# The slow death of a tyrant: learning to live without Henry VIII, 1547-63

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Henry VIII stopped breathing on 28 January 1547, but although his body died, his political power did not. When such a political colossus finally topples, the resulting vacuum is disorientating to his allies and enemies alike. Politics cannot swiftly return to normal, if only because no-one knows what 'normal' is. In modern times, the examples of leaders as diverse as Franklin Roosevelt, Joseph Stalin or Margaret Thatcher demonstrate how bewildering the sudden departure of a dominant political figure can be, as well as the potential potency of their political afterlives. And so it was with Henry VIII, a king who had made himself the sun around which England's political and religious universe turned. He might be gone, but the planets which orbited him had still to continue in their courses.

But even political giants die eventually, and the aftershocks of their fall fade. This essay is an attempt to trace how Henry VIII's subjects, neighbours, friends and enemies came to terms with his absence in the decade and a half after his death, through to the early years of his younger daughter's reign. It will argue that the loyal consensus that Henry had successfully forced on his people broke down only slowly, and that his memory continued to be politically potent. Evangelicals and conservatives alike tried to conscript the dead king to support their cause under Edward VI, but this contest was won decisively by the evangelicals; their successful co-option of Henry VIII was vital to their Edwardian triumph. Thereafter, both Catholics and Protestants became much more willing to dissociate themselves from the old tyrant, but he remained politically vital, an irreplaceable source of legitimacy and authority for both Mary I and Elizabeth I's regimes – however uneasy those regimes may have been at the association.

**Praise and vilification: views of Henry VIII by the time of his death**

By 1547, most of Christendom had come to one of two polarised views on Henry VIII. He was, according to taste, an egomaniacal, sacrilegious tyrant; or the rightful Supreme Head of his subjects' church, defending it from papal usurpation and heretical error alike.

The first view was Europe's conventional wisdom. It was widespread amongst Protestants: Martin Luther's antagonism towards Henry VIII had been obvious since their pamphlet dispute of the early 1520s, and was only inflamed by the English king's subsequent matrimonial and religious adventures. Although European Protestants recognised the magnitude of the religious changes Henry had imposed on England, the failure of the attempts to forge an alliance in the 1530s and the limits of Henry's reforms left few with illusions about the English king. The English agent in Bremen in 1546 summed up what his hosts thought of Henry: he 'has put awaye the divyll but his ma$^{te}$ has his dam & his dyvylysh sermonyes styll vssed w$^{t}$in hys realme w$^{t}$ dyvers other thynges w$^{ch}$ I dare not wrytte.'[1] A few English reformers were willing to assert such views on their own account. In 1542 the radical Henry Brinklow wrote (in an anonymous pamphlet which he had smuggled to printers in Antwerp): that 'if it be so that GOD throughe the Kyng hath cast oute the deuell oute of this realme ... yet both he and we supp of the broth in which the deuell was sodden.'[2]

For those loyal to the papacy, of course, no such equivocation was necessary. From 1534 down to the present, the orthodox Roman Catholic view of Henry VIII has been very straightforward: he was an excommunicate, a schismatic, an adulterer and a murderer. He had profaned holy places, desecrated sacred relics, destroyed true religion and claimed a blasphemous degree of authority for himself. Many of his subjects – we cannot know how many – silently entertained such thoughts, or whispered them to their neighbours. Only a few said such things aloud, and faced grim coercion or exile as a consequence.[3] But amongst their

co-religionists elsewhere in Europe, this view was universal. In 1547 William Thomas, an English evangelical who had fled to Italy to escape charges of theft from his former master, wrote a treatise, 'Peregrine', defending his recently-deceased king against such perceived slanders. In it he gives us a neat summary of the common Italian view of Henry VIII. It was not a positive one. 'Cicero his elloquence should not suffice to defend him of his Tyrany, since he hath ben knowne, and noted ouer all, to be the greatest Tyrant that euer was in England.' Heading the charge sheet were four executions. The deaths of Thomas More and John Fisher had shocked the continent and were still remembered; Henry could not have chosen two better-known subjects to kill. And the executions of his second and fifth wives had already made him notorious as a wife-killer. One of Thomas' Italians asked, 'did he nott choppe, change, and behead them [his wives], as his horse coueted new pasture'? Here, undoubted fact was bolstered by rumours that Katherine of Aragon had been poisoned, and that Jane Seymour had died from callous neglect (or worse). But these judicial murders were only the showpiece accusations against a king accused of ransacking the English Church and debasing his country's coinage from mere avarice, and of conducting a generalised campaign of terror against his own people in the process. Thomas' Italians told him that 'yo$^{r}$ kinge beinge invironed w$^{th}$ the ocean sea, thought it impossible that the fame of his wicked lyfe & doinges should passe into the firme lande of other Countryes ... but ... not only his generall proceedinges but euery particuler & privat parte thereof was better knowne in Itallye then in his owne dominions, where for feare no man durst either speake or winke.'[4]

Very similar charges were echoed from the opposite end of the continent. In 1549 the Scottish judge William Lamb wrote a passionate denunciation of English conduct towards Scotland, in which he dwelt at length on the iniquities of the dead English king. The new English king, Edward VI, is a

> bastard seid ... and quhat his father wes I traist þe wallis of every guid toun will tell quhar abbayis stuid. I will no*ch*t zo*u*r lordis and ladyis reherss, quhilkis for þe trewt*h* wes miserablie murdreit, þair airis disherist, the spuilze of zo*u*r kirkis, the extorsioun of þe yemanrie and gentillmen; as concerny*n*g the faith and religioun, thair actis and proclamatiounis zeirlie ane aganis ane vthir will speik quhone we be gane.

He made a virtue of the fact that King James V of Scots – Henry's nephew – had refused even to meet this 'kyng seuerit fra societie of Christin men'. He too deplored Henry's matrimonial history, explicitly accusing him of poisoning Katherine of Aragon, mocking his frequent changes to the English succession 'als oft as Protheus did change formis', and, worst of all, compelling all his subjects to swear to the new order 'no*ch*t without greit periure of all þe haill realme.' And there was blunter tyranny, too. Henry 'wes no*ch*t saciate in vij. or viij. zeris persecutioun and scheddin of his awin subdittis bluid.'[5] Another Scot, Robert Wedderburn, not only detailed Henry's brutal persecution of his clergy (many of whom had taken refuge in Scotland), but drew particular attention to how this Welsh king had oppressed his own countrymen: 'the pepil of valis ar in sic subiectione that thai dar neuer ryde bot iiij to gidder'.[6]

These were to remain constant themes of Henry's reputation down to modern times, especially but not exclusively from Catholics. They were, in his own lifetime and immediately afterwards, matched by an obvious mirror-image, an image which reflected Henry's own preferred view. In this he was Imperial Majesty, a new David, a new Solomon, a new Hezekiah, whose martial glory was matched by his achievement in liberating his crown and his people from papal tyranny, and who had used his rightful power as the Supreme Head of the English Church to drive out error and corruption. Henry's subjects competed with one another to praise him in these terms. Sometimes they did so with a little unease: evangelicals, for example, might observe that the king was not responsible for everything done in his

name, or pray that he might finish the reformation which he had begun. But such caution was hardly typical.[7] More common is the attitude of a priest named Edward Leibowrne who, in the late 1530s or early 1540s, dedicated a verse paraphrase of Psalm 21 to the king. Leibowrne declared that the description of kingship in the psalm has not 'represented ony kingis behaviour soo constantlye / Sence Dauid wrote it as it does nowe our owne kinge henry.' Before Henry's reign, Leibowrne lamented, the English were imprisoned in darkness by covetous prelates; now Henry 'hath eradicatt by the root*e*s mooste of these myscheves / And moo will herafter by scriptur*e*s supportacyon.'[8] Or again, in 1539 an Essex lawyer named John Pylbarough published an excruciating panegyric to Henry based loosely on the *Benedictus*. For Pylbarough, Henry's title of Supreme Head was only the beginning, and even the sacred kingship of the Old Testament did not quite go far enough. Remarking how the Jews had been promised a saviour born of David's line, he observes that for England (the true Israel, or 'vs moste christian englyshe people'), God has 'raysed vp to vs thy peculyar people, a godly dewe power of helthe, our naturall most soueraygne lorde kynge HENRY the VIII' from 'the moste noble house of his moste famouse progenitours.' Henry is therefore 'thyne holy enoynted, immediate minyster, and vicar ouer us ... to whom also we owe only to haue recourse as unto thy chiefe herdeman.' He did not quite dare claim that Henry VIII is the Second Coming, but he did add that Henry 'ought to be estemed of vs an other John Baptist, and holy prophete of the mooste hyghest god.'[9]

Of course, sycophantic praise directed at a vain and capricious tyrant should not be taken at face value. Nor, however, should we dismiss it entirely, for one of the features of a successful tyranny is that its subjects are brought to believe in it. Ethan Shagan's study of what he calls 'popular politics' under Henry VIII has made it plain how far the king's subjects were brought to consent to his actions, rather than merely being coerced into accepting them.[10] In modern terms, this was a regime adept at the use of soft power. When

Henry VIII begged his subjects for unity at Christmas 1545, he could reduce the parliament house to tears: tears no less genuine for being politic, for in such a world, both the safest and the easiest course is to let oneself believe the slogans one is compelled to parrot. William Petre, as flint-faced a Tudor bureaucrat as one might hope to find, delighted that on that occasion his king had spoken with 'such a gravity so sententiously, so Kingly, or rather fatherly', and added that it 'was such a Joy and marvellous comfort, as I reckon this day one of the happiest of my life.'[11]

And indeed, it is one of Henry VIII's few real achievements that, while he lived, most of his subjects were successfully united by this rhetoric. The shibboleth that kept them so was the Royal Supremacy. From staunch religious conservatives, through the religiously compliant, confused or uninterested, to most (but not all) of the king's evangelical subjects, assent to the king's self-awarded title of Supreme Head controlled the views they could hold about his rule. In the decade and a half following Henry's death, however, this artificial unity fractured under its own internal pressures, as the medicines, or poisons, which were Henry VIII's legacy worked their way through England's body politic. The emergence of a range of views of the old king himself is one of the clearest signs of those changes.

**'A father yet breathing in his son': Henry VIII in the reign of Edward VI**

The battle lines of the struggle for Henry VIII's legacy in Edwardian England were quickly drawn. It was, and remained thereafter, a battle of due process against political substance. And as usual in English politics, due process won decisively.

At the heart of the battle were two old colleagues and opponents, the bishops Thomas Cranmer and Stephen Gardiner.[12] It was Gardiner who swiftly developed the most dangerous and effective critique which Edward VI's regime's faced: that the young king's regents had no right to overturn his father's settled will in matters of religion.[13] It was a powerful

argument, for two reasons. First, the appeal to Henry VIII packed a powerful emotional punch. Appealing to Henry's final and most authoritative statement of doctrine, the *King's Book* of 1543, Gardiner insisted that 'the King my late sovereign lord, in his book, taught a true doctrine,' and reacted angrily to Cranmer's crass suggestion that Henry had been 'seduced' from the truth.

> I will defend his wisdome and learnyng in these matters to be greater then it may seemly be said of hym by any man that he was seduced. ... These words, my Lord, to say, 'the King our late sovereign lord was seduced in his book,' be words to be spoken by them that durst not or would not shew the truth in his tyme, and not of your Grace, which can professe neither the one in respect of your selfe, ne the other in respect of him; who made you as you are, and left you his executour to maintayne his acts and laws and not impugne them. ... Although hys body lvyeth no longer amonge us, yet hys memory should ... continew in honour and reverence.[14]

Secondly, Gardiner's factual claims were undoubtedly and obviously right. Cranmer had argued with his old master for years over the doctrine of justification, with no success whatsoever. Henry's implacable opposition to the Protestant view of this matter was encoded in the *King's Book*, and as such had been given statutory force. As Gardiner put it, 'if such as travaile in the doctrine of "fayth only" brought their water pott to the Kinges booke, they were lyke to go thence with out lycquo*u*r.' And as Gardiner also pointed out, he himself had had nothing to do with this. 'In this, our late soveraigne lordes resolution, I was no doer, but a folower, accepting the treuth concluded, as became me.'[15] Yet within months of Henry's death, and while the laws mandating the *King's Book* were as yet unrepealed, Cranmer's newly published homilies were officially teaching the doctrine which Henry had so abhorred.

For Gardiner, and for many other religious conservatives in Edward VI's reign, Henry VIII became a totem of everything which they fought to protect, or whose passing they

mourned.[16] In 1549 the Kentish schoolmaster John Proctor lamented the passing of 'that Noble Henrye, Kynge of Kynges', urging his ungrateful subjects: 'Deceaue not the louyng expectacion of so hygh and fatherly a Prince conceyued of you, do not frustrate his traueil and labours.'[17] In the same year, William Lamb's diatribe against Henry recognised that pious English conservatives still respected him. One of the characters in Lamb's dialogue, the 'guid man of Syon', laments Henry's death, 'for than I think þe court sall no*ch*t onlie þe new leirny*n*g for to incresche amangis þe nobillis and co*m*monis of Ingland, bot als able to renew þe auld philosophouris opinionis.' The worst he would say of Henry was that his 'naturale guidnes wes oftymes alterat be counsell' (a clause much used by all side to exculpate Henry).[18] Deep loyalty to the old king was matched by expediency. Henry's memory was perhaps the only defensible line against runaway religious change, since the papacy had been so comprehensively renounced. In particular, the 1539 Act of Six Articles became an emblem of the orthodoxy which Henry VIII had defended. When Bishop Hooper listed the signs of popery which his visitation of 1552 was to stamp out, heading the list was 'the Six Articles'.[19] Three years earlier, the south-western rebels of 1549 had demanded Henry's 'Lawes … concernynge the syxe articles, to be in vse again, as in hys tyme they were.'[20] Even Reginald Pole believed that the Act had been 'the best thing [Henry] ever did in this world.'[21]

This argument – that since Henry VIII had repeatedly condemned the new regime's policies as rank heresy, the regime could hardly claim his mantle – may have seemed powerful to those, like the south-western rebels, who were innocent of how the Tudor state functioned. But Gardiner, at least, will have been aware of how dangerous this gambit was. For if Henry VIII had been plain in his loathing of perceived heresy, he had been plainer still in his determination to maintain the absolute temporal and spiritual authority of the Crown. If the substance of the new regime's religious policy was innovative, the political theory behind

it was largely unchanged.[22] Edward VI, as the new Supreme Head of the Church, wielded his father's authority. As Gardiner himself put it, Henry was 'a father most unfortunately reft from us, yet breathing in his son'.[23] Gardiner's argument, of course, turned on the new king's age, pointing out that the new policies were not his own but his regents'. While undeniably true, this was – as Gardiner of all people will have known – legally almost unthinkable. If accepted, his argument threatened systematically to undermine the authority of this and of any regency government. The logical consequence would have been something like the situation in Scotland, where regents' acts and grants were provisional and legally revocable upon a monarch attaining majority – a level of uncertainty which England's rigid legal structure could never have tolerated. It is easy enough to see why Gardiner's attack alarmed Edward's regents, but it is hard to see how it could possibly have succeeded.

Instead, the Edwardian conservatives' appeal to Henry VIII's memory rebounded on them, in two ways. Firstly, and more importantly, to wrap oneself in Henrician loyalty ruled out any attack on the Royal Supremacy, the fundamental motor of the Edwardian Reformation. Gardiner's own attacks on the Edwardian regime started to falter by the end of 1547, when that regime's policies began to be backed up by parliamentary legislation. He even found himself forced to concede the 1549 Prayer Book, much to his distaste. The regime and its allies were quick to cite Henry as 'evident profe' that true spiritual authority was vested in the temporal power, a proof which carried emotional as well as logical force.[24] The Henrician orthodoxy which Gardiner and others tried to defend had been a splendid edifice, but it turned out to be built on sand, and it crumbled under the Edwardian assault; for it was built specifically to repel the one weapon which could have defended it, the papacy. After six years of hard doctrinal pounding from 1547 to 1553, there was not much left.

Secondly, and more immediately, the conservatives' argument was based on a false premise – one which seemed plausible enough in 1547 but which was becoming threadbare

by 1553: namely, that the young king did not really approve of the policies being enacted in his name. Henry VIII had persuaded Gardiner and other religious conservatives to accept the Royal Supremacy on the grounds that it was a bulwark against real heresy, and during his lifetime he had more or less kept to that promise. It was a promise bolstered by the almost numinous faith in good kingship which England had long enjoyed and which Henry himself had so ruthlessly exploited. But none of this could rule out the ghastly possibility that an English king might become a heretic himself, and by the early 1550s there was no concealing that this was happening. Many conservatives continued to believe that – as John Bale put it - 'when [Edward] cometh of age, he will see another rule, and hang up a hundred of such heretic knaves'.[25] But it was becoming plain that Edward shared those heretic knaves' convictions. These hopes inclined conservatives to wait patiently while their church was destroyed around them, clinging to an increasingly transparent fantasy of rescue rather than acting to defend what was left of their Church.

**'This monstrous boar': Henry VIII in Marian England**

Edward VI's death, the Jane Grey fiasco and the accession of Mary threw the battle to claim, and to escape, Henry VIII's legacy into a new phase.

It is not always appreciated how far Henry himself was responsible for the bizarre dynastic crisis of July 1553.[26] This is not merely because of his colourful matrimonial history, nor because of his serial inconsistency on the subject of the succession. The order which was left in the 1543 Succession Act and in his own will was certainly very odd indeed: two daughters, whose claims were in logic mutually exclusive and both of whom remained legally illegitimate, were placed in the order of succession by a sheer assertion of the royal will. But the real problem was the precedent this set, which again pitted political substance against political process. Henry's will expressed the substance of his policy clearly enough. But the

process he used apparently established that English monarchs might settle the succession according to their own wills, rather than submitting to inexorable laws of inheritance. Elizabeth I's reign was largely consumed by her refusal to follow her father's example in this regard. This was precisely what Edward VI's 'devise' for the succession in 1553 was trying to do, and if (especially in its final form) it was short on dynastic logic and long on expediency, it remained more consistent than Henry's order. All it lacked was a parliamentary rubber-stamp. In this case, however, substance trumped process, as good luck and good judgement enabled Mary to raise a successful rebellion. This matters because, on any reading, Henry VIII's will and Mary's perceived legitimacy were crucial to her victory. Henry had overruled his son from beyond the grave. The new queen owed her throne to him but also reviled his central legacy to her. This paradox was to snap at her heels throughout her reign.

In one sense, of course, Mary's decision to return England to papal obedience rescued English Catholicism from the horns of its Henrician dilemma. Where English Catholics had been paralysed by the Royal Supremacy, they could now once again ground their faith firmly on St. Peter's throne. Yet Henry VIII's legacy was not so easily shaken off. The new regime was willing enough to denounce him. Court preachers apparently inveighed against both Henry and Edward in the first few months of the reign.[27] Above all, Reginald Pole was unswerving in his condemnation of his old master, whose name was 'notorious throughout the Christian world like no other for centuries'.[28] Pole's view of England's troubles was unambiguous. Within days of his hearing of Mary's accession, he wrote to her in blunt terms:

> Her Majesty will perceive that the beginning and cause of all the evil, commenced at the time when the perpetual adversary of the human race placed in the heart of the King her father the perverse desire to make the divorce from the blessed Queen her

> mother. ... From this iniquitous and impious seed there subsequently sprang up those pestiferous fruits which have so corrupted every part of the kingdom.[29]

Yet this could not be the last word on Henry VIII, and Pole knew it. Months later he was reproaching Mary for having referred to her father as '*regem piisimae memoriae*'. Her duty as a daughter to honour her father, he warned, was trumped by Christ's injunction to hate one's parents for the sake of the Gospel. He pointed out, with perfect logic, that if Henry was to be remembered as pious, that those such as Thomas More, John Fisher, Katherine of Aragon and indeed Pole himself who had resisted his tyranny must be condemned. Yet this logic was too sharp for the Marian regime to accept, and even Pole himself quailed at it, going on to emphasise his own love for the dead king. 'There was never mother mourned her only child as I mourned him. ... I never saw the time but I would have been content to have lost my life corporal to have saved his soul.'[30] Even Pole could not simply abandon Henry to the devil.

For those whose personal histories were less heroically consistent – a group which included the queen – matters were more complicated still. In the battle between political substance and political process, the competing parties had changed ends. Now it was the newly empowered religious conservatives who wished radically to change the policies they had inherited, but who had to do so using the existing machinery of state. The irony of Mary's having been, in law, Supreme Head of the Church is well enough known, but she was plainly determined to rid herself of the title as quickly as possible. She could not, however, shake off the fact that her claim to the throne derived from her father. Nor was this a merely technical, legal connection. Henry had so transformed the authority of the English throne that her authority was inescapably linked to, and built upon, his. Those of her subjects who had tried to reconcile Catholicism with the Royal Supremacy under Edward were now ready to celebrate her accession, but also to remind her to whom she owed her throne. Thomas Paynell

twice dedicated translations to Mary, both times emphasising that she was 'daughter vnto the moost victorious and mooste noble prynce, kinge Henry the viii. kynge of Englande, Fraunce and Ireland.'[31] Her own chaplain, John Angell, praised God for sending England 'a newe Iudith, by whose godlines the trewe light and knowledge of Goddes worde is nowe by her broughte agayne, whiche frome the death of that noble prince her father Henry y$^{e}$ viii. was here in this realme extincte' – a radically different diagnosis of England's ills from that which Pole had offered.[32]

Marian Protestants, of course, were aware of this discomfort and did their best to exploit it, positioning themselves as Henry's true heirs in exactly the same way Gardiner had done in the previous reign. Princess Elizabeth, under house arrest at Woodstock, asked to be allowed to use the 1544 English litany, on the grounds that it 'was set forth in the kyng my Father hys dayes.'[33] She was of course refused, but she was not the only person to recognise the 1544 litany's potential to unsettle the Marian regime. It was the only part of the Prayer Book service whose authorised use dated to Henry's reign, and its regular use for nearly a decade had ingrained it into most English memories. In 1554, the tough conservative William Chedsay, interrogating the Protestant Thomas Hawkes, asked Hawkes for his view of the Pope. Hawkes replied by quoting the litany: 'From him and all his detestable enormities good Lorde deliuer vs.' Chedsay was stung into a revealing response: 'Mary so may wee saye from king Henry the eight, and all his detestable enormities, good Lord deliuer vs.'[34]

Not all his colleagues would have said Amen to that. In the same year, by his own account, Nicholas Ridley used the issue to set his interrogators by the ears. When John Feckenham put it to Ridley that forty years previously, all Christendom had accepted transubstantiation (a variant of the classic 'where was your Church before Luther?' argument), Ridley replied that forty years previously, all Christendom had accepted papal supremacy. Feckenham, a conservative cleric of Pole and Chedsay's school, could only

agree, but one of the other interrogators present, Sir John Bourne (the queen's principal secretary), found himself discomforted. Bourne was a stout Catholic but, as a recent study of his career suggests, 'he was more plain English than ultramontanist'.[35] Papal supremacy was, he now said, 'but a positive law'. Ridley pounced, pointing out the papacy's claims to have been instituted by Christ. 'Tush, it was not counted an article ... of our faith,' Bourne replied, much to Feckenham's horror. A third man present, the former Lord Chief Justice Roger Chomley, weighed in on Bourne's behalf, 'and told a long tale what laws were of Kings of England made against the Bishop of Rome, and was vehement to tell how they alway of the clergy did fly to him.' This was singing an old Henrician song. The argument became so heated that Chomley 'thought himself much wronged, that he could not be suffered to speak, the rest were so ready to interrupt him.' Meanwhile Ridley, supposedly the subject of the interrogation, needed only to sit on the sidelines and watch as the tensions between clergy and laity, and between theological and legal certainties, played themselves out.[36]

However, Marian Protestants were themselves subject to a parallel set of tensions. Those who continued to appeal to Henry's legacy – whether cynically or sincerely – found themselves trapped by the same logic which had troubled Gardiner and the Edwardian conservatives. If they recognised the Royal Supremacy, how could they oppose the queen's proceedings? It was a criticism made all the more powerful by the twin fiascos of Jane Grey's abortive reign and of Wyatt's rebellion, a rebellion which the regime was quickly (and misleadingly) painted as a Protestant plot. Protestants were left vulnerable, and sensitive, to the charge of sedition. John Proctor, who had lamented Henry's passing in 1549, now used some very Henrician rhetoric to argue that heresy was inherently treacherous and corrosive of good order.[37] The effect was to herd Marian Protestants into affirming their loyalty to the queen, so making their continued defiance of her religion uncomfortable. Famously, Thomas Cranmer was trapped by this dilemma, forced by his exceptionally high doctrine of the Royal

Supremacy into accepting that the queen might authoritatively deny her own supremacy. The tale is that he was shocked out of his recantations in part by a dream in which Henry VIII spoke to him and rejected him. If true, it is eloquent testimony to how the dead king continued to weigh heavily on his subjects' hearts.[38]

Cranmer's position was extreme, however, and by this time most Protestants had already begun to put a little distance between themselves and their former master. The record of Protestant unease towards Henry during his own lifetime helped here, and as his memory receded the reformers became bolder. Hugh Latimer, who had reason to remember both the kindness and the severity of his former patron and gaoler, recalled the bloody atmosphere of Henry's reign when preaching before King Edward in 1549: 'It was, as ye know, a dangerous world, for it might soon cost a man his life for a word speaking.'[39] William Turner, in exile in the mid-1540s, had been one of the bolder Protestant voices criticising Henry during own lifetime. In particular, he was openly uneasy about the Royal Supremacy, anticipating Elizabeth by trying to recast Henry as 'Supreme Governor'.[40] By 1554, this had grown into a more comprehensive critique, whose key points were Henry's marriages and his looting of church property. Turner now lambasted 'King Henry the eight, [who] ... toke all the goodes of the abbayes,' and compared Henry to Ananias, struck dead by God for trying to steal from the Church. 'The same Kinge spoiled againe all honestie and goddes forbid.' Turner still, however, put most of the blame on Henry's 'couetous counsell', who not only swallowed up all the stolen wealth, but also 'suffred the Kinge and diuers Lordes of the realme to put awaye and take as many wiues as they liste'.[41]

The longest journey of disillusionment which we can document was that of Anthony Gilby. In a tract of 1548 against Gardiner, Gilby was referring to 'the noble kynge Henrie the eight (whom surely God appoynted to beat downe poperie and Idolatrie, long preserued him from your manifolde treasones, and at the length now whan hys good wyll was: hath taken

hym to hys mercies)'.[42] Ten years later, in 1558, that year of printed bitterness from British Protestant exiles, Gilby wrote an *Admonition to England and Scotland to call them to repentance*. This was bound with the work of his newfound friend John Knox, whose prophetic denunciations it echoed. From Gilby's new perspective, Henry appeared less noble. 'There was no reformation, but a deformation, in the tyme of that tyrant and lecherous monster.' He admitted that Henry had torn down many popish institutions:

> The bore [Henry] I grant was busie wrooting and digging in the earth, and all his pigges that folowed him. But they sought only for the pleasant frutes that they winded with their longe snowtes; and for their own bellies sake, they wrooted up many weeds; but they turned the grounde so, mingling good and badd togither ... that no good thing could grow, but by great miracle, under such Gardners.

His bloody persecution of Catholics and evangelicals alike 'doth clearly paynt his beastlynes, that he cared for no maner of religion.' Noting that he had written both against Luther and the Pope, Gilby concluded that

> this bore raged against God, against Devill, against Christ, and against Antichrist. ... This monstrous bore, for al this, must nedys be called Head of the Churche in paine of treason, displacing Christ, our onlie Head, who ought alone to have this title. ... In his best time, nothing was hard but the Kinges booke, and the Kinges procedings; the Kinges Homelies in the churches, where Goddes word should onely have bene preached. So made you your King a god, beleving nothing but that he alowed.

More than merely a covetous, adulterous murderer, Henry was now given an almost apocalyptic significance, as a monster whose wickedness equalled that of the Papacy itself.[43]

**'Puissant prince royal': the taming of Henry VIII's memory**

After years of obedient sycophancy, one can understand that's Gilby wild language might seem cathartic, an act of iconoclasm directed at Tudor England's most insidious idol. Yet for the sober Protestants who re-inherited England's governance in 1558, such language was quite impossible. Other ways had to be found of domesticating Henry VIII's memory. For the new queen, too, owed her claim to the throne, and indeed the fact of her survival during her sister's reign, to her father. A pamphlet celebrating her recalled that some had called for her execution in 1554, and wondered that

> … those mad men did not knowe
> That ye were doughter vnto King Hary
> And a princesse of birth, one of the noblest on earth,
> And sister vnto Quene Mary.[44]

Yet Mary and King Philip did know it, and for that and other reasons had not only allowed the young princess to live, but allowed Henry VIII's illogical order for the succession to stand. Henry's paternity and his will trumped illegitimacy and partisan religious concerns.

The new Elizabethan establishment found two ways of managing this awkward inheritance: one subtle and at least partly honest, the other disingenuous and effective. The honest approach is that which was canonised for the Protestant establishment by John Foxe. Foxe inherited the Marian exiles' growing willingness to distance themselves from Henry, but it was politic to be more diplomatic than Turner, and his own conscience would have revolted at Gilby's language. The natural response, then, was to portray Henry as an innocent scarcely in control of his own court, swayed by his councillors and easily led astray. It was an interpretation with good precedents, even in Henry's own reign. [45] In 1546 George Joye had described Henry as a 'weake faithed king' who was 'demented and bewitched' by his wicked advisors, comparing him to King Darius, who had been duped into persecuting the prophet Daniel.[46] If this was hardly the unvarnished truth, it did provide an explanation of sorts for

Henry's apparently erratic behaviour, and it is not too far distant from some modern interpretations of Henry's reign, which have depicted him as the plaything of faction.[47] However, where Joye's portrait of Henry had emphasised the king's innocence, Foxe's was more openly ambiguous. In the first, 1563 edition of his *Actes and Monuments* (known then and since as the *Book of Martyrs*), Foxe interrupted his narrative of the case of John Lambert with an 'apost[r]ophe to king Henrye'.[48] The Lambert case was a particularly uncomfortable episode for Foxe. Lambert was burned for denying Christ's presence in the Eucharist in 1538, following a show trial at which Henry VIII presided in person, and in which an array of evangelicals from Robert Barnes to Thomas Cranmer participated. Foxe dealt with this in part by trying to blame the entire episode on the arch-villain Stephen Gardiner, an accusation which seemed highly plausible to him and to most other evangelicals, but for which he had no evidence whatsoever.[49] However, it also forced him (or gave him an opportunity) to confront the question of King Henry's own role head-on.

He addressed his remarks to the king directly, 'where so euer thou arte': a telling declaration of ignorance, as Foxe could confidently place virtually all of his other characters firmly in Heaven or Hell. It was true, he admitted, that Lambert's death was primarily due to Gardiner's 'malityous and crafty subtilty'. Yet

> nothinge seemed more vnworthye, then the vndecent and the vncomelye behauiour of the kinges maiestye at that daye. ... Howe muche more commendable had it beene for thee, O kynge Henry ... if thou haddest ayded and holpen the poore litle sheape, ... and haddest graunted hym rather thy autoritye to vse the same for his sauegarde, rather then vnto the other to abuse it vnto slaughter.

He made no bones as to what this might mean for Henry's soul. 'The time shall once come, when as ye shall geue accompt of all the offences whiche ye haue eyther committed by your owne fault, or by the Councell or aduise of others.' And he imagined Henry being judged by

the apostles and martyrs, some of whom were martyrs of his own making. 'With what hart wil ye implore their mercy, which so vnmercifully reiected and cast them of, whe*n* they fled vnto your pity and mercy?'[50]

And yet, for all this, Foxe maintained that the Lambert trial, and all the others that went with it, were in some sense aberrations. 'O kynge Henrye, I knowe you did not follow your owne nature there in, but the pernitious councels of the b[i]shoppe of Wynchester.'[51] Did Foxe genuinely believe this, or was it a convenient way of avoiding a blunt condemnation of his queen's father and his Reformation's founder? It does not matter, for he and the entire Elizabethan Protestant establishment shared the same dilemma here, and as such would have shied away from any attempt to resolve the question. The careful ambiguity of Foxe's stance, which blended a godly nature and an uncertain eternal fate into its stern condemnations, served its purpose. It meant that, whether Henry was in Heaven or Hell, he could at least be safely confined to his grave.

Even so, for most political purposes, this cut altogether too close to the knuckle. The Elizabethan establishment's mainstream view of Henry VIII picked up on another, rather older set of traditions, whose key feature was that they studiously ignored his religious policy altogether.

The concentration on Henry's religious and matrimonial misadventures in the last part of his life and in the years following his death is understandable enough, but it can obscure the fact that Henry had spent the first half of his reign constructing another image for himself: the Renaissance warrior-king, Great Harry, a king whose astonishing political charisma was not bounded by his somewhat limited real achievements. However soured and vitiated by the events of his last two decades, this older image had one great advantage: it was safe. During his own lifetime, it was recovered by foreign observers who wished to maintain good terms despite his religious proceedings. The anonymous 'Spanish Chronicler' who wrote up an

account of Henry's reign in about 1550 was as unforgiving as any Spaniard of Henry's treatment of his first wife and of her supporters, but as his account moves on its tone changes. The king's dalliances with heresy are (once again) sloughed off onto his ministers, notably Cranmer. Instead, the Spaniard focused on Henry's larger-than-life personality. (Literally: 'The King was so stout that such a man has never been seen. Three of the biggest men that could be found could get inside his doublet.' And he had Anne of Cleves say of Katherine Parr, at the time of her marriage, 'A fine burthen Madam Katherine has taken on herself!') He had much to say about Henry's expensive and ultimately futile French war of 1544-46, and in particular commended his generosity to Spanish soldiers. 'Oh! good King! how liberal thou wert to everyone, and particularly to Spaniards!' And he had Henry dying a stereotypically good death, reconciled to his eldest daughter and receiving the sacrament on his deathbed. 'Truly the English lost much on the day that the valiant King Henry VIII died .'[52]

To call Henry 'valiant' was to stretch the truth, but to do so in an uncontroversial direction. One of the earliest depictions of Henry in Elizabeth's reign was in *A brief abstract of the genealogie of all the kynges of England*, which provided crude portraits and brief verse summaries of the reigns of each of the new queen's predecessors. The image of Henry was a simple copy of the already-iconic Holbein portrait. The verse beneath it described him as a 'puissant prince royall ... whose martiall actes be knowen abroad right well.' It named three particular achievements: the capture of Tournai (in 1513) and of Boulogne (in 1544), and the creation of the kingdom of Ireland in 1541. The only religious reference of any kind was the claim that Henry departed life 'very godly'. This was not because the anonymous author was uninterested in such matters: Edward VI is noted as a king 'who punished vice and wickedness abhorde' and who was a precocious Solomon, while Philip and Mary 'allowed the Popes authoritie / Erecting eke all Papistry agayne'.[53] But the simplest way of dealing

with Henry VIII was to pretend he was merely a martial hero, and to efface his Reformation entirely.

This approach, which together with Foxe's coll agnosticism formed the Elizabethan orthodoxy, was the final victory of process over policy. The specifics of Henry's own religious policy were only of use to one party in Elizabethan England: papal loyalists, who could happily denounce the schismatic king and his bastard daughter. For everyone else, the old king's proceedings were an embarrassment. His function became simply to provide legitimacy to his daughter, while retreating to become as much of a stock figure of kingship as possible. That way, even if he could never again be the focus of unity he had been in his lifetime, he could at least cease to be so divisive. In this manner, his bereaved subjects slowly learned to live with, and without, Henry VIII.

[1] National Archives, SP 1 / 222 f. 79[r] (*LP* XXI (i) 1331).

[2] Henry Brinklow, The lamentacion of a christian, against the citie of London, made by R. Mors (RSTC 3764. Bonn, 1542), sig. B2r.

[3] Peter Marshall, *Religious Identities in Henry VIII's England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), chapter 11.

[4] British Library, Harleian MS 353 fos. 10r-11v; cf. British Library, Cottonian MS Vespasian D.xviii, and J. A. Froude (ed.), *The Pilgrim: A Dialogue on the Life and Actions of King Henry the Eighth* (London, 1861).

[5] William Lamb, ed. Roderick J. Lyall, *Ane Resonyng of ane Scottis and Inglis Merchand betuix Rowand and Lionis* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1985), pp. 35, 39, 41, 45.

[6] Robert Wedderburn, ed. A. M. Stewart, *The Complaynt of Scotland* (Edinbuegh: Scottish Text Society 4th series no. 11, 1979), pp. 74-5, 128.

[7] Alec Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII: Evangelicals in the Early English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 61-7.

[8] British Library, Royal MS 7.F.xiv fos. 53r-55r.

[9] John Pylbarough, *A commemoration of the inestimable graces and benefites of God* (RSTC 20521. London, 1540), sigs. A4r-v, B2v-3r, D4v.

[10] Ethan Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[11] National Archives, SP 1 / 212 fo. 111r (*LP* XX (ii) 1030).

[12] Diarmaid MacCulloch, 'Two Dons in Politics: Thomas Cranmer and Stephen Gardiner, 1503-33' in *Historical Journal* 37 (1994), 1-22.

[13] Stephen Alford, *Kingship and Politics in the Reign of Edward VI* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 57.

[14] James Arthur Muller (ed.), *The Letters of Stephen Gardiner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), p. 301.

[15] Ibid., pp. 338, 365.

[16] This paragraph draws on the argument made in Alec Ryrie, 'Paths Not Taken in the British Reformations', *Historical Journal*, forthcoming 2009.

[17] John Proctor, The fal of the late Arrian (RSTC 20406. London, 1549), sigs. B3r, C4v.

[18] Lamb, *Ane Resonyng*, pp. 169-71.

[19] John Hooper, ed. Charles Nevinson, *The later writings of Bishop Hooper* (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1852), p. 129.

[20] *A Copye of a letter contayning certayne newes, & the articles or requestes of the Deuonshyre & Cornyshe rebelles* (RSTC 15109.3: London, 1549), sig. B6r.

[21] Rawdon Brown (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts existing in the archives and collections of Venice, vol. 5: 1534-54* (London 1873), no. 575.

[22] Alford, *Kingship*, pp. 58-63.

[23] Muller (ed.), *Letters of Stephen Gardiner*, p. 322.

[24] William Baldwin, *The canticles or balades of Salomon, phraselyke declared in Englysh metres* (RSTC 2768: London, 1549), sig. A3r.

[25] John Bale, *An expostulation or complaynte agaynste the blasphemyes of a franticke papyst of Hamshyre* (RSTC 1294. London, 1552), sig. B1r.

[26] I am grateful to Eric Ives for discussions on this point.

[27] Thomas S. Freeman, '"As True a Subiect being Prysoner": John Foxe's Notes on the Imprisonment of Princess Elizabeth, 1554-5' in *English Historical Review* vol. 117, no. 470 (2002), p. 105.

[28] Thomas F. Mayer (ed.), *The Correspondence of Reginald Pole. Volume 2. A Calendar, 1547-1554: A Power in Rome* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 107.

[29] *Calendar of State Papers ... Venice, vol. 5: 1534-54*, no. 766.

[30] Mayer (ed.), *Correspondence of Pole. Volume 2*, pp. 236-7.

[31] Augustine, tr. Thomas Paynell, *Twelue sermons of Saynt Augustine, now lately translated into English by Tho. Paynel* (RSTC 923. London, 1553); cf. Cuthbert Tunstall, tr. Thomas Paynell, *Certaine godly and deuout prayers* (RSTC 24318. London, 1558).

[32] John Angell, *The agrement of the holye fathers, and Doctors of the churche, vpon the cheifest articles of Christian religion, as appeareth on the nexte syde folowinge, very necessary for all curates. Gathered together by Iohn Aungell preist, one of the Quenes maiesties Chapleyns.* (RSTC 634. London, 1555?), sig. A3r.

[33] Freeman, '"As True a Subiect"', p. 115.

[34] John Foxe, *Actes and monuments of matters most speciall in the church* (RSTC 11225. London, 1583), p. 1589.

[35] L. M. Hill, 'The Marian "Experience of Defeat": the case of Sir John Bourne' in *Sixteenth Century Journal* vol. 25 (1994), p. 536.

[36] Nicholas Ridley, ed. Henry Christmas, *The Works of Nicholas Ridley, DD* (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1853), pp. 163-5.

[37] John Proctor, *The historie of Wyates rebellion* (RSTC 20407. London, 1554).

[38] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 598.

[39] Hugh Latimer, ed. George Elwes Corrie, *Sermons by Hugh Latimer* (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1844), p. 149.

[40] William Turner, *The rescuynge of the Romishe fox other vvyse called the examination of the hunter ... . The seconde course of the hunter at the romishe fox* (RSTC 24355. Bonn, 1545), sigs. C1v-3v.

[41] William Turner, *The huntyng of the romyshe vuolfe* (RSTC 24356. Emden, 1555), sigs. D6r-v; cf. Acts 5:1-11.

[42] Anthony Gilby, *An answer to the deuillish detection of S. Gardiner* (RSTC 11884. London?, 1548), fo. 23r.

[43] Anthony Gilby, 'An Admonition to England and Scotland, to Call them to Repentance', in David Laing (ed.), *The Works of John Knox*, vol. IV (Edinburgh, 1895), pp. 563-4.

[44] William Birche, *A songe betwene the Quenes maiestie and Englande* (RSTC 3079: London, 1564). This broadsheet was first entered into the Stationer's Register for a different printer in 1558-9, presumably indicating a lost edition.

[45] Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII*, pp. 64-7.

[46] George Joye, *The exposicion of Daniel the prophete* (RSTC 14823. Antwerp, 1545), fos. 90r-91v.

[47] A view associated particularly with Eric W. Ives. See his survey of the debate in 'Stress, Faction and Ideology in Early-Tudor England', in *Historical Journal* 34 (1991), 193-202.

[48] John Foxe, *Actes and monuments of these latter and perillous dayes, touching matters of the church* (RSTC 11222. London, 1563), p. 533.

[49] Michael Riordan and Alec Ryrie, 'Stephen Gardiner and the making of a Protestant villain' in *Sixteenth Century Journal* 34 (2003), 1039-63.

[50] Foxe, *Actes and monuments* (1563), pp. 533-4.

[51] Ibid. p. 533.

[52] Martin A. Sharp Hume (ed. and tr.), *Chronicle of King Henry VIII of England. Being a Contemporary Record of some of the Principal Events of the Reigns of Henry VIII. and Edward VI. Written in Spanish* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1889), pp. 106, 108, 127, 151-2,

[53] *Beholde here (gentle reader) a brief abstract of the genealogie of all the kynges of England* (RSTC 10022. London, 1560?).