

THE MONARCHICAL REPUBLIC OF MARY I*

ALICE HUNT

University of Southampton

ABSTRACT. *In his celebrated 1987 essay, ‘The monarchical republic of Queen Elizabeth I’, Patrick Collinson wrote that ‘Elizabethan England was a republic which also happened to be a monarchy: or vice versa.’ Since then, the idea of an Elizabethan ‘monarchical republic’ has been tested, challenged, and developed, with precedents found in Henry VIII’s and Edward VI’s reigns. Mary I’s reign has not, however, been considered for its contribution to the debates. Yet, in 1553, the unique circumstances of Mary’s accession as England’s first queen regnant, who was also still legally a bastard, exacerbated sixteenth-century anxieties about monarchical authority, and about the correct relationship between a monarch and parliament. Prior to Mary’s coronation, her council put forward an unprecedented proposal: they wanted parliament to sit before Mary was anointed and crowned queen. This article explores this proposal, in conjunction with two texts, Richard Taverner’s An oration gratulatory made upon the joyfull proclayming of the moste noble Princes Quene Mary Quene of Englande and the play Respublica, to argue that, at the beginning of her reign, significant pressure was put on Mary to rule her country as a ‘monarchical republic’.*

In his 1987 essay, ‘The monarchical republic of Queen Elizabeth I’, Patrick Collinson wrote that ‘Elizabethan England was a republic which also happened to be a monarchy: or vice versa’.¹ It was, of course, the unique circumstances of the Elizabethan exclusion crisis that Collinson identified as the ‘single issue on which the monarchical republic most forcefully expressed itself’.² Encapsulated in both this particular political moment and in Collinson’s powerful, paradoxical phrase was a new way of thinking about Elizabethan politics. It acknowledged that Elizabethan men of government were able, in response to a very unusual situation, to conceive of themselves, and name themselves, as citizens as well as subjects; they saw the responsibility of governing the state as their own as much

School of Humanities, University of Southampton, Highfield SO17 1BJ a.hunt@soton.ac.uk

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¹ Patrick Collinson, ‘The monarchical republic of Queen Elizabeth I’, in Patrick Collinson, *Elizabethan essays* (London and Rio Grande, 1994), pp. 31–57, at p. 43. The essay was first published as ‘The monarchical republic of Queen Elizabeth I’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 69 (1987), pp. 394–424.

² Patrick Collinson, ‘Elizabeth I and the verdicts of history’, *Historical Research*, 76 (2003), pp. 469–91, at p. 490.

as their monarch's, and could envisage parliament and council ruling England (albeit temporarily) without a monarch. 'While', Collinson wrote, 'not necessarily captains or pilots of the ship of state, they shared the responsibility of ensuring that it did not run onto the rocks.'³

Since Collinson first proposed the idea, 'monarchical republic' has become both a useful and contested epithet. On the one hand, it has been interrogated for its accuracy or suitability as a description of Elizabethan politics and Elizabeth's mode of rule, particularly when the last years of her reign have been equated with a more absolutist form of monarchy.⁴ On the other hand, the notion of a 'monarchical republic' has been influential in the longer story of English political thought, with the seeds of seventeenth-century republicanism searched for in sixteenth-century theory and practice.⁵ As Collinson makes clear, however, *republica* (as in Sir Thomas Smith's *De republica anglorum*, for example) was 'simply the common term' for the commonwealth or state, and did not, for sixteenth-century England, necessarily denote a constitution antithetical to monarchy, but one in which supreme power might not continuously reside with the monarch alone.⁶ While the 'acephalous conditions' (Collinson's phrase) of Edward VI's reign have been invoked as significant to the development of ideas about

³ Collinson, 'Elizabeth I', p. 489.

⁴ For a more absolutist version of Elizabethan rule, particularly in the latter part of the reign, which modifies the extent of a monarchical republic, see Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans?: Presbyterians and English conformist thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London, 1988). Stephen Alford's *The early Elizabethan polity: William Cecil and the British succession crisis, 1558–1569* (Cambridge, 1998) identifies, like Collinson, quasi-republican rumblings in the Elizabethan polity. Other important responses to Collinson include Simon Adams, 'Favourites and factions at the Elizabethan court', in Ronald G. Asch and Adolf M. Birke, eds., *Princes, patronage and the nobility: the court at the beginning of the modern age c. 1450–1650* (Oxford, 1991); John Guy, 'The 1590s: the second reign of Elizabeth I?', in John Guy, ed., *The reign of Elizabeth I: court and culture in the last decade* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 1–19; Anne McLaren, *Political culture in the reign of Elizabeth I: queen and commonwealth, 1558–1585* (Cambridge, 1998); and Natalie Mears, *Queenship and political discourse in the Elizabethan realms* (Cambridge, 2005). Most recently, an anniversary collection of essays in response to Patrick Collinson's 1987 essay has appeared: John F. McDiarmid, ed., *The monarchical republic of early modern England: essays in response to Patrick Collinson* (Aldershot, 2008).

⁵ See Markku Peltonen, *Classical humanism and republicanism in English political thought, 1570–1640* (Cambridge, 1995); J. G. A. Pocock, ed., *The varieties of British political thought* (Cambridge, 1993); and, earlier, Pocock's *The Machiavellian moment: Florentine political thought and the Atlantic republican tradition* (Princeton, NJ, 1975; reissued 2003). See also Ann Hughes, *The causes of the English civil war* (2nd edn, Basingstoke, 1998); and Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Republicanism: a shared European heritage* (Cambridge, 2002).

⁶ Collinson, 'The monarchical republic', p. 36. Sir Thomas Elyot's 1552 Latin dictionary translates *Res publica* as 'common weale': *Bibliotheca Eliotae: Eliotes Dictionarie the second time enriched, and more perfectly corrected, by Thomas Cooper* (London, 1552). Smith's *De republica anglorum* appeared in English in 1594 as *The common-wealth of England*. However, in his *Boke named the governour*, Elyot distinguishes between the 'publike weale' and the 'common weale', between publicans (those who rule) and commoners. Elyot writes 'hit semeth that men have ben longe abused in calling *Rempubliam* a comune weale ... And consequently there may appere lyke diversitie to be in englishe, betwene a publike weale and comune weale, as shuld be in latine, betwene *Res publica* and *Res plebeia*', Donald W. Rude, ed., *A critical edition of Sir Thomas Elyot's 'The Boke named the governour'* (New York, NY, and London, 1992), pp. 15–16. Sir Thomas Smith's *De republica anglorum* was first printed in 1583 but he began writing it in 1563. See Sir Thomas Smith, *De republica anglorum*, ed. Mary Dewar (Cambridge, 1982).

parliamentary monarchy, Mary I's reign has not.⁷ But, in 1553, the unprecedented circumstances of Mary's accession, as England's first crowned queen regnant and a Catholic bastard who was proclaimed supreme head of the church of England, added fuel to sixteenth-century debates about correct monarchical authority, particularly concerning the monarch's relation to council and parliament. This article argues that, as Mary consolidated her power in the summer and autumn of 1553, significant pressure was put on her to conceive of her realm as a monarchical republic, and thereby to acknowledge that the 'ship of state' should be navigated by a (male) crew rather than a lone helmswoman. Mary's response to this pressure is revealing for its indication of what sort of queen she wanted to be, and what sort of government she wanted to preside over.

To explore this Marian monarchical republic, this article examines the circumstances of Mary's coronation, and three different 'texts' linked to her accession. The first 'text' is a letter which describes the unprecedented proposal, put forward by Mary's council, to reverse the traditional order of coronation and parliament: certain members of the newly formed council wished to delay Mary's coronation until after her legitimacy could be confirmed by a parliamentary sitting. This plan is reported by the imperial ambassadors in a letter to Charles V dated 19 September 1553. The ambassadors also refer to a written bill outlining the proposal, a copy of which they enclosed with their letter but which, unfortunately, is not extant. While this novel proposal has been mentioned in accounts of Mary's coronation, its significant challenge to England's constitution has been largely underexplored. The second text is Richard Taverner's little-studied *An oration gratulatory made upon the joyfull proclayming of the moste noble Princes Quene Mary Quene of Englande* (1553). The third is an unattributed play with a revealing title: *Respublica*, which was probably performed at court over Christmas 1553 and constitutes, I argue, a striking dramatization of a female monarchical republic. Taken together, Mary's problematic coronation, Taverner's text, and the accession play can be identified as the moment of a Marian monarchical republic. As such, we are prompted to think about Mary's reign as a precedent for Elizabeth's.

I

In one of many letters to Charles V relaying the fraught process of Mary's proclamation as queen, the imperial ambassadors reported with, we imagine, a sigh of relief, that on 3 August 'the Queen accomplished two regal acts: she was proclaimed, and took possession; the third, remaining, is the coronation, which will take place as soon as the necessary preparations can be made'.⁸ What exactly the

⁷ Collinson, 'The monarchical republic', p. 39, and see Stephen Alford, *Kingship and politics in the reign of Edward VI* (Cambridge, 2002); and Dale Hoak, 'Sir William Cecil, Sir Thomas Smith, and the monarchical republic of Tudor England', in McDiarmid, ed., *The monarchical republic of early modern England*, pp. 37–54.

⁸ *Calendar of letters, despatches, and state papers, relating to the negotiations between England and Spain, preserved in the archives at Simancas and elsewhere* (London, 1862–1954) (*CSP: Spanish*), XI (1553), p. 151.

'necessary preparations' for the coronation of England's first queen would be, however, was not quite so straightforward. There was no precedent for the anointing and crowning of an English queen regnant, and the 1534 act of supremacy and Mary's formal proclamation meant that she, much to her dismay, would be inaugurated as supreme head of the church of England.⁹ In addition, although Mary's legitimacy as rightful heir could never have been disputed successfully, despite Edward's signed letters patent, her bastardy had not been revoked since Henry's first act of succession of 1534. The third act of succession, of 1544, had reinstated both Mary and Elizabeth as rightful heirs should Edward die childless, but this act did not retract their bastard status.¹⁰ Henry VIII's acts of succession – acts which no English monarch had ever passed before – brought the legitimacy of kings and queens under the authority of parliament. Only parliament could undo what parliament had done, even when the issue at stake was divinely ordained monarchy.

Lady Jane Grey's and Princess Mary's competing proclamations of July 1553 highlight this tension between the roles of the monarch and parliament in legitimizing successors. Jane's proclamation promoted the prerogative of Edward and his 'devise for the succession', which, crucially, was never sanctioned by parliament.¹¹ At the same time, Jane's proclamation ironically drew attention to the fact that, despite Henry's will and royal prerogative, the illegitimacy of the princesses Mary and Elizabeth still held because their mothers' divorces had been 'ratified and confirmed by authority of special Parliament in the XXVIII year of the said King Henry's Reign, which ratification is still in force, power and effect'.¹² By contrast, Mary's proclamation, read out at the Cross on Cheapside on 19 July 1553, appealed to the authority of the divine laws governing English succession: it is God's will and Edward's death 'whereby the crown imperial of the realms of

⁹ The fourteenth-century coronation service book, the *Liber regalis*, used for all Tudor coronations, included rubrics for the crowning of a queen consort, but not a queen regnant. The *Liber regalis* is still held at Westminster Abbey. For a translation, see Leopold G. Wickham Legg, ed., *English coronation records* (London, 1901).

¹⁰ On the acts of succession, see G. R. Elton, ed., *The Tudor constitution: documents and commentary* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1982), pp. 2–3; and *Statutes of the realm*, III: 1534 Act of Succession, 25 Henry VIII, c. 22 (p. 471), 1536 Act of Succession, 28 Henry VIII, c. 7 (p. 655), and 1544 Act of Succession, 35 Henry VIII, c. 1 (p. 955).

¹¹ As the 'devise for the succession' was never sanctioned by parliament, letters patent dated 21 June 1553 instead declared the princesses Mary and Elizabeth bastards and summoned parliament to ratify this and the deviation of the crown to Jane. The letters state that all needed to be 'established, ratyfed, and confirmed, as well by authoritye of parleamente'. J. G. Nichols, ed., *The chronicle of Queen Jane and two years of Queen Mary, and especially of the rebellion of Sir Thomas Wyatt written by a resident in the Tower of London* (London, 1850), p. 98.

¹² 'Events of the kingdom of England beginning with King Edward VI until the wedding of the most serene Prince Philip of Spain and the most serene Queen Mary as related by Monsignor G. F. Commendone: an Italian manuscript in the library of the Monasterio de San Lorenzo El Real Del Escorial', in C. V. Malfatti, ed. and trans., *The accession, coronation and marriage of Mary Tudor as related in four manuscripts of the Escorial* (Barcelona, 1956), pp. 3–65, at p. 9.

England and Ireland, with the title of France and all other things appertaining unto the same, do most rightfully and lawfully belong unto us'.¹³

Despite the confident wording of her proclamation, Mary had not automatically become queen on Edward's death. Her proclamation, read out nine days after Jane's, urgently attempted to claw back the right she was so nearly denied. Consequently, the terms of her legitimacy and the grounds of her queenship remained ill-defined because she was brought to power by a bloodless coup. Recent research into the rebellion that secured Mary's throne has shown that her supporters, and her subsequently large council, comprised different groups of people with different motives: loyal members of Mary's household, co-religionists and former Edwardian councillors who recognized Mary's legitimacy as Henry VIII's daughter, or who were forced to acknowledge this once it became clear that Northumberland's plot was falling apart.¹⁴ Henry Fitzalan, earl of Arundel, for example, had been reluctant to accept Lady Jane Grey, as was William Cecil, and William Lord Paget, who had fallen from Northumberland's favour in 1551, was never involved with the succession plot.¹⁵ In a speech to the wavering council in London, Arundel backtracked and, in doing so, attempted to reconcile 'true Religion' with rightful succession and lawful governance. 'I am sure ... you know,' he told the council, 'that this Crown belongs rightfully, by direct succession, to My Lady Mary lawful and natural daughter of our King Henry VIII ... and that will be true Religion, because you will enforce justice, restoring his right to the lawful heir.'¹⁶ What exactly this 'true Religion' might look like, however, was left unsaid.

It is likely that it was the crowd of experienced Edwardian councillors who had joined the co-religionists and household members in support of Mary who attempted to push through the unprecedented proposal concerning her coronation. On 19 September 1553, the imperial ambassadors reported that some 'novelty' was afoot:

[S]ince our last letters to your Majesty were written, the Queen has sent us word through Scheyfve's secretary that certain Councillors now opine it would be better to hold the Parliament before the coronation, the better to establish and confirm the reign; to discover the intentions of the estates in general and the tendencies of individuals; to discover if there be opposition; to annul the declaration of bastardy made by the Parliament during the lifetime of the late King Henry in the year 1535, and declare the late King Edward's testament null and void. We were informed also that there was a good deal of plotting going on against the Queen in this town of London; arquebuses, arrows and other weapons were being collected in various houses, giving cause to fear that during the ceremony of the coronation,

¹³ Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, eds., *Tudor royal proclamations* (3 vols., New Haven, CT, and London, 1964–9), II, p. 3.

¹⁴ Anna Whitelock and Diarmaid MacCulloch, 'Princess Mary's household and the succession crisis, July 1553', *Historical Journal*, 50 (2007), pp. 1–23.

¹⁵ David Loades, *The reign of Mary Tudor: politics, government and religion in England, 1553–1558* (2nd edn, London, 1991), pp. 19–20.

¹⁶ Malfatti, ed., *The accession, coronation and marriage of Mary Tudor*, p. 16.

as the Queen must proceed to Westminster through the streets of the town for a distance of an English mile or more, some attempt might be made against her person. The Council were now of opinion that Parliament should be held before the coronation to avoid the likelihood of trouble; the Queen was distressed to hear of this alteration, and the Council could not agree as a whole with the opinion of Paget and others that the coronation should take place and the established order be followed. She asked our advice on the matter.¹⁷

The ambassadors return to the plan to delay the coronation at the end of their letter. Here they refer to a 'writing', and then a 'leaflet', a copy of which they enclosed with their despatch. They report:

A personage of this place, adviser (*conducteur*) of Courtenay and the Lady Elizabeth, came to see us at our lodgings to communicate the writing whereof we send a copy with this letter, and find out if we were of opinion that the coronation should precede the assembling of Parliament or follow it, as if with the intention to discover whether we had discussed the matter with the Queen.¹⁸

They then go on to comment that 'the publication of such leaflets, intended to bring about the Parliament before the coronation, is no doubt made with the object of traversing the Queen's affairs, and is not exempt of danger and suspicion'.¹⁹ This 'leaflet' was likely to be a manuscript bill; it is described first as 'un escript' (a writing or manuscript) in the original French letter, and then as 'billet' which translates most clearly as 'bill'.²⁰ No copies of any such bill are extant, but something in writing was clearly circulating beyond the council. The proposal was a serious one and, as the ambassadors' report implies, significant pressure seems to have been exerted on the queen to accept it. However, as the ambassadors also describe, the council was divided. '[T]he Council could not agree as a whole with the opinion of Paget and others that the coronation should take place and the established order be followed', they write and, later, 'We hear from a good source that the Queen's Councillors are divided among themselves and cannot agree, and that they take sides violently.'²¹

The purpose behind the proposal as outlined by the ambassadors is sevenfold, and not as explicit as we – or the ambassadors – would like. The ambassadors refer twice to feeling ignorant of the proposal's real agenda. To 'better ... establish and confirm the reign' and to 'discover the intentions of the estates in general' seem vague and unpersuasive reasons, as does the fear that 'some attempt might be made against' the queen's person, for how and why could parliament confirm Mary's queenship more securely than the ancient rite of coronation? The implication is that parliament is more legitimizing than sacred ceremony. Furthermore, by discovering 'the intentions of the estates in general' and the 'tendencies of individuals' during the session, is it implied that this

¹⁷ *CSP: Spanish*, XI (1553), p. 238.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

²⁰ The original letter is in French, in Simon Renard's handwriting. The version in the *Calendar of state papers* is translated from a transcript in L.-P. Gachard and C. Pinot, eds., *Collection des voyages des souverains des Pays-Bas* (4 vols., Brussels, 1874–82), IV, pp. 124–7 (relevant paragraph p. 126).

²¹ *CSP: Spanish*, XI (1553), pp. 238, 241.

headless parliament could then somehow deal effectively with any intentions deemed troublesome? And troublesome according to whom: the nobles or the uncrowned queen? More persuasive is the plan that parliament should finally annul 'the declaration of bastardy' against Mary, and yet Henry's will had legitimized her as the rightful successor to Edward and had thereby always rendered her claim stronger than Jane's. The ambassadors' report remains silent on the issue of the supremacy. Possibly, a parliamentary session before the coronation could both insist that Mary accept the supreme headship and delineate the terms of her supremacy. A concomitant possibility is that behind the proposal was the belief that Mary, as an unanointed monarch, would not be head of that parliament, and would thus be, and remain, under parliament's authority. Indeed, it is further implied in this report that Mary's subsequent coronation would seal and bind her to any acts that this parliament might pass.

Traditionally, the English monarch opened parliament, not the other way round. If parliament was sitting when a monarch died, as was the case in 1547, the session was automatically dissolved and not re-opened until after the successor's coronation via a state ceremony, with the monarch bearing the regalia that had been consecrated and bestowed during the coronation. The parliamentary session was thus legitimized by the anointed and crowned monarch; it was not the role of parliament to render that monarch legitimate. As the ambassadors were only too aware, a proposal to 'better ... establish and confirm' Mary's queenship by parliament first suggested a magnification of the role of the council and parliament over Mary and the direction of her reign. They saw that the proposed reversal would render Mary 'more dependent on Council and Parliament than she should be; bridle her so that she cannot marry a foreigner, and bring about her marriage to Courtenay according to the Bishop of Winchester's design; prevent the establishment of religion, and generally, put their intrigues into execution'.²² As is implicit here, the council's various 'intrigues' were not necessarily in line with one another or religiously motivated. Stephen Gardiner, bishop of Winchester, for example, wanted to bind Mary to a marriage with Edward Courtenay rather than with Philip of Spain, whom William Lord Paget supported, but Gardiner would not have wanted to 'prevent the establishment of religion'. At the heart of the proposal is an anxiety about the correct role of council and parliament in determining monarchy and, since Mary was England's first queen, in determining *female* monarchy.²³ Many of the experienced men in Mary's early council were, however, predominantly political men, who had advocated and carved out a system of government-by-council, begun towards the end of Henry's reign and advanced in Edward's.²⁴ The precedent of Edward's

²² *Ibid.*, p. 241.

²³ On the issue of gender in Mary's reign, see the work of Judith Richards, in particular her 'Mary Tudor as "Sole Quene"? Gendering Tudor monarchy', *Historical Journal*, 40 (1997), pp. 895–924.

²⁴ John Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford and New York, NY, 1988); and Dale Hoak, 'Two revolutions in Tudor government: the formation and organization of Mary I's privy council', in Christopher Coleman and David Starkey, eds., *Revolution reassessed: revisions in the history of Tudor government and*

minority rule meant that, to a certain extent, the proposition of a headless parliament to confirm the successor was not wholly unthinkable, regardless of that successor's religion and gender. In this way, a pre-coronation parliament was entirely compatible with the developing notion of parliamentary monarchy. The question, then, of whether or not such a constitutional reversal would have been proposed if Mary had *not* been a woman becomes more difficult to answer. Gender is inextricable from Mary's situation and the circumstances underpinning her succession, and yet, at the same time, the relationship between monarchy and parliament had shifted ever since the supremacy had been established, and gender was not a principal factor in this.

The ambassadors advised Mary to reject the proposal, which she duly did, thereby asserting her independence from her council and from the parliamentary process. Indeed, her coronation on 1 October 1553 proceeded counter to established ecclesiastical law. Despite the 1552 Second Act of Uniformity, Mary's coronation service proceeded as a full Roman mass.²⁵ Since England was still technically schismatic, she asked Henry Penning to request that Cardinal Pole absolve her and her bishops so that they 'might be able to say mass and administer the sacraments without sin'.²⁶ In addition, fearing that the Edwardian oils used for her anointing 'may not be such as they ought because of the ecclesiastical censures upon the country', Mary asked for special oil to be sent to England by the bishop of Arras.²⁷ She also ensured that her coronation oath did not mention the new religion. A copy of the oath that Mary swore is not extant, but the ambassadors (whose advice Mary again consulted and who urged her to 'follow the old and accustomed' form) reported that she 'told us afterwards that she had seen the old form of oath wherein no mention was made of the new religion, but it was said that she should observe the laws of England; and in order to remove every uncertainty she would have the words *just and licit laws* added'.²⁸ Henry Penning also referred to the oath that Mary amended, and in doing so, preserved her royal prerogative: 'Her Majesty gave me the copy of the oath taken by her at the coronation, which she had thoroughly considered beforehand, and added a few words having for object to maintain her Majesty's integrity and good-will; as may be seen by the identical copy.'²⁹ Despite such assertiveness about her full monarchical authority, Mary appeared at the end of her coronation holding two sceptres: the 'one of the King, the other bearing a dove which, by custom, is given to the Queen', according to the papal envoy

administration (Oxford, 1986), pp. 87–115. Guy, for example, writes that, at this time, Mary's council saw 'traditionalists ... bedded down with *politiques*', *Tudor England*, p. 230.

²⁵ According to ambassador Simon Renard, it followed 'the rites of the old religion', *CSP: Spanish*, XI (1553), p. 262.

²⁶ *Calendar of state papers and manuscripts, relating to English affairs, existing in the archives and collections of Venice, and in other libraries of northern Italy* (London, 1864–1947) (*CSP: Venetian*), V (1534–54), p. 430. The break with Rome was not officially reversed, and England absolved, until the third parliament in 1554.

²⁷ *CSP: Spanish*, XI (1553), p. 220.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 239–40.

²⁹ *CSP: Venetian*, V (1534–54), p. 431.

Commendone.³⁰ This double image may well have been the result of an innocent muddle or an entirely acceptable (if contradictory) expression of the status of a queen regnant, but its symbolism is striking. The newly anointed Mary was presented as both prince of her realm and consort to that realm, as both in charge of her country and its governing, and, as the laws of marriage dictate, subordinate to it.

There seems, then, to be a dichotomy between presentation and intention at the beginning of Mary's reign. Mary may have been forced to acknowledge the experience of certain 'men of position' by admitting them to her council, but she was not necessarily going to heed their advice. The plan to delay the coronation may have come to nothing, but what remains significant is that, in 1553, the possibility of holding a parliamentary session without an anointed monarch at its head, in order to secure the succession, had been presented to the queen. Confronted with a delicate and complex legal problem, governing men conceived of, and articulated, an alternative understanding of monarchical authority. At times, Mary seems acutely aware of a degree of subordination to her council. Just before the coronation, Mary summoned her councillors to the Tower and, sinking to her knees before them, pledged her intention to rule 'to the public good and all the subjects' benefit'. As the imperial ambassadors reported, she informed them that she had 'entrusted her affairs and person ... to them'. In response, her councillors were reportedly moved to tears by this unprecedented action: 'amazed as they were by this humble and lowly discourse, so unlike anything ever heard before in England'.³¹ A little later in her reign, Mary again acknowledged her dependency on those who had supported her claim to the throne and on parliament's ratification of her queenship. In 1554 when she addressed the Guildhall to counter Sir Thomas Wyatt's uprising against her Spanish marriage, she argued, according to one report of the event, that her subjects owed her more obedience than was ordinarily due to a monarch because she was not only a consecrated monarch, and thus a type of David, but also a queen who had been elected and confirmed by 'unanimous acclamations and votes'.³² In a chronicle account of this Guildhall speech, Mary referred to her coronation as a marriage, pointed to her coronation ring and reminded her audience of their coronation oaths of allegiance – but also of their 'actes of parliament' confirming her legitimacy:

at my coronation when I was wedded to the realme and to the lawes of the same (the spowsall ring whereof I have on my finger, which never hetherto was, nor hereafter shall be left of) ye promised your alleageaunce and obedience unto mee, and that I am the right and

³⁰ Malfatti, ed., *The accession, coronation and marriage of Mary Tudor*, p. 34.

³¹ *CSP: Spanish*, xi (1553), pp. 259–60.

³² Juan Paez de Castro, 'A diary of events regarding the happenings in connection with the rebellion of Thomas Wyatt and others following the arrival of the imperial ambassadors', in Malfatti, ed., *The accession, coronation and marriage of Mary Tudor*, pp. 63–75, at p. 67.

true inheritor to the crowne of this realme of Englande, I not onely take all Christendome to witnesse, but also your actes of parliament confirming the same.³³

II

In 1553, Richard Taverner wrote *An oration gratulatory made upon the joyfull proclayming of the moste noble Princes Quene Mary Quene of Englande*.³⁴ Taverner was former clerk of the privy seal (having been appointed by Cromwell in 1536–7) and the author and translator of several humanist and reformist works. *An oration* was dedicated to Mary (although not necessarily ever read by her), and Taverner was probably hoping to protect his position at court by presenting the new queen with an account of her right to rule England. If this was his intention, it was unsuccessful: Taverner lost his place in the signet office. But Taverner, ‘Cromwell’s principal propagandist for religious reform’,³⁵ was also undoubtedly taking an opportunity to counsel Mary.

Taverner’s neglected accession text lurches between fixing Mary’s legitimacy to the will of God and to the authority of parliament. In doing so, it encapsulates the dilemma of a divinely ordained Catholic queen and her status vis-à-vis the law and established religion. As a solution, it advocates a system that looks remarkably like a monarchical republic: it presents Mary as bound by her parliament in order to protect the interests of the commonwealth. There is no doubt, Taverner wrote, that Mary is ‘the true and undoubted heire to the Crowne imperiall’, who has been restored to her rightful throne by God: ‘God, god, it is I saye O England that hath delivered the. Wherefore geve the onely glorye to hym and prayse herof. God it is and none other that hathe of hys profounde wysdome broughte to passe, and wroughte thys whole matter.’³⁶ But Mary’s legitimacy confronts the primacy of law when it comes to matters of religion. God may have delivered England from the wrongful blood heir, but this was not the same as delivering England from the true religion. Taverner pauses:

But here me thinke, I heare some saye, that albeit these thinges be most true, whych I have heare alledged for causes of high joy and gladnes: yet manye men wolde be muche more joyfull and inwardlye gladde in theyr hearts if they mighte be assured, that the true religion of Christe, whych is now receyved into thys realme, myghte, throughe hir graciouse goodnes, be retheyned & kept styll.³⁷

³³ Richard Grafton, *A chronicle at large and meere history of the affayres of Englande and kinges of the same* (London, 1569), p. 1332.

³⁴ *An oration gratulatory made upon the joyfull proclayming of the moste noble Princes Quene Mary Quene of Englande* was printed by John Day in 1553.

³⁵ Andrew W. Taylor, ‘Taverner, Richard (1505?–1575)’, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*. This account of Taverner’s life and career does not mention *An oration gratulatory*.

³⁶ Taverner, *An oration*, Aiii^v.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Av^v–Avi^r.

In answer to this, Taverner, careful to distance himself from his own opinion with ‘I nothing doubt’, appeals to the authority of parliament, and to Mary’s duty to observe this:

I nothing doubt, but that all lawes, concerninge religion, made uppon just and godlye groundes by auctorithy of Parlyamente, in the time of hir graces father of noble memorye kynge Henry the eyght, or which were made sithens that time, or that here after shalbe made, by like auctorithy, and upon like good, just and godly groundes hir highnes wyl confyrme, ratify and establishe. But on the contrary side, if anye thinges rashlye, by mennes pryvate auctorithy, have been lately setfourth, without warrant of Parliament, or (which is chieffye to be regarded) wythoute warrant of gods worde, shall we desyre that such things may stand? or shall we not rather wishe that it wold please hir Maiesty, withal convenient spede, to se the same revoked? the true religion placed? the discipline of the church restored? wherby the erroneouse opinions maye be syfted out from the ryght & catholike.³⁸

This is a clever piece of admonishing counsel. Mary’s authority hails from God, whose will has been miraculously recovered, but she is also represented as being subject to the authority of parliament, a *public* authority as opposed to the ‘pryvate auctorithy’ of men – Mary’s trusted intimates perhaps, rather than her councillors? For Mary to be a legitimate governor, Taverner’s text implies, she will need to understand her relationship to parliament, and the relationship between supremacy, religion, and parliament that the Henrician reformation established. In Taverner’s text, ‘true religion’ is that established justly and correctly by parliament. It is not distinct from the Catholic religion, but is a purged, purified ‘ryght & catholike’ religion, and one ratified by the parliamentary process for the good of the commonwealth.

Taverner’s published oration belongs to an arena of counsel surrounding Mary on her accession. The unique circumstances of England’s first queen, while not necessarily controversial on sole account of her gender, occasioned the voicing of new ways of thinking about monarchy. *Respublica* is a play that, like Taverner’s oration, also casts a version of Mary’s queenship in the identifiable mould of a monarchical republic. It is surely significant that one of the first plays of the reign of England’s first queen is called ‘commonwealth’. The eponymous heroine, ‘Respublica’, is not a historical or classical character, but instead represents the abstract concept of the English ‘common weal’ and, furthermore, is aligned with Mary herself. *Respublica* dramatizes the paradox, or perhaps the perfectly acceptable balance, of a divinely ordained queen whose power is negotiated and limited by parliament.

Evidence is shadowy about the exact authorship and performance history of *Respublica*.³⁹ The title page of the manuscript dates the play to ‘1553 and the first

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Avi^r–Avi^v.

³⁹ On the authorship question, see W. W. Greg’s introduction to his edition of the play: W. W. Greg ed., *Respublica: an interlude for Christmas 1553 attributed to Nicholas Udall*, Early English Text Society (London, 1952), pp. vii–xxi. See also L. Bradner, ‘A test for Udall’s authorship’, *Modern Language Notes*,

yeare of the moost prosperous Reigne of our moste gracious Sovereigne Quene Marye the first' and the play text refers to itself as a 'Christmas devise', indicating that a performance did take place during Christmas 1553, and possibly at court.⁴⁰ Since the play also refers to its actors as 'boys', this could refer to the children of the Chapel Royal.⁴¹ The Poet in the prologue also refers directly to the newly crowned Queen Mary, and the end of the play incorporates, as was customary, a short prayer to the queen and her council. Neither of these facts constitutes hard proof, unfortunately, that *Respublica* was ever performed before Mary, but in its reference to Christmas 1553 and its direct addressing of the queen, and in its subject matter, this play offers an invaluable glimpse into early Marian politics. What is similarly intriguing is that if indeed Nicholas Udall was the author of this play, then his material did not offend: Udall went on to enjoy success as one of the court's most favoured playwrights.⁴² *Respublica* offers Mary a limited, and conciliar, version of her rule, but adroitly cloaked throughout the play in the guise of flattery that would appeal to a queen who wanted to believe in her autonomy.

By Christmas 1553, the first parliament of Mary's reign had just closed and Mary had announced her intention to marry Philip. This parliament had declared Henry's marriage to Katherine of Aragon legitimate, and restated Elizabeth's illegitimacy. It had also repealed the Edwardian laws of treason and the acts of uniformity, ruled against clerical marriage, and reinstated religious images, communion in both kinds, and the form of consecration. Religion was thus brought back into line with the law of 1547. Consequently, *Respublica* is often read in terms of its critique of Edwardian policies, particularly the ransacking of church wealth and land, or for its religious position.⁴³ The allegory is not subtle: *Respublica* exclaims, 'O lorde howe have I bee used these five yeres past?' (l. 1776), and she is held hostage by corrupting vices (representing rogue Edwardian councillors) who disguise themselves pointedly as Reformation, Policy, Authority, and Honesty. The play has not, however, been discussed in terms of the relationship it creates between *Respublica* and Mary – between the English state and a female monarch.

⁴² (1927), pp. 378–80; and Greg Walker, *The politics of performance in early Renaissance drama* (Cambridge, 1998). The identification of Udall as author on stylistic grounds is persuasive but cannot, unfortunately, be conclusive.

⁴⁰ *Respublica*, ed. Greg, ll. 5–6, 39. Further line references will be to this edition and will be in the main text.

⁴¹ Mary was probably at Richmond for Christmas 1553.

⁴² A 1554 warrant from the Marian revels office refers to 'our welbeloved Nicholas Udall' who 'hath at soundrye seasons convenyente heretofore shewed and myndethe hereafter to shewe his diligence in setting forthe of dyalogges & enterludes before us for our regall dysporte and recreacyon', *Documents relating to the revels at court in the time of King Edward VI and Queen Mary*, ed. Albert Feuillerat (Louvain, 1914), p. 291.

⁴³ In *The politics of performance*, pp. 172–92, Walker provides a detailed analysis of the play as a response to disastrous Edwardian economic and social policies. For the play's religious stance, see Jean-Paul Debax, 'Respublica: pièce catholique?', *Caliban*, 24 (1987), pp. 27–47; and Michael A. Winkelman, 'Respublica: England's trouble about Mary', *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 33 (2002), pp. 77–98.

If *Respublica* was indeed performed at court before Mary in 1553, it would, in many ways, have been an appropriate and flattering choice. *Respublica* can be read as a celebration of sacred and absolute monarchy.⁴⁴ The character of Nemesis, the ‘mooste highe goddesse of correccion’ (l. 1782) who is sent by God at the end of the play to alleviate *Respublica* and restore the impoverished commonwealth, is explicitly aligned with the newly crowned queen of England:

Soo for goode Englande sake this presente howre and daie
 In hope of hir restoring from hir late decaye,
 we children to youe olde folke, bothe with harte and voyce
 maie Joyne all together to thanke god and Rejoyce
 That he hath sent Marye our soveraigne and Quene
 to reforme thabuses which hithertoo hath been,
 And that yls whiche long tyme have reigned uncorrecte
 shall nowe forever bee redressed with effecte.
 She is oure most wise and most worthie Nemesis
 Of whome our plaie meneth tamende that is amysse.

(ll. 45–54)

These words, uttered by the Poet in the play’s prologue, anticipate Nemesis’s entrance at the end of the play and, by aligning her with ‘Marye our soveraigne and Quene’, mean that, when Nemesis appears on stage, she does so as a mirror image of Mary: with ‘powre from godde all practicse to repeale’ (l. 1786), able to ‘reforme thabuses [the abuses] which hithertoo hath been’ and forever correct the path of history. Tom Betteridge has described this apocalyptic version of Mary’s accession as depicting a ‘once and for all redemption’.⁴⁵ Mary’s queenship will end all corruption and stem the uneasy contingency of history, the knowledge that, as the Poet in the prologue expresses, ‘all Commen weales Ruin and decaye/from tyme to tyme’ (ll. 19–20).

At the same time, however, the play does not fully subscribe to the redemptive version of history that it sets up with the arrival of a divine body in the form of Nemesis/Mary. Throughout *Respublica*, allusion is made to the capriciousness of history.⁴⁶ *Respublica*’s first words when she enters the stage are ‘Lorde what yeaerthlye thinge is permanent or stable,/or what is all this worlde but a lumpe mutable?’ (ll. 439–40). Underlying the play is a distinct sense that divine majesty may not be sufficient to restore or sustain the health of a commonwealth. Nemesis may appear on stage as an image of Mary I, sent by God and surrounded by the four traditional monarchical virtues of Truth, Mercy, Justice, and Peace, but Nemesis then leaves the play. She flies to another realm altogether, leaving *Respublica* alone to govern the People, with her male councillors. The final scene

⁴⁴ For this view, see David Bevington, ‘Drama and polemics under Queen Mary’, *Renaissance Drama*, 9 (1966), pp. 105–24; and Douglas F. Rutledge, ‘*Respublica*: rituals of state elevation and the political mythology of Mary Tudor’, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 5 (1991), pp. 55–68.

⁴⁵ Thomas Betteridge, *Tudor histories of the English Reformation, 1530–1583* (Aldershot, 1999), p. 138.

⁴⁶ Betteridge, *Tudor histories*, also discusses the ‘conflicting nature of the play’s two models of history’, p. 138.

of the play represents a tableau of a commonwealth, complete with governors and People but no sacred ruler: ‘Now dearling Respublica ye are in tholde goode estate/and they taken awaie that spoiled youe of Late’ (ll. 1922–3). More powerfully, this commonwealth is represented by the older female character, Respublica. Indeed, Respublica looks like a type of queen at the end of this play, touched by the fleeting divinity of Nemesis, accompanied by the heaven-sent virtues of Mercy, Truth, Peace, and Justice, and surrounded by councillors. Consequently, as Nemesis devolves her power to Respublica, it is with Respublica that Queen Mary is finally identified in this play: the queen is collapsed into the ‘commonwealth’.

Crucially, Respublica has to recognize her dependency on the men of governance – her councillors. In many ways, this play teaches monarchs a lesson about heeding the advice of unreliable and untrustworthy councillors, and thus appeals to a more absolutist version of monarchy. Typical of this play’s bifocality, however, *Respublica* simultaneously emphasizes a state’s unequivocal need for good councillors and ‘good government’ (l. 1360). The causes of the previous five years of decay are attributable not to the monarch’s competence, but to that of the ‘governors’. Respublica says:

yet by all experience thus muche is well seen
That in Comon weales while good governors have been
All thing hath prospered, and where suche men dooe lacke
Comon weales decaye, and all thinges do goe backe.
what mervaile then yf I wanting a perfect staigh
From mooste flourishing welth be falen in decaye?

(ll. 453–8)

At the end of the play, Respublica’s supposedly ‘faithfull/and trustie counsaillours’ (ll. 1824–5) are punished, but moderately and not solely by the monarchical figure of Nemesis. Avarice, for example, is handed over to the People ‘that he maie bee pressed’ (l. 1903) and Adulation is forgiven and swears to ‘mooste duelie servie god and the Commonweale’ (l. 1891). And as Mercy, Justice, and Peace turn outwards at the end of the play to address Queen Mary and her council, they emphasize the council’s role in ‘maintaining’ the respublica. This serves as a warning to the councillors to serve their monarch well, but also to the monarch to trust her councillors:

Mia.: Praie wee forre hir Counsaile to have long life and healthe.
Justice: Theirre soveraigne to serve. *Pax.*: And to mainteine Comonwealthe.

(ll. 1936–7)

III

As Mary’s reign progressed, she distanced herself increasingly from her privy council and their meetings.⁴⁷ But Collinson’s moment of an Elizabethan

⁴⁷ Loades, *The reign of Mary Tudor*, pp. 27ff.

monarchical republic has a prologue in Marian England. When Elizabeth ascended the throne, a message to the new queen to create a monarchical republic was rehearsed again, and this time in the city and parliament man Richard Mulcaster's commissioned account of the coronation pageants designed for Elizabeth's procession through the city of London on the eve of her coronation. Echoing *Respublica*, the pageant scene erected at the little conduit on Cheapside in that snowy January in 1559 featured two hills representing two contrasting types of republic: one barren, the 'Ruinousa Respublica', and one flourishing and fertile, 'Respublica bene instituta'.⁴⁸ When Elizabeth's chariot drew near, so Mulcaster's text tells us, Time appeared from a cave in between the two hills, carrying a Bible and leading his daughter, Truth, by the hand. Visually, this scene clearly equates a successful commonwealth with the restoration of the 'true' religion. However, it also associates successful monarchy, and a restored 'respublica', with successful conciliar and parliamentary process. The words decorating the pageant boards and describing the cause for a flourishing commonwealth do not mention religion, but instead mention 'Lovers of the common weale'.⁴⁹ Furthermore, this pageant is explicitly linked in Mulcaster's text to the next and final pageant of the series, on Fleet Street, in which Elizabeth was represented by Deborah 'consulting for the good government of Israel', and as a queen-in-parliament.⁵⁰ Never before had an English coronation procession depicted the monarch in this way, dressed in crimson parliament robes.⁵¹ Mulcaster glosses this pageant for its message of 'good counsell': it is this that will revive the wilting 'respublica' witnessed in the previous pageant:

The ground of this last pageant was, that forsomuch as the next pageant before had set before her graces eyes the florishing & desolate states of a commonweale, she might by this be put in remembrance to consult for the worthie government of her people, considering god oftimes sent women nobly to rule among men, as Debora which governed Israell in peace the space of xl yerres: & that it behoveth both men & women so ruling to use advise of good counsell.⁵²

This is the version of the monarchical republic dramatized in the 1553 Marian play, and repeated here as a warning to England's second queen.

This article has not argued that Marian England should be understood as a monarchical republic. Rather, it has argued that the moment surrounding the crisis of Mary's accession forced the articulation, in various ways, of a monarchical republic as a viable solution to the particular and overlapping issues of legitimacy, religion and gender – issues that were not so distinct from those surrounding Edward's minority rule or the accession of the third Tudor sibling, Elizabeth. Constitutionally, perhaps, the idea to reverse the order of coronation

⁴⁸ *The Quenes majesties passage through the cite of London to Westminster the daye before her coronacion*, ed. James M. Osborn (New Haven, CT, 1960), Ciii^v, Ciii^f.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Di^v.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Diii^v.

⁵¹ On the Tudor coronations, see my *The drama of coronation: medieval ceremony in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2008).

⁵² *The Quenes majesties passage*, ed. Osborn, Diii^f.

and the opening of parliament did not necessarily need to be controversial, and could be justified. And yet, to hook the monarch into parliament in this way, before they are anointed and crowned, signals undeniably that, for some Marian subjects at least, the ship of state could sail, momentarily, without a monarch at its helm.