

# To and From the Queen: Modalities of Epistolography in the Correspondence of Elizabeth I

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## *Abstract*

The article analyses the connection between modalities of letter writing and the relation between writer and addressee. We take into consideration the case of Elizabeth I of England, situated in the overall panorama of early modern European historiography. The English Queen was a prolific and skilful letter writer, endowed with an uncommon talent for foreign languages; but she was also, thanks to her role, the willing or unwilling recipient of thousands of epistles. By selecting two different *corpora* of letters, from and to the Queen, it is possible to explore how personal relations, degree of acquaintance, respective status and purpose of the letter influence the very structure of the genre.

*Keywords:* Dedications, Elizabeth I, Epistolography, Rhetoric

## 1. *Elizabeth I and Letter Writing*

Queen Elizabeth I's correspondence is vast and as yet partially unknown; an unexpectedly substantial number of her letters is still unpublished, and, possibly, unread.<sup>1</sup> As frequently happens with documents of heads of state and political leaders, her epistolary exchanges have been partly examined in historical and sociological investigations, since the amount of information provided by letters is invaluable. The beginning of the twenty-first century, though, witnessed a growing consideration for the Queen's epistles as a huge and significant literary corpus worthy of attention, and a number of research studies – both collections and critical essays – have appeared in the last fifteen years.<sup>2</sup> By 'epistolary corpus' we mean her life-long correspondence, which is both private and public, domestic and foreign, holograph and scribal, and written in English as well as in other European languages, such as Latin, French, and Italian. In the case of public authorities it is important to point out that the distinction between public and private letters is very often blurred, and even more so in the early modern

period, when the process of composing, editing, transcribing, and sending a letter involved more than one agent. We should therefore be careful never to take it for granted that an epistle sent by a Renaissance head of State has actually been physically *written* (or even devised, corrected, and amended) by the same person whose signature appears at the bottom of the last page.

Elizabeth is, of course, no exception. Once a queen, she would employ her own hand to get in touch with a chosen number of addressees, and would leave the rest of her correspondence to her secretariat. Whilst studies on the Queen's handwriting have made it possible to identify a good number of holograph letters (no easy task, by the way, since her hand became more and more unreadable with the passing of time),<sup>3</sup> in the case of scribal correspondence the attempt to determine her degree of involvement in the devising and composing of an epistle becomes really arduous. What we can be quite confident about, though, is that Elizabeth always strove to be in control of the multiple activities carried out in her name, and it is therefore quite probable that she would at least revise the correspondence handled by her secretariat, rather than entrusting it completely to her collaborators – be they as competent as William Cecil, her chief advisor and Secretary of State for a long part of her reign. She had risked her life more than once in her youth; her early experiences, added to the danger of being a woman in a world ruled by men, made her extremely careful and suspicious in her dealings with other people: her attempts to keep everything under control, both in the private and in the public sphere, also affected her epistolary exchanges, as we shall see presently.

It is the relatively recent interest in Elizabeth I's letters from a literary perspective that allows for a study not only of the political, historical and sociological aspects of her writings, but also of the stylistic and rhetorical construction of her correspondence. This essay starts from the assumption that there is still a considerable amount of work to be done on the Queen's epistolography, and also that cooperation among scholars from different countries is indispensable to deal with her polyglot achievements. Already as a young princess, Elizabeth disclosed a multilingual inclination she was never to abandon throughout her life, and which proves pivotal in the attempt to perceive the interrelated aspects of her epistolary prose, which are far from negligible.

It is precisely from this perspective that the first part of this essay moves. Since this is not the right place to attempt a more comprehensive treatment of the Queen's epistolary rhetoric, the discussion focuses on her use of one metaphor in particular – the 'metaphor of the scales' – which can be considered a case in point to deal with Elizabeth's prevalently pragmatic use of figurative language in her mature letters. Always in search of effectiveness, this polyglot letter writer would not refrain from employing the same expression at least in three different languages, English, Italian and French, having found it particularly functional to bring home her often multiple meanings. The analysis of this metaphor also tells us something about Elizabeth's recurring attempt to

be in control of the epistolary exchange by fashioning herself as a right and trustful monarch, who can deal properly with public and personal matters just because she can ‘think properly’, that is, rationally. These are the instances in which she has recourse to the metaphor of the scales, which evokes images of balance and equilibrium in order to persuade her reader of the correct (and therefore indisputable) nature of her argumentation.

In the second part of the essay the attention is focused on letters written to the Queen, particularly petitionary letters inserted as dedications to works presented to the monarch. Elizabeth is a very particular case: a highly cultivated and intelligent monarch whose vast body of correspondence has in large part survived. Thus our observations will allow us to explore strategies of epistolary negotiation taking place with the Queen playing the double role of writer and recipient, observing how analogies and similarities in such negotiations could be attributed to contemporary rhetorical practices and to a shared cultural and social background.

## *2. Queen Elizabeth I's Letters: the Metaphor of the Scales*

That Elizabeth wrote letters for the pleasure of writing is no mystery, since she started early, at the age of eleven, and produced an impressive amount of epistles until the end of her life, in spite of a ‘disease in her fingers [which] perhaps helped contribute to the increasingly wild and tottery nature of [her] hand’ (Gibson 2011, 59). That she also learned quite early the importance of being able to communicate clearly, persuasively, and effectively is apparent from the style of the letters in which she addressed Edward Seymour, the Lord Protector, in 1549, during the brief reign of her young brother Edward VI. The sixteen-year-old Princess was then in troubled waters: she was suspected of being involved in the treacherous intrigues of Thomas Seymour against his brother Edward (see MacCaffrey 2004, 9-11), and therefore found herself in life danger. The abrupt change in her correspondence is visible in her letters to Edward Seymour,<sup>4</sup> in which she tries to defend herself against suspicion: her epistolary style passes from the adorned, formal and complimentary letters to the royal members of her family – her stepmother Katherine Parr, her father King Henry VIII, and her half-brother King Edward VI – to plain and straightforward epistles, albeit well-constructed and elegant. Not only is Elizabeth in personal danger, but she is also trying to save the life of the people she loves, her governess Kate Ashley and her cofferer Thomas Parry.

In her letters to the Lord Protector she mainly employs plain syntax, an ordered narration of events, and very few figures of speech; those few are to be found in her longest and most articulate epistle (February 21, 1549), and are, at any rate, functional to the argumentation. The young Princess desperately needs to be clear, effective, and persuasive; at the beginning of the above-mentioned letter, she uses the words ‘plainlie’ and ‘plaine’ three times:

My Lorde hauinge reseuede your Lordeships letters I parceue in them your goodwill towarde me bicause you declare to me plainlie your mynde in this thinge... my mynde was to declare unto you plainlie as I thoght in that thinge wiche I did also the more willingelye because (as I write to you) you desired me to be plaine with you in al thinges.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout her argumentation, she carefully alternates between expressing her indignation for being slandered and showing humility; she even attempts to 'manage' her own case by giving advice to the Privy Council on the right way to contain the spreading of evil reports concerning herself. Rather than asking her to denounce the 'evil tongues', it would be much better if the Privy Council showed their concern for the Princess' good name by issuing a proclamation

in to the counntries that the[y] refraine ther tonges declaringe how the tales be but lies it shulde make bothe the people thinke that you and the counsel haue greate regarde that no suche rumors shulde be spreade of anye of the Kinges Maiesties Sisters as I am thought vnwordie. (Mueller and Marcus 2003, 22)

It is worth taking these first persuasive letters into consideration because they introduce some rhetorical features to be found in Elizabeth's more mature epistolography. Along with the use of the readily available 'encoded wisdom' drawn from classical and biblical sources (maxims, *sententiae*, proverbs and *exempla*), at the disposal of all those who had profited from a humanistic education, Elizabeth developed personal strategies of argumentation. These can be partly traced back to her classically grounded eloquence, but are also the outcome of a particularly skilled letter writer, who is determined not to lose ground in the sometimes challenging epistolary battlefield. The above-mentioned balance between humility and a more pugnacious attitude, as well as the habit of taking upon herself the role of advisor – not only towards her subjects or younger correspondents (like James VI of Scotland), but also when writing to foreign ruling powers – are recurring characteristics of her later epistolary style.<sup>6</sup> That Elizabeth was a prolific and skilful writer, that she was able to exploit her outstanding education, that she employed effective rhetorical constructions in order to fashion her own image, is fairly well-trodden ground. In her correspondence, the Queen poses both as the authoritative sovereign and as the affectionate and caring kin (see Mueller 2000 and Allinson 2007); she often plays the role of the wise counsellor (see Crane 1988 and Allinson 2007); she notoriously employs a 'rhetoric of gender', by fashioning herself both as the strong and severe king and as the soft and vulnerable queen. A recurrent feature of her correspondence is also the 'rhetoric of trust', employed, for instance, with Mary Stuart and considerably with James VI of Scotland, in order to set the rules of their relationship: each time, depending on need, advising, warning, chiding and basically reminding them of the danger of betraying her trust and confidence.

Above all, Queen Elizabeth wants to be effective when communicating by letter. She wants to convey her meaning clearly when giving instructions (to the point of being sometimes pedantic and redundant), and she strives to be particularly incisive in her argumentations. In order to be persuasive, she obviously does not disregard the assistance of the art of rhetoric. But since her goal in writing is mainly pragmatic, she generally maintains strong control over her prose, which has to be more communicative than embellished. When she employs elegant rhetorical constructions and figures of speech, she manages to combine effectiveness and ornament, by choosing structures and words apt to convey her meaning powerfully.

The particular metaphor which is the object of the present analysis comes to the Queen's aid several times, and is employed also in languages other than English. It can be expressed in slightly different ways, such as 'to weigh a [certain] matter with an even hand', or 'to weigh matters in equal/right balance', or 'with the right scales'. Its importance is linked to the fact that, by employing it, Elizabeth proposes her arguments as indisputable evidence. Since the scales are the symbol of balance, and therefore of justice, their link with argumentative equilibrium and with sound judgment is also apparent. Having recourse to that metaphor in particular, the Queen means to assert her ability to follow a rational line of reasoning; moreover, by prompting her correspondent to weigh matters correctly, she implicitly states her own superiority in drawing reasonable conclusions from given premises, which is, traditionally, the aim of logic. A 'naturally' less-gifted thinker because a woman, she feels the need to forcefully establish her crucial role in the epistolary exchange, particularly in those cases in which she is corresponding with foreign monarchs inclined to underestimate her. She therefore tends to assert her mental lucidity over her interlocutor, who is consequently urged to recognize the indisputable nature of her arguments.

This is the very context in which the first metaphor of the scales discussed here should be read. In 1566 a relatively young Queen Elizabeth – definitely not in her prime, but still eligible in the European matrimonial market – wrote a letter to Maximilian II, Holy Roman Emperor. The occasion for writing was the protracted marriage negotiations between herself and Charles, Archduke of Austria, the Emperor's younger brother. The Austrian suit was a complex issue, which was taken into consideration intermittently between 1559 and 1567 by a deeply divided Privy Council.<sup>7</sup> It was only in the years 1566-1567, though, that the conditions for the match were actually made clear between the two monarchs involved, namely Elizabeth and Maximilian: they exchanged a couple of holograph letters in which they discussed the specific conditions for stipulating the marriage agreement – only to come, eventually, to the conclusion that the match was unadvisable.<sup>8</sup> The main obstacle for the English Queen, in that particular political juncture, was probably Charles' Catholicism; Maximilian's reiterated request that his brother should be left

free to practice his creed in private did not facilitate the process of finding an acceptable solution to the problem. Yet, there were also financial issues to be settled, in addition to a request on the part of Elizabeth that the Emperor (and/or his brother) did not seem inclined to grant: that the Queen and the Archduke should be able to meet in person before marrying, which meant a preliminary visit to England on the part of Charles, arranged on purpose to know – and to be known by – her.

Be it as it may, negotiations failed towards the end of 1567. Elizabeth's letter discussed here, instead, written in spring 1566, still contemplates the possibility of a marriage agreement. The Queen is displeased with Maximilian's previous missive (written in Spanish in his own hand, and dated 27 November 1565), but she is not yet ready to put an end to negotiations, and therefore manages to find a compromise between giving voice to her disapproval and maintaining decent diplomatic relations with the Austrian household. To Maximilian's epistle written in Spanish she decided to answer in a diplomatic *lingua franca* of her time, Italian, which was well known to be the language of a cultural élite. It is therefore in Italian that she employs the metaphorical expression 'se vi piacerà bilanciar con mano dretta questa causa', which brings the 'scales' ('bilancia' in Italian) into the present discussion.<sup>9</sup>

On a practical level, the Queen is trying to show the Emperor the rightfulness of her plea, which regards the third condition for marrying mentioned above; she deems it indispensable that Charles and herself be able to meet and know each other before the official engagement:

Pare a me che *per* tutti duoi sarebbe il meglio il vedersi[.] Chi sa se a luy piacerà la elettione fatta *per* gli occhi d'altrui. Tot Capita tot sensus[.] Quel chi a vn piace a vn altro non *conviene*. A me toccherebbe la vergonia vualmente con esso luy se la venuta sua fussi indarno... talche se vi pi<sup>a</sup>cerà *bilanciar con* mano dretta questa causa mi pare che tal obiectione di già ha la sua risposta[.]<sup>10</sup>

On the level, instead, of what this argument implies, the communicative strategy is more subtle. Apart from reaching her practical goal, Elizabeth also needs to emphasize her own worth as a 'European' monarch, who deserves that visit, 'not for what I am in myself, but for the honour of the position which I occupy'. In that case, employing a metaphor which, as discussed above, highlights the self-explanatory quality of her line of reasoning, somehow forces her correspondent to recognize that such rational and incontrovertible arguments derive from a fellow monarch endowed with sound judgment and intellectual lucidity.

The metaphor of weighing matters correctly can be also found in a couple of letters in French, where Elizabeth makes a similar appeal on sound judgment. They both concern, once again, the Queen's marriage negotiations with a foreign household, this time the French monarchy. The first attempt to organize a match between Elizabeth and one of the four sons of Henry

II of France and Caterina de' Medici (namely Henry, Duke of Anjou) had already failed by 1572. A much longer life had the second project, which involved Henry's younger brother Francis, Duke of Alençon (later Duke of Anjou, when Henry accessed the throne of France in 1574). In that case, a kind of affection developed on the part of Elizabeth, who corresponded with her approximately twenty-year-younger 'Monsieur' until his death in 1584.

The first of the two French epistles is addressed from Queen Elizabeth to 'Monsieur', and dated circa December 1579 - January 1580. It is a copy, but 'with one (and possibly a second) local insertion in Elizabeth's hand' (Mueller and Marcus 2003, 152, note 1); the Queen, therefore, read and amended the copied version. The metaphor we are discussing can be found in the first part of this relatively long letter, in which Elizabeth is trying to persuade the by then Duke of Anjou of the righteousness of her attitude in front of her subjects' reaction to their projected marriage. Religious practice is once more at stake: unless Anjou renounces his resolution to exercise his (Catholic) religion openly once married, Elizabeth warns him that they will have to abandon the idea of the match altogether, because 'le public exercice de la Relligion Romaine adhere tant en leur coeur que le ne consentirayia mais que uous ueniez entre telle companie de malcontents' (Mueller and Marcus 2003, 152-153).<sup>11</sup> She claims to have made use of 'time' and 'reason' in order to be able to deal with the people's wishes and aversions in the best possible way; she then proceeds by distancing herself from the practice of bad governors, who make 'temeraires iudgements au premier coup, sans auoyr peizé en meilleure balance le fon de leurs opinions' (Mueller and Marcus 2003, 152)<sup>12</sup> – that is, of course, without having duly considered, in a balanced and rational way, the political convenience of their actions.

Although the tone of this letter to Anjou is obviously more intimate than that to be found in the Maximilian epistle, the Queen is once more trying to export an image of herself as a just, rational, and considerate monarch, torn between giving vent to her own passions and desires and being ready, instead, to renounce them out of a profound respect for her people and their opinions.<sup>13</sup> She also shrewdly prompts the Duke to make use of *his* better judgment in evaluating her conduct correctly: 'Te ne doute de comparoistre deuant le siege de uostre droyct iugement pour me quitter de toute cautele ou dissimulation' (Mueller and Marcus 2003, 153).<sup>14</sup> The latter is another recurrent argumentative strategy in Elizabeth's epistles: by flattering her recipients through a commendation of their just and equitable mental attitude, she tries to prevent their potential objections and to bring them to accept her line of reasoning.

The other French example employing the metaphor of the scales is another epistle, this time holograph, addressed to the Duke of Anjou and dated 1581. It is less rhetorically interesting than the first, albeit briefly touching similar issues when the Queen gives voice to her increasing doubts concerning their

marriage; therefore, it will be sufficient to quote the sentence in which Elizabeth employs the metaphor itself to prompt her correspondent to consider matters thoughtfully before taking any course of action: ‘... Nonobstant ne puis faillir d’auoir soing de Vostre grandeur si auant que Vous priettes humblement premier que le faire de poiser en droictes balances quelz accidentz uous en peuvent reuscir Comme en premier lieu Si le mariage n’ensuivit’.<sup>15</sup>

The last example to be discussed here is in English. In March 1586 Elizabeth writes one of her many holographs to her ‘deare brother’ James VI of Scotland; it is, in Janel Mueller’s words, a ‘highly charged, profusely metaphoric letter’ (2000, 1067), which endeavours to warn James of the risk of losing the Queen’s favour and trust without openly accusing him of treacherous designs. The reiterated attempts on the part of France to weaken England by turning Scotland against its neighbour are obvious enough to Elizabeth, who frequently reminds James of their mutual pact of friendship, and wants to be reassured of his loyalty. At the beginning of the letter, she makes use of a widely employed extended metaphor to dissuade James from abandoning the close alliance with England: that of the seaman/ship able to ‘pas the highest bellows without yelding and broke nimlest the roughest stormes...’ (Mueller and Marcus 2003, 62). The Scottish King, that is, had better resist the French financial lures – France had promised to fill James’ coffers in case of an alliance – and keep a straight course, maintaining an ‘irremovable goodwill’ towards the English Queen and her country.

It is not only a question of keeping faith to a promise; pragmatic as she is, Elizabeth highlights the interests at stake when choosing between two alternatives; actually, she employs the word ‘bargain’ when she tries to persuade James not only of the dangers of a broken alliance, but also of the advantages, for his realm, of an untainted friendship with England. It is in this context that she also underlines the rationality of that choice by making use of her beloved metaphor of the scales:

I dare thus boldly affirme that you shall haue the bettar part in this bargain for When you Way in equal balance with no palsey hande the Very ground of ther desires that wold withdrawe you it is but roote of mischif to peril your selfe with out Who to [*sic*] hope to harme her who euer hathe preserved you. (Mueller and Marcus 2003, 62)

France, in other words, is not genuinely interested in a political bond with Scotland. Rather, France’s aim is the weakening of England through the complicity of English neighbours. Enticed by the temptation of money, James’ hand may be wavering when trying to balance the pros and cons of political action, but the English Queen, his ‘dearest sister’ and strongest supporter, is there to render his ‘weighing’ steady and just. Employing, alternatively, the reasons of personal loyalty and those of a more effective *Realpolitik*, Elizabeth once again appeals to her correspondent’s reasoning skills, but at the same time



promotes an image of herself as the just and rational counsellor, who can be of great help thanks to her capacity to think correctly. That she has a lot to teach her nephew on the 'art of thinking' is the implication of an argument constructed by employing effectively the 'art of rhetoric'.

The Queen was to employ the metaphor of the scales over again in her correspondence with James VI. For instance, in her holograph dated 'circa February 1, 1587' she tries to persuade him of the necessity that his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, be kept in her custody instead of being entrusted to the hands of 'some indifferent prince, and haue all her Cousins and allies promis she wyL no more seake my ruine. Deare brother and Cousin Way in true and equal balance Wither the lak not mucche good ground whan suche stuf serues for ther bilding' (Mueller and Marcus 2003, 79).

The metaphor of the scales is not only a functional tool in Elizabeth's epistolary exchanges, but it is also, as hinted above, a beloved expression of hers. She employs it in various contexts, and not exclusively to convey the meaning of a decision taken after due consideration. In a holograph letter to James dated August 1588, in the aftermath of the defeat of the Spanish Armada, she warns him of the danger of the Scottish Catholic earls giving aid to some retreating Spanish ships approaching the Scottish coast. Once more trying to steer the course of Scottish politics from abroad, a worried Queen Elizabeth diplomatically takes her leave from a nephew she knows she can never trust entirely; her beloved metaphor assists her in reiterating her affection and good will towards him, with the clear implication that he is bound to grant a reciprocally satisfactory conduct, to balance his verbal assurances of loyalty:

The necessity of this matter makes my skribling the more spidy e hoping that you WyL mesure my good Affection with the right balance of my actions Wiche to you shall be euer suche as I haue professed not doutinge of the reciproque of your behalfe... (Mueller and Marcus 2003, 83)

### *3. Looking for Protection and Plenty: The Dedicatory Letters to the Queen*

The first section of the present essay has focused on how the metaphor of the scales becomes a mode of interlocation for the Queen who, as we have seen, employs its different nuances according to different situations and addressees. Elizabeth was clearly an awkward interlocutor for her correspondents, given her position and the paradox she embodied by being a female monarch of a rising power, demanding a recognition that neither her sex nor the role of her country in Europe guaranteed in full. In the exchanges with other monarchs and heads of state, as shown above, she negotiated this paradox relying on the changeable personal relationship between herself and her correspondent: adopting a flirtatious tone with Monsieur, or a motherly tone with James VI

of Scotland, meant, for each letter and for each correspondent, re-establishing the rules according to which the exchange was to be conducted. Obeying to her more powerful rhetoric, or guided by simple courtesy in addressing a lady and a Queen, her interlocutors often found themselves following the allegorical or metaphorical set-ups she proposed in her letters. As shown above, the power game is sometimes quite explicit, and the forestalling rhetoric of the Queen becomes part of her strategy of negotiation.

The second part of this paper works on the hypothesis that letters of dedication to the Queen, prefacing printed books or manuscripts, obey to the same logic of negotiation, in this case not determined by the writer but by the addressees expectations. Thus the writers taken into consideration in this section are shown to pre-empt the addressee's evaluation and intercept any possible criticism by positing her supreme understanding and intelligence as necessary requirements for a correct (for 'correct', read 'positive') assessment of the gift she is about to receive. Inevitably, the respective positions of writer and addressee in such an exchange are extremely important, and in this case scholarly work on the relationship between patrons and painters can be of help. Discussing patronage in painting, Michael Baxandall reminds us that 'painting is the deposit of a social relationship' (Baxandall 1988, 1); but, as Dennis Romano usefully observes, this form of patronage is based on a contract between the artist and an individual or institution: the contract, at least on a temporary basis, puts the two actors on an equal ground, each guaranteeing to fulfil their side of the bargain (Romano 1993, 712). Though established in eminently business terms, such a contract, given the nature of its expected outcome, is also socially and culturally binding: independently from the aesthetic results of the work which is the object of the contact, both patron and painter agree on a system of cultural significance and values, in which they engage to enter. In the case of book dedications, especially with such an illustrious dedicatee, one may presuppose a different setting, in which the writer has to *anticipate* the addressee's response, intercepting his or her approval, as it were, by encountering his/her requirements before they are explicitly stated. As Elizabeth strove to create and spread a well-defined public image, writers of dedicatory letters could (and perhaps should) model their intellectual attitude along the lines proposed by her model. It remains to be seen whether these expectations are met by the dedicatory letters to Elizabeth we possess.

In the analysis of dedicatory letters to the Queen, a fundamental tool is the index, compiled by Franklin B. Williams in 1962, of the dedications and commendatory verses appearing in English books printed up to 1641. Williams lists over a hundred books, printed between 1559 and 1603, which were either dedicated to the Queen or included verses in her praise (61-62). A recent study has added considerably to this list, counting 183 books dedicated to Queen Elizabeth (Wood 2008); it should be noted that both works

refer only to printed books and ignore the large number of manuscripts that constituted occasional or New Year's gifts (studied, for instance, in Lawson 2007). An impressive haul; but though, as has been noted, most of these dedications present florid compliments (Wood 2008, 1), they are often mechanical: the writers seem absorbed in their own composition, in its difficulties and shortcomings, and exercise little imagination in the representation of the dedicatee, or in the evocation of the encounter between the dedicatee and the book. There is sometimes the distinct feeling that the same compliments or glowing praises might be applied to any potential addressee – and perhaps they were, as shown by roughly contemporary instances.<sup>16</sup> What is probably more relevant here are the circumstances in which such dedications were penned.

Out of the vast material available, the most rewarding dedications, from our point of view, are petitionary ones: if the dedication of a book was part of a supplication for protection or financial support, the writers had to exercise all their ingenuity to guide the sovereign's gracious reception through their rhetoric. Unlike the contacts set up between painters and patrons mentioned above, the letters of dedication we are going to examine are rather to be considered petitions *for* patronage, sometimes expressed in the form of downright supplications or requests for help, protection or support, and sometimes couched in more generic terms of praise. The lack of previous intercourse between writer and addressee multiplies the risk of a *faux pas*, and transforms the dedicatory letter into the opening gambit for a more articulate game that the interlocutor is not yet prepared to play. In fact, the writer could not even be sure that the dedicatee would be the first reader of the work that was being presented: the manuscript, or first printed copy, could be received by a secretary, or another member of the household (for instance, in the case of a Latin poem by Thomas Wilson, we also have an accompanying letter to Burghley asking him to show the poem to Elizabeth; Bajetta 2001, 152-153). Indeed, while from an ordinary letter one may generally gauge the level of intimacy between the two interlocutors, a dedicatory letter may be built on no intimacy at all, and (as it accompanies a *publication*) may address the public rather than the private persona of the dedicatee. The tone of the dedications actually changes radically when Elizabeth is addressed as ruler, or as defender of the Church, or as Petrarchan mistress.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, in the case of a head of State, such a game must also obey to a strict protocol and undergo complex negotiations, as is shown by the example below.

In 1586 Georges de La Motthe, a French refugee and gentleman, dedicated to Queen Elizabeth a splendidly illuminated manuscript, now in the Bodleian Library, whose frontispiece reads: 'Hymne a tres-haute tres-puissante tres-vertueuse et tres-magnanime, Princesse, Elizabeth Roynne d'Angleterre, France, et Irelande, &c. Presentee a sa Majesté par Georges de La Motthe, gentilhomme Francoys. 1586'.<sup>18</sup> The elaborate appellation to the Queen, set in a multi-coloured page, all surrounded by symbols and showing at its centre the

image of the phoenix,<sup>19</sup> should not lead us to make unwarranted hypotheses on La Motthe's originality, or on his baroque style: it is simply the usual appellation reserved to the monarch of England, who claimed dominion (or at any rate monastic rights) also on France and Ireland. The adjectives employed are also part of a pre-existing code, and the Queen would have expected nothing less. Indeed, Elizabeth herself used almost identical words in dedicating one of the manuscripts she wrote in her youth to her father<sup>20</sup> – a chilling thought, since the appellation bespeaks the same distance between a daughter and her father as there was between La Motthe and the Queen. Appellations of public personages, in a fundamentally public context such as a frontispiece, can hardly deviate from the norm. La Motthe was engaged in a more difficult negotiation in the dedicatory letter prefacing the text, which was, as announced on the frontispiece, a hymn in praise of Elizabeth. A dedication, directly addressing the receiver in epistolary terms, sets a tone of, as it were, public intimacy: it is proposed as part of a private interaction between writer and dedicatee while aiming, in the case of a richly illuminated manuscript, at public display; in the case of a printed book, at public circulation. Evidently conscious of his precarious position as a refugee and a supplicant, La Motthe plays it rather safely, claiming that he contemplates 'selon que la capacité de mon petit Intellect se peult estendre'<sup>21</sup> the many virtues of Elizabeth, which 'vous font vray Miracle de Nature, ornement de nostre aage, honte des deuanciers, & Lumiere a la posterite, uniuersellement admirer de tout le Monde, honorer des estrangers, & adorer de voz bons et fideles subiects, Iusques a reuerer la trace bien-heureuse de voz pudiques pas' (fol. 5r).<sup>22</sup>

The rest of the long dedication is concerned partly with the contrast between such high excellence and the writer's own shortcomings, and mostly with the circumstances of the presentation of the manuscript. It is a stereotyped and highly imitative style;<sup>23</sup> its impersonality is redeemed only by the allusion to the 'pudiques pas' above, which can be read as a courteous reference to the womanly nature of the Queen. The only passages that may reveal an individual voice are those referring to the writer's own circumstances, as when he proposes a quasi-Petrarchan comparison between himself and a small, ill-equipped boat launched on the deep sea: 'Et voyant ma petite nasselle si mal equippee, calfutree, & munie, Ie en eusse estré si Impudent, & temeraire d'oser luy donner voyle pour singler en si haute & profonde mer, de peur de me perdre parmy tant de perils & dangers, qui s'y peuuent trouuer' (fol. 5r).<sup>24</sup>

The metaphor continues with the mention of 'Madame la Duchesse de Lodunois' (a probable reference to Françoise de Rohan, Duchess of Lodunois) who acts as a pilot of the lost vessel, and who is probably the highly-placed intermediary that can ensure the attention of the Queen (fol. 5v). The articulate metaphor implicitly sets the Queen in the role of lodestar, distant yet benign, unconcerned with the petty details of the writer's predicament but not (one hopes) unmoved by his plight. The image, incidentally, resonates with the

many instances of Elizabeth being depicted as a sun, and the two metaphors are summed up in John Davies' dedicatory letter in verse prefacing his *Nosce te ipsum*: Elizabeth rises in the North like another Sun in glory, and is at the same time 'Loadstone to Hearts, and Loadstarre to all Eyes' (Davies 1599, A3).

La Motthe is by no means a great or original writer, as witnessed by the hymn itself, and the negotiation for patronage he undertakes here is consequently embarrassed and stereotyped; his allusion to the Petrarchan *topos* is slightly mechanical. But it could also be hypothesized that a dedication to Queen Elizabeth presented a number of problems and pitfalls with which writers had to contend. Besides, his example (exactly because he is by no means an original writer) illustrates some of the recurring characteristics of dedication letters to the Queen: the exaggerated insistence on spiritual virtues that should help the reader to forget the Queen's physical shortcomings; the recurring *topos* of the abysmal difference between the writer's desert and the dedicatee's (even potential) gifts; the use of Petrarchan motifs. In this last element we can also see another typical trait of dedication letters, when, as in the present case, the dedicatee is not only highly placed but also highly literate. As already suggested in the first part of the present article, Elizabeth, in her correspondence, would *self-fashion*, presenting an allegorical image of herself, as when, in letters to the Duke of Alençon, she describes herself as a rock 'assaulted by several storms and winds that blow from divers climes' (see letters dated 17 January 1580 and June 1581 in Marcus, Mueller and Rose 2000, 245, 249-250; see also Marcus 2002).

The quasi-Petrarchan image of the small boat lost in a deep sea resonates significantly with the allegory chosen by La Motthe; in analysing it, one is reminded of what Stephen Greenblatt and Arthur Marotti write on the aura of Petrarchism surrounding Queen Elizabeth, an aura which makes her the object of manipulation at least as much as the manipulating agent (Greenblatt 1984, 165-169). In his seminal article on Elizabethan sonnet sequences, Marotti charts the use of love imagery in an upwardly mobile context, observing how love poetry 'reflects courtly striving for the rewards available in hierarchical societies that functioned according to systems of patronage and that allowed (at least limited) forms of social mobility' (Marotti 1982, 398). The same happens in some of the imagery presented in dedicatory letters, depicting the dedicatee in such a way that it resonates with the contemporary cultural context. Such a strategy answers the writer's need to forestall any negative reaction on the part of the addressee: by aligning himself with a prevailing Petrarchan mode, La Motthe could hope to be recognised as part of a poetic coterie that has already met with the Queen's favour, and thus to be looked upon with the same benevolence.

At the same time, dedicatory letters were also informed by the text they were accompanying, and shaped their pre-emptive strategies accordingly; thus the dedication to Elizabeth prefacing the Geneva Bible kept a resolutely biblical tone, using for the Queen accents evoking the fate of martyrs:

... considering God's wonderful mercies toward you at all seasons, who hath pulled you out of the mouth of the lions, and how that from your youth you have been brought up in the Holy Scriptures, the hope of all men is so increased that they cannot but look that God should bring to pass some wonderful work by your Grace to the universal comfort of His church. (Quoted in Stump and Felch 2009, 115)

Here the Protestant polemic is evident, as is evident the equation between Elizabeth and Daniel in the lions' den (Daniel 6.1-28). The approval of the Queen is expected from the very role that is delineated here: the allusion to the Queen's youth is also an allusion to a difficult and dangerous time in which her fate could easily become the fate of a martyr in the hands of the 'evil' Catholic Mary, and by being reminded of her past predicament the Queen could more promptly sympathize with those who still suffered for the Protestant cause. Religious texts would often insist on this role for the Queen, using appropriate Biblical images – the blueprint here was offered by the account of Elizabeth's youth offered in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* – and comparing Elizabeth to Biblical leaders brought to face terrifying opponents, such as David or one of the prophets.<sup>25</sup>

Even in religious contexts, however, the representation of the Queen may transcend simple comparisons with Biblical or religious characters and be connoted with images of protection and fruitfulness; it is the case, for instance, of the long and rich dedicatory letter written by Andrew Willet for his *Synopsis papismi*, published in London in 1592:

The Lord hath made you a wall and a hedge to his vineyard to keepe out the wilde-boare: a goodly tree to giue shade to the beasts of the field, & succour to the foules of the aire, a nurse to the people of God, to carry them in your bosome, as the nurse beareth the sucking child. (Willet 1592, A2r-v)

It is an extraordinarily articulate image, carrying the same implications of all-embracing protectiveness that we find in some of the maritime images quoted elsewhere in this article. Beyond the religious tones, Elizabeth is a guarantee of peace, protection and prosperity: a note struck also by John Jones in his dedication to *The Arte and Science of Preseruing Bodie and Soule in Healtie, Wisedome, and Catholike Religion*, printed in London in 1579, in which Elizabeth is compared to 'a grain yarde' (Jones 1579, Avv). If in the dedication of the Geneva Bible Elizabeth is the young, fearless warrior, here she is transformed into a motherly image of plenty: for the Geneva writers, she was expected to provide support to the English Protestants that were suffering persecution abroad (as she herself had been persecuted); the English controversialist, on the other hand, addressed her as the mother and protector of the nation. The role prepared for her in these dedications corresponds to the expectations she is supposed to answer.

Lay dedications, on the other hand, could risk no Biblical echo, and would have to fall back on less charged images, such as those offered by the developing Petrarchist tradition, authoritatively linked to the image of Elizabeth by Sir Walter

Raleigh's sonnet commending Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, celebrating a Queen 'at whose approach the soule of Petrarke wept'.<sup>26</sup> It may be added that, in the decades following Elizabeth's death, nostalgia prompted the construction of a myth that was suffused with Petrarchan attributes: thus we have doubtful and posthumous attributions of Petrarchist literary works to Elizabeth (such as the one concerning the poem 'On Monsieur's Departure'), which may be the result of the construction of cultural authority around the figure of the dead Queen (Marcus 2002, 146-148). The ability of the dedication writer was then to understand the importance of this construction as it was still in its developing stages: as in the case of La Motthe, many writers participate in the building of an idealized image of Elizabeth as a benign Petrarchan mistress. It is impossible to know what Elizabeth herself thought of this construction, though her jocular poem dedicated to Walter Raleigh, part of a poetic exchange undertaken *circa* 1587 (Marcus, Mueller and Rose 2000, 307-309), seems to show that she was consciously participating in the Petrarchan game; what is clear is that this construction allowed writers of dedicatory letters to fashion the image of the benefactress according to her own expectations.

Other writers would play a comparatively simpler game, insisting, in their dedication, on traits they knew not simply to belong to the Queen, but to be qualities she would prize in herself; thus Petruccio Ubaldini, publishing his *Rime* in 1596, would insist on the Queen's love of the Italian language: 'Hò alcuna volta cercato d'alleggerir le mietediose vigilie con qualch [*sic*] numero di versi nella mia maternal lingua, alla Maestà vostra tanto cara, & familiar' (Ubaldini 1596, A2v).<sup>27</sup>

It is well known that the Queen often and publicly expressed a fondness for the Italian language;<sup>28</sup> it might be supposed that Italian writers had thus a natural advantage in addressing their works to the Queen. This, at least, certainly seems Ubaldini's supposition, as the very use of Italian is mentioned here as a sure way of meeting Her Majesty's favour. Immediately after this letter, besides, Ubaldini inserts a series of sonnets, once again addressing the Queen, but this time in recognizably Petrarchan terms, attributing to Elizabeth the supernatural power of the courtly lady: 'Voi sola in me seren potete, e chiaro, / render l'aer gravato hoggi da nebbia' (Sonnet 1, lines 9-10).<sup>29</sup> Once, however, the poet abandons generic praise and turns to a more specific celebration of the monarch, the nautical metaphors reappear, as they do in the central stanzas of the second sonnet:

Mentre piu d'hor in hor la mente interno,  
 Nel mar de i vostri merti, e la profonda,  
 Acqua voglio solcar, non veggio sponda,  
 Ch'ei fin non ha: nè d'io falso discerno.

Perch'io mia debil barca à vela, e à remi  
 Guido per l'onde, spinta da quel vento,  
 Ch'al porto di salute altrui conduce.<sup>30</sup>

The tone and imagery might strike a casual reader as, again, Petrarchan; but, as in the case of the nautical imagery employed by La Motthe, here the Queen is not sailing in the frail boat, but is one of the superhuman forces in this scene, a guidance and goal for the weary mariner.

The weighing of scales, ships and rocks in the stormy sea, a wall surrounding a vineyard, granaries and goodly trees: the imaginary world suggested by these letters is not only revealing of a cultural climate, or of Petrarchan fashion, but also of the social climate, and of the main worries and interests of a nation then expanding its commercial (and thus political) power on land and sea. Elizabeth herself would make use of maritime imagery in her poems, as in the case of the Song composed upon the occasion of the Armada victory, in which she celebrated the Lord who ‘made the winds and waters rise’ (Marcus, Mueller and Rose 2000, 411), and would insist, up to her last recorded speech, on ‘peace and prosperity’ for her loving people, goals that ‘we evermore prefer before all temporal blessings’ (Marcus, Mueller and Rose 2000, 353). This repertory of images creates a common language, shared by the Queen and many of the writers who dedicated their works to her, and authorizes the strategy of pre-emptive evaluation hypothesized at the beginning of this section. One of the less subtle instances of such a strategy is offered by the already mentioned Ubaldini, in the dedication of his *Vite delle donne illustri*:

Onde ella giustamente degnarsi possa di muouer se stessa à corrisponder alla mia giusta speranza con proportionata clemenza, accettando gratamente il picciol dono, ch’io diuotamente le porgo, stimandolo verace memoria (se gli historici pur il vero ne dicono essi) di quelle Donne tutte in essa opera raccolte, et descritte...<sup>31</sup> (Ubaldini 1591, 4r)

What is revealing here is Ubaldini’s use of *giustamente* and *giusta*: it is as if the writer’s hope of a benefit was turning into a rightful expectation. The same justice that is such a natural attribute of the Queen should ‘justly’ move her to favour the dedicator: the epistolary rhetoric here, clumsily manipulated by Ubaldini, shows the intended strategy beneath. If, as noted above, Elizabeth always strived to be in control, even of her interlocutors, other writers could be less adept at this game; but what is important here is the participation of all players to a shared language, a common code of patronage and protection.

<sup>1</sup> Giuliana Iannaccaro is responsible for sections 1 and 2 of the present article; Alessandra Petrina for section 3.

<sup>2</sup> Among the various, recent publications dealing with Queen Elizabeth’s epistles from a literary perspective, see the collections which appeared at the beginning of the twenty-first century: Marcus, Mueller, and Rose, eds 2000; Mueller and Marcus 2003; Pryor 2003; May 2004. On the Queen’s mode(s) of letter writing, see Kouri 1982; Bassnett 1988; Crane 1988; Mueller 1994; Mueller 2000; Schneider 2005; Beal and Ioppolo 2007; Duncan-Jones 2007;



Iamartino and Andreani 2010; Baseotto 2011; Coatalen 2011; Gibson 2011; Allinson 2007 and 2012. On early modern letter writing by women, see Warnicke 1983, and Daybell 1999, 2001 and 2006.

<sup>3</sup> On Elizabeth's handwriting see Woudhuysen 2007 and Gibson 2011.

<sup>4</sup> See Mueller and Marcus 2003, Letters 13, 14, 15, and 16 (19-24). All quotations are taken from this edition.

<sup>5</sup> February 21, 1549. It is Letter 15 in Mueller and Marcus (2003, 21-22).

<sup>6</sup> For instances of the Queen's role as political advisor to be found also in her correspondence with foreign ruling powers, see Iannaccaro, forthcoming.

<sup>7</sup> See Doran 1989 and 1996; see also MacCaffrey 2004, 91-100.

<sup>8</sup> The 1566 and 1567 holograph letters, in Italian, that Elizabeth I sent to Maximilian, have been transcribed, edited and translated by Carlo Bajetta, and are to be published in C.M. Bajetta, G. Coatalen and J. Gibson, forthcoming. I am thankful to Carlo Bajetta for permission to quote from these letters before publication. For a rhetorical analysis of the same epistles, see Iannaccaro, forthcoming.

<sup>9</sup> This is the complete sentence: 'se vi piacerà bilanciar con mano dretta questa causa mi pare che tal obiectione di già ha la sua risposta' ('If... you will weigh this matter with an even hand, it appears to me that such an objection is already answered'). All translations from the original Italian are by C.M. Bajetta.

<sup>10</sup> 'It seems to me that it would be better for both to see each other. Who knows whether he would like the choice made by the eyes of another? *Tot capita tot sensus*. What pleases one is not acceptable to another. If his coming should be without result, the shame would be no less mine than his... If, therefore, you will weigh this matter with an even hand, it appears to me that such an objection is already answered.'

<sup>11</sup> The English version of the French original is to be found in Marcus, Mueller, and Rose 2000, 243: '[The] public exercise of the Roman religion sticks so much in their [the English people's] hearts that I will never consent to your coming among such a company of malcontents'.

<sup>12</sup> '... rash judgments at the first stroke, without having weighed in a better balance the depth of their opinions', in Marcus, Mueller, and Rose 2000, 243.

<sup>13</sup> The sonnet 'On Monsieur's Departure', attributed to the Queen, displays the same dichotomy between heart and duty in a much more dramatic way. The identification of 'Monsieur' with Francis, by then Duke of Anjou, and the sonnet's dating (ca. 1582) are only conjectural. See Marcus, Mueller, and Rose 2000, 302-303.

<sup>14</sup> 'I do not fear to present myself before the seat of your just judgment and acquit myself of every wile and dissimulation', in Marcus, Mueller, and Rose 2000, 243.

<sup>15</sup> This letter is as yet unpublished. It was transcribed, edited and translated by Guillaume Coatalen, and is to be published in Bajetta, Coatalen and Gibson, forthcoming. I am thankful to Guillaume Coatalen for permission to quote from this letter before publication: '... notwithstanding, I cannot fail to take care of your grandeur further, and I beg you very humbly first to weigh in scales which accidents may occur to you, like, in the first instance, if a marriage followed'.

<sup>16</sup> One of the most notable cases of multiple dedication concerns Reginald Pole's *De Unitate* (1537), extant in three versions with three prefaces, one addressed to Charles V, King of Spain, one to the King of Scotland, and one to Edward VI of England (van Dyke 1904, 700).

<sup>17</sup> It might also be noted that, in some of the instances in which the author of the dedication is a person well-known to the Queen (as in the case of Francis Bacon's letters accompanying his New Year's gifts to the Queen between 1594 and 1602, transcribed in Stump and Felch 2009, 513-514), the tone is much more business-like, and there is very little room for metaphors or allegorical imagery.

<sup>18</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Fr.e.1 (*olim* Miscellaneous 3062), frontispiece. The manuscript is briefly described in Craster and Madan 1922, 581.

<sup>19</sup>The manuscript is indeed striking for the beauty of its layout and the sumptuousness of the illumination, as well as for the elegant hand employed. These characteristics in fact should not be automatically connected with the purpose of the manuscript, since, as observed by Carlo Bajetta, gift books to the Queen might show a poor handwriting (Bajetta 2001, 149).

<sup>20</sup>'A treshault et trespuissant et redouble Prince Henry 8 de ce nom Roy d'Angleterre, de France, et d'Irlande, defenseur de la foy, Elisabeth sa tres humble fille, rend salut et devot obedience'. The dedication is transcribed in Marcus 2002, 137.

<sup>21</sup>'As far as my poor intellect can encompass'. All translations from La Motthe are mine.

<sup>22</sup>'Make of you a true miracle of nature, an ornament of our age, the shame of her predecessor, and the light of posterity, universally admired by the whole world, honoured by foreigners, and adored by your good and faithful subjects, to the point of revering the happy trace of your modest steps'.

<sup>23</sup>It has, in fact, been imitated on many occasions. Among the best parodies is one by the early twentieth-century writer P.G. Wodehouse: in his dedication prefacing *Bertie Wooster Sees it Through* he imitates the tone of literary flattery thus: 'It is with inexpressible admiration for your lordship's transcendent gifts that the poor slob who now addresses your lordship presents to your lordship this trifling work, so unworthy of your lordship's distinguished consideration'.

<sup>24</sup>'And seeing my little boat, so ill-equipped, prepared and armed, I would be so Impudent and foolhardy as to set sail and venture onto such a deep sea, that I am afraid I might lose myself amidst so many dangers, that I may find there'.

<sup>25</sup>The comparison between Elizabeth and David is to be found, for instance, in the anonymous dedication of a book of psalms published in Geneva in 1559 and in Thomas Stapleton's Catholic pamphlet, published in Antwerp in 1566 (Wood 2008, 126-127).

<sup>26</sup>Line 7. See Spenser 1590, Pp3v.

<sup>27</sup>'I have sometimes tried to lighten my tedious vigils with a few verses in my mother tongue, so dear and familiar to Your Majesty'.

<sup>28</sup>I have analysed Elizabeth's attitude towards the Italian language in Petrina, forthcoming.

<sup>29</sup>'You alone can bring sunshine in me, and clear the air now made heavy by fog'.

<sup>30</sup>'As I immerse myself more and more in the sea of your many merits, as I try to wade through that deep water, I see to shore, no end: nor do I see falsely. Because my frail boat I steer, with sail and oars, across the waves, driven by that wind that leads others to a safe harbour'.

<sup>31</sup>'So that she may justly deign to correspond to my just hope with adequate benevolence, gratefully accepting the small gift I make to her in all devotion, evoking the memory (if historians tell the truth) of all those women here gathered and described...'

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