and possibly Sir Thomas Cornwallis. These reports come from the French ambassador in England, the papal nuncio in Paris, and Charles Sledd, a government spy reporting gossip among English Catholics in Rome; all are, to some degree, dubious sources. Doran suggests that in view of her harsh words against him, the queen may have contemplated dismissing Walsingham. Read, *Walsingham*, II, p. 21; Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony*, pp. 173-4, 253 n.92; Bossy, 'English Catholics', p. 7; Clare Talbot, ed., *Miscellanea: recusant records* (Catholic Record Society, vol. 53, 1961), p. 229 (I owe this last reference to Michael Questier).

⁵¹ The *Acts of the privy council* show that the councillors present at New Hall were lord chancellor Bromley, Burghley, Warwick, Leicester, Hunsdon, Sir Francis Knollys, Sir Henry Sidney, Sir Christopher Hatton, and the two secretaries, Walsingham and Wilson. Sussex must have been too busy to sit in council himself. APC XI, p. 267; Dovey, *Elizabethan progress*, p. 94.

⁵² Leicester was uncle of Philip Sidney and his sister Mary, Pembroke's wife. As we have seen, Pembroke had already been associated with Leicester's opposition to the marriage.

had chosen to absent themselves is not clear. Like the councillors, however, they may well have been deploying a neglected manoeuvre in early modern court politics: making a political statement through pointed absence from court or court events. On a comparable occasion in January 1562, the Swedish ambassador put on a 'grete feaste' for the council and courtiers to promote the King of Sweden's suit for Elizabeth's hand, but his opponents, including Robert and Ambrose Dudley, attended a dinner put on by Lord Chandos instead.⁵³

All of this makes Burghley's prominent role very interesting. His position on the match, as we have seen, is hard to pin down – he was officially pro-marriage, but his support may have been qualified by doubts about its political feasibility. His decision to appear as an ostentatious 'wellwiller' of Sussex demonstrates that he was willing to align himself publically in favour of Anjou alongside the likes of Surrey and Montague. This may be simply due to his political caution: given that the queen remained enthusiastic about the match, he may have been hedging his bets in case it went ahead, on the basis that the her decision was final, and that he would work to implement it whatever it was. On the other hand, it may be that historians have underestimated his support for the match.

III

As Clere's description shows, a royal entertainment comprised music, feasting, jousting, presentation of gifts and the show of bodies just as much as the dramatic performance itself, and multiple elements of the overall programme could be used to communicate political messages. It is worth reflecting, however, on Sussex's decision to use this medium to attempt to counsel the queen, given that he was already counselling her in multiple ways, as a member of the privy council, in working groups appointed by her, and in writing. What did a dramatic performance

⁵³ Simon Adams, Ian W. Archer, and G.W. Bernard, eds., 'A 'journall' of matters of state happened from time to time as well within and without the realme from and before the death of King Edw. the 6th untill the yere 1562 [and] Certayne brife notes of the controversy betwene the dukes of Somerset and duke of Nor[t]humberland' in Ian W. Archer et al., eds., *Religion, politics and society in sixteenth century England* (Camden Fifth Series 22, 2003), p. 91.

add to this? On one level it was a sign of status and wealth, an impressive mark of his respect for the queen. Another point, noted by Doran, is that Elizabeth ‘was bound by the rules of hospitality to listen and participate in these offerings’.⁵⁴ In this case, indeed, she was an actor in the performance, roped directly into the drama without even being disguised as a classical figure; this was not uncommon in entertainments, but it is perhaps surprising in view of the obvious direct relevance to her. Finally, as we have seen, the attendance of spectators was crucial to the overall effect, something that could best be managed on Sussex’s own turf.

A further point about this medium is that it permitted a degree of publicity without forfeiting legitimacy, which to an extent squared a circle in Elizabethan political discourse. In the wake of the *Gaping Gulf*, the hostile sermons and so on, Elizabeth was especially prickly about public discussion. The anti-Anjou side had mobilised its resources effectively, but at the cost of heavy royal disfavour all round (and in Stubbs’s case, the loss of his hand). In large part this was because the anti-Anjou arguments were not what Elizabeth wanted to hear, yet the promiscuously public nature of these attempts to counsel her also offended her. The court, however, was regarded as a private space, so a royal entertainment was an opportunity to publically or semi-publically canvass these matters whilst staying within what the queen viewed as acceptable. As Doran points out, the queen seldom manifested displeasure even at remarkably unsubtle attempts to counsel her in this way, though she knew that she was being directly targeted. During the course of the Gray’s Inn masque of 1566, she remarked to the Spanish ambassador that ‘this is all against me’.⁵⁵ Many entertainments were of course fairly straightforward, even banal, exchanges of submissive pleasantries and generalised pleas for favour, but even those which were not do not seem to have caused offence. Court drama had a certain amount of license to handle sensitive matters; by a proclamation of 1559, ‘Interludes’ concerning ‘matter of religion or of the governaunce of the estate of the commonweale’ were

⁵⁴ Doran, ‘Juno versus Diana’, p. 257.

⁵⁵ Doran, ‘Juno versus Diana’, p. 265, citing *CSP Spanish I*, p. 404. The audience of *Palamon and Arcite* (1566) even took part in the drama by loudly applauding the marriage of the characters: Doran ‘Juno versus Diana’, p. 264.

prohibited, but audiences of ‘grave and discrete persons’, which can presumably be taken to include the court, were specifically exempted.⁵⁶ Elizabeth sat through entertainments which implicitly criticized government policy (such as that at Cowdray in 1591) or which, as at New Hall, dealt with the hottest political debate of the moment. There were limits – one of the 1575 Kenilworth entertainments, the *Masque of Zabeta*, was never performed, probably because its message was too frank and unwelcome – but in general, within the court, Elizabeth was content to accept even very thinly-veiled advice (if she *had* disliked such advice, Sussex, as lord chamberlain, would have known it). This again opened the possibility of generating momentum behind the marriage; in this sense, the entertainment was not purely for the benefit of the queen, but was a quasi-public statement of Sussex’s position.⁵⁷

This courtly privateness was in reality somewhat notional, even fictional, since, as Clere’s letter demonstrates, the content of entertainments hardly stayed private; they were meant to be talked about, and were increasingly put into print.⁵⁸ Again, this enabled matters of great political sensitivity to appear in print, disguised under a veil of mere courtly entertainment. As Annabel Patterson has suggested with regard to the inclusion of the *Four Foster Children of Desire* in Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, the entertainment stood in for ‘truly unrepresentable matters’ of court opposition to the Anjou match.⁵⁹ In a similar way, Elizabeth accepted ‘private’ advice from the likes of Bishop Cox or Philip Sidney (it may not have helped them politically but they kept both hands), even though such documents were quite widely disseminated within court circles or

⁵⁶ Hughes and Larkin, *Tudor royal proclamations II*, pp. 115-16.

⁵⁷ See also on this Natalie Mears, *Queenship and political discourse in the Elizabethan realms* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 106.

⁵⁸ This began in 1575 with the Kenilworth entertainments and was common by the 1590s. Elizabeth Goldring, “‘A mercer ye wot az we be’: the authorship of the Kenilworth *Letter* reconsidered”, *English Literary Renaissance* 38 (May 2008), pp. 245-69, at p. 266. There were at least two publications relating to entertainments for the French commissioners sent to negotiate a marriage in spring 1581: E. Arber, ed., *A transcript of the registers of the company of stationers of London 1554-1640 A.D.* (London, 1875), II, p. 401; Henry Goldwel, *A briefe declaratio of the shens [...] performed before the queenes maiestie & the French ambassadours*, STC (2nd edn) 11990 (London, 1581), reprinted in Nichols, *Progresses*, II, pp. 310-29.

⁵⁹ Annabel Patterson, *Reading Holinshed’s chronicles* (Chicago, 1994), p. 54.

beyond.⁶⁰ The extent to which such publications pushed at the limits of acceptability is evident from the excision of descriptions of some courtly events from Holinshed.⁶¹

The New Hall entertainment was not, apparently, published, and nor is there any sign that it was printed or circulated in manuscript, as such entertainments often did (Gabriel Heaton notes that about 30 different Elizabethan entertainments survive in manuscript, most in multiple copies).⁶² This may be because the practice of publishing entertainments was not as well established as it became in the 1590s. But it is worth noting that a conservative reply to the *Gaping Gulf*, a substantial tract by Lord Henry Howard, also went unpublished, although it may well have been intended for publication.⁶³ It is striking that whilst the anti-Anjou forces appear to have been able and willing to make use of the ‘public sphere’, of popularity, to advance their cause, the pro-marriage forces were not, and instead seem to have focused primarily on persuading the queen, in the approved, conventional fashion – or else they thought their view was not sufficiently popular in the country to effectually use the weight of public opinion.

IV

Questions of the publicity of New Hall lead to a final issue raised by this document: the dissemination of these events into provincial news networks. This letter casts light on important questions around the news culture of the provincial gentry: how much did they know about events at court; how much of their political significance did they understand; and what did they think of what they heard? These questions, central to any consideration of the impact of news, remain debated.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ H. R. Woudhuysen, ‘Sidney, Sir Philip (1554-1586)’, *ODNB*; Alan Stewart, *Philip Sidney: a double life* (London, 2000), pp. 220-1; Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony*, p. 160; Mears, ‘Counsel, public debate and queenship’, p. 648.

⁶¹ Elizabeth Goldring and Jayne Elisabeth Archer, ‘Shows and pageants’, in Paulina Kewes, Ian W. Archer, and Felicity Heal, eds., *The Oxford handbook of Holinshed's Chronicles* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 319-35, at pp. 329-30.

⁶² Heaton, *Writing and reading royal entertainments*, p. 4.

⁶³ Berry, *Gaping gulf*, pp. lix-lxi, 155-94.

⁶⁴ F. J. Levy, ‘How information spread among the gentry, 1550-1640’, *Journal of British Studies*, 21 (Spring 1982), pp. 11-34; Richard Cust, ‘News and politics in early seventeenth-century England’, *Past and Present*, 112 (1986), pp. 60-

Studies of the publication of royal entertainments have tended to focus on media such as printed texts, 'scribal publication' (the distribution of manuscript copies within a limited circle of acquaintances), or 'separates' (short documents intended to be copied and distributed amongst interested parties for their news value) rather than personal accounts, not least because eyewitness accounts of entertainments, or indeed any sixteenth-century dramatic performances, are so rare.⁶⁵ Yet letter's such as Clere's between kin or personal friends, mixing private news and gossip, local affairs and news of more general, national interest, remained the most common vehicle for news in this period.⁶⁶ Certainly Clere's letter is unusual in presenting so lengthy a description of a single event, and in that sense it recalls descriptions of entertainments published in letter format, such as Laneham's letter about the 1575 Kenilworth entertainments. This clearly reflects how interesting and impressive an event Clere believed this to be, and his interest is not in the text, the poetry or the drama, but in the political message. The letter includes other business (largely inaccurate news from France and Ireland as well as Norfolk affairs), but it clearly remains a personal letter rather than one written for a more general readership.

What can we say about what Clere thought of events at New Hall? Clere and Gawdy were both of a social level at which some familiarity with affairs of state could be taken for granted; both had sat in Parliament and had friends and relatives at court and in official circles in London. Gawdy must have been among the best-informed of county gentry, through letters from his son, his half-brother and others; he had already had news from London of 'Monsieur's' expected visit earlier in 1579.⁶⁷ They must also have known about the *Gaping gulf*, not least because of the royal proclamation against it. In line with this, Clere's letter demonstrates a quite sophisticated understanding of events. He makes clear that a significant courtly and political event had taken

90; Adam Fox, 'Rumour, news and popular political opinion in Elizabethan and early Stuart England', *Historical Journal*, 40 (1997), pp. 597-620; Mears, *Queenship and political discourse*, chs. 4-5.

⁶⁵ On separates, see Cust, 'News and politics', pp. 62, 64; Heaton, *Writing and reading royal entertainments*, p. 95. On scribal publication, see for example Goldring, "'A mercer ye wot az we be'", p. 266. On distribution of news and texts of court entertainments, see Gabriel Heaton, 'Elizabethan entertainments in manuscript: the Harefield Festivities (1602) and the dynamics of exchange', in Archer, Goldring and Knight, *Progresses, pageants and entertainments*. On the rarity of accounts of plays, see Jones and White, 'Gorboduc and royal marriage politics', p. 3.

⁶⁶ Fritz Levy, 'The decorum of news', *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism*, 21 (1998), pp. 12-38, at p. 18.

⁶⁷ See above, n. 6; HMC *Gawdy*, p. 10.

place, describing the entertainments themselves; he also describes who was involved and implicitly makes clear the position of leading political actors on the matter at hand. Clere may have been dependent on others for his knowledge of events; he refers to ‘occurrences’ that ‘were signified to me’, leaving open the question of whether he actually witnessed the events in person. Either way, it was clearly regarded as a very significant and impressive event, far more so than the thoroughly enjoyable trip on a grand new merchant ship that he describes later in the letter.

The most interesting point, however, may be the circumspection with which Clere expresses himself: he does not gloss or comment upon what he reports, since (as has become a truism of sixteenth-century news culture) domestic political news could not legitimately be discussed. He merely provides the information needed to reconstruct the message of the entertainment, without stating what he took it to be. He also demonstrates his awareness of the subtext of Pembroke and Sidney’s absence from New Hall without stating it openly, but through his rather arch comment, ‘I can tell yow of some that were nat at the courte’. Nor did Clere express an opinion on the match itself, a matter on which he might quite reasonably have had views. These were surely deliberate decisions, based on an assumption that Gawdy would readily understand him. Clere thus evaded what Levy has called the ‘decorum of news’ whilst remaining formally bound by it.⁶⁸ It reflects, in fact, the standard approach to publishing entertainments: ceremonies, performances and participants could be described, but political messages could not.⁶⁹

Whilst the prohibition on political news is understandable with regard to the public print or stage, it is perhaps surprising that a powerful, well-favoured and loyal gentlemen like Clere felt the need to be so careful and to censor himself in a private letter; was he seriously concerned about accusations of sedition or rumour-mongering? The risk of discovery and punishment must have been remote (would letters addressed to the sheriff of Norfolk be opened or censored?). Yet just seven years before, the duke of Norfolk, Clere’s former patron, had been executed for

⁶⁸ See Levy, ‘Decorum of news’.

⁶⁹ Goldring and Archer, ‘Shows and pageants’, p. 323. They similarly note that the pageants tended to be described rather than the texts printed.

treason.⁷⁰ The corollary of this is, as so often, that key information would be communicated orally, as Clere notes in his enigmatic postscript: ‘Loke what I leve nat spoken of at Newhall it is like Bradshawe may resolve yow therof’ – clearly the bearer had something else of significance to add. Overall, therefore, the letter supports historians’ recent claims that those in the localities knew and understood much more than has been supposed about current affairs, even if, as in this case, they were highly coded in their discussion of it. It also demonstrates how elastic the audience for Sussex’s entertainment was, expanding from the court outwards, via Clere to Gawdy (plus of course ‘this bearer’), and thence, probably, it would spread much more widely, through markets, private visits, local events such as quarter sessions and so on.

V

Whether the events at New Hall had any significant impact on the national debate is doubtful; the fact that the entertainment appears to have left no other mark on the historical record suggest that it may not have done. Sussex’s efforts ultimately came to nothing, and Elizabeth remained a virgin queen. It is certainly true that the prospects for the Anjou match continued to fluctuate for some time. Any momentum in favour of the marriage generated by the New Hall entertainment must have been blunted by the council debates of early October, which revealed how few councillors fully supported the match. Yet the forward Protestants were in disarray that autumn: Walsingham was banished from court in October, apparently for reasons connected to the *Gaping Gulf*.⁷¹ Hatton, although a conservative figure, also found himself in temporary disgrace over his opposition to the marriage.⁷² In November, Elizabeth discovered (in circumstances that remain murky) that Leicester had privately married Lettice, the widowed

⁷⁰ Hasler, *Commons*, I, p. 612.

⁷¹ See Read, *Walsingham*, II, p. 22; Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony*, p. 167. Mendoza wrote that he heard she had said to Walsingham ‘begone and that the only thing he was good for was a protector of heretics’, and that she had been rowing with Knollys and Hatton too. *CSP Spanish* II, p. 704.

⁷² Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony*, p. 174.

countess of Essex, a year previously; his standing naturally suffered.⁷³ Both he and Walsingham were absent from court until the following January. These setbacks for the anti-Anjou side have been interpreted by John Bossy as a pro-Anjou response to the *Gaping Gulf*, and by Simon Adams as an ‘attempted overthrow of Leicester’.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the momentum behind the marriage reduced in early 1580; it was largely revived in March, when even Leicester and Walsingham were reported to be favouring it, but again looked unlikely in May.⁷⁵ The match continued to be discussed for some time, virtually until Anjou’s death in June 1584, as the international situation continued to look threatening, but it seems to have generated less and less concern within England itself, and certainly nothing on the scale of the *Gaping Gulf*.⁷⁶

Ultimately, the most powerful factor in stopping the marriage seems to have been the lack of support from the council, which both reflected and informed wider opinion in the country. The New Hall entertainment, and indeed historians’ continuing efforts to make sense of the Anjou match more broadly, demonstrates the complexity and sophistication of Elizabethan political culture. As the entertainment underlines, the decision was ultimately the queen’s, and not the council’s; yet the complexity of the considerations, stresses and tensions cutting in different directions across the matter at New Hall are a reminder of the restraints and limitations on Elizabeth’s freedom of action.

*Sir Edward Clere to Bassingbourne Gawdy, sheriff of Norfolk, 22 September 1579.*⁷⁷

⁷³ Leicester married Lettice on 21 September 1578, and the queen seems to have found out in November 1579, with Leicester in disgrace until March 1580. Adams, ‘Leicester’, *ODNB*.

⁷⁴ Bossy, ‘English Catholics’, pp. 6-7. He suggests French manoeuvres and Anjou’s visit prompted a Leicestrian/puritan backlash (the *Gaping gulf*), and then a French counterblast (revealing Leicester’s marriage to Lettice and subsequent banishment). Adams, *Leicester and the court*, p. 6.

⁷⁵ Read, *Walsingham*, II, pp. 31-2.

⁷⁶ Read, *Walsingham*, II, pp. 23-117.

⁷⁷ British Library, Additional MS 27960, fol. 12, (c) The British Library Board. In the transcription, the use of u/v and i/j is modernised; the thorn is transcribed as ‘th’; standard contractions are silently expanded [‘y^e’ to ‘your’ etc]. The hand, apparently Clere’s own, is fairly neat but cramped; the letter is squeezed on to one unfolded sheet of paper and written upside down on the verso. The manuscript shows clear signs of having been folded, sealed, addressed to Gawdy and (on the basis of its discolouration) sent, which makes it curious that it is now found in a bound volume of other letters from Clere and his relatives, mostly to other Norfolk gentry recipients (often Gawdy). Presumably therefore Clere was in the habit of recovering his own letters from their recipients.

Being advertised of your absence from Harlinge, I thought good to sende over this bearer to yow & in as miche as he was at the courte I leve it to him to dilate of the particuler persons that were there: & will only now imparte to yow the occurrents in generall that besides his vewe were signified to me.

The enterteinment of her Majestie at Newhall was very magnificente, Firste the Erle of Sussex meetinge her with a marveyulous trowpe of those that bene [*sic*] accompted his wellwillers namely besides the Lord treasurer⁷⁸ The Earles of Northumberland⁷⁹ Ruttlande⁸⁰ & Surrey⁸¹ with Vicount Montagewe⁸² all which were said to have traveled of purpose to do him then that honour: Of Lordes six or seven & many knights. There were placyd severall sortes of musick at the Utter court the Inner court, the hall, the great chamber the chamber of presence & the privy chamber, eche tunable with siche sound & variete as were thought moste apte for the places & resorte to the same. In the bestowing the Attendants it was notyd that there were abowte fower hundred. At the cumming in towardses the hall was a scaffold erectid; And theruppon when her highnes approchid was a resemblance of the opening the ayre, Thunder lightning light & siche apparance as be seene when the Aire is obfuscate & trowblid, in siche seasons; aptly counterfeete.

Hereuppon steppid forthe Jupiter & delivred some reason of the trowble of the gods & motion of the heavens in maner aforsayd, which was there the greater in as miche as he had signification of the approche of siche a creature thither whose nature was moste congruent to a divine spirit, & it trowble him & so the reste of the divine power to admitt the society of siche

⁷⁸ William Cecil, 1st Lord Burghley (1520-98), lord treasurer and Elizabeth's most trusted councillor.

⁷⁹ Henry Percy, 8th earl of Northumberland (c. 1532-85); he had remained loyal during the rebellion of 1569-70, led by his brother and predecessor the 7th earl, but had flirted with support for Mary, Queen of Scots shortly afterwards and spent 18 months in disgrace.

⁸⁰ Edward Manners, 3rd earl of Rutland (1549-87), a great magnate in the east Midlands but an infrequent and reluctant courtier.

⁸¹ Philip Howard (1557-95), by courtesy earl of Surrey but better known by his later (1580) title of earl of Arundel; head of the Howard family since the execution for treason of his father Thomas, 4th duke of Norfolk. Although not at this stage a Catholic, he was widely regarded as being sympathetic towards conservative religious tendencies.

⁸² Anthony Browne, 1st Viscount Montague (1528-1592); widely known as Catholic though accepted at Elizabeth's court and the recipient of her favour. His first wife, Jane, was a daughter of Robert Radcliffe, first earl of Sussex, and therefore the third earl's aunt. J. G. Elzinga, 'Browne, Anthony, first Viscount Montagu (1528-1592)', *ODNB*.

consideringe all things now framid in perfection in heaven, And therfore this of sodein was set owt by his power to expresse the Terror things above, & that the creatures terrefied sholld nat further aproche to Deyte.

Butt seing that he founde that this wrought nat so great effect as hathe ensuid in like case, And it semid this divine creature so neerely had resemblance with the nature of the gods, And in some degree excellid, he wolde call the other company of his heavenly sphere & they wolde eache counsell with other promising his favour, for the continuance in earthe of [^]a thing[^] so excellent a nature.

Then at the call cam the other company: & descrieng that this creature was the Queen's Majestie it was put over to the wemen goddesses, to yelde their reasons for continuance of that excelleng nature, according to Jupiters determination

Among the reste all concurred of the superexcellencye of the creature & espetially yeldid to her in this that beinge conversant among men, & bothe publikely & privatelye frequentinge companye of choyse men, yet was she nat for all this alluryd or perswadid by siche companie in other manner then as a creature immaculate & yet now at lenththe [*sic*] consideringe the Gods all had joynd in one resolution that they all favouryd the continuance in earth of siche divine nature Therefore meete it were that she that was so divinely enspired sholld assente herin to siche purpose of the gods: And the meane was to admitte siche a matrimoniall conviction as were meete; to the which she sholld find all the divine powers bent to make it fortunate.

The next day Justs were preparid, And Mr Ratclif,⁸³ Mr T. Knivet⁸⁴ & Mr Rafe bowes⁸⁵ were chalengers & sondry ran agenst them among which Mr Tressam⁸⁶ had very evil fortune to

⁸³ This could be any of a number of Sussex's relatives, including his brother Sir Henry Radcliffe (by 1533-93), later 4th earl of Sussex, or his cousin the gentleman pensioner Thomas Radcliffe (d. 1586), who participated in the elaborate masque the *Four Foster Children of Desire* (also known as the *Fortress of Perfect Beauty*) in 1581: Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, IV, p. 64.

⁸⁴ Probably Thomas Knyvet (c. 1545-1622), a fixture at court and groom of the privy chamber (Hasler, *Commons*, II, pp. 423-4).

⁸⁵ Ralph Bowes (d. 1623), son of Sir Robert Bowes, English ambassador in Scotland; not regarded as a significant courtier but formerly a servant of Leicester's (Hasler, *Commons*, I, p. 465); also a participant in the *Four Foster Children of Desire* (see above).

be overthrown horse & man by defalt of his horse: there were xi other eche running thre courses, to tell yow which did better then other is above mye reache.

This done commith in a knight layd in a chariot guidid by a Damoyzell compleynenge that the knight was enchantid & that she by these chalengers had bene hindred to seke remedy for this knight & that was none other but in that a Virgin Queen wolde vouchesafe to sprinkle water on him: when many had tryed to help the knight the Queen's fortune was to disannull this enchantment: And then he assayed his prowesse ageinste the chalengers: And did verye well as the same was spredd.

Then was there preparation for the hunting the morow after & for the better furniture of her highnesse was brought a palfrey all white & furniture for the same; & a cloke & safe garde to kepe her from evill wether that might hap: presentid to her from her Lord Chamberlein [i.e. Sussex]. I leve it in suspense to commend either the colour, the cost or the curious workmanship, & making of these.

[v] I can tell yow of some that were nat at the courte, by reason I mette them nat farre from Ratcliffe⁸⁷, when I was toward shipbord namely the Erle of Penbroke [*sic*] & Mr Philip Sidneye with a greate trowpe with them, & bicause it will delight yow & my cosin to heare that I performed my jorney so well as to be redye to be embarkid at my comming up with many Ladyes & gentlewomen into the Roiall merchant of England,⁸⁸ & accompanied with many of good place & wellthe, saluted with shotte of sondry shippes, attended on by diverse of the Ammirallty, & refreschid with sound of trumpetts & diverse other sortes of melodye, till we were conductyd where we had newe of passengers of sondry countryes, & were satisfied plenteously with all delicacy. I wollde nat omitt this nor how with trowp of nombres of people in my return to London warde I went to see the new found water *reportid of lyke efficacye as those worke [?] that late*

⁸⁶ Possibly Sir Thomas Tresham of Rushton, Northamptonshire (1543-1605), later a noted recusant but at this stage conforming, and an occasional courtier (*ODNB*); however, probably more likely his brother William Tresham, a gentleman pensioner, another participant in the *Four Foster Children of Desire* (see above).

⁸⁷ Ratcliffe was a hamlet between Shadwell and Limehouse, a few miles downstream from London, and a significant embarking place at the time.

⁸⁸ A large new merchant ship.

were writen of at Newnam Regis nat far from coventry that is [this line seems to be interlineated in the middle of a sentence] between ratclef & the Tower of London; nor my chering in all places as I cam backe & my safe return leving my busines in good termes. The Earle of Oxford allso I heare was absent from the courte (as is sayd), by reaso[n] of the Quinz disease which is perillous.

Other newes I heard of Mr Martin Calthorp that the Frenche king shold be dead:⁸⁹ The king of Navarra hathe surprised Fountraby from King Philip, & he is angry⁹⁰: The Earles of Desmone glencarn & the onele [O'Neill] be sayd to be in Armes & that vijC spaniard shold be Arrived in their Ayde.⁹¹ There is direction for suppressing the rebells. I leve to write further noveltyes. And now pray yow to write by this bearer unto my Lord Bishop that yow could nat now perform your jorney to him: & that yow wold desyer my commission might be dispatched to Derham cessions. I wold have word when those shold be: And shall return my Lord's answer to yow if he will do so miche as to traveill thither or neere there: for I have writen to him allso my sellfe to the same effecte: And if this take nat effect I desyer that yow will so use the matter yow may spen a day at Blickling to perform the receyving of my answer: yow may touche in your lettre that otherwise yow can be content if my Lord cum nat to receyve the answer uppon our othe at Derham & sende it my Lord to be sealed up by him & sent by one whom I shall appoint of purpose. And so commending me hertily to yow & my good cosin your wife I committ yow to God: written this xxij of September 1579.

Your lovinge cosin & frende

Edward Clere

[PS] This bearer hath a note to deliver to yow wherin I pray your favour:

⁸⁹ Henry III of France was not dead.

⁹⁰ Fuenterrabia, now known as Hondarribia, in the Basque Country.

⁹¹ A reference to the early stages of the Second Desmond Rebellion, triggered by the landing of James Fitzmaurice Fitzgerald with about 60 Spanish and Italian troops at Smerwick. The earl of Desmond did indeed come out in rebellion. It is not clear who is meant by 'Glencarne', since the earls of Glencairn were Scottish nobles; this may be a confusion for Clanrickard, though neither he nor the O'Neill, Turlough Luineach, had yet risen in support of the rebels.

My Lord North & Mr Poley have them commendid: Loke what I leve nat spoken of at Newhall
it is like Bradshawe may resolve yow therof.⁹²

[Addressed (with signs of folding):]

To my verye good worshippfull frende Mr Bass: Gawdye high shreve of Norff at Mendham

[Also with a Victorian endorsement:]

22 Sept 1579

An account of the Queen's Entertainment at Newhall in Essex the seat of Thomas Ratcliffe Earl
of Sussex

A representation of the Heavens, Jupiter etc appear

Tilting etc

Derham Sessions'

⁹² One Bradshaw was gaoler of Norwich at this stage, and would thus have been working for Gawdy; it is possible that he was the bearer of this letter. HMC *Gawdy*, p. 8.