



Royal Poetrie: Monarchic Verse and the Political Imaginary of Early Modern England

Peter J. Herman

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Royal Poetrie is the first book to address the significance of a distinctive body of verse from the English Renaissance?poems produced by the Tudor-Stuart monarchs Henry VIII, Mary, Queen of Scots, Elizabeth I, and James VI/I. Not surprisingly, Henry VIII is no John Donne, but the unique political and poetic complications raised by royal endeavors at authorship imbue this literature with special interest.

Peter C. Herman is particularly intrigued by how the monarchs' poems express and extend their power and control. Monarchs turned to verse especially at moments when they considered their positions insecure or when they were seeking to aggregate more power to themselves. Far from reflecting absolute authority, monarchic verse often reveals the need for authority to defend itself against considerable, effective opposition that was often close at hand.

In monarchic verse, Herman argues, one can see monarchs asserting their significance and appropriating images of royalty to enhance their power and their position. Sometimes, as in the cases of Henry and Elizabeth, they are successful; sometimes, as for James, they are not. For Mary Stuart, the results were disastrous. Herman devotes a chapter each to the poetic endeavors of Henry VIII, Mary Stuart, Elizabeth I, and James VI/I. His introduction addresses the tradition of monarchic verse in England and on the continent as well as the textual issues presented by these texts. A brief postscript examines the verses that circulated under Charles I's name after his execution. In an argument enhanced by carefully chosen illustrations, Herman places monarchic verse within the visual and other cultural traditions of the day.

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