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Reading Monarchs Writing:

Introduction

THIS ANTHOLOGY EXAMINES A BODY OF VERSE that has received surprisingly little attention: the poetry of Tudor and Stuart monarchs Henry VIII, Mary, Queen of Scots, Elizabeth I, and James VI/I. Despite all the enabling work that has been done on the intersections of poetry and politics in such "courtly makers" as Wyatt, Surrey, and Sidney, among many others, critics seem to have neglected the fact that *monarchs* also wrote verse. Although James's works have received some attention (due, in no small part, to Ben Jonson's recognition of his monarch's poetic activities),¹ virtually nothing has been written on Henry VIII's lyrics. As for Mary Stuart, while she remains a popular figure outside of academia, and while her verse has remained continuously available, critics have all but ignored her verse.² And while Elizabeth's speeches have come under in-

¹ See Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 17–24, and Kevin Sharpe, "The King's Writ: Royal Authors and Royal Authority in Early Modern England," in *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 117–38. In addition, see Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier, eds., *Royal Subjects: The Writings of James VI and I* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, forthcoming), Peter C. Herman, "'Best of Poets, Best of Kings': King James VI/I and the Scene of Monarchic Verse," forthcoming in *Royal Subjects*; and Daniel Fischlin, "'Like a Mercenary Poët': The Politics and Poetics of James VI's *Lepanto*," *Essays on Older Scots Literature*, ed. Sally Mapstone (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, forthcoming), vol. 3: 9.

² See in this volume Peter C. Herman, "'mes subjectz, mon ame assubjectie': The

creasing scrutiny, her poetry too remains nearly unexamined. (Steven May, for example, cites only one item on Elizabeth's poetry in his "Recent Studies in Elizabeth I" — a single page from his own book on courtier verse.)³ This neglect is surprising for a number of reasons.

To begin, there is a minor tradition of English monarchs writing verse. Richard I, during the last years of his father's reign, lived in the courts of Provence and, according to Walpole, practiced their poetic arts.⁴ Edward II wrote a lament in verse;⁵ Richard II commissioned an epitaph for himself which compares him to Homer,⁶ and Henry VI is supposed to have written "Kingdomes are bote cares," a proverbial poem on the nature of worldly vanity.⁷ Closer to home, Henry VIII's mother, Elizabeth of York, may have written the short poem "My heart is set upon a lusty pin,"⁸ and Henry's first wife, Katherine of Aragon, also has a lyric ascribed to her.⁹ Moreover, Margaret of Austria — whom Henry's father proposed to marry, and whose Burgundian court culture Henry admired and imitated — wrote many lyrics as well, chiefly in the tradition of the courtly love lyric.¹⁰ Marguerite de Navarre was also both a poet and a

Problematic (of) Subjectivity in Mary Stuart's Sonnets," n. 2 and n. 4. After completing work on *Reading Monarchs Writing*, however, I had the good fortune of reading Sarah Dunnigan's published and forthcoming work on Mary (see "'mes subjectz,'" note 2).

³ May, "Recent Studies in Elizabeth I," *English Literary Renaissance* 23.2 (1993): 348. Ilona Bell devotes five pages to Elizabeth's verse in *Elizabethan Women and the Poetry of Courtship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 108–13.

⁴ Horace Walpole, *A Catalogue of the Royal and Noble Authors of England* (London, 1758), 2.

⁵ "Lamentatio gloriosi Regis Edwardi de Karnarvan, quam edidit tempore suae incarcerationis," Walpole, *Royal and Noble Authors*, 4; Thomas Tanner, *Bibliotheca Britannica* (London: Gulielmus Bowyer, 1748), 253.

⁶ Gervase Matthew, *The Court of Richard II* (New York: Norton, 1968), 22.

⁷ This attribution may be suspect. Sir John Harington, *Nugæ Antiquæ: Being a Miscellaneous Collection of Original Papers in Prose and Verse*, ed. Henry Harington (London: W. Frederick, 1775), vol. 2: 247.

⁸ From *Oxford, Bodleian Rawlinson MS C.8* (155^v–156^r). For a full discussion of this ascription, see Julia Boffey, *Manuscripts of English Courtly Love Lyrics in the Later Middle Ages*. *Manuscript Studies* 1 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 1985), 83–84.

⁹ The poetic voice of "Whilles lyue or breth is in my brest" (*London British Library Additional MS 31,92*, 54^v–55^r), a lyric seemingly intended to be sung by a woman in praise of her lover's performance at a running of the ring, appears to be that of Katherine of Aragon; the matter of the poem, as well as marginal notations in the manuscript, suggest that the male lover, the "lord," is Henry.

¹⁰ See Ghislaine DeBoom, *Margarite d'Autriche-Savoie et la Pre-Renaissance* (Paris: Librairie E-Droz, 1935), 123 ff., and E. W. Ives, *Anne Boleyn* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 26 ff., for discussion and examples of Margaret's lyrics. On the importance of Bur-

great queen, and in all likelihood Mary, Elizabeth and James knew about her literary bent. There is, in short, nothing surprising or unprecedented about a monarch turning his or her hand to lyric poetry.

The neglect also seems to be a relatively modern phenomenon, as monarchic verse constituted a recognized (sub?)genre during the early modern era. For example, in a letter dated 1609 and addressed to King James I's eldest son, Prince Henry, Sir John Harington mentions and reproduces:¹¹

A special verse of King Henry the Eight, when he conceived love for Anna Bulleign. And hereof I entertain no doubt of the Author, for, if I had no better reason than the rhyme, it were sufficient to think that no other than suche a King could write suche a sonnet; but of this my father oft gave me good assurance, who was in his household. This sonnet was sunge to the Lady Anne at his commaundment, and here followeth:

THE eagle's force subdues eache byrd that flies;
 What metal can resyst the flaminge fyre?
 Dothe not the sunne dazzle the clearest eyes,
 And melt the ice, and make the froste retire?
 The hardest stones are peircede thro wyth tools;
 The wysest are, with Princes, made but fools.

While in all likelihood, Henry VIII did not write these lines,¹² the metaphors the speaker uses to describe himself (an eagle, a fire, the sun, the highly phallic piercing tool) are all associated with authority and in particular, with authority establishing its pre-eminence through the use of some kind of *force*, irresistible flame, blinding incandescence, melting heat, and probing incision. These are the metaphors, in other words, that a prince *ought* to use when composing verse, and therefore Harington is sure, even, as he says, if had he no other basis than the words themselves,

gundy to the early Tudors, see Gordon Kipling, *The triumph of honour: Burgundian origins of the Elizabethan Renaissance* (The Hague: Leiden University Press, 1977).

¹¹ Harington, *Nugæ Antiquæ*, vol. 2: 248.

¹² Nonetheless, William Byrd set them to music in *Psalmes, Songs, and Sonnets* (1611; B1'). See also Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry From the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century* (1781), rev. ed. (London: Thomas Tegg, 1824), vol. 3: 342–43. They also appear in *A Mirror for Magistrates* (1563; Lily B. Campbell, ed., *A Mirror for Magistrates* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938]) as lines 85–91 of Thomas Churchyard's "Shore's Wife" (376; see also E. H. Fellowes, *English Madrigal Verse, 1588–1632*, 3rd ed. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967], 685).

that *only* "A King could write suche a sonnet." In addition, the last line's reference to "Princes" carries with it the assumption that Henry is revealing his identity explicitly, thus turning a conventional lyric into a royal performance.

While aesthetics surely plays some role in the marginalization of monarchic verse — most of these poems are competent at best, one or two, we must admit, are downright terrible — the absence of masterpieces should not prevent our taking these texts seriously. Lack of poetic merit has certainly not stopped critics from according serious and sustained attention to other less than wondrous poetic texts, such as the *Mirror for Magistrates* or Robert Sidney's sonnets. Nor is there a problem of establishing a reliable canon. While as Harington's mistaken ascription attests and as Leah Marcus's contribution will later show, poems circulated under a monarch's name that were not written by a monarch, the existence of spurious texts should not obscure the fact that the canon of monarchic verse rests on a solid foundation.

Granted, we do not have a holograph of Henry VIII's lyrics, yet we have indisputable firsthand evidence that Henry wrote lyrics (Hall records that during a progress in the second year of his reign, Henry exercised "hym self daily in shotyng, singing, daunsyng, wrastelyng, casting of the barre, plaiyng at the recorder, flute, virginals, and in setting of songes, [and] makyng of balettes" [515]), and in a letter written to Wolsey, Richard Pace noted that the royal almoner incorporated "Pastime with Good Company" and another lyric, "I love unloved, such is mine adventure," into his sermon while preaching in the King's hall in March of 1521.¹³ The anonymous interlude *Youth* (c. 1514) employs Henry's lyrics, specifically those which present his persona of the youthful lover (given exemplification in other courtly entertainments as well), and identifies Henry with the interlude's protagonist.¹⁴ And the lyric, "Though Some Say that Youth Rules Me," concludes with an assertion of Henry's royal authorship that perfectly coincides with his proclivity for public performance: "Thus says the King, the eighth Harry, / Though some say that youth rules me." Furthermore, the compiler of the *Henry VIII Manuscript*, our primary source for Henry's lyrics,¹⁵ carefully separated Henry's contributions from

¹³ *Letter and Papers: Henry VIII* 3.1, #1188, 447.

¹⁴ Ian Lancashire, ed., *Two Tudor Interludes: The Interlude of Youth, Hick Scorer* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), 54.

¹⁵ See "A Selection of Henry VIII's Lyrics," in this volume, n. 1.

the others.¹⁶ For everyone else, attribution appears following the music and verse of each piece; but in Henry's case, "The Kynge H. VIII." is given centred at the top of the leaf on which each piece begins. In one instance, the block "H" even incorporates a little portrait of the king (figure 1).

The case for Elizabeth's and James's responsibility for their verse is indisputable because for both Elizabeth and James, we have copies of their poems in their own handwriting,¹⁷ plus James published his verse under his name. The situation with Mary appears less certain, as her sonnets were not only published without her permission, but as part of Buchanan's book arguing for Mary's responsibility for her husband's murder. Yet Mary never disclaimed responsibility for the Casket Sonnets (as they came to be known), and even her defenders, including the French ambassador to England, La Mothe Fénelon, who knew and praised Mary's poetry, did not assert that the poems are forgeries.¹⁸

There are no good reasons, in sum, for ignoring this poetry, and the omission of monarchic verse from our considerations of early modern lyric poetry means that we have inadvertently created an incomplete history of the lyric's place in early modern culture, and in particular, in the cultural poetics of the early modern court. Starting (more or less) with the seminal articles by Arthur Marotti and Louis A. Montrose, literary critics of both new and old historicist leanings have continuously explored how the conventions of lyric verse are ideally suited to describe the hopes and frustrations of a courtier seeking favor.¹⁹ Indeed, the commonplace of "love is

¹⁶ On King James's manipulation of the appearance of his poems so as to emphasize their royal origin, see Peter C. Herman, "'Best of Poets, Best of Kings': King James VI/I and the Scene of Monarchic Verse," forthcoming in *Royal Subjects: The Writings of King James VI/I* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press).

¹⁷ Elizabeth's French verses exist in her own hand. For the provenance of her other lyrics, see the notes to her poems in this edition. As for James, in addition to his printed volumes, MS. Bodley 165 contains an Anglo-Scots versions of many of James's poems, some of them unpublished, in James's hand. In addition, a manuscript in the British Museum (MS. Add. 24195), entitled *All the kings short poesis that ar not printed*, while produced by Prince Charles and James's Groom of the Chamber, Thomas Carey, contains corrections by the king (James Craigie, "Introduction," *The Poems of James VI of Scotland* [Edinburgh: Blackwell, 1955], vol. 2: xxiii).

¹⁸ See Herman, "mes subjectz," n. 58.

¹⁹ The bibliography on this topic is huge. However, the following may be considered a preliminary list of essential works on the politics of early modern literature: Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989); Stephen J. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago:

not love" has grown so established that Heather Dubrow devotes *Echoes of Desire* to resituating the Petrarchan lyric within the discourses of desire, arguing that in the Petrarchan lyric, love remains very much love and not always politics.²⁰ Yet despite the fascination with the nexus of poetry and power, almost no one has investigated what happens when poetry gets written by the person in power, the person dispensing rather than seeking favor, or the complex relations between a courtier's use of erotic tropes and a monarch's use of them. If, as Montrose rightly observes, "The otiose love-talk of the shepherd masks the busy negotiation of the courtier; the shepherd is a courtly poet prosecuting his courtship in pastoral forms,"²¹ what happens when the otiose love-talk is articulated not by a courtier, but by a king or a queen? Answering these questions constitutes the project of this anthology.

§

Peter C. Herman and Ray G. Siemens propose that Henry VIII's lyrics directly respond to the anxieties caused by the crowning of a new king

University of Chicago Press, 1980); Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Daniel Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Ann R. Jones and Peter Stallybrass, "The Politics of *Astrophil and Stella*," *Studies in English Literature* 24 (1984): 53–68; David Scott Kastan, "'Proud Majesty Made a Subject': Shakespeare and the Spectacle of Rule," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37 (1986): 459–75; Arthur F. Marotti, "'Love is not Love': Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order," *English Literary History* 49 (1982): 396–428; Steven May, *The Elizabethan Courtier Poets: The Poems and Their Contexts* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991); Louis A. Montrose, "'Eliza, Queene of Shepherds,' and the Pastoral of Power," *English Literary Renaissance* 10 (1980): 153–82; Montrose, "'The perfecte paterne of a Poet': The Poetics of Courtship in *The Shepherdes Calender*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 21 (1979): 34–67; David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984); Annabel Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Maureen Quilligan, "Sidney and His Queen," in *The Historical Renaissance: New Essays on Tudor and Stuart Literature and Culture*, ed. Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 171–96; Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker, eds., *The Politics of Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Steven N. Zwicker, *Lines of Authority: Political and English Literary Culture, 1649–1689* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

²⁰ Dubrow reminds us that as much as "Petrarchism and anti-Petrarchism are . . . about subjects like politics, history, or the relationships among men, . . . they are always—and often primarily—about love, desire, and gender as well" (*Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and Its Counterdiscourses* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995], 10).

²¹ Montrose, "'Eliza, Queene of Shepherds,' and the Pastoral of Power," 155.

