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Gajda, Alexandra

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ALEXANDRA GAJDA

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DEBATING WAR AND PEACE IN LATE ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND*

ALEXANDRA GAJDA

University of Birmingham

ABSTRACT. *Peace with Spain was debated by Elizabeth I's government from 1598, when France and Spain made peace by signing the Treaty of Vervins. Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex was zealously hostile to accommodation with Spain, while other privy councillors argued in favour of peace. Arguments for and against peace were, however, also articulated in wider contexts, in particular in a series of manuscript treatises, and also in printed tracts from the Netherlands, which appeared in English translation in the late 1590s. This article explores ways that ideas of war and peace were disseminated in manuscript and printed media outside the privy council and court. It is argued that disagreement about the direction of the war reveals differing contemporary responses to the legitimacy of the Dutch abjuration of Spanish sovereignty and the polity of the United Provinces, which have implications for our understanding of political mentalities in late Elizabethan England.*

‘I found the state embarked in a great and tedious war ... by the peace in my person is now amity kept.’¹ To his first English parliament in 1604, James VI and I defined himself as God’s instrument of peace and regeneration. War, above all, had shaped the dynamics of Elizabeth’s so-called ‘second reign’. The economic burdens of conflict with Spain, exacerbated by harsh environmental conditions and the rebellion of Hugh O’Neill, earl of Tyrone in Ireland, top a long list of reasons that have caused historians to regard the 1590s as a decade of unusual hardship, and to explain a broader sense, reflected in the political and literary culture, of weariness with the old queen’s rule.²

The Jacobean peace, though, had longer roots in the final years of Elizabeth’s reign.³ English attacks on the Spanish mainland and fleets in the 1590s had little lasting impact on the direction of the war, and by the latter part of the decade Elizabeth began to view the restoration of authority in Ireland as the most urgent

Department of History, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, B15 2TT a.m.gajda@bham.ac.uk

* Versions of this article have been read at seminars at the Tudor and Stuart seminar at the Institute of Historical Research, the University of St Andrews, and the University of Birmingham. All pre-1800 works were published in London unless otherwise stated.

¹ James VI and I, *The political works of James I*, ed. Charles McIlwain (New York, NY, 1965), p. 270.

² John Guy, ‘The 1590s: the second reign of Elizabeth I?’, in John Guy, ed., *The reign of Elizabeth I: court and culture in the last decade* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 1–19.

³ Pauline Croft, ‘Brussels and London: the archdukes, Robert Cecil and James I’, in Werner Thomas and Luc Duerloo, eds., *Albert and Isabella, 1598–1621: Essays* (Brepols, 1998), pp. 79–86.

priority of her government. The serious possibility of peace with Spain was debated when England and the United Provinces were invited to participate in negotiations that surrounded the Treaty of Vervins, made public on 22 April (2 May NS), which brought a formal end to Franco-Spanish hostilities. Thereafter, Anglo-Spanish relations have been described as a gradual ‘shuffling towards peace’, realized in 1604.⁴

There was, however, no inevitable trajectory towards the Treaty of London, and Elizabethans expressed varied and complex attitudes towards the war with Spain in the late 1590s. Most famously, vociferous hostility to peace was expressed by Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex, whose treatise, *To Maister Anthony Bacon: an apologie of the earle of Essex against those which falsly and maliciously taxe him to be the onely hinderer of the peace, and quiet of his country* (1600), stridently argued that a settlement with Spain would bring disaster to England and Christendom.⁵ The earl’s ideological hostility to peace caused a permanent breakdown in his uneasy relations with William and Robert Cecil, who were more strongly inclined to seek an end to England’s military commitment on the continent, and energized the nascent factions at court.⁶ Disagreements between Essex and the Cecils were, however, representative of a wider and more vigorous debate about foreign policy in the late 1590s.

Essex’s *Apologie* was itself a ‘semi-public’ document, which initially circulated in manuscript soon after its composition in the late spring or early summer of 1598.⁷ Historians have not hitherto realized that the *Apologie* was originally one of a series of similar treatises about the peace, written around the time of the Treaty of Vervins. Almost all were anonymous, but appear to have been written by figures connected to the court, and received limited scribal circulation. Some concurred with Essex’s views on the war, but others argued in favour of peace with equal vehemence.

Important elements of this critical debate about peace with Spain were also disseminated in print. The only direct discussion of the deliberations in court and council to appear in a printed text was Essex’s *Apologie*, published in an unauthorized version in 1600. In this article, it will be shown that a rash of propaganda from the United Provinces, published in English translation in the late 1590s, also provided Elizabethan readers with a commentary on Spain’s relations with the Netherlands and the Protestant Dutch, which had foreboding implications for England’s involvement in peace negotiations. Through the indirect medium of foreign news pamphlets, an even wider audience of Elizabethan readers gained access to the critical substance of debates about foreign policy, the

⁴ W. T. MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I: war and politics, 1588–1603* (New Haven, CT, 1992), pp. 220–45.

⁵ This unauthorized edition was published in 1600; a further edition was printed in 1603.

⁶ P. E. J. Hammer, ‘Patronage at court, faction and the earl of Essex’, in Guy, ed., *Reign of Elizabeth I*, pp. 65–86.

⁷ P. E. J. Hammer, ‘The smiling crocodile: the earl of Essex and late-Elizabethan “popularity”’, in Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, eds., *The politics of the public sphere in early modern England* (Manchester, 2007), pp. 95–115, at p. 86.

essential *arcana imperii*, the most traditional prerogative of princes. Analysis of manuscript treatises and translations of foreign news pamphlets reveals that the ideas used to express and explore the desirability of peace, and the written media in which they were conducted, deepen our understanding of late Elizabethan political culture in significant ways.

Contemporary arguments about war and peace demonstrate the ways that foreign policy shaped Elizabethan political thinking, and the articulation of political ideas. Formal and informal state and self-censorship meant that Elizabethans often wrote about political ideas implicitly, or covertly; in drama, literature, or historical writing.⁸ In the 1590s, it has been argued, the Elizabethan regime became especially concerned to denounce theories that legitimized resistance to princely rule, which found potent expression in the writings of English Jesuits, or were associated with the 'Dangerous Positions' of radical Puritanism. The political rhetoric of the Elizabethan elites grew more authoritarian in tone in response to the acute economic hardships of the decade, which caused widespread fear of social disorder and popular revolt.⁹ Debates about foreign policy, however, engaged Elizabethans in wider discourses about concepts of monarchy and tyranny, liberty and slavery, resistance and obedience, interest and policy: ideas being central to ideological debates about the state in sixteenth-century Europe, that were rarely explored in explicit relation to domestic politics.

In particular, deliberations about the future of the alliance with the United Provinces reveal the ideological conundrum posed by Elizabeth's foreign policy. Famously, Elizabeth rejected the formal sovereignty of the Netherlands: the official published justification for Elizabeth's intervention in the Dutch revolt stressed that the queen had laboured to prevent the rebel provinces from casting off their allegiance to their prince, and that the martial aid offered the rebel states was defensive, intended to restore the Low Countries' 'ancient liberties' and constitution as had existed in the reign of Charles V. The same pamphlet, however, also admitted that the 'ancient lawes' of the Netherlands permitted the Dutch, in defence of their liberties, to transfer their allegiance to a different ruler.¹⁰ By signing the Treaty of Nonsuch in 1585, Elizabeth treated with the United Provinces as a sovereign power, implicitly recognizing their abjuration of Philip II's authority as legitimate, and acknowledging the de facto transformation

⁸ See for example, Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and interpretation: the conditions of writing and reading in early modern England* (Madison, WI, 1984); Marie Axton, *The queen's two bodies: drama and the Elizabethan succession* (London, 1977). For the sporadic nature of the enforcement of censorship, see Cyndia Susan Clegg, *Press censorship in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge, 1997).

⁹ John Guy, 'The Elizabethan establishment and the ecclesiastical polity', in Guy, ed., *Reign of Elizabeth I*, pp. 126–49; A. N. McLaren, *Political culture in the reign of Elizabeth I: queen and commonwealth, 1558–1585* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 9–10, 195–7; J. Sharpe, 'Social strain and social dislocation', in Guy, ed., *Reign of Elizabeth I*, pp. 192–211. Richard Bancroft is the assumed author of *Dangerous positions and proceedings, published and practiced ... for the presbiteriall discipline* (1593).

¹⁰ *A declaration of the causes mooving the queene of England to giue aide to the defence of the people afflicted and oppressed in the lowe countries* (1585), p. 8 and passim.

of the polity, from a monarchical state to a republic of federated provinces, governed by the States General of the North. Although historians of Elizabethan foreign policy have acknowledged the importance of the ideological dilemma faced by Elizabeth in her decision to support the Dutch, most studies of Elizabethan political thought have not hitherto paid adequate attention to the ways that the Dutch revolt or the government of the United Provinces was conceptualized.¹¹ The texts that debated the future of the war in the 1590s reveal that contemporaries held distinctly different attitudes to the legitimacy of the polity of the United Provinces, which are indicative of deeper variance in political mentalities.

There has been intense recent engagement in the historiography of early modern England with the character of ‘popular politics’, ‘news culture’, and the development of a ‘public sphere’, which engaged Englishmen and women in critical discourse with the state that governed them.¹² Peter Lake and Steven Pincus have argued that, while such a sphere did exist in pre-Civil War England, it was energized sporadically, and by a clutch of acute topical concerns that galvanized ‘public opinion’.¹³ The war with Spain touched the lives of Elizabeth’s subjects as profoundly as any other concern of the commonwealth, as it affected that potent brew: the material *and* spiritual welfare of nation and subjects. Moreover, a ‘reading public’ in Elizabethan England had easier access to printed information about continental news than about domestic politics.¹⁴ Scholars have long recognized the significance of the popular response to foreign policy in the 1620s – particularly in reaction to the Spanish match – but the Elizabethan roots of public engagement with foreign policy demand further attention. A study of translations of Dutch news materials from the late 1590s offers some preliminary observations towards such an investigation, by demonstrating the nexus which connected the political debate of the court and privy council to the public readership of print. Analysis of texts reflecting on the peace also demonstrates that the substance of politics was differently aired in manuscript and printed texts, which also has ramifications for our understanding of the complexity of the burgeoning news culture, and the late Elizabethan ‘public sphere’.

¹¹ For important treatments of the ideological ramifications of Elizabeth’s decision to support the Dutch in 1585 see especially S. L. Adams, ‘The Protestant cause: religious alliance with the European Calvinist communities as a political issue in England, 1585–1630’ (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1973), pp. 24–42 and passim; idem, ‘Elizabeth I and the sovereignty of the Netherlands 1576–1585’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 14 (2004), pp. 309–19; R. B. Wernham, ‘England and the revolt of the Netherlands’, in J. S. Bromley and E. H. Kossmann, eds., *Britain and the Netherlands* (London, 1960), pp. 29–40.

¹² Recent works include Lake and Pincus, eds., *Public sphere*; Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and pamphleteering in early modern Britain* (Cambridge, 2003); Natalie Mears, *Queenship and political discourse in the Elizabethan realms* (Cambridge, 2006).

¹³ ‘Introduction: Rethinking the public sphere in early modern England’, in Lake and Pincus, eds., *Public sphere*, pp. 1–30.

¹⁴ Raymond, *Pamphlets and pamphleteering*, pp. 98–160.

I

By 1598, there were pressing reasons to welcome the end of the war. The English naval campaign of the summer of 1597 had been disastrous, failing to assault the Spanish fleet at Ferrol or to capture the convoy of Spanish treasure from the West Indies.¹⁵ The dreadful harvest failures of 1594–7 exacerbated fears of social unrest, while in Ireland the crisis of English authority was deepened in mid-October 1597 by the death of the new deputy, Lord Burgh. Meanwhile the military muscle of Spain, fighting an alliance of France, England, and the United Provinces, was massively over-stretched: in November 1596, Philip II stopped paying interest on his debts, effectively declaring his bankruptcy. Henry IV, however, the ally of England and the Dutch, also deemed peace essential to the restoration of the prosperity of his war-ravaged kingdom. Encouraged by the urgings of the papacy, the French king believed that he could reach agreeable terms with Spain by the winter of 1597.¹⁶

As the terms of the Triple Alliance of 1596 between France, England, and the United Provinces dictated that France could not treat individually with the enemy, Henry invited Elizabeth and the Dutch to discuss possible terms for an over-arching peace between the allies and Spain.¹⁷ Sir Robert Cecil led a commission to France for talks in February 1598, which was joined by a similar Dutch delegation.¹⁸ Whatever ambivalence Elizabeth felt towards the prospect of peace with Spain, the queen instructed her commissioners to signal her willingness to engage in negotiations, provided that a series of conditions could be met, which included the guarantee of the security of the Dutch Protestants, and the restoration of the ancient political and religious liberties of the Low Countries. In the course of frustrating talks with Henry, however, English intelligence revealed that the king of France had been far from open in his dealings with Elizabeth, and had

¹⁵ The following discussion is taken from R. B. Wernham, *Return of the armadas: the last years of the Elizabethan war with Spain* (Oxford, 1994); MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I: war and politics*, pp. 196–298; P. E. J. Hammer, *Elizabeth's wars: war, government and society in Tudor England, 1544–1604* (Basingstoke, 2003), pp. 190–235; Paul C. Allen, *Philip III and the Pax Hispanica, 1598–1621: the failure of grand strategy* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2000); Nathan Goodman, *Diplomatic relations between England and Spain with special reference to English opinion* (Philadelphia, PA, 1925); Charles Wilson, *Queen Elizabeth and the revolt in the Netherlands* (London, 1970); Adams, 'Protestant cause'; J. C. Grayson, 'From protectorate to partnership: Anglo-Dutch relations, 1598–1625' (Ph.D. thesis, London, 1978), pp. 19–47.

¹⁶ Geoffrey Parker, *The grand strategy of Philip II* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1998), pp. 278–9.

¹⁷ In November 1597, Henry sent the envoy Hurault de Maisse to Elizabeth, see G. B. Harrison, ed. and trans., *A journal of all that was accomplished by Monsieur de Maisse ambassador in England from King Henri IV to Queen Elizabeth anno domini 1597* (London, 1931).

¹⁸ Cecil's mission can be read in *Historical Manuscripts Commission: a calendar of the manuscripts of the Most Hon. the marquis of Salisbury, KG, &c, preserved at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire (HMC Salisbury)*, (12 vols., London, 1888–1973), VIII, pp. 90–9, 104–12, 118–27, XXIII, pp. 10–74; Thomas Birch, *An historical view of the negotiations between the courts of England, France, and Brussels, from the year 1592 to 1617* (1749), pp. 97–164. Burghley made notes on the pros and cons of accepting a peace offered in the course of these negotiations, 'Considerations of y^e motivation for a treaty of peace w[ith] the K. of Spayn', British Library (BL), MS Lansdowne 103, fos. 243r–251v; and The National Archives (TNA), State Papers (SP), 12/266/3.

already agreed terms with Philip. The Treaty of Vervins, however, allowed a six-month window within which Elizabeth might choose to join the Franco-Spanish settlement. Although furious with Henry's desertion of the allies, Elizabeth signalled to the French king that she was willing to continue to consider negotiations for a general peace that would include the Dutch.¹⁹

With the problem of peace now laid openly on the diplomatic table, the Dutch negotiated furiously with Elizabeth in late spring and summer to persuade the queen from making her own separate settlement with Spain. In a position of relative strength, Elizabeth renewed her alliance with the United Provinces on 6 August on terms which transferred most of the fiscal burden of English arms to the States General, while reserving her own right to negotiate for a separate peace.²⁰

Elizabeth, who had invested so much money in the Dutch cause, continued to fear the grave security risks that England would face were the United Provinces to be reduced to Spanish rule by military force. There were also strong reasons to suspect that Spain had no genuine desire for rapprochement with England. The English still entertained substantial fears of Spanish aggression towards England, nourished by failed raids by Spanish fleets in 1596 and 1597, and by Spain's support of Tyrone's rebellion. When Philip II died on 3 September 1598 (OS), he was succeeded by his son, Philip III, an enthusiastic advocate of the continuation of the war. Within two months of his father's death, the young king demonstrated his aggressive intentions towards the Dutch with the imposition of a trade embargo and new plans to launch an invasion of England. Ironically, Philip III hoped that the Treaty of Vervins itself would allow Spain to concentrate its military resources against Protestant enemies in England and the Netherlands. In July 1599, reports of a renewed naval assault energized the privy council to mobilize England's defences to repel Spanish forces on a scale not seen since the Armada of 1588, causing widespread rumour and panic in London.²¹

As Paul Allen has shown, when the Spanish government debated peace with England and the United Provinces in the late 1590s, it was for reason of state and necessity rather than irenic or pacific ideals. Spanish councillors and *arbitristas* argued that peace should be pursued as a regrettable but temporary strategy, to lull the heretic enemies into a false sense of security and ease so that the Spanish military machine might be re-oiled.²² A vital development in relations between

¹⁹ The Treaty of Vervins was published by Henry two weeks after its signature. For Elizabeth's response to Henry see G. G. Butler, *The Edmondson papers: a selection from the correspondence of Sir Thomas Edmondson* (Roxburghe Club, London, 1913) pp. 331–8.

²⁰ The terms were finally ratified by the States General of the United Provinces on 30 Dec.; Wernham, *Return of the armadas*, p. 243.

²¹ The fleet had been intended to attack England, but had been diverted to attack a Dutch fleet off the coast of the Azores; Parker, *Grand strategy*, p. 279. John Chamberlain reported the widespread panic in the capital at the perception of military unpreparedness for an invasion; N. E. McLure, ed., *The letters of John Chamberlain* (2 vols., Philadelphia, PA, 1939), I, pp. 80–5.

²² Allen, *Pax Hispanica*, pp. vii–x, 18–61.

the warring states had occurred, however, just four days after the signature of the Treaty of Vervins, when Philip II bestowed the sovereignty of the Netherlands upon his daughter Isabella, who was betrothed to his nephew, the cardinal-archduke Albert of Austria.²³ The grant was for the whole of the Netherlands, although the de facto power of the 'archdukes' lay in the 'obedient' Southern Provinces, whose sovereignty was accepted by the States General of the South in August.²⁴

In England and the Netherlands, a different path to peace and the problem of Dutch resistance appeared to have emerged. Rumours of Philip II's intentions had circulated at the English court since the winter of 1597, and Elizabeth had initially responded with enthusiasm: if the Low Countries could be reunited as an independent polity, peace with Spain could be made without conceding the Spanish reconquest of the Netherlands.²⁵ Elizabeth soon realized, though, that serious problems inhibited a settlement based on the assumption that the archdukes would establish their sovereignty over the whole of the Netherlands. When the deed of the donation was made public, on 26 April (OS) it soon became clear across Europe that the independent duchy of Burgundy had clearly not been reborn. The (obvious) reality of the authority of the archdukes was their absolute dependence on Spain for financial and military support. Even the finality of the grant was suspected. Although Philip II had intended that the Netherlands should descend to any offspring produced by his daughter and nephew – a stipulation bitterly resented by Philip III – the provinces were to revert to Spain in the event that the archdukes failed to produce an heir.²⁶ Although the States in Brussels insisted that their acceptance of the donation and the sovereignty of Albert and Isabella should be accompanied by overtures of peace towards the Northern rebel provinces, the United Provinces vigorously spurned the sovereignty of the archdukes, and continued to resist the Habsburgs in the name of liberty and freedom of religion.²⁷

Nevertheless, the new situation in the Netherlands was still promising for those who hoped that England could be extricated from war on the continent. Albert strongly desired an Anglo-Spanish peace, which would ease the establishment of the authority of the archdukes in the Netherlands. Sensing willingness in England, the government in Brussels also opened up negotiations with Robert Cecil and Elizabeth, sending an envoy, Jerome Coomans, on four missions to the English court in 1599, to propose a treaty that might also encompass reconciliation with the Dutch. The following February, the more formal visit to London of Audencier Verreycken was celebrated with elaborate ceremonial and

²³ The marriage was formally celebrated on 8 Apr. 1599 (OS).

²⁴ Werner Thomas, 'Andromeda unbound: the reign of Albert & Isabella in the Southern Netherlands, 1598–1621', in Thomas and Duerloo, eds., *Albert and Isabella*, pp. 2–3.

²⁵ For Elizabeth's initially delighted response see De Maise, *Journal*, p. 83.

²⁶ The Infanta issued a procuration giving absolute authority to Albert to govern on 20 May (OS); Thomas, 'Andromeda unbound', p. 3; Allen, *Pax Hispanica*, p. 18.

²⁷ P. Geyl, *The revolt of the Netherlands, 1555–1609* (London, 1932), pp. 239–40.

entertainment. Despite the panic over the so-called 'Invisible Armada' in July 1599, Rowland Whyte reported the general belief at Elizabeth's court that peace with Spain – 'a thing very much desired here' – was imminent.²⁸ Finally, in response to these developments, Spanish and English delegates met at a conference in Boulogne in May 1600, to discuss possible terms for an Anglo-Spanish peace.

Talks at Boulogne were doomed even before they began. For all the enthusiasm that had greeted Verreycken's visit, his formal meeting with Elizabeth had revealed the great unlikelihood that terms could presently be agreed.²⁹ Aside from the intractable problem of the autonomy of the Dutch, the Spanish demanded that Elizabeth allow public toleration of Catholics, and that she hand over the cautionary towns of Flushing and Brill (held as security for loans to the United Provinces). They refused to allow English trade with the Indies, one of Elizabeth's most determined aims. These terms were intolerable to the English delegates, and negotiations broke down amid squabbles over precedence.

The earl of Essex's major written contribution to peace negotiations of 1598, his *Apologie*, was composed in the aftermath of the Treaty of Vervins, when peace was debated before Elizabeth renewed her alliance with the Dutch in August. The treatise can probably be dated more precisely to July, when the earl was absent from court after quarrelling with the queen over the appointment of the new lord deputy.³⁰ The opening lines of the *Apologie* captured the fierce antagonism that fuelled debates about peace at court in the aftermath of Vervins. Essex excoriated those who charged him 'that all my counsels actions and indeavours doe tend to keepe the state of England in continuall wars', and defended himself as a 'zealous patriot' from accusations of bloodthirsty militarism, apparently fired by Burghley.³¹ On the council, however, Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, was noted by contemporaries to be a particular proponent of peace, while Sir Robert Cecil's support of his father's position was widely assumed.³²

²⁸ Croft, 'Brussels and London', p. 81; Wernham, *Return of the armadas*, p. 321; Arthur Collins, *Letters and memorials of state in the reigns of Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth ...* (2 vols., 1746), II, pp. 128, 130.

²⁹ Cecil confirmed his pessimism in a letter to his agent at the Scottish court; *HMC Salisbury*, X, pp. 93–4; Rowland Whyte was initially more positive about the forthcoming prospect of peace; Collins, *Letters and memorials*, II, pp. 170–1; Goodman, *Diplomatic relations*, pp. 51–62.

³⁰ As the English commissioners set out for France in February, Essex had written a letter to Robert Cecil that warned that the Spanish did not intend a 'trew peace', and that safety for the allies rested in the continued pursuit of war; TNA, SP 78/41/177.

³¹ Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex, *To Maister Anthony Bacon: an apologie of the earle of Essex against those which falsly and maliciously taxe him to be the onely hinderer of the peace, and quiet of his countrey* (1600), sig. Ar. Camden relates that Burghley presented Essex with with Psalm 55, verse 23: 'Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days'; *Tomus alter annalium rerum Anglicarum et Hibernicarum regnante Elizabetha* (hereafter *Annales*) (1627), p. 160. Sir Thomas Edmondes reported to Sir Robert Sydney on 15 July that rumours in Paris were that the English were so divided and 'schismaticall' over the peace that no decisions could be reached; *Historical Manuscript Commission: report on the manuscripts of Lord De L'Isle & Dudley, preserved at Penshurst Place* (2 vols., London, 1924–34), II, p. 356.

³² In a private conference at the end of June, Buckhurst unsuccessfully tried to persuade Oldenbarnevelt to accept his arguments for making peace; J. L. Motley, *History of the United Netherlands: from the death of William the Silent to the Twelve Years' Truce – 1609* (4 vols., 1860–7), III, pp. 495–6. Buckhurst was also described as the most ardent and consistent advocate of peace in the council's debates in 1602;

The earl's arguments against the peace were centred on his unshakeable hostility to the tyranny of Philip II. Throughout the 1590s, Elizabeth's government had justified the queen's participation in the war as a struggle against the universality of Spain's imperial ambitions. Whereas previous justifications had emphasized the tyranny of Philip's governors and counsellors in the Netherlands, the aggressive proclamation of 1591 drafted by Burghley, 'Establishing commissions against seminary priests and Jesuits', formally denounced the 'violence and malice' of the king of Spain himself, who waged 'a most unjust and dangerous war for all of Christendom'.³³ Essex, however, had magnified this rhetoric of Spanish predations and violence into a complete vision of the conflict as a cataclysmic struggle for liberty from the 'fearfull usurpation' of the Spanish tyrant himself, whose power must be crushed by offensive warfare.³⁴

Essex warned that this subtle '*Sinons* horse' could never be trusted: tyrants are masters of deception, as Philip had proved in 1588, when he had pretended to negotiate with Elizabeth while all the time preparing to launch the Armada.³⁵ Furthermore, Philip's religion would permit him to abrogate the terms of any treatise because the pope assured him that oaths made to heretics could be broken.³⁶ Essex predicted – quite accurately – that even the death of the ageing king would not clear a path to peace: the future Philip III's 'bloud is hotter' for war, 'his humour of ambition is like to be greater'.³⁷ Worse, the terms that Spain would propose in the course of negotiations would be completely unacceptable. Primarily they would include toleration of Catholicism, a demand that Essex objected to as detrimental to Elizabeth's sovereignty, a condition 'only for a conquerour to impose, and unfitte for a braue state', an equal treating for peace.³⁸ Spain would also demand custody of the cautionary towns, creating unthinkable security dangers for England and the Low Countries, and trade links with the Indies would not be opened to Elizabeth's merchants. Essex's objections were entirely correct: the stalemate reached at the Boulogne conference in 1600 occurred for precisely these reasons, and because Spain, as Essex prophesized, negotiated from a position of dominance, rather than one of equality. All

H. S. Scott, ed., 'Journal of Sir Roger Wilbraham, master of requests', *Camden Miscellany*, Camden Fourth Series, 10 (London, 1902), pp. 49–50; for perceptions of Robert Cecil's inclination to peace in the negotiations leading up to the Boulogne conference see Goodman, *Diplomatic relations*, p. 38; Laffleur de Kermaingant, *L'ambassade de France en Angleterre sous Henri IV: mission de J. de Thumery, Sieur de Boissise, 1598–1602* (Paris, 1886), pp. 336–7.

³³ Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, eds., *Tudor royal proclamations* (3 vols., New Haven, CT, and London, 1964–9), III, p. 86.

³⁴ TNA, SP 12/259/12. See P. E. J. Hammer, *The polarization of Elizabethan politics: the political career of Robert Devereux, 2nd earl of Essex, 1565–1597* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 246–7.

³⁵ Devereux, *Apologie*, sig. [B4]r.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, sig. c2r.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, sig. cr. Essex's intelligence agent in Venice, Dr Henry Hawkins, had warned at the end of February 1597 that the future Philip III was 'very hott & importunate w[ith] his father to goe to these warres', Lambeth Palace Library, MS 661, fo. 22r–v.

³⁸ Devereux, *Apologie*, sig. dv. For Essex and toleration see Hammer, *Polarization of Elizabethan politics*, pp. 174–8.

negotiations, in any case, and any treaty that might result from negotiation with the Spanish monarchy, would be a temporary ruse to ‘sing vs asleepe with the name of peace, till he may rouse us from sleepe by a thundering warre’.³⁹

Essex’s textbook humanist understanding of strenuous virtue defined a flourishing commonwealth as sustained by the militarism and self-sacrifice of its inhabitants, amply evidenced by the ‘spirit and alacrity’ of the English.⁴⁰ To those who pleaded the poverty of the realm, Essex breezily insisted that the fiscal burden of an offensive war could be maintained at 150,000 pounds per annum through the subsidy, contributions from the Dutch, and a pension from Henry IV. Although Essex’s figures were hardly rooted in sober economic calculation of the fiscal capabilities of the Elizabethan state, he sternly denounced those who argued that the present economic difficulties necessitated peace, yet spent lavishly on ‘sumptuous buildings, infinite plate, and costly furniture of houses’. Here his scorn was clearly directed at the growing reputation of the Cecils for financial rapacity, confirmed in physical form in the great Cecilian building projects.⁴¹

The religious dimension to Essex’s militarism was complex. As a sporadic advocate of toleration of Catholic worship, Essex had tended to appeal to a broader confessional audience in England and abroad, and to justify the war as a struggle for the liberty of all the states of Christendom – Catholic and Protestant alike – which were threatened by the might of Spain.⁴² Essex specifically defined the tyranny of Philip and the papacy as an ambition for dominion that made the Spanish monarchy ‘a generall enemie to the libertie of Christendome’, and a threat to all free states.⁴³ The language of the *Apologie*, however, contained stronger strains of the confessional militarism that had shaped the international Protestantism of the Sidney and Leicester circles.⁴⁴ The Spanish were the ‘chiefe enemy of our religion’, egged on by the ‘undertaking Pope’ who sought ‘a generall league against all such, as doe not, or will not acknowledge the omnipotency of his *Bulles*’.⁴⁵

Essex also presented Elizabeth’s obligations to her Dutch allies as an essential defence of the freedom of the United Provinces from Spain’s thirst for secular power. He insisted that peace would require the queen to abandon England’s Protestant brethren, who in turn would be forced to acknowledge the king of Spain’s sovereignty, or ‘him that shall claime vnder him for their Soueraigne, as

³⁹ Devereux, *Apologie*, sig. Er.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, sig. D3v.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* Essex also willfully refused to take into account the massive expense demanded by military operations in Ireland. For the Cecils as builders see ‘Introduction’, in P. Croft, ed., *Patronage, culture and power: the early Cecils* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2002), pp. ix–x. No builder himself, Essex had massive debts from ploughing his own money into military campaigns; Hammer, *Polarization of Elizabethan politics*, pp. 227–9.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 143, 241–7, 260–1; Alexandra Gajda, ‘Robert Devereux, 2nd earl of Essex and political culture, c. 1595–c. 1600’ (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 2005), pp. 82–106.

⁴³ Devereux, *Apologie*, sig. A3r.

⁴⁴ Adams, ‘Protestant cause’, pp. 1–103; Blair Worden, *The sound of virtue: Philip Sidney’s Arcadia and Elizabethan politics* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1996), pp. 219–94.

⁴⁵ Devereux, *Apologie*, sig. [D4r–v].

the Duke of *Burgundie*'. This would impose 'slauerie vpon the *Netherlandes*'.⁴⁶ Essex rejected the notion that the translation of sovereignty to Isabella and Albert would solve England's diplomatic conundrum: instead, the marriage would have dire consequences for the English succession, placing across the Channel 'the Infant the person whose title to the crown of *England*, *Parsons* so laboured to prooue'.⁴⁷ Moreover, Essex insisted that this alleged division of the Netherlands from Spain would be but a covert pretext to achieve what military aggression had failed to do: reducing the Netherlands to the 'absolute' rule of Spain, through indirect means.

Essex had been courted by the Dutch as their obvious ally on the English privy council, and these lines of reasoning reflected Essex's intimate knowledge of the arguments used by the States General to persuade Elizabeth to renew the Anglo-Dutch alliance.⁴⁸ Essex's treatment, though, of the imminent change in the political structure of the United Provinces also revealed his own reflections on the nature of the Dutch polity. It would be woeful were the 'authority of the generall states, and the present forme of government of the vnited provinces [to] be broaken and dissolved, a monarchie set vp and a prince acknowledged' once again. In such a state, 'there shall nothing limit the princes absoluteness, but his owne will. The strength of a contract cannot limit it.'⁴⁹ The repression of religious liberty would surely follow, and the newly enslaved Dutch would succumb to 'idolatrie' to 'win the fauour of the most tirannical prince in the erth'.⁵⁰

Although Elizabeth's consistent aim in succouring the Dutch had been to prevent the 'reduction' of the Low Countries to the direct rule of Spain, the solution she publicly sought was the restoration of Habsburg overlordship. In his *Apologie*, however, Essex clearly endorsed the federated polity of the United Provinces as a legitimate and free form of government; entirely preferable to 'absolute' monarchy 'unlimited' by contract.⁵¹ Essex's admiration for the martial virtue and liberty of the United Provinces was also linked to their current constitutional arrangements. If England were to abandon the Dutch, they would be tempted by Philip's siren-song of peace, because in the federated decision-making of the States General, where 'there is not like to be vnanimitie in opinion', a fearful majority might override the strenuous virtue of the military leaders. Despite this weakness, Essex defined the sovereignty of the States General in more positive terms: it was rooted in the grant of a voice to all provinces 'it being vnsafe for them to denie libertie of voyce to any, such libertie being *the true cause of their taking armes*, and standing out against the common enemy' (my italics). Here

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, sig. c2r.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, sig. c3v.

⁴⁸ The envoy Noël de Caron's dealings with Essex had been especially close since the earl's elevation to the Mastership of the Ordnance in 1596; Essex had also assumed some of Robert Cecil's secretarial duties when the latter was absent in France early in 1598, and copies of the arguments of the envoys of the States General survive in his hand and the hand of his secretary, Edward Reynolds; see *HMC Salisbury*, VIII, pp. 20, 250, 257; Collins, *Letters and Memorials*, II, pp. 48, 89.

⁴⁹ Devereux, *Apologie*, sig. c2r.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, sig. c3r.

⁵¹ Oldenbarnevelt made exactly the same point to Sir Robert Cecil in the negotiations before Vervins; Wernham, *Return of the amadas*, p. 236.

the causes of the Dutch revolt were described as the defence of free speech and representation from the shared enemy of liberty, the king of Spain.⁵²

II

Although Essex's *Apologie* was clearly written in the context of Essex's absence from the court and his inability to argue his position on the privy council, the tract was disseminated widely, with scores of archival copies surviving from the late Elizabethan and Jacobean period.⁵³ The intended wider audience for the treatise is unclear. When the manuscript was spread abroad in 1598, the earl pleaded ignorance, claiming that it had either been stolen from his bedroom by servants, or disseminated by his friend Fulke Greville, without authorization. Nor is there any clear evidence linking Essex to the printed edition of the *Apologie* in 1600, which emerged when he was suspended from political office and in disgrace with Elizabeth.⁵⁴ Essex's secretariat and associates, however, were widely practised in the dissemination of texts intended to promote a particular image of the earl to a semi-public audience, and it seems highly likely that the *Apologie* was conceived with a similar readership in mind.⁵⁵ The compositional form of the treatise is telling. By framing the *Apologie* as a letter to Anthony Bacon, Essex's great friend and intelligence gatherer, Essex employed an epistolary framework very common to late sixteenth-century polemic and news pamphlets.

Furthermore, it is apparent that the *Apologie* was one of several similar pieces written in response to the debates about peace after the Treatise of Vervins. One treatise in the Lansdowne manuscripts has annotations by Robert Beale, clerk of the privy council, and was probably written by Beale for Burghley's use. The rest are anonymous, although the existence of multiple copies of some suggests that they, like the *Apologie*, were also circulated in manuscript coterie. Several treatises argued, with Essex, that peace threatened the welfare of England. Others strongly disagreed, and urged the incontrovertible benefits of peace, and the necessity of accommodation with Spain. When thus contextualized, Essex's *Apologie* seems simply the most extended and best-known contribution to a debate about foreign policy argued not merely in the council chamber, but also in prose treatises and position papers.

The treatise in the Lansdowne manuscripts, written in May 1598, argued in favour of the advantages of the peace, and listed answers to objections and obstacles.⁵⁶ A number of the anonymous treatises are in the Petyt manuscripts in

⁵² Devereux, *Apologie*, sig. [C4v].

⁵³ A further printed version appeared in 1603, a Dutch translation the same year. In the British Library, in the Additional Manuscripts alone, are the following copies: MSS 4128, fos. 29–42v, 4129, fos. 1–15, 38137, fos. 161–72, 48063 (Yelverton MS 69), fos. 238–51, 72411, fos. 1–14.

⁵⁴ The appearance of the *Apologie* exacerbated Elizabeth's hostility to Essex, as she bridled at further evidence of the earl's 'popularity'; Hammer, 'Smiling crocodile'.

⁵⁵ P. E. J. Hammer, 'Myth-making: politics, propaganda and the capture of Cadiz in 1596', *Historical Journal*, 40 (1997), pp. 621–42.

⁵⁶ BL, MS Lansdowne 103, fos. 252r–257r.

Inner Temple Library. In favour of continuation of the war are 'The resolution of some doubts now cast to move simple men to embrace the conditions of peace', and 'An Answer to certen trifling reasons alleaged to perswade her Ma^{tie} and the English nation to conclude peace with the Spaniards'.⁵⁷ The collection also contains four copies of 'Considerations towching the peace nowe in speache', which argued that it was manifestly 'better to settle the present quietnes of this Realme' than to gamble on the outcome of 'a chargeable, uncerteyne, fruteles, & endless warre'.⁵⁸ Also in the British Library are two copies of a zesty treatise against the peace penned by an ideological associate of Essex, which echoed the earl's own denunciation of those who 'censure farr more worthie Spirits touching the peace'.⁵⁹ By contrast, other tracts in the Cotton manuscripts argued that the 'Benefitts of peace with Spaine' would bring 'perfect loue and amitie' between England and her neighbours.⁶⁰ A further reflection on the prospect of reconciliation argued that the imminent marriage of Albert and Isabella offered a brilliant diplomatic opportunity to bring a permanent resolution to the Netherlands crisis.⁶¹

The significance of these texts was recorded by William Camden, who followed his account of English diplomacy in the spring and summer of 1598 with a description of domestic discourse: 'it was acutely debated in England, whether it would be for the benefit of the commonwealth and the Queen to contract peace with the Spaniard'.⁶² Camden summarized the arguments for and against peace replicating exactly the points made by authors of the position papers, in some instances quoting verbatim from the treatises. Camden clearly situated this debate in court circles, and named Burghley and Essex as representing the polarities of the arguments pro and contra peace. By using the passive voice, however, he described the substance of the arguments while remaining frustratingly silent about the identity and number of contributors to the debate, and the provenance, circulation, and readership of the tracts.

The treatises adopted a similar form, most setting out a set of arguments in *utramque partem*, before concluding either in favour of the peace or for continuation of the war. Could Spain be trusted to make a secure peace? Upon what conditions would Philip be willing to treat? Was the English state relentlessly over-stretched, or a vigorous military power, capable of bringing the war to a victorious conclusion? And – crucially – what would be the fate of the Dutch Protestants?

Those wanting hostilities rekindled echoed Essex's arguments. The Spanish monarchy offered but a 'pretended peace', since Catholics would not bind

⁵⁷ Inner Temple Library (ITL), MS Petyt 538, xlvi, fos. 36r–41r, 42r–46r.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, fos. 47r–48v, 103r–106v, 130r–134v, 139r–140r. Further copies are BL, MS Cotton, Galba D^{XII}, fos. 188r–198r and BL, MS Stowe, 164, fos. 86r–89r.

⁵⁹ BL, MS Stowe 161, fos. 37r–64r, 'A discourse touching the peace'; a copy is BL, MS Stowe 151, fos. 74r–96r.

⁶⁰ BL, MS Cotton, Caligula EIX, ii, fo. 155r–v; BL, MS Cotton, Titus CVII, fos. 146r–148r.

⁶¹ BL, MS Cotton, Titus CVII, fos. 3r–4v.

⁶² Camden, *Annales*, p. 155; 'Accurate interim disceatur in Anglia, an in reipub. & Reginae rem esset, pacem cum Hispano pacisci.'

themselves to oaths made with heretics.⁶³ Essex's humanist militarism also pervaded the pro-war treatises. One author insisted that although 'this lande had never more valiant and experte men of warre', peace would demilitarize the valiant nation and make her dangerously vulnerable.⁶⁴ Another argued that 'long peace' stimulated some 'by greate prosperity to waxe insolent, others by abondance to waxe delicate, superfluous and effeminate'.⁶⁵ It is worth noting that this Machiavellian conflation of the flourishing state and the martial virtue of its citizens was shared by those Spanish *arbitristas* who similarly argued that peace would disarm and corrode the strenuous militarism of Spain's enemies.⁶⁶

The treatises which favoured continuation of the war advanced strong, pragmatic arguments for refusing any Spanish olive-branch. They emphasized the strategic danger to England if the Dutch Protestants should conclude a separate peace with Spain.⁶⁷ The financial benefits of reimbursement by the rebel states were contrasted with the crippled finances of the Spanish crown, which would be utterly devastated were the passage of New World treasure to be stemmed.⁶⁸ Most acutely, the anonymous authors insisted that the tyrant's universal ambitions remained unchanged: *any* negotiated peace in the current situation of military stalemate would be a temporary deception that would allow Spain to recover from her present weakness.⁶⁹ Again, these warnings closely reflected the pragmatic arguments for peace expressed in contemporary Spanish political debate.

It is striking, though, that those tracts which contained a strong ideological opposition to the peace all dwelt, like Essex, in urgent rhetoric, on the 'tirannie' of the enemy, and the ceaseless ambition of the Spanish who 'seeke under pretence of Religion our Lyves, our Libertie, our Friendes and Countrie'.⁷⁰ The aims of 'so perfidious an enemy' were most immediately to 'reduce the Low Countries under absolute obedience'.⁷¹ One tract argued that the United Provinces were engaged in a struggle for their own political liberty and autonomy – their 'ambition and desire to command' – which had been cemented by 'having governed many yeres togeather'.⁷²

Even more stridently than in Essex's *Apologie*, the authors of the treatises that favoured the war also associated this defence of freedom from tyranny with an apocalyptic vision of confessional conflict. One author described the military cause as 'undertaken for the defence of godes truth against an Antechriste and his adherents ... for the succour of distressed Christians ioyned to us ... in communion of religion'. Another implored 'let all true Christians abhorre the tyranny of Antichrist and pride and ambition of the Spaniard that dryveth us to this extremity'.⁷³

⁶³ IITL, MS Petyt 538, xlvi, fo. 36v.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, fo. 44r.

⁶⁵ BL, MS Stowe 161, fo. 38v.

⁶⁶ See above, pp. 6–7.

⁶⁷ IITL, Petyt MS 538, xlvi, fo. 36r.

⁶⁸ BL, MS Stowe 161, fo. 58v; IITL, Petyt MS 538, xlvi, fo. 38r.

⁶⁹ BL, MS Stowe 161, fo. 49r; IITL, Petyt MS 538, vol. xlvi, fo. 40v.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, fos. 39r, 45v.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, fo. 44v.

⁷² BL, MS Stowe 161, fos. 49r–v.

⁷³ IITL, MS Petyt 538, vol. xlvi, fos. 38r, 39r, 46r.

The treatises that argued in favour of the peace did so for obvious reasons. Peace was a God-given state to which all ‘civile Societie’ and ‘Christean Princes’ should aspire.⁷⁴ Elizabeth’s subjects could no longer bear the financial burden of the war – ‘a reason unanswerable’ – while the menace of Tyrone loomed ever larger.⁷⁵ The opening of trade with Spain’s dominions would surely follow, bringing long-desired relief to the economic hardships of Elizabeth’s merchants. Although these tracts invoked the ideal of a united Christendom, they were couched in the language of reason of state; of necessity, policy, and interest. ‘To direct our warrs agaynst his prouinces weare *opus infinitum*’ wrote one author of the unlikelihood of victory against Spain.⁷⁶ ‘The Lawes of Nature ... preferreth *Sui conseruationem*, before all other respects.’⁷⁷ Another described the ‘interest’ of Elizabeth in the ‘commoditie of the peace’, and the likelihood that England and a resurgent France could ‘ballance the force of Spaine’.⁷⁸

For all his inclinations towards peace, Burghley, like Essex, continued to define the grievances of the inhabitants of the Low Countries as an understandable response to the ‘tyranous’ oppressions of Spanish government.⁷⁹ In striking contrast, however, the authors of the anonymous pro-peace tracts did not conceptualize of the war as a cataclysmic struggle between the forces of tyranny and liberty, religious or secular. The authors of the tracts in favour of peace referred to the Spanish monarch not as a tyrant, bent on the repression of religious and political liberty, but as the ‘enemy’ or the ‘king of Spain’, with whom conditions could be struck on the grounds of mutual interest, political and economic. Rather than a vital demonstration of Spain’s insatiable desire for universal monarchy, the mighty power of the Spanish king was invoked to argue that the English could never emerge victorious from the war.⁸⁰

This ideological distinction between the authors of pro-peace and pro-war tracts was also underscored by marked differences in attitudes to the United Provinces. The arguments of the pro-peace tracts did not dwell on Philip’s oppression of the liberties of his subjects in the Low Countries. Instead they re-emphasized that Elizabeth’s succour of the Dutch had not been intended to defend the vulnerable liberty of a newly hatched polity, but to restore ‘the ancient leagues in tearmes ... as they were in the tymes of Charles the Emperor’, the justification of limited intervention that had been consistently used by the queen to legitimize her support of the Dutch.⁸¹ Were Elizabeth to make peace with Spain the Dutch Protestants could reach a separate agreement with Madrid that

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, fo. 47r.

⁷⁵ BL, MS Cotton, Titus cvii, fo. 147r.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, fo. 146r.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, fo. 148r.

⁷⁸ ITL, MS Petyt 538, lxvi, fos. 48r, 47v.

⁷⁹ BL, MS Lansdowne 103, fo. 249v, Burghley’s notes on the proposals put forward by Henry IV before the Treaty of Vervins.

⁸⁰ BL, MS Cotton, Titus cvii, fos. 146r–148r.

⁸¹ ITL, MS Petyt 538, lxvi, fo. 48r; the notes corrected by Beale typically detailed how the Low Countries might be pacified with ‘a ratification of all former priuiledges as they weare in the time of the Emperor Charles’, and proposed the establishment of a Council of State, staffed entirely by natives of the Low Countries; BL, MS Lansdowne 103, fos. 254v–255r.

would allow them to preserve some kind of autonomy.⁸² Another author insisted that the solution to peace in Western Christendom lay in Philip II's proposals to divide the Low Countries from Spain in perpetuity, under the rule of his daughter and nephew.⁸³

The pro-peace authors did not envisage the war as an apocalyptic battle with the forces of popery, or view the English and Dutch as brethren, united in a common religious cause. Rather they demonstrated considerable resentment of the mercantile prosperity of the Dutch, who continued to trade with Spain when Elizabeth's merchants were prohibited. The authors of the pro-peace tracts also exhibited a wary dislike of the subversive implications of the rebel provinces' abjuration of Spanish sovereignty, which contrasted significantly with Essex's sympathetic appraisal. One reminded readers that Elizabeth had refused the sovereignty of the Low Countries as 'it could not be so well grounded in justice'.⁸⁴ Elsewhere, strong dislike of the 'popular' government of the United Provinces was manifested more overtly. One author drew blistering comparisons between the Swiss Cantons and the United Provinces, both of which had renounced a Habsburg lord's authority. The 'blunt Democraticall weapons' used by 'these popular estatz [to] impugne a peace with Spayne' were characteristic of the 'manie strange positions' adopted by 'these cantonising people'.⁸⁵ Reflecting the anxiety felt by many of the elite about imminent social unrest caused by the fiscal burden of the war, another author warned that the continuance of 'new-devised taxations' to prolong the conflict might cause Elizabeth's own subjects to revolt against their social superiors. The discontented English might, like 'ye Zwitzers', 'follow their example & reduce this Monarchie to a popular state'; or, equally, the 'reduced' monarchy and 'popular' state of the United Provinces.⁸⁶

Some significant points emerge from these tracts. The arguments for war were not solely grounded in idealization of glory and arms, but evinced wholly pragmatic and accurate fears about Spain's disinclination to make lasting peace. The different positions adopted by authors in favour of or hostile to peace, however, revealed divisions over attitudes to political authority, the legitimacy of resistance, non-monarchical government, and the threat of tyranny, and demonstrate that Elizabethans held divergent attitudes towards a confessionalized foreign policy. These differing ideological positions were thrown into relief by the response of the authors of these treatises to the Dutch revolt.

III

The conceptual problem of supporting the 'rebel' Dutch had already taxed the dexterity of apologists for Elizabeth's foreign policy. Theories of resistance articulated on the continent by French, Dutch, and Scottish writers circulated

⁸² ITL, MS Petyt 538, lxvi, fo. 47v.

⁸⁴ ITL, MS Petyt 538, lxvi, fo. 47r.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, fos. 147r-v; see also Camden, *Annales*, pp. 155-60.

⁸³ BL, MS Cotton Titus cvii, fos. 3r-4v.

⁸⁵ BL, MS Cotton Titus cvii, fos. 3v-4r.

in imported texts, especially in the circles of Sir Philip Sidney and the earl of Leicester, as well as among Essex's followers in the 1590s, underpinning their ideological vision of international alliance against the forces of tyranny in Christendom.⁸⁷ In 1581, William of Orange's *Apologie* had been printed in English translation, a treatise that endorsed the rights of oppressed peoples to rise against rulers who had broken their contractual obligations to their subjects.⁸⁸ From the mid-1580s, however, the regime had grown increasingly concerned to denounce the resistance theories of English Catholic exiles, and to propagate the doctrine of absolute obedience of subjects to secular authority expounded in the *Homilie agaynst disobedience and wyfyl rebellion* (1570). An English translation of Book IV of *Vindiciae, contra tyrannos*, which justified the intervention of foreign rulers to relieve oppressed soldiers, was published in 1588 as *A short apologie for Christian souldiours*. A marginal gloss, however, sternly directed the reader to 'reade this aduisedly because we may not by the worde of God resist our own prince if he be wicked'.⁸⁹ Meanwhile, the remaining four books of the *Vindiciae*, which legitimized the rising of *subjects*, were not printed in a vernacular translation until the Civil Wars of the mid-seventeenth century.

The circle was squared in Thomas Bilson's *The true difference between Christian subiection and unchristian rebellion* (1585), primarily written to denounce theories of the papal deposing power which 'released' subjects from their allegiance to Elizabeth. Bilson admitted that the laws of certain polities, where the monarch was elected, or where specific constitutional arrangements prevailed, permitted subjects to depose rulers. This theory was illustrated by reference to the powers of the Holy Roman Emperor, but also applied implicitly to the authority of the Habsburg rulers in the Low Countries. By contrast, Bilson insisted that the monarchies of Spain, France, Scotland, and England were 'absolute' monarchies, whose princes inherited by succession. The subjects of absolute monarchs were utterly bound to obedience and passive resistance.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ See in particular Worden, *Sound of virtue*, ch. 16; James E. Phillips, 'George Buchanan and the Sidney circle', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 12 (1948), pp. 23–55; Alexandra Gajda, 'The State of Christendom: history, political thought and the Essex circle', *Historical Research*, 81 (2008), pp. 423–46.

⁸⁸ *The apologie or defence of the most noble Prince William, by the grace of God, Prince of Orange* (1581). See Martin Van Gelderen, *The political thought of the Dutch revolt, 1555–1590* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 151–3.

⁸⁹ H. P., *A short apologie for Christian souldiours: wherein is contained, how that we ought both to propagare, and also if neede require, to defende by force of armes, the Catholike Church of Christ, agaynst the tyrannie of Antichrist and his adherentes* (1588), unpaginated. The printer was John Wolfe, of whom, see below. J. H. M. Salmon, *The French wars of religion in English political thought* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 15–20. Salmon points out that other treatises containing 'Huguenot theoretical views' that endorsed resistance, including Francois Hotman's *Francogallia* (1573) and Theodore de Bèze's *Du droit des magistrates sur leurs sujets* (1574), were not translated for publication in English.

⁹⁰ Thomas Bilson, *The true difference between Christian subiection and unchristian rebellion: wherein the princes lawfull powere to commoind for trueth, and indepriuable right to beare the sword are defended against the Popes censures and the Iesuits sophismes vttered in their apologie and defence of English Catholikes: with a demonstration that the things reformed in the Church of England by the lawes of this realme are truly Catholike, notwithstanding the vaine shew made to the contrary in their late Rhemish Testament* (Oxford), pp. 509–16 *passim*.

Alberico Gentili, the Protestant Italian Regius Professor of Civil Law at Oxford, reached different conclusions when he grappled with the same problems in the final published version of his seminal treatise on international law, *De iure belli libri tres* (1598). Gentili's groundbreaking delineation of the laws of war that governed relations between states was markedly shaped by his passionate hostility to Spain, and his discussion of offensive and defensive wars impressed the necessity of action against tyrants whose ambitions threatened the security of Christendom. With English support of the Dutch in mind, Gentili described the intervention of foreign states to succour oppressed subjects as a godly duty, an argument which led him, like Bilson, to address the legitimacy of the resistance of subjects. Gentili's conservative instinct was to denounce rebellion in all circumstances: in the next reign, his political writings would endorse James VI and I's theories of monarchy, and notions of absolute obedience. He also argued, with Bilson, that the powers of princes varied, and could be more or less absolute or circumscribed depending on the constitution of the particular polity. In this earlier work, however, Gentili placed significant emphasis on the mutual, contractual obligations that bound all rulers and subjects, and concluded that subjects who occupied 'a particular public position' (inferior magistrates) in extraordinary circumstances could lawfully resist tyrants by force of arms.⁹¹

The publication of *De iure belli* in 1598 gives pause for thought. The treatise was prefaced by a fulsome dedication to Essex, who was godfather to Gentili's son, while the earl's own *Apologie* concluded with a quotation from *De iure belli*'s analysis of defensive wars.⁹² Unlike the earlier printed versions of parts of the treatise, which were published by John Wolfe in London and also dedicated to Essex, the final version of *De iure belli* was printed in Germany, possibly to expose the work to a wider international audience. Published at a critical period in the diplomatic relations of the warring states, Gentili's work added substantial intellectual ballast to Essex's argument that the power of Spain must be definitively checked before peace could be restored to Christendom.

IV

The most significant body of printed texts to provide a commentary on the prospect of peace emanated from the Netherlands, and dwelt specifically on the implications of the donation of the sovereignty of the Low Countries to the archdukes. The response of the United Provinces to the donation was, of course, of fundamental significance to England's role in the war: despite the continued

⁹¹ Alberico Gentili, *De iure belli libri tres*, ed. Coleman Phillipson, trans. John C. Rolfe (2 vols., Oxford and London, 1933), II, pp. 20, 50–1, 77–8; Gezina van den Molen, *Alberico Gentili and the development of international law: his life, work and times* (Leiden, 1968), pp. 227–35; Diego Panizza, *Alberico Gentili, giurista ideologico nell'Inghilterra elisabettiana* (Padua, 1981).

⁹² 'Justum id bellum quibus necessarium, copia arma, quibus nulla, nisi in armis, spes est', Devereux, *Apologie*, sig. EV; Gentili, *De iure belli libri tres*, I, p. 59; see Hammer, *Polarization of Elizabethan politics*, pp. 239–40, and n. 224.

assurance of the bellicosity of the Dutch, Elizabeth feared that the Northern provinces might be tempted to reach a settlement independently of English mediation. Conversely, as Elizabeth's relations with Brussels grew closer in 1599, the States General also implored the queen to distrust the overtures of peace from the Southern Netherlands and Spain, and assured the queen of their own zealous commitment to war.⁹³

The donation also provoked a fierce propaganda campaign in the United Provinces, engendering the publication of a mass of cheap tracts, a number of which were also published in London, in English translation. Generally these pamphlets urged the need for the States to reject reconciliation with the archdukes or Madrid, and exhorted the Southern provinces to revolt against this newly imposed authority.⁹⁴ Many of the polemical arguments of the Dutch against the peace and in favour of the war were similar or identical to those debated by the English after Vervins, especially as they revolved around the character of Spanish tyranny, the trustworthiness of the Spanish, and the threat of Spain's ambition to the liberty of the states of Christendom. Through the indirect means of translation of Dutch propaganda, crucial arguments about the direction of foreign policy were further disseminated to Elizabethan readers of these short, cheap, printed tracts.⁹⁵

Recent work on 'popular politics' has argued that English news pamphlets, which were a staple of the book trade by the 1580s and 1590s, played a crucial role in 'creating informed critical debate about news, politics and culture'.⁹⁶ The publication of news about domestic politics, however, was occasional, and mainly limited to official or unofficial government publications which justified Elizabeth's actions in extraordinary cases, such as the execution of high-profile traitors, or her formal decision to enter into the war in 1585.⁹⁷ Despite 'caution over domestic news', the war with Spain catalysed a massive increase in the supply of foreign news, most of which entailed translations of French or Dutch pamphlets, produced by a regular stable of translators employed by London printers.⁹⁸ The main discursive themes that engaged Elizabethan readers of news pamphlets were continental political and military developments, and England's engagement with the theatres of war.

⁹³ Noel de Caron, the Dutch agent at Elizabeth's court, alternated warnings about the dangers of Spanish Netherlands with reassurance that the Dutch were sincere in their hostility to accommodation with the obedient South; Collins, *Letters and memorials*, II, pp. 170–2; Kermaingant, *L'ambassade de France en Angleterre*, pp. 87, 99, 121; Motley, *United Netherlands*, IV, pp. 594–8.

⁹⁴ Astrid Stilma, 'Justifying war: Dutch translations of Scottish books around 1600', in Andrew Hiscock, ed., *Mighty Europe 1400–1700: the writing of an early modern continent* (New York, NY, 2007), pp. 58–9; Craig Harline, *Pamphlets, printing and political culture in the Dutch Republic* (Dordrecht, 1987).

⁹⁵ The news pamphlets were typically in quarto. One contemporary book inventory valued a news pamphlet relating to the Low Countries at 1d; Raymond, *Pamphlets and pamphleteering*, p. 4.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17, 26.

⁹⁷ See James K. Lowers, *Mirrors for rebels: a study of polemical literature relating to the Northern Rebellion, 1569* (Berkeley, CA, and Los Angeles, CA, 1953).

⁹⁸ Raymond, *Pamphlets and pamphleteering*, pp. 100–1.

Scholars have afforded attention to the 130 or so translations of French pamphlets that flooded the English book market in the late 1580s and early 1590s, unfolding the horrors of the French succession crisis.⁹⁹ Studies of these translations convincingly argue that the publication of these tracts was orchestrated with the particular compliance and encouragement of Burghley, in association with the London printer, John Wolfe.¹⁰⁰ Most translations were of polemic by loyalist supporters of Henry of Navarre, and were exuberantly hostile to the Catholic League, and the tyranny of their ally, the king of Spain. For an Elizabethan audience these pamphlets acted as an indirect form of propaganda for English military support of Navarre and justification for the war with Spain.¹⁰¹

Crucially, the anti-League pamphlets also propagated 'absolutist' ideas of kingship and the necessary obedience of subjects which characterized ideas of sovereignty expressed by Henry IV's supporters, in response to the Catholic League's theories of radical resistance. Thus Burghley exhibited a degree of ambivalence towards the power of print: he encouraged the development of news culture, but only covertly, and through texts that avoided direct commentary on English politics. Furthermore, the French news pamphlets presented authoritarian concepts of political allegiance and obedience to Elizabethan readers and subjects, adding weight to the current scholarly consensus that political culture in the 1590s was predominantly characterized by the dissemination of ideas of 'absolute', rather than 'mixed' monarchy, and the illegitimacy of resistance.¹⁰²

Scholars have not, however, studied translations of news from the Low Countries, which offer a very different perspective on the political ideas that would have confronted the readers of Elizabethan news pamphlets.¹⁰³ The total number of printed relations of news from the Low Countries is far smaller than the number of French translations, apparently numbering just over sixty for the whole of Elizabeth's reign.¹⁰⁴ It is, however, in the late 1590s, when printed translations of French pamphlets were in decline, that the number of Dutch publications quickens significantly. Over half the total number of Elizabethan translations of Dutch pamphlets – over thirty – were published between 1597 and

⁹⁹ Lisa Ferraro Parmelee, *Good news from France: French anti-League propaganda in Elizabethan England* (New York, NY, 1996), p. 31; also Paul J. Voss, *Elizabethan news pamphlets: Shakespeare, Spenser, Marlowe & the Birth of journalism* (Pittsburgh, PA, 2001).

¹⁰⁰ From the early 1590s Wolfe began farming out the actual printing of his work to printers such as John Windet, while Richard Field also published a large number of the French translations. See Denis B. Woodfield, *Surreptitious printing in England, 1550–1640* (New York, NY, 1973), pp. 24–34.

¹⁰¹ Victor Houlston, *Catholic resistance in Elizabethan England: Robert Persons's Jesuit polemic, 1580–1610* (Aldershot, 2007).

¹⁰² Parmelee, *Good news from France*, pp. 7–8, 97–117; Guy, 'Introduction', in Guy, ed., *Reign of Elizabeth I*, pp. 1–19.

¹⁰³ Voss and Parmelee are solely concerned with the French news pamphlet.

¹⁰⁴ Figures taken from my analysis of tracts from A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, revised by W. A. Jackson, F. S. Ferguson and K. F. Pantzer, *A short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland and Ireland, and of English books printed abroad, 1475–1640* (3 vols., London, 1976–91); and D. C. Collins, *A handlist of news pamphlets, 1590–1610* (London, 1943).

1603. Once more, most were published by John Wolfe before his death in 1601. Printers must have produced translations of Dutch materials independently of Burghley's particular impetus, though, as the lord treasurer died in August 1598.¹⁰⁵ This sharp increase in the number of published translations of material from the United Provinces notably coincided with the commencement of political debates at court about the direction of the Spanish war, and the future of England's alliance with the Dutch.

Of particular relevance to the peace were translations of printed propaganda from the United Provinces, mainly published by Wolfe.¹⁰⁶ Although these translations adhered close to the Dutch originals, readers of these tracts would have been confronted with strong, polemical arguments for the necessity of the war's continuation, albeit from the perspective of the United Provinces, and an absolute confirmation of the resolve of the Dutch to continue to oppose a negotiated peace with either the archdukes or with Spain.

A true coppie of the transportation of the Lowe Countries, Burgundy and the countie of Charrolois, entered in the Stationers' Register on 7 November 1598, was a printed copy of the actual text of the donation itself, with ancillary documents. The latter included the formal recognition by the States of the Southern Provinces, which stipulated that they might 'ioyne in communication with those [Estates] of Holland and Zealand, to make peace'.¹⁰⁷ The text of the donation, however, did not make easy reading for those whose arguments for peace were grounded on the newly independent sovereignty of the archdukes. The conditions clearly stated that should the archdukes produce no heirs, or should those heirs break their oath to uphold Catholicism, the provinces would revert to Spanish rule.¹⁰⁸ The text strongly signalled the intention that the marriage of Isabella and Albert was intended to reunite the 'rebel' and 'obedient' states.¹⁰⁹ In an appended letter, Philip II explained in more revelatory language that the 'intent' of the donation was 'the *reducing* of the Low Countries' to 'peace and tranquillitie' (my italics).¹¹⁰

In February 1599, Isabella's aggressive proclamation forbidding trade with the Northern provinces was printed, followed by the response of the States General, declaring the goods of the Spanish and their adherents 'lawfull prize'.¹¹¹ This publicized the removal of those trading privileges enjoyed by Dutch merchants

¹⁰⁵ Other publishers of Dutch pamphlets included Peter Short and Matthew Law.

¹⁰⁶ Wolfe made particular use of one translator, H. W., whose identity is unclear.

¹⁰⁷ Philip II, king of Spain, trans. H. W., *A true coppie of the transportation of the Lowe Countries, Burgundie, and the countie of Charrolois: done by the king of Spayne, for the dowrie of his eldest daughter. Giuen in marriage vnto the Cardinall Albert, duke of Austria, with the articles and conditions of the same, signed by the king in Madrill* (1598), [p. 27], printed by J. Roberts for Paul Linley. The Dutch title is *Copie van het transport ... van de Nederlanden/Bourgoignen/ende Graefschappe van Charrolois*, which was printed in several editions in the Netherlands. I am indebted to Monica Stensland for tracing the originals.

¹⁰⁸ Anon., *True coppie of the transportation*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹¹¹ Isabella Clara Eugenia, *A coppie of the proclamation made by the illustrious Infanta ... touching the defence, interdiction and restraint of all communication, dealing and trafficke with Holland, Zealand and their adherents* (1599); United Provinces, States General, *A proclamation of the lords the General States, of the vnitid Prouinces, whereby the Spaniards and all their goods are declared to be lawfull prize* (1599).

with Spain and the Southern Netherlands, which had been the cause of such resentment in Anglo-Dutch negotiations the previous summer.¹¹²

Other printed translations more directly presented the archdukes as puppets controlled by Madrid, and the donation as a scheme to reduce the Netherlands to the Spanish empire. A brilliantly mischievous pamphlet was published in translation by Wolfe, also in April 1599: *A copie of a certaine letter: written by a person of reputation, to a prelate of Brabant, being at Brussels* was seemingly designed to stiffen the Dutch resistance to the archdukes' government in both the Northern and Southern Provinces. Revelling in the use of a false narrator and fake 'editorial' practice typical of late sixteenth-century polemic, this tract purported to be a letter by a dignitary who had been asked by an unnamed Flemish prelate for his opinions on the new authority in the Low Countries. The 'person of reputation' warned that the donation was a typically deceitful effort by Spain to reconquer the whole of the Netherlands, 'which by armes or other meanes can hardly be done', and reminded the reader of the untrustworthiness of the words and intentions of Spanish monarchs.¹¹³ This 'letter' was accompanied by a text of the donation itself, surrounded by new marginalia and glosses which undermined and *reinterpreted* the donation, to 'reveal' the dangerous reality behind the translation of sovereignty. One marginal note argued that the donation itself was an unlawful usurpation, as it had been decreed in Spain without the assent of the States General representing the whole of the Netherlands.¹¹⁴ The conditions of the donation would ensure that 'the Princes of the Netherlands, should for euer remaine subiects to the king of Spaine and the Spanish counsaile', enforcing confessionalization through the 'Spanish Inquisition'.¹¹⁵ Marginalia reminded the reader of the brutality of the 'Duke of *Alba*, and other his Tyrants', who had attempted to rule the Netherlands as a 'new conquered land'. If Spanish tyranny continued to flourish through such underhand means, the consequences for the rest of Europe were starkly laid bare: 'insatiable Spanish ambition' had as its greatest aim the subjection of *all* free polities, 'the incorporating and establishing laws to all Realmes, Countries, and Commonweales'.¹¹⁶ The 'dignitary' finished with a call to arms: he explained that his glosses proved that the donation – this 'conditioned gift' – 'will not prooue the right means to reduce the Netherlands in rest, peace, & prosperitie'. Rather, it should encourage all the states of the Low Countries to 'take armes against the Spaniard & his adherents' and allow the people to recover 'their rights, freedomes, & securitie' enshrined in the free authority of 'the Generall States of all the Netherlands'.¹¹⁷

¹¹² See above.

¹¹³ Anon., *A copie of a certaine letter: written by a person of reputation, to a prelate of Brabant, being at Brussels* (1599), sig. A3r. The Dutch original is *Copie van seekeren brief cheschreven by een van qualiteyt, aen den abt van N. wesende tot Bruyssel*, published in several editions anonymously.

¹¹⁴ Anon., *Copie of a certaine letter*, sig. [A4v].

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, sigs. B2v–B3v.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, sig. Bv–v.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, sig. [B4r–v].

As well as informing English readers about the dangerous implications of the archdukes' rule for peace in the United Provinces – but Christendom more generally – these texts revolved around analyses of tyranny. Dutch propaganda emphasized that peace and reconciliation with Spain was impossible because the Spanish were deceitful, insatiable warmongers, who sought to repress religious conscience, as well as the secular privileges, goods, and property of a free estates and people, and the imperium of other sovereign nations. Reconciliation by the kinds of mediated peace being proposed was impossible because of the despotic character of the general adversary of the Dutch and their allies.

Two especially striking tracts printed earlier, in 1598, related this discourse about war and peace specifically to arguments about political authority. *A true coppie of the admonitions sent by the subdued provinces to the states of Hollande: and the Hollanders answeere to the same*, and *The second admonition, sent by the subdued prouinces to Holland ... with the Hollanders aunsweere* were companion pieces of Dutch propaganda, written directly in response to the prospect of peace in the Netherlands. The first was entered in the Stationers' Register on 12 July, when Essex was probably writing his *Apologie*, and while the States were bargaining with Elizabeth for the renewal of the Anglo-Dutch alliance. Wolfe entered the second on 28 October, soon after the accession of Philip III.¹¹⁸ Both tracts were constructed on the same template: an imagined dialogue ventriloquized between the 'subdued' or 'obedient' provinces and the United Provinces, or 'Hollanders', about the benefits of making peace with Spain. The structure of the tracts, in which the 'Subject Provinces' argue in favour of the peace, followed by the refutation of the 'Hollanders', echoed the *utramque partem* structure of the English manuscript treatises.¹¹⁹

In both pamphlets the 'Subdued Provinces' urged the United Provinces to make peace for conventional reasons. War was inimical to Christian religion, and by perpetuating military strife the rebel states were 'bent to murther and bloodshed'.¹²⁰ The 'Hollanders' replied that tyrants could not be held to promises, and warned against 'an accursed peace', 'a fained peace which should be hurtfull, or which might cause losse of lawfull liberty or priuiledges'.¹²¹

The debate, however, extended into a dialogue about tyranny, obedience, and the legitimacy of resistance. In both tracts, the ventriloquized voice of the 'Subdued Provinces' conflated the bellicosity of the United Provinces with the

¹¹⁸ Both were translated by 'H. W.' Dutch versions are *Copie van seker referen by de overheerde Nederlandsche Provintien ... Met oock der Hollanders antwoorde ...*, published anonymously, and *Antwoordt op het tweede referen, by de overheerde Nederlandsche Provintien aen Hollant gheschreven ... te bewegen, vrede te maken met den Spangiaert*, published by Laurens Jacobsz in Amsterdam. An edition of the first text was also published in Edinburgh by Robert Waldegrave, also in 1598.

¹¹⁹ The English version of the *Coppie of the admonitions* also replicates (with translated inscriptions) the frontispiece engraving from the Dutch version.

¹²⁰ Anon., trans. H. W. *The second admonition, sent by the subdued prouinces to Holland, thereby to entice them by faire-seeming reasons, groundlesse threats, and vnlike examples to make peace with the Spaniards: with the Hollanders aunsweere to the same* (1598), p. 7.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

sin of disobedience. The ‘Hollanders’ had rejected ‘the Prince whome God and nature hath giuen thee’.¹²² ‘There were neuer yet found rebels, which in their faults were not confuted and ouerthrown.’¹²³

The voice of the United Provinces refuted all of these allegations in an even more robust and self-righteous rhetoric. It was not the rebel states that were guilty of bloodlust, but Philip of Spain, who, ‘what with hanging, strangling, murdering, and burning, destroyeth (in a manner) all the worlde’.¹²⁴ The ‘Hollanders’ defined their struggle as a just and lawful war: ‘In the defence of our libertie and securitie ... we are altogether zealously bent ... *An honourable death is to bee preferred before a slauish life.*’¹²⁵

The voice of the ‘Hollanders’ in the *Second admonition* pursued the defence of ‘liberty’ in some detail, extending into a general treatment of the nature of monarchy – defined as contractual and elective – and of the legitimacy of resistance and deposition. The pamphlet asserted that princes were bound by the conditions of their coronation oaths: ‘the people choose a Prince: but he swears at his crowning, to be unto them, their lawes and liberties an eternall defendor, and to maintaine them and augment them with all his might’.¹²⁶ The abrogation of these oaths reduced their people to slavery, as proved with specific reference to the conditions and privileges that were particular to the Spanish king’s sovereignty of the Netherlands and in Aragon.¹²⁷ The discussion of subjects’ rights to resist tyranny, however, was expanded into a general rule, a divine law, or law of nature, which was illustrated by reference to both Scripture and history. The examples of Shadrach, Mischach, and Abednego, Daniel and Matthias were invoked to argue that ‘Against tyranny all God-fearing people may fight.’ This rule was also proved by ‘the example of many nations’; the deposition of Louis II of France, or Caligula, ‘murdered by the Romans’, and a famous English case: Edward II of England, who had been ruled by ‘bad counsaile’ and deposed by ‘Peares of the land moued by [his] Cruelty’. The depositions of these kings had been achieved by human agents who acted in accordance with divine providence: ‘*No Tyrant that euer could escape Gods punishment.*’¹²⁸

This argument completely undermined Bilson’s constitutional relativism: his theory that resistance was legitimate in ‘elective’ but not in ‘absolute’ monarchies. History proved that actions justified in the Low Countries were theoretically applicable in any monarchy, including England. These ideas were hardly groundbreaking, and were common to late sixteenth-century resistance theory, as articulated by Scottish and continental writers. What was remarkable about this particular exposition of these arguments was their appearance in print and in the

¹²² Anon., trans. H. W., *A true coppie of the admonitions sent by the subdued provinces to the states of Hollande: and the Hollanders answere to the same. Together with the articles of peace concluded betweene the high and mightie princes, Phillip by the grace of God King of Spaine, &c. and Henry the Fourth by the same grace, the most Christian King of France* (1598), unpaginated.

¹²³ Anon., *Second admonition*, p. 8.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 27–8.

English vernacular. The content of these pamphlets from the Netherlands also contrasted markedly with the political ideas contained in translations of French pamphlets studied by Parmelee, which articulated ideas of absolute kingship and the illegitimacy of resistance.

These materials presented arguments against peace with Spain grounded in the impossibility of accommodation with untrustworthy enemies, and the continued threat of Spanish tyranny to the liberty of free states: essentially the nub of Essex's ideological hostility to peace, and of the authors of like-minded manuscript treatises. In the printed realm, there did not appear to exist a set of similar texts which countered the message of the enthusiasts for war, sympathetic to the pacific intentions of Spain or the archdukes. Only bellicose and hispanophobic arguments against peace were represented in late Elizabethan news pamphlets.

The question that begs and eludes an easy answer is the motivation that lay behind the publication of these translations. Market and profitability would have been the primary consideration of any London printer, especially one as commercially aware as Wolfe. Publishers presumably calculated that the immediate context of the peace negotiations would attract the interest of a book-buying public, who paid subsidies, or felt the repercussions of the war for English trade. The French translations would have provided Wolfe and other printers with a substantial part of their income in the earlier part of the decade. After the decline of Burghley's patronage and death, it might have seemed opportune to restore that income with zesty pamphlets from the Netherlands.¹²⁹

Further research also remains to be carried out into the passage of books between the Low Countries and England. Parmelee admits that it is exceptionally difficult to trace the journey of texts from the continent to English presses, but that merchants, travellers, and especially diplomats were regular conduits for the passage of books across the channel.¹³⁰ English diplomats were certainly aware of the significance of the propaganda war that was stimulated by the peace debates.¹³¹ When Essex was writing his *Apologie*, he borrowed Dutch pamphlets from Thomas Bodley that the latter had amassed during his sojourn as Elizabeth's ambassador with the States General between 1588 and 1597.¹³² It is also possible that the States General might have attempted to manipulate the popular press or 'public opinion' in England in their delicate attempts to prevent Elizabeth from reaching a settlement with Spain. This would have been a risky strategy, at least as likely to anger the queen as to put pressure on her to maintain the Anglo-Dutch alliance. The publication of the English translation of the *Coppie of the admonitions* in Edinburgh in 1598 dismayed recently arrived representatives of the United Provinces at the Scottish court, because it had reached James VI's attention, who

¹²⁹ Parmelee, *Good neues from Fraunce*, p. 33.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 35–7.

¹³¹ In May 1598 George Gilpin wrote to Essex from The Hague about the disruptive pamphleteering in favour of peace or war that followed the publication of the Treaty of Vervins; *HMC Salisbury*, VIII, pp. 178–9.

¹³² Birch, *Negotiations*, pp. 170–2.

strongly objected to the radical content of the pamphlet's discussion of princely authority and obedience.¹³³

It seems most likely that the initiative behind translations of Dutch propaganda lay with the publishers rather than with members of the Dutch or the Elizabethan regimes. Wolfe especially had extensive contacts with printers and booksellers in the United Provinces.¹³⁴ Was the publication of these texts, however, somehow connected to the court? Were Essex and his wider circle involved, as William Cecil had been in the French translations? The earl's associates 'scribally published' texts in manuscript which articulated his political position. But Essex's circle also planned covert print publications: in 1596 the queen suppressed plans of Essex and his secretariat to publish a version of the Cadiz voyage, while Essex's circle prepared an English translation of Antonio Pérez's *Pedaços de historia ó relaciones* in 1594–5, for a print run which never materialized.¹³⁵

It seems most likely, though, that Wolfe recognized that these Dutch tracts contained a compelling reflection on contemporary events which made them likely to sell, especially as they echoed Essex's views on the war. Wolfe may also have sought out the earl as a patron after Burghley's death. He was certainly responsible for publishing John Haywood's infamous *Life and raigne of King Henrie III* in February 1599, which caused great controversy on account of perceived parallels drawn between the misgovernment of Richard II and Elizabeth, but especially because the history was dedicated to Essex. The dedication had been included at Wolfe's suggestion, and he made at least three journeys to the court to ascertain Essex's response immediately after the book's appearance in print.¹³⁶

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Irrespective of 'elite' encouragement, these sensationalist news pamphlets engaged their audiences with impassioned arguments about the direction of foreign policy that were usually carried out in more rarified political space and media, in the interaction of diplomats, or in conciliar debates. The manuscript treatises represent an intersection between the personal exchanges of statesmen, diplomats, and courtiers, and the more public medium of print.

The published translations underscore again the *indirect* ways that readers of print were exposed to the substance of politics and political ideas in the form of foreign news, before the development of domestic news culture during the English Civil Wars. In the last years of Elizabeth's reign, wariness about the subversive properties of print intensified, as did attitudes to coded political allusion

¹³³ Stilma, 'Justifying war', p. 62.

¹³⁴ Personal communication from Dr Stilma.

¹³⁵ Hammer, 'Propaganda and the capture of Cadiz'; Gajda, 'State of Christendom', pp. 427–8.

¹³⁶ Essex waited until consternation about the book became evident before requesting Whitgift to investigate the text; John Manning, ed., *The first and second parts of John Hayward's The life and raigne of King Henrie III*, Camden Fourth Series, 42 (London, 1991), pp. 18–19.

in literature. In June 1599, Archbishop Whitgift and Bishop Bancroft issued the so-called 'Bishops' Ban', which prohibited the publication of satires, epigrams, histories, and plays without the prior approval of regulatory authorities.¹³⁷ No mention, however, was made of the publication of foreign news pamphlets, despite their clear topicality, and the markedly non-authoritarian political ideas contained in some translations of Dutch tracts. Nor was there anything clandestine about Wolfe's Dutch translations, most of which were entered in the Stationers' Register. Accordingly, the most radical political theory endorsed in a printed text in England in 1598–9 was not to be found in the satires of John Marston or Thomas Middleton, in John Davies's epigrams, or other censored tracts, but was buried in the *Second admonition*, which was not an ostensible commentary on English politics.¹³⁸

The wider importance of this multi-layered debate about war and peace lies in its contribution to our understanding of the relationship between foreign policy and political discourse in Elizabethan and early Stuart England. Quentin Skinner has argued that translations of Roman history during this period encouraged English readers to develop an acute sensitivity to the repression of liberty and the operation of tyranny, which shaped ideological divisions before the 1640s.¹³⁹ Debates about peace in the late 1590s, however, reveal that ideas of tyranny and slavery, liberty and privilege, obedience and resistance, absolute and contractual monarchy were also articulated in contemporary arguments about the war with Spain and the conceptualization of the Dutch revolt.

The manuscript treatises, which disclose different attitudes to the government of the United Provinces and the abjuration of the sovereignty of Philip II, supply a sense of future ideological divisions. The pro-war tracts reveal a mindset orientated above all towards opposition to tyranny, albeit Spanish tyranny, and the tendency to view the threat to political and religious liberties on the continent as a common danger to all Protestant states. The pro-peace treatises reveal a conservative abhorrence of 'popular' government and the disruption of social hierarchy, as well as the impulse to read confessional divisions as just one of a series of factors that affected the direction of foreign policy. It is significant in light of his developing attitude to Elizabeth that the bellicose mentality of Essex encompassed the former propensity to dwell on the threat of tyranny. It is even more significant that the future king would side firmly with the peacemongers. Malcolm Smuts has shown that James's perception of himself as *rex pacificus* developed in relation to his theories of monarchical authority. In 1603, the

¹³⁷ Clegg, *Press censorship*, pp. 198–217.

¹³⁸ The tract had even been licensed by Abraham Hartwell, a secretary of Whitgift; E. Arber, *A transcript of the registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554–1640 AD* (5 vols., London, 1875–94), III, p. 43.

¹³⁹ Quentin Skinner, 'Classical liberty, renaissance translation and the English Civil War', in *Visions of Politics*, II: *Renaissance virtues* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 308–43.

new king would denounce the ‘rebellious’ provinces in table-talk about subjects’ duty of obedience to princes.¹⁴⁰ The long legacy of these Elizabethan debates about war and peace would bear fruit in the 1620s, when response to England’s engagement in the Thirty Years War would form a fizzing backdrop to the troubles of the Stuart monarchs.

¹⁴⁰ Malcolm Smuts, ‘The making of *rex pacificus*:. James VI and I and the problem of peace in an age of religious war’, in Daniel Fisclin and Mark Fortier, eds., *Royal subjects: essays on the writings of James VI and I* (Detroit, IL, 2002), p. 378.