



A Switch of Language: Elizabeth I's Use of the Vernacular as a Key to her Early Protestantism

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ABSTRACT

From childhood Elizabeth was trained in the 'New Learning' and brought up under Protestant influences. Her *juvenilia* attest to this immersion in Protestant and humanist education. The youthful Elizabeth often wrote formal Latin letters in the style of the mediaeval *ars dictaminis* replete with humanist and Protestant imagery. She continued this style of writing throughout her brother's reign. However, after Parliament passed the Act of Uniformity of 1549, Elizabeth stopped writing formal Latin letters to her brother and switched to formal English ones instead. This essay will argue that this switch was intentional on the part of Elizabeth; and set within the context of the time gives an early clue to Elizabeth's solidarity with her brother's Protestant efforts in England.

KEYWORDS: Elizabeth I, vernacular, Latin, Protestant, Edward VI, Reformation

Introduction

Today, there is little scholarly disagreement that as a young princess Elizabeth Tudor received a fine humanist education. There is also little doubt that this education included an advanced familiarity with the reformed religion of Protestantism. However, in the middle of the twentieth century, most historical scholarship continued to portray Elizabeth as a *politique* who only used religion as a tool due to political necessity. Christopher Haigh was one of the first to cast doubt on this view stating that Elizabeth: 'was a political realist, but this does not

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mean she was indifferent to spiritual things; she cared about right religion, but she would not take foolish risks for it. There is some evidence of real personal commitment'.² While agreeing with Haigh on this issue, Susan Doran has noted that most historians have tended to neglect Elizabeth's letters and instead focus solely on her personal book of devotions as the only key to her religious beliefs.³ Doran argues that Elizabeth's letters actually tell quite a bit about her own religious beliefs making her into what Doran calls 'an old sort of Protestant'.⁴

I believe that Elizabeth's youthful letters also hold a key to her education in the reformed religion of the sixteenth century. These pre-accession letters of Elizabeth I give good insight not only into the depth of her humanist and Protestant education, but also the value that Elizabeth placed upon the political importance of language in general. For in 1549, Elizabeth abruptly stopped using Latin as her medium for letter writing to her brother, the king; and concentrated instead on using English in the same sophisticated style as she had used previously in Latin. I believe that this was a purposeful attempt on the part of Elizabeth to express solidarity with both her brother's rule and his reformed religious beliefs.

To set this discussion in context, I will first examine the growing importance of the vernacular in the writings of reformers of the sixteenth century. Next, I will explore Elizabeth's own education in matters of reformed theology and humanism and then relate this to her abrupt switch to the vernacular in her letters to her brother King Edward VI. In so doing, I will argue that this switch appears to be both deliberate and purposeful to demonstrate the young Elizabeth's support for (or perhaps careful compliance) with the Protestant reforms and aesthetics championed by Edward's government.

Historical Context

From the medieval to the early modern periods, Latin unquestionably dominated the cultural and religious landscape of Europe. The *Vulgate* had been the official version of the Scriptures for the Roman Catholic

2. Christopher Haigh, *Elizabeth I: Profiles in Power* (London: Longman, 2nd edn, 2005), p. 31.

3. See Susan Doran, 'Elizabeth I's Religion: The Evidence of her Letters', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 51.4 (October 2000), pp. 699–717.

4. Doran, 'Elizabeth I's Religion', p. 717.

Church and European Christendom since the late fourth century. While medieval scholastic commentaries were in abundance helping to interpret the Scriptures, vernacular translations were still rare. This was for many reasons, including the fact that a great majority of the European populace was illiterate. However, during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, the increased availability of the printed word helped fuel a desire for the Bible and other literary works in the vernacular. This occurred in the mid-1400s after the European invention of the printing press by Johann Gutenberg in Germany. Now that the printing press made copies of works readily available to a wider audience, literacy rates began to rise causing the demand for religious texts in the common tongue to rise steadily as well.⁵

The Catholic Church had historically resisted the egalitarianism which was inherent in giving the laity full access to the Scriptures. This led to the suppression and persecution of groups who advocated for the Scriptures in the vernacular, such as the Lollards and the Waldensians. While the message of these early reformers did have a mass appeal, at that time it was impossible for them to disseminate their message on a wide scale. So most of these groups remained isolated and fragmented, never reaching the laity as a whole. However, with the innovation of the printing press, the sixteenth-century reformers now had the advantage of a rapid and cost effective means of spreading their message.⁶ Coupled with the corresponding rising literacy rates of the populace, this advantage was multiplied. Now their ideas could reach a wider audience and more national audience. Printers, too, profited from this arrangement because they wanted to publish materials that were in high demand. All of these factors helped create a kind of 'perfect storm' for the sixteenth-century reformers making them markedly more successful than their predecessors.⁷

This new demand for religious works in the vernacular was shared with the humanists of the Northern Renaissance. Euan Cameron states that the humanists desired to give the laity the Scriptures in their common language. He also argues that the

5. For a good discussion of how the printing press affected European society see Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Canto edn; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

6. Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250–1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 202.

7. Ozment, *The Age of Reform*.

humanists never imagined that the less-educated peasantry would create divisive and different interpretations from any obscure text. Instead he states they optimistically thought the laity would only glean 'moral exhortations and examples of virtues to follow'.⁸ Even Erasmus initially advocated for the laity's access to Scripture in the preface to his 1516 New Testament.⁹ This view of the laity's lack of interest or inability to interpret the Scriptures for themselves might, in the light of current times, appear at best an optimistic and at worse a naive prediction. Brad Gregory has argued that this cry for *Sola Scriptura* and the optimism concerning the laity's use of their new-found access to Scripture actually proved counterproductive. He argues that this freedom of access to the Scriptures generated the confusion and division that quickly followed in the Protestant circles of Europe. Gregory writes that: 'Scripture alone let the genie out of the bottle; [and] he has never been put back in.'¹⁰

This growing demand for the vernacular had a history in England as well. As early as 1382, John Wycliffe and his followers advocated the reform of the Catholic Church with an emphasis on teaching the laity in the vernacular. This included a translation of the *Vulgate* into English. While current scholars cast some doubts on his direct role in the translation of the Bible into English, they do credit him with the inspiration of the task. At times, Wycliffe did preach in Latin, but he preached and wrote in English as well. His later followers, derisively named the Lollards, continued to stress the importance of the vernacular in religious dialogue as well as in the teachings of the Scriptures.¹¹ William Tyndale also championed this emphasis on religious teaching in the vernacular well into the reign of Henry VIII. Tyndale's first version of the English New Testament appeared in England in 1526. He was also a prolific writer of texts advocating religious reforms in English, publishing *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* (1528), *Obedience of the Christian Man* (1528) and *The Practice of Prelates* (1530).¹² His translation of

8. Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 142.

9. Cameron, *The European Reformation*.

10. Brad Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 344.

11. 'Wycliffe, John', in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (ed. E.A. Livingstone; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 1769–70.

12. 'Tyndale, or Tindale, William', in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 1648.

Erasmus's *Enchiridion* appeared in print form in England as early as 1533.¹³

It was in this age of the growing importance of the vernacular in regard to religion on the continent and in England, that the young Elizabeth I was educated. While direct evidence for her early education is scant, most of the clues to reconstruct what she studied come from her literary corpus as well as a few extant comments from herself and some of her contemporaries. For example, Elizabeth gave some insight into her early education in a 1566 speech before Parliament. She asserted:

It is said I am no divine. Indeed, I studied nothing else but divinity till I came to the crown, and then I gave myself to the study of that which was meet for government, and am not ignorant of stories wherein appeareth what hath fallen out for ambition of kingdoms, as in Spain, Naples, Portingal, and at home.¹⁴

While this statement is most probably an early attempt by Elizabeth to justify her rule through the promotion of her own learning, it gives personal testimony that her early education included matters of theology. This statement also demonstrates that Elizabeth thought very highly of herself as a scholar in both the areas of classical literature as well as theology. She would demonstrate this same degree of confidence her entire life. For in 1586, in a speech to Parliament over the proposed execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, Elizabeth reminded the members that they did not need to lecture her about either the intricacies of government or religion. She stated: 'I was not simplie trained up, nor in my yewth spent my time altogether idly.'¹⁵

Furthermore, there is testimony from her contemporaries about the depth and content of her education. Roger Ascham, her tutor after William Grindal, gave several instances of high praise for his young student. It is significant that Elizabeth had Roger Ascham as a private tutor as he was one of the leading Protestant scholars in England during this time. Due to his skill in classical languages and handwriting, Ascham was able to serve three different English monarchs, including the Catholic Mary I, despite his overt Protestant

13. See *A booke called in latyn Enchiridion militis christiani, and in englysshe the manuell of the christen knyght replenysshed with moste holsome preceptes, made by the famous clerke Erasmus of Roterdame, to the whiche is added a newe and meruaylous profytable preface*. (London: By wynkyn de worde, for Iohan Byddell, otherwyse Salisbury, 1533).

14. Syndics of Cambridge University, CUL MS Gg. III.34, p. 208.

15. BL, MS Lansdowne 94, art. 35B, ff. 86r–88r.

beliefs. He famously made these known on 5 January 1548 in a public disputation at St John's College, Cambridge.¹⁶ This disputation dealt with whether or not Ascham felt that the Catholic Mass and the Lord's Supper were one and the same. Ascham also corresponded frequently with prominent Protestant reformers such as Archbishop Cranmer, Johannes Sturmies and Martin Bucer.¹⁷

Ascham wrote his praise for Elizabeth's academic ability in a letter to Johannes Sturm, the rector of the Protestant university in Strasburg, in April of 1550. Ascham stated:

There are many honourable ladies now who surpass Thomas More's daughters in all kinds of learning; but among all of them the brightest star is my illustrious Lady Elizabeth ... I will write nothing however which I myself have not witnessed. She had me for her tutor in Greek and Latin two years; ... The praise which Aristotle gives wholly centres in her - beauty, stature, prudence and industry. She has just passed her sixteenth birthday ... Her study of true religion is most energetic ... She talks French and Italian as well as English: she has often talked to me readily and well in Latin, and moderately so in Greek. When she writes Greek and Latin, nothing is more beautiful than her hand-writing. She is as much delighted with music as she is skilled in the art.¹⁸

This is an important accolade and trustworthy evidence of Elizabeth's level of scholarship at a young age by one of England's best-known Protestant and humanist scholars.¹⁹

It is most interesting that Ascham stated that Elizabeth's 'study of true religion (i.e., reformed faith) is most energetic'. Ascham also gave some details of the theological curriculum in her studies in the very same letter. Ascham noted that Elizabeth read with him: 'Saint Cyprian and Melanchthon's *Common Places* ... as best suited, after the holy Scriptures, to teach her the foundations of religion, together with elegant language and sound doctrine'.²⁰ Ascham mentions here

16. In this particular letter Ascham details the parts of the disputation to Cecil after the fact. Roger Ascham, 'Letter to Sir W. Cecil', in J.A. Giles (ed.), *The Whole Works of Roger Ascham, Now First Collected and Revised with a Life of the Author* (London: John Russell Smith, 1865), Vol. I, Part I, pp. 156-58.

17. Ascham, 'Letter to Sir W. Cecil', pp. cxvii-cxviii.

18. Roger Ascham, 'Ascham to Sturm' [4 April 1550], in Giles, *The Whole Works of Roger Ascham*, pp. lxii-lxiii.

19. For more on Ascham's Protestant views see Ryan J. Stark, 'Protestant Theology and Apocalyptic Rhetoric in the Roger Ascham's *The Schoolmaster*', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69.4 (October 2008), pp. 517-32.

20. Ascham, 'Ascham to Sturm', pp. lxii-lxiii.

Elizabeth's familiarity with the works of such notable continental reformers as Phillip Melancthon.

Ascham later wrote in his book *The Schoolmaster* concerning Elizabeth's continuing efforts and achievements in education. He writes that by 1570 his student, Elizabeth, now his Queen:

Hath attained to such a perfect understanding in both the tongues (Latin and Greek) and to such a ready utterance of the Latin, and that with such a judgment as they be few in number in both the universities, or elsewhere in England, that be in both tongues comparable with Her majesty.²¹

These statements give some impressionistic and anecdotal evidence of the thoroughness of Elizabeth's early education as well as her mastery of it. While in this last example, it was in Ascham's interest to flatter Elizabeth as she was now his Queen, her extant corpus of work corroborates his testimony quite well. Elizabeth studied more than theology before her rule, but the evidence indicates her education involved at least some exposure to the emerging reformed faith from Europe.

The fact that Elizabeth's early interest and focus was in matters of religion and theology also makes sense as after the birth of Prince Edward, Elizabeth was free to study religion due to the lack of political expectations for her.²² There was also no expectation that Elizabeth, as a woman, would enter the Protestant church in a clerical capacity. Therefore, her educational focus may very well have been for the preparation of a later patron of evangelical scholars.

There is also abundant evidence in Elizabeth's *juvenilia* of her familiarity with and interest in Protestant theology. For example, in 1544, the then 11-year-old Elizabeth sent her stepmother, Katherine Parr, a New Year's gift of Elizabeth's own English translation of Marguerite of Navarre's *Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* (The Glass of the Sinful Soul). Marguerite, Queen of Navarre, and sister to the then King of France sent a copy of this book to Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn, around the time of 1534–35. It is possible that Elizabeth may have found this book amongst her mother's belongings and then used this particular copy to translate into English as the gift for her stepmother Queen Katherine Parr in 1544.²³

21. Roger Ascham, *The Schoolmaster* (ed. Lawrence Ryan; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, [1570] 1967), p. 87.

22. 'Third Act of Succession' (1543) 35 Henry VIII, c. 1, in Alexander Luder *et al.* (eds.), *The Statutes of the Realm* (London, 1810–28), III, pp. 955–58.

23. Marc Shell, *Elizabeth's Glass with 'The Glass of the Sinful Soul' (1554) and 'Epistle Dedicatory and Conclusion' (1548) by John Bale* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), p. 3.

This work is a very personal account of one woman's deep search and yearning for an intimately spiritual relationship with God. Marguerite had also been both an advocate of vernacular translation of Scripture and patron of reformers, thus making her text somewhat of a controversial one for the time that Elizabeth translated it.²⁴

In 1545, the young Princess Elizabeth sent her father, King Henry VIII, a letter which accompanied a gift of her own original trilingual translation of Queen Katherine's *Prayers or Meditations* into French, Italian and Latin.²⁵ The gift of her translation also says as much about the influences to which Elizabeth was exposed as a child as it does about her abilities in languages. Queen Katherine intended her work to be a supplement to Archbishop Cranmer's *Litany* to help teach lay people how to pray in English. While Cranmer's work was intended for public worship, Katherine's was a work of personal and private devotions. Later textual scholars have discovered that her work is essentially a 60-page summary of the classic medieval work of spirituality, the *Imitatio Christi* by Thomas a' Kempis.²⁶ Janel Mueller asserts that Parr purposely manipulated the texts of the *Imitatio Christi* to demonstrate how the soul must have direct access to Christ and his saving grace without a mediator such as a priest or church, thus reflecting the tenets of reformed theology.²⁷

On the same date as the gift to her father, Elizabeth wrote to Queen Katherine and included a gift of her original English translation of Chapters 1–10 of Book 1 of John Calvin's seminal work of systematic theology, the *Institution de la Religion Chrestienne* (1541).²⁸ Demonstrating that her project was as much about the context of the text as translation, the 11-year-old Elizabeth states that Calvin's work was a:

little book whose argument or subject, as Saint Paul said, surpasses the capacity of every creature and yet is of such great vigor that there is no

24. Shell, *Elizabeth's Glass*, see especially ch. 6. See also Anne Lake Prescott, 'The Pearl of the Valois and Elizabeth I: Marguerite de Navarre's *Miroir* and Tudor England, in Margaret Hannay (ed.), *Silent But for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1985), pp. 61–76.

25. BL, MS Royal D.X., ff. 2r–5r. For Elizabeth's complete translation see BL, MS Royal D.X., ff. 6r–117v.

26. Janel Mueller, 'Devotion as Difference: Intertextuality in Queen Katherine Parr's "Prayers or Meditations" (1545)', *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 53.3 (Summer 1990), p. 175.

27. Mueller, 'Devotion as Difference', p. 180.

28. NAS, MS RH 13/78, ff. 1r–180v.

living creature of whatever sort that has not had within itself the feeling of it.²⁹

When she mentions St Paul's thoughts on the matter, she may very well be referring to Romans ch. 1 where Paul asserted that since the beginning of creation all mankind has had an innate knowledge of their Creator.³⁰ In this first chapter of *The Institutes*, Calvin highlights the relationship between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of one's self. He writes:

But, though the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves be intimately connected, the proper order of instruction requires us first to treat of the former and then to proceed to the discussion of the latter.³¹

Elizabeth goes on to give even more praise to this work of reformed theology. In her remarks to Katherine, Elizabeth even extols the 'source' (Calvin) of the work. She writes:

But seeing the source [Calvin] from which this book came forth, the majesty of the matter surpasses all human eloquence, being privileged and having such force within it that a single sentence has power to ravish, inspire, and give knowledge to the most stupid and ignorant beings alive in what way God wishes to be known, seen and heard: I yet think it is sufficient in itself and has no need for any human consent, support or help.³²

Susan Doran stated from her examination of Elizabeth's letters: 'There can be no question that she stood firmly on the Protestant side of the confessional divide which tore Christendom apart in the sixteenth century: she was no crypto-Catholic nor was she indifferent to religion.'³³

Elizabeth's Early Letters

During this time of her early exposure to reformed theology, Elizabeth kept up a prolific and intellectual correspondence with the central figures in her life. Owing to her humanist education and leanings,

29. Elizabeth I, 'Princess Elizabeth to Queen Katherine, Prefacing her English translation of Chapter 1 of John Calvin's *Institution de la Religion Chrestienne*', in Leah Marcus, Janel Mueller and Mary Beth Rose (eds.), *Collected Works*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 11.

30. This was a very notable chapter for Protestant reformers, especially Martin Luther.

31. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1 (trans. John Allen; (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1930), p. 48.

32. Marcus *et al.*, *Collected Works*, p. 12.

33. Doran, 'Elizabeth I's Religion', p. 716.

these early letters demonstrated quite well her command of multiple ancient and modern languages. For example, in her first seven letters, she employed Latin four times, French twice, Italian once, and English once. In the midst of these early letters, Elizabeth began a brief correspondence with her erudite younger brother, King Edward VI with her first letter to him in Latin in 1547.³⁴ While Elizabeth's father was admittedly not committed to a full-scale reformation, the accession of her brother Edward provided new hope for many of the religious reformers of the time. Thomas Cranmer, the archbishop of Canterbury under both Henry VIII and Edward VI, gave full expression to this hope when he labeled Edward as a 'second Josiah' in his coronation sermon.³⁵ Calvin expressed a similar hope in a letter to Edward in 1551. In this letter Calvin urged the young King to imitate the Old Testament king Josiah in his zeal for reforming the religion of his people. He stated that Edward should also: 'brake down the high places that the memory of the idolatrous worship might be destroyed'.³⁶

In her correspondence with Edward, Elizabeth continued her previous style of letter writing that she utilized during the time of her father's reign. In this style Elizabeth imitated the medieval recommendations of letter writing as her letters are replete with exaggerated similes and in the style of an inferior to a superior. While scholars of letter writing attest that the influence of the more formal medieval *ars dictaminis* began to fade in the fifteenth century, Elizabeth's earliest letters demonstrate a close affinity with and possible heavy influence from this source.³⁷ It is significant that her first four letters to Edward, all written before 1549, are all quite formal and in Latin. Each of these letters begin with a variation of a very formal *salutatio* such as: 'Illustrissimo et Nobilissimo Regi Edouardo Sexto' (To the most illustrious and noble King, Edward VI).³⁸

34. BL, MS Harley 6986, art. 11, f. 19r.

35. Chris Skidmore, *Edward VI: the lost King of England* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2007), p. 61.

36. Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored: The Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547–c.1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 163.

37. See Martin Camargo, 'The Waning of the Medieval *Ars Dictaminis*', *Rhetorica* 19.2 (Spring 1991), pp. 135–40; and Malcolm Richardson, 'The Fading Influence of the Medieval *ars dictaminis* in England after 1400', *Rhetorica* 19.2 (Spring 1991), pp. 225–48.

38. BL, MS Harley 6986, art. 11, f. 19r.

It is in the midst of this highly adorned correspondence between Elizabeth and her younger brother, the king, that an interesting clue about Elizabeth's thoughts on religion emerges. Elizabeth's last letter to Edward in Latin is undated but is assumed to have been written in the summer or fall of 1548.³⁹ In this letter she continues her style of exalted Latin and mainly concentrates on making sure that Edward still views her as both a grateful sister and faithful subject.⁴⁰ Elizabeth's next letters to her brother continue the same style of the structure and formality advocated by the medieval *ars dictaminis*. These letters are full of flattery and from the perspective of an inferior to a superior, but something curious occurs in these last three letters. Elizabeth switches her language choice to the vernacular instead of Latin.⁴¹ I believe that this switch to the vernacular, when set in the context of both her education and the time, actually gives insight into Elizabeth's thoughts on religion.

Elizabeth wrote her first letter to Edward in the vernacular on 15 May 1549.⁴² This change is significant because in January of that same year, the English House of Lords began debating the Act of Uniformity of 1549. This new Act of Parliament proposed to make the first prayer book of Edward VI the only legal form of worship in England. This is momentous as this Act mandated that all services, prayers and songs be conducted in English instead of Latin. Just after this Act had been passed by Parliament and just shortly before it went into effect (9 June 1549), Elizabeth abandoned Latin as her medium of correspondence with her brother, the King. Elizabeth continued her letter writing with Edward, but this time she only wrote to him in English. Her first letter in the vernacular to Edward was on 15 May 1549.⁴³ Elizabeth then writes to Edward again on 21 April 1552, to comfort him on his sickness. Once again, this letter is in the vernacular in the style of an inferior to a superior.⁴⁴ In the spring of 1553, Elizabeth wrote her last letter to her brother expressing a sisterly affection over his recent illness and regret over not being able to see him personally. This letter

39. Bodleian Library, MS Smith 19, art. 1, f. 1.

40. Bodleian Library, MS Smith 19, art. 1, f. 1.

41. BL, MS Cotton Vespasian, F.III, f. 48.

42. BL, MS Cotton Vespasian, F.III, f. 48.

43. 'The Act of Uniformity, 1549', 2 and 3 Edward VI c. 1, in Gerald Bray (ed.), *Documents of the English Reformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), pp. 266–71.

44. BL, MS Lansdowne 1236, f. 39.

also in the vernacular would be her final letter to her young brother as he would die on 6 July 1553.⁴⁵

While there is little doubt that Elizabeth kept progressing as a serious scholar from the time of Edward's reign, her switch to the vernacular appears to reflect more than a temporary submission to Protestant fashion. Elizabeth does not write a formal Latin letter again for another fifteen years. When troubled by the controversy surrounding Mary Queen of Scots, Elizabeth returned to her once familiar medium of Latin in a very brief note to her principal advisor William Cecil. Elizabeth penned this short letter on 23 September 1564.⁴⁶ Even during her lengthy and copious correspondence with her erudite cousin, James VI of Scotland, Elizabeth always wrote in the vernacular.⁴⁷

This interpretation of Elizabeth's early endorsement of Edward VI's Protestantism is bolstered by the fact that after 1549, Edward VI also abandoned Latin as his primary medium for letter writing. Out of Edward's first 55 letters, he uses Latin 50 times. However, after 1549, he changes to the vernacular just like his sister Elizabeth. His last eight extant letters, all written after 1549, are all in English.⁴⁸ His last Latin letter is to Barnaby Fitzpatrick on 8 May 1548.⁴⁹ It would be helpful to have more letters to suggest more of a motive, but it is surely more than coincidence that both he and his sister stop writing Latin letters after 1549 when the Act of Uniformity went into effect.

Supporting the significance of Elizabeth's switch is the fact that this action is not seen in many of Elizabeth's contemporaries. For example, Edward's Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, wrote letters in the vernacular from the very beginning of his tenure especially when dealing with internal matters of the English Church. He did continue to utilize Latin both before and after the Act but this was primarily in letters to foreign reformers as Latin was still an international language of academic and theological debate.⁵⁰ Elizabeth's sister, Mary, whose education in the Latin is well-attested, primarily used English as her

45. BL, MS Harley 6986, art. 16, f. 23r.

46. TNA, SP Scotland, Elizabeth 52/9/48, f. 113r.

47. See BL, MS Additional 23240. This MS volume is entitled *Autograph Correspondence of Q. Elizabeth with James VI, of Scotland, 1582–1596*.

48. Edward VI, *Literary Remains of King Edward the Sixth*. Edited from his *autograph manuscripts, with historical notes and a biographical memoir*, by John Gough Nichols (2 vols.; New York: B. Franklin, 1964).

49. Edward VI, *Literary Remains*, pp. 63–66.

50. Thomas Cranmer, *The Works of Thomas Cranmer Edited for the Parker Society*, vol. 2 (ed. Revd John Edmund Cox; (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1844–46).

medium for letter writing throughout her lifetime.⁵¹ Roger Ascham, Latin secretary to Edward VI, Mary I and Elizabeth I, also tended to write both in Latin and English before and after the Act of Uniformity of 1549. Ascham's last letter to Edward VI is dated March of 1550, and it was in Latin.⁵² While this could be due to the fact that Ascham was the King's Latin secretary, it does not demonstrate any sort of switch or change to the vernacular as did Elizabeth's.

Therefore, when this switch to English is examined in the context of both the times and her education, this abrupt language change appears to have the marks of a purposeful and deliberate act. Elizabeth may very well have been attempting to demonstrate her own solidarity with Edward in matters of both state and religion. While writing or praying in Latin privately was not outlawed by this Act, the Act of Uniformity of 1549 made the vernacular the language of religion and devotion of the English church placing it on a par with Latin – the language of the Catholic Church. English was now the language of the Church of England. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that Elizabeth's use of her native tongue may very well underscore her careful reading of the times and demonstrate her interest and willingness to show support for both her brother as well as the New Religion.

Elizabeth continued a preference for the English language in religion as well as education for the rest of her reign. She never again returned to Latin as a primary or even common medium of letter writing. Elizabeth also made sure that her preferences for religion in the vernacular also influenced the education in her realm. In 1570, Elizabeth changed many of the statutes for the colleges of her realm including Cambridge. In so doing she enshrined the idea of learning in the vernacular as having equal value with the classical and biblical languages. She declared:

All which books each lecturer shall explain in the vulgar tongue according to the capacity and intelligence of his hearers, and the professor of Greek shall translate Homer, Isocrates, Demosthenes, Euripides, or some one of the more ancient authors, and shall teach the grammatical construction together with the properties of the language.⁵³

51. For a discussion of Mary's early education see David Loades, *Mary Tudor: A Life* (Cambridge and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992), p. 32. Mary Ann Everett Wood (ed.), *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain*, vol. I (London: Henry Coburn, 1848).

52. Giles (ed.), *The Whole Works of Roger Ascham*, pp. 179–80.

53. Elizabeth I, 'The Laws or Statutes of the University of Cambridge' [1570] in *Collection of Statutes for the University and the Colleges of Cambridge*, (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1840), p. 5.

Her statutes also make quite clear that those studying divinity should also learn and participate in preaching in English as well as Latin.⁵⁴ Elizabeth used her position as queen to place English as a language of debate in both politics and religion on par with Latin.

Elizabeth's embrace and support of Protestantism was no secret nor was it half-hearted. Even to the end of her lengthy reign, Elizabeth promoted the reformed faith in her own realm and also in Europe. She entertained alliances with German Protestants and even supported the Dutch Netherlands in their revolt against Catholic Spain.⁵⁵ Later in her reign she supported the French Protestant Henry of Navarre in his fight against Catholicism in France. So in 1593 when she heard news of his sudden conversion to Catholicism to gain the crown of France, she was horrified by his overt political move at the expense of what she saw as 'true religion'. She wrote to him in July of 1593 and stated quite sternly:

Ah, what griefs, what regret, what groaning I feel in my soul at the sound of such news as Morlains has recounted. My God, is it possible that any earthly respect should efface that terror wherewith Divine fear threatens us? Can we reasonably even expect a good issue from an act so iniquitous? He who has for many years preserved you by His hand, can you imagine that He allows you to go alone in the greatest need? Ah, it is dangerous to do ill that good may come of it.⁵⁶

This is also about the same time that she began to translate Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae*, perhaps, trying to find her own consolation in this work of medieval theology and philosophy.⁵⁷

Elizabeth's Protestant beliefs and leanings and her preference for the vernacular had its origin from her earliest years. So in 1549, when Elizabeth switched her language of letter writing to English, she was making a powerful statement that she endorsed the religion of her brother. As queen, she continued this trend and preference for the vernacular throughout the rest of her life.

54. See, for example, Elizabeth I, 'The Laws or Statutes', pp. 8, 9 and 25.

55. Susan Doran, *Elizabeth I and Foreign Policy: 1558-1603* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 52.

56. Elizabeth I, 'Elizabeth I to Henry IV, July 1593', translated from French, in G.B. Harrison (ed.), *The Letters of Queen Elizabeth I* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968), p. 225.

57. See Caroline Pemberton, (ed.), *Queen Elizabeth's Englishings of Boethius, Plutarch and Horace* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1899), p. vii.