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**‘Masks of Revelation’: Literary Personae and the Expression of Identity in the Writings of
James VI and Alexander Montgomerie**

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**Dissertation for the Degree of M.Phil
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Introduction

In a sonnet addressed to Elizabeth Tudor dated c. 1586, and appended to a letter that sought to reassure the monarch of the sender's loyalty after a lengthy period of discussion that dwelt upon political and financial concessions, the author penned these lines:

Full oft contentions great arise, we see,
Betwixt the husband and his loving wife
That sine they may the firmlyer agree
When ended is that sudden choler strife.¹

They hint at a strained relationship with the possibility of recovery and departure from the 'choler strife' that has come to characterise it, or so its author would have us believe. The sonnet was written by James VI of Scotland, and is indicative of the unsteady, and often volatile, relationship the two monarchs shared, as well as the dependency James had upon his more powerful and wealthier neighbour. Indeed, the phrase 'loving wife', in reality, could not have been more inappropriate given the deference James was to adopt in his dealings with Elizabeth, and the latter's frequent unwillingness to co-operate with her neighbour on anything but her own terms. It is not hard to imagine a degree of irony on the king's behalf in writing a sonnet which describes his continued disagreements with Elizabeth on a whole raft of matters as the foundation upon which a successful, although firmly metaphorical, marriage could progress. Indeed, given the male dominated structure of society, it becomes likely that James sought to reverse the roles of their professional relationship thus far, implying that he is the dominant party, rather than Elizabeth. Whilst James frequently sought out a more equitable footing with Elizabeth, his ultimate political goal often hindered the pursuance of this wish. From an early stage in his personal reign the king had his eye on ascendancy to the English throne, a feat he eventually achieved in 1603, and many of the concessions he would make (the tacit acknowledgement of the inevitability of his mother's execution being perhaps the most striking)² were often granted with this ultimate goal in mind.

For much of the 1580s Scotland was a beleaguered nation. Supporters of opposing religious ideologies, Protestant and Catholic, attempted to exercise power through the formation of political factions. In turn, those separate religious groupings sought to influence the policy of the king. The increasing paranoia of the more fanatical Protestants in Scotland often led to an underlying suspicion that James was not wholly committed to their cause, giving, as he did, concessions to Catholics as well as Protestants in a bid to retain a degree of domestic harmony. The growing independence of the Kirk from the crown and the king's inability to quell the religious disputes which so troubled Scottish

¹ G.P.V Akrigg, *The Letters of James VI and I*, (London, University of California Press, 1984)

² *The Letters of Queen Elizabeth and James VI of Scotland*, ed. John Bruce (Camden Society, 1849), pp.43-6

domestic policy were cause for alarm in England as well as Scotland. James's inability to exercise power over politico-religious disputes did not bode well for those who desired a stable and prosperous Scotland after a century of bloodshed. Moreover, the cultivation of a harmonious Scotland was in the best interests of the English. Indeed, the young king's reactions to events were being monitored by English diplomats in Edinburgh in the service of Elizabeth. It is within this context of uncertainty that the king and his own diplomats pressed for firm assurances that he would be the rightful heir to the English throne upon Elizabeth's passing, as well as receiving, in the meanwhile, a much needed annuity from his wealthier neighbour.³ In return James would be willing to tow the English line for the interests of both countries.

James did not receive all the assurances he wanted from these early forays into Anglo-Scottish politics, and was himself reluctant to sign the treaty⁴ offered him because of its refusal to acknowledge his legitimacy as successor to the English throne. In response to such bargaining Elizabeth was both humorous and assertive:

Must so great dout be made of fre good wyl, and gift be so mistrusted, that our signe Emanuel must assure? No, my deere brother. Teache your new rawe counselars bettar manner than to aduis you such a paringe of ample meaning. (*Letters of Elizabeth and James VI*, p. 30)

There is more than a hint of condescension in Elizabeth's tone, and we are left in no doubt that her 'deere brother' is the younger and more inexperienced of the two 'siblings'. Indeed, almost all of the extant correspondence between James and Elizabeth incorporates the familial trope of brother and sister, as a means of maintaining an air of diplomatic cordiality and personal warmth between two monarchs whose countries share a history of conflict. However, the tone of James and Elizabeth's early interactions can at times be caustic; literary formality plays an important role in keeping their differences from boiling over.

What is immediately striking about the king's conciliatory sonnet is his use of a more explicitly matrimonial metaphor. It is not the suggestion that James is married to Elizabeth that is immediately outlandish, although it is perhaps not an image that Elizabeth found altogether favourable. Rather, it is the idea that such a fictional arrangement could be alluded to at all. Peter Herman's recent study into the significance of James's sonnet rightly draws our attention to the literary techniques the king utilises to imply his wish to be the dominant partner in their political interactions. By proffering images which cast James as the more assertive of the two, such as the archer, the smith and indeed the husband, the king 'does more that compare their political disagreements to a lovers' spat; he implicitly

³ Scotland was not a wealthy nation, and the king's own frivolity with the country's finances is well documented. See Julian Goodare, 'James VI's English subsidy' in *The Reign of James VI*, ed. Julian Goodare and Michael Lynch (East Linton, Tuckwell Press, 2000), pp. 110-26

⁴ The so called Treaty of Berwick which was eventually signed on 6 June 1586 was an Anglo-Scottish league which sought to mark an end to cross border hostilities.

compares his relationship with Elizabeth to a series of *unequal* relationships, with *himself* as the dominant partner.⁵ Thus, the creation of this new persona was to acknowledge existing differences (Even so this coldness did betwixt us fall/To kindle our love as sure I hope it shall.), but more importantly it sought to reverse the realities of their relationship. Whilst I agree with Herman's analysis of the sonnet's contents, I am inclined to question his conclusion that in writing it James had made a 'tactless blunder' (Herman, *Royal Poetry*, p.163). It is unlikely that James would have been oblivious to the manner in which his sonnet would be received, especially given the deliberately provocative images he employed in order to give weight to his intended message. Moreover, he actually sent the text twice in the belief that Elizabeth may have been unaware that it was written in the king's hand. This emphasis on kingly authorship surely implies that James was seeking to make a point here, and was thus aware of the way in which it would be received. Written at point where Elizabeth had firmly refused to offer any guarantee of James succession, and *after* the signing of the Berwick treaty, the context of the letter and sonnet adds further weight to the supposition that James knew exactly what he was doing in sending it. In other words, the king had little to lose at this stage by implying that he was unhappy at the way in which their professional relationship was progressing. His hopes of initiating a change were unfounded, however, and his efforts subsequently dismissed by Elizabeth in her refusal to acknowledge her receipt of the letter or engage in any form of literary game play of her own.

Regardless of Elizabeth's refusal to reply to James's calculated appeal this particular correspondence exemplifies the importance of literary role-play within both Scottish and English Renaissance networks. For both monarchs the epistolary medium would retain its value as a diplomatic tool. The process by which agreements could be facilitated is exemplified in the sonnet above. By implying that Elizabeth has an obligation to write a poem of her own the king provokes a writing game where the queen's reciprocity would signify her willingness toward an agreement and a reconciliation of previous disputes. Viewed within a broader context, this sonnet, and the epistle to which it was appended, becomes a sort of social currency between the two nations, a mode of exchange in which the author is free to experiment and adapt a literary persona in response to political realities. The external factors which facilitate this kind of literary shape-shifting are often, although not exclusively, negative; reactions, I will argue, to what Roderick Lyall has termed the sixteenth-century 'European background of crisis and response'.⁶ In the sonnet above James reacts to his own 'crisis', namely his inability to retain a positive political and diplomatic relationship with a nation that holds the key to Scottish stability, and a monarch who can facilitate the Stewart ascendancy. He does

⁵ Peter C. Herman, *Royal Poetry: Monarchic Verse and the Political Imaginary of Early Modern England*, (London, Cornell University Press, 2010), p.163

⁶ Roderick Lyall, 'James VI and the sixteenth-century cultural crisis' in *The Reign of James VI*, ed. Julian Goodare and Michael Lynch (Tuckwell Press, 2000), pp. 55-71

this by attempting to overcome their diplomatic rift by assuming a conventional literary persona with which to appeal to her better nature.

The preoccupation of my first chapter, then, will be an assessment of the political bartering that James and Elizabeth shared in their voluminous epistolary correspondence and the degree to which the formulation of literary identities played an important role therein. By doing so, I will discover to what extent the, at times, restrictive and confused personae James adopted were self-imposed, or whether Elizabeth's superior political manoeuvring forced him into roles of subjugation that he found difficult to overcome. Whilst I acknowledge that the use of personae as a means of countering external pressure was not a new literary phenomena in late sixteenth-century Europe, rarely would it have had such important political ramifications. Thus, this study will also demonstrate that the literary practices of Renaissance Britain were inextricable from the politics of that age and, moreover, that the eventual union of Scotland and England in 1603 was far from certain given the frequent disharmony inherent in the two monarchs' relationship.

My study of James's letters to Elizabeth will focus on a relatively short time frame: from a letter dated 27 June 1585 which sought to ratify the Anglo-Scottish league, to the bitter reaction to his mother's, Mary Queen of Scots, execution in February 1587. This year and half would come to test the authority of a young monarch at stage where he was desperate to appear credible and independent in the eyes of his southern neighbour. Regrettably for James, Elizabeth was equally keen to assert her own power over Scottish affairs. Inevitably, it was Elizabeth's authority that held sway over James, yet the latter's correspondence displays repeated attempts to counter these realities by employing literary personae in a number of different ways: to appeal, provoke or reason with Elizabeth as she continued to undermine his sovereignty. My primary desire, therefore, will be to assess how successful James was in his attempts to counter Elizabeth's encroachment upon his own political affairs with his use of literary personae, and in doing so, whether he was able to emerge as an equal sovereign in the eyes of his 'most assured sistar and cousin', Elizabeth I.

The remaining two chapters will continue to pursue the theme of literary personae, and their multifarious uses, in relation to the verse of Alexander Montgomerie. Court poet to James VI, Montgomerie's verse was used by the king to exemplify the new artistic direction he sought for Scotland. Indeed, because of their shared artistic ideals, Montgomerie and his monarch developed a relationship that transcended the usual boundaries of sovereign and subject. Promising though Montgomerie's career initially, appeared his inability to fully adapt to the courtly life style, a failure to obtain financial stability and, finally, his attempts at religious subversion were to result in an unfortunate end to a life with a rich artistic strand. Thus, whilst my first chapter will be a discussion of literary role play within the political and diplomatic networks of Scotland and England, the remainder of this dissertation will extend that analysis to look at the ways in which personae are utilised within

the strictly literary context of the Scottish Jacobean court, with particular emphasis placed upon lyrics addressed to the king and other prominent figures of the Edinburgh cultural scene.

As the patron and catalyst of the literary establishment to which Montgomerie belonged, James is intimately connected with that world, and he too plays in an important part in the discussion of Montgomerie which follows. Indeed, in a reversal of roles, it is the king who is the recipient of appeals from a subject who feels he must conform to roles which compromise his sense of self. My second chapter will begin with a literary analysis of an overlooked Montgomerie lyric, 'The Poets Complaint of his Nativitie', a text which perfectly communicates the attenuation of identity and the resultant anxieties the poet began to experience as a figure head of the court. In this analysis I will demonstrate the manner in which Montgomerie manipulates poetic identity as a means to communicate this disaffection, as well as suggesting that the unsettling distortion of identity in the poem comes to represent the poet's inability to reconcile the very public world of the court with the private one of the self. The poet's frustration, in turn, is manifest in a desire for his own private identity to break through the veneer of the public personae he has adopted. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the ways in which the wider Jacobean writing community operated, focusing on the manner in which Montgomerie used the hierarchies and conventions of this literary network to his own ends. I will suggest that, with the poet's career in jeopardy, the exchange of literature within this society of writers and readers enabled him to project and manipulate an identity that afforded him the means to ingratiate himself to the members of this confined group (and more importantly to the king), in spite of the unknown misdemeanours he committed.

Finally, in chapter three, I will propose that the personal setbacks Montgomerie experienced during the 1590s allowed him to emerge as a 'poet-sovereign', free from the pressures of the courtly world he had inhabited. Building upon critical analysis of the masterful sonnet sequences the poet addressed to those he deemed responsible for his professional downfall, I will demonstrate how the private identity previously distorted by his public personae is eventually projected to the fore, and much like his monarch James VI, how Montgomerie is finally able to attain the freedom of self-expression which had previously eluded him. This dissertation, then, will offer a study of the ways in which personae were used within the fertile literary networks of the Jacobean court from the perspective of both monarch and courtier. It will suggest that both men experienced a desire to project an identity that was hindered by the realities of their environment, and that this, in turn, would lead to the adoption of personae as a means to communicate their frustration, and effect change. Moreover, I hope to show the ways in which the concerns of a monarch in sixteenth-century Scotland could come to mirror those of a courtier, and the ways in which the boundaries between subject and sovereign were often uncertain and prone to fluctuation.

Chapter 1: ‘your owne honor [...] lieth a-bleeding in the bowels of many an Inglas man’: James VI - Scottish King, English Subject?

Having introduced this dissertation with an illuminating verse epistle penned by the royal hand of James VI of Scotland, this chapter will look at their revealing communiqués in more detail extracting, from the myriad political manoeuvrings and authorial posturing the corpus presents, a more accurate account of James VI’s approach to governance and kingship. My analysis of James’s writings to Elizabeth, a surprisingly understudied area of both English and Scottish monarchic literary history, is indebted to very recent research which has sought to impress the importance of the ‘sociology’ of such early modern texts, encouraging an approach which favours a consideration of the ‘social and cultural practices of manuscript and print’ (and the epistle), considered alongside the ‘context in which they were produced, disseminated and consumed’,⁷ considerations which, I hope, will allow us to view these royal letters with a much greater degree of clarity and a more nuanced understanding of the messages they contain. Within the present study, this means being aware of the social functions such epistles perform and conform to, within the royal, and more generally political, forum of sixteenth-century Britain, such as the diplomatic relations they maintained with regard to contemporary political events and the ever-changing roles both sender and recipient conform to in their correspondence.

The early modern epistle carries with it a certain degree of social and cultural expectation, the effects of which are acutely felt in the royal correspondence presented below. Although the letters of James VI and Elizabeth I are those of two monarchs, their extant correspondence is not one founded upon equity. James was undoubtedly the monarchic ‘prentice’ so to speak, and as we shall discover, this relationship is exacerbated by the attendant formalism and acknowledgement of social hierarchy inherent in the epistolary procedure. However, these social protocols could also provide a framework within which the sender could explore his/her voice, and even bend the rules from time to time. Thus, James is able to subvert the expectations of his English readership in order to gain political concessions or, on occasion, smooth out some of the diplomatic kinks which so hindered the advancement of Anglo-Scottish relations. One other very important aspect of these royal exchanges, and letter writing more generally, that we must consider, is the notion of reciprocity; the early modern epistle, a much more expressive form of address than the generally more perfunctory approach to letter writing evidenced in the medieval period in Britain⁸, was often reliant upon a similar textual acknowledgement in return to generate its meaning. As James himself puts it ‘dead letters cannot

⁷ *Material Readings of Early Modern Culture: Texts and Social Practices, 1580-1730* ed. James Daybell & Peter Hinds, (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2010)

⁸ However, it is clear from recent research that the adaptability of the epistle as a literary medium conducive to the wielding of political power became apparent in Southern Europe before its potential was realised elsewhere. Carolyn James, ‘Marriage by Correspondence: Politics and Domesticity in the Letters of Isabella d’Este and Francesco Gonzaga, 1490–1519’ in *Renaissance Quarterly* Vol. 65, No. 2, Summer 2012, pp. 321-52

answer no questions’ - and it is within the practice of ‘textual exchange’ that epistles operate; they were integral documents in the construction of the ‘virtual’ networks of their age. Indeed, the geographical distance between Edinburgh and London forced the bi-national conversation to inhabit the textual realm rather than oral discussions between heads of state. It is surely correct, then, to

consider letter-writing not as an oral performance or as a direct mirror of speech, but as a self-conscious, premeditated mode of communication amenable to drafts, to second and third thoughts, and to understand that communication by letter, based as the letter is on distance and physical absence, was not the same as immediate, face-to-face conversation.⁹

Thus, in the lack of face-to-face conversation the conventions and formalities of the epistle naturally encourages the cultivation of personae, which provides both sender and receiver with an engaging narrative and literary exercise and accentuates the importance of the textual world because of the lengthy time between dispatch and arrival (which could be often be several days or longer). Furthermore, as Allinson has commented, ‘[t]he exchange of royal letters was a highly ritualised process, and once a regular cycle of send-and-receive was established it could not be broken without some dishonour’¹⁰; epistolary exchanges carried with them certain rules of engagement. The reciprocal nature of these texts often leads to a propensity for private divulgence; the sender must concede something for a worthwhile and similarly revealing response. These divulgences were often delivered using literary convention, such as the sonnet which introduced this thesis, as well as containing a measured dose of obfuscation, occasionally resulting in humorous exchanges. What is omitted from a letter can often tell us much more than what is written. Thus, the personal concessions that the sender is willing to make highlights the importance of the early modern letter as a socio-historical document that can enhance our understanding of Scotland’s often turbulent relationship with England, especially at such an important historical juncture. Furthermore, they offer us the opportunity to decode the interior thought processes of the individuals who shaped the Anglo-Scottish policy which would eventually lead to the modern notion of Great Britain.

The material aspects of letter writing are equally revealing, often shedding light on the messages contained within. For example, are the texts under scrutiny holograph versions or were they written by a royal amanuensis; who accompanied the letter to its recipient and of what importance, if any, are they to the letter’s contents? I will balance such material approaches with more conventional textual analysis in order to present a more comprehensive scrutiny of the king’s correspondence. Finally, as Cedric Brown has recently pointed out, as modern readers of epistolary correspondence we

⁹ Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England, 1500-1700*, (Newark, NJ, University of Delaware Press, 2005), p.32

¹⁰ Rayne Allinson, ‘“These latter days of the world”: the correspondence of Elizabeth I and James VI, 1590-1603’, in *Early Modern Literary Studies* 16 (2007), pp.1-27

are intruders upon often very private communiqués.¹¹ After some four hundred years the morality of reading such texts is no longer an impediment. None the less, we should be aware that we read from a privileged position. In a culture where the wilful construction of alternative textual identities was a viable and successful means of coercing ones readership, and therefore implementing ones authority, if read with an understanding of the formalities and protocols which accompany the epistle, modern readers can glean very rare insight into the interiority of monarchic relations. The corpus of James's letters is a broad one, thanks in large part to J.P.V Akrigg's near-complete compilation of the king's letters spanning most of the his reign.¹² As already indicated, I will be concentrating on a relatively short time-span, but one which is witness to some of the more intriguing political brinksmanship James and Elizabeth engaged in. This should demonstrate the various ways in which James adapts his writing style, both as he begins to mature as a monarch and as the context in which he writes dictates.

The early years of James's reign were, as J.H. Burns has noted, dominated by the various familial and religious factions who sought to ingratiate themselves within the royal household, ultimately seeking to effect political and religious change favourable to their own concerns.¹³ One such notable individual was the Catholic earl of Arran, James Stewart. A 'handsome man, eloquent, intelligent, and of great presence and considerable charm',¹⁴ he was made a Gentleman of the King's Bedchamber in 1580, and, until his arrest in 1585, continued to receive from James various public roles and offices, including that of Chancellor of Scotland. In that capacity he passed the Black Acts, which would significantly confer control of the church back to the crown, inflaming an already sore relationship between monarchy and kirk. He was also a lord of Session, and later, keeper of Edinburgh castle. Burns proposes that the ascendancy of James Stewart, as well as that of another prominent Catholic, Esme Stewart, later Duke of Lennox, should 'preclude our regarding the king himself as being in control of the government during the early years of his reign'. Arran's growing fame and influence during the first half of the 1580s, and more importantly his Catholic faith, as well as the perception that the young James did not operate full control in the affairs of his country, was a concern for those who favoured the continuation of the Calvinist faith in Scotland, as well as those south of the border keeping a watchful eye on Scottish political proceedings. James's impressionability at this stage in his reign also offered Elizabeth herself the opportunity to capture the imagination of the newly crowned Scottish king and, in turn, she could begin to influence the affairs of the Scottish nation in a manner

¹¹ Cedric C. Brown, 'Losing and Regaining the Material Meanings of Epistolary and Gift Texts' in *Material Readings of Early Modern Culture: Texts and Social Practices 1580-1730* ed. James Daybell & Peter Hinds, (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2010), p. 46

¹² It should be noted that although Akrigg's volume is a valuable, and indeed the only, collection of James's extant letter writing, his Anglicisation of the king's writing is a drawback, especially for those approaching the letters from a purely literary or historio-linguistic point of view, as much of the rhetorical practices inherent in the writing are unfortunately lost.

¹³ J.H Burns, *The True Law of Kingship: Concepts of Monarch in Early-Modern Scotland*, (Oxford, 1996), p.223

¹⁴ Rosalind K. Marshall, 'Stewart, James, earl of Arran (c.1545–1596)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2006

fruitful for the stability of her own kingdom. In her desire to remove the persistent threat Arran posed to her own machinations, and to initiate the required discussions which would bring about an Anglo-Scottish treaty, Elizabeth sought to use every diplomatic avenue open to her. In June 1586 she dispatched her able ambassador Edward Wotton to Edinburgh in a bid to gently coerce the king, as well as discreetly taking advantage of the services offered to her by the protean and shady courtier Patrick Gray. A trusted advisor to Mary Queen of Scots during her Scottish rule, Gray was a figure who would subsequently secure an important role throughout the negotiations for an Anglo-Scottish coalition. So adept was he at negotiating the hurdles of courtly diplomacy, one contemporary commentator described him as containing ‘all the mingled potentialities of talent and treachery of the former archangel’.¹⁵ In the end, however, Elizabeth resorted to blackmail, sending James the gift of ‘eight couple of buckhounds and some horses of particular beauty’, a move which the king sought fit to respond to as, ‘the most acceptable present that euer came to me’. To accompany these gifts, Elizabeth also sent ‘loving letters’ to James; and it is the king’s response to Elizabeth’s ‘generosity’ that I wish to turn to now, and from which I quote at length.

Madame and dearest sister, I must most earnestly crave and beseeche you to appardone me for my long delay of wrytting, in respect I thocht youre ouin seruant Robert Alexander, the bearrar heiroyf, fittest to be the carrier of it, for if I hadd als oft written thanks within this short space as ye furnisheit subiect, than had I but importunatitt your eies with reading, and yit done nothing that had worthily requited the great good will of such a prince as ye are [...] By no deidis (much less wryttes) I can worthely requyte your using of me. For, sett asyde youre louing dispatche, to my full contentment, of my lait ambassadoure, justice clerk, as also the directing towardis me of so honourable and so wyse a gentleman, so well affected to the amitie and so well thocht of by you, as Edward Uotten, youre ambassadoure, as also the directing since of so discret a gentleman and so fitt for his office as your forsaid seruant Alexander, with a number of so faire and good horses as he brocht (the most acceptable present that euer came to me), as also your louing letters sent als uell [...] sett aside, I say this forsaid tokinnis and proofes of youre inuard friendship, your only memoriall tuching the horsis sent to me with youre forsaid ambassadure hath more bound me unto you then any letteris, presntis, or deidis of amitie, that euer ye haue or coulde haue bestoued upon me; for not only wayre the wordis thairof most louing, but also the purpois discouered such kinde cairfulness in you ouer me, as it seemis rather to haue proceidit from sum *alter ego* than from any strainge and forraine prince, quich I can on [sic] no wayes requite bot by ofring unto you my person, and all that is myne, to be used and imployed by you as a louing mother wold use hir naturall and deuoted chylde. Thus, praying you euer to use and imploy me so, I pray most humbly the creatour, madame and dearest mother, to preserve you from all youre foes quhatsumeuir, to cast thaim in their ouin snayers, as he did Haman, and to increase your days in all honour and happiness, as they haue euer yet bene. From Dunfermling, the xx7. day of June, 1585.

Your most louing and deuoted brother and sonn,
James R.

¹⁵ G. R. Hewitt, ‘Gray, Patrick, sixth Lord Gray (c.1558–1611)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004

Madame, I haue, according to my promeis in my last letter, bene trying out yone alledgit report of the lord Maxuellis concerning you, quhich, so farr as I can tray [sic], uas indeed uanted of by him, as also that he had the lyke fauoure of me, both untrue ... (*Letters of Elizabeth and James VI*, p. 15)

James was not unaware of the 'game' being played by Elizabeth in this exchange, and his letter is presumably suitable in its accordance with the role he was expected to assume after receiving such gifts. Therefore James adopts the role of subordinate in the exchange, one he was presumably not quite so opposed to after being sent 'tokinnis and proofes' of the queen's 'inward friendship'. Yet below the surface of the epistolary conventionality James makes Elizabeth aware of his own knowledge of the political game being played. Indeed his proclamation that the rather base, and somewhat humorous, level Elizabeth has sunk to in order to win the king over is a legitimate representation of her 'inward friendship' is an impetuous and sarcastic remark acknowledging the questionable motivations behind her gifts. The king continues his subtle affront by claiming that

not only wayre the wordis [in Elizabeth's letters to James] thair of most loving, but also the purpois discouered such kinde cairfulness in you over me, as it [the gifts] seamid rather to haue proceedit from sum *alter ego*... (*Letters of Elizabeth and James VI*, p. 15)

There are two distinguishing features in this extract. The first is the role of submission James appears to acquiesce in when he states that Elizabeth's kind words and gifts display a 'cairfulness in *you over me*' [my italics]; considered words which dramatise the relationship between the two monarchs in this particular exchange. Is James willing to submit to Elizabeth, offering to her his very person in the style of the besotted lover? Apparently not, for he counters such submission by, for all intents and purposes, observing that Elizabeth as the generous monarchic gift-giver is so out of character as to be an *alter ego*, a statement which itself shows an acknowledgement that these letters revolve around role play, and that the persona presented on the page does not necessarily mirror the sender in actuality. So whilst James is willing to assume the subordinate, perhaps even feminine, role in this exchange, whereby he offers himself up in exchange for lavish gifts, he none the less subverts this role by subtly undermining Elizabeth's character and motives. In doing so he asserts his own position of authority within the political context which fuelled the letter.

James assumes a number of roles in this example, then; he is at once the overcome lover and the knowledgeable king, aware of the weighty political implications that fuelled the queen's motives, and finally, loyal child, offering her his 'person, and all that is myne, to be used and imployed by you as a louing mother wold use her naturall and deuoted chylde'. Indeed, Allinson has noted that James's continued reference to Elizabeth as a mother-figure, especially during negotiations for the Anglo-Scottish alliance, was a measured rhetorical device aimed at strengthening the perception in England that James would be the rightful heir to the throne. This point is given further weight by the absence of

any such filial address once it was clear she would not commit this promise to paper. It also acts to reinforce the hierarchy of Elizabeth as mentor and James as subordinate, highlighted by their significant age gap, and it is a characteristic of their relationship which is present throughout their writings.

What are we to make of such numerous role-shifting within one short text? Certainly, that the sixteenth-century epistle is a protean form of address which provided a versatile framework in which to appeal to one's recipient. However, in this particular example, I would argue James may have been harnessing the role(s) he was expected to conform to as a means of cynically questioning Elizabeth's motives, whilst simultaneously offering assent to her political desires. Indeed, the Biblical allusion which is cited towards the letter's close, the story of Haman, whose desire to massacre the Jews was thwarted by a noble and morally superior queen, Esther, is arguably another very subtle way of undermining Elizabeth's motives. Moral superiority is not a characteristic Elizabeth displays in these dealings, and this allusion may be a coded reference to her political manoeuvring in this matter. Regardless of such cryptic jibes, James appears willing to begin negotiations for the Anglo-Scottish treaty, signing his letter 'Your most louing and deuoted brother and sonn, James R'; he was aware of the gains an Anglo-Scottish treaty could afford him just as much as Elizabeth could see the benefits of control in Scotland's political decisions. One final characteristic of this 1585 epistle is the post-script appended after the king's signature. Its contents are of no real significance here, rather it is the abrupt change of tone from playful role shifting to the more mundane, matters of state that is worthy of recognition, magnifying the degree to which the main body of the text is a performance piece. Indeed, it emphasises the degree to which, what Brown terms, 'gift codes' are central to such exchanges. In this case, James acknowledges the queen's 'gift codes' by conforming to the role he was expected to play, and in turn begins negotiations for the defensive treaty. Indeed, it may be argued that he *overplays* the character(s) he was expected to assume, and in an act of hyper-adaptation, undermines the very textual game the queen sought to promote. In his own very subtle way, James makes Elizabeth aware of his own gifts for dissembling.

In this case, then, James was able to match Elizabeth's scheme¹⁶, yet by and large his attempts at furnishing the identity he wished to project south of the border are rendered ineffectual by her pithy and acerbic responses. Indeed, in our approach to these texts, we must note that control over one's *textual* persona, which as we have seen was an integral aspect of early modern letter writing, was equally in the hands of the recipient when penning their response. This can be seen in a letter Elizabeth writes to James regarding his much sought after annuity, which he refers to variously in his

¹⁶ This particular letter is not a holograph edition, and therefore we cannot be sure it was the king himself who composed it.

previous correspondence with Elizabeth as an “instrument”¹⁷, a euphemism which seeks to retain a sense of decency without openly referring to money. Her response displays an unwillingness to allow James to retain such basic kingly rights in a teasing manner:

touchinge [on] an “instrument”, as your secretarye terme it, that you desiar to haue me signe, I assure you, thogh I can play of some, and haue bine brought up to know musike, yet this discord wold be so grose as wer not fit for so wel-turned musicke. (*Letters of Elizabeth and James VI*, p.30)

By referring to the treaty which would grant James an annual income of £5000 Scots as an “instrument” he initiates a formality in their correspondence, in which the foresaid “instrument” symbolises his need for hard cash as well as communicating the tacit wish for such a need to remain unspoken. By belittling the king in this way, Elizabeth refuses to comply with his slight of hand, breaking the ‘rules’ of their correspondence. This is a revealing and, depending on ones disposition, humorous example of the way in which refusal to comply with the accepted norms of epistolary exchange can allow the sender to gain the upper hand; something Elizabeth clearly considered an advantage in these monarchic exchanges. It is telling, therefore, that the letter James sent in response to this patronising ‘misunderstanding’ does not make direct reference to her sarcasm. However, the autograph does reveal a certain coldness and reservation, signing off with ‘Hir most beholden louing friend and cousin’. On this occasion, the filial signature which normally closes the king’s letters to Elizabeth, variations of ‘your most loving/affectionate brother and cousin/son’ is dispensed with, replaced by the more measured ‘friend’. By circumventing the conventions which give their correspondence a veneer of personal warmth and cordiality, James distances himself from the somewhat humiliating response he received from his older cousin. This small, but not insignificant, change in the autograph displays how the correlation between the context and tone of what is being communicated can affect the formal choices of the sender, and can offer a way of voicing displeasure without resorting to open statement.

In a letter dated August 1585, and written by Elizabeth in the aftermath of an altercation which seriously hampered the progress of the Anglo-Scottish league, James Stewart, earl of Arran, once more represents the thorn in Elizabeth’s side. Whilst attending a day of truce between the two nations held at the border in July 1585, attended by several Scottish and English dignitaries, a fight broke out in which one of Elizabeth’s favoured courtiers, Sir Francis Russell, was mortally wounded. Indignation on the English side soon followed, and Arran’s numerous enemies, both north and south of the border, conspired to implicate him in the murder. After James himself professed his own

¹⁷ The Dictionary of the Older Scots Tongue defines ‘instrument’ in this context as ‘A notarial instrument; a formal and duly authenticated record of any proceeding or transaction drawn up by a notary public; a similar record made by the scribe of a court. In this precise sense only Scottish’.

'honest innocence in this lait mischief', Elizabeth wrote a remarkably unsettling letter, couched in pleasantries but with an underlying fury at such an event taking place. It displays her full wrath in a calculated manner, as well as leaving readers in no doubt as to where the balance of power lay in her and James's relationship. Her letter highlights the apparent contradiction between the amicable friendship fabricated and projected by the proposed alliance and the actual subjugation of James by Elizabeth that is worthy of scrutiny here as it highlights the primary point of contention in their relations: Elizabeth's refusal to acknowledge James as a monarchic equal.

Right deare brother, I find to true the Frenche adage, *Qu'un mal ne vint jamais seul*; for as the horrible soudain murder of my most faithful suiect and most vaillant baron was unto me a heartsore and grievous tidings, so was it tenfold redoubled with knowelege that a Skot shuld dare to violate his handes on any of our noble bloude, in a peacable concord, whan our friendship shuld haue sent out his hottest beames to the kindeling of the entire affection of both realms; that any of that nation shuld ons dare haue had a thought to maculate suche a contract of amitie. I perceive, by my ambassador, that your grief is litel les than suche a hap deserveth, and do perceave that you haue not spared your wel-fauored, to cause him answer suche a suspicion. I thinke myselfe, therefor, greatly obliged unto your care for my satisfaction, and theirin I thanke you for being so considerast of your owne honor, which, I assure you, lieth a-bleeding in the bowels of many an Inglas man, until ful rayson be made for suche a treacherye. (*Letters of Elizabeth and James VI*, pp.19-20)

Elizabeth immediately refuses to engage in the conventional formal pleasantries which mark their more harmonious correspondence, opting for the more abrupt and blunt address of the opening line. The true extent of Elizabeth's regard for her northern neighbour is plainly stated, as she begins to voice her apparent disgust that a Scottish nobleman should 'violate his handes' upon the superior race of the English. She later refers to Scotland simply, and disparagingly, as 'that nation'. Comments such as these indicate that whilst Elizabeth had envisaged that a Scottish and English 'friendship shuld sen[d] out his hottest beames to the kindeling of the entire affection of both realms', it is clear such a 'bilateral' arrangement would always be on her own terms. Thus, the death of one her own courtiers at the hands of a Scottish nobleman, one James's favoured courtiers, becomes a much more infuriating act, and represents insubordination to the perceived superiority of the English. From the evidence of this letter, at least, Elizabeth's 'friendship' with James, and Scotland itself, was one of necessity rather than genuine affection. However, it is her subsequent comments regarding James's reactions to the events which begin to colour our understanding of their relations at this time, and the extent to which James was expected to defer to Elizabeth's authority. Not only must James react in a way that is pleasing to Elizabeth, ('your grief is litel less than such a hap deserveth'), but her ambiguous statement thanking him for the consideration of his own 'honor' in the matter, not to mention the violent imagery she goes on to associate with it, leaves a decidedly bitter taste.

What exactly is Elizabeth suggesting in this statement? She may be genuinely thankful for James's protestations of his innocence and his avowals of treating those responsible with swift justice

in accordance with her wishes. One other possibility, given the proximity of her statement to a warning regarding the king's 'wel-fauored' James Stewart, is that Elizabeth is advising James to set aside his allegiance to James Stewart in favour of offering up his court favourite to her. This ultimatum forces the king to show where his true priorities lie, as well as removing an obstacle which prevents Elizabeth from gaining a greater amount of control of the king's decision-making. This hypothesis is given further weight if we consider the caution against duplicity the queen sent to James a month earlier: 'who seaketh two stringes to one bowe, the may shute strong, but never strait'. Statements such as these send a message to the Scottish king which effectively states that any unwillingness to tow the English line will result in political pressure from England. James could ill afford such complications.. In doing so she starts to erode the sovereign authority of his position within Scotland, in favour of her own interests, regardless of whether her advice is the correct course of action.

These examples seriously call into question Rayne Allinson's claim that 'once James was crowned King of Scotland...he became Elizabeth's "deare brother", having officially entered into the political "family" of European monarchs.' As will become clearer, it was conversely Elizabeth's refusal to let James enter, at least in her own mind, a European community of monarchs which formed the basis of their unequal correspondence, and was the driving force behind the subjugated personae James was to adopt in his writings to her. It is not unreasonable to expect a certain degree of deferral to Elizabeth both because of the significant age gap between her and James, and the country over which she ruled. None the less, James would be fully aware of his royal status within the wider context of Britain, and to a lesser extent Europe. As his kingship matured Elizabeth's treatment of him would become increasingly troubling, and as events progressed, threatened to cause a more permanent rift in their relationship.

Exchanges in which the sender seeks to undermine the recipient's authority is regular tactic throughout James's correspondence with Elizabeth, not always bad natured, usually to the advantage of the latter. James was clearly concerned by the increasingly compromising positions he was forced into when dealing with the English monarch, and her propensity to disregard his royal authority. However, the narrative identity he assumes in response to this pressure is baffling, choosing personae which tend to reinforce his own subjugation rather than alleviating it. In a letter dated 24 December 1597, prompted by Elizabeth's repeated failure to reply to his courteous inquiry regarding his annuity, he voices his anxiety at being the 'ignored lover' on the one hand and the king of Scotland on the other, two roles which sit rather uncomfortably with one another. He opens:

Your silence hath been so long, and I have so long awaited upon your breaking therof, that I am forced now at last to remember you again by these few lines. I have written three letters unto you and have never as yet received answer of any of them either by word or writ, which

moves me to think that my letters never came to your hands – especially my last wherein I wrote as plainly and as lovingly unto you as I could’ (*Letters of James VI&I*, p. 152).

Deliberate or not, James’s opening paragraph has distinctly amatory overtones, which force the king into assuming the role of snubbed lover/courtier once again. This opening is puzzling when considered alongside the sentiments the king goes on to make regarding his need for the “instrument”, where by he breaks the epistolary convention by openly demanding that Elizabeth recognise his status as a king of the realm, thereby acknowledging him as a sovereign equal.

I pray you, madame, excuse my impatience in this. It is no wonder I weary to be a longsum suitor as one who was not born to be a beggar but to be begged at ... Remember that, as I am your kinsman, so am I a free prince. The disdain of me can be no honour to you ... let not the circumstances of the giver disgrace the gift, for I weary to be a suitor. (*Letters of James VI&I*, p.152-3)

Here James chooses to express his apprehension regarding the diminishing status of his monarchic authority *vis-a-vis* Elizabeth in what amounts to the pleading of a prospecting, and ignored, suitor. If James’s decision to express his misgivings at Elizabeth’s refusal both to reply to his letters and acknowledge his kingship in this particular form was a rhetorical decision, whereby his plight is analogous with that of his fictional persona, the ‘longsum suitor’, then it is unclear whether he was entirely successful; I am aware of no English response to the letter. In the absence of a reply, then, when compared to the instances of role-playing discussed above where the king asserts his presence precisely by *conforming* to the epistolary conventions expected of him according to the context in which he writing, his persona appears less confused. In this instance, the opposite is true. James is unsure exactly who he wants to be in this letter. Stepping outside the role he first initiates, he goes on to write as the ‘king of Scotland’, free of literary embellishments, unable to contain his frustration within the roles expected of him. Whilst his complaints are valid, and understandable, his means of appealing to the queen lacks the sense of decorum present in his other, more successful writings to her. It is telling, therefore, that by casting aside the conventions which would disallow an open and vocal complaint to Elizabeth, such as the one above, the king presents himself as a petulant and expectant monarch. He appears confused, rather than assured, in the roles he wished to conform to. Indeed, this letter hints at a niggling uncertainty regarding the degree to which he should feign deference to the queen and how to communicate his distaste at being ignored in spite of his royal position. On this occasion, then, perhaps James’s anger got the better of him; it is certainly clear that in the face of Elizabeth’s silence he found it difficult to maintain the conventions expected of him in his writing. James’s distaste at Elizabeth’s refusal to acknowledge and respect his status as king of his own realm which paradoxically causes him write to her in his own, unadorned, voice. Unfortunately, she wasn’t listening.

Shortly after the ratification of the Treaty of Berwick, on July 6 1586, an attempt was made on Elizabeth's life by an English Catholic, Sir Anthony Babington. After his capture he implicated Mary Queen of Scots in the conspiracy, and so precipitated her eventual execution; with the treaty signed and James content with his annual English gratuity, Elizabeth could presumably see no real hindrance to the elimination of her troublesome adversary. Thus, the perception of James as an authoritative king and loyal son would be seriously tested by the events which followed, accurately commented upon by Susan Doran in her reappraisal of the king's reaction to his mother's trial and subsequent death.¹⁸ Elizabeth's conduct towards James took on a more personal and potentially damaging role during the Mary Queen of Scots affair, as she consistently ignored the king's pleas to spare his mother's life. Understandably James felt a need, both personally and politically, to assert his royal authority upon England in the hope that he could turn the tide of English suspicion against his mother. Thus, for the sake of his kingship in Scotland and for the benefit of his perception in Europe and perhaps, despite his early estrangement from Mary, his personal connection as a son, James must now counteract English authority over himself and his realm. Doran writes

...dynastic honour demanded that he [James] protect his mother's life and avenge her death...Elizabeth's claim to have jurisdiction over Mary undermined his own rights and status as king of Scotland...Elizabeth's action [ignoring James's request to spare his mother's life] therefore, implied an overlordship over his realm, a claim which the Stewart king's had long resisted. (Doran, p. 599)

How, then, did James attempt to intervene on his estranged mother's behalf? Appealing to Elizabeth using plain and direct language was a strategy that very rarely succeeded, if at all: a fact James came to realise himself and confirmed in a letter dated 26 January 1587, 'I doubt greatly in what fashion to write in [this] purpose, for ye have already taken so evil with my plainness as I fear if I shall persist in that course ye shall rather be exasperated.' Thus in the same letter it is clear that the king adopts a different approach because 'nature and honour so greatly obliges' him to do so (i.e. because he cannot be perceived to allow his mother's execution to go ahead).

What thing, madame, can greatlier touch me in honour that [am] a king and son than that my nearest neighbour, being in straightest [friend]ship with me, shall rigorously put to death a free sovereign prince and my natural mother, alike in estate and sex to her that so uses her ... [w]hat monstrous thing is it that sovereign princes themselves should be the example-givers of their own sacred diadems profaning! (*Letters of James VI and I*, p.82)

James's appeal operates on two interrelated associations with Elizabeth, one of friendship, and the other as a monarch: a variation of what Janel Mueller has termed James and Elizabeth's 'friendship –

¹⁸ Susan Doran, 'Revenge her Foul and Most Unnatural Murder? The Impact of Mary Stewart's Execution on Anglo-Scottish relations' in *History* 85 (2000)

kingship – kinship graduation'.¹⁹ In this instance, James uses these separate forms of association with the English monarch both as a means to appeal for his mother's life and as a mode of criticism. Underpinning James's claims to monarchic superiority over Elizabeth regarding the matter in hand is his reference to the 'divine right of kings' theory, a subject he would later expound upon in his 1598 publication *The True Lawe of free Monarchies*. This mode of governance is premised on the idea that a monarch is exempt from any form of earthly authority or judgement by virtue of being God's supreme representative on earth, and was a mode of statesmanship that Elizabeth herself espoused. The allure of the absolute power it grants to monarchs need hardly be explained. Thus, James seeks to expose Elizabeth's theoretical hypocrisy by stating that her proposed execution of his 'natural mother' would be a violation of such a divine right. By using this mode of appeal James is able to acquire a morally, and politically, superior position (the moral element being further emphasised by conveniently reverting to his position as Mary's son as well as referring to her as his 'natural mother', symbolically a breaking of his *de facto* role as Elizabeth's child) and is a significant reversal of their usual epistolary roles. In this case it is James, rather than Elizabeth, who provides political advice to a fellow monarch. However, the king understandably chooses to ignore that his mother was only nominally queen of Scots at this point and a symbol of religious and political subversion in England.

James's second mode of appeal is more subtle in its ability to criticise Elizabeth's motives and simultaneously elevate his own kingship. He appeals to Elizabeth's better nature, and her undeniable power as queen of England, by opining that she should operate self-restraint rather than vengeance. However, in a further reversal of roles, James's next statement is at once advice, warning and retribution.

Then what should move you to this form of proceeding (supposing the worst, which in good faith I look not for at your hands)? Honour or profit? Honour were it to you to spare when it is least looked for; honour were it to you (which is not only my friendly advice but my earnest suit) to take me and all other princes in Europe eternally beholden unto you in granting this my so reasonable request and not (pardon, I pray you, my free speaking) to put princes to straits of honour where your general reputation and the universal (almost) misliking of you may dangerously peril both in honour and utility your person and estate. (*Letters of James VI & I*, p. 83)

The king's 'friendly advice' is given by one who proclaims himself a member of the pan-European fraternity of princes, who upholds the belief that Elizabeth is seriously jeopardising her status as one of the most respected heads of state within Europe by proposing the execution of a fellow monarch. This 'advice' is all the more biting for its ability to seriously call into question Elizabeth's judgement from a political and diplomatic perspective. The king's rhetoric effectively operates to exclude her

¹⁹ Janel Mueller, "'To My Very Good Brother the King of Scots': Elizabeth I's Correspondence with James VI and the Question of the Succession" in *PMLA* (2000) 115.5, pp. 1063-71

from the 'princes of Europe' to which James has tentatively affiliated himself. Perhaps the king gets somewhat carried away in his veiled warning that such a turn of events would be a threat not only to England, but to Elizabeth's person as well, yet this letter displays a more assured and confident writer than the one we have seen elsewhere. This, I would argue, is due to the personal connection James has to the letter's subject matter and to his morally and politically superior positioning.

With the role of monarch and dutiful son being played, his final role as Elizabeth's friend and 'nearest neighbour' acquires a perfunctory note, a means of signalling that he is willing to negotiate providing his mother's life is spared: yet another token of epistolary exchange, if perhaps more important than some of the previous examples. Considering the sustained undermining of Elizabeth's political motivations on display in this letter such an amicable assurance of friendship could be interpreted as being either deliberately patronising or a seriously misguided attempt at diplomatic negotiation; it surely would have incensed Elizabeth all the more. None the less, the king's mode of appeal is an intelligently devised one, projecting an authority that had previously been disallowed to him by Elizabeth, using the queen's rash proposition of his mother's execution as a deed which would contradict her own stance on the power of monarchs, whilst simultaneously being the friend bearing such news and offering advice to solve the problem.

Sensing that James had gained the upper hand in this written exchange at such a crucial point in their relations, Elizabeth's response is one of caution, as well as an unwillingness to cede any control to James during the negotiations for his mother's life. Her argument is one of self-preservation, with an accompanying tone of incredulity at James's previous textual venture and a disregard for the gravity of the subject they are discussing.

Be not carried away, my deare brother, with the lewde perswations of suche, as instead of infowrming you of my to nideful and helples cause of defending the breathe that God hath given me, to be better spent that spilt by the bloody invention of traitors handz.

Upon the proposition that Mary be kept in the custody of a disinterested third party, Elizabeth is candid, yet her acknowledgement that James had no other choice but to appeal indicates that she is willing to overlook his previous impetuosity:

Suppose you I am so to truste my life in anothers hand and send hit out of my owne? [...] Let your councelors, for your honour, discharge ther duty so muche to you as to declaire the absurdity of such an offer; and for my part, I do assure myselfe to muche of your wisdome, as, thogh like a most natural good son you charged them to seake all meanes the could deuis with wit or judgement to save her life, yet I can not nor do not, allege any fault to you of thes persuations [...] I doute not but your wisdome wil excuse my nide, and waite my necessitie, and not accuse me of either malice or of hate. (*Letters of Queen Elizabeth and James VI of Scotland*, pp.43-4)

By invoking self-defence as her primary motive for carrying out the execution, as well as communicating her understanding that as Mary's 'natural good son' James had no other choice but to petition Elizabeth for her life, she is able to take much of the venom out of the king's previous correspondence. James's appeals had come to naught. And with that, at Fotheringhay Castle on 8 February 1587, Mary Stewart was taken to the block, reportedly affirming her adherence to the Catholic faith till the end. Moreover, James's attempts to rearrange the power relations the two monarchs shared using the morally and politically superior arguments against his mother's execution had failed.

The letter James sends in the immediate aftermath of his mother's death, although reverting back to the coded references and politic statements that characterise much of their other writings, employs epistolary conventions with a certain irony to express his bitterness at the events that have transpired. It is a letter which also seeks to communicate his willingness to cooperate provided he gains significant concessions for Elizabeth after her 'monstrous act':

Whereas by your letter and bearer Robert Carey, your servant and ambassador, ye purge yourself of yon unhappy fact, as on the one part considering your rank, sex, consanguinity, and long professed goodwill to the defunct, together with your many and solemn attestations of your innocency, I dare not wrong you so far as not to judge honourably your unspotted part therein. (*Letters of James VI & I*, p. 84)

Accordingly, lurking barely beneath the surface of James's social conventionality and decorum are the marks of his anger toward Elizabeth's part in his mother's death.²⁰ Thus, references which belie a greater degree of importance, much like "instrument" in the previous examples, take on a mordant and clinical tone. For example, Mary's death and the annoyance she caused Elizabeth are described as 'yon unhappy fact', and later, she is simply described as 'defunct'. Moreover, he once again reminds Elizabeth that she is not so different from his now deceased mother; both were female monarchs descended from the same bloodline. However, unlike the previous reference to their apparent similarities, James uses it on this occasion to elicit anger in his recipient rather than reason. His final scathing sentiments, making reference to the English monarch's 'unspotted' role in the execution are sardonic, but allow the king to present a much stronger case for the proposal that appears later in the draft.

And as for my part I look that ye will give me at this time such a full satisfaction in all respects as shall be a mean to strengthen and unite this isle (*Letters of James VI & I*, p. 85)

²⁰ Elizabeth did indeed sign the death warrant, but later informed James that she had not given orders for it to be carried out, sacking her secretary in the process and denying any direct involvement in Mary's death.

Regardless of the disguised insults noticeable in the first half of this short letter, the latter half marks it out as perhaps one of the more important historical documents relating to Anglo-Scottish negotiations, for James voices his willingness to forego retribution for his mother's death if Elizabeth will commit to a Jamesian accession to the throne ('a mean to strengthen this isle'). The simplicity of this phrase masks the importance of its implications. The king's previous insults are a mere formal posturing, one that may have been expected by the English, and allow him to emphasise just how accommodating he is being by turning a blind eye to Elizabeth's involvement in his mother's death, which in turn makes his request all the more difficult to refuse. In this instance, the king takes advantage of a situation in which he was bound to be the morally superior monarch, and uses epistolary convention in a manner which emphasises his indignation, but also his willingness to overlook it. The Camden Society edition of James and Elizabeth's letters comments upon the material aspects of this particular letter, which are revealing. Written in the king's own hand, it does not contain his autograph, but does bear witness to numerous deletions and scorings, indicating that James spent much time mulling over his written response to his mother's execution, finally arriving at the decision to cast aside Scottish resentment for greater power in the future.

It would be prudent to consider the two monarchs' stubborn and unstinting rhetorical posturing which sought to promulgate what Mueller terms their 'friendship-between-equals' is just that, a rhetorical device symbolising a friendship and *entente cordiale* between two nations that was not necessarily mirrored in actuality. Thus we must treat statements that appear to take James and Elizabeth's 'friendship' at face value with caution. Whilst

[f]riendship roles in the Elizabeth-James correspondence ramify, for the most part, through their discursive cultivation of two entirely commonplace themes in the period of the Renaissance: (1) that each is as watchful and caring for the other as for a second self and (2) that each will neither flatter nor mislead but only speak the truth (Mueller, p. 1066),

we must also acknowledge that these friendship identities are part of a wider epistolary procedure which operates within the historical context of their writing. From the evidence we have encountered, any suggestion that either monarch cared equally for the other or, indeed, that neither flattery nor deceit plays an integral part in their correspondence is a misrepresentation of the textual evidence. Discounting the historicity of these texts, then, is to misread them entirely. In order to penetrate the obfuscation and dissembling these personae often project, we must place them within such an historical position to truly understand the ways in which they operate and the valuable historical insight they provide for modern readers. The relationship the two monarchs cultivated, and pandered to, throughout their correspondence comes to mirror the political realities of Anglo-Scottish relations. Thus, from the outset, James assumes the subordinate role whilst Elizabeth is happy to 'advise' the king on a myriad of political, religious and diplomatic affairs. Her advice is usually beneficial to

English interests if not Scottish ones. When Elizabeth first initiated formal correspondence with her Scottish neighbour in 1585, it is unsurprising that she quickly assumed a position of mentor to him, given his relative inexperience and youth. If role playing is an integral component of the early modern epistle, then the inherent inequality in James and Elizabeth's relationship certainly exacerbated this characteristic.

However, as James's reign progressed it is precisely this unequal correspondence, and it has to be said his general submission to Elizabeth, which leads to the numerous political complications that characterise Scotland's relationship with England. Consequentially, his letters display an increasing frustration at Elizabeth's refusal both to indicate his accession to the English throne and acknowledge him as a sovereign equal. Whilst James was eager to employ personae in his writings as a means of appeal, he was not always as deft as his recipient. The roles he adopts are often too varied, seeking to communicate too much, and for this reason the figure presented to his reader is not as assured as Elizabeth. Rather than those adopted identities becoming vehicles for expressing anger at his subjugation, they are representative of the king's fractured sense of identity, and his inability to cope with it. Unsure of how to present himself to the English monarch, James proffers several identities, none of which cultivated a perception of royal authority.

James was aware that the basis upon which Elizabeth first initiated her written communication with him was quelling his attempts at repositioning their friendship, and therefore relations with Scotland and England, towards a more even footing. His letters are often characterised by the jarring collision of the supposed authority he represented as a king, and the submissive role he was forced to assume in the textual realm he inhabited with Elizabeth. Thus, a 'crisis of identity' is borne in his writings which symbolise the containment of both his role as king of Scotland and as a quasi-subject to the English monarch, perhaps best exemplified by the 'longsum' suitor who shares the same textual space as king of Scots. From the evidence the corpus of his letters to Elizabeth presents, he was a monarch who consistently sought confirmation of his authority from Elizabeth, something she was reluctant to do, as it would represent a political concession and a loosening of grip on Scottish affairs; it was an authority which the king tried, often in vain, to regain on the page. Arguably the events surrounding Mary's execution, and the king's reaction to them, afforded him the means to appear more authoritative in his writings to Elizabeth. Taking advantage of the unfortunate situation, James positions himself as the morally superior monarch, highlighting the extent to which Elizabeth's actions would undermine the way she is perceived amongst the monarchies of Europe. More importantly, however, James communicates a tacit acceptance of the events that have unfolded provided his position as heir to the English throne is now assured. Whilst he does not gain this assurance, there is a marked alternation in the way Elizabeth interacts with James after this event. Whether this change was due to feelings of guilt, or admiration that James was willing to put political

realities before his emotions is unclear. What is undeniable is the degree to which textual exchange and the use of personae were integral in the king's pursuit of altering her perception in England.

Chapter Two: ‘my persone is in prisone pynit’ – the transition from subject to sovereign in the verse of Alexander Montgomerie

The previous chapter demonstrated that an understanding of the political and diplomatic crises which arose during James VI’s reign, and in particular his differences with the English crown and its encroachment upon his own sovereignty, can be better understood by analysing his written responses to them, with particular emphasis placed upon the ways in which he harnessed literary personae in those writings as means of appeal, reconciliation or retribution. Aside from indicating that the epistle is a medium conducive to literary role play, James’s letters, I would argue, display a ‘crisis of identity’, one whose roots can be traced to the unequal status of his acquaintance with Elizabeth, and one in which he was forced to occupy both a role as monarch of Scotland and subject of England. Thus the conflation of these two identities, subject and sovereign, is manifested in his writings in the multitude of personae he adopts and the anxious tones in which those speakers address their interlocutor.

If James VI’s sovereignty was not perceived as a sufficiently strong enough force to effect a significant change in English relations with Scotland, his status as king and ruler of his own nation was not in doubt in the minds of his various artistic courtiers, who each praised the unerring qualities and enlightening nature of their new king if they wished to prolong their careers. The basis of this chapter, then, will be to continue to explore the theme of role play and literary identity within the sixteenth-century Scottish writing network as an immediate reaction to the external experiences of the author, concentrating particularly on the tumultuous relationship that James VI had with his best-known court poet Alexander Montgomerie. In the latter’s lyrics we are confronted with copious evidence of a poet whose career was affected by the decisions of his monarch, and whose bitterness at his eventual downfall from the Edinburgh court was the cause of much inner turmoil, ultimately represented on the page as a questioning and exploration of the social and cultural role the courtier played. Like his monarch, he too experienced his own ‘crisis of identity’, ultimately caused by the cultivation of a persona which must conform to the shared cultural mores of one’s environment, but which is not necessarily compatible with one’s individual moral code.

Relatively little is known of Alexander Montgomerie before his entry into James VI’s court c. 1580. His literary fame was cemented shortly after this date when he took part in the literary game of flying with the already established courtier Sir Patrick Hume of Polwarth. Montgomerie gained a symbolic victory over his opponent on that occasion, and he would later reminisce that his ‘highnes laughed som tyme for to look / Hou I chaist Polwart from the chimney nook’,²¹ the chimney nook here

²¹ *Alexander Montgomerie. Poems* ed. David J. Parkinson (2 vols, Edinburgh, STS, 2000)

representing initiation into the court, and more importantly, the king's favour. This event, as well as James's exemplary use of Montgomerie's verse in his poetic treatise, 'Reulis and Cautelis' (1584), marks the beginning of what promised to be a brilliant career. The poet's cultural services to the court continued throughout the first half of the 1580s, but were cut short when, in 1586, he was dispatched to the Continent in a military capacity to fight on the Protestant side against the encroaching Catholic Spanish; he would remain there for two years, his activities remain tantalisingly unknown.²² This departure marks the axis upon which the poet's fate turned, for upon his return to Scotland in 1588 he was to find the pension granted to him by the king under the auspices of the bishopric of Glasgow challenged in the Edinburgh courts by William Erskine, an Edinburgh socialite and favourite of James VI. With the king's marriage to Anna of Denmark in 1589, the growing importance of the English accession in regards to his foreign policy and the Scottish Crown's repeated differences with the kirk, the appeals of an impecunious poet, although not completely ignored, increasingly fell on deaf ears as the 1590s came to a close. With no real income to speak of, and his once prevalent position in the artistic circles of court increasingly under threat, the embittered personae and narrative voices in his poetry, railing against the moral inconsistencies of courtly life, more and more began to mirror the realities of Montgomerie's own existence. These events were to prove a grievous blow to the poet's spirits, and his remaining years were largely consumed by the protracted legal battle which followed; not surprisingly his literary output parallels his increasing isolation from the court of which he was once a stalwart, containing futile appeals and expressing defiance and anguish at the king's eventual abandonment. James VI is far from exonerated in the demise of his poet laureate.

To further complicate matters, their relationship to each other was not one based simply upon sovereign and subject, and from Montgomerie's verse there is more than a suggestion that the two men shared some semblance of equality, both harbouring similar concepts of literary expression. They were, thus, complementary figures within their own cultural-political sphere. There was a symbiotic relationship in which the king was reliant upon Montgomerie's literary talents in the advancement of his cultural model, and Montgomerie was equally reliant on his monarch for patronage.²³ Moreover, the familial connection between the poet and the king, noted by Roderick Lyall²⁴ (Montgomerie's great-great grandfather's aunt, having married John Stewart, earl of Lennox, an ancestor of Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley, directly connected Montgomerie to the king's father), rather broke down the typical barriers of sovereign and subject. That the two men shared a significant personal connection, one that spanned over two decades, rendered occasionally in their own writings, is beyond doubt. Given the events which surrounded Montgomerie during the 1590s, and his

²² For speculation on this issue see Roderick J. Lyall, "Alexander Montgomerie and the Netherlands, 1586-89", *Glasgow Review* 1 (1993)

²³ Sarah Dunnigan, *Eros and Poetry in the Courts of Mary Queen of Scots and James VI* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), p.143

²⁴ Roderick Lyall, *Alexander Montgomerie: Poetry, Politics and Cultural Change in Jacobean Scotland* (Tempe, Ariz., Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005)

acrimonious dealings with the court, it is unsurprising that his relationship with the king had soured. Despite their previous disputes, James felt compelled to honour the personal and artistic connection he once shared with Montgomerie in a poignant epitaph written shortly after the poet's death in 1598. It is in these lines that the personal warmth and affection James felt towards Montgomerie is most keenly felt, sentiments made all the more acute by the unfortunate circumstances in which the poet spent his final decade.

What drousie sleep doth syle your eyes allace
Ye sacred bretheren of Castalian band
And shall the prince of poets in our land
Goe thus to graue vnmurned in anie cace
No; whett your pens ye imps of heauenlie grace
And toone me wp your sweete resounding strings
And mount him so on your immortall wings
That euer he may lie in eurie place
Remember on Montgomries flowand grace
His suggred stile his weigtie words diuine
And how he made the sacred sisters nine
There montaine quitte to followe on his trace
Though to his burial was refused the bell
The bell of fame, shall aye his praises knell.²⁵

In this, one of James's more accomplished sonnets, the poet immediately references the literary coterie of which Montgomerie was nominal head, the so called 'Castalian band', reminding his readers, presumably Montgomerie's contemporaries and fellow courtiers, not to forget their 'prince of poets'. Yet, whilst the king is keen to direct attention to the once prominent position Montgomerie occupied within his own artistic scheme, it is clear that by the late 1590s he was in danger of passing 'vnmurned in anie cace'. That it was James himself who ultimately failed to intervene on Montgomerie's behalf whilst the poet fought in vain for his disputed pension, predictably, goes unmentioned. Undeterred by this possible moral crux, James continues by paying homage to the stylistic ingenuity which undoubtedly marks Montgomerie out as the most gifted poet of his generation, whose ability to combine light-footed rhetorical flourish with 'weigtie words diuine' provided the model espoused by the king himself. James retrospectively embellishes his own artistic venture and Montgomerie's primary role therein by interlacing the epitaph with the commonplace mythological imagery of his court, the 'sacred sisters nine', who he boldly states, followed the poet's artistic lead, as well as highlighting the 'flowand grace' which the king hoped would become a stylistic prerequisite for any prospecting artistic courtier. Montgomerie's cultural leadership, reiterated once more in ll. 11-12,

²⁵ *The Poems of James VI of Scotland*, ed. James Craigie (2 vols, Scottish Text Society, 1958)

consolidated by the king's insistence upon the poet's superior poetic ability, are all reasons why, he insists, Montgomerie should be remembered after his death.

The king's epitaph, however, did not prove to be prophetic. Outlawed from his country of birth Montgomerie sought refuge in the abbey of Wurzburg, but later returned to Scotland, intending to fight for the Catholic cause in his native country. The historical changes wrought upon the British Isles, culminating in the Union of the Crowns, and particularly the liquidation of the Edinburgh court which resulted from that Union, meant Montgomerie was a largely forgotten figure, both immediately prior to, and after, his death. Whilst the adoration the poem seeks to communicate relies a great deal on hyperbole, and readers should be wary of such an over-romanticised vision of poetic unity and mutual artistic creation implied in the text, this sonnet none the less neatly encapsulates the formal characteristics of Montgomerie's verse, as well as the artistic status he acquired. He was a poet whose literary ability facilitated his court ascendancy but, one whose underlying suspicion of that environment, compromised his reputation and ultimately cost him his livelihood. The relatively rare act of a sovereign paying homage to his subject in verse form is further testament to the fact that more than any other poet of the court, Montgomerie's own history appears more personally related to that of his monarch; James's political decisions are indelibly linked to both Montgomerie's successes and failures as a courtier.

By praising three related aspects of Montgomerie's poetic technique in particular, his 'flowand grace', 'sugared style' and 'weighty words divine', James places Montgomerie within a wider European artistic milieu, one in which deft artistry and elaborate ornamentation were a means of masking, as well as dealing with, underlying tensions stemming from the pressures inherent in the concentrated court environment, such as maintaining one's reputation and social status within an elect group of individuals as well as remaining on amicable terms with the sovereign head of state. Roderick Lyall has commented upon the sixteenth-century European cultural backdrop which facilitated this type of artistry. Placing Montgomerie, and the Jamesian court more generally, within the wider context of sixteenth-century conflict and societal change, and focusing specifically on those formal aspects of Montgomerie's verse which may or may not have been mannerist²⁶ or, indeed, a precursor to Baroque ostentation, Lyall proposes that Scottish courtiers fundamentally experienced the pressures of late sixteenth-century court life no differently than their Continental counterparts. He writes:

Faced with a world in which religious belief was becoming increasingly polarised, in which the power of princes was being wielded with greater display and the uncertainties of the life

²⁶ Mannerism is a term usually reserved for the visual arts, although it does have growing currency within the realms of literary criticism. Usually attributed to works of art from c.1520-1600, or between the High Renaissance and the Baroque, Mannerism has defied concrete definition. Deriving from the Italian *maniera*, or 'stylishness', it was first used pejoratively implying an 'over-elaborate distortion, an imbalance, and a neurosis' but has since been used to indicate 'grace, poise, facility and sophistication' in any form of artistry. For a general introduction see *The Oxford Dictionary of Art*, ed. Chilvers and Osborne (Oxford, 1988), John Shearman, *Mannerism*, (London, Penguin, 1967) provides a more detailed account.

of a courtier, even a courtier-artist, were more and more manifest [...] artists responded both by breaking up the symmetries of the highly unified order of the earlier Renaissance and by seeking forms of expression in which *uncertainty was masked by verbal grandiloquence and the splendid elaboration of detail.*²⁷ (my italics)

In light of Lyall's own analysis of Montgomerie as a Scottish representative of Continental literary fashions, James VI's commentary upon Montgomerie's 'sugared style' becomes increasingly apposite. Whether or not Montgomerie's verse can assuredly be described as mannerist in style or intention is a question which will have to remain unanswered at this point. However, as we have seen from the brief sketch of Montgomerie's life above, the poet certainly experienced 'uncertainties' relating to his court position, and these uncertainties inevitably spawned poetry that would relate these professional anxieties in the contemporary styles. I would add to Lyall's analysis that these pressures not only inspired verse which displays 'verbal grandiloquence' and the 'elaboration of detail' but also a crisis of literary identity, manifested in the incongruous relationship shared between the author and the narrator of his verse. Indeed, the identity of the speaker in much of Montgomerie's verse is difficult to determine, at one moment the poet employs the voice of his narrator, at others he speaks directly to his readership. Such ambiguities of literary identity, I will argue, betray an uncertainty regarding the individual's role within the social and cultural fabric of the environment in which they operate. This phenomena inevitably arose from the Renaissance writer's desire to look inward as a means of expressing his external world, the 'increasing power of princes' over their subjects referred to above, and from the evidence of the previous chapter, the copious implementation of malleable personae adaptable to the ever changing needs of the writer. Ultimately, this crisis of *literary identity* is indicative of a deep questioning of identity itself.

If Montgomerie's mercurial relationship with his monarch provided the basis for some of his most tortured musings, then his mastery of the lyric, with its condensed and concentrated form of expression in conjunction with the formal artistry and changing cultural priorities outlined above, allowed him the means to communicate his personal grievances in a pithy and often acerbic manner. The evolving role of the lyric in the European literary consciousness meant that, broadly speaking, the medieval fashion for exploring the human condition and man's connection to the world around him in relation to an exterior set of values, such as religion, increasingly had to compete with a desire to look inward, to use individual experiences and anxieties to comprehend external pressures. In this way,

[t]he literary lyric became the true-to-life linguistic imprint of the workings of the individual human psyche, instancing an emergent awareness that the formation of self and of identity is a process equivalent to, as well as determined by, the weaving of words that is language.²⁸

²⁷ Roderick J. Lyall, 'Montgomerie and the Moment of Mannerism' in *Scottish Literary Journal* Vol. 26.2 (1999) p. 41-58

²⁸ Theo van Heijnsbergen, 'Modes of Self-Representation in Older Scots Texts' in *Older Scots Literature*, ed. Sally Mapstone (Edinburgh, 2005), p.314

Thus, placing Montgomerie within the context of the Jacobean court, where the poet's experiences of that environment are rendered in his verse, we can gain insight into the ways in which the inherent contradictions and back-biting resulting from its social code began to affect his 'individual human psyche'. By analysing the variegated use of personae in the Montgomerie lyric, a picture begins to emerge of a poet whose sense of identity became endangered by the inherently protean nature courtiers had to adopt, and that this led to a fracturing of identity between the public proclamations of the poet and his privately held convictions. Only when Montgomerie was finally free of the court environment was he able to overcome these difficulties, emerging as a sovereign poet, an individual, in his own right – the word 'sovereign' here anticipating the discussion of the writing of James and Montgomerie below.

All of these themes, from Montgomerie's entry into the court, his stylistic ingenuity and his relations with James VI, can be seen operating in 'The Poets Complaint of his Nativitie', a lyric which takes as its central theme a poet whose existence is made unbearable by his ill fate, the torment of which is made all the more acute by the fame he garners as a result of his literary ability. Moreover, the speaker repeatedly proclaims his inability to exercise control over a fate controlled by the courtly environment he operates in. The lyric contains seven tightly constructed rhyme royal stanzas, employing some of the rhetorical craftsmanship for which Montgomerie was famed, as well as displaying a curious oscillation between the negation of identity itself (the narrator's adamant wish for death in the first two stanzas) and the contrary desire for his identity to be known and propagated. This effect is achieved by the poet's gradual introduction of biographical details, which when considered in their entirety leave no doubt as to the actual identity of the speaker.

Since that the Hevins ar hinderers of my hap
And all the starris so strange against me stand
Quhy kild not Jove me with his thunderclap?
Hou soon the Midwyfe held me in hir hand
Quhy wald not Mercure with his wrethin wand
Depryve me baith of senses, wit and shape?
Since that the Hevins ar hinderers of my hap. (Parkinson, *Poems* vol.1,10, ll. 1-7, p. 18)

Opening with the refrain which henceforth closes each stanza, reinforcing the belief that the narrator is never fully in control of his existence, these lines are in essence an insolent defiance of the life the speaker has been granted: an uncertainty regarding his existence expressed in a series of rhetorical questions delivered to his, as yet, unspecified interlocutors. Proffering to the reader the intimate moments of his birth the speaker immediately attempts to reverse the instant of his

conception (indeed the moment of being placed in the hands of the midwife is considered a propitious occasion for Mercury to spirit the future poet away). It is not that the speaker is retrospectively requesting his own end that is immediately surprising, but the very nature of the death he wishes had befallen him at the hands of Mercury. The god of eloquence, Mercury is a '[m]ediator between gods and mortals, between the dead and the living',²⁹ and in this capacity, the speaker suggests, should have deprived the poet of life in order to avoid the turmoil related in the remainder of the text. Thus, in his retrospective analysis the speaker desires, respectively, his 'senses', or his ability to detect and process his surroundings to be nullified. This request is followed by a desire for his 'wit', "the mind as the seat or source of consciousness, thought, knowledge or memory" and finally his 'shape', or his physical being,³⁰ to be reversed. These desires hint not simply at death, but the unmaking of both corporeal and spiritual: the cancellation of identity itself.

The poem proceeds with its theme of 'self-cancellation', taking advantage of the carefully constructed rhetorical pattern which seeks to communicate the speaker's desire to pre-empt his own birth:

Quhy thoild my Mothers bouels me to breath?
 Quhy wes hir belly not my bureall bed?
 Quhy wes not hir delyverie my death?
 Quhy suelt I not so soon as we wer shed? separated
 Quhy come the Muses and my Cradle cled?
 Quhat movit these Vestall Virgins me to wrap?
 Since that the Hevins ar hinderers of my hap. (ll. 8-14)

Thus, the poet inserts a word with a positive connotation, or one signifying birth, such as 'belly' and 'deliverie', only to negate the positive with a word or phrase constituting death, as in 'bureall bed', the more obvious 'death' and 'shed', ending each line. The iambic rhythm (in which the positive is placed roughly on the fifth stress whilst the negative is placed on the tenth, endowing each line with a hidden emphasis on the transformation from birth to death, as in 'Quhy wes not hir delyverie my death?' 1.10). Intelligent use of alliteration plays to his theme, inflecting each line with a bitter yet alluring vehemence inherent in the older Scots tongue. Whilst the narrator's questioning has a distinct tone of resignation, these allusions to death have more than a hint of dramatic posturing; indeed there is no open statement of the speaker's intention to end his own life, but rather a petulant questioning indicative of a speaker thriving on his own melancholy. The delivery of each question merely affirms an ironic resignation to *life*, rather than death. Indeed, the title of the poem emphasises this very point, death is only implied rather than openly stated, whilst 'nativitie' is overtly signified. Perhaps with this

²⁹ *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1949), p.529

³⁰ Dictionary of Older Scots Online, [http://www.dsl.ac.uk/, accessed 3 September 2011]

realisation, the remainder of the poem departs from its hitherto gloomy protestations of a life not worth continuing, to the actual events which have come to shape it.

Quhy wes my Mother blyth when I wes borne?
Quhy heght the Weirds my weilfair to advance?
Quhy wes my birth on Eister day at morne?
Quhy did Apollo then appeir to dance?
Quhy gaiv he me good morou with a glance?
Quhy leugh he in his golden chair and lap?
Since that the hevins are hinderers of my hap (ll. 15-21)

These familiar biographical sketches, which render the narrator's life in relation to the mythographic figures which populate verse from the Jamesian court, begin to adumbrate the speaker's persona with details which imply that he is, in fact, Montgomerie himself. The apparent date of the poet's birth signifies a deliberate shift from death to (re)birth as the primary thematic anchor of the text. The gestation from unidentified poet to recognisable public figure of the Scottish court is completed by the speaker's account of Apollo, who, laughing in his 'golden chair', grants him his favour. This loose sketch runs uncannily parallel with what we know of Montgomerie's own initiation into the royal coterie. Given this context, Apollo's presence within the poem is of some importance. However, as with numerous other Montgomerie lyrics, his deliberate ambiguity tempts multiple interpretations of his work, and I would suggest that Apollo, the figure typically representing James VI in Scottish court poetry of his reign, is not the benevolent figure rendered here. It is left unclear, for example, whether his appearance is just that, to appear in front of the speaker's eyes, or if 'appeir' in this retrospective context, means rather to *seem* as if Apollo was dancing, instead masking malevolent intentions which Montgomerie's readership would recognise. Although no direct accusations are made against Apollo in the text, the distinction acquires more importance as it progresses, when the mythological imagery is momentarily dispensed with.

It is abundantly clear by now, as it most certainly would have been to those who included themselves within the royal and literary networks of the Jamesian court, that the speaker is voicing the concerns of his author. The narrator becomes a self-dramatised approximation of the poet, a mask that Montgomerie can use to disguise those vague anxieties and pressures referred to throughout the text. Montgomerie and his narrator begin to share a textual space in which the differentiation of the two identities becomes difficult; Montgomerie implies his identity rather than openly declares it. He employs the voice of his narrator to dramatise and mythologize the events of his own life, and in doing so conflates the fictive Montgomerie on the page with the 'real' Montgomerie who penned the lyric. The 'real' Montgomerie lurks beneath the ornamental surface of his verse, coquettishly implying his identity without formally unveiling himself to his readership.

The affirmation, rather than negation, of identity is completed in the fifth stanza where the continued use of biographical detail is combined with ingenious use of poetic device which is simultaneously used to encrypt and pronounce the identity of the speaker, neatly exemplifying the anguish of an author who has a desire to proclaim his existence, but is impeded by factors not within his control:

Quhy wes I nurisht with the Noble Nymphs?
Quhy wes I fostred for to flie with fame?
For drinking of these Ladyis hallouit lymphs
EXTOLD AMONG YE RARE MEN wes my name.
Quhy did Apollo Poet me proclame?
To cleith my heid with his grene laurell Cap
Since that the Hevins ar hinderers of my hap. (ll. 29-35)

The question continues to provide a rhetorical framework for the poem, which now relates to the narrator's successes at court following his encounter with Apollo/James VI. Indeed in a particularly fine Montgomeriean line, 'fostered to flie with fame', he once more raises the spectre of ambiguity: is Montgomerie simply referring to his successes as an artistic courtier, ascending the heights of his fame, or more alarmingly, given the extra connotation 'flie' has in Older Scots, is the poet telling us fame has spirited him away?³¹ Given the poem's paradoxical theme of a courtier whose famed literary ability has garnered him a celebrity and social respectability which has compromised his very identity, it is a likely supposition. Ultimately, though, it is the anagrammatic flourish situated at the centre of the stanza which furnishes the reader with the greatest understanding of the ways in which Montgomerie felt his identity was being compromised. The anagram is of the author's name, and most obviously fulfils the purpose of indicating the true identity of the speaker without resorting to open statement, much like the metaphorical account of his advance through the court hierarchy related above, or indeed, the sonnet used by James VI to address Elizabeth I discussed previously. This device would afford Montgomerie the ability to write more candidly than he might have without such literary guises, allowing him to explore the emotional and psychological torment his narrator experiences in direct relation to the court, as well as significantly blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction. In doing so, the world of the Jamesian court is fantastically and unsettlingly mirrored in each stanza.

However, given the ambiguities inherent in Montgomerie's aulic verse, I would argue the anagram hints at a more urgent need to reaffirm an identity he perhaps felt he was in danger of losing, for reasons that are not entirely clear at this point. The line seeks to affirm, to emboss upon the

³¹ The possibility of fame having positive attributes is somewhat tempered by the inclusion of 'flie', which can mean 'To put to flight, frighten away'. Oxford English Dictionary Second edition, 1989; online version December 2011. [<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/71549>, accessed 25 January 2012]. Earlier version first published in *New English Dictionary*, 1897

psyches of those readers who comprised the networks of the court, the name of Alexander Montgomerie, and in doing so the poet betrays the uncertainty of his own experiences and existence within the royal coterie and the cryptic parallel he shares with the narrator of the poem. This is confirmed by the outward message the anagram contains. Relating to the name encrypted therein, it not only seeks to immortalise the poet but to do so within the context of Montgomerie's contemporaries, those 'rare men' who participated in Scottish cultural advancement. In this moment Montgomerie unburdens himself of the pressures his narrator relates throughout the text, leaping forth from the page to announce his own existence as distinct from that of his narrator, and in doing so takes ownership of his own identity. This is precisely what his narrator never manages to do, whose life, we are repeatedly reminded, is hindered by forces over which he operates no control.

The reasons for Montgomerie's uncertainty over his own identity, voiced through the anguished questioning of his narrator, are perhaps clearer in the penultimate stanza where an allusion is made to the king, and the use of metaphor to describe the court becomes less urgent:

Quhat helpeth me thought Maja or Minerve
 With hevinly fury haif my spreit infusde?
 Quhat do these sacred Ceremonies serve?
 Quhilks they haif on thair auin adoptit wsde
 Quhat profits me vhom fortun hes refusde?
 Thought with my King in credit once I crap
 Since that the Hevins ar hinderers of my hap. (ll. 36-42)

It is important to note that this lyric makes no outright allusions to the court as the *source* of the narrator's woe, indeed, we are repeatedly informed that it is the somewhat abstract forces of fate which are the cause. However, it is insinuated as the text progresses that the *location* in which fate bestows misery on the narrator is the royal court and that of James VI in particular, and that within this atmosphere his 'spreit' has been 'infusde' with 'fury', ultimately resulting in the anguished protestations and shifting sense of identity the poem presents. Perhaps, then, it is only natural that the narrator, speaking on Montgomerie's behalf, vents his frustration, in a passive-aggressive manner, towards the court, its ceremonies and, ambiguously, the king himself. And it is within this courtly context that we are confronted with a gradually shifting sense of identity, one in which the narrator's voice eventually overlaps, and at one point becomes engulfed, by that of the author. So whilst the final stanza once more adopts the dramatised poet-narrator of the beginning, Montgomerie none the less lingers, imparting a final, unresolved message: regardless of his virtuous nature and intentions, the court is none the less an environment where 'wylis avails and Veritie is vane' (l. 46).

Quhy wes my will to Vertue mair then Vyce?
 Quhy wes I faithfull and refusde to fane?
 Quhy soght I aye warme water vnder yce?

Quhair wylis avails and Veritie is vane
Forgive me this, and if I do-it agane
Then tak me with the foxis tail a flap
Since that the Hevins are hinderers of my hap. (ll.43-9)

Van Heijnsbergen, analysing the jarring relationship between author and speaker in the sixteenth-century Scottish lyric comments that the

persona's imagined conversation with the 'other', the [audience] outside the text, turns into – in fact can be a mere pretext to – an act of self-identification in which the distance between author and speaker has become very narrow. Speaker and author, drawn into an internal dialogue in a genre that only has one personal pronoun available to accommodate such a dialogue, inevitably begin to share pronominal space. However, due to the clearly defined conventions of the form itself as well as the dramatic postures that are a part of the genre, tensions remain between author and speaker. What results is the dramatization of the 'I' rather than a straightforward authorial take-over... (van Heijnsbergen, *Literature, Letters and the Canonical in Early Modern Scotland*, pp.318-9)

To say that Montgomerie shares 'pronominal space' with his speaker would perhaps be an understatement, for the poet's achievement in this text is to meticulously delineate the identity of his speaker from that of himself, and then to slowly conflate and eventually replace entirely this identity with that of his own, before retreating behind the mask of his narrator in the final stanza once more; the problems of identity are ultimately never resolved. It is left deliberately unclear whether the final appeal of forgiveness is voiced by Montgomerie or his narrator. In this lyric, there is simply no room for both parties, as evidenced by the abrupt uncovering of identity which yearns to announce the poet's existence to his audience. So whilst the beginning of the text, with its metaphorical account of the speaker's initiation into an artistic environment can be described as a dramatisation of the 'I', the real Montgomerie seeks to communicate his anxieties unadorned. However, the final stanza hints that the realities of the courtly environment mean that the suppression of identity will continue to be a requirement of the successful courtier. Of course, disguising one's identity within the context of the court and those who populated it was also an expected facet of the lyric genre, a convention of the form itself, which makes Montgomerie's proclamation of his own existence in the anagram, and those fairly obvious biographical details, so intriguing, for there was no real requirement to proclaim his identity given that his intended audience would have known in any case. Montgomerie certainly ignores the boundaries of convention, and in doing so, hints at an anxiety, a steady pressure, being exerted upon the 'self'.

There is no way to assign the grievances this poem expresses to a specific moment in the poet's life, although it is fair to say it is a reaction to one of the numerous disputes he had with the court's members. Indeed, the line 'Thought with my king in credit once I crap' provides firm evidence for this assumption. The unidentified dispute may have exacerbated the poet's emotions, leading to a

desire to retreat from the setting of his ill-luck (or the speaker's wish to erase his own identity) and the contrary desire to forcefully state his presence within the courtly context as the author himself (the anagram of Montgomerie's name and the message it contains). Therefore, this lyric as a whole encapsulates the effects the aulic environment had upon our author, possibly related to a specific flash-point of disagreement, and more importantly his sense of identity. Montgomerie manipulates the accepted norms of the lyric by progressively blurring the boundaries between his own identity and that of his speaker, until eventually there is only room left for the author. In this way, in the face of his hindered 'hap' Montgomerie proclaims to his audience: forget me not. This proclamation could only have materialised had its author felt his own autonomy was being compromised, or indeed that the heavens were hinderers of his 'hap'.

The nature of the factors which impede his 'hap', the heavens, are left ambiguous enough to suspect that they could conceivably refer to the court itself, and thus arises the central paradox of the poem: the context in which his literary gifts operate, the Scottish court, simultaneously produces the factors which oppress his identity and wellbeing. This paradox accounts for the curious wavering and fluctuation between a desire to erase identity itself and, only three stanzas later, to heighten the sense of his own persona within the same court by abruptly proclaiming his existence to its members. Montgomerie, then, is adept at manipulating his own literary persona for rhetorical means, at once downplaying and later heightening his presence within the text. He highlights the degree to which persona was not a fixed term, but was adaptable to the needs of his situation.

The cultural context which facilitated the writing practices on display in 'The Poets Complaint of his Nativitie' was first commented upon by Helena Shire in her seminal study, *Song, Dance and Poetry of the Court of Scotland under King James VI*,³² a consideration of court artistry in Scotland in all its forms during the king's reign. She was, likewise, the first critic to venture a comprehensive analysis of the writing game at court, a practice whereby poets would use the shared social context of the court to depict its members and the events which shaped their relations, a *lusus regius* where the literary realisation of the court abounds with personalities analogous to their real life counterparts, acting in a virtual courtly world similar to the realities of the Edinburgh cultural milieu. Shire describes a courtly universe, or as she terms it a 'play world' (Shire, p.88), in which the ribaldry and ostentatious behaviour of the king and his poets, whose social gatherings often involved prolonged drinking bouts and hunting expeditions amongst other activities, began to provide the context and backdrop for a shared poetics at court. The result is a literature in which certain phrases, metaphors and personae become shared reference points for those who comprise the literary networks of the royal milieu. Thus, Shire singles out poems such as the king's 'Ane admonition to the maister poete', in which James

³² Helena Shire, *Song, Dance and Poetry of the Court of Scotland under King James VI* (Cambridge University Press, 1969)

jocularly lambasts Montgomerie for his misplaced boasting regarding the speed and capabilities of his thoroughbred and the poet's ability to ride it as part of a social gathering of court members. The final stanza of the monarch's poem thus ends on a teasing, but friendly, note:

Bot to conclud the houre appointit came
ye made you readie for to rin the race
ye brakk together & ran out the same
as robeine sayis it had bene fild your face
it chancit ye uar forrunn a prettie space
a mile or mair that keipit it sa clene
quhen a uas done ye had sa ill a grace
ye sta auay & durst na maire be sene.
Alias
Ye sta auay & luikit lyke rob stene.³³

The king badgers Montgomerie for the slow pace at which he rode, indeed so lacking in pace that he failed even to get a splash of mud on his face from the horses in front of him, and for his subsequent ill temper which eventually forced him to steal away from the other riders. Yet the poem does not simply recount a shared social experience, as Shire notes: it dramatizes the event, focussing specifically on Montgomerie's failures at the expense of his pride and legitimacy within the royal group he frequented, and is an example of what she terms the 'embellishing of social intercourse' (Shire, p.90). Once an event or anecdote is transferred into the literary sphere it is open to transformation, embellishment and hyperbole, in which the event in question merely provides the framework within which, for example, the author can criticise another member of the group or highlight a specific sequence of events for the comedic benefit of others. Noteworthy, too, is the emergence of *noms de guerre*, a technique which further aides the 'embellishment of social intercourse' (Shire, p. 90) by creating an alternative, or virtual, court populated by analogous characters which could be manipulated and shaped in order to serve the needs of the writer. Indeed, in the final line of the stanza immediately above, reference is made to 'rob stene', a name Shire identifies as a poetic alias for Montgomerie used by James VI, who in turn is addressed as William Mow on various occasions by Montgomerie.³⁴

The courtly world occupied by Montgomerie and his colleagues is transposed, manipulated and altered to be eventually expressed in the discourse of the court, an artistic environment which encouraged the cultivation of verse by a group of individuals united by a monarch who wished to

³³ *Poems of James VI of Scotland Vol. II*, ed James Cragie (Scottish Text Society, 1958).

³⁴ The names referred to in the king's poem, Rab Stene and William Mow, do refer to actual persons. Shire locates a William Mow to the Dalkeith area (Shire, *Song, Dance and Poetry*), whilst Heijnsbergen (*Literature, Letters and the Conanical*) believes Mow is a pun on the Old Scots use of the word denoting a 'derisive grimace' or a 'piece of clowning, foolery, or fun', a play on words which reinforce the convivial aspects of these 'writing games'. Shire believes Stene is based on a 'pedantic schoolmaster of Edinburgh', although from the references to Rab Stene in texts such as Montgomerie's flying with Polwart his alias appears to have taken on a teasing and pejorative aspect, depicting him with his britches falling down and other such embarrassing comical attributes.

revive and transform Scottish court literature, and make it into a manipulable cultural-political tool. Much has been made of the 'Castalian' issue within studies of Jamesian poetic practice, and the romantic hypothesis that the king surrounded himself with an artistic brotherhood, or 'band', of poets reminiscent of the French Pleiade, propagated by critics such as Shire and R.D.S. Jack. This notion has rightly been questioned.³⁵ However, the various referential indicators outlined in the passage above, together with emerging academic practices which are beginning to concentrate on the social and literary networks prevalent at court and other prominent geographical areas such as the west of Scotland, should induce a reassessment of the 'Castalian' issue as a helpful concept to describe courtly writing practices. These fashions are indicative, at the very least, of a shared cultural prerogative whose discourse was contributed by king, courtier and nobleman alike.

Shire is, however, restrictive in her analysis of the 'writing game' by mainly choosing examples that can be perceived as convivial and light-hearted, implying that the writing practices she analyses, although highly skilled examples of poetic artistry, were none the less ephemeral. Whilst the comedic aspects present in poems like the king's 'Ane Admonition' often mask more serious tones and didactic qualities, she goes on to observe that '[v]erse is used here [the Scottish court] in fun by a group of friends, King, poets and court servants. It is verse made after an ancient pattern but exercised in social undress' (Shire, p.88). Clearly the characteristics of role shifting and self-dramatisation lend themselves well to convivial settings, but as we have already seen in 'The Poets Complaint of his Nativitie', the literary characteristics of the 'writing game' could extend beyond the boundaries of entertainment, to be used in more sombre or anguished modes of address. As Montgomerie's 'hap' worsened, the communal nature of writing at the Edinburgh court could be used to his advantage, affording him the ability to use formally accepted literary practices shaped during the early years of James's reign to offer criticisms of his court companions which contain a more barbed and serious tone than the convivial and jocular examples Shire offers to support her argument.

Further evidence to support this claim can be found in a sonnet sequence written by Montgomerie addressed to his fellow courtier and musician, Robert Hudson. In this sequence, and the sonnet which immediately follows it in the Ker MS (c.1600), also addressed to Hudson, the 'writing game' as outlined above can be seen in operation in a more serious and eventually accusatory manner. Montgomerie makes clever use of the intertextual nature of courtly writing practices to seek the king's favour and, eventually, to provide moral criticism of Hudson's actions using an assumed identity. In this sequence of five sonnets, which incorporate several genres and literary styles designed to showcase Montgomerie's craft, the poet attempts to reclaim his position at court. In exile, and clearly unhappy at his exclusion from the cultural and social hub, Montgomerie relates his dreary surroundings and physical discomfort to his reader:

³⁵ Priscilla Bawcutt, 'James VI's Castalian Band: A Modern Myth', in *Scottish Historical Review* 80 (2001), pp. 251-59

My best belouit brother of the band,
 I grein to sie the sillie smiddy smeik.
 This is no lyfe that I live vpland
 On rau rid herring reistit in the reik,
 Syn I am subject somtyme to be seik
 And daylie deing of my auld diseis
 Eit bread, ill aill and all things are ane eik.
 This barme and blaidry buists vp all my bees.
 Ye knau ill guyding genders mony gees
 And specially in Poets, for Example
 Ye can pen out tua cuple and ye pleis.
 Your self and I, old Scot and Robert Semple
 Quhen we ar dead that all our dayis bot daffis,
 Let Christian Lyndesay wryt our Epitaphis.

(Parkinson, *Poems* vol.1, I, p. 112)

The opening sonnet presents his current situation: condemned to a life of exile ‘vpland’, he is physically and mentally destitute surviving on a paltry diet; in short, ‘all things are ane eik’. Contrasted against this bleak picture is the poet’s representation of the court and his desire to once more be a part of its literary culture. Thus, he expresses a desire to see the smithy smoking, a familiar ‘Castalian’ metaphor which alludes to the art of ‘making’ or forging poetry. He is, likewise, eager to reference the fraternal friendship he has with his addressee in the opening line. The notion of poetic camaraderie is reinforced in the poem’s closing, where Montgomerie includes himself and the recipient of the sonnet sequence alongside the supreme exponent of Scottish lyric verse under Mary Stewart, Alexander Scott, as well as the Protestant writer and courtier, Robert Semple. Thus, the poem’s success depends on its ability to contrast the poet’s impoverished situation with the somewhat idealised depiction of fraternal artistry that characterises the Scottish court.

Revealing though the details of this sonnet are in regard to Montgomerie’s mental and physical wellbeing, it is the manner in which he addresses his interlocutor that elucidates our understanding of courtly writing practices and Montgomerie’s role therein. Effectively opening *in medias res*, this epistolary sequence makes absolutely no concessions to an outside readership, that is, to anyone outwith the literary or social networks of the Jacobean court. Thus, it appeals to a very specific readership, and one expected to have certain foreknowledge of, and relation to, the events which surround the poet’s exile. Montgomerie takes care to relate his misgivings but not the events which surround them. Moreover, the ‘Castalian’ metaphors, fraternal unity implied throughout, and the enigmatic name dropping of the last line, a point this chapter will return to in due course, are indicative of a readership that has no need of contextualisation. It is a sonnet whose meaning is generated by a concentrated social and cultural environment. Whilst this sequence is nominally

negative connotations of insidious and treacherous behaviour. In fact, Regina Sheibe, in her meticulously compiled *Catalogue of Amphibians and Reptiles in Older Scots Literature* cites John Stewart of Baldynnies in the entry for snake, or asp, ‘the venom of an asp[ide] lies behind the lips of Flattery’ (p.161)

Thus, if we read the poet’s metaphor with this in mind, Montgomerie claims not to be a courtier prone to flattery for immoral or self-serving reasons. Rather he is the lizard, whose fixed glance was representative of love and affection, he is a courtier whose allegiance and affections stem from this simple affection and dedication, not for conceited or contrarious reasons: ‘Loue vhome they lyk, for me I loue the King’ (Parkinson, *Poems* vol.1, III l.12, p. 113), he boldly proclaims. However, the differentiation between courtiers who resemble the snake and those who resemble the lizard becomes confused, as Lyall has noted (Lyall, *Alexander Montgomerie*, pp.216-17). The poet appears to suggest that there is, in fact, no clear distinction between the two categories, but rather that both can reside within the one individual (‘one shap, one subject’), a satirical pun on royal subjects perhaps. Given the ingratiating nature of the poem it is unsurprising that Montgomerie goes on to imply that, unlike the duplicitous and conceited courtiers who surround the king, *his* character has no such moral inconsistencies. We should perhaps be cautious giving credence to Montgomerie’s claim that ‘I can not skan these things above my skill’ (Parkinson, *Poems* vol.1, III l.11, p.113).

The argument Montgomerie pursues here is more than a little surprising, for a number of reasons. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the hypocritical and self-serving nature in which he ingratiates himself with the king, an act he is, after all, quick to criticise in other courtiers (l. 9-10). Secondly, by implying that all courtiers, other than he, have an inherent duplicity about their character (both a lizard and a snake), whereby they offer their allegiance to their king whilst harbouring thoughts of their own court ascendancy, he rather makes himself a target of criticism for his own fellow poets, effectively requesting Hudson to curry favour on the exiled poet’s behalf (within this context it is not surprising that Hudson chose to ignore his colleague’s implied wish to show the sequence to the king).

Montgomerie, then, offers one of his many insights into the flattery and conceit of the courtly universe, and the distaste he expresses towards these deplorable traits by employing a culturally significant metaphor which highlights the refracted and disjointed nature of the personalities circulating there. It is a world of deceits, contradictions and self-serving pragmatism, one in which courtiers’ outward appearance is the benevolence of the lizard, whilst an alternative persona of the snake potentially lurks beneath. It is precisely this duality of persona, a splitting of public and private identity that leads to the lamentations of the speaker in ‘The Poets complaint of his Nativitie’, as well as encouraging the forms of ingratiation displayed in the Hudson sequence. And, indeed, it is clear that Montgomerie, too, is a victim of harbouring an outward appearance of cordiality, a mask of ingratiation, whilst concealing an inner desire to ascend to, or in this case, retain, his courtly position

using false flattery. For almost every aspect of aulic behaviour he chooses to criticise is on display in this sequence. Montgomerie has the capacity to use his sonnet sequence to ‘dissipate [his] voice in a range of different tones and genres [...] in an attempt to speak through, and hide behind, a persona, a genre or another text’ (van Heijnsbergen, p.81). Implicit in this action are the falsity of his claims to moral superiority, and perhaps the purity of the love he declares for James. The indignation directed towards Hudson in the sonnet which directly follows the sequence addressed to him is, on the surface, indicative of a rift between himself and Montgomerie.

Both the king’s ‘Admonition to the Maister Poet’ as well as the first sonnet in Montgomerie’s sequence to Hudson, make fleeting reference to a female member of the royal court, Christian Lyndsay, an elusive figure who has resisted identification. Her presence within the artistic discourse of the king’s coterie has raised the possibility of a female poetaster, most obviously because there appears in the Ker MS a sonnet apparently written by her, entitled ‘Christian Lyndsay to Robert Hudson’. There is no way to confirm Lyndsay’s authorship of this sonnet, or indeed her existence, yet its placement within the manuscript (coming directly after the Hudson sequence which itself references Lyndsay), suggests there is some connection between herself, Montgomerie and Hudson; a connection that appears not to have escaped the attention of the Ker MS’s compiler. Because of the paucity of any official historical document or written material referencing her role at the Edinburgh court, or in Scottish cultural endeavours generally, many critics have been reluctant to offer a significant analysis of the only text which can be assigned to her, or indeed its curious placement within the Montgomerie corpus. Thus, it is possible that Christian Lyndsay may have been a poetic alias similar to the Rob Stein and William Mow used in poetic exchange by James, Montgomerie and others at court. As van Heijnsbergen³⁷ has noted, the earliest of Montgomerie’s modern editors, Laing and Cranstoun, were reluctant to assign the sonnet to female authorship, whilst Sarah Dunnigan³⁸ has inferred that Christian Lyndesay may have been yet another *nom de guerre* in circulation at court, employed by Montgomerie in a calculated act of ventriloquism to attack his fellow courtier for his failure to heed the request made in the closing lines of his epistolary sonnet sequence. Heijnsbergen has been the most recent critic to study this sonnet in detail and supplies compelling evidence to suggest that Montgomerie was indeed the author of this sonnet. This possibility becomes more convincing if we compare the content, style, tone and diction of the Christian Lyndsay sonnet to that of Montgomerie’s own in the sequence which immediately precedes it.

Oft haive I hard, bot offer fund it true

³⁷ Theo van Heijnsbergen, ‘Masks of Revelation and ‘the “female” tongues of men’: Montgomerie Christian Lyndsay, and the Writing Game at the Scottish Renaissance Court’ in *Literature Letters and the Canonical in Early Modern Scotland*, ed. Theo van Heijnsbergen and Nicola Royan (Tuckwell, 2002), pp. 69-89

³⁸ Sarah Dunnigan, ‘Scottish Women’s Writers, c.1560 – c.1650’, in *A History of Scottish Women’s Writing*, ed. Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp.15-17

That Courteours kyndes last bot for a vhye.
Fra once your turns be sped, vhy then Aduē,
Your promeist freindship passis in exile.

Bot (Robene) faith ye did me not beguyll,
I hopit ay of you as of the lave.
If thou had wit thou wald haif mony a qyle
To mak thy self be knaune for a knaive.

MONTGOMERIE, that such hope did once conceive
Of thy guid will, nou finds all is forgotten.
Thought not bot kyndnes he did at the craiv
He finds thy friendship as it rypis is rotten.

The smeikie smeithis cairis not his passit trauel
But leivis him lingering deing of the gravell.

(Parkinson, *Poems* vol. 1, 72a, p. 115)

From the opening line it is clear the author is familiar with the vicissitudes of courtly life, where the verity of courtiers is often fleeting, and promises of friendship pass in 'exile'. Indeed, if Montgomerie is the author of the sonnet, the noun 'exile' may be punning on his own vacation from the court, immediately locating this sonnet within the context of those which precede it. On a rhetorical and stylistic level, as van Heijnsbergen has commented upon at length, the Lyndsay sonnet is reminiscent of the visceral and venomous complaints Montgomerie would go on to make in the closing stages of his career, in which he strikes a careful balance between moral superiority and martyrdom for his cause. The poem's taut construction, considered use of alliteration as a tool to emphasise the poet's indignation and the concentrated oxymoronic couplings such as those found in l.12, which act to compound the implication that Hudson's friendship is less than sincere, all hint at an author who is more than familiar with the 'Castalian' poetics of James VI, many of whose literary guidelines are obediently adhered to in this example. Moreover, the informality with which the speaker addresses Hudson, a voice which is confident enough to offer scathing criticisms of the recipient's moral ineptitude (ll. 9-11), is unlikely to be that of a female in the male dominated world of the late sixteenth-century Scottish court (van Heijnsbergen, *Literature, Letters and the Canonical*, p. 71). However, it is the capitalised reference to Montgomerie placed in l.9 which foregrounds our poet's presence within this text, much as the similarly capitalised anagram did in 'The Poets Complaint of his Nativitie', a cryptic clue to the narrator's identity. If the capitalisation process in the manuscript is used as a visual indicator concerning identity, then perhaps the same is true in this case.

The poem continues in the style of anti-court satire similar to that of the third Hudson sonnet, this time attacking not the generic behavioural traits of all courtiers, but of Hudson in particular. Indeed, the poem's accusations against Hudson are successful by placing his vague misdemeanour against the backdrop of fraternal artistic creation cultivated in the preceding sequence, emphasising the degree to which the court musician has betrayed his fellow 'brother'. Lyndsay, or Montgomerie, compresses this theme by incorporating the smithy metaphor once more to highlight the continued

creation of poetic artistry at court from which Montgomerie has unduly been excluded and consequently left to suffer mental and physical hardship in the dreary landscape 'vpaland'. Thus, the style, diction and themes which the poem incorporates, coupled with its irrefutable continuity with the sequence which precedes it, equability of address towards Hudson and clear knowledge of the Jamesian poetic model, in the absence of any irrefutable evidence of literary authorship by a female member of court named Christian Lyndsay, strongly point towards Montgomerie as the author of this text. If this hypothesis is accepted, then here is an example of the 'writing game' being used, not for collective enjoyment, but for personal gain, and eventually criticism of a fellow courtier.

Both the Hudson sequence and the Lyndsay sonnet display signs of a courtly world in which literary identity was not fixed. Instead, Montgomerie suggests that courtiers could harbour contradictory personalities, caught between a desire to please their monarch and further their own affairs within this confined, and competitive, social environment. Viewed within this context, the sixteenth-century propensity for self-dramatisation and the masking of one's identity is a logical progression of court literature, a practice which seeks to contain two opposing and apparently incompatible mind-sets, the outward 'mask' seeking to please the prince, whilst containing the machinations of the individual seeking to further their career. It is clear, then, that role play and literary 'shape-shifting' were a culturally accepted activity at James's court, and the evidence above suggests that Christian Lyndsay was indeed a *nom de guerre* used by the coterie for a range of purposes: to 'wryt our epitaphs' or 'speak' on the behalf of a betrayed fellow courtier. If the original desire in the creation of this quasi-mimetic culture was to develop a 'rhetoricized theatre of a literary court as a discourse in which textually constructed authority could regulate relations between courtiers and between courtiers and the monarch' (van Heijnsbergen, *Literature, Letters and the Canonical* p. 82), then Montgomerie is quick to appropriate these writing practices for his own benefit, manipulating and subverting the delineated hierarchies maintained by such personae as Rob Steine and William Mow to heighten his own sense of moral superiority and indignation at the behaviour of his fellow courtiers. Moreover he often uses these subversive literary practices to regain a position at court that was intermittently endangered. By addressing Hudson using the voice of Christian Lyndsay, Montgomerie procures the ability to sanctimoniously proffer moral platitudes whilst simultaneously deflecting criticism away from himself; although he is directly implicated in the text, it is not his own voice. The ploy is equally intelligent because of the simultaneity with which Montgomerie is propelled to the foreground as well as remaining removed from it by his expert appropriation of the female voice.

Montgomerie, then, is a courtier whose characteristics are similar to those he chooses to criticise: duplicitous, contradictory and at times selfish. These traits can be disguised or exacerbated by the culture of role play and self dramatisation fostered by the king and his poets. In offering his criticism of Hudson's disloyalty using the female voice of Lyndsay, Montgomerie is conforming to

court formalities and literary practices that he might perhaps have ignored had his position at court not been his main objective, retreating behind the relative decorum of the Lyndsay voice, for as his title of 'maister poet' became increasingly tenuous, it became unnecessary to involve himself in the masking of identity and courtly decorum implicit in these writing practices. In 'The Poets Complaint of his Nativitie' there is evidence to suggest that the harbouring of two personalities, one private and the other public, led to profound anguish, and to a constant questioning of the effects this could have on the psyche of courtiers. For Montgomerie, whilst the adoption of alternative personae could provide an intelligent means of appeal and retribution, none the less an anxiety and instability can begin to be felt as a result. By employing the concept of Shire's courtly 'writing game' we can begin to see that Montgomerie attempted to harness those anxieties in his writing by using personae to affect changes beneficial to the author. By manipulating the literary networks of the court, its culture of textual exchange and the vogue of alternative literary identities, Montgomerie attempts to better his position within the royal coterie in order to mark an end to the events which caused him so much anguish. Whilst this is not an altogether surprising conclusion, the manner in which Montgomerie adapts these literary networks is more so. He displays in these sonnets a forceful wish to reveal his identity, but is ultimately unwilling to do so. At this stage then, he was still attempting to reconcile a public identity compatible with the socio-cultural environment where he garnered fame, and a private identity that intermittently threatened that position. However, as his position at court became untenable, the verse which relates this downfall displays signs of an impatience with literary improvisation, with the constant 'masking' of one's identity, and it is in this verse that Montgomerie is revealed, accentuating his authorial presence rather than diminishing it.

Chapter Three : ‘Aduē my King, Court Cuntrey, and my kin’: the poet sovereign emerges

Montgomerie’s concern over the retention of his position at court was to be eclipsed in the early 1590s by the climax of a lengthy legal dispute pertaining to the pension granted to him in 1583 by the king, the legality of which was challenged in court by William Erskine. Whilst Montgomerie gained professional legal council and representation from John Sharp and Alexander King, two Edinburgh lawyers, it becomes clear from the remarkable sonnet sequences which punctuate these series of personal set-backs for the poet that he relied to a large extent upon the personal word of his monarch. Indeed, the king had provided signed assurances that Montgomerie would eventually become the benefactor of monies procured under the Bishopric of Glasgow (Lyll, *Alexander Montgomerie*, p.146). However, the poet’s eventually unsuccessful case seems not only to have been a refutation of his right to the pension, but also a refusal to allow outside interference and influence from the monarch, protesting against what it perceived as royal meddling in a case that had no legal merit in the first place. The unfortunate outcome of Montgomerie’s case confirms that his trust in the efforts of his monarch were misplaced, and it is this betrayal and other minor grievances which imbue his final literary endeavours, and their twin strands of honour and fortune, with a bitter and caustic vehemence: they are a personal vindication of the poet and a public attack on his foes.

What is striking about the impressive verse produced as the twilight of the poet’s career approached, verse which presents to us an unrivalled rhetorical achievement and mastery of the lyric genre in sixteenth-century Scots verse, is the distinct lack of any device which seeks to ‘mask’ the poet’s identity. Unlike the previous examples of the Montgomerie *oeuvre* referenced throughout this chapter, all of which operated within the closed and privileged social network of the nobility and the urban establishment, and which displayed evidence of an identity struggling to emerge, these later embittered salvos contain a supercilious air, a confidence of literary identity in contrast to the uncertainties previously highlighted. In his capacity to scorn and judge those he deemed responsible for his downfall, to use the narrative of his worsening fortune as the subject of his verse, Montgomerie becomes *the* predominant subject; stepping outside the anxious world of the court, placing himself in opposition to the social environment he had become accustomed to, he becomes a sovereign in his own right. If the court and its members provided the overarching framework for the creation of the ‘writing game’, that parallel play world full of mischief and comedy enacted in verse by the literary counterparts of the authors’ themselves, then the sonnet sequences marking the close of Montgomerie’s literary career are an enactment of his alienation from that environment. With nothing left to lose, there is no real attempt at ingratiating, nor any meaningful retrospective on his career and achievements, just a bitter resignation in defeat, and reliance upon his own, unmediated, voice.

It is in no way a dishonourable defeat, however, and Montgomerie is at pains to contrast his own honour against the moral corruption of his opponents. Indeed, the verse which narrates his

gradual withdrawal from the public realm can easily be viewed as a form of flyting, in content at least; the jocular gamesmanship is of course absent. The poet is adept at forcing his readers to compare the moral superiority implicit in his writings by, as previously mentioned, choosing himself as the subject of his verse, then elaborating on a specific facet of his personality or his on-going struggle to amplify the deceit of his addressees. Thus, the verse which deals with the poet's diminishing status as a public figure, whilst free of the formal disguises familiar at court, still takes liberties with its readership, using biographical details to enhance, not an alternative persona, as in the 'Nativite', but the identity of the poet himself. In a series of four sonnets addressed to the Lords of Session, those charged with deciding the poet's case, this sense of manipulation is keenly felt. After appealing to his recipients on a fairly amicable basis in the first two of the sequence, 'Then mak the Poet Pensioner I pray / And byde be justice as ye haif begun' (Parkinson, *Poems* vol.1, I, ll.7-8, p. 109), the third takes on a more threatening tone.

How long will ye the Poet's Patience prove?
 Shaip ye to shift him lyk a pair of Cartis?
 Look vp my Lords, thair is a Lord above
 Quha seis the smallest secreit of your hairts.
 He vnderstands your offices and your airts.
 He knauis vhat is committit to your Cure.
 He recompencis as ye play your pairts.
 Once, soon or syne, your lordships must be sure
 For he respects no Princes more then pure.
 Quhat evir ye do then, hald the Ballance evin,
 Sa to do Justice, I you all conjure,
 As ye will merit ather hell or hevin.
 Deserv not de- (befor your Lordships) –fames
 For I may able eternize your Names.

(Parkinson, *Poems* vol.1, III, p. 110)

The abrupt opening signals the change in timbre from the preceding appeals; Montgomerie clearly indicates his disapproval of the dithering Lords, accentuating his annoyance using the alliterative triplet which closes the opening line. After setting the belligerent tone which subsequently characterises the sequence, Montgomerie is at pains to exert his formidable and threatening presence by consistently undermining the ability of the Lords to carry out their task and the objectivity with which they have so far conducted themselves. To buttress the intended effect Montgomerie invokes the omniscient presence of God as the arbiter of justice whose professional judgements pale in comparison to the moral authority of this ultimate power. The intimidating and insinuating tone comes to the fore as Montgomerie urges his legal foes to look upwards, where there resides an authority who can perceive their inner-most secrets and motivations, who can understand their 'airts', and, more significantly, who recompenses those they have wronged. This allusion undermines what is perceived to be a sober and serious profession by suggesting that those he is addressing act in accordance with

predefined roles, removing the respectable airs of a social class that would surely have been respected.³⁹ Given the personal context of this sonnet, it is a reasonable assertion that the poet is suggesting God is recompensing him for the wrongs committed by the Lords of Session. In doing so, the poet clearly aligns himself with the omniscient judgement initially invoked, proffering himself as a power, if not equal to God, then certainly analogous with him; the Montgomerie of this sequence appropriates the power to pass judgement on his enemies in a universal manner.

This is confirmed as the text progresses, where Montgomerie successfully merges the profundity of religious judgement with the earthly powers of the artist who harbours the ability to eternalise those he chooses to commit to writing. Thus, the neat image of ll.10-11 urges the Lords to 'hald the balance evin' as he 'conjures' them to provide justice, a verb which seeks to amplify the sense of mystery and foreboding Montgomerie cultivates for himself as well as acknowledging the legal context of the poem (in Medieval Latin *conjurare* has the implication of an oath).⁴⁰ Continuing the wordplay of l.10, where the beleaguered tone culminates in a specific threat, he balances his own judgement on the page, precariously situating his ability to preserve or destroy the fame and public respectability of their Lordships between the parenthetical brackets of l.13, with the close of the text reinforcing the power Montgomerie has over those he is addressing: will he forever blunt their social respectability and moral standing by defaming them in verse? The answer, he implies, depends on their handling of his case.

Montgomerie, then, is able to sit in judgement over the Lords of Session, inverting preconceived roles by instilling his verse with a religious and moral authority much greater than those of his addressees. Moreover, by relating his own case, and what he perceives to be the injustice dealt out to him, within this religious framework, he aligns himself with the absolute representative of all judgement, God. This is a bold move, and one that could only have been written by a poet with the utmost belief in his writing ability and the identity he wishes to project, and at a stage in his woes when he perhaps had nothing to lose. The chronology of this sequence is not certain; for example, there remains the possibility that the poet penned the individual sonnets which comprise the sequence over a period of months in response to his legal predicament rather than writing the whole in a short period of time. In any case, the final two sonnets anticipate legal defeat, for the threatening tone and bitterness they contain could not have been expected to be received in a positive way. This might also explain the refutation of literary disguise, Montgomerie clearly wanted his addressees to know who was criticising them, yet there is certainly on display here a degree of self-dramatisation which seeks to intimidate by accentuating and amplifying specific aspects of his poetic voice. This verse marks the beginning of a textual venture which, rather than documenting the life of a courtier sharing public and

³⁹ A gesture towards this theme is made in an earlier poem which explores the consequences of one's actions when sent before God: 'It is no laughter vhen thou looks / Vpon the legend of thy lyfe'. Montgomerie, *Poems*, ed. Parkinson, Vol. 1, p.12

⁴⁰ Dictionary of the Older Scots Tongue, [<http://www.dsl.ac.uk/>, accessed 14 November 2011]

textual space with others like him, begins to relate the plight of the individual beginning to retreat from that world and emerge into a textual realm occupied only by Montgomerie.

This trend is indicative of a poet whose subject is essentially himself, his own experiences and the verse he produces. Indeed, the degree of stylisation, literary technique and sheer poetic ability would initially suggest that Montgomerie wished his readership to recognise his talents in a possible bid for patronage, yet the content runs contrary to such a hypothesis, simply because he lambasts and criticises those individuals who might clear his name, paving the way for a possible return to court.⁴¹ If this sonnet sequence was a realistic appeal to the Lords of Session then one is hardly surprised it did not produce the desired result; if it was not a realistic appeal then it is evidence of a poet who, in the process of losing his livelihood, used the only thing he had left to express his anger, resentment and disappointment - namely his verse. Free from the literary formalities of the courtly world, Montgomerie no longer hides behind his verse; his presence and indignation are felt throughout. In the mode of a portrait painter, he highlights and accentuates certain aspects of his personality to challenge his audience, to provoke a response, daubing his text with moral tones, with the ever-present retribution, not only of God, but of the poet himself hovering unsettlingly over his readership.

I have suggested that Montgomerie's protracted legal dispute which, among other events, precipitated his exit from the Edinburgh court milieu, led to a transformation from the poet as a royal subject to Montgomerie being a sovereign in his own right, free from the courtly anxieties which gave rise to the tortured musings prevalent in 'The Poets Complaint of his Nativitie' and elsewhere in his corpus. This transition from subject to sovereign can be gauged by the absence of formal poetic disguises which, whilst he still frequented the royal coterie, allowed him to voice the anxieties experienced by courtiers using the poetic mask of his narrator, or to take advantage of the 'play world' of the court to dissemble and disguise using its textual constructs and potential abundance of alternative personae. Whilst the literary networks of contemporary Jacobean Scotland still facilitated Montgomerie's writings, there is no attempt at disguise; rather there is a heightened sense of the poet himself, the poet's presence within the text is no longer implied by its absence, but rather by the projection of that authorial voice. Montgomerie's world is related in his verse, and he begins to take the primary role. That verse which relates and responds to the events which caused his ejection from the court is characterised, not by the 'crisis of identity' mentioned above which induced an unsteady and confused relationship between narrator and author, but paradoxically, by an affirmation of the poet's identity and existence. Pressurised by the need to retain what was a constantly unstable position at court, aligning himself with a religious ideology at odds with that of his sovereign, much of Montgomerie's courtly verse is initially characterised by a distinct tension between the public voice of

⁴¹ It remains a possibility that Montgomerie, aware of his impending legal defeat and, perhaps, exit from the court, was appealing for patronage to social circles more conducive to his Catholic views.

his narrator and the private convictions of the author. Both the sonnet sequence to the Lords of Session, and as we shall witness, his final address to the king, betray none of these concerns; troubled and embittered though they are, the reader does not have to guess who their author is.

Thus, in Montgomerie's anguished address to James VI, the reader witnesses the poet taking ownership of his own identity, refuting the society and culture which had precipitated his artistic ascendancy during the previous decade. The dating of the sequence has proved to be troubling. Lyall has tentatively proposed a date of 1591⁴², prior to the literary tirade delivered to the Lords of Session which is assumed to be a response to his legal defeat of 1592. This is plausible, given the apparent hope Montgomerie expresses in the third sonnet, and the lack of any acute bitterness such as that delivered to the Lords of Session. Moreover, the final sonnet's reference to two English Catholics, one of whom is known to have visited Scotland c. 1590, directs the sequence towards a date prior to his legal defeat rather than after. However, the vitriol of the final sonnet strongly suggests Montgomerie knew defeat was looming.

As with the sonnets addressed to the Lords of Session, Montgomerie's appeal to the king displays a considered escalation of emotion and accusation. The first of the sequence is a thoughtful appeal to the king, pragmatically balancing his need for royal assistance without apportioning blame to the king himself: 'Help (PRINCE) to vhome, on vhome not, I complene / Bot on, not to, fals fortune aye my foe' (Parkinson, *Poems* vol.1, I, ll.1-2, p.107), whilst the second, likewise, demurs from outwardly questioning what Montgomerie perceives as the king's dishonourable ignorance of the poet's dire situation. Indeed, Montgomerie wittily uses the conventional modesty topos to simultaneously deny his considerable literary ability, remind the king of his forlorn situation, and only a few lines later include himself, after all, amongst the respected names of Classical literature.

If det, if dolour and to become deif,
If travell tint and labour lost in vane
Do properlie to Poets appertane,
Of all that craft my chance is to be chief.
 With August Virgill wauntit his reuard
And Ovids lote als lukles as the lave.
Quhill Homer liv'd his hap wes wery hard
Yit when he died sevin Cities for him strave.
 Thought I am not lyk one of thame in Arte
 I pingle thame all perfytlie in that parte.

(Parkinson, *Poems* vol. 1, I, ll.5-14, p. 107)

⁴² Roderick Lyall, 'Thrie Truear Hairts': Alexander Montgomerie, Henry Constable, Henry Keir and cultural politics in renaissance Britain' in *The Innes Review* vol. 54, no. 2 (Autumn 2003), p.213

The black humour of the second sonnet soon gives way to the dramatic posturing and heightening of literary presence identified in the Lords sequence, employing what is a familiar Montgomerian technique, noted by van Heijnsbergen (*Literature, Letters and the Canonical*, p.71), of illustrating a possible future event or outcome in the present, in order to pre-empt its eventual fruition. Thus the uncertainty of the conjunction ‘if’ which commences the opening lines proffers to the king a possible future of destitution and penury that Montgomerie would rather avoid.

If I must begge it sall be far fra hame.
If I must want it is aganis my will.
I haif a stomok thocht I hold me still
To suffer smart, but not to suffer shame.
 In spyt of fortun I shall flie with fame.
Sho my Corps bot not my Curage kill.
My hope is high houbeit my hap be ill

(Parkinson, *Poems* vol.1,III, ll.1-7, p.108)

Whilst this is an obvious appeal to James, urging him to intervene lest his former poet laureate descend to the life of a wandering beggar, it is Montgomerie’s pride and honour which colours the tone of the poem. Whilst Montgomerie seeks the king’s help, if it is not forthcoming, he will retire from the courtly world, lest he suffer ‘shame’. There is an echo of ‘The Poets Complaint of his Nativitie’ in ‘flie with fame’, where the poet doggedly asserts that his renown as a poet will ensure the posterity of his name, whilst it may also have contributed to his downfall. The delicate alliteration of line five is immediately contrasted with the more caustic insistence that, whilst those who have wronged him, including the king, may eventually succeed in causing the poet’s death they, rather dramatically, can never blunt his ‘Curage’. This is rhetorical posturing *par excellence*, proposing a possible future in which the negligence of the king causes the death of his former friend and courtier, whilst simultaneously imbuing the poem with an unrelenting sense of honour and self-worth which works in much the same way as the moral judgement invoked against the Lords of Session. The poet may retreat from his former world, but his honour and courage remain, interlacing his verse, lingering in the consciences of those who have wronged him. Montgomerie creates for himself a textual afterlife in which his considerable presence and perhaps martyrdom will remain at the fore.

The remainder of the sonnet goes on to reference the legal case directly, and at this stage in proceedings Montgomerie is hopeful of success. The Bishop Beaton referred to is the previous appointee of the diocese of Glasgow and former recipient of the pension Montgomerie was hoping to receive, providing more reliable evidence for a date before the final decision was made. The closing couplet is a bitter, yet reserved, criticism of James’s ineffectuality in the matter:

Wes Bishop Betoun bot restord agane,
To my ruin reserving all the rest

Montgomerie immediately declares his intentions, symbolically separating, perhaps even liberating, himself from the individuals and social institutions which have been the root of so much anguish. First he addresses the figure who ensured his cultural and social ascendancy and, through his ineffectuality, the poet's downfall; the court in which he practised and honed his art; and finally his kin, which may refer to his fellow courtiers, or more widely his countrymen. Each line commences with a theatrical 'adeu', which forces the reader to pause in consideration of the poet's intentions, whilst the alliteration encourages a spondaic rhythm that lends an unrelenting and vehement quality to those individuals and institutions the poet is departing from.⁴³ The following farewells require some explanation and are of importance to the text as a whole, providing tantalising insight into an aspect of Montgomerie's persona, namely his Catholicism, which has remained an ambiguous aspect of his writing. The figures referred to are, respectively, Ludovick Stewart, second duke of Lennox, son of Esme Stewart; Henry Constable, an English poet and Catholic and finally Henry Keir, a Scots Catholic who left Scotland during the Reformation, teaching in Paris and serving as secretary to Mary, Queen of Scots, for a time. The significance of these names appears to be of a politico-religious nature, an eleventh-hour declaration of the poet's true religious sentiments. Montgomerie's Catholicism was tacitly recognised at court, and he is one of a number of prominent courtiers who subscribed to a faith contrary to the official Protestantism of Scotland. Indeed, James VI's wife was a practising Catholic.

This may be a significant declaration, yet given the rhetorical and dramatic nature of the text, we should perhaps be weary of gleaning too much significance from these 'admissions'. Indeed, Deirdre Serjeantson, amongst others⁴⁴ has cautioned against such ready insights into Montgomerie's religious convictions in light of the ecumenical approach he takes in his sacred writings, tactfully using scriptural context to generate meanings that would appeal to both religious camps. Thus it becomes probable that, in light of the highly dramatised nature of this sonnet sequence, such Catholic name dropping was intended to propel an already acknowledged aspect of Montgomerie's character to the fore in order to create a division between those who have remained true to Montgomerie and those, like the king, who have betrayed him. This hypothesis becomes more probable when we consider the parentheses Montgomerie adds to these names, hinting at a possible brotherly allegiance, a tri-partite alliance of Catholicism, or 'Thrie treuar hairts' (l.4). Whether or not a significant religious bond existed between Montgomerie and the Catholics he mentions is debatable, Lyall suggests they met intermittently at the 'intersection of poetry, personal advancement and doctrinal politics' in the Scottish court during the 1580s and early 1590s (Lyall, *Thrie Truear Hairts*, p.190). Within the

⁴³ It remains a possibility that Montgomerie may have been appealing to a specifically Catholic readership, in an attempt to garner patronage from an alternative source once it was clear his hopes of rejoining the Holyrood court were misplaced. This possibility becomes more realistic when we consider the poet's propensity to use verse as a means of appealing to individuals other than those he nominally addresses.

⁴⁴ Deirdre Serjeantson, 'English bards and Scotch poetics: Scotland's literary influence and sixteenth-century English religious verse' in *Literature and the Scottish Reformation*, ed. Crawford Gribben and David George Mullan, (Ashgate, 2009), p.183 and Roderick Lyall, *Alexander Montgomerie: Poetry and Politics in Jacobean Scotland*, Chapter 8.

context of the present analysis, it is not essential that we know; rather, the significance lies in the *implication* of a religious fraternity which seeks to elevate one aspect of the poet's persona, and what would become future subversive religious actions, adding a layer of self-dramatisation that had some basis in fact.

Departing from his Catholic theme, Montgomerie compresses the series of setbacks that characterise his existence into the four lines of the second quatrain, a 'tragedie' whose narrative would instigate tears from his audience, whilst there is a familiar comparison between his current destitution and the honour he 'wes once in'. Indeed, Montgomerie's theatrical use of 'tragedie' in reference to his less than fortuitous life as a courtier lends another nuance of dramatic posturing to the text, which is confirmed only three lines later when he openly addresses, not the official recipient of the sequence James VI, but the unidentified audience watching from the wings: 'Shirs, ye haif sene me griter with his grace / And with your vmquhyle Maister to and myne' (ll.9-10), gesturing and performing to his fellow courtiers much in the same way as the nameless narrator does in 'The Poets Complaint of his Nativitie'. Of course now Montgomerie has the stage to himself, he does not employ a narrator to operate on his behalf, he 'plays himself' in the narrative of his life. The act of acknowledging an outside audience differentiates this sonnet from its predecessor, whose appeal is directed towards the king only. Here Montgomerie is effectively staging an address to James in which the poet retains the primary role, using the king as a symbol representative of the poet's grievances for the benefit of the reader. This is evidence of a poet who unashamedly manipulates his readership, getting them 'on-side' so to speak, histrionically projecting his dilemma in verse form; as Jack has noted, Montgomerie does not merely relate the events which have led to his demise, but 'enacts' them, using his 'tragedie' as a means of extracting emotion.⁴⁵ In fact, there is no trace of an appeal in this final sonnet, and one suspects that Montgomerie's intention is to unmask himself and his struggles to courtly society as a whole, vindicating and revealing himself in his moment of departure from an environment which has caused him considerable anguish.

We must now turn our attention to the final, cryptic line, which strikes a particularly unsettling, even threatening note. The final couplet begins with wordplay directed towards those who have failed to fulfil promises made to the poet, 'sen wryt nor wax nor word is not a word' (l.13), before proceeding to a finale which has proved difficult to decipher, 'I must perforce ga seik my fathers suord' (l.14). There are a number of possible meanings which can be assigned to this line. The first is perhaps the most unlikely, the possible threat of suicide posited by Jack.⁴⁶ Given Montgomerie's repeated statements of honour and pride, themes which weave their way through this sonnet sequence, it seems an uncharacteristic threat. The second implication is one of vengeance, the

⁴⁵ R.D.S. Jack, *Alexander Montgomerie*, (Scottish Academic Press, 1985), p.99

⁴⁶ R.D.S. Jack, 'The Theme of Fortune in the Verse of Alexander Montgomerie' in *Scottish Literary Journal* vol. 10.2 (1983), pp.25-44

image of the sword suggests the vague possibility of violence. This hypothesis is plausible, given the poet's inclination towards threatening retribution in his address to the Lords of Session, albeit using the eternalising power of the artist to do so on that occasion. The third possibility is related to the second hypothesis, and given the displays of self-dramatisation is, at the very least, a likely supposition. It is possible that Montgomerie is here referring to his period as a professional soldier. After all, the title page of the Ker MS refers to 'Captain' Alexander Montgomerie, whilst the final line is a variation on a proverb noted by both Parkinson and Lyall, intended to instil a parting image of Montgomerie as a wandering soldier.⁴⁷ Indeed, Montgomerie came from a military family, and it is likely he had an early military career, like his father, rather than engaging in academic study.⁴⁸ And of course, he was employed as soldier for his king on the Continent. The military and family connection is mixed with a sense of family history and pride in the final phrase 'fathers suord'. Thus, in light of the self-dramatisation and posturing on display in this sequence, where the poet magnifies specific aspects of his persona for literary effect, the final military image is perhaps another example of the rhetorical practice of implying more than one meaning in a text.

This final sonnet then, with its alternative depictions of the poet, marks a symbolic, if not actual, break with the court and the king. It locates that moment where Montgomerie's persona is no longer dictated by the pressures of retaining his social position, where the poet can operate full control over his self-representation because at this stage there is no hope of reclaiming his role as courtier. There is no narrator to appeal on his behalf, no poetic mask, Montgomerie himself is the subject. Yet, his habit of self-dramatisation is not easily dispensed with, and the Montgomerie of these sonnet sequences is propelled to the fore, accentuated, distorted and omniscient. Indeed, Parkinson is surely correct to note that

[o]n Montgomerie's palette, various colours lend themselves to self-dramatisation. As a fallen hero, malcontent... gifted singer of the Lord, and rejected courtier, Montgomerie has an inimitable presence in his verse. The power of his eloquence is to be respected, even feared.⁴⁹

Indeed, it is through the poet's multiplicitous modes of self-representation that we can begin to piece together an approximation of the whole, shifting our focus outward from individual aspects of the poet's persona to consider the panoply of elements which are integral to an understanding of Montgomerie in all his forms. His appeal to the king marks the culmination of this means of revelation.

⁴⁷ Parkinson quotes Thomas Moore (1779-1852) to provide some provenance for the final line: Minstrel Boy to the war is gone, / In the ranks of death you'll find him; / His father's sword he girded on, / And his wild harp slung behind him.' Parkinson, *Alexander Montgomerie: Poems Vol. 2* (STS, 2000), p. 93, whilst Lyall translates the line as 'I must become a wandering beggar'.

⁴⁸ R. D. S. Jack, 'Montgomerie, Alexander (early 1550s-1598)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2006 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19052>, accessed 9 Jan 2012]

⁴⁹ David J. Parkinson, 'Alexander Montgomerie: Scottish Author' in *Older Scots Literature*, ed. Sally Mapstone (Edinburgh, John Donald Publishers, 2005), p.495

In those lines he is at once a martyr for his cause, a forgotten poet and tragic hero of the court, a devout Catholic and finally a soldier, whose only recourse is to exit with the honour represented by his 'fathers sword'. The poet's gift is to manipulate these various elements, to shape and mould them to his advantage. Paradoxically, in doing so Montgomerie becomes a far more elusive character, precisely because there are so many facets to the manner in which he presents himself: he is all these things, and more. His presence hovers over his audience, at once respected and intimidating, pathetic and forceful. In contrast, the anxious and psychologically confused narrator of 'The Poets Complaint of his Nativite' is one who operates within the bounds of courtly formality, and one can sense the frustration of a poet who seeks to escape from the pressures this formality exerts upon his identity. In these expressions of the poet's anxiety and frustration at the social world he inhabits, one can begin to sense a conscious departure from the prescriptive cultural code James expected his courtiers to adhere to. In seeking to 'determine how his subjects represented their king and themselves metaphorically, so that they might sing from the royal hymn sheet rather than their own', James understood that 'linking the art of poetry to the art of rule'⁵⁰ would maintain a cultural-political environment over which he could operate full control. However, once the poet's ties of friendship to the king and his cultural connection to the court became tenuous, the need to uphold such cultural values became less apparent. The poet takes ownership of these cultural methods, and accordingly places himself at the centre of the culmination of his literary output.

In these literary ventures, then, Montgomerie is no longer a royal subject, accountable to the king and the social and cultural formalities of the courtly universe, but a sovereign in his own right, free to adapt and construct himself as the situation dictated whilst also relying on his own experience to inform his actions and words; a true 'emancipation'. It is one of the central ironies of Montgomerie's life that the court in which he could practice and perfect his considerable literary ability, and which provided the patronage that allowed him to do so, was the primary source of his anxiety. Only in his impending departure from that environment could he proffer an image of himself unhindered by conventionality and social pressure. Acute and accentuated though that persona is, Montgomerie's undeniable presence, in all its variegated and refracted forms, continues to linger. The identity he felt was hindered by 'his hap' is eventually allowed to emerge.

⁵⁰ Theo van Heijnsbergen, 'Early Modern Literature' in *Scotland: The Making and Unmaking of the Nation c. 1100-1707* (Dundee University Press, 2007), pp. 234

Conclusion

In his analysis of 'self-fashioning' Stephen Greenblatt observes that the process of cultivating and furnishing an alternative identity is one which is predominantly carried out using language. Furthermore, such 'self-fashioning' 'always involves some experience of threat, some effacement or undermining, *some loss of the self*' (Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p.9, my italics). What the writings of James VI and Alexander Montgomerie demonstrate is that the political, religious and courtly pressures which were being felt in early sixteenth-century England were also being felt in Scotland some fifty years later. Perhaps more importantly, from the evidence of James and Montgomerie at least, writers responded to these pressures in the same way. Thus, in James's correspondence with Elizabeth there is conclusive evidence to suggest that the personae which the king adopted were a means of effecting political change or attempts to realign a professional relationship in which the disregard of his kingship led to a loss of identity. Indeed, the king's written interactions with his royal neighbour are characterised by his repeated efforts to impart a monarchic authority which was predominantly ignored by the more powerful English monarch. For a personage whose reality and existence was based upon his royal status, Elizabeth's unwillingness to accept him on an equitable basis, monarch to monarch, necessarily represents a 'loss of the self'. The king's 'crisis of identity', which I have referred to throughout this thesis, finds its roots in this unstable relationship, where the subordinated personae the king was forced to adopt (ignored suitor, appealing husband, child) comes into conflict with the dignity and respect he would have welcomed as an independent king of a separate state.

It is not only in his writings to Elizabeth that James attempts to fashion his persona, to shape his literary presence in order to provoke a specific response from his readership. Indeed, his first publication, *The Esseys of a Prentise in the Divine Art of Poesie* (1584), was just such a text. This publication attempts to present the young James as an enlightened, knowledgeable cultivator of the arts in Scotland and, in the poetic treatise which forms part of the text proper 'Some Reulis and Cautelis to be observit and eschewit in Scottis Poesie', to impart a sense of artistic guidance and authority over his subjects. This attempt at autonomy is made all the more significant when we consider the degree to which factions within the court were attempting to influence or undermine a newly crowned monarch. At this early stage, James knew the importance of language as an instrument of control and as a means to alter the way he wanted to be perceived.

Later in his reign (1588-9), James would use religious topics in his writings as a political tool to bolster his perception as a stringently Protestant monarch in order to appease the Kirk and, perhaps,

to proffer himself as a pan-European Protestant leader.⁵¹ Indeed, Astrid Stilma has provided compelling evidence to suggest the king's two anti-Catholic tracts, *Ane Frvitfvull Meditatioun contening ane Plane and Facill Expositioun of ye 7.8.9 and 10 versis of the 20 Chap. Of the Reuelatioun in forme of ane sermone (1588)* and *Ane Meditatioun vpon the xxv, xxvi, xxvii, xxviii, and xxix verses of the xv Chapt. Of the first buke of the Chronicles of the Kingis (1589)*, should be considered as religious exegesis with a distinctly political motivation. These texts balance thoughtful, if Protestant-oriented, religious contemplation alongside the political themes of kingship, and as a result provide James with an 'opportunity to display his theological learning', but more importantly, to use these texts as a 'political tool in his attempt to manage his reputation through the medium of print' (Stilma, *Literature and the Scottish Reformation*, p. 128).

The king's use of language as a means of constructing an alternative textual identity in his various publications was, however, rather more difficult to maintain using the epistolary medium. The king's promulgation of himself as a leader of the arts in Scotland and an authoritative young monarch, or later as a Protestant flag-bearer, were textual ventures over which he could operate full control. The readership of such texts would not necessarily know that the confident and authoritative young monarch of the *Essayes of a Prentise* was struggling to assert his monarchic authority amidst political factions who had ruled during his infancy, or that the ultra-Protestant persona of his religious tracts belie the more nuanced cohabitation of Protestants and Catholics within his own court.

Unlike those publications, the epistle is a medium with a continuous, constantly evolving narrative; its open-ended nature makes it difficult for the author to assert a definitive self-representation. Moreover, upon entering into a dialogue with a figure who wielded an inordinate degree of influence over his decision making, any attempts at changing the basis of this unequal political relationship were easily discounted by Elizabeth. Thus, James's attempts at 'self-fashioning' in his epistolary corpus must be viewed rather differently from his other ventures into self-fashioning using language, simply because the personae in his exchanges with the English monarch were responses to an authority much greater than his own, rather than attempts to heighten a sense of kingship over subjects who should know better.

Arguably, the ultimate effacement of James's monarchic identity was the execution of his mother in 1587. Susan Doran has attempted to induce a reassessment of the king's role in his mother's untimely death, weary of the cynical view some past historians have adopted.⁵² Whilst the political realities of his mother's existence would have hindered James's accession to the English throne, and represented a thorn in Elizabeth's side, the epistolary evidence suggests that, using the conventions of the genre, James at once diplomatically and emotionally appealed to Elizabeth's better judgement in

⁵¹ Astrid Stilma, 'King James VI and I as a Religious Writer' in *Literature and the Scottish Reformation*, ed. Crawford Gribben and David George Mullan (Ashgate, 2009), p. 132

⁵² J.B Black, *The Reign of Elizabeth 1558-1603*, (Oxford University Press, 1959), p.388

order to avoid a scenario that would certainly be painful for all sides in the short term. Paradoxically, in spite of the effacement he experiences, it is in the king's immediate written response to Elizabeth's abuse of power that he is able to find his kingly voice. The king's transition from English subject to independent Scottish monarch, I would argue, becomes apparent in his immediate textual responses to this event. James demonstrates a willingness to take advantage of a catastrophic event in Anglo-Scottish politics to reinstate his position as an independent monarch in the eyes of Elizabeth. Indeed, his religious writings of the late 1580s may have been a further effort to appear as a more authoritative Protestant monarch, not only throughout Europe, but to his English neighbour as well. Thus, the king's epistolary writings at this formative period in Anglo-Scottish relations provide detailed insight into the ways in which James's relationship with Elizabeth was founded, and the manner in which he sought to change it by imparting a monarchic and political autonomy that was predominantly ignored. In due course, a more comprehensive analysis of his writings to Elizabeth, focussing on the development in their relations throughout the 1590s and as 1603 grew closer is long overdue and much needed.

Much like his monarch, Alexander Montgomerie experienced an effacement of identity, a 'loss of the self'. His dilemma was an inability to operate within a cultural environment which threatened his own moral code and sense of autonomy, but one which none the less provided his primary means of practising his gift as a poet.⁵³ Indeed, the details of his biography that are known to us, and the unspecified grievances alluded to in his verse, indicate a life punctuated by disputes that were exasperated by the courtly world, and in some cases emanated from it. After his initial successes of the early 1580s, during the fruition of the artistic court and the solidification of his primary role therein, Montgomerie's career is marred by episodes of exile and solitude. These events are documented throughout his corpus, and characterised by the degree to which the manipulation of authorial identity and self-dramatisation were integral methods of dealing with these pressures. Montgomerie's relationship to the courtly world and its inhabitants was not an easy one. We should, perhaps, also consider the poet's Catholic religion as another contributory factor to his estrangement from the court environment, leading, as it did, to the poet's participation in various subversive ventures in which he sought to promote the Catholic faith in Scotland. The sense of an individual whose private world is in constant conflict with his public duties as a courtier is keenly felt.

It is the overwhelming need to explore, understand and impart a private identity that was increasingly overshadowed by his public persona that characterises much of Montgomerie's verse. A

⁵³Whilst Montgomerie's primary role was as a leading poet to the king of Scotland, we must also be aware that much of his poetry was written for, or under the patronage of, the many aristocratic families who did not necessarily reside in Edinburgh but were located in their respective regional localities. Indeed, as Montgomerie's court career came to an end, it is plausible to consider that he may have found gained further aide from these families, particularly if they were of a Catholic inclination.

yearning to relate this inner tension, the uneasy cohabitation of public and private, can be felt in ‘The Poets Complante aganst the wnkyndnes of his Companions when he wes in prisone’. Relating the experience of one of his numerous enforced exiles, Montgomerie’s literal description of imprisonment appears to flirt with the metaphorical:

No wonder thocht I waill and weip
That womplit am in woes,
I sigh, I sobe vhen I suld sleep.
My spreit can not repose.
My persone is in prisone pynit
And my Companionis so vnkynd
(Melancholie mischeivis my mynd)
That I can not rejose.

(Parkinson, *Poems* vol.1, 11, ll. 1-8, p.19)

These lines, I would argue, go some way towards capturing the exasperation Montgomerie began to experience as a member of the court. In a text which proceeds to criticise his fellow courtiers for their apparent abandonment of the poet, he describes a spirit in constant unrest, the very essence of his own identity is becoming compromised. Similarly, the noun ‘persone’, within this context, begins to be shaded with further symbolic meaning. The poet describes here the physical imprisonment of his person, yet given the descriptions of mental anguish and suffering, one suspects Montgomerie is describing the confinement of the ‘self’, of his identity, as well. The mask of Montgomerie’s public persona, those unnamed narrators who provide a veneer of disguise, begins to slip. What is revealed beneath this mask is a poet experiencing a profound inner struggle and confusion. He was a poet who resented having to camouflage his troubles by employing a voice and persona which could only ever represent an approximation of his, very real, private struggle.

Quhen men or wemen visitis me
My dolour I disguyse
By outuward sight that nane may sie
Quhair inward langour lysis.
Als patient as my pairt appeirs
With hevvy hairt vhen no man heirs (ll. 17-22)

This descriptions of the poet’s physical internment, then, becomes symbolic of his desire to assert and realise his existence within the courtly universe, that uncertain, fantastical ‘play world’ of shifting identities and priorities. Indeed, the sentiments the poem expresses, as the title indicates, were written after his release, yet the text proper is written in the present tense. This grammatical inconsistency indicates that whilst the negative emotions the poet relates in this text emanated from his period of exile, those emotions retained their prominence in the poet’s mind, and could begin to articulate his imprisonment of the ‘self’, the cancellation of identity, he experienced at court.

Like James VI, Montgomerie reacted to the pressures placed upon his identity by manipulating the personae he presented to his readership, yet it was a process of disguise that the poet found difficult to maintain. The speakers in the poet's verse can be described as amalgamations of Montgomerie, constituted of elements which indicate that the speaker may indeed be the poet, without formally revealing his identity. So whilst the elaborate and ornamental language the poet employed provides a veneer of assurance, it is to the ever shifting relationship between the author and his narrator which we must turn in order to appreciate the inherent instability of the 'self' Montgomerie began to experience. The conflation of Montgomerie's improvised public persona and his increasingly tormented private identity present problems for the historian and literary critic. Indeed, one 'consequence of a life lived as histrionic improvisation is that the category of the real merges with that of the fictive' (Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* p. 31). The merging of the real and the fictive makes attempts to distinguish between genuine distress and self-dramatisation in Montgomerie's verse somewhat difficult. However, it is similarly difficult to ignore the unremitting malaise of anxiety and vexation that permeate a large proportion of his writings, and his description of a private identity seeking to be free. It is the merging of the real and the fictive, the private with the public, that is the cause of Montgomerie's 'crisis of identity'. He was perpetually using an improvised, adopted and fictive persona to voice concerns that were very real indeed. This uncertainty, in turn, led to an attenuation of his private identity, as the poet's existence increasingly became identified by the histrionic posturing of his narrators. As we have seen, attempts were made to articulate his feelings of imprisonment, but it would not be until his final farewell from court that Montgomerie could discard the alternative identity of his narrators for that of his own.

The gradual process of discarding alternative personae as a means of expression culminates in those series of extraordinary texts which accompany his legal dispute and eventual withdrawal from public life. Here, his private and public spheres of existence become indistinguishable and he finally becomes a sovereign identity in his own right, taking ownership of the textual world he inhabits with complete control over his self-depiction and the presentation of his identity. There is a freedom of self-expression in the verse dealing with his legal case which mark them out as a significant departure from the more constricted and tortured attempts at the projection of identity. With a legal case that seemed likely to end in defeat, and a continued alienation from the royal coterie, his writings become pre-occupied with depicting himself, foisting upon his readership an unrelenting desire to announce his presence even in his moment of departure. The culmination of this desire is manifest in his symbolic 'farewell' to James VI, in which specific aspects of identity are detailed and expounded in order to construct a final, parting image of the poet. Montgomerie's address to both the Lords of Session and James VI demonstrate a comprehensive exposition and depiction of the poet's identity: free from the responsibilities and pressures of the courtly environment, he is able to emboss his poetry with the lasting image of Alexander Montgomerie as he, himself, wished to be perceived.

Both the study of James's letter writing and Montgomerie's lyrical compositions are linked by the desire of their respective authors to project a sense of self that was being hindered by the actions of their addresses. Thus, James seeks to emancipate himself from the overbearing commands and encroachments of Elizabeth, whilst Montgomerie seeks to emerge as a sovereign, independent of his monarch and the courtly world which had come to frustrate his attempts at self-affirmation. By analysing the twin desires James and Montgomerie shared I have demonstrated how the interests of the courtier can begin to converge with those of the monarch. If James was dissatisfied by his 'subject' status in his dealings with Elizabeth, those feelings of anxiety were, likewise, communicated by Montgomerie in relation to his monarch, James VI. Moreover I have demonstrated that Montgomerie and James reacted to their shared pressures in much the same way. Indeed, the predominant characteristic of the writings I have chosen to illustrate my argument is the uncomfortable cohabitation of a literary identity incompatible with the both writers' sense of self. Their writings display a constant willingness for their private identity to 'break through' the text. It is notable, too, that it took an upheaval in order to initiate the transformation from subject to sovereign. In James's case the execution of his mother triggered what would become a lasting evolution in his relations with England, eventually breaking free of the cosseted grip Elizabeth wished to maintain (he would eventually become king of Britain after all, surely the ultimate reinforcement of his kingship).⁵⁴ In Montgomerie's case, whilst he had often voiced misgivings about the cultural world he belonged to, his eventual down-fall from the court marked a definitive change in his writing style. Upon the realisation that his position is untenable, he is able to place what was a disguised private identity into the public realm, projecting a previously disguised identity. The writing community to which both men belonged is blind to social hierarchy, for both monarch and courtier use this textual environment in order to gain the sovereign status they desired. From the evidence of James VI and Alexander Montgomerie, it is during those moments when the author's 'real' identity is in danger of being eclipsed, when 'self-cancellation' is imminent, that the individual finally emerges, free of any disguise, to announce their presence to their readership.

⁵⁴ It is striking that roles which had previously cast James in a subordinate position to Elizabeth (such as that of the surrogate child) are entirely dispensed with both during, and after, the execution of his mother.

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