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## Stuart, Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia

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## Stuart, Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia



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### Abstract

Elizabeth Stuart (1596–1662), Electress Palatine of the Rhine (1613–19) and sometime queen of Bohemia (cr. 1619) was the daughter of King James VI of Scotland and Anna of Denmark. She was a stateswoman who soon found herself at the epicenter of the Thirty Years War, with her Calvinist husband having accepted the crown of Bohemia. They ruled for a single year before being declared outlaws and having to fight off Spanish, Bavarian, and imperial armies. The Palatinate being overrun by the enemy, they set up court in the Dutch Republic, which was soon transformed into a cultural center as a result of the rivalry between Elizabeth and her former lady-in-waiting Amalia von Solms, whose marriage to the new prince of Orange she arranged in 1625. As a widow, her two courts in the Dutch Republic—The Hague and Rhenen—attracted political refugees during the Wars of the Three Kingdoms (that is, the civil wars of her brother King Charles I), and their aftermath, when the restoration of her nephew Charles II encouraged her to return to England. She was one of the most prolific letter writers of the era, using her eloquence to win

allies to her cause, the restitution of the Palatinate. Her love of masques and plays enabled her to make political statements, especially at times when she appeared at her most powerless.

### Keywords

English succession · Epistolary writing · Letters · Masques · Religion · Rhetoric

### Introduction

Elizabeth Stuart (1596–1662), Electress Palatine of the Rhine (1613–19) and sometime queen of Bohemia (cr. 1619), was the daughter of King James VI of Scotland and Anna of Denmark. This granddaughter of ► [Mary, Queen of Scots](#), and goddaughter of ► [Queen Elizabeth I](#), was born in Dunfermline Abbey, Queen Anna's personal residence. In 1613 she married a German ruler, the Elector Palatine-in-waiting, one of the seven electors of the Holy Roman Empire, the pan-European territory that comprised Germany, Bohemia, Austria, the Spanish Netherlands, and part of northern Italy. Her new home, Heidelberg Castle, situated in the capital of the Lower Palatinate, was surrounded by nothing but bare rock, its beautiful gardens having yet to be designed. She was pregnant for most of her married life, producing thirteen children, of whom only three (Louis, Charlotte, and Gustavus Adolphus) failed to reach puberty. In 1619, her Calvinist husband Frederick V accepted

the crown of Bohemia, a vast kingdom made up of five predominantly Protestant or Lutheran territories—Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and Upper and Lower Lusatia—which bordered directly on part of his ancestral lands, the Upper Palatinate. She was crowned three days after her husband; together they ruled for an entire year. Driven out of Prague by armies supporting the emperor, they took up exile in the Dutch Republic, which became her home for the next forty years, from where they organized military campaigns. Widowed in 1632, she became one of the most politically active of early modern women, influencing ambassadors and wars from behind her writing desk, while refusing her brother's multiple invitations to return to England. She opted for voluntary exile as she wanted to act independently, and her political policies did not necessarily match those of her Stuart family.

## Biography

Elizabeth Stuart was the second child of King James VI of Scotland and his Danish consort Anna, and was baptized the first daughter of Scotland in 1596. She was raised away from her parents, as was royal custom, in the household of the Livingstones. The Scottish Kirk objected to this arrangement, as Lady Livingstone was Catholic, but Elizabeth remained with these, her first guardians, for the first seven years of her life; as this period was regarded as preceding formal education, James considered the confession of any guardian irrelevant. When James acceded to the throne of England in 1603, Elizabeth journeyed south alongside her mother and her elder brother; it is quite possible that it was the first time the siblings had met, as they had been raised apart (one reason for this being to limit the possibility of their both being abducted). She would never again see the land of her birth. Her younger brother, Charles, was considered too delicate for the arduous trip and remained in Scotland for some months. As she was soon to turn seven, Elizabeth was given into the care of a new guardian, Lady Kildare, an arrangement which turned sour when Kildare's husband, Lord Cobham, was exposed as a ringleader of the Main and Bye

plots which sought to replace James with his cousin ► [Arbella Stuart](#). Cobham confessed that he had intended to kill the “king and his cubs,” and Elizabeth's care was promptly transferred to the Haringtons, who would act as guardians for the rest of her time in England (Confession 1603, fol. 28v). Over the subsequent years Elizabeth would develop a strong bond with their daughter, ► [Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford](#). The guardianship was at times a demanding and expensive honor, but it was only Lord Harington's quick thinking that prevented Elizabeth's abduction by the Gunpowder plotters, who had hoped to turn her into a Catholic puppet queen.

Though they kept separate courts in England, Elizabeth and her elder brother Henry grew very close, exchanging letters on an almost daily basis and visiting one another frequently. Like Henry, Elizabeth's position made her an attractive and valuable match in the push and pull of European marriage politics. She had many suitors, including the king of Spain, but at the age of sixteen she was married to the Calvinist Frederick V, Elector Palatine-in-waiting. Though he was yet to reach his majority and thus accede to the electorship, the Elector Palatine was the most powerful of the seven electors of the Holy Roman Empire, and the only elector who could veto decisions of the emperor. James had chosen the Elector Palatine-in-waiting as part of his campaign to maintain the somewhat delicate confessional balance in Europe; her elder brother was to marry a Catholic bride not long after. The Palatine wedding in London in 1613 was the grandest feast Europe would see in the seventeenth century, and the first English royal wedding since that of ► [Mary I](#) in 1554. The celebrations lasted for several days, and included fireworks displays, a mock sea battle on the Thames, and several lavish theatrical performances. Despite the glitz and glamor, however, death cast a long shadow over the union of Thames and Rhine, as Elizabeth's beloved brother Henry had succumbed to typhoid in November 1612. Her younger brother Charles was frail and sickly, and James, apprehensive that public opinion would mount against the sending of his only robust heir abroad, brought the date of the wedding forward. In the presence of the flower of the nobility, Elizabeth and Frederick were hastily

married in Banqueting House on January 6, two months after Henry's death: the public witnessed the solemnization on St. Valentine's Day. James trusted that the splendor of the occasion would drown out the fear engendered by Elizabeth's impending move to the Palatinate.

The Palatine Wedding was not merely a sumptuous marker of the union of two powerful dynasties, but was seen by many to guarantee the long-term safety of Protestantism. Elizabeth was poetically transformed into the heir, if not the reincarnation, of her godmother Elizabeth I, and after the wedding she and her new husband undertook a progress through the Dutch Republic aimed at, amongst other things, garnering support for the Protestant Union, a coalition of Protestant states dedicated to protecting the fruits of the Reformation, of which Frederick was also the leader.

Elizabeth's first years in her new marital home, Heidelberg Castle, were anything but smooth. As Frederick was yet to reach his majority, the Palatine government, and perhaps more importantly, the household itself, was dominated by administrators and Elizabeth's mother-in-law, and there were constant arguments concerning, amongst other things, precedence. Elizabeth was also homesick, a malaise that James attempted to cure by sending a constant stream of ambassadors bearing gifts of exotic (and not-so-exotic) pets. While the couple's first child, Frederick Henry, was born in 1614, the second, Charles Louis, would not appear until 1617, the long gap a sure indication that not all was well in Heidelberg. Matters improved when Frederick acceded to the electorship, though Elizabeth's plans to visit her home and family were scuppered by her pregnancy: the princess Elisabeth was born in 1618. It was in this year that Elizabeth's fortunes took two turns for the unexpected, first when Frederick openly supported rebellion against the Catholic emperor, marking the beginning of thirty years of brutal, pan-European conflict, and second when he was offered the crown of Bohemia.

The crown of Bohemia was traditionally, if not inevitably, worn by the emperor, and Frederick's father-in-law counseled him against accepting it; but on November 4, 1619, Frederick was officially crowned as Bohemia's new king and Elizabeth was crowned queen three days later. For most of the

reign she ruled alone in the capital, Prague, as Frederick was occupied with gathering oaths of allegiance throughout his kingdom. The emperor demanded that Frederick relinquish the crown, but he refused, and a series of armies were raised against him: the imperial general Charles Bonaventure de Longueval, Count of Bucquoy; the Lutheran John George, Elector of Saxony; and Frederick's distant relative the Catholic Maximilian, Duke of Bavaria, made their way towards Prague, while Ambrosio Spinola, in service of the Spanish king, headed towards the Palatinate, Frederick's German ancestral lands, from the Spanish Netherlands. Well aware of the oncoming storm, Frederick made plans for their escape should they fail to weather it, but Elizabeth refused to leave the capital and her subjects, despite her husband's pleas. The subsequent defeat at the Battle of White Mountain mere miles from the city walls was as surprising as it was devastating; the couple fled Prague in haste. Two months later, Elizabeth gave birth to her fifth child, Maurice, in Brandenburg. It soon became apparent that all hope of military support from the Protestant Union had evaporated, and in April 1621 the couple accepted the offer of a relative, Maurice of Nassau (Frederick's mother was Maurice's half-sister), to take refuge in the Dutch Republic; they promptly set up court in The Hague. Elizabeth and Frederick were declared outlaws of the Empire and stripped of their lands and titles. Their reign in Bohemia had lasted almost exactly a year.

Determined to regain the Palatinate, they used The Hague as a base from which to organize their military campaigns; Elizabeth acted as a figurehead for the many Scottish and English soldiers who formed part of the Dutch army and were stationed in the Republic but intended to fight for her. Over the next decade, they came close to regaining the Lower Palatinate, but Frederick died of a fever on campaign with the Swedish army in 1632. Shorn of her direct access to military action by Frederick's death, Elizabeth turned to politics and became a stateswoman, serving as head of the Palatine government-in-exile while she waited for her eldest surviving son, Charles Louis, to reach his majority in 1635 (her firstborn had drowned at the age of fifteen). Unfortunately, he could not take up his responsibilities: initially he was held prisoner in

all but name at the Stuart court and later was incarcerated by the French following his attempt to take up leadership of the army of the late Bernard von Saxe-Weimar. Elizabeth thus remained in control of matters until her son's release in 1640, after which she continued to lobby for the retrieval of her dower lands. Her attention, however, necessarily shifted towards the Wars of the Three Kingdoms, not least as her court in The Hague, which had always functioned as an alternative Stuart court on the Continent, now became a place of refuge for Royalists. Her loyalties were split during these wars: while her sons Maurice and Rupert supported their uncle, her eldest, Charles Louis, sided with Parliament. The Stuart contingent in The Hague had also expanded when her young niece, Mary Stuart, married the son of Amalia von Solms and future prince of Orange, William. Together they worked to support both the Palatine and the Stuart causes while forming a united front against the internal political battles being fought with Amalia. In 1648, when the Peace of Westphalia was concluded (with no little help from Amalia), Charles Louis regained half of the Palatinate but most of the power stayed with Bavaria—a compromise Elizabeth had refused to accept as early as 1636. Having fallen out with Charles Louis, who refused to return her German dower lands to her, she returned to England after the Restoration, one year before her death in 1662.

## Education

From the moment she was born, Elizabeth was modeled into a miniature version of Elizabeth I. Having been named after the English queen as part of her father's bid for the English throne, and accepted as her godchild, she was taught to write, move, and sound like her. Her writing master was the French Jean de Beau-Chesne, whose writing manual was used by Elizabeth I and who undoubtedly encouraged her to make her godmother's signature her own. Her dancing master was Francis Cardell, son of Thomas Cardell, who had taught Elizabeth I to swirl in farthingales, while John Bull taught her to play the virginal as he had also once taught Elizabeth I. To further push the resemblance into the realms of the uncanny, her hairline was plucked to create an artificially high forehead and

“Elizabethan” wigs became part and parcel of her daily outfitting (Akkerman 2021, 34, 38, 43).

Intellectually, she was as precocious as her godmother. The Geneva-born royal physician Theodore Diodati taught her French and Italian; her earliest surviving letters in those languages date from the ages of seven and thirteen respectively (Akkerman 2021, 67). French would be the only language in which she could communicate with her future spouse, and her mastery of Italian allowed her to foster amicable, if not gossipy, relations with most Venetian ambassadors. The story that James forbade his daughter to learn classical languages is most likely apocryphal (Akkerman 2021, 48). If her education was gendered nevertheless, which might still have been the case since no letters from her hand survive in either Greek or Latin, in 1610 she wrote a bilingual letter to her brother Henry, showing a desire to learn Latin:

[In French:] I return to you a thousand praises, and tell you briefly that I feel an intense happiness at your return hither. [Continues in Italian:] And so it is beautiful and finished. [Resumes in French:] If you do not understand my Italian, I will give you the translation when we next meet, and exchange it with the one you promised me of your Latin. (Akkerman 2011–, 1:94, letter 53, Elizabeth to Henry, [after June] 1610, n.p.)

At the end of her life the philosopher Samuel de Sorbière noted that she was fluent in six languages, though he unfortunately failed to list them (Sorbière 1660, 71, letter 15, Sorbière to Princess Palatine Elisabeth, June 3, 1652, Orange): it is not hard to speculate that those would have been the languages that she was either taught or that she taught herself as a child (French, Italian, and also Latin) and the languages of the various courts in which she lived (Scots, English, and Czech). She never spoke German or Dutch.

Elizabeth was a keen reader. Her childhood accounts note monies spent on Foxe's “book of Martyrs,” a “great bible, and diverse other volumes of histories by her highness speciallie appointed to be provided” (Expenses 1613, 5, 11–12). These histories especially might have ensured that she became a powerful writer, one more than capable of putting an opponent to the rhetorical sword. As she sparred with Archbishop Laud over the question of making peace with the usurpers of the

Palatinate in 1636, she responded to one particularly condescending letter with the following words:

I confess, as a woman and a Christian, I shoulde rather desire it [the restitution of her children's ancestral lands] by peace, but I have lived so long amongst soldiers and warrs, as it makes one to me as easie as the other, and as familiar, especiallie when I remember never to have read in the Chronicles of my ancestours, that anie king of England gott anie good by treaties but most commonlie lost by them, and on the contrarie by warrs made always good peaces. (Akkerman 2011–, 2:493, letter 270, Elizabeth to Laud, August 6, 1636, New Style, The Hague)

She laced her letters with literary references. Kenelm Digby gave her a copy of Ben Jonson's *Workes* (1616; see Rose 2020, n21, 22). She was particularly fond of the *Alchemist* and *Volpone*, borrowing her name for the Spanish, “Scurvie Dons,” from the former, and referring to “Sir Politique Would-Bee disease” and “Spinola's whales plots” from the latter in letters to Sir Thomas Roe, James, Marquis of Hamilton, and Sir Henry Vane (Akkerman 2011–, 1:844, letter 575; 2:175, letter 87; 2:193, letter 102). She also cited Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV* and *Henry V* in letters to Roe (Akkerman 2011–, 2:374, letter 374; 2:941, letter 548; 2:972, letter 569). She used them both for poetic effect and as a sort of literary code, such as to indicate that an individual was not to be trusted. Elizabeth's use of metaphor and allusion often appears most playful where it is most effective. While she and Frederick referred to themselves by the names Astraea and Celadon, taken from Honoré d'Urfé's prose romance *L'Astrée* (1607–27), Elizabeth's habitual use of nicknames such as “honest fat Thom” for Sir Thomas Roe and “ugly camel's face” for Sir James Hay, first Earl of Carlisle, not only created or curated a personal connection with the correspondent in question, but had the added bonus of helping to keep her letters private. The ambassadors were unlikely to circulate letters in which they were insulted—even playfully.

Elizabeth never forgot her own experience of being separated from her brother, and insisted that her children be raised together in one court and her daughters taught the same subjects as her sons, martial matters excepted. The result of this care

shaped her daughter Elisabeth into one of the most accomplished female philosophers of the early modern period, and allowed another of her daughters, Louise Hollandine, to become a valued pupil of the painter Honthorst (Akkerman 2021, 10).

## Correspondence

Elizabeth waged war by letter, writing thousands of them to family members, heads of states, generals, and ambassadors in Italian, French, and English. Her archive does not survive, but the letters she sent are to be found in approximately fifty repositories; some one thousand letters are edited for the first time in a three-volume Oxford University Press edition (Akkerman 2011–). Over the years, Elizabeth's use of coded references evolved into habitual usage of ciphers. From the 1620s to the 1640s she used eight different cipher keys (Akkerman 2022, 550). It is not clear when Elizabeth learnt how to use ciphers, but she may well have started young; some sources suggest that her sometime guardian Lady Kildare was also employed to instruct James VI/I in the art of cryptography. She also married into a family of cipherers: Frederick V's uncle, Duke August of Brunswick-Lüneberg, wrote one of the century's great manuals of cryptography, *Cryptomenytices* (1624), under the pseudonym Gustavus Selenus. Elizabeth used ciphers with her husband Frederick, the art dealer and diplomat Balthazar Gerbier, the Palatine councillor Sir Richard Cave, and ambassador Sir Thomas Roe. The ciphered letters between herself and Roe which used one particular key are littered with errors, errors which strongly suggest that she used a cipher wheel when encrypting and decrypting. Indeed, having lobbied for years for Elizabeth to send him a cipher with which they might communicate (less, initially at least, with regard to security concerns than for the status that sharing a cipher with Elizabeth would confer upon him), Roe soon realized that the polyalphabetic cipher he had sent her was somewhat unwieldy, and suggested that she use only its attached nomenclature, a code in which figures stand in for names or entire words

rather than individual letters (Akkerman and Langman 2024, 106–09).

## Paintings and Tapestries

Frederick and Elizabeth were avid collectors of art; until 1630 their favorite artist was Michiel Janszoon van Miereveldt, who produced the first life-size pendant portraits of the couple in the northern Netherlands, the only paintings of this type he would ever produce. They found him slow in his work, however, and his position was usurped by the rather prompter Gerard van Honthorst, who would produce a painting measuring 304 × 480 cm that depicted Frederick and Elizabeth as Celadon and Astraea (Akkerman 2014, 43–46). It was sent to Charles I as a gift, but its present whereabouts is unknown. Honthorst not only produced many portraits of Elizabeth, but also of her one-time lady-in-waiting Amalia, who was rather taken by his style. A rivalry ensued: Elizabeth and Amalia were depicted in paintings wearing the same clothes, in the same postures, or as the same mythical characters, each trying to outdo the other. As a widow, Elizabeth employed Honthorst to produce posthumous portraits of Frederick as king of Bohemia and of herself that could be copied for engravings and sent to supporters, as well as a propaganda piece called *The Allegory of the Just*. As large as *Celadon and Astraea in the Garden of Love*, the *Allegory* comprised her entire brood, living and dead, with Charles Louis portrayed as Elector and herself riding a war chariot, and it was intended to emphasize the justness of the family's claim to their ancestral lands. It was used to impress Thomas Howard, second Earl of Arundel, before he went off to negotiate the Palatine situation with the emperor in Vienna (Akkerman 2021, 302–06). There is no extant inventory of their estate in The Hague, but their summer palace in Rhenen in the province of Utrecht, from which they could easily access grounds for the par force hunt (with dogs), a favorite pastime, was also used to display art. Its collection of 127 paintings included works by Cornelis Cornelisz of Haarlem, Hendrick Cornelisz Vroom, Abraham Willaerts, Rubens, and, not surprisingly, Honthorst (Hoogsteder

2003). Heidelberg had housed a collection of even more valuable commodities, approximately five hundred tapestries. Elizabeth had come to love them and was continually on the lookout for new examples of the art: in 1650, she bought three sets for her private dining room from Pieter de Cracht, including specimens recounting the stories of Tobias and Cleopatra (Hubach 2010, 117).

## Masques

With Anna of Denmark as a mother, and Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford (the court's most frequent masquer after Anna herself) as a childhood friend, it is no surprise Elizabeth enjoyed masques from an early age. She was a masquer in Samuel Daniel's *Tethys' Festival* (1610), taking the role of a water nymph personifying the River Thames, and in 1611 appeared as a "Daughter of the Morn" in Jonson's *Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly* (Akkerman 2021, 79). In 1613 she most likely either commissioned or co-invented Georg Rudolf Weckherlin's militant, pro-Protestant *The Masque of Truth*, a performance with engineering works and costumes designed by Inigo Jones, which was originally scheduled for her own marriage celebrations, but was canceled. There were many possible reasons for its cancellation, but grief was definitely not the reason: Elizabeth was reportedly to dance in the masque next to fifteen other "maidens" and continued to practice for this "sumptuous ballet," as Venetian diplomat Antonio Foscarini termed it, two months after Henry's death (Akkerman 2021, 79–80). The masque's libretto survives in a French compendium to the festivities, whose compiler D. Jocquet describes Elizabeth as "le premier mobile"—that is, "the prime mover"—behind the masque's conception (Jocquet 1613, sig. Fr–v). Despite Jocquet's words, literary history has put forward her elder brother Henry as the main force behind the masque's creation, primarily on the grounds that Elizabeth was allegedly not old enough to fulfill such a role (see Norbrook 1986, 89). Nadine Akkerman has argued elsewhere that "assigning Henry a decisive role on this basis, to the extent that scholarly criticism rarely mentions Elizabeth in connection to the masque, is not

at all convincing.” Elizabeth embraced the same bellicose politics as her brother, had shown greater interest in participating in this theatrical genre than her sibling, and was sixteen and a half in February 1613; “had he lived, Henry would have turned 18 that very month” (Akkerman 2021, 426n39).

Her exposure at the Stuart court to the only theatrical genre in which women could appear on a semi-public stage stood her in good stead in later life. In Heidelberg, the capital of the Lower Palatinate, the two households of Elector and Electress clashed over precedence, but to overcome rifts she sought recourse in the masque, in which one household performed for the other before joining in a dance together. She had everything to hand to introduce the hostile German courtiers to the genre. Before he rejoined the Earl of Arundel’s entourage in 1613, Inigo Jones needed a mere week to design a banqueting hall for the English wing of Heidelberg Castle, a space suitable for such theatrical performances (Harris 1993). Around 1615 she had a ballroom built in Amberg, the capital of the Upper Palatinate (Laschinger 2003, 57). More importantly, she employed an architect and engineer on site to invent machinery in order to, for instance, change stage settings in an instant and have fairies and witches literally fly across the stage: Jones’s French counterpart, Salomon de Caus, was not only famously the “Master of the Gardens, Fountains and Grottoes of Heidelberg Castle,” but collaborated on several masques with Elizabeth (Winkler 2000), with his wife Esther (*née* Picart), most likely designing the costumes (Akkerman 2021, 112).

While in exile in The Hague, Elizabeth again put the masque to good use. The Dutch diplomat and poet Constantijn Huygens, whom she had recommended as secretary to the new prince of Orange, tried his hand at a masque after the Spanish Match came to naught in 1624. Not fully understanding the genre, even though he had witnessed a Jonsonian masque in England, Huygens failed to obliterate the forces of evil at the end of the performance. Elizabeth made him redo the work, and in his revised version the antimasquers are explicitly identified as the Spanish before being obliterated by Elizabeth’s radiant virtue. In effect, she had symbolically declared war on Spain, before her father or brother had had the chance. Both versions

of the masque survive in print: the original, *Vers pour le subject du ballet de l’amour triomphant, des nations, & de leur passions* (preserved as SP 117/764, The National Archives, Kew); the altered version, *Dessein de l’entrée de ballet présenté à la reine de Boheme, a la Haye*, included in the *Otia* (1625), Huygens’s collected works (Akkerman 2009). It attracted the disapprobation of the clergy, but with choreographical patterns mimicking battle formations, practicing for and performing in the masque soon became part of the exercise routine for soldiers stationed in The Hague. In 1655, when Mary Stuart’s son William was denied the title of Stadholder and the concomitant role of General of the Dutch army, Elizabeth as aunt and godmother put on another masque, *Ballet de la Carmesse*, which symbolically demonstrated that in spite of this insult the soldiers would continue to dance to a Stuart tune (Akkerman and Sellin 2004, 2005). In 1624 she would threaten the preacher speaking out against her pastimes with legal action, but by 1655 such critiques no longer had much effect:

my deare Neece recovers her health and good looks extremelie by her excersice the fairie dauncing with the maskers has done her much good ... our dutch olde minister sayde nothing against it in the pulpet, but a little french preacher Carré saide in his sermon wee had committed as great a sinne as that of Sodome and Gomora, which sett all the churche a laughing. (Elizabeth to Charles II, December 13, 1655, quoted in Akkerman 2021, 388)

In the year that followed, Mary and Elizabeth put on a series of “little plays” for each other’s courts (Hughes and Sanders 2011; Huysman 2007; Keblusek 1999). It was nothing short of provocation: their courts were located on opposite sites of the Hofvijver, the pond in front of the Binnenhof, the Dutch center of government. Their parading of courtiers in front of the state offices, as one court was going to visit the other, back and forth, possibly in costume, was a constant reminder to the Dutch statesmen of the royal Stuart contingent in the Republic (Akkerman 2021, 389). It was not the first time that Mary and Elizabeth had used performances to make their feelings known in this manner: in 1643, shortly after Mary’s arrival in The Hague, they put on a play for their Stuart supporters, the *Acteonisation du Grand Veneur d’Hollande*,

which made malicious fun of the Dutch and German contingent of the court of Orange and presented a most cruel caricature of Amalia (Kebulsek 2016). Love for new theatrical forms never left her: in the last year of her life, having just returned to London, she went to see the first English opera, Sir William Davenant's second part of *The Siege of Rhodes*, with her nephew the restored King Charles II. Two months later, Samuel Pepys spotted her in the audience of Davenant's *The Witts* (Akkerman 2021, 405). Elizabeth died on February 13, 1662, after a short illness.

## Conclusion

Elizabeth Stuart was one of the most influential female political actors of the period, and a great patron of the arts, yet her reputation has long suffered at the hands of her enemies. Following the defeat at White Mountain, a single poet referred to Frederick as "The Winter King," a name subsequently adapted for use with Elizabeth by later historians and adopted by all and sundry. No contemporary ever referred to her as "The Winter Queen"; her supporters knew her as the "Queen of Hearts" and were moved to pledge their lives to her cause largely because of her irresistible charisma. She is derided for her alleged vanity in refusing to part with the title queen of Bohemia, but her logic was irrefutable: to relinquish the title, she argued, would suggest that her election as queen had not been legal and that the subsequent confiscation of her family's ancestral lands in Germany was therefore legitimate. She had no wish to rule Bohemia again, but held onto the title to protect the inheritance of her children.

Throughout her long life, Elizabeth held personal mottoes which reflected her circumstances, leaving them in various *alba amicora*. In 1609 she adopted the Italian motto "Giunta mi piace honestà con leggiadria" (virtue with gracefulness pleases me) (Akkerman 2011–, 1:77). The motto of her Heidelberg years, "plustost morte que changée" (I rather break than bend) was rather more brutal. On moving to Prague, her motto changed again, now reading "Io non fa stima che del' honore" (I esteem only honor) (Akkerman 2021, 115, 228).

Elizabeth's reputation as a spendthrift and as a poor mother are particularly tenacious, and yet equally specious. She did little in her life but strive for the honor and the possessions of her family, and was as fierce a friend as she was an enemy. She certainly would have appreciated the irony of her grandson acceding to the thrones of England and Scotland as George I, though she might have frowned upon his inability to speak the language of the people he ruled. When she died in 1662, she had outlived every one of her enemies.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland](#)
- ▶ [Mary I, Queen of England and Ireland](#)
- ▶ [Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots](#)
- ▶ [Russell, Lucy, Countess of Bedford](#)
- ▶ [Stuart, Arbella](#)

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