

Peter C. Herman. *Royal Poetrie: Monarchic Verse and the Political Imaginary of Early Modern England*.

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010. ix + 229 pp. index. illus. \$45. ISBN: 978-0-8014-4835-5.

This book addresses a fascinating topic: how and why did early modern monarchs explore, construct, and enact their authority through poetry? Devoting a chapter each to Henry VIII; Mary, Queen of Scots; Elizabeth I; and James VI/I,

and a brief but suggestive coda to Charles I, Herman demonstrates that poetic composition was an important and enduring component of Tudor and Stuart monarchical self-construction. Each of the main chapters offers detailed and contextualized readings of a selection of poems, demonstrating the diversity of personal, political, and diplomatic uses to which royal poetry could be put. The book thus has the potential to be of interest to both literary critics and historians.

Some readers, however, may be disappointed by the extent to which this book reproduces the author's earlier work. Earlier versions of the chapters on Henry VIII and Mary, Queen of Scots, appeared, cowritten with Ray G. Siemens in the case of the former, in Herman (ed.), *Reading Monarchs Writing: The Poetry of Henry VIII, Mary Stuart, Elizabeth I, and James VIII* (2002). An earlier version of the chapter on James VI/I appeared in both *Renaissance Quarterly* (2001) and Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier (eds.), *Royal Subjects: Essays on the Writings of James VI and I* (2002). Some additions to this material have been made, but the overall arguments are largely unchanged and substantial sections are identical to sections in the earlier publications. Even the introduction is not entirely new, but makes some of the same comments on the critical field as the introduction to *Reading Monarchs Writing* (also cowritten with Siemens). Indeed, both introductions are given the same framing: an opening claim that the book examines "a body of verse that has received surprisingly little attention," and a concluding assertion that this verse "illustrates the limitations of Michel Foucault's famous rhetorical question 'What matter who's speaking?'" While some of the new studies in the field that have appeared in the last eight years are listed in the introduction's footnotes, such repetition in the discussion creates the false impression that the field has not changed, and suggests that Herman's earlier work has been extended rather than developed.

The introduction is rather too brief to draw together and to contextualize the chapters that follow. Herman certainly succeeds in raising the question of why four monarchs, reigning over a period of more than a hundred years, all turned to poetry; but his answer, as articulated in a single paragraph in the introduction, is not entirely satisfactory. The answer lies, he suggests, "in both the shift in poetry's cultural capital within humanist culture and the importation of Burgundian cultural forms to the court of Henry VII" (4). He does not here consider cultural changes across the long period the book covers, nor differences between England and Scotland, where two of the monarchs under consideration — Mary and James — wrote much of their poetry. Indeed, the fact that Scotland had its own traditions of poetry and of monarchical writing is paid little attention, a bias evident even in the title of the book, which puts the emphasis squarely on "early modern England." At various points in the book, a fuller engagement with questions of circulation and reception would have helped to strengthen and nuance some of the claims made. For example, the chapter on James asserts, paraphrasing the earlier versions of this account, that what we see in James's early poetic publications is that "the king does not enhance authorship's authority; rather, authorship enhances the king's authority" (183). Yet, authorship and authority were never so straightforwardly complementary for the king, as considering some of the ways in which contemporaries responded to his works highlights.

Although Herman might thus have done more to develop his earlier work and to contextualize the discussion, *Royal Poetrie* covers a considerable amount of ground and includes some illuminating and thought-provoking individual readings. Herman has highlighted the interest and significance of the genre of monarchical poetry, and one hopes that this book will help to generate new work in the area.

JANE RICKARD

University of Leeds