

THE THREAT AT COURT: SUBVERSIVE USES OF TRANSLATION, TRANSCRIPTION, AND TRADITION IN THE HENRICIAN COURT

My dissertation analyzes the use, at the Henrician court, of the strategies of translation, transcription, and tradition to cushion and to code the presentation of dangerous and radical ideas. Each strategy allows courtier-poets deniability, while nonetheless allowing them to communicate clearly with their readers. These writers speak in a code that can be interpreted by anyone at court, but use that code to create just enough distance to avoid overt confrontation with the king; this system is further complicated by the king's own deeply influential role in the creation of that code. Each strategy also establishes each author's work within a larger continuity which serves to give verses greater context, greater interpretive potential, and greater authority for their contemporary readers. Further, those continuities could be accessed to support a range of goals – for the centralization of power, the preservation of aristocracy, or a push towards greater equality for those of lower birth – according to the goals of a particular poet.

The work is divided into three sections, each addressing a separate method of subversion. The first section deals with the use of translation in the courtly love lyric tradition and in the translation of Classical and Biblical texts, focusing primarily on works by Wyatt and Surrey. Joining translation to similar subversive coding techniques highlights systems of resistance at play across poetic genres, while the joint analysis also highlights the ways that coding works differently in translations than through other outlets, with more clarity in its critiques and so more risk. The work then moves into an analysis of the strategy of transcription, particularly as practiced in the Devonshire Manuscript. Like the practice of translation, transcription was understood as a method through which courtiers could reimagine a text, making works more immediately resonant with their world. Compared to translation, however, transcription allowed for both greater flexibility and greater deniability, not least because the products of the manuscript are a collaborative project where transcription unites with multiple authorship. The widespread use of such strategies emphasizes the particular literacies involved in the use of poetry at court; those particular literacies must be established for subversive energies to circulate successfully via context-dependent codes. The work closes with a section on poetic tradition as used in Henrician works. Particularly relevant here is Henry's own verse. Despite his apparent resistance to using translation in his own work, perhaps because of the potential to be understood as using a system of coding which he understood as less authoritative than the outlets he chose instead, Henry clearly saw the value of adapting established tropes to reinforce and reimagine his own position. Both courtiers and king were simultaneously aware of and resistant to the need to put their most radical claims to power in codes that both protected such claims and robbed them of at least some force. Henry's own choices underline the subversion that takes place when courtiers manipulate his choices of royal precedent so that they become critiques rather than validation or valorization.

Understanding these relationships will create new avenues to understand the changes that came to all of England in the 16th century, charting the negotiation between the increasing centralization of power and the increasing push for popularization of power. The outlets through which the king and his courtiers attempted to preserve and privilege their traditions often opened up new opportunities, and the Humanist atmosphere of the court created men and women to take advantage of those new chances and changes. Taken together, these analyses establish not only that poetry was used to express subversive energies in their various forms, but that courtier-poets at all levels were trained to recognize and use this poetic coding.