Introduction

Mark Rankin, Christopher Highley, and John N. King

The publication of this volume marks the five-hundredth anniversary of Henry VIII's accession to the throne of England. Along with his daughter Elizabeth I Henry remains one of England's most identifiable monarchs. Unlike the case of Elizabeth's posthumous reputation, however, the reason for Henry's enduring fascination is both notorious and controversial. This notoriety is not difficult to explain. Henry VIII divorced two of his wives, beheaded two more, and sanctioned the banishment or execution of numerous secretaries and ministers, whose names – Cromwell, Fisher, More, Pole, Wolsey, to name only a few – comprise a veritable pantheon of luminaries. At the same time, and in spite of this evidence, it is difficult to describe Henry VIII wholly as a "tyrant," in part because the king insisted so forcefully that he always acted on some nobler motivation, whether it be his "conscience," his ideal of Renaissance kingship, or his interpretation of the "divine" sanction of his royal office. He was undeniably egotistical and obsessively megalomaniacal, but many had a stake in the royal image – both in terms of how the king represented himself and how others represented him. The figure of Henry VIII is a study in contrasts between the prerogatives of his own lived life and his life as scripted by people who stood to gain – or lose – from the outcome of a collective national response to the iconic king.[1]

Essays in this volume grapple with the dichotomy of how Henry saw himself versus how others saw him. Struggle to reconcile these separate impulses began during the reign itself, particularly in terms of Henry's self-fashioning along the lines of an enlightened Renaissance prince. Henry VIII was accomplished by most any measure. He demonstrated skill in theological disputation in his tract against Luther, the *Assertio septem sacramentorum adversus Martinum Lutherum* (1521), even if that work was the product of collaboration with a team of scholars. When Henry determined to wrestle the papacy over control of his marital

status to Catherine of Aragon, evangelicals in and around the court seized the opportunity to weld their devotional aims to the royal prerogative. As a number of scholars have realized, the promulgation of the royal supremacy in 1534 only increased the stakes for those who attempted to influence the king. Following the passage of the Act of Six Articles (1539), as is well known, the climate at court became more hostile toward evangelical Protestantism. The king himself is responsible for laying down competing signals for those who sought an indication on the direction of royal policy. Henry's death in 1547 initiated efforts to manipulate the royal afterlife – and define its significance in terms of ongoing cultural, political, and religious activities. It hardly needs saying that royal advisers, theologians, poets, fiction writers, artists, playwrights, musicians, and many others responded to this opportunity with alacrity.[2]

Henry VIII and Elizabeth I have both enjoyed a lively historical, cultural, and literary afterlife. The recent quatercentenary of Elizabeth's death (2003) witnessed an outpouring of studies and exhibits which chronicled the queen's enduring presence. Comparable investigation of Henry, however, has been absent.[3] Traditional disciplinary distinctions are partly to blame for this. Findings gleaned from debate among historians concerning the religious and political climate of the reign, including but not limited to controversies surrounding Henry's personal responsibility for the Reformation, have not influenced early modern literary scholars until relatively recently. Owing to pressures of canonicity, however, these scholars have tended not to investigate Henry's complex literary afterlife apart from its treatment in selected texts, including Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* (1613). Definition – and redefinition – of the Henrician legacy during the Shakespearean age has gone unnoticed. Henry's reign has shaped numerous fields of inquiry as diverse as literature, art history, theology, musicology, popular cultural studies, antiquarian studies, and more. One of the goals of this volume is to bring together scholars working in all of these disciplines and allow their voices to speak to a shared set of concerns. To a greater or lesser degree each contributor seeks to determine exactly how Henry acquired iconic status.

It is instructive to ponder the intellectual conditions that have given rise to this project. Of England's several dozen monarchs to rule since William the Conqueror, select few have come to dominate the national imagination. One struggles to imagine, for example, a modern edited collection on the posthumous afterlife of, say, the twelfth-century King Stephen. Such a project may be viable, but it would be a fundamentally different enterprise than the one undertaken here. Only Henry VIII and perhaps Elizabeth I

and Victoria embody contrarieties so effectively as to generate a compelling, enigmatic presentation. Why was Henry VIII England's last great medieval prince? Did he revolutionize the monarchy and bring centralization to the government? Did Parliament grow bolder as a result of his actions, or was its growth independent? What is the precise relationship between the Henrician English Church and the later, Protestant religious settlement? What motivated his mercurial tendencies? These questions, of course, may remain unanswerable. The point is that many have attempted answers to them over the course of five centuries since Henry took the throne. In assessing their efforts, the essays contained within this volume contribute to an ongoing conversation on Henry VIII that began no later than 1547.

It is difficult to deny that Henry VIII has attained mythic status. As a larger-than-life cultural presence, he is a figment of collective imagination, and attempts to describe him as otherwise risk anachronism by applying to his life scenarios that are invariably foreign to conditions during which he actually lived. The question becomes merely how to delineate the contours of this myth and elaborate its trajectory up to the present moment. Numerous primary sources exist to support this undertaking, and one goal of the present volume is to assess what these materials tell us about Henry VIII's reign, particularly in terms of its reception over time and the uses to which it has been put. Analysis of books that Henry acquired, confiscated, and read is instructive. Recent research has reconstructed Henry's known library and suggested ways to investigate the reign's effect on reading and the book trade.[4] Henry scorned William Tyndale's 1526 English vernacular New Testament but ironically went on to authorize the Great Bible (1539), which relies heavily on Tyndale; this move opened the floodgates of Bible publication, and many thousands of copies of different translations were sold. William Thynne dedicated his folio edition of Chaucer's works (1532) to Henry VIII, in a move that added further prestige to Chaucer's status as England's premier poet. This edition helped to shape the market for printed editions of medieval authors by declaring implicitly what was most acceptable.[5] Much can also be gleaned concerning widespread perceptions of Henry's royal ethos, particularly following the advent of the royal supremacy, by scrutinizing manuscripts presented to him or acquired by him.[6] Despite their richness, though, such materials tell only part of the story. Beginning in the second half of the sixteenth century, treatises, propaganda, libel, and polemic concerning Henry VIII circulated both publicly, in the literary marketplace, and surreptitiously, depending on the political stance of both authors and readers. Roman Catholics disaffected with

the Elizabethan settlement, as well as others (e.g., "puritans"), who opposed the policies of the regime, remade Henry VIII in their own images. It is to be expected that a monarch whose policies had such far-reaching effects would reappear in – and blend into – diverse genres and agendas over time.

Contributors to this collection seek to categorize these evolving and sometimes paradoxical textual remains. Their effort to grapple with nearly five centuries of evidence will inevitably leave gaps. These essays are far from exhaustive. Readers will look in vain, for example, for sustained treatment of Henry VIII among English Catholics. This omission is compensated for by highly specialized assessments which investigate Henry's long-term cultural influence from other perspectives. Contrary to what may at first appear, the Protestant Henry VIII does not descend to us through unambiguous channels of representation. Protestantism itself has given rise to its own history of dissent, and the legacy of Henry VIII has evolved along with it. If Catholic readers had reason to revile this king for divorcing Catherine of Aragon, Protestant readers – captured most memorably, perhaps, through the conflicting voices preserved in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (1563) – did not embrace him with jubilant unanimity. It is to be hoped that, by surveying selected responses to the king, the studies presented here will give rise to additional analyses and lead to other fruitful inquiry.

Beginning with texts produced during Henry's lifetime and continuing forward to the twenty-first century, this collection assesses the evolution of Henry VIII as a political and cultural icon. Its contributors investigate representations of Henry's marital adventures, his enduring egotism, and his entry into schism from the Church of Rome, both as these elements emerged during the reign itself and as they evolved posthumously. Henry remains an influential figure in popular culture, as a number of films, songs, and even a recent television miniseries indicate. He exerts a satirical force in modern British politics as well. In November 2006 the conservative MP Sir Peter Tapsell sardonically demanded that Prime Minister Blair apologize to the nation for Henry VIII's "disgraceful treatment" of his wives after Blair had expressed regret over the British slave trade.[7] This remark is as wry as it is poignant. Henry's achievement established the institutional foundation upon which English nationalists would build. This collection reconsiders the literary, political, and artistic texts through which writers debated Henry's ongoing importance. The essays collected here show how he moved from

being a powerful living monarch to become an even more powerful force in the decades and centuries following his death.

Although Henry VIII continues to capture the attention of scholars, no collection or monograph of this kind has yet appeared. Controversy surrounding the king's responsibility for the upheavals of his reign thrives following the publication of G. W. Bernard's *The King's Reformation* (2005), and it rests on important studies and collections put forward by Alistair Fox (1989), Diarmaid MacCulloch (ed.) (1995), and many others. Recent studies of the cultural afterlife of Elizabeth I, mentioned above, suggest the viability of such an approach to England's most influential of monarchs. The plethora of extant literary, historical, artistic, and cultural artifacts concerning Henry VIII indicates its potential to stimulate interdisciplinary enquiry into the afterlife of this particular king. Literary scholars have broken new ground in studies of Henry VIII's influence on the literary culture of his reign, especially in works by Greg Walker (1991 and 2005), Peter Herman, ed. (1994), and Seth Lerer (1997). Important studies of Hans Holbein's memorable Privy Chamber mural have appeared in Roy Strong's classic account (1967) and in more recent work by Susan Foister (2004) and others. Nevertheless, we still lack an account of Henry VIII that takes the findings from these studies and investigates their applicability to the evolving uses of and debates surrounding Henry's posthumous reputation. This collection seeks to provide such an account.

Within a broadly chronological framework spanning Henry VIII's own reign and the present day, individual chapters cluster around the interrelated themes of (1) contemporary response to Henry's character and policies during his lifetime; (2) Henry's posthumous literary and political afterlife; (3) Henry's effect in shaping art and popular culture; and (4) Henry's debated place in historiography, from the Tudor period to the present moment.

Peter Happé opens the section on contemporary responses by revisiting Henry VIII's debated influence on the literary culture of his own reign, specifically the dramatic interlude. He argues that the dramatists John Skelton, John Heywood, and John Bale crafted a recognizable portrait of Henry for their own purposes in order to shape court opinion on controversial political issues. His assessment of Henrician plays in terms of their ability to offer royal counsel anticipates John N. King's chapter, which moves forward by describing changes that Henry's monarchical image underwent following England's break from the Church of Rome. During the second half of Henry's reign, the royal image bears the imprint of Protestant ideology even though the king himself rejected change in official

theology. Portraits of Henry transform the king from the representative of devout Christian orthodoxy to the champion of royal authority in both secular and ecclesiastical spheres. This iconographical shift manifests itself in a variety of works of art and literature, most notably in the title pages of the Coverdale Bible (1535) and the Great Bible (1539). King also investigates the divergent ways in which Henry and others at court viewed his authority in specifically biblical terms, on a model derived from interpretation of the Psalms as foreshadowing Henry's own struggles against the papacy.

In bringing this section on evolving views of kingship during Henry's reign to a close, Dale Hoak scrutinizes the king's own opinions on this subject. In doing so, he provides a theoretical foundation for the succeeding chapters. Hoak argues that Henry's own views on kingship provide the starting point for any understanding of his legacy. Hoak complicates received opinion about Henry's gradual decline into tyranny by arguing that from the beginning of his reign the king combined his assumed role as an ideal Renaissance prince with savage cruelty toward anyone who opposed him. Contemporary treatment of Henry's taste, ability, and learning, as well as the magnificence and entertainments of his household and court, exist alongside the king's own self-deception and a self-pity that turned to volcanic anger over his failed marriages. Henry viewed the royal supremacy as his greatest legacy.

Henry VIII loomed sufficiently large in English political culture that the mere fact of his death was not enough to end his daunting presence. Alec Ryrie opens a series of chapters on the king's literary and political afterlives by discussing ways in which Henry gradually came to represent a liability to his successors. Ryrie argues that for Roman Catholics, and indeed for most foreigners, the king remained an icon of lust, greed, and pride, although this was complicated by the need of Mary's regime to derive its legitimacy from him. For the regimes of Edward VI and Elizabeth I, and their servants, on the other hand, Henry remained a father figure, admittedly a highly ambiguous one. Many religious conservatives remembered Henry as a bulwark against heresy and tried to appropriate his memory on behalf of their cause. Conversely, the more radical Protestants whom Henry had intermittently persecuted weaned themselves from their habit of obedience to the old tyrant. Some of those in exile under Mary came to denounce Henry with as much vitriol as any Catholic. Others continued to try to excuse or minimize his failings. Crystallizing Protestant unease about how to deal with his memory, the first edition of John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (1563) represents Henry as a uniquely ambiguous figure whom Foxe could not place confidently among either the saved or the damned.

Uniting these diverse strands is an effort to lay Henry VIII to rest and the common inability to do so.

In his investigation of the literary presence of Henry VIII during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I, Mark Rankin, on the other hand, demonstrates that many writers refused to ignore Henry. They explicitly stirred up paradoxical aspects of his legacy in order to satisfy the demands of patronage or political ambition. Rankin argues that the beginning of Henry's "mythic" status coincides with writers' attempts to use Henry in order to shape the direction of public opinion around debated points of controversy. They ranged from the question of the royal succession under Elizabeth I to the proposed involvement of England in the Thirty Years War under James I. Ronald Paulson carries the investigation of Henry VIII's literary legacy forward into the eighteenth century. Like King's, his chapter explicitly compares Henry's literary representation with that in the graphic arts. Following a revival of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* in 1727 to accompany the coronation of George II, writers incorporated the king in narratives of patriotism and English nationalism. Enemies to these ideals from Henry's reign included Thomas Wolsey, whose treatment in Johnson's *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749) suggests a widespread reluctance to impugn Henry VIII or, by extension, George II for moral and political failings. William Hogarth's 1727–8 illustration of Henry's coronation with Anne Boleyn extends the contemporary analogy between Henry VIII and George II, in this case by focusing on the two kings' sexual activities.

Paulson traces the representation of Henry VIII in both the visual and performing arts across the eighteenth century. Hogarth's illustration for John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) established an analogy between Macheath and Robert Walpole that extrapolated and extended the visual iconography of Holbein's Henry VIII. Inaugurating a selection of essays addressing Henry's importance in art and popular culture, Tatiana C. String uses the Holbein codpiece as a point of departure to discuss analogues between this image of Henry's masculinity and Renaissance portraiture more generally. Ideas of Henry's "masculinity" range beyond dynastic iconography alone; individual components in the Holbein portrait comprise a composite whole, in which triangular forms created by the splayed legs and enormous shoulders meet at the codpiece as a focal point. String places Henry VIII and his painter at the center, rather than at the traditional margins, of artistic enterprise in the Renaissance.

Building upon String's findings, Christopher Highley examines the aura of Henry VIII not only through perceptions of his masculinity, but also in his material artifacts themselves. The personal objects that he touched, used, and wore enjoyed a wide circulation. Focusing on Henrician artifacts at the Tower of London, especially the king's talismanic codpiece, Highley shows how extant narratives written by spectators during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries helped construct Henry as a pivotal figure in the emerging practice of cultural tourism. Beginning in the late sixteenth century, the Tower functioned as a proto-museum in which Henry VIII was a central presence. By considering suits of armor connected with the king at the Tower and the narratives that grew up around them, including stories concerning their codpieces, Highley demonstrates Henry's evolving function as a cultural icon.

Turning from literary and graphic remains to aural ones, Matthew Spring argues that Henry VIII's musical abilities confirmed his reputation as an ideal prince in the minds of his contemporaries. Contemporary evidence documents Henry's reputation as a skilled performer and an able composer, but he went further by reorganizing and expanding musical activities at court. His patronage of continental musicians laid the foundation for the development of polyphonic consort and orchestral music during the eighteenth century. Musicians gained access to the Privy Chamber, and with it a degree of proximity to the monarch, following the establishment of this inner precinct in the Eltham Ordinances of 1526. Musicologists' tendency to praise Henry's musical talents has as much to do with his patronage of musicians as his own musical ability. Although Henry may not have actually composed certain pieces that are commonly attributed to him (such as "Greensleeves"), scholars came to describe his accomplishment according to inflated, alternate criteria.

Tom Betteridge concludes this section with his chapter on Henry VIII in popular culture. Over the course of the last hundred years, popular culture, cinema, prose, and theater have wavered between depicting Henry VIII as a gloriously hearty monarch, on the one hand, and a misogynist and violent tyrant, on the other. Beginning with an investigation of Henry as depicted in the film version of Robert Bolt's play *A Man for All Seasons* (1966), Betteridge discusses the famous BBC series *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (1970) and other recent fictional accounts of Henry, including Philippa Gregory's *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2002) and the Showtime miniseries *The Tudors*, which is now in its third season. Betteridge detects a direct and uncanny relationship between representations of Henry VIII in these texts and debates within popular culture

over the nature of history and, in particular, the interaction between historical action and gender. Henry is a profoundly masculine figure, but, at the same time, Betteridge argues that his having six wives appears at once excessive, comic, and even tragic in these texts.

The final section of this collection revisits the fascinating and problematic topic of the historiography of Henry VIII. In the last decade of the sixteenth century, a powerful wave of politically motivated nostalgia swept over the English imagination. As a part of this tradition, Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594) and Thomas Deloney's *Jacke of Newbury* (1597) – two early experiments in fiction – idealize an avuncular Henry VIII at the heart of a socially cohesive England. In his chapter, Andrew Fleck argues that these two texts playfully appropriated the markers and tropes of the period's increasingly sophisticated and partisan historiography. Mid-century Tudor chronicles, including Edward Hall's *Union of the Two Noble and Illustrate Families of Lancaster and York* (1548), Thomas Cooper's continuation of Thomas Lanquet's mid-century *Chronicle* (1560), Richard Grafton's *Abridgement* and *Chronicle at Large* (1569), John Stowe's *Summary* (1565) and *Annales* (1592), and *Survey*, and Holinshed's *Chronicle* (1577), provide sources for Nashe's and Deloney's proto-novels. These authors' framing of their fictional tales with historical events concerning Henry VIII jeopardize the stable limits of truth and fact. In doing so, they project generic ambivalence that characterizes the sixteenth-century flowering – and subsequent decline – of the chronicle tradition.

Peter Marshall's concluding chapter on the twentieth-century historiography of Henry VIII brings this collection to a close. Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, Henry VIII has remained a towering figure in the English historical imagination, one of the very few historical personages of whom almost everyone has heard. Nevertheless, there has been a surprising paucity of modern academic (or even non-academic) biographies that devote themselves to the analysis of the king's life. A. F. Pollard's epic biography of 1902 was in many ways the final crash of a Victorian wave, seeing the king as a patriotic embodiment of England's national will at the threshold of its era of imperial greatness. Most subsequent writers on Tudor England have found less to celebrate unequivocally, and, as a result, many have shied away from the intense personal involvement with Henry that biography demands. It is remarkable that (barring an unusual 1971 offering by Lacey Baldwin Smith), J. J. Scarisbrick's 1968 biography still stands as the standard academic study, and still more remarkable in light of Scarisbrick's complete disavowal of the empathy and admiration a biographer usually evinces

for his or her subject. We eagerly anticipate Paul Hammer's new biography, which is forthcoming from Yale University Press.

In examining the twentieth-century historiographical tradition surrounding Henry VIII, Marshall argues that, in a sense, Henry VIII has become an icon without a cult. His exercise of power lacks the allure of Elizabeth I's mastery of gender politics, and gendered analyses of Henry's masculinity – besides those contained within the present volume – are few. His idiosyncratic ecclesiastical policies make him neither the founder of any modern Church nor the beneficiary of any tradition of confessional or apologetic writing. Nor was Henry's exercise of violence sufficiently extreme to turn him into a compelling "portrait of evil." (In contrast, it seems impossible to separate the achievement of his daughter Mary I from the unforgettable sobriquet of "Bloody Mary.") Instead, much of the most important modern work on Henry VIII has come at him obliquely, either through biographies of important contemporaries, such as Thomas Wolsey, Thomas More, and Thomas Crammer, or through small-scale prosopography of his multiple marriage partners. From at least the time of G. R. Elton's controversial thesis concerning the "Tudor Revolution," Henry has also been the main protagonist of rival scholarly interpretations of the workings of Tudor government and politics, pitting advocates of a faction-driven model against those who emphasize the king's mastery and autonomy. In recognizing these disputes, Marshall does not arbitrate them. Instead, he examines and explains the difficulties modern historians have found in producing a rounded, persuasive, and widely accepted portrait of Henry VIII as a monarch, a religious reformer, a husband, and a man.

NOTES

1. We follow Thomas F. Mayer's model of the "life as lived" versus the "life as written" in his study on *Reginald Pole: Prince & Prophet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
2. Details in this paragraph draw upon Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 21–4; *Antwerp, Dissident Typographical Centre: The Role of Antwerp Printers in the Religious Conflicts in England (16th Century)* (Antwerp: Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon for the Plantin-Moretus Museum, 1994), item 3; and Alec Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII: Evangelicals in the Early English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).