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The Queen Elizabeth / Anjou Match and the Politics of Dynastic Libel

Much has been said in recent years about the Habermasian 'rise of the public sphere' in early-modern England. One recent offshoot of that continuing controversy has been whether, assuming it has some validity (and plenty of historians still have their doubts), that concept can be pushed back as far as the sixteenth century. Malcolm Smuts argued that the dynastic uncertainty created by Elizabeth I's virginity – what Patrick Collinson has called the 'Elizabethan exclusion crisis' – did indeed create a discourse about high politics that qualifies as a 'public sphere'. By 1578 many of Elizabeth's subjects feared that her proposed marriage to the Duke of Anjou would undermine English Protestantism. Arguments about the succession therefore became entangled once again with existing religious tensions. What was different was the degree to which these critics of the Anjou match were willing to use print to make these points. Particularly influential was John Stubbes's *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf* (1579), which imported French anti-Medici smears to develop the argument that the Valois bloodline was tainted. This would later mutate into claims that the Tudor bloodline, now on the verge of extinction, was tainted anyway, with or without a Valois-Tudor marriage. Smuts suggested that what made Stubbs important was not so much whether he was acting as a mouthpiece for any particular court faction but that he published in print arguments that had previously been confined to court circles. So, it was not that a 'public sphere' had challenged or was superseding the court; rather it was that the discourses of the court, print and the provinces were becoming intertwined more closely than ever. **AB**