

The Elizabethan Response to Magical Plots

Elizabeth Heaton

B00882436

HIST 4981/4982

April 9, 2024

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
HISTORIOGRAPHY.....	3
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO ELIZABETHAN MAGIC	10
RELIGIOUS INSTABILITY	10
MAGIC.....	14
JOHN DEE.....	20
CHAPTER TWO: THE PLOTS OF THE 1560S	24
CATHOLIC PLOTS OF THE 1560S	24
FRANCIS COXE	28
LAWS OF 1563.....	34
CHAPTER THREE: THE PLOTS OF THE 1580S	39
PLOTS AND BACKGROUND OF THE 1580S	39
LAWS OF 1581.....	47
HENRY HOWARD.....	50
CONCLUSION	60
BIBLIOGRAPHY	63

Introduction

The reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603) was filled with magical plots meant to usurp her position and her throne. With Elizabeth having returned England to Protestantism, a significant number of those plotting against her were Catholic and wanted to see the country become Catholic once more. The Elizabethan authorities and the queen's supporters used the law and propaganda to counter these plots. This thesis examines the periods of major plots and the different measures that went into stabilizing the position of Elizabeth I. Plots were at their highest in the 1560s and 1580s. The religious instability during Elizabeth I's reign caused some Catholics and Protestants to resort to unusual means to aid their religion in gaining power in England, including magic and prophecies. In addition to counter-magic and surveillance, the Elizabethan government used statutes and propaganda to aid in their fight against magical Catholic plots.

The first chapter provides historical context and looks at the types of magic that were used. The religious instability in England began with Elizabeth's father, King Henry VIII (1509-1547), and continued throughout the reign of Elizabeth. Each monarch during the Tudor period ruled and viewed religion differently. Each monarch also viewed magic and its effects differently, for example Henry VIII and Elizabeth I believed it was a top priority. The reality of what was considered magic was fluid so the definition of magic will be discussed in this chapter. One of the defences the Crown used to protect Elizabeth was to hire John Dee, an astrologer, to aid in the fight against conjurors attacking Elizabeth. The use of a conjuror demonstrates the seriousness of magic to the Crown. While this chapter does heavily rely on secondary sources, it is essential to understanding the situation and the primary sources used in the other chapters.

The second chapter focuses on the 1560s, the first decade of Elizabeth's reign. Most of the magical plots occurred during this period and two major statutes were enacted to prevent or punish the use of magic. A key piece of anti-magic propaganda is examined in detail written by an individual that was convicted in 1561 for being involved in a Catholic plot. Francis Coxe wrote *A Short Treatise Declaring the Detestable Wickednesse of Magicall Sciences as Necromancie, Conjurations of Sprites, Curious Astrologie and such Lyke* in 1561 following his short incarceration. After being caught he quickly turned his loyalty from the Catholic church to the queen with this treatise against the use of magic. There were two acts that were aimed at punishing those who used magic and they will be examined in detail to see specifically what was banned: "An Act against Conjurations, Inchantments and Witchcraft" and "An Act against Fonde and Phantasticall Propheyses." These laws were passed in 1563 and came with heavy punishments for those who committed offences. The 1560s laid the groundwork for the next decades to punish magical plotters and to try to deter others from turning to magical methods.

Chapter three will focus on the 1580s which saw a resurgence in plots against Elizabeth I and the Protestant church. It also witnessed new measures to counter the threat. In 1581 Parliament passed "an Act against Sedicious Wordes and Rumours Uttered Againste the Queens mooste Excellent Majestie." The act was not entirely focused on magic but there were specific lines that mentioned prophecies and conjurations to determine the lifespan of the queen. Prophecies determining the lifespan of the queen caused some of the plots as plotters believed she would not live long. To bring attention to the deceit of magic, Henry Howard wrote *Against the Poyson of Supposed Propheyses* in 1583. Like Coxe, Howard was linked with people involved in magical plots against the English crown, making this book interesting as it is avidly against the use of magic and prophecies. The comparison of the 1560s and 1580s show the

progression that the Privy Council, Parliament and supporters took in trying to remove and prevent any threats. The authorities' response was thorough and used different mediums to reach all levels of society, ensuring the message was brought to the attention of everyone.

Historiography

The specific topic of English prophecies and magic in connection to religious rebellions began being discussed in detail in the 1970s. The main secondary sources that aided in this thesis are from Keith Thomas, Sharon Jansen, Norman Jones, Krista Kesselring, Michael Devine, Francis Young, and Lewis Brennan. In the 1970s Thomas introduced historical engagement with prophecies through anthropological analysis that considered them legitimate reasons for concern during the Early Modern period. Previous historians discussed magic, but typically without considering it a substantial element of political or social protest.

The earliest secondary source I have consulted is *Religion and the Decline of Magic* by Keith Thomas which was published in 1971. Thomas was the earliest historian to consider prophecy and magic a serious element when discussing the early modern period. He “tried to show their [magic and prophecy] importance in the lives of our ancestors and the practical unity which they often possessed” and hoped to “have contributed to our knowledge of the mental climate of early modern England.”¹ He also recognized that religion and magic were closely linked after beginning his research. Arguing that magic was considered a real threat in society changed the way that historians viewed magic moving forward. In the foreword Thomas cites Dr. Alan Macfarlane's study of witchcraft prosecutions in Essex as statistical confirmation for his

¹ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), ix.

research.² One reviewer said that this book is “a most important study” that should be studied “by all students of witchcraft and of the history of ideas.”³ Thomas has been a source of inspiration for future historians to look closer at prophecy and magic.⁴

Political Protest and Prophecy under Henry VIII by Sharon Jansen was published in 1991. Her book argues that prophecies in the early modern period were an important reason for social protest and should be studied seriously. She argues that everyone believed in the power of prophecy but did not necessarily believe in every prophecy. This argument builds on the idea that magic and prophecies were believed to be real and should be studied as such. Focused on the 1530s, Jansen’s aim was “to determine as far as possible the role of prophecy in the events of the decade and to discover in as great a detail as possible just what it was that people... were hearing, reading, copying, collecting and... dying for.”⁵ She was able to determine that prophecies were very influential for rebellion and politics as they had “the authority of tradition” since the prophecies used dated back to the time of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. The monarchy did not argue with the authority that this antiquity held but did often argue that people had misinterpreted prophecies or tried to restrict their use. This book brought to light the importance that prophecies had on the populations during the early modern period. The importance of prophecies began decades before the reign of Elizabeth I and some were legally considered treason during the reign of Henry VIII. Jansen built on past historians’ work on prophecies to emphasize their importance and how they were utilized in protest.

² Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (1970).

³ Rossell Hope Robbins, “Keith Thomas. Religion and the Decline of Magic,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1973), 72.

⁴ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, xi.

⁵ Sharon Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy Under Henry VIII* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1991), 7.

The very influential piece by Norman Jones, “Defining Superstitions: Treasonous Catholics and the Act Against Witchcraft of 1563,” was also published in 1998. Every author that published after 1998 that has discussed prophecies during Elizabeth’s reign has mentioned Jones when discussing previous works. Jones focused on the prophetic and magical aspect of the plots, whereas historians before did not believe in the importance of the magic. Jones went into a detailed history of “superstitio” and the connection between Catholicism and magic. Jones argues that reformers used “superstitio” as evidence to drive the connection between Catholicism and magic and sorcery, in other words Catholic superstition. Jones argued that the 1563 “Act against Conjurations, Inchantments and Witchcraft’ was part of the Privy Council’s attempt to complete the machinery defending the Elizabethan Settlement because they had failed to get such legislation in 1559.”⁶ A major argument was that a group of Catholics in Essex were the reason behind the push for the 1563 laws due to the lack of legal consequences for their attempts to use prophecy against the queen. Jones elaborated further on the Catholic connection with prophecy and magic in general. It is an essential piece that has been used by other historians in their work since it was published.

Krista Kesselring’s article “Deference and Dissent in Tudor England: Reflections on Sixteenth-Century Protest” was published in 2005. This article argues that most disagreements between the Crown and peasants did not include violence and were within “pre-existing conventions of obedience.”⁷ But those that were motivated by prophecies were different and did “not conform to the standard model of conservative, deferential protest.”⁸ She also argues that

⁶ Norman Jones, “Defining Superstitions: Treasonous Catholics and the Act Against Witchcraft of 1563,” In *State, Sovereigns & Society in Early Modern England*, ed. By Charles Carlton (Sutton Publishing, 1998), 199.

⁷ Krista Kesselring, “Deference and Dissent in Tudor England: Reflections on Sixteenth-Century Protest,” *History Compass* 3, no. 2 (2005), 8.

⁸ Kesselring, “Deference and Dissent in Tudor England: Reflections on Sixteenth-Century Protest,” 8.

most cases of protest were aiming for the return of traditional society but some strands, such as those motivated by prophecy, wanted there to be a new outcome. She builds on previous scholarship to argue that prophecies need to be seriously examined when studying past political issues due to their importance to early modern English populations. Kesselring disagrees with previous authors that argue protest during this period was only by conservatives who were not capable of imagining a changing society. She references Jones and Jansen to build on arguments that they made in their pieces. She agrees with Jansen regarding prophecy being respected by all social classes and Jones' reasoning for the 1563 statute's creation. Kesselring builds on the previous narrative by introducing the distinction of disagreements based on prophecies as being different from the average peasant rebellion.

Michael Devine published "Treasonous Catholic Magic and the 1563 Witchcraft Legislation: The English State's Response to Catholic Conjuring in the Early Years of Elizabeth I's Reign" in 2015. Devine argued that Elizabeth's chief minister, William Cecil, "was willing to do whatever necessary, employing 'manipulation, intimidation, and hyperbole,' to combat the Catholic threat and defend the realm."⁹ Throughout the article he continues to identify where Cecil exaggerated threats to Elizabeth I in order for them to be treated seriously. Devine develops the historical argument that prophecy was used for political protest rather than just social protest. He also develops the connection between Catholicism and magic in comparison to politics. Jones is cited throughout the article which builds on the previous narrative by emphasizing how a specific political figure was worried about the threat of prophecies. Devine made important

⁹ Michael Devine, "Treasonous Catholic Magic and the 1563 Witchcraft Legislation: The English State's Response to Catholic Conjuring in the Early Years of Elizabeth I's Reign," in *Supernatural and Secular Power in Early Modern England*, ed. Marcus Harnes and Victoria Bladen (Routledge, 2015), 68.

additions to the historiography by focusing on Cecil's reaction to the plots and his determination to have legal consequences for the use of magic against the crown.

The most recent book is *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England: A History of Sorcery and Treason* by Francis Young which was published in 2018. Young argues that both the Privy Council and Parliament were fearful of magic and the possible threats that could occur against the Crown. He specifically looks at uses of magic that were considered treasonous and why they became treasonous. For example, the Effigy Plot of 1578 was believed to be wax figures that were created to cause harm against Elizabeth when they were created for love magic. He argues that not all use of magic was political in nature, only when they were a threat to the monarch or the realm. Young continued the argument of Kesselring by saying "the government began to face magical threats from individuals who did not conform to the old stereotypes of discontented Catholics."¹⁰ It is a consistent theme that those who used prophecy to back their actions were more determined and violent. He cites and credits Devine and Jones for being influential in this field of history. Young is credited with a "well-constructed and illuminating book" that "takes on the relatively unstudied role of magic as a form of treason."¹¹ Young continues the field of magical prophecies by expanding previous arguments and focusing on political treason.

The most recent study on witchcraft and politics is Lewis Brennan's dissertation "Witchcraft and Politics in Early Modern England, c. 1558-1604." Brennan builds on past historians work on witchcraft and politics, but his focus is on the religious political element of

¹⁰ Francis Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England: A History of Sorcery and Treason* (London•New York: I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2018), 142.

¹¹ B Lowe, "Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England: A History of Sorcery and Treason," *Choice* 55, no. 11 (2018), 1390.

witchcraft.¹² He aimed to fill the gap of study regarding how “England’s secular and religious governing elites understood witchcraft, felt threatened by it, and were able to use it for polemical purposes.”¹³ He views witchcraft and politics as having a symbiotic relationship which is a more modern understanding of their connection. While his focus is on witchcraft, the concepts and ideas relate to the entirety of magic as those terms were fluid during the early modern period. Brennan also argues that witchcraft and magic were feared by the Elizabethan advisors and their aim was to remove it as a threat to the Crown. He argues that the regime was mainly only involved in witchcraft when it was a threat to the monarch’s life which can be seen in the 1563 statutes against the use of witchcraft and prophecy. Brennan continued the field of magic and witchcraft study by focusing on the relationship between religious politics and witchcraft.

The study of prophecies and magic in political and social reforms during Tudor England began in the 1970s. The arguments of these authors support the idea that prophecies and magic were dangerous and serious threats to social and political reform against the monarchy. These authors seriously engaged with the cultural belief that magic was real and a threat. Subjects during the reign of Elizabeth I believed in the potential harm that magic could bring. They also believed in prophecies and it can be seen that plots that were backed by prophecies were different from typical rebellions. This difference in intensity and belief were threatening to the Crown. There is no significant disagreement between these authors, but rather they build upon each other to create new ways of thinking about the use of prophecies and magic. I hope to continue their work by further narrowing my research and looking at the reactions to the Catholic magical plots from the Parliament and loyalists.

¹² Lewis Brennan, “Witchcraft and Politics in Early Modern England, c. 1558-1604,” PhD diss., (University of Southampton, 2021), 5.

¹³ Brennan, “Witchcraft and Politics in Early Modern England, c. 1558-1604,” 17.

Conclusion

Few historians have looked at the Catholic plots through the viewpoint that magic was believed to be real and threatening. The next chapter goes into a detailed explanation of the political and religious climate that Elizabeth I faced in her ascent to the throne. The complex definition of magic is examined along with the different types of magic. Modern historians have a difficult time constituting belief of a society from hundreds of years ago, but the belief in magic can be seen through statutes, plots, books, letters and more.

Chapter One: Introduction to Elizabethan Magic

Understanding the religious upheaval England experienced prior to Queen Elizabeth's reign is vital to understanding how and why Catholic plotters took such extreme measures to attempt to push Elizabeth from the throne. Beginning with the reign of her father, King Henry VIII, the religion within England was changed and those who did not follow the new religion were heavily prosecuted. While religion was changing, magic was continuously believed by the Crown and the people, but the laws regarding its use were inconsistent. Magic came in different forms that ranged from innocent astrology to dangerous necromancy. In their attempt to protect Elizabeth, the Crown used the aid of John Dee. Dee was an astrologer who used his knowledge to counter magical attacks against the queen and to determine courses of action such as the date for the queen's coronation. This information gives ample background to laws, propaganda and magical attacks that will be discussed in later chapters.

Religious Instability

The religious instability that tore through England began with the divorce of King Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon. Catherine could not produce a male heir for the King which was essential for his line to continue as the rulers of England. Henry was determined to make a divorce occur and decided to become the head of the Church of England after the Pope would not allow the divorce.¹ The Act of Supremacy of 1534 declared Henry the Supreme Head of the Church of England on the grounds that England was never within the jurisdiction of the Pope to begin with.² Young argues that the terms 'reformer' and 'conservative' are more fitting than

¹ Wallace T MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I* (London: E. Arnold, 1993), 4.

² Francis Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England: A History of Sorcery and Treason* (London•New York: I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2018), 58.

using Protestant and Catholic, but Protestant and Catholic will be used for better understanding. Anne Boleyn was the second wife of Henry and gave birth to Elizabeth I. When Elizabeth was born, she was celebrated by those who supported the Protestant change but was deemed a bastard by those who held onto the Catholic traditions. Since Henry's first wife was still alive, Anne was not considered a legitimate wife to those who followed the Catholic faith. Continuing with this logic, Elizabeth was born out of wedlock as Anne was never married to Henry. This issue followed her throughout her time as a Princess and later Queen of England.

King Henry VIII had acts against treason, but none specifically mentioned magic or witchcraft until 1542. The 1542 'Bill against conjurations and witchcrafts and sorcery and enchantments' was passed after Lord Hungerford, a wealthy landowner, used magic to 'compass or imagine' the King's death.³ While Hungerford was executed for treason before the bill was passed, it ensured that the use of magic was considered treasonous for future events. The act emphasized the use of magic for treasure-hunting which is interesting due to its original purpose being to protect the King. Henry VIII died on 28 January 1547 and his son from his third marriage, Edward VI (1547-1553), became king. In a sweeping set of repeals, Edward's government repealed the 1542 Witchcraft Act. There were no prosecutions for magical treason or for the use of magic in Edward's short reign. Edward's government appeared to not be as concerned about the threats that could come from magic and witchcraft as much as his father and half-sister, Elizabeth, were.

The country remained Protestant until Elizabeth's half-sister from Henry's first marriage, Mary, took the throne (1553-1558). Mary was Catholic and reverted the country to viewing the Pope as the head of the Church again. Mary repealed all the treason acts since 1351 and promised

³ Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 76.

that no one would be punished for their words under her reign.⁴ With the return to Catholicism, the jurisdiction over magic returned to the Church courts. But Parliament and the Church courts were more focused on heresy and establishing Mary's reign than on magic. She prosecuted those who would not convert to Catholicism and especially those who treated her mother, Catherine of Aragon, with disrespect. Mary deemed Elizabeth "the natural leader of the Protestants" and treated her as a suspect throughout her reign.⁵ There were periods when Elizabeth was imprisoned and questioned as a supporter of Protestant plots aimed at removing the Catholic monarch from the throne.⁶ While Elizabeth publicly proclaimed she was a Catholic under the reign of Mary, she did not continue with that sentiment past the death of her sister.

Elizabeth became the monarch of England on 17 November 1558 after Mary died with no child. With her accession to the throne, she made England Protestant again. While the country was Protestant, Elizabeth was somewhat more lenient towards religious differences than her predecessors. The belief that Elizabeth was born out of wedlock was a constant argument for others with claims to the throne. Elizabeth never married and having a woman, let alone an unmarried one, running the country was sufficiently unusual to alarm many. Outside sources constantly pressured Elizabeth to marry throughout her reign. At first the aim was for an heir but later for political alliances. While she was not the first woman to rule England, she was the first to not have the backing of a husband. The idea that Elizabeth was unmarried and a bastard aided in other claims to the throne, such as those of the queen of Scotland.

Mary, Queen of Scots was a Catholic monarch who grew up in France. She believed that Elizabeth was a bastard and campaigned to have herself put on the English throne. Mary had a

⁴ Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 80.

⁵ MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I*, 13.

⁶ MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I*, 17.

claim to the throne through Henry VIII's sister being her grandmother.⁷ Since Mary was not considered a bastard, she believed she had a stronger claim to the throne over Elizabeth. The English Catholics heavily supported this claim which is the root of many of the Catholic 'popish' plots. Their aim was to have Elizabeth removed from the throne for Mary to ascend and make England Catholic again.⁸ These plots did end with her execution in 1587 after she was implicated in a plot against Elizabeth.⁹

William Cecil, Elizabeth's secretary, attempted to accuse Mary Stuart of using witchcraft as a way to increase Elizabeth's popularity within England. He used the existing propaganda of the 'superstitious' and maleficent Catholic to anonymously promote Mary as a sorcerer.¹⁰ Cecil viewed the immediate Catholic prophecies against Elizabeth as a clear connection between Catholicism and magic. He used the Pole-Fortescue Treason, which will be mentioned in more detail in Chapter 2, as a way of convincing Elizabeth that Mary had supporters within England that were conjuring demons and rituals to try and kill her. Mary's immense focus on the prophecies that forecasted Elizabeth's death encouraged Cecil in his conspiracies against Mary. The connection between Mary's Catholicism and the accusations of her being a witch increases the idea that Catholicism and magic were intertwined in the eyes of Protestants. Cecil used the fear of magic and prophecy as a political weapon for Elizabeth and Parliament to view Mary as a witch.

The religious instability that England experienced beginning with King Henry VIII caused significant death, bloodshed, and the looming unknown. Religious extremists took

⁷ MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I*, 60.

⁸ Lewis Brennan, "Witchcraft and Politics in Early Modern England, c. 1558-1604," PhD diss., (University of Southampton, 2021), 60.

⁹ MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I*, 352.

¹⁰ Glyn Parry, "The Monarchical Republic and Magic: William Cecil and The Exclusion of Mary Queen of Scots," *Reformation* 17, no. 1 (2012) 30-39.

advantage of the instability to try and have their monarch of choice put on the throne. A way of gaining this was by using a variety of different types of magic. Many believed in magic and witchcraft during this period, and it was unknown the limits it could achieve.

Magic

Historians have argued over the definition and scope of magic throughout English history. The thirteenth-century Dominican friar, Vincent of Beavais, defined magic in his *Speculum Maius* (1244) as “a sinful art involving an inappropriate relation to the natural or spiritual world.”¹¹ A common theme surrounding the definition was the negativity attached to the practice causing those that have practiced to be harshly persecuted over the years. The use of magical plots against the monarchy goes well into the Middle Ages meaning it was not new to the Tudor line. But the Reformation gave Catholics and Protestants alike more reasons for plotting and prophecies. Some types of magic were generally accepted, and others were not. The term for some practitioners they deemed acceptable was “nigromancy.” They used “necromancy” for magic that was not, thinking it demonic.¹² Common names for those who practiced the occult arts include: ‘cunning man’, ‘wise woman’, ‘sorcerer’, ‘astrologer’, ‘necromancer’, ‘conjurer’, ‘prophet’, ‘witch’, and ‘charmer.’¹³ The persecution of those that practiced magic depended on the type, purpose and the period of history, but many people in early modern England viewed it as something to fear.

¹¹ Frank F Klaassen, *The Transformations of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 19.

¹² Klaassen, *The Transformations of Magic*, 10.

¹³ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 210.

While the definition of magic is debated, there is a consensus of the different categories of magic. One category was ritual magic which included conjurations, demonic magic and necromancy which manipulated the spiritual world.¹⁴ Necromancy is described by Edward Bever as contacting the spirits of the dead and is a type of divination.¹⁵ Divination was used to find hidden objects, missing people, to predict the future, and to learn unknown things about the past. There were other types of divination such as: oneiroscopy, interpreting dreams; chiromancy, palm reading; and scapulimancy, inspecting animals' shoulders. Another category was natural magic which manipulated the elemental world, or the physical world.¹⁶ Divination was sometimes considered natural magic when it was being used to forecast weather or manipulate natural beings. The last category was celestial or astral magic, and one type was astrology. Astrology required learned skill as knowledge of the solar system and star systems were needed along with a general understanding of how planets and stars moved as well. Planets and stars were used to determine current and future events. Astrology was considered a learned skill due to the amount of knowledge required to use it. Magic could be performed through rituals, incantations, conjurations and more. There was a difference between magic and witchcraft in the early modern period, but all terms were used fluidly so it is difficult to determine an exact definition. Witchcraft was believed to always be evil or to be used negatively. Some believed that witches were "members of devil worshipping cults" while magicians acted alone or "without being full-blown diabolists."¹⁷ But magic could be viewed as either negative or positive, for example some charmers made a living by selling their services to locals but necromancers called

¹⁴ Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 10.

¹⁵ Edward Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft and Popular Magic in Early Modern Europe: Culture, Cognition and Everyday* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008), 220.

¹⁶ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 265.

¹⁷ Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 13.

upon demons to answer questions. There are many other specific types of magic that can be discussed, but this is a layout of the basic magic that was used in early modern England.

The Antiphoner Notebook was written by a late sixteenth-century scribe “who was interested in magic, charms, and the old religion.”¹⁸ The first experiment in the notebook is “A proven experiment for making a male or female thief return to you in person if he should be in any place within the kingdom of England.”¹⁹ It begins by telling the reader to make an image of a man and a woman and carve certain characters and figures into the wax. After saying a specific prayer, and putting the figures in the fire, one must say:

I conjure you Angels of God, Sabaoth, Uriel, and Raguel, by the great potency of God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and by these names of God, which I invoke in my support: I am Alpha and Omega and first and last and Agla, and by this name of God, Tetragrammaton, and by this name of our Lord Jesus Christ at which every knee of celestial, terrestrial, and infernal beings is bent and by the delights of heaven in which you are, that in whatever country within the kingdom of England you compel Alexander Tebbe and Helen Tebbe to return to us by the virtue of these characters written in these images, and to return to us in all vigor, just as I fashion them in these images with this ring of thorn.²⁰

This one ritual contains significant biblical and religious references. They are using God and their prayer to power what they are looking for with this ritual, which is a thief within England. The prayers and religious references demonstrate the link between magic and religion. Once the effigy is pricked with a needle, the person performing the ritual cannot rest until the thief appears before them. This ritual in the Antiphoner Manual is just one example of many manuals that existed.

¹⁸ Frank Klaassen, *Making Magic in Elizabethan England: Two Early Modern Vernacular Books of Magic* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2019), 3.

¹⁹ Klaassen, *Making Magic in Elizabethan England*,” 32.

²⁰ Klaassen, *Making Magic in Elizabethan England*,” 33.

Prophecies were a major fear and were outlawed on multiple occasions during the reign of Elizabeth I. Young claims that the types of plots targeting her made prophecy “more important than magic as a threat to the state.”²¹ Prophecies were shared from word of mouth and were often open to interpretation which made them dangerous. During the Tudor period, every major rebellion had some prophecy attached to it.²² A single prophecy could be used to encourage anti-government activism or support a plot to unseat Elizabeth. Prophecy had three branches: animal symbolism, written/word prophecies, and ‘painted prophecies.’²³ Written/word prophecies were the most common and painted prophecies were simply prophecies shown through picture books. As mentioned, the way prophecies were told and understood meant that they were open to interpretation and used to support anyone’s argument. Jansen argues that new prophecies were compilations of predictions from an older prophecy which people then interpreted based on the current political situation.²⁴ This argument means that anyone could put together a prophecy based on older models and use it to support their argument. Devine comments that “astrology and prophecy were endemic in England, and a major event like the change of a monarch saw a flurry of prophecies.”²⁵ The government feared what the prophecies could cause, especially during times of unrest and religious uprisings.

As mentioned, Elizabethan prophecies were constant. A popular one was the *Dreadful Deadman* which came in many forms. A Protestant version of it was from “Robert Blake,”

A dead man that no man saw borne nor no man shall see buried, shall be king over vi kingdoms,
and he shall be generated out of the sea by the strength and nature of a dun cowe; and this Lion

²¹ Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 5.

²² Krista Kesselring, “Deference and Dissent in Tudor England: Reflections on Sixteenth-Century Protest,” *History Compass* 3, no. 2 (2005), 7.

²³ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 462.

²⁴ Sharon Janson, *Political Protest and Prophecy Under Henry VIII* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1991), 10.

²⁵ Devine, “Treasonous Catholic Magic and the 1563 Witchcraft Legislation, 71.

shall be gone where few shall find him for the space of 22 moneths, and od daies, and after 22 monethe and *od* daies, he shall come againe and execute iudgement in his fathers house, and that which is darke he shal make light, and shall make a way to the holy Crosse²⁶

This prophecy includes examples of imagery of animals, such as the Lion, and nature, such as the sea. Previt -Orton understands the ‘sea’ to be Jane Seymour, the mother of Edward VI and the third wife of Henry VIII, but many interpretations were possible.²⁷ Those using prophecies in their plots against the Crown would turn the imagery into figures that would support their cause, often equating the animals in the prophetic texts with the animals in noblemen’s heraldic devices. The ambiguity of these prophecies allowed for many interpretations.

Magic and religion were tightly intertwined and there was a thin line between religious practices and magical ones. Keith Thomas points out that “this belief that earthly events could be influenced by supernatural intervention was not in itself a magical one. For the essential difference between the prayers of a churchman and the spells of a magician was that only the latter claimed to work automatically; a prayer had no certainty of success and would not be granted if God chose not to concede it.”²⁸ The medieval practice of ritual blessings, or ‘sacramentals’, was another example of where Catholicism and magic were blurred and intertwined.²⁹ For example the wine and bread at a Catholic service was believed to have been transformed by the priest into the blood and body of Christ. Whereas Protestants viewed the sacraments as reminders or symbols of Christ. The introduction of Protestantism was the beginning of the removal of magical and ritualistic ceremonies from religion. The idea that a

²⁶ John Harvey, *A discursive probleme concerning prophecies*, 1588, 56.

²⁷ C. W. Previt -Orton, “An Elizabethan Prophecy: ‘This Prophecy Merlin Shall Make.’ Shakespeare,” *History (London)* 2, no. 8 (1917), 210.

²⁸ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 46.

²⁹ Norman Jones, “Defining Superstitions: Treasonous Catholics and the Act Against Witchcraft of 1563,” In *State, Sovereigns & Society in Early Modern England*, ed. By Charles Carlton (Sutton Publishing, 1998), 189.

Priest could work the same type of miracles as God was “a challenge to God’s omnipotence” and deemed criminal. The Catholic Church was in constant suspicion of using magic or being involved with it. There are examples of rituals that required a mass to power the end result. Along with this connection of magic and religion, there was a connection between magic and politics that dates back to Ancient Egypt.³⁰ While witchcraft and magic has been outlawed many times since then, persecution rose dramatically under the reign of Elizabeth I. The persecutions against those who practiced magic occurred due to the fear of what magic could do.

Early modern individuals did not know the limits of magic or when it was occurring which caused the immense fear of it. Francis Young points out that rituals and magic could be performed secretly and away from the scene of the crime making it a safer option for treason compared to explosions, riots, etc.³¹ While to modern readers a ritual to try to kill the queen of England is not realistic, many early modern individuals truly believed it could do damage to people, animals and possessions. It is difficult to constitute belief of an entire population, especially hundreds of years later. But looking at the evidence of laws and books, the wording and penalties of using magic show a society that feared what it could do. Young argues that “a few instances of a magical ritual, followed by the intended victim’s death, were enough to convince many people of magic’s ability to kill.”³² While some may not have believed in the occult, they understood that many did believe which is what made it dangerous.

The idea that rituals and prophecies could occur at any time in any location made Elizabeth and the Privy Council extremely nervous. The fear that there were conjurers attempting to kill Elizabeth was enough to cause concern, especially since Elizabeth had no

³⁰ Brennan, “Witchcraft and Politics in Early Modern England, c. 1558-1604,” 3.

³¹ Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 1.

³² Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 16.

heirs. The use of magic was usually only part of a plot to remove the queen, and there were other plotters and plans involved.³³ The magic that was involved in plots tended to be the conjurations of demons to calculate the monarch's death or the use of an effigy to harm the ruler through sympathetic magic.³⁴ Effigies were figures, such as a doll or wax molded, designed to look like the targeted individual and were used to inflict pain on their body. An effigy was used against Elizabeth in the form of three wax figures that had her name written on them. This use of an effigy ended up being part of a failed use of love magic,³⁵ but the Crown took it very seriously considering the normal use of effigies. Parliament did not consider whether magic would harm Elizabeth or not, but focused on the idea that there was intent to harm the queen.

Magic in early modern England is an expansive topic that is often viewed today as mere fairy tales or fiction. But to the average individual during this period, magic was truly believed and feared by many. The witch trials across Europe, which lasted decades, is just one example of belief constituting fear and violence. The limit of magic was not known and the few instances of the intended victim of a ritual dying caused fear amongst all classes of society. The Elizabethan Parliament tried to protect Elizabeth from all forms of magic which came through the Catholic plots against her.

John Dee

The Catholic plots had the English Parliament fearful of magical threats that could harm Queen Elizabeth I. The government used techniques and precautions including the consultation of John Dee (1527-1608). Dee was an alchemist, astrologer, philosopher, and mathematician

³³ Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 1.

³⁴ Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 12.

³⁵ Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 133.

with multiple university degrees who spent a couple of years teaching at Cambridge University.³⁶ In the 16th century every learned man had knowledge of Astrology and it was the most intellectually demanding magical practice that could be performed.³⁷ The Court brought him in on many occasions to consult on issues they were having with magic and he even had a special place with Queen Elizabeth I. There is evidence of Elizabeth consulting Dee during the reign of her sister, Queen Mary.³⁸ She first went to him for advice and knowledge regarding her sister's reign and marriage. It is important to recognize that the Crown was so afraid of what magic could do that they had their own magician to counter attacks against the queen. While Dee was never officially patronized by the queen, he was hired by nobles such as William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke.

Robert Dudley, the organizer of the queen's Coronation, asked Dee to aid in the decision of the day the celebrations should be on when Elizabeth was preparing to ascend to the throne.³⁹ There was anxiety amongst Parliament and the newly appointed Monarch that the day represent a long and positive reign after the turmoil of the last couple of monarchs. He spent time using astrological calculations to decide on the best day for her coronation and was even present at the celebrations. He was a rival with John Prestall, another astrologer in England who was involved in almost every Popish Plot against the queen.⁴⁰ Their rivalry began around the time of the queen's coronation when Prestall developed a negative horoscope for her reign while Dee cast one that estimated a long and prosperous reign. The rivalry would be present throughout both of their lives and especially in the plots of the 1560s.

³⁶ Glyn Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England: John Dee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 8.

³⁷ John Dee and Gerald Suster, *John Dee: Essential Readings* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2003), 20.

³⁸ Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England*, 31.

³⁹ Benjamin Woolley, *The Queen's Conjuror: The Science and Magic of Dr. John Dee, Adviser to Queen Elizabeth I*. 1st ed (New York: Henry Holt, 2001), 53.

⁴⁰ Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 132.

Dee was consulted again during the 1580s to aid in assessing and countering the wax figures discovered in Essex.⁴¹ He was brought in to perform counter spells and it is highly likely that he performed exorcisms on the effigy figures as it would ensure that no harm came to the queen. He travelled back and forth from Essex, London and the queen's castle to deliver news and performs spells. The queen trusted him entirely and even had him present for discussions of the other magical plots of the 1580s.⁴² The Court involved him in discussions when they were trying to find the plotters meaning that he was highly important in the investigation and his opinion was held in high regards.

The queen went to Dee with her personal problems and found solace in his words. When they met again after she was the queen she said to Dee, "Where my brother hath given him a crown, I will give him a noble", acknowledging that Dee was helpful to her half-brother, but she would be able to provide more for him.⁴³ As Benjamin Woolley points out, a gold Noble was worth two silver Crowns, meaning the queen would double what her half-brother provided. The queen even paid him a personal visit at his house, which was extremely uncommon especially since Dee was a commoner, not a noble.⁴⁴ Elizabeth would have had to have held Dee in high regard to take the time to travel to his manor. It was not a custom for the queen to make house visits. It was rare for a monarch to hold an astrologer and conjuror in such high regard.

Dee has been dubbed "The Queen's Conjuror" and "The Arch-Conjuror of England" due to his close relationship with Elizabeth. She trusted him with aiding her with some of her biggest decisions, such as her potential marriage to the Duke of Anjou. The Court trusted his opinion and expertise to help aid in investigations of magic and choosing appropriate dates for important

⁴¹ Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 123.

⁴² Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England*, 139.

⁴³ Woolley, *The Queen's Conjuror*, 57.

⁴⁴ Dee and Suster, *John Dee*, 64.

events. He had a reputation in England for being a trusted advisor of Elizabeth during a time other magicians and conjurors were under attack by laws and social isolation. Elizabeth promised him protection on multiple occasions, allowing him to have the freedom to conjure spells and cast horoscopes without fear of prosecution.⁴⁵ The English Court took the magical plots seriously and feared the possible outcomes of magic. Bringing John Dee in as an astrological and magical consultant demonstrates that fear as he was protected from any of the witchcraft and conjuration laws and was respected deeply by Queen Elizabeth I.

Conclusion

The beginning of Elizabeth I's reign was unstable, and the Catholic plotters attempted to use that to push her off the throne. The use of Dee was a prime example of the steps the Crown was willing to take to protect the life of Elizabeth. While the magic did not necessarily do anything to directly harm the queen, the idea that these plotters aimed to harm Elizabeth was a worry to the government. Their aim was the kill Elizabeth in any way, whether that be with an incantation, a gun or poison. The claim that Mary, Queen of Scots had on the throne was the backbone of a significant amount of Catholic plots in their aim to have a Catholic sovereign. The Elizabethan government was determined to use any resource to prevent that from occurring. They would also turn to legislation and propaganda to help in the fight.

⁴⁵ Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England*, 129.

Chapter Two: The Plots of the 1560s

This chapter discusses how the events of the Catholic plots caused the English state to use everything in its power to prohibit the use of prophecies and prevent future plots. The events of the 1560s targeted Queen Elizabeth due to her returning England to its previous Protestant state. The Catholic plotters attempted to use their arsenal of magical knowledge to prophesize the end of Elizabeth's reign and to harm her directly. A past plotter, Francis Coxe, wrote a treatise by the name of *A Short Treatise declaring the destestable wickednesse, of magicall sciences, as Necromancie. Coniurations of spirites, Curious Astrologie and such lyke* to deter readers from using magic. He uses himself as an example throughout but also attempts to induce a fear of magic in the reader. There are theories concerning whether he wrote it himself or if a government official wrote it to aid in the fight against plotters as Coxe was a previous plotter himself. The statutes 5 Elizabeth 1 c.15 and c.16, both passed in 1563, targeted specific types of magic that were harmful. Magic was a fear for many during the early years of the 1560s and the State tried to use said fear to attempt to stop Catholic plotters.

Catholic plots of the 1560s

The beginning of Elizabeth's reign was filled with constant magic and plots. Each plot had elements other than magic and prophecy, but they were used in conjunction to obtain the wanted results. Prophecy was the main source of magic used but necromancy, astrology and conjurations were also seen. The plotters that were involved ranged from the poor to the nobility. The plots from the nobility received more attention as they had more influence and connections, especially with foreign diplomats. Catholic nobles were willing to use sinful magic and risk ending up in Hell to see England revert to Catholicism.

The first plot began before Elizabeth even took the throne and has been named the Affair of the Fortescue-Prestall Horoscope. John Prestall was a reoccurring figure in Catholic plots and managed to get himself out of imprisonment on multiple occasions.¹ On 17 November 1558 Thomas Kele, John Prestall and another were arrested for conjuration.² These conjurors were working with Sir Thomas Fortescue. There are no court records regarding punishment, but according to Privy Council records they were trying to commune with the devil to prophesize the length of the queen's reign using conjuration.³ Due to the lack of laws prohibiting magic and conjuration, there would have been no legal course of action to punish the conjurors and Fortescue. King Henry VIII had a law against witchcraft and magic, but King Edward VI repealed it in 1547.⁴ While the queen hired John Dee to prophesize the same question, the plot's use of magic was not supported by the Crown. Having prophecies and Catholic magic occur before Elizabeth even took the throne demonstrates the perceived threat of Catholic usurpers.

The Affair of the Cross of St. Donats was not a major political affair but, as Lewis Brennan notes, "it highlights the paranoia and persecutorial instincts of the... regime."⁵ When a tree was knocked over in March 1559 in Sir Thomas Stradling's yard, he discovered that there was a hidden cross inside of one. While there is a scientific explanation for this occurrence, the strong hold that magic and mysticism had on the population allowed for the explanation to become magical. The authorities considered it a threat to the queen since the time it fell was within proximity to other Catholic plots. They believed that it was somehow connected to

¹ Francis Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England: A History of Sorcery and Treason* (London•New York: I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2018), 87.

² Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 91.

³ Lewis Brennan, "Witchcraft and Politics in Early Modern England, c. 1558-1604," PhD diss., (University of Southampton, 2021), 47.

⁴ Michael Devine, "Treasonous Catholic Magic and the 1563 Witchcraft Legislation: The English State's Response to Catholic Conjuring in the Early Years of Elizabeth I's Reign," In *Supernatural and Secular Power in Early Modern England*, ed. Marcus Harms and Victoria Bladen (Routledge, 2015), 67.

⁵ Brennan, "Witchcraft and Politics in Early Modern England, c. 1558-1604," 48.

Elizabeth, but they did not know how so Stradling was put on trial. It is not known what charges were laid against him. By this point in Elizabeth's reign, she had made it the mission of Bishops to discover any who practiced even a hint of magic directed at the Crown.⁶ The Bishops believed that Stradling was using magic on his property and used the incident of the falling tree to prove it. The tree represented everything that Elizabeth's government feared and came at a time that it fit into the other plots that were occurring.

The Waldegrave Conspiracy occurred in 1561 and was a conspiracy that brought about the first signs of international cooperation. John Coxe was attempting to cross the border into the Low Countries with letters on him which were meant for Catholic exiles but was caught by authorities.⁷ He confessed to being in contact with Catholic exiles and for holding mass for the purpose of love magic. Magic was not illegal at this point, but it was illegal to hold Catholic mass. A network of priests were arrested for holding mass and those whose homes were used as a location for the ceremonies were also arrested. While the plot was named after Sir Edward Waldegrave, his wife, Lady Frances Waldegrave, was also involved and was heavily questioned in the Tower.⁸ The involvement of Lady Waldegrave does show that these plots were not being handled by just men, but their wives were also directly involved. Some that were arrested include Sir Edward Waldegrave, Sir Thomas Wharton, Sir Edward Hastings, Francis Coxe and Arthur Pole. They were tried by a Commission of Oyer and Terminer that was presided over by the Earl of Oxford at Brentwood on 3 June 1561.⁹ The Spanish Ambassador to England recorded that two who were arrested were "necromancers, and that they have conjured demons to have the Queen

⁶ Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 94.

⁷ Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 96.

⁸ Brennan, "Witchcraft and Politics in Early Modern England, c. 1558-1604," 56.

⁹ Brennan, "Witchcraft and Politics in Early Modern England, c. 1558-1604," 57.

die.”¹⁰ While this plot was discovered before it became a serious threat, some who participated met to try again.

The Pole-Fortescue Treason was the biggest plot that occurred during the early years of Elizabeth’s reign. Arthur Pole and Anthony Fortescue, who were involved in previous plots, planned to use magic to dethrone Elizabeth and use foreign sources to place Mary, Queen of Scots on the English throne to bring back Catholicism.¹¹ In 1562 they planned to gain the help of Catherine de Medici, the King of Navarre and the Duke of Guise to marry Edmund Pole to the Scottish Queen.¹² John Prestall and Edward Cosyn “practised invocations of evil spirits and asked of an evil spirit the best way to carry out their treasons.”¹³ Young argues that the conjurors used questionnaire horoscopes rather than necromancy, which was the use of evil spirits to answer questions. Before they could leave the country to gain the international help, they were caught, and Pole was found guilty of high treason. Humphrey Barwick, who was involved in conversations, had been a spy for the Privy Council and was feeding them information the entire time. Prestall escaped into the Netherlands but ended up in prison before being allowed out again. While there were treasonous aspects to the plotters’ actions, there were no laws that could try them for their use of magic and prophecy. This case also demonstrated that Catholic priests and religious individuals were engaging with magic. The Pole-Fortescue Plot contained the elements that the Crown feared – magic, international cooperation and Mary, Queen of Scots.

There were many other Catholic plots during Elizabeth’s reign, but the early plots of the 1560s emphasized the risk that came from prophecy and magic. The biggest hurdle during the beginning of her reign was dealing with the Catholic plotters, whether they were using magic or

¹⁰ Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 99.

¹¹ Brennan, “Witchcraft and Politics in Early Modern England, c. 1558-1604,” 60.

¹² Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 100.

¹³ Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 100.

not. It was essential for Elizabeth to secure her role as Queen and subdue any that questioned her legitimacy. Not having any laws that prohibited the use of magic and prophecy made it difficult to punish those that used it against her. There were different responses that the Privy Council and Elizabeth used to gain stability.

Francis Coxe

Francis Coxe was involved in the Waldgrave Conspiracy of 1561. He was imprisoned in April and May of 1561 but was released. Coxe was then involved in another plot to use magic to kill Sir William St Loe, who was the captain of Elizabeth's guard.¹⁴ Since there was no statute regarding magic, William Cecil was able to find a way to have those involved imprisoned for their actions based on the wider scale of the plan rather than just the magical aspects. Nothing is known about his life before these arrests.¹⁵ After this second arrest Coxe put out a written work titled, *A Short Treatise declaring the detestable wickednesse, of magicall sciences, as Necromancie. Coniurations of spirites, Curious Astrologie and such lyke* in 1562.¹⁶ This treatise takes the stance that all magic is sinful and warns readers against the use of any type of magic. Coxe firmly believed that magic was real and warned readers about the consequences of dabbling in the occult. He mentions Catholicism multiple times and makes a clear connection between magic and Catholicism. Coxe points to himself as a prime example of someone who went down the wrong path and suffered the consequences of what occurred to him. The "prince"

¹⁴ Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 103.

¹⁵ Edward Heron-Allen and Lauren Kassell, "Coxe, Francis [Fraunces Cox] (fl. 1560–1575), astrologer and medical practitioner," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sep. 2004, <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-6533>.

¹⁶ Francis Coxe, *A Short Treatise Declaringe the Detestable Wickednesse, of Magicall Sciences as Necromancie. Coniurations of Spirites, Curious Astrologie and such Lyke* (London: 1622) <https://ezproxy.library.dal.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/short-treatise-declaringe-detestable-wickednesse/docview/2240900309/se-2>.

is mentioned multiple times throughout the treatise and is used in lieu of Queen, King, or Monarch. The mentions of the “prince” points to Coxe using this treatise as an attempt to regain favour in court.

One of the main arguments that Coxe has against magic is the temptation that comes with practising it. He says, “I do not exempte the curious parte of Astrologie,”¹⁷ meaning that even the innocent curiosity that causes most astrological adventures is too tempting. One can enter the art of magic with innocent intentions to use astrology to answer simple questions, but that it is still unacceptable and dangerous. He follows that up by saying, “Neuer was there any that coulde yet holde hym selfe content with the simple knowledge of Astrologie: but wolde wade furder in those sciences of prediction.”¹⁸ Coxe is saying that a person would be unable to stop themselves from exploring more dangerous forms of magic after beginning with the art of astrology. The temptation that comes from learning more would outweigh a person’s conscience advising them to go no further. Perhaps this was an experience that Coxe had himself, beginning with astrology and then ending up in a magical plot to kill the queen’s Guard. “For y’ starres & skyes are not sufficiēt for their future prediction: but they muste adioyne therevnto moste detestable partes or societie with spirites” was another way for Coxe to say that using astrology was not enough to answer deeper and more important questions.¹⁹ The use of spirits through necromancy was required to answer more difficult questions, such as those regarding the lifespan of Queen Elizabeth and how Mary, Queen of Scots was going to end up on the throne. Coxe was attempting to persuade readers away from trying any magic to avoid the inevitable temptation that came with this art.

¹⁷ Francis Coxe, *A Short Treatise Declaringe the Detestable Wickednesse*, sig. A7v.

¹⁸ Francis Coxe, *A Short Treatise Declaringe the Detestable Wickednesse*, sig. A7v.

¹⁹ Francis Coxe, *A Short Treatise Declaringe the Detestable Wickednesse*, sig. A8v.

Coxe connects prophecies to poison and false promises. He writes, “of this pestilēciall poysoned lying prophesies. Of all poysons moste difficulte to auoyde by meanes of the sweete and pleasaunte myxture therof, wherfore it may be called dulce venenū.”²⁰ This statement argues that prophecies promise sweetness and pleasure, but the outcome is poison. Someone trying magic for the first time sees the sweet temptation of knowing the future but would not understand the sacrifice that comes from it. “Sweete meats haths sower sauce, so is this sweetnes tempered, with an euerlastinge bitternes or gall” further presses the idea that tampering with magic will forever affect a person.²¹ These statements are trying to push the idea that magic is not temporary but has lasting, unintended effects.

Coxe ensures that when mentioning connections to religion it is always Catholicism. He calls the pope “that coniuringe Pope” leading readers to believe that the Catholic Pope was participating in magic as well.²² Coxe was involved with plots among other Catholics so connecting religion to the plots potentially allowed him to offload some of the blame onto the religion rather than himself. The Pope is the top Bishop and leader of the Catholic Church, and him implying that the leader of the church was participating in conjurations and plots allows readers to question the legitimacy of the entire Catholic system. Earlier Catholic plots such as the Waldegrave Conspiracy and the Pole-Fortescue Treason involved priests and individuals holding mass as well. Coxe argued that the temptation of magic “so blinded and bewytched the wittes of men, that scant durst thei credit God him self, if it semed that their blinded prophesies any time woulde make contradiction.”²³ The prophecies that the conjurors were creating ‘blinded’ them against the reality of the situation. As mentioned, prophecies were very vague and could be

²⁰ Francis Coxe, *A Short Treatise Declaringe the Detestable Wickednesse*, sig. A5r.

²¹ Francis Coxe, *A Short Treatise Declaringe the Detestable Wickednesse*, sig. A5r.

²² Francis Coxe, *A Short Treatise Declaringe the Detestable Wickednesse*, sig. B4v.

²³ Francis Coxe, *A Short Treatise Declaringe the Detestable Wickednesse*, sig. A4v.

interpreted to represent many situations. Coxe argued that the plotters interpreted them to support their cause rather than what made the most sense. For example, a prophecy might be interpreted by plotters to support the claim of Mary, Queen of Scots, but it was meant to support the claim of Elizabeth. Coxe argued that the clergy used their position to manipulate the plotters into helping them do magic and used prophecies to support their cause.

Coxe says early in the treatise that he, “had almost vtterli perished, had not y^e almighty power of god by his ōnipotētie and gifts of grace called me back through most sweet & gentle chastisemēt.”²⁴ Here he means that God called him back after committing his sins of magic and was kind in his punishment. He returned to Protestantism, which was the true religion of England at that time. He said, “This God of mercye hath offered hys grace, wherfore refuse it not, but with all humble heartes embrace it”²⁵ This statement holds significant weight in respect to the readers who had used magic and sinned. Coxe counselled readers that they may have committed sinful acts, but God is loving and will kindly take them back. This method of convincing readers to not use magic is more encouraging compared to the threats he made regarding magic being negative and tempting. This may have been to use different methods to elicit a reaction from different groups of people. Those who had not touched magic might react to the sections warning against the temptations. While those who have used magic might find ease in knowing that they will still be welcomed back by God despite their actions.

The stance that Coxe was attempting to take was to encourage the Crown to bring back laws against the use of magic in England. Referring to the earlier law of Henry VIII, he wrote, “This godly and wholsom law was in tyme past executed within this realme, by the terrour whereof, many were feared from these practises, But now whilst this lawe for lacke of

²⁴ Francis Coxe, *A Short Treatise Declaringe the Detestable Wickednesse*, sig. A4r.

²⁵ Francis Coxe, *A Short Treatise Declaringe the Detestable Wickednesse*, sig. B6v.

execution hath lyen a slepe, and thoffendors nothings punished.”²⁶ He is arguing that the law provided the “terror” required for those who were considering practicing magic to fight against the temptation. During the period Coxe was using magic there were no active laws to prevent one from taking the step into astrology and later into the more dangerous magical arts, such as necromancy or prophecy. Having a law to prevent the innocent from attempting astrology would further prevent them from trying to explore the arts deeper. Having a punishment would potentially deter those contemplating magic and punish those that take the step into damning themselves. Coxe is implying that had there been a law, he may not have used magic and ended up in the situation he was in.

The use of his own situation allowed readers to sympathize with his situation, but also allowed the Crown to understand that he regretted his actions. There is evidence within the treatise that he was using this to gain back the respect and trust of the Crown. Early in the treatise he mentions, “o cause all toūges to laud his eternal maiestie, which hath so renouated or regenerated me frō y’ state of endles death, into the which I was almost slipt, to shew my self myndful therfore of my loue & duety towardses my cōtry and frendes, to whome next God and my prince I am moste chiefly bounden.”²⁷ God was generous and “renouated” and “regenerated” him back into the Protestant reality from where he had been lost. Instead of him facing death, he was jailed and then brought back into the world as a new man due to the kindness of the ‘prince,’ which is referring to Queen Elizabeth I. There are other mentions throughout the treatise that refer to the queen in positive and grandiose terms, “our most noble souerain” for example.²⁸ Coxe ensured that any who read this treatise would understand where his alliances stood.

²⁶ Francis Coxe, *A Short Treatise Declaringe the Detestable Wickednesse*, sig. A6r.

²⁷ Francis Coxe, *A Short Treatise Declaringe the Detestable Wickednesse*, sig. A4r.

²⁸ Francis Coxe, *A Short Treatise Declaringe the Detestable Wickednesse*, sig. A4v.

The intended audience of this treatise is arguably both the lower and upper classes. The bold type face that it was printed with was more widely used for the lower class. The more educated tended to read works with smaller type face which is still used today. The bold type face was used for printing literature, treatises, etc that were intended to be read by the masses rather than just the upper class.²⁹ This means that the warnings against magic were not just for those in the nobility that were involved in Catholic plotting, but also the lower class involved in magic that were not gaining as much public attention. There are many uses of Latin phrases and ancient stories to aid in arguments that would only be understood by those that were properly educated. Latin was known to those that had proper schooling, so only those that were educated would understand what was being said in those Latin phrases. While understanding Latin was not crucial for gaining the message of the treatise, it allowed the educated to have a deeper understanding compared to the uneducated. The treatise was meant to be read by the masses and the message to stay away from magic was universal.

There are two theories as to why the treatise was written. Brennan speculates that the confession that Coxe gave during his trial and his treatise were written by a government figure to use as propaganda against the use of magic.³⁰ His speculation can be confirmed by the mentioned statement from Coxe regarding the role of the government in his regeneration of faith in the Anglican church and the state. The extreme use of language against magic and the fear tactics used also support this view. Coxe was involved in the Waldegrave conspiracy and within the same year this treatise was published making it difficult to understand how his views changed so significantly. The other view is that Coxe wrote this to regain the trust and respect of the

²⁹ Keith Thomas, "Literacy in Early Modern England," in *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition*, ed. Gerd Baumann (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 99.

³⁰ Brennan, "Witchcraft and Politics in Early Modern England, c. 1558-1604," 53.

authorities. The sudden switch in his position could be explained by his capture and imprisonment. He wanted to avoid that reputation and the chance that he could be considered a suspect in further Catholic plots. Either theory demonstrates how vital this treatise was thought to be for deterring readers from participating in magic, whether it was state propaganda or not.

Laws of 1563

The events at the beginning of the 1560s kept occurring, perhaps in part because of the lack of laws that were in place to punish those who participated in magic, incantation, prophecies, astrology, etc. The events of the Pole-Fortescue Treason were the main triggers that caused Queen Elizabeth and the state to create and publish laws to try to prevent future plots and to have a law to punish future treasonous magicians. Pole and Fortescue had international contacts and had a complete plan to overthrow the government and replace Elizabeth with Mary, Queen of Scots. This plan was discovered before it went into its final stages, but they had already ‘practised invocations of evil spirits’ in their beginning phase.³¹ Without any direct treasonous plans occurring, the state was unable to properly prosecute the conjurors in their use of magic against the Crown. Parliament decided to put forth two laws against the use of various types of magic. Statute 5 Elizabeth 1 c.15 is named “An Act against Fonde and Phantasticall Prophesyes” and statute 5 Elizabeth 1 c.16 is named “An Act against Conjurations, Inchantments and Witchcraft.”³² Both of these laws came into effect in 1563.

This parliament was also focused on other areas of importance for the realm. As England was supporting the Huguenots in the French Religious Wars, England was spending significant

³¹ Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 100.

³² “An Act against Conjurations, Inchantments and Witchcraft,” 5 Elizabeth 1 c.16 (1563) and “An Act against Fonde and Phantasticall Prophesyes,” 5 Elizabeth 1 c.15 (1563).

amounts of money. Parliament wanted the Crown to provide more money to back their Protestant allies and they also wanted to gain back custody of Calais, which the French had taken from them. The Act of Artificers and an Act for the Relief of the Poor were passed to help those in economic need. While the second one was aimed at supporting the workers, the first one was aimed at ensuring owners and companies were making money. A major concern for Parliament and the Privy Council was the question of succession; who would come after Elizabeth? As Elizabeth was childless and the last direct Tudor heir, it was unknown what would happen after she died. Elizabeth viewed the question of succession as dangerous and attempted to use her power to prevent any discussion of it. Along with the pressure to name a successor, the Privy Council pressured Elizabeth to marry and produce an heir. The future of England was resting on the shoulders of a single woman who almost died from smallpox before this set of acts.³³ It was vital to protect Elizabeth at all costs, which is what led to the strict anti-magic statutes that appeared in 1563.

Statute fifteen focused on preventing the use of prophecies within the realm. Prophecies were involved in most of the plots as they tended to suggest that Elizabeth's death was quickly inevitable. Preventing prophecies from being produced would save the realm from having to prove that Elizabeth was alive, and that her reign was going to be long and prosperous. The statute states that it was created to prevent "the grete disquiet trouble and perill of the Quenes Ma and of this her Realme," demonstrating that the earlier plots had created 'trouble' within England.³⁴ The specific forbidden prophecies were "the thocccasion of any Armes Fieldes Beastes Badges," "the reason of any Time Yere or Date name Blodshed or Warre," and "make anye Rebellion Insurrection Dissention losse of Lief or other Disturbance within this Realme and

³³ John Ernest Neale, *Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments* (London: Cape, 1953), 86-116.

³⁴ "An Act against Fonde and Phantasticall Propheyses," 5 Elizabeth 1 c.15 (1563).

other the Quenes Dominions.”³⁵ The specific ‘fonde and phantastical Propheyses’ that were prohibited were discussions of the realm, any wars and the queen which would create havoc within England. This law was to prevent anyone from prophesizing a major event that would create fear and terror among subjects and encourage them to act against the Crown.

The punishments in statute fifteen varied for a first or second offence and the punishment for a first offence was quite light. If caught a person served one year in jail before there is a chance of parole and there is a fine of up to “tenne powndes.”³⁶ If caught again a person would be jailed for life and would have to give their assets to the state. The punishment for a first offence does not offer a significant deterrence for those using prophecies but risking life in prison and loss of property might have been a major deterrent for nobles and peasant alike. The State seemed to give sorcerers a chance to make a mistake before they were locked away for life. Having such a severe punishment for a second offence would make sense to try to prevent serial offenders from accessing the public with their claims. The punishments were to ensure the repeat offenders would not be able to share their prophecies with the world.

Statute sixteen focused on witchcraft and the use of incantations against others and property. Incantations were prohibited if using “evill and wicked Spirites, to or for any Intent or Purpose,” “whereby any pson shall happen to bee killed or destroyed,” or “wherby the Deathe of anny pson doth ensue.”³⁷ From these descriptions there was a focus on incantations being used against other people or instances where someone could be injured in the crossfire. It is very clear that if someone died due to an incantation, the sorcerer would “suffer paynes of Deathe” whether it was a first or second offence.³⁸ The description for witchcraft was that any “practice or

³⁵ “An Act against Fonde and Phantasticall Propheyses,” 5 Elizabeth 1 c.15 (1563).

³⁶ “An Act against Fonde and Phantasticall Propheyses,” 5 Elizabeth 1 c.15 (1563).

³⁷ “An Act against Conjurations, Inchantments and Witchcraft,” 5 Elizabeth 1 c.16 (1563).

³⁸ “An Act against Conjurations, Inchantments and Witchcraft,” 5 Elizabeth 1 c.16 (1563).

exercise any Wytchecrafte Enchaument Charme or Sorcerie, wherby any pon shall happned to bee wasted consumed or lamed in his or her Bodye or Member, or wherby any Goodes or Cattelles of any pson shalbee destroyed wasted or imparted.”³⁹ Again, there was a focus on witchcraft being used against other people and it is curious that there is mention of cattle and goods being targeted in the witchcraft description compared to prophecy and incantations. At the end of the statute there is a statement that says, “further to thintent that all maner of practise use of exercise of Witchcrafte Enchantment Charme or Sorcerye shoulde bee from hensforthe utterly avoided abolished and taken away,” making it very clear that even if magic was to be used in a positive way, it was still banned.⁴⁰ It was specifically mentioned that magic used to find treasure, harm someone or “provoke any pson to unlauffull love” was completely banned.⁴¹ This statute was less focused on the realm but more focused on magic being used to harm the public.

The punishments for statute sixteen were more public compared to fifteen. A first offence had the same time in prison, but every quarter of the year they would have to stand “in some Market Towne” and “stande openly upon the Pillorie by the Space of Syxe Houres, and there shall openly confesse his or her Errour and Offence.”⁴² Having to confess one’s offence for six hours was quite public and allowed the masses to harass the offender. The punishment tried to ensure that the felon was embarrassed and shameful over what they did to another. The second offence the felon “shall suffer Deathe” and “shall lose the Privilege of Clergie and Sancuarie.”⁴³ The “Privilege of Clergie and Sancuarie” meant that someone could claim they were part of the clergy or avoid capture by hiding in a church. Those who were literate tended to claim they were

³⁹ “An Act against Conjurations, Inchantments and Witchcraft,” 5 Elizabeth 1 c.16 (1563).

⁴⁰ “An Act against Conjurations, Inchantments and Witchcraft,” 5 Elizabeth 1 c.16 (1563).

⁴¹ “An Act against Conjurations, Inchantments and Witchcraft,” 5 Elizabeth 1 c.16 (1563).

⁴² “An Act against Conjurations, Inchantments and Witchcraft,” 5 Elizabeth 1 c.16 (1563).

⁴³ “An Act against Conjurations, Inchantments and Witchcraft,” 5 Elizabeth 1 c.16 (1563).

part of the clergy, and it was difficult to prove that they were not. The harshness of the punishment shows that the Privy Council cared more about magic being used directly against another person compared to trying to learn the future. The lack of laws in place to punish magicians in the events of the 1560s made it difficult to try to deter plotters from striking again. Parliament wanted to ensure that they had laws in place to punish magicians to the highest extent.

Conclusion

The events of the 1560s shaped how magic was going to be perceived in England moving forward. The Catholic plots produced fear for the Crown about what magic could do and pushed them to make harsh laws through Parliament to punish future plotters. The plots also reminded the Crown that the threat of the Catholic Scottish Queen was still apparent as Catholic supporters wanted her to be on the throne. Using a past felon, Francis Coxe, propaganda was published to make readers fearful about using magic and to promote the creation of laws to try to prevent it. Coxe's pamphlet was widely available and had a reason against magic that spoke to different sectors of the population. The statutes that were ratified demonstrated the major fears that the Crown had with respect to the different outcomes of magic. Parliament used statute fifteen to punish those creating prophecies, specifically those discussing the realm. Statute sixteen outlined the serious and embarrassing punishments that came with being discovered practising incantations, witchcraft, charms and sorcery. While the Crown tried to deter Catholic plotters with propaganda and statutes, there continued to be threats made against Elizabeth's life.

Chapter Three: The Plots of the 1580s

This chapter discusses the increase in the volatility of Catholic plots against the queen. Some of Elizabeth's Catholic enemies moved from using prophecies and distant magic to remove her from the throne and instead planned to physically murder her. The threat of Mary, Queen of Scots increased when she fled Scotland and found asylum in England as her supporters had easier access to her. The introduction of the handgun increased the level of anxiety among the English court, especially after the close contact murder of William the Silent of the Netherlands. The increase in treasonous activity led to the 1583 introduction of two acts that focused on the prevention of Catholic worshipping and the ability to slander the queen. After being involved with the Catholic church, Henry Howard wrote his *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies* in 1583. This work focuses on the falsity of prophecies and astrology being used against innocent men for their money. Even with the decrease in magical plots, there were still fears of their use and what they could do.

Plots and Background of the 1580s

The plots of the 1580s tended to have supporters of Mary, Queen of Scots attempt to usurp Elizabeth's throne and replace her with Mary. While these plots were not as entangled with magic, they still threatened the life and reign of Elizabeth. The Elizabethan government feared the death of Elizabeth as she had no heirs and refused to name an official successor.¹ The threat of Mary increased when Scottish nobility pushed her off the throne and imprisoned her in favour of her Protestant infant son, James.² While in captivity, Mary convinced one of her wardens to

¹ Stephan Alford, *The Watchers: A Secret History of the Reign of Elizabeth I* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2012), 11.

² Wallace T MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I* (London: E. Arnold, 1993), 103.

assist in her escape and she fled to England with the aid of the Hamilton's army. Once Mary was on English soil, she became a bigger threat and issue for the Elizabethan monarchy. There were negatives for any of Elizabeth's choices: Mary being sent back to Scotland or to France or staying imprisoned in England.³ In February 1570, Pope Pius V excommunicated Elizabeth and told all Catholic subjects that they had permission to reject Elizabeth's reign and subsequently her laws.⁴ The Crown officially deemed Catholics enemies as the issues from Catholic plotters continued throughout the 1570s and intensified in the 1580s.

The Crown's fear of assassination began before the 1580s due to the Ridolfi Plot. Roberto Ridolfi was a Florentine banker who had access to the inner circles of the English court.⁵ With the aid of other conspirators, he prepared a plan to have the Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Howard, marry the Queen of Scots. The Duke of Norfolk was the brother of Henry Howard, who is discussed later in this chapter. The marriage was not illegal, and Elizabeth did not have legal grounds to consider it treason. But they planned to overthrow Elizabeth with their marriage. The duke was arrested after attempting to escape to the countryside and was sent to the Tower to await punishment. He was executed in 1572. The other conspirators were arrested as well, one of whom was Francis Throckmorton, but they were released. This began the string of plots that made Elizabeth and her Parliament wary of assassination attempts.

In 1583 Throckmorton aided in planning an international plot to invade England and murder the queen. The French Guises planned to monetarily support an assassin to kill Elizabeth.⁶ While Elizabeth was being assassinated, the Spanish and French armies planned to invade Scotland and England with the aid of Throckmorton from within England. Throckmorton

³ MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I*, 106.

⁴ MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I*, 328.

⁵ MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I*, 116.

⁶ MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I*, 341.

frequently visited the French embassy which made Sir Francis Walsingham, Elizabeth's secretary, suspicious. After English intelligence investigated, the entire plot was discovered and stopped. Throckmorton was executed for his involvement in this plot and the French ambassador was removed from England. While Mary was not directly involved, the aim was for her to be put on the throne. The Parliaments of 1571 and 1572 attempted to convince Elizabeth to execute Mary but she refused due to familial bloodlines and her status as a monarch.⁷ After the Ridolfi and Throckmorton plots aimed to throw Elizabeth off the throne and assassinate her, she began to despise her cousin, but still did not want to execute her.

After the international cooperation involved in the last two plots, the Parry Plot of 1585 was driven by a single individual. Dr. William Parry was arrested for attempted murder in England but was recruited in 1580 by the English secret service. He went to France to gain access to the English Catholics that were living abroad.⁸ Those who knew him described Parry as a social climber and that he had lived a life he could not sustain. While in France he became a double agent and worked with the Catholics on a plan to kill Elizabeth. In January of 1584 Parry appeared to come to his senses and he returned to England. But, in February 1585 Parry proposed an entire plot to kill Elizabeth to Sir Edmund Neville. They discussed an intricate plan where Parry would kill Elizabeth during her walks in the gardens at Whitehall Palace, but that never occurred. Neville went to the authorities after having multiple discussions with Parry. Parry admitted to it but said that he was working as an agent for the Crown to gain treasonous answers from Neville. Although the Crown knew he was an agent, the written confession by Parry and the detailed evidence provided by Neville was enough for him to be found guilty of

⁷ MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I*, 143.

⁸ Lisa Jardine, *The Awful End of Prince William the Silent: The First Assassination of a Head of State with a Handgun* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 107.

treason. Parry was continuously switching sides between Protestant and Catholic and it appeared to be based on which side could uphold his status and lifestyle. Parry was executed on 2 March 1585 and was the only serving member of the English House of Commons to have been arrested for treason.⁹ Even with his confession, it will never be known if he was truly planning to kill Elizabeth or attempting to catch Neville in a treasonous act. It can be assumed that the Crown was extra cautious of any inkling of treason or word of killing the queen after the many planned attempts in the years prior.

Sir Francis Walsingham created an espionage system which proved to be one of the most successful methods against plotting. This system was able to intercept dozens of letters that were meant for England's enemies across Europe. Spies created cyphers to read the encoded letters, and this provided Walsingham with significant information to learn about and prevent the Catholic plots against the queen. The spies employed by Elizabeth's government infiltrated Catholic groups in England, France, Spain and more. The spy network caused Mary, Queen of Scots to be implicated and eventually executed for the Babington Plot.¹⁰ The information the spies provided to Walsingham saved Elizabeth's life on multiple occasions and brought conspirators to justice.

The last major plot against Elizabeth in the 80s was the Babington Plot of 1586. Babington played a role in the 1583 Throckmorton Plot but was not executed. He had also aided in illegal correspondences with Mary Stuart previously.¹¹ The plot was first thought of by John Ballard, a priest, when he went to France to try and convince France and Spain to rescue Mary as the time was ripe. After corresponding with Ballard, Babington agreed to "a plot which would

⁹ Alford, *The Watchers*, 88 – 188.

¹⁰ Alford, *The Watchers*, 13-194.

¹¹ MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I*, 346.

combine the rescue of Mary, foreign invasion and the assassination of Elizabeth,”¹² which had all failed on previous plots. He gathered a group of his friends who would be involved in killing Elizabeth and rescuing Mary. Phillip II would then lead the Spanish army into England to aid in the transition of Mary taking the throne. In July 1586 Babington sent a letter to Mary requesting her permission for this venture. But Sir Francis Walsingham, the queen’s secretary, used a recently turned agent, Gilbert Gifford, to gain access to the letters. Walsingham read all the letters, which involved Mary agreeing to the plot and Babington keeping her updated on what was occurring. It was difficult to directly implicate Mary due to her not handwriting her letters; instead, she had her secretaries do it for her.¹³ Babington’s confession and the letters that were intercepted from Mary indirectly implicated her. This was the third plot in under a decade in which Elizabeth was the focus of an attempted assassination with the goal of putting Mary on the throne. Parliament and the Privy Council pressured Elizabeth to issue a death warrant against Mary. The French and Scottish Kings used their positions to attempt to stop any executions of Mary, which made the decision more difficult as it was becoming a political and safety concern. Eventually the warrant for Mary’s execution was proclaimed on 4 December 1586 and Elizabeth signed approval after a very difficult decision. Mary was executed at Fotheringay on 8 February 1587. The deaths of the others involved, Ballard, Savage, Babington and Chidiocke Tycheborne, “were quite as terrible as Queen Elizabeth, demanding the full execution of royal justice, wanted them to be.”¹⁴ The danger Mary posed to Elizabeth would not have stopped until she was either executed or Elizabeth was assassinated.

Even as this threat was being put down, an entirely other threat came to light.

¹² MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I*, 346.

¹³ Alford, *The Watchers*, 194.

¹⁴ Alford, *The Watchers*, 235.

The invention of the wheel-lock pistol left monarchs across Europe threatened by a distanced assassination. The wheel-lock pistol was invented in Italy or Germany, both countries claim to have invented it, but it spread through Europe so rapidly it is difficult to distinguish.¹⁵ These guns were seen as a sign of status and most high-born nobles had one. They were seen in many portraits of nobles across Europe to show viewers the power and wealth they had. It was also viewed as a danger akin to magic since people could be killed from a distance. In July 1584 a trusted agent in his own home shot William the Silent of the Netherlands at point-blank range. The bullet mortally wounded William and became lodged in his chest. He was the first European head of state to be killed with the pocket-sized gun leading to other monarchs feeling unsafe in the wake of the murder. The murderer was Balthasar Gérard, a recently hired agent meant to provide intelligence on the Spanish troop's activities. The Netherlands and Spain were enemies as William was the leader during the Dutch Revolt which essentially sought to remove any Spanish influence or power from the country. Under torture Gérard claimed to have acted alone for the Catholic church as William was Protestant. He supported the claim that Phillip II of Spain had on the Netherlands throne. In 1580 Phillip II had put out a proclamation saying for all, "good Catholics throughout the Habsburg Netherlands to seek every opportunity to kill the man who persisted in challenging the Habsburgs' might and right to rule,"¹⁶ essentially giving all of his supporters the right to kill William. Spain fought to regain their stronghold in the Netherlands after William's death, and to remove it as a Protestant ally of England.

After the murder there was a growing concern for Elizabeth's safety as the English government believed the Spanish would come after her next. It was said that "This Pope doth

¹⁵ Jardine, *The Awful End of Prince William the Silent*, 78.

¹⁶ Jardine, *The Awful End of Prince William the Silent*, 60.

send Magicians to her land. To seek her death, by that their devilish art,”¹⁷ referring to the Pope sending an assassin to England to “seek her death” using a handgun. As Spain was a Catholic ally to Mary and involved in earlier plots to see Elizabeth assassinated, the fear of a handgun wielding assassin killing her in her home became a real fear.¹⁸ A “Mr. Somerville, or Somerfield, a Warwickshire gentleman, in the presence of witnesses declared that he meant to shoot the Queen with a dagg and hoped to see her head on a pole, for she was a serpent and a vipe[r].”¹⁹ This was similar to the murder of the Duke of Guise during the French Civil Wars 20 years prior, making it a plausible plot. Sir Francis Walsingham personally interrogated Master Somerville due to the serious nature of the threat.²⁰ While this Mr. Somerville probably did not have the security clearance or connections to gain close enough access to the queen, it was the idea that individuals were having these treasonous thoughts that caused fear amongst the government.

A significant worry for anyone in the early modern period was poisoning. Poisoning had the greatest number of trials of any crime in the Tudor period.²¹ A poison could be concocted naturally or synthetically meaning it was simple enough to get a hold of. Like magic, it was easier for the perpetrator to hide their actions as someone could poison something and be far away when the intended target ingested it. Bellany writes that it “was also intrinsically wicked, a secretive, disguised killer, whose defenceless victims were struck down without warning,” much like victims of magic.²² Without forensic technologies, it would be very difficult to detect who poisoned someone, but that did not stop accusations from flying around. Parliament legislated

¹⁷ James Aske, *Elizabetha Triumpans* (London, 1588), p. 8.

¹⁸ Jardine, *The Awful End of Prince William the Silent*, 100.

¹⁹ Conyers Read, *Mr. Secretary Walsingham and the Policy of Queen Elizabeth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), II, 381.

²⁰ Alford, *The Watchers*, 135.

²¹ Edward Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft and Popular Magic in Early Modern Europe: Culture, Cognition and Everyday Life* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008), 8.

²² Alastair Bellany, “Thinking with Poison,” in *The Oxford Handbook of The Age of Shakespeare*, ed. R. Malcolm Smuts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 559.

against poison during the reign of Henry VIII as he had the same fears as Elizabeth. Robert Beale mentioned the dangers of poison in his 1572 book on the international scene in Europe.²³ It tended to be used by those in a weaker position in society, such as women, against stronger and more prominent positions, such as the queen of England. Elizabeth was the perfect candidate to be the target of poison.

Reginald Scot warns readers about the threat of poison in his book *Discovery of Vvitchcraft*. It was published in 1584 and was reprinted three more times and is seen as his most important work.²⁴ Most of the work is focused on proving that magic was a hoax and magicians “use their juggling knacks only to amase or abuse the people” instead of practicing magic.²⁵ He does say that poison is a real threat to people but they are focusing on witches instead. He verified what current historians believe about poison: “Truly this poisoning art called *Veneficium*, of all others is most abominable; as whereby murthers may be committed, where no suspition may be gathered, nor any resistance can be made.”²⁶ In short, no one could see it coming nor could the perpetrator be caught. Scot argues that poisoning should be the main concern for paranoid individuals as it could come from anywhere.

The plots of the 1580s did not contain the same magical properties as those of earlier decades, but they were more focused on physically assassinating the queen and bringing Mary Stuart to the throne. There is debate amongst historians regarding the role that Mary played in

²³ Alford, *The Watchers*, 133.

²⁴ David Wootton, "Scott [Scot], Reginald (d. 1599), writer on witchcraft," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sep. 2004, <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-24905>.

²⁵ Reginald Scot, 1538?-1599, *Scot's Discovery of Vvitchcraft Proving the Common Opinions of Witches Contracting with Divels, Spirits, Or Familiars ... to be but Imaginary, Erronious Conceptions and Novelties: Wherein also, the Lewde Unchristian all Written and Published in Anno 1584, by Reginald Scot, Esquire* [Discovery of witchcraft Scot's discoverie of witchcraft.] (London: 1651) <https://ezproxy.library.dal.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/scots-discovery-vvitchcraft-proving-common/docview/2240960666/se-2, sig. A3v>.

²⁶ Scot, *Discoverie of witchcraft*, M4v.

these plots and whether she was an active conspirator herself against Elizabeth.²⁷ The plots came from Catholic individuals, groups or countries attempting to undermine the Protestant state that Elizabeth created. Secret agents and double agents were significant players in the plots on both sides. Elizabethan England had an expansive spy network that kept Elizabeth and her close circle updated on what was occurring. The introduction of the handgun added to the anxieties on state leaders as anyone could fire from a distance, as if it was like magic. The laws of the 1580s supported the worries of treasonous plots, activities and prophecies from their Catholic enemies and fellow Englishman.

Laws of 1581

The Statutes that were passed by Parliament in 1581 were not as centered around magic as they were in 1563. Queen Elizabeth was forced to deal with the increasing Catholic tensions and the prophesying that was occurring regarding her reign.²⁸ There were tensions with Parliament as there were Puritan sympathizers who wanted to impose severe punishments on those who did not attend church. In 1576 Peter Wentworth motioned “for a public fast, to the end that it might please God to bless us in our actions better than we had been heretofore, and for a sermon to be had every morning,”²⁹ but Elizabeth held her stance on not interfering too severely with religion. She did not allow this bill to pass even though it was voted 150 for and 100 against. Sir Walter Mildmay pushed for there to be an increase in military supply and forces within England in case of issues abroad or at home with the increasing threats from Catholics. A committee was appointed, and a subsidy was approved to increase the military presence. Among

²⁷ Alford, *The Watchers*, 44.

²⁸ J. E. (John Ernest) Neale, *Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments* (London: Cape, 1953), 370.

²⁹ Neale, *Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments*, 378-80.

the many other Acts that emerged from this session, two of relevance stand out: the Sedition Act and the Bill for Religion, as they were coined.

The Bill for Religion went through three separate rewrites as Elizabeth and the House could not agree on how firm the punishments should be. Attending mass was outlawed with heavy fines and there was a fine for not attending Protestant church services.³⁰ The bill for the 'Act to retain the Queen's Majesty's subjects in their due obedience,' was passed on March 4th and was later approved with Royal Assent. It went against what Elizabeth wanted in terms of making laws about church and attending services, but she was pressured by Parliament and her advisors. The war against Catholics was getting worse and she had to use the law to deter it from growing stronger. The next bill, the Sedition Act, was also focused on Catholics but Puritans too as it was meant to stop the harmful rumours being spread about Elizabeth and her reign.

The Sedition Act is formally called "An Acte against sedicious Wordes and Rumurs uttered against the Queenes mooste excellent Majestie." The act focuses on those who "speake any false seditious and slaunderous Newes Rumors Sayenges or Tales," against the queen.³¹ It was an extension of an act from 1554 under the reign of Mary and the addition appeared to be target Puritans and Catholics as they were the most prominent speakers against the Crown.³² The penalty for slander against the queen on the first offence was a loss of both ears, payment of 200 pounds, and six months in prison. There was originally no other option for the loss of ears, but a fine was added along with a possible death penalty. The remainder of the act focuses on specific instances of slander and includes a section on rumours in the context of witchcraft and prophecy.

³⁰ Neale, *Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments*, 389.

³¹ "An Act against Sedicious Wordes and Rumours Uttered Againste the Queens mooste Excellent Majestie." 23 Elizabeth 1 c. 2 (1581).

³² Neale, *Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments*, 393.

There is a small section of the 1583 Seditious Words and Rumours Act that touches on prophecy, which is typically forgotten when discussing anti-magic laws. It begins that no one,

shall be setting or erecting of any Figure or Figures, or by casting of Nativities, or by calculaon, or by any Prophecieing Witchcrafte Conjuracions or other lyke unlawfull Meanes whatseev, seeke to knowe, and shall set forth by expresse Wordes Deedes or Writinges, howe longe her Ma [Majesty] shall lyve or continue, or who shall raigne as King or Queene of this Realme of England after her Highnesse Decease, or els shall advisedlye and with a maliciouse intent against her Highneses, utter any manner of directe Pphecies to any suche Intent or Purpose, or shall malitiouslye by any Wordes Writing or Printing wishe will or desire the Deathe or Deprivacon of our Soveraigne Ladye the Queene Ma.³³

The specifics of the law mention witchcraft, prophecy, conjuration, the use of nativities, and sympathetic magic. Sympathetic magic is the use of an object associated with a person or an image of them which would result in harm to the actual person. For example, using a doll that looked like Elizabeth to inflict harm upon her.³⁴ Nativities are maps of the sky from when a person was born.³⁵ The mentioning of many different forms of magic leads to the assumption that Parliament was afraid of the queen being targeted in different forms. After many sorcerers were able to avoid punishment before the 1563 laws, Parliament must have wanted to be as specific as possible to ensure that those who broke the law would be punished.

Subjects were not allowed to speak of or spread rumours about the queen's death or who would be the next monarch. Elizabeth never named an official successor as a means of protecting herself. Once a successor was named then she would lose supporters and protection. By making

³³ “An Act against Seditious Wordes and Rumours Uttered Againste the Queens mooste Excellent Majestie.” 23 Elizabeth 1 c. 2 (1581).

³⁴ Francis Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England: A History of Sorcery and Treason* (London•New York: I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2018), 20.

³⁵ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin books, 1973), 339.

it illegal to prophesize the end of Elizabeth's reign, Parliament tried to prevent any potential uprisings and the spread of false rumours. In turn, by trying to theorize who was going to be the next Monarch assumed that the queen was going to die or step down from her position. This was a massive attempt to strengthen her reign and put down the idea that she needed to marry to rule.

Both the statutes that were passed in 1581 were attempts to lower the risk that Catholic radicals brought to the queen. They were acts for the safety of the queen and to preserve the Protestant monopoly within England. The Sedition Act targeted Puritans who wanted Elizabeth to be stricter with regards to subjects attending church and fasting. The punishments for both acts were severe, but the Sedition Act had a possible death penalty, whereas the Bill for Religion was mainly fines. The severity of death leads to the presumption that the Sedition Act was more critical as it was directly tied to the safety of the queen. The fears of monarchical assassinations was present during this decade with the multiple attempts on William the Silent's life.³⁶ The use of the Acts was for the safety of the queen rather than to prevent the use of magic in general. The use of propaganda during this decade was to try and dissuade readers from believing in magic, especially astrology and prophecy, as an aid to the Crown to prevent the use of magic.

Henry Howard

Lord Henry Howard wrote *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies* in 1583 in response to the continuing use of magic and prophecy in England. Brennan argues that it was as a response to the 1583 work by Richard Harvey, *Astrological Discourse upon the Conjunction of Saturne and Jupiter*.³⁷ Howard's father, the Earl of Surrey, was executed for

³⁶ Jardine, *The Awful End of Prince William the Silent*, 61.

³⁷ Lewis Brennan, "Witchcraft and Politics in Early Modern England, c. 1558-1604," PhD diss. (University of Southampton, 2021), 114.

treason in 1547 under the reign of Henry VIII. His grandfather, the third Duke of Norfolk, escaped execution due to Henry dying before he was taken to the execution block. This treason caused the Howard name to be disgraced until the reign of Elizabeth when she reversed the claims against his family. Elizabeth also paid for Howard to attend King's College and receive a higher education. In 1571 he was arrested for suspicion of being involved in the Norfolk marriage plot, since his brother was the Duke of Norfolk. The marriage plot was attached to multiple circulating prophecies, and it was said, "that it is concluded by astronomy that the Scottish damsel shall be Queen and the duke the husband."³⁸ After the duke's death, Howard remained friends with a group of Catholics. In 1580 he was friends with Charles Arundell when it was discovered that Arundell and Howard were meeting with the French Ambassador, Castelnau.³⁹ Howard was arrested again in September 1583 under suspicion of being involved in the Throckmorton plot. He was arrested a total of five times and was known to be corresponding with Mary, Queen of Scots, and was paid by Mendoza, the Spanish Ambassador, for information on the Elizabethan court.⁴⁰ One reading of his work is that it was his attempt to get back into the good graces of the court, such as the treatise from Francis Coxe. One significant difference, though, was that Coxe argued that magic was real whereas Howard argued that it was not. Howard dedicated the book to Walsingham and it is speculated that it was an attempt to enter into the royal service. That is interesting considering he continued to be in contact with Mary until her death. The *Defensatiue* is split into different sections which cover different types of

³⁸ Krista Kesselring, *The Northern Rebellion of 1569: Faith, Politics, and Protest in Elizabethan England* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 45.

³⁹ Brennan, "Witchcraft and Politics in Early Modern England, c. 1558-1604," 115.

⁴⁰ Susan Brigden, "Howard, Henry, earl of Surrey (1516/17–1547), poet and soldier," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sep. 2004, <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0 001/odnb-9780198614128-e-13905>.

magic. Some sections include Dreams, Oracles, and Astrology.⁴¹ Throughout the sections Howard lays out his argument surrounding the reasons against using astrology and prophecy. He viewed magic as false and fake as God is the only person who can make someone a Prophet or can change the course of nature. The length of the work and the large amount of Latin that has been used leads to the assumption that it was intended for a literate and knowledgeable audience, more specifically the upper class.

Howard explains that God picks those that are proper prophets and anyone else is a false prophet or astrologer. Only “the chosen vesselles & selected Prophets of our Lord which shall be formally distinguished and sette foorth in theyre proper places” and all other prophets are false.⁴² Any prophet that is not officially chosen by God was said to go against the order of nature and be working against the good of society. Howard argued that God only wants what is best for society, but the false prophets are looking to create chaos and deceive. Howard reasons “It is not straunge that man sometimes forgettes himself, and is egged forward y aspiring thoughtes, to the quest of matters far aboue his reache.”⁴³ Men try to go beyond their means to answer questions, but according to Howard, they are forgetting their place. Howard uses Bible verses and the word of God as evidence for future events. He says, “that there is a difference betweene admiring and commending them as works of GOD, and making them the causes or discoverors of future accidents.”⁴⁴ Howard was rationalizing how some might use God’s word as a way of warning about future incidents but he was making it clear that it should not occur. There are no mentions of Protestant versus Catholicism, but if this is a defence written for the Crown then it can be

⁴¹ Henry Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophetes by the L. H. Howard* [Defensatiue against the poyson of supposed prophetes.] (London: 1583).

⁴² Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophetes*,” Sig. G.ijr.

⁴³ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophetes*,” Sig. F.ijr.

⁴⁴ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophetes*,” Sig. Q.ivr.

assumed that he would be taking the Protestant stance. God deciding the worthy prophets and being the only one to affect the natural world is used to deter readers from believing in magic.

Throughout the *Defensatiue* Howard discusses astrology with disdain. He believed that astrology as an art was completely false and that it was “brought in to dazell and perplex the wittes of simple menne.”⁴⁵ The show of astrology confused the “simple menne” into believing what they were told was going to occur based on the planets. Howard argued that the astrologers “neither vnderstand the properties of all those Planets” nor could argue that the location of planets based on the time of year affected nature.⁴⁶ Howard questioned the authority that astrologers had to be making these predictions and to be telling innocent people lies. Near the end he asked the astrologers to prove their knowledge “by reason, by experience, or any sound authority” that what they were saying will occur or is affected by the planets in any way.⁴⁷ The stance Howard adopted makes it appear that he was concerned for the public, specifically those less educated on subjects such as the falsity of astrology. Howard was so against astrology that he says “that theyr Astrology hath done and is lyke hereafter to do, more micheefe to the Church of GOD, then all those other rotten braunches” of magic.⁴⁸ Howard believed that astrology was more harmful than necromancy, prophecy, or witchcraft.

Howard made an interesting observation regarding the power of the moon. He said that “our wisest and most sound Philosophers hold for a principle that no planet (onely the Moone excepted) chaungeth propertie but by regard of place” meaning that he thought the moon could make physical changes in nature.⁴⁹ Even though the other planets were not understood to have

⁴⁵ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies*,” sig. Q.ijiv.

⁴⁶ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies*,” Sig. R.iiv.

⁴⁷ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies*,” Sig. F.f.3v.

⁴⁸ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies*,” Sig. D.d.ijv.

⁴⁹ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies*,” Sig. O.ivr.

caused changes, it was generally understood by those in early modern England that the moon affected nature. The moon was not viewed as magical, but the phases of it helped with the timing of planting crops, bloodletting and the tides.⁵⁰ By this time there was scientific evidence to prove that the moon affected nature, especially with the movement of tides. Howard could not believe the other planets made any changes to nature as there was no scientific proof from the astrologers.

A common description that Howard has for magic is “childish”. In a comment about astrology he says, “Moreouer it is not vnknowne, how childishly not one or two, but al of them defende, that Planets vnder the beames of the sun are parched or combuste.”⁵¹ He is literally saying that this belief is bogus and only a child would imagine such things. Later he says, “If we chaunce to tell these Starre diuiners of theyr childishe lyes,”⁵² regarding astrology. Again, he is mocking the beliefs and understandings of the world that astrologers have to make their arguments and teachings completely irrelevant and embarrassing. Embarrassment was a different tactic of attempting to convince readers to avoid magic as the fear tactic of Francis Coxe’s treatises did not work. Howard continues to restate that magic, especially astrology, is silly and for the imaginations of children.

Howard had the stance that all Prophets that were not picked by God were creating their own false prophecies. Within the first half of the work, Howard wrote that people “ought not to credite the vaine words of presuming Prophetes, whose lode starre is blind chaunce, whose guide happe hazard, whose learning imagination, whose gesses are farre lighter than the winde, and

⁵⁰ David Cressy, “Early Modern Space Travel and the English Man in the Moon,” *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 4 (2006): 961.

⁵¹ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies*,” Sig. S.3v.

⁵² Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies*,” Sig. X.2v.

more variable then the rainebowe.”⁵³ This description very clearly argued that prophets could change their prophecies and that their ideas were implausible. Howard tells a story of a prophet who was asked by two men about the chances of two runners “in gaming at Olimpus.”⁵⁴ As the prophet could not tell them both they would win, “To the first therefore he gaue great enouragemet, to hope and comfort that he should preuaile” and “The second he discouraged with feare.”⁵⁵ This story shows prophets as manipulating individuals that would lie and cheat for their prophecy to come true. Since he was telling one they would not win, the runner would not try their best and would ultimately lose compared to the runner the prophet encouraged would win. While this story does not demonstrate the dangerous side of prophecies, Howard warns that they “would make the wisest man aliue... to suspect and feare the spoyle of his owne country.”⁵⁶ Even though he believed that they were false, he still understood how dangerous prophecies were to those that truly believed in them and their power.

Howard mentions the events that occurred in the 1560s. He wrote, one “who most vndutifully tooke armes against his Soueraigne, vnder colour of expelling forrainers... by encouragement of a certaine prophecie, that he should pruaile against his Prince.”⁵⁷ He is referring to the Pole-Fortescue Treason as they were encouraged by a prophecy and Howard mentions “the Duke of Guise” who was also involved in that treasonous plot.⁵⁸ The manner in which he was describing the events shows the reader how silly it was that a group of English and international noble figures had a plan to assassinate the queen based on one prophecy. But it also shows the danger of prophecies as they did have a thought-out plan that they were attempting to

⁵³ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies*,” Sig. J.ijr.

⁵⁴ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies*,” Sig. L.ijv.

⁵⁵ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies*,” Sig. L.ijr.

⁵⁶ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies*,” Sig. H.iiiv.

⁵⁷ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies*,” Sig. L.ijr.

⁵⁸ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies*,” Sig. L.ijv.

carry out. Howard says, “Another pretie knacke these cogging prophets haue, to marke what noble families are eyther tyed by consanguinitie, allied by matches, or vnited in good wyll together,”⁵⁹ as if referring to the groups of Catholic nobles who were caught up in plots together. Howard could have been attempting to rationalize how he got caught up with the Catholic Church due to the manipulating prophets. Overall, the mentioning of the Pole-Fortescue Treason is interesting in connection with the continuation of plotting against Queen Elizabeth in the 1580s.

A common theme throughout the text is the comparison between physicians, astrologers and the humours. In the chapter regarding oracles, Howard writes, “No man denies, but dreames giue warninges of the pride or weakenesse, of all humours which infest the body.”⁶⁰ During the early modern period it was understood that the body was made up of four liquids – blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile - which controlled one’s emotions, illnesses and more based on the season and ratio of each in the body.⁶¹ There was also the Aristotelian elements which consisted on earth, water, air and fire and corresponded to hot, cold, dry and wet.⁶² The general understanding of medical treatment was when there was an imbalance of humours they needed to be treated with its opposite, i.e., hot with cold or dry with wet.⁶³ This view of medicine began in the ancient world and continued throughout the early modern Period.

Continuing with the theme of medicine, Howard compared astrologers and physicians. He says, “but from grounds of witte, as to make no difference between the Prophet... or the Phisition”⁶⁴ meaning that they were similar in his opinion. He further says, the physician “feeling

⁵⁹ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophesies*,” Sig. H.h.iv.

⁶⁰ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophesies*,” Sig. K.iijv

⁶¹ Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550–1680* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 37.

⁶² Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550–1680*, 37.

⁶³ Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550–1680*, 38.

⁶⁴ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophesies*,” Sig. H.jr.

his pulse, &c. is able to deliuer a good gesse vpon the grounds of art, to what disease the body is most apt and subiect, either by distemper or by kind: and yet they cannot tell, what accident shall aither diminish or decrease this sicknesse when it comes,”⁶⁵ insinuating that physicians merely guess at what is wrong with the body and how to treat it. Those who were able to help with illness in small towns or the countryside were witches or astrologers who offered their services at a lower cost compared to trained physicians.⁶⁶ But there were some individuals trained in official institutions, such as Simon Forman, who viewed themselves as being sent by God to heal diseases and individuals with the help of magic and angels.⁶⁷ Physicians also never looked inside the body, so Howard argued that they were merely guessing. He appears to also be warning readers against the harm of physicians and medicine, as “which giue in plaine notice, by what meane nature seeketh in distresse, to be relieued and disburdened.”⁶⁸ Howard was saying that nature and the body will clearly show what part needs to be “relieued” when the disease gets bad enough. He wanted readers to trust nature, and in turn what God was telling the body. Howard did not trust the ‘modern’ medicine as it was linked to witches and astrologers.

Howard used the authority of Aristotle to defend his thesis. Throughout the work he quotes Aristotle and mentions that he would support Howard’s beliefs. He goes as far as to say, “Aristotle, whose reason and authoritie I reuerence and preferre before the rest.”⁶⁹ By saying that Aristotle is his authority, it allowed his readers to trust his judgement as the population trusted Aristotle. To prove a point, one had to prove it with the word of God, the word of Aristotle, or both. By Howard saying that he trusted Aristotle “before the rest,” it can be assumed that he

⁶⁵ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophetes*,” Sig. H.jr.

⁶⁶ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1st edn (1621), ed. Floyd Dell & P. Jourdan-Smith, (Tudor, New York, 1948), 382. & Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550–1680*, 22.

⁶⁷ Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London: Simon Forman: Astrologer, Alchemist, and Physician* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2005), 212.

⁶⁸ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophetes*,” Sig. H.ir.

⁶⁹ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophetes*,” Sig. T.4r.

trusted him over all other philosophers. By continuing to reassure readers that he was looking at the case of prophecy and astrology through the Aristotelian lens, it allowed readers to have trust in what he was trying to argue.

Throughout the *Defensatiue*, Howard warns readers against the false prophets and astrologers within England. His opinion of magic appeared to be that magic was not real but was dangerous as there were many that fell for the fear and manipulation tactics. As he was potentially using this work to regain influence within the court and trust from the Crown, it is interesting that he took a different stance than Francis Coxe. Coxe truly believed in magic and the dangers of it due to his involvement in a magical plot. Howard made it very clear that God is the supreme ruler, and the astrologers or prophets could not use the stars or prophecies to change what is occurring or what will occur. Astrologers did not understand the true powers of the planets but the alignment of them did nothing to predict what would happen other than to manipulate ‘simple menne.’ Whereas prophets were completely fabricating their prophecies and were creating fear for what was to come. The connection between physicians and astrologers in the context of medicine is interesting and affirms the theme that Howard was trying to push that God is the only being that can change nature. The beginning of the plots against the queen in the 1580s must have spurred Howard into reminding readers of what occurred in the 1560s and the fears that came from those. He concludes the work by saying, “For, when all is done, the glorie of this lyfe is but a blaste, and they that couette more an earth, then falleth to the losse of theyre vncertayne state, shall be depriued of a greater happynesse in the ioyes to come, which are prepared for the chosen,”⁷⁰ reiterating those who chose God will be chosen for happiness and a greater purpose.

⁷⁰ Howard, *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies*,” Sig. R.r.iiiv.

Conclusion

The events of the 1580s demonstrated the risk monarchs were at from their enemies. Elizabeth had many as she was an unmarried Protestant woman ruling England after it went through significant changes religiously and politically. The aim of enemies was to push her off the throne no matter the cost. The Catholic plotters used Mary, Queen of Scots as their figurehead to have someone with a Catholic claim to the throne. Elizabeth's Parliament introduced the Sedition Act and the Act for Religion in response to the late 1570s plots and to deter further ones. While the Acts did not stop plotting from happening, it aided in punishing those who suggested treasonous acts, such as William Parry of the 1585 Parry Plot. Another aid to preventing plotting was Henry Howard's *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophetes* from 1583. This work aimed to make readers understand that prophecy and astrology were completely fake. While magical activity decreased, it was not completely gone which led to Howard using the stance that magic was fake compared to Coxe's treatise that warned of the real dangers from magic. The statutes, propaganda and executions attempted to protect the fragile life of Elizabeth.

Conclusion

The Elizabethan government used many methods to punish those who were involved in the Catholic magical plots of the 1560s and 1580s. They introduced statutes in both decades and propaganda was written by men at the edges of plots. The intense use of espionage, especially in the 1580s, infiltrated most of the Catholic plots before they occurred. But even with these punishments in place, there was still magic present until the end of Elizabeth's reign. The wider use of torture began as the government scrambled to find different ways to try to prevent magic and plots from occurring.¹ The magical plots against the Crown did not end with the decline of magic or the beginning of a new reign.

Beginning in the 1580s the use of torture became prevalent, especially against priests. The plots of the 1580s appeared to include more concrete plans and had more international cooperation. The Crown prevented most use of magic in plots but could not completely stop Catholics from attempting to put Mary, Queen of Scots on the throne. The Crown tried to prevent Catholic priests from illegally practicing in England. The use of torture allowed investigators to gain information from suspects and learn about who was involved. Edmund Campion was a Catholic priest caught practicing Catholicism in England and investigators questioned him on the rack twice.² The rack pulled suspect's limbs apart more than they physically should and the fact that he was put on it twice to be questioned was torturous. Once suspects were convicted of treason, they were dragged on a wicker hurdle to the gallows to be hanged. Suspects were hanged until almost dead, and then were cut open and had their bowels burned before them. It

¹ Stephan Alford, *The Watchers: A Secret History of the Reign of Elizabeth I* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2012), 110-125.

² Alford, *The Watchers*, 110-125.

was truly a torturous end for those convicted. By doing this out in the open it was intended to deter future plotters and priests from going against the Crown.

While magic and prophecy were on the decline, there were still instances in the later years of Elizabeth's reign. The best example is Francis Hacket who declared he was the Supreme King of Earth and was Jesus Christ returning to judge the world in July 1591. The only difference was Hacket was a Puritan rather than a Catholic and the issues from Puritans became worse during Elizabeth's reign. While the public considered Hacket a lunatic, the Crown considered him a threat. Hacket was convicted of treason and was hanged, drawn and quartered near where he first announced his intention to be king.³ The threat of a mentally ill individual constituting a torturous execution demonstrates the fear the Elizabethan government had over potential plotters, especially after the 1580s.

Elizabeth's refusal to officially name an heir to the English throne caused concern for her ministers. To ensure a long and safe reign for herself, Elizabeth did not name a successor. Once Elizabeth named one, the ministers would no longer be as concerned with keeping her alive as the future of the country was secured. This caused the ministers to secretly negotiate with King James of Scotland for a smooth accession to the English throne (1603-1625).⁴ James' reign in Scotland was filled with magical plots, one example was an effigy plot in August 1590 which included sixty witches.⁵ The first English Parliament held in 1604 of his reign produced "An Act against Conjurat[i]on, Witchcraft and dealing with evil and wicked spirits" which was the most important of its time. English witch trials, which occurred in the following decades, used this act

³ Alexandra Walsham. "'Frantick Hacket': Prophecy, Sorcery, Insanity, and the Elizabethan Puritan Movement," *Historical Journal* 41 (1998), 27-31.

⁴ Alford, *The Watchers*, 13.

⁵ Francis Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England: A History of Sorcery and Treason* (London•New York: I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2018), 156-165.

in their favour. While James had interest in witchcraft, he eventually shared the view that magic was a supernatural phenomenon. The switch from believing to not follows the attempt English propaganda took between Coxe and Howard.

The written works from Coxe and Howard demonstrate the different ways propaganda was used to deter readers from using magic. Coxe focused on the real dangers of magic while Howard stated magic was not real but the belief in it was. The different stances targeted sections of the population based on their belief system. While these works were probably written to gain praise from the Crown, it helped the government's aim at deterring magic.

The most direct impact that the Elizabethan government had on the deterrence of magic were the multiple statutes from 1563 and 1581. It gave them the ability to prosecute and punish those that used magic against Queen Elizabeth. As the country was relying on one unmarried woman that named no successors to run the realm, the government used its powers to ensure her safety. It was a difficult circumstance due to the number of threats that she faced. The major powers of Europe, including France and Spain, were Catholic and attempted to use their influence to return England to its Catholic religion. While espionage was extremely successful at preventing certain plots from occurring, it did not deter future conspirators from attempting their own plans. The statutes and propaganda of the 1560s may have reduced the element of magic in plots, so arguably the Elizabethan government successfully handled one element of the plots. Plots against crowned monarchs did not begin or end with Elizabeth's reign. The use of torture, spies, propaganda, execution, statutes and prison could not stop those that were determined to put their favourite on the throne.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

“An Act against Conjurations, Inchantments and Witchcraft.” 5 Elizabeth 1 c.16 (1563).

“An Act against Fonde and Phantasticall Propheyses.” 5 Elizabeth 1 c.15 (1563).

“An Act against Sedicious Wordes and Rumours Uttered Againste the Queens mooste Excellent Majestie.” 23 Elizabeth 1 c. 2 (1581).

Aske, James. *Elizabetha Triumpans*. London, 1588.

Burton, Robert. *The Anatomy of Melancholy, 1st edn* (1621). ed. Dell, Floyd & Jourdan- Smith, P. (Tudor, New York, 1948).

Coxe, Francis. *A Short Treatise Declaringe the Detestable Wickednesse, of Magicall Sciences as Necromancie. Coniurations of Spirites, Curious Astrologie and such Lyke*. London: 1622. <https://ezproxy.library.dal.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/short-treatise-declaringe-detestable-wickednesse/docview/2240900309/se-2>.

Harvey, John. *A discoursiue probleme concerning propheties*. 1588.

Howard, Henry. *Defensatiue Against the Poyson of Supposed Propheties by the L. H. Howard* [Defensatiue against the poyson of supposed propheties.]. London: 1583. <https://ezproxy.library.dal.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/against-poyson-supposed-propheties-l-h-howard/docview/2240921505/se-2>.

Scot, Reginald, 1538?-1599. *Scot's Discovery of Vvitchcraft Proving the Common Opinions of Witches Contracting with Divels, Spirits, Or Familiars ... to be but Imaginary, Erronious Conceptions and Novelties: Wherein also, the Lewde Unchristian all Written and Published in Anno 1584, by Reginald Scot, Esquire* [Discoverie of witchcraft Scot's discoverie of witchcraft.]. London: 1651. <https://ezproxy.library.dal.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/scots-discovery-vvitchcraft-proving-common/docview/2240960666/se-2>.

Secondary Sources

Alford, Stephan. *The Watchers: A Secret History of the Reign of Elizabeth I*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2012.

Bellany, Alastair. “Thinking with Poison.” In *The Oxford Handbook of The Age of Shakespeare*, edited by R. Malcolm Smuts, 559-579. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

- Bever, Edward. *The Realities of Witchcraft and Popular Magic in Early Modern Europe: Culture, Cognition and Everyday Life*. 1st ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008.
- Brennan, Lewis. "Witchcraft and Politics in Early Modern England, c. 1558-1604." PhD diss. University of Southampton, 2021.
- Brigden, Susan. "Howard, Henry, earl of Surrey (1516/17–1547), poet and soldier." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 29 Mar. 2024. <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-13905>.
- Cressy, David. "Early Modern Space Travel and the English Man in the Moon." *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 4 (2006): 961–82. <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.111.4.961>.
- Dee, John, and Suster, Gerald. *John Dee: Essential Readings*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2003.
- Devine, Michael. "Treasonous Catholic Magic and the 1563 Witchcraft Legislation: The English State's Response to Catholic Conjuring in the Early Years of Elizabeth I's Reign." In *Supernatural and Secular Power in Early Modern England*, edited by Marcus Harmes and Victoria Bladen. 67-91. Routledge, 2015.
- Heron-Allen, Edward, and Kassell, Lauren. "Coxe, Francis [Fraunces Cox] (fl. 1560–1575), astrologer and medical practitioner." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 29 Mar. 2024. <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-6533>.
- Janson, Sharon. *Political Protest and Prophecy Under Henry VIII*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1991.
- Jardine, Lisa. *The Awful End of Prince William the Silent: The First Assassination of a Head of State with a Handgun*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005.
- Jones, Norman. "Defining Superstitions: Treasonous Catholics and the Act Against Witchcraft of 1563." In *State, Sovereigns & Society in Early Modern England*, edited by Charles Carlton. 187-203. Sutton Publishing, 1998.
- Kassell, Lauren. *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London: Simon Forman: Astrologer, Alchemist, and Physician*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2005.
- Kesselring, Krista. "Deference and Dissent in Tudor England: Reflections on Sixteenth-Century Protest." *History Compass* 3, no. 2 (2005): 1-16.
- Kesselring, Krista. *The Northern Rebellion of 1569: Faith, Politics, and Protest in Elizabethan England*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007.

- Klaassen, Frank F. *The Transformations of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance*. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013.
- Klaassen, Frank. *Making Magic in Elizabethan England: Two Early Modern Vernacular Books of Magic*. University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press. 2019.
- Lowe, B. "Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England: A History of Sorcery and Treason." *Choice* 55, no. 11 (07, 2018): 1390.
- MacCaffrey, Wallace T. *Elizabeth I*. London: E. Arnold, 1993.
- Macfarlane, Alan. *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (1970).
- Neale, J. E. (John Ernest). *Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments*. London: Cape, 1953.
- Parry, Glyn. *The Arch-Conjuror of England: John Dee*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.
- Parry, Glyn. "The Monarchical Republic and Magic: William Cecil and The Exclusion of Mary Queen of Scots." *Reformation (Oxford, England)* 17, no. 1 (2012): 29–47.
- Previté-Orton, C. W. "An Elizabethan Prophecy: 'This Prophecy Merlin Shall Make.' Shakespeare." *History (London)* 2, no. 8 (1917): 207–218.
- Read Conyers. *Mr, Secretary Walsingham and the Policy of Queen Elizabeth*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1925. II.
- Robbins, Rossell Hope. "Keith Thomas. Religion and the Decline of Magic." *Renaissance Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1973): 70–72. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2859473>.
- Thomas, Keith. "Literacy in Early Modern England." In *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition*, edited by Gerd Baumann, 97-132. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Thomas, Keith. *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin books, 1973.
- Walsham, Alexandra. "'Frantick Hacket': Prophecy, Sorcery, Insanity, and the Elizabethan Puritan Movement." *Historical Journal* 41 (1998): 27-66.
- Wear, Andrew. *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550–1680*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Woolley, Benjamin. *The Queen's Conjuror: The Science and Magic of Dr. John Dee, Adviser to Queen Elizabeth I*. 1st ed. New York: Henry Holt, 2001.

Wootton, David. "Scott [Scot], Reginald (d. 1599), writer on witchcraft." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004. <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-24905>.

Young, Francis. *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England: A History of Sorcery and Treason*. London•New York: I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2018.