manuscripts, Hadley Williams has printed both versions in facing-page format. The poems themselves are skillful and inventive productions, worthy of the wider readership that this edition will help them reach. Fine literary productions in their own right, they also reveal much about religious, political, and cultural life in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Scotland.

The explanatory notes, which are grouped together following the texts themselves, are particularly thorough and helpful. They frequently gloss unfamiliar words, phrases, and lines; in many cases, a reader with limited familiarity with Older Scots will do better to turn to the notes than to the (excellent) glossary. The notes also explain allusions to historical personages and events. Much astute critical commentary is to be found here, as well—for example, Hadley Williams's discussion of otherness and monstrosity in relation to the pejorative references to Jews and Muslims in the "Gyre Carling." The notes are most impressive, however, in their tracing of intertextual echoes and allusions: one line of a poem will frequently yield references to five or more other literary works, and a tantalizing picture emerges of Scotland's late medieval / early modern literary scene. The ample bibliography of primary and secondary works will facilitate further scholarship; the volume also includes a full glossary, and an index of names and places. This edition is a welcome addition to the field of older Scottish studies.

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Verse Libel in Renaissance England and Scotland. Steven W. May and Alan Bryson, eds.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. xiv + 450 pp. $95.

Steven W. May and Alan Bryson's edition of verse libel is a valuable counterpart to Alastair Bellany and Andrew McRae's digital edition, *Early Stuart Libels: An Edition of Poetry from Manuscript Sources* (2005). Whereas *Early Stuart Libels* includes over 350 poems presented in the form of a historical edition, with semidiplomatic transcriptions of poems from a single manuscript representing a particular moment in their transmission, May and Bryson concentrate on 52 poems, scrupulously edited according to the principles of textual criticism and elegantly presented. In doing so, their anthology confers on this most informal and errant of genres the credibility of a scholarly edition.

Verse libels were part of the fabric of early modern Britain, sometimes literally so, pasted onto walls and nailed to doors. By the early seventeenth century, they were one of the most collected genres of poetry in manuscript miscellanies. The recorded history of English verse libel can be traced to *Beowulf* and the hero's humiliating attack on Unferth's honor. Personal invective is one of the defining features of verse libel, although, as May and Bryson's edition demonstrates, this is an inventive and highly

tactical genre that can appropriate other verse forms, from epigrams and epideictic genres to dream visions and beast fables.

The growing appreciation of verse libels in Elizabethan and early Stuart England, and "the genre's overall threat to civil society" (6), contributed to changes in the laws of defamation to criminalize the copying and transmission of verse libels. Even so, in the early Tudor period, if not exactly state sponsored, the libelous verse of poets, most notably of John Skelton, that attacked the Crown's enemies was tolerated and entered into print, serving as a model for the antipapal libels of subsequent Edwardian and Elizabethan poets. Libelous poetics continued to be explored in the paper wars that broke out between Thomas Nashe and Gabriel Harvey and spilled over into the verse satires of the late 1590s.

The vitality of verse libel, however, lies in scribal cultures, where its formal range, diversity, and intensity found its most dynamic expression. Necessarily anonymous, verse libels instead frequently circulated under the names of their victims—the editors have been able to identify only thirteen authors for the fifty-two poems (32). Transmission within and across Scotland and England often relied on established channels of communication: verse made its way across borders through diplomatic channels, and was transmitted via university, Inns of Court, and other scribal networks.

This edition groups verse under broad institutional categories: the court, religion, Scotland, the Inns of Court, Parliament, and the university. The first category is designated "Representative" and selects poems said to exemplify the literary range of the genre and its defining feature in the sixteenth century—a local ad hominen attack. The detailed historical commentary to each poem carefully explicates context, identifying the key players and providing information about the manuscript in which it survives and the manuscript's compilers. In doing so, it provides the groundwork for the study of particular moments in the transmission of a verse libel as well as the various networks involved.

Verse libels are regarded as the most malleable of texts, open to recasting and augmentation, hence, as McRae and Bellany argue, resistant to principles enshrined in a critical edition. May and Bryson's edition challenges this view. Where multiple witnesses survive, the editors produce a conflated text, guided by the principle that the aim must be "to reconstruct authorial intentionality as closely as possible from the surviving evidence" (69). The accompanying textual notes provide an incredibly rich account of the status of variant readings as well as stemma for several poems.

The drive to produce authoritative texts goes hand-in-hand with renewed attention to verse libel's aesthetic qualities. Popular verses, such as the Bashe Libel (poem 2) and Thomas Buckley's "Libel of Oxford" (poem 49), are distinguished by their technical skill and hence were valued by copyists for their aesthetics. The aim of this edition is to open up the field of research, and it will certainly reenergize debates about how we understand the aesthetic appeal of verse libel and the textual status of scribal texts more broadly.

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