

E duobus elige: The Becket “Devise” and Elizabeth I’s Spanish Dilemma

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In 1592, a group of English Catholics living in Continental exile commemorated the feast of Thomas Becket with local authorities in the Spanish city of Seville. Though surviving information about the event is sparse, this article reconstructs the complex design behind one of the most extraordinary elements in the celebration: a “devise” or visual poem featuring a representation of Elizabeth I confronted with a political and moral dilemma. The poem’s messages, intended to reach a mixed Anglo-Spanish audience, were displayed through multiple symbolic and rhetorical strategies to resignify the past and make it relatable to them—and to Elizabeth.

INTRODUCTION

On 29 December 1592, an English student delivering a speech in the Spanish city of Seville opened his address with the following words: “Faced with the prospect of speaking today about that brightest shining light of the Catholic church, St Thomas of Canterbury (Your renowned Eminence, most distinguished hearers), I have frequent recourse to this comforting thought: there is nothing I am about to say in this great concourse which does not relate

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to almost everyone present.”¹ The orator John Worthington’s accomplished exercise of *captatio benevolentiae* (winning of goodwill) was more than an empty rhetorical flourish. Rather, his words were the prelude to a complex undertaking: making the story of the foreign medieval saint relatable, first to the mixed Spanish and English audience attending the event and then to a subsequent readership, by bringing the past to the present across different national identities, languages, and political allegiances. Only fragmentary records of this celebration in honor of the saint have been preserved, though enough survive to establish how—and why—the figure of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury (ca. 1119–70), carried such weight for those wishing to resignify the past to serve their pressing needs.

Despite the early popularity of Saint Thomas in medieval Iberia,² by the sixteenth century his cult had waned. Devotional fervor for Becket among Spaniards attending the event was slight. By contrast, the English Catholics hosting the celebration held their saint in the highest reverence. Moreover, faced at home with religious persecution, they invested Becket’s story with a new meaning, one not devoid of political import. In the pages that follow, I examine both the aesthetic design and the religiopolitical messages underlying this important, but little recognized, transhistorical, transnational, and transcultural event. Its relevance for Anglo-Spanish relations cannot be sufficiently emphasized, as it took place at a time when Spain and England were at war—a war as much about political confrontation as about religious opposition. I shall show that every word, every image, and every symbolic reference in the 1592 Seville celebration was designed to project a multiplicity of messages, which, to be understood today, require a combination of literary and historiographical approaches as well as a close analysis of their symbolic, semantic, and figurative meanings. Contextualized by literature produced within the network of Catholic English colleges in Continental exile, and set against the complex dynamics of the event itself, it will become clear how those messages were shaped to speak to the different audiences: those present in Seville on that feast day of Saint Thomas, and those who would later read the printed account of the festivity. Underlying the celebration, and the poetry written for the occasion, rhetorical strategies are discernible that reveal how thoroughly the English collegians employed the *habitus* of communication of their new environment to influence the public sphere.³ Correctly assembled, these pieces explain one of the most extraordinary elements of the celebration:

¹ “A Sermon Delivered at the English College, Seville,” in Persons, 2024, 237.

² Cerda.

³ For a discussion of the public sphere in the early modern period, see Lake and Pincus, and more specifically in connection with English Catholics, Lake and Questier.

a visual poem—a poetic text combined with graphic elements—featuring a pensive Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603) facing a dilemma about her future both in government and in her afterlife. This portrayal of Elizabeth invites questions about its curiously mild vitriol, precisely at a moment when persecution of English Catholics was enhanced.

Thomas of Canterbury—Thomas Becket, as he would be known after the Middle Ages—was one of the most acclaimed English martyr-saints, both in his own country and throughout Europe. One of the favorite men of Henry II (r. 1154–89), Thomas was appointed lord chancellor first, and then archbishop of Canterbury. While for Henry this was a manner of ensuring a loyal primate of England, for Thomas it posed a conflict of interest, which he resolved in favor of the ecclesiastical, invoking Henry's wrath. Although the king and the archbishop were reconciled officially through papal mediation, and Becket returned to Canterbury from his self-exile in France, the tension continued. Henry's continuing complaints prompted four knights to assassinate the archbishop in Canterbury Cathedral at the high altar during mass. The story of Thomas of Canterbury's life and death immediately appeared in writing in a number of martyrology-like biographies,⁴ all of them ending with a coda about the fates of his murderers:

The divine revenge began to work so wonderfully against those who had slain him [Becket] that one tore himself into pieces with his own fingers and nails, the others rotted as they went upon the earth, some had palsy, some were mad and died cursedly. And thus, our Lord punished these cursed tyrants for love of his holy martyr.⁵

Typically, martyrdom accounts made explicit God's retribution against those responsible for the deaths of their martyred victims, not only illustrating divine justice but also providing a moral lesson for their readership.⁶ In Elizabethan England, the conflict between a king and the Roman Church, exemplified by Becket, had political immediacy, captured in the reference to "tyrants" in the quotation above. While also maintaining its primary meaning, an unjust ruler, the term *tyrant* referred to "a religious persecutor or oppressor" in martyrologies, and became common in Becket narratives early on.⁷ Over time,

⁴For the Becket biographies, see Staunton.

⁵Modernized from Hamer, 1:64–65. All translations are the author's except where otherwise noted.

⁶Marotti, 66–94.

⁷*Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "tyrant." <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/>.

the figure of the archbishop and his memory were vilified and disparaged by new “tyrants,” for different reasons. If in the late Middle Ages the cult and pilgrimage to his shrine were considered by Wycliffites such a source of idolatry and decadent opulence that they renamed him “Thomas of Cankerbury,”⁸ his early Tudor critics showed a greater concern for his defense of the prerogatives of ecclesiastical authorities over those of secular rulers, with obvious political resonances in their own times. It was precisely his defense of the primacy of church authority over that of the monarch that made Becket, in Margaret Aston’s words, “an early and outstanding casualty of Henry VIII’s iconoclasm”:⁹ the twelfth-century archbishop of Canterbury was famously “unsainted” in 1538 by a royal proclamation decreeing that “[he] shall not be esteemed, named, reputed, nor called a saint.”¹⁰ Furthermore, Henry VIII (r. 1509–47) commanded that “his Images and Pictures, through the whole Realme, shall be put down and avoided. . . . And that from henceforth, the Days used to be Festivall in his Name shall not be observed. . . . but [e]rased and put out of all the Bookes.”¹¹

Every effort was made to remove the demoted Becket from visual, verbal, physical, and material representation.¹² His sepulcher and shrine were destroyed, and after 1538 he would be Thomas [à] Becket or Bishop Becket among Reformation authors. On the other hand, for sixteenth-century English Catholics, he remained Saint Thomas of Canterbury, known as the saint who had been martyred twice. The more Protestants attacked his figure and his sainthood, the more Catholic apologists presented him as a staunch defender of the Church, who, after being exiled from his country for this reason, on his return would eventually be killed by the Church’s enemies.¹³ All of these features rendered him an ideal model of sainthood for those who, under Elizabeth I, felt themselves similarly persecuted for asserting the primacy of the Roman Church, and driven to suffer the comparable fate of banishment and potential martyrdom: Catholics in English seminaries on the Continent, the “loopholes in the Crown’s control of the Catholic resurgence,” in Albert

⁸ Slocum, 144. For a recent reassessment, see De Beer and Speakman’s volume of the 2021 British Library exhibition on Becket.

⁹ Aston, 365.

¹⁰ According to Henry, Becket’s canonization was a papal attempt to maintain “his usurped authority”: Hughes and Larkin, 1:185. On the political and religious circumstances of Becket’s “unsainting,” see Scully; Marshall; and Walsham.

¹¹ Hughes and Larkin, 1:275. Early modern texts, when cited from the original, are transcribed maintaining their spelling and punctuation, except for nasal abbreviations, which are silently expanded.

¹² Roberts.

¹³ Houliston, 1993b; Gibbons.

J. Loomie’s words.¹⁴ When the English Hospice of Rome was refounded as a college-seminary for English Catholics in 1579, it maintained its dedication to Saint Thomas of Canterbury, undoubtedly with those parallels in mind.¹⁵ Similarly, the commemoration of Becket’s day in the Seville English college was in line with the Roman memorialization, making it resonate both with the seminarians’ English identity and with their persecution at home.

THE “DEVISE” OF BECKET AND THE TWO HENRYS

The Venerable English College in Rome and other English seminaries on the Continent venerated Becket on the days dedicated to him in the liturgical calendar (December 29, commemorating his death, and July 7, the translation of his body to the shrine), celebrating mass in his honor and preparing special events, often the performance of Latin plays about his life, and sometimes music.¹⁶ Some of these texts are still extant, providing exceptional testimony for how English Catholic exiles represented Becket. This essay focuses on one such, the event at the College of St. Gregory in Seville, which was among the first seminaries abroad to celebrate the festivity of Saint Thomas of Canterbury. Only a few weeks after its foundation in 1592, the college commemorated the saint’s day with an event open to select Sevillanos. Unfortunately, only incomplete records of it are extant. These remnants are significant enough, however, to invite reflection on the religious and political messages underlying this unique celebration. As I hope to demonstrate in the following pages, an ideological agenda shaped both the Seville commemoration of Becket and the account about it published subsequently. Both pointedly extend the story of the martyr and his significance for the English mission, to comment clearly, if indirectly, on “cursed tyrants”—past and current—and their inevitable punishment, should they fail to repent.

What is known about the 1592 Seville celebration devolves from a description included in *Nevves from Spayne and Holland*, published in Antwerp in 1593, and traditionally attributed to the pen of Robert Persons (1546–1610).¹⁷ Its author pretends to be a Dutchman raised in England, writing “unto his friend and oste in London.”¹⁸ Like many other reports on the English Mission, the

¹⁴Loomie, 6. William Allen’s *True Sincere and Modest Defence of English Catholics* (1584) added Becket to the pantheon of Catholic martyrs (Gibbons, 321).

¹⁵Schofield; M. Williams.

¹⁶Shell, 211–21. See Houliston, 1993a, for the edition of the 1599 “Breuis Dialogismus.” For the liturgical music dedicated to Becket, see Leech.

¹⁷[Persons], 1593. For a discussion of the authorship of the work, see Rea, 220–30.

¹⁸[Persons], 1593, title page.

pamphlet is presented in epistolary form.¹⁹ It has two quite distinct parts. The first half offers a first-person account of the newly established institutions of the English Mission in Andalusia, providing details of the celebration of Saint Thomas Becket at Seville, as well as an account and summary of the written reactions to the latest anti-Catholic penal laws. The latter *Nevves* section imagines a “conference” “conteyning certaine considerations of State”²⁰—that is, a discussion of the political situation in England, carried out among a multinational group of “diuers gentlemen, captaynes, schollers, and others,”²¹ following the author’s return to Holland from Spain. At the center of this debate is the role of Elizabeth’s counsellors, especially William Cecil, Lord Burghley (1520–98), in her religious decisions. Many have connected this section of *Nevves* with other books by Robert Persons: the work popularly known as *Philopater* (1592), a critique of Elizabeth’s religious and political rule,²² and his main political work, *A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crowne of England* (1595). In this reading, *Nevves* is seen as an advertisement for the latter book.²³ Paulina Kewes, emphasizing the relevance of *Nevves*, has argued that its second part “is a transitional text which fuses insistence on the robustness of the Catholic cause plus evil councilor rhetoric with the more novel, reason-of-state approach to religion and the succession.”²⁴

As shown below, however, both aspects are already present in the first section of *Nevves*. There readers learn about the December 29 commemoration of Thomas of Canterbury’s death at the English college in Seville. This event bears an undeniable resemblance to another festivity just a few months earlier, on the occasion of a visit by Philip II (r. 1556–98) to St. Alban’s College in Valladolid, described by Persons in the pamphlet *A Relation of the King of Spaines Receiving in Valliolid, and in the English College of the Same Towne*.²⁵ Both the Valladolid and the Seville colleges combined the celebration of the

¹⁹ Fictional letters of this sort had become so widely associated with the communication style of English Catholics that Christopher Perkins—an ex-Jesuit turned agent for Cecil—recommended using the same method to counter their publicity: Houliston, 2007, 55. Brian Lockey, 77–79, has remarked on the novelty of Persons’s usage of this (pretended) epistolary form.

²⁰ [Persons], 1593, fol. 21^v.

²¹ [Persons], 1593, fol. 21^v.

²² Persons [Philopater, pseud.], 1592a. According to Houliston, 2007, 68–70, Persons wrote *Nevves* in support of this earlier work.

²³ Houliston, 2007, 55–58, 68–70; Houliston, 2000; Persons [Doleman, pseud.], 1594.

²⁴ Kewes, 60; Houliston, 2007, 55.

²⁵ English and Spanish pamphlets were printed to publicize the royal visit: Persons, 1592c, 1592b. See Cano Echevarría and Sáez-Hidalgo, 2009; Cano Echevarría and Sáez-Hidalgo et al.

saint’s mass with a significant political event, decked out in typical Habsburg fashion with ephemeral ornaments: an array of multilingual visual poetry identifying the occasion, and other religious and pedagogical exercises intended to display the students’ learning and piety while furthering the specific event. As narrated in *Nevves*:

An other day vvvas the feast of S. Thomas of Canterbury celebrated vvwith great solemnity & exceding much concourse of al principal people of that city [Seville], the Cardinal and some other great personages vvvere intertayned vvwith orations and speches in Latine, at their first entrance, vvntil the masse began, the church and court therunto adioned, vvvere addressed and hanged vvwith greate store of rich clothes, & thereppon mnch [*sic*] variety of poemes and learned inuentions in Latin, Greeke, Hebrue, French, Spanish, Italian, & other languages vvwherein these students seme to haue much vse and skil. . . . Two Sermonos [*sic*] vvvere made bv [*sic*] two Inglish scollers, the one in Latine, towards the middle of masse, after the gospel which indured about au [*sic*] houre, the other in spanish.²⁶

Clearly, the *Nevves* account of the ceremonies at Seville is selective, as was Persons’s report of the Valladolid celebration, *A Relation of the King of Spaines Receiving in Valliოდolid* (1592). The Spanish sermon preached at the Seville college is omitted; only the beginning and the end of the Latin sermon are transcribed and translated, with a brief overview of the gist of the rest of it. A copy of the latter has survived, however, in a seventeenth-century manuscript.²⁷ As for the “poemes and learned inuentions” presented at Seville, the *Nevves* pamphlet is even more selective: only a Latin poem is included, a “witty” and “pleasant” devise.²⁸ According to *Nevves*, this was a work of significant size, combining text with an elaborate visual design displayed on a wall.²⁹ The

²⁶ [Persons], 1593, fol. 4^v.

²⁷ Edited and translated in Persons, 2024, 225–48. See the “Propaganda” section, below.

²⁸ [Persons], 1593, fol. 11^v. The usage of the term *devise* (or *device*) denotes poetic textual and visual invention in a broad sense, in the fashion of emblems or hieroglyphs, rather than a heraldic blazonry. The designation in *Nevves* will be maintained throughout the essay. For its definition in the Spanish literary context, see López Poza.

The combination of visual and textual elements in the “devise” points at a connection with the emblem, highly popular among Jesuits: at least once a year, emblems were displayed on the walls of Jesuit colleges: Dimler, 59–61; Daly and Dimler, 53–55, 59–77, 139–66. Note, however, that Daly and Dimler’s survey misdates the foundation of St. Gregory’s College to 1619: 395.

²⁹ Richard Williams has speculated that the images for the devise were supplied by Richard Verstegan: 213. However, that shipment was done in 1593, after the Becket event.

ephemeral piece itself unfortunately is lost to us.³⁰ Its only record is the verbal description and translation in *Nevves*, without a pictorial representation. There the “devise” (hereafter referred to without quotation marks) is introduced under the title “the representation of the tvvo persecutions by the tvvo King Henryes of Ingland agaynst S. thomas of Canterbury”³¹—a subtle but significant alteration of its Latin caption: “*Triumphus Sancti Thomae Cantuariensis de duobus Henricis Angliae regibus* [The triumph of Saint Thomas of Canterbury from two kings Henry of England].”³² Such a shift reveals the amphibology inherent to the piece: while the Latin *triumphus* (a term frequently used in religious public festivities in the period) alludes to the celebration of sainthood and the gaining of heaven,³³ the English heading emphasizes not exultation but the persecution of the archbishop. Thus, the English rendering of the devise is more concerned with the “tyrants” who acted against the archbishop of Canterbury—the two Kings Henry—than with the life and death of the saint or his piety: “[the devise] did represent the antithesis or contrary procedinges of tvvo King Henries of England, to witt, king Henry the second before mentioned, vvho persecuted S. Thomas of Canterbury in his life, but after repented as hath bin shewed, and king Henry the eight vvho fower hundred yeares after his death cited and condemned him and destroyed his sepulcre which the other had built vp and many kinges after him richly adorned.”³⁴

The strategies underlying the semantic displacement observed in the English translation of the Latin caption of the devise are present in its visual architecture as well. What was displayed on the wall in the Seville college, according to the description in *Nevves*, was a complex set of vignettes or panels in a tableau, arranged in a vertical succession of four horizontal “rancks” (that is, rows or ranks), with a clear left-to-right symmetry of the figures in each (see figure 1 for a virtual reconstruction of the devise).³⁵ The first rank depicts what the title announces—the two historical “persecutions” of Becket, by Henry II on the right

³⁰ The loss of these texts and images was probably an unwanted effect of the destruction of documents and letters that Father General Muzio Vitelleschi implemented to end the *memorialista* crisis: McCoog, 2012, 135.

³¹ [Persons], 1593, fol. 11^v.

³² [Persons], 1593, fol. 11^v. All bracketed translations are the author’s unless otherwise noted.

³³ The religious triumph was a pictorial or architectural design symbolically commemorating a saint’s earning of heaven: García Bernal, 263–312.

³⁴ [Persons], 1593, fol. 11^v. Highley, 2002, 191–92, has identified a similar focus on persecutors in Richard Verstegan’s *Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum Nostri Temporis* (1592).

³⁵ This reconstruction has been created following the design, structure, images, and text of the devise, as described in Persons’s *Nevves*. Its purpose is to provide a visual sense of its elements and their symbolic and semantic relations, rather than to offer a precise recreation of the original.



Figure 1. Virtual reconstruction of the devise by © Juan Rojo, designed following Robert Persons's description in *Nerves*.

and Henry VIII on the left. Becket is painted before each of them. Different Latin inscriptions accompany the kings: on Henry II's side, it reads, "*Persequitur viuum & fugientem*, he pursueth him [Becket] in his life flying from him,"³⁶ which is mirrored in the text associated with Henry VIII, "*Persequitur mortuum & regnantem*. He pursueth him dead and rayning in heauen."³⁷ While the former caption echoed the circumstances of many contemporary English Catholics, including seminarians in Seville and Valladolid who fled persecution in their homeland, the latter evokes one of the most bizarre stories of Becket's afterlife: a mock trial and condemnation allegedly effected under Henry VIII.³⁸

One rank below, the chronology advances, presenting sequels to the monarchs' previous actions. Henry II is portrayed in a penitent attitude: "repentant, barefooted kneeling on his knees, and whipping himself," in stark contrast with the Tudor monarch, who appears "in great fury digging downe the sepulchre with a pickaxe."³⁹ The two Latin inscriptions accompanying the kings on this second rank emphasize the diverging attitudes of the monarchs toward Becket's sepulcher: Henry II's repentance on the right hand ("*Ad sepulcrum martyris poenitentiam agit*, he did penance at the martyres tombe"),⁴⁰ and Henry VIII's destruction and desecration on the left ("*Sepulcrum martyris demolitur, & cineres dissipat*: he breaketh downe the martyrs tombe and casteth abroad his ashes into the ayer").⁴¹

Throughout the later sixteenth century, the comparison of Henry II's and Henry VIII's attitudes toward Becket paralleled the debate over whether church or state held preeminent authority.⁴² John Bale's (1495–1563) early attempt to undermine the challenge posed by Thomas More (1478–1535) to Henrician monarchism by linking him to Thomas of Canterbury was taken up by others and carried far beyond the obvious coincidence of Becket's and More's first names.⁴³ In response, Catholic apologists and controversialists like Nicholas

³⁶ [Persons], 1593, fol. 12^r.

³⁷ [Persons], 1593, fol. 12^r.

³⁸ This story was disseminated in the papal bull of excommunication of Henry VIII. Supposedly, the saint was indicted for treason and formally summoned, and his absence was cited as an admission of guilt: Houliston, 1993b, 48; Marshall, 294. In Spanish, the pretended trial was known through Ribadeneira, 1588, 133–35 (*Historia ecclesiastica* 1.38).

³⁹ [Persons], 1593, fol. 12^r. Both of these quotations are Persons's descriptions of the images on the devise.

⁴⁰ [Persons], 1593, fol. 12^r.

⁴¹ [Persons], 1593, fol. 12^v.

⁴² Marshall, 303–13; Houliston, 1993b, 44–47; Slocum, 151–53.

⁴³ Houliston, 1993b, 44–46; Slocum, 155–58. According to Lines, 12, "Becket's martyrdom authorizes More's own resistance, which in turn authorizes further Catholic resistance."

Harpsfield (1519–75) and Thomas Stapleton (1535–98) subsequently built up this connection, with a discourse that emphasized the sanctity of the two Thomases and blamed the two monarchs (conveniently also namesakes) for their deaths—whether in a direct or indirect way.⁴⁴ Stapleton further elaborated on the difference in the moral status of these two “tyrants.” In his eyes, while the two Henrys were each considered responsible for the death of their contemporary Thomas, the royal attitudes couldn’t be more disparate. Stapleton emphasized that Henry II, not directly or personally involved in the murder itself, repented and acknowledged the terrible consequences of his anger toward Becket, subsequently making public gestures of remorse and building a shrine to him.⁴⁵ By contrast, Henry VIII’s moral depravity was presented as unmitigated, the emanation of a hopelessly wicked soul. Catholic writers explicitly contrasted the execution of More and the desecration of Becket’s shrine in 1538, both at Henry VIII’s order, with the repentant Henry II, in order to sharply criticize the Tudor king.⁴⁶ By December 1592, when the newly founded English college in Seville celebrated the festivity of Thomas Becket, these parallels must have been sufficiently commonplace for its English audience to recognize their symbolism in the devise of the Henrys. Perhaps it was less so for the Spaniards, even if they were not entirely ignorant of Becket’s and More’s stories.⁴⁷ The readers of the printed *Neuves*, English Catholics across the Continent, would immediately appreciate how the devise echoed Stapleton’s concise, direct language in the juxtaposition of the monarchs.⁴⁸

The progress of the two sovereigns continues in the third rank of the devise, which symbolically denotes the consequences of their actions for their afterlives. The two Henrys themselves, however, are no longer depicted. Instead, represented on the right are “many angels with garlands & crownes in their handes expecting him [Henry II] to glory and saluation” and, on the left end of the rank, “many diuels with instruments of torments in their hands” (for Henry VIII).⁴⁹ The angels, according to the Latin text, “*Inuitant ad gloriam*, they doe inuite him [Henry II] to glory” while the devils “*Expectant ad penam*,

⁴⁴Nicholas Harpsfield’s *Life and Death of Sir Thomas More* (ca. 1555); Thomas Stapleton’s *Tres Thomae* (1588). Slocum, 171–74; Sheils.

⁴⁵Sheils, 79; Stapleton, 64–65.

⁴⁶Houliston, 1993b, 51.

⁴⁷For the Spanish dissemination of More’s biography, see Lillo Castañ; and García García. On Becket’s veneration in Spain, see Cerda 136–45.

⁴⁸Stapleton, 64–65. Probably even the polemical layout of Nicholas Sander’s chronology of Catholics and Protestants would be understood in this way: Sander, book VII. Lockey, 48–50.

⁴⁹[Persons], 1593, fol. 12^v. Both of these quotations are Persons’s descriptions of the images on the devise.

they expect him [Henry VIII] to punishment,”⁵⁰ in a combined visual and textual representation of the different afterworld each monarch will encounter, corresponding to his deed: reward for the former, retribution for the latter, as proclaimed by Pope Paul III’s excommunication of Henry VIII following the dismantling of Becket’s shrine. If the vertical sequence from the top down to the third rank is evocative of Catholic notions regarding the redeeming effects of a sinner’s remorse, on the one hand, and the punishment of sins unrepented, on the other, the horizontal layout of the devise—far from the outright exultation of a *triumphus*—evokes the dualistic imagery of the Last Judgment, with the saved on the right side, Henry II’s place, and the condemned on the left, where Henry VIII is located. The symbolic meaning of the contrast between the two monarchs wouldn’t escape a Catholic observer in the audience, whether English or Spanish.⁵¹ Strongly reminiscent of widespread oppositions of good and evil, similar parallels of saintly or heroic figures versus wrongdoers (Reformists in particular, who epitomized heresy for Spaniards) became prevalent in Spain.⁵² Thus, in the Seville devise, the moral and eschatological keys combine throughout these three ranks to read the repentance, or lack thereof, in the two Henrys.

In the *Nevves* printed account, the symbolism of the design is further reinforced by the physical representation of the two monarchs. As depicted, the bodies of the two Henrys reflect their moral and spiritual conditions. This is particularly evident in the case of Henry VIII, who in the first rank is said to have been portrayed as “very fatt and furious” and then evolves in the second rank, becoming “more fatt and monstrous them [*sic*] before sweating and chaffing.”⁵³ The progression clearly brings him to resemble more closely the devils in the third rank, presaging what awaits him in hell. Thus, Henry VIII’s fatness underscores his religious and moral monstrosity, a trope elaborated upon by Catholic controversialists like Nicholas Sander (ca. 1530–81) in his *De origine ac progressu Schismatis Anglicani* (1586), where it is Henry’s apostasy—rather than his treatment of Becket—that turns the Tudor monarch into, in Victor Houlston’s words, a “freakish” character.⁵⁴ Not insignificantly, perhaps, for Spaniards in the audience at the Seville college in 1592, the physical description of Henry VIII in the devise might have been familiar not only

⁵⁰ [Persons], 1593, fol. 12^v.

⁵¹ Persons himself exploited the right/left contraposition in his texts, especially in his speech to the seminarians in the Roman college, when trying to straighten the disorders caused by anti-Jesuit students: 2024, 667–85.

⁵² Goñi Gaztambide, 488–90, 497–500; Gamba Corradine, 2017, 2018; Arteaga Martínez.

⁵³ [Persons], 1593, 12^r.

⁵⁴ Houlston, 2012, 125.

through Sander but also through the *Historia ecclesiastica del scisma del Reyno de Inglaterra* (1588), the Spanish version of Sander's work translated by Pedro de Ribadeneira (1526–1611):

Para que se vea el castigo que Dios nuestro Señor da a los hombres notablemente malos. . . . Primeramente le castigo nuestro Señor al Rey Enrique en el cuerpo. . . . Porque auiedo sido quando moço muy bien dispuesto, gentilhombre y agraciado, vino por su insaciable carnalidad, y torpeza a ser tan feo, y tan disforme y pesado, que no podía subir una escalera, y apenas auia puerta tan ancha por do pudiesse entrar⁵⁵ [See how God our Lord punishes infamous sinners. . . . First of all, our Lord punished King Henry in his body. . . . Having been a well-disposed, graceful gentleman in his youth, his insatiable sensuality and brutishness made him ugly, and so obese that he could not mount a stair, and there was scarcely a door wide enough for him to pass through].⁵⁶

In both Ribadeneira's *Historia ecclesiastica* and the devise, the deformity of a monarch's body is offered as the fatal consequence of tyrannical wrongdoings,⁵⁷ an interpretation that inherits ancient notions of physiognomy still current at the time. Accordingly, the physical deformities of Henry VIII contrast with the emphasis the devise puts on Henry II's emaciated body during his public act of contrition at the saint's tomb: "king Henry the second is paynted leane and repentant, barefooted kneeling on his knees, and whipping himselfe seuerly before the said sepulcre."⁵⁸ Thinness, seen as physical proof of the capacity to forgo worldly temptations and restrain sensual appetites, commensurately befits the Plantagenet king, who chose a path of repentance and penitence to earn salvation. So, as the description in *Nevves* explicitly notes, "in truth the matter passed."⁵⁹

Taglines emphasizing the truthfulness of narratives were common currency in the early modern period, as claims to veracity had become appropriated and weaponized by both Catholics and Protestants.⁶⁰ In the *Nevves* account of the celebration in Seville, the claim of truth, noted above, provides a clue helpful for further decoding what went on. In the devise, Henry II's repentance markedly

⁵⁵Ribadeneira, 1588, 166–67 (*Historia ecclesiastica* 1.49); Yepes, 8. However, the parallel between Henry II and Henry VIII only appears in the 1593 continuation of Ribadeneira's work.

⁵⁶Weinreich, 322.

⁵⁷Ribadeneira, 1593, fol. 151^v (*Segunda parte de la Historia ecclesiastica* 3.28); Weinreich, 701.

⁵⁸[Persons], 1593, fol. 12^v.

⁵⁹[Persons], 1593, fol. 12^r.

⁶⁰Saxl; Heal, 110–114; Collinson, 220–24.

offsets a less historically accurate depiction of his story. His portrayal in the previous scene in the first rank as “armed and angry and striking at S. Thomas” is anomalous.⁶¹ No known narrative or visual account of Becket’s death describes Henry II physically striking him. Moreover, scholars of the saint’s iconography emphasize the regularity of the images representing his murder. Becket is always shown being struck in the head with a sword by soldiers, who sometimes vary in number, but never include Henry II in their group. In fact, Stapleton makes clear that the king refused to defend the murderers.⁶² The unprecedented representation of the king himself murdering the archbishop is thus an oddity at Seville. Even if early debate took place about how much Becket’s murder had happened at the instigation of the king, Henry was never described or shown to be present at the scene.

Surely, such a contravention of historical truth in the Seville devise could neither reflect ignorance of the story nor have been innocent or unintentional, prompting the question, Why is it there? Very likely, this ahistorical representation had two purposes: the first was intratextual, intended to contrast with and dramatically enhance the value of the monarch’s repentance portrayed in the following rank of the devise. The maneuver strategically brings repentance—as suggested above, a key to reading the devise as a whole—to the viewer’s attention at the first possible moment. The second purpose is largely extratextual, inasmuch as the narrative of Henry II’s mistreatment of Becket is presented as a prefiguration of and commentary on the current state of Catholic repression in England.

GENEALOGY AND THE LESSONS OF HISTORY

Appropriating the historical account of Becket’s life and sainthood for contemporary purposes had become intrinsic to the commemorations of the saint from early on.⁶³ The relevance of the Seville imagery was explicitly brought home to the audience, Spanish and English, in the third rank of the devise. While, as noted earlier, the angels of glory stand in on the right hand for a repenting Henry II, and the devils on the left for cruel Henry Tudor, the center of this third rank is occupied by another monarch:

In the third ranke . . . in the midle is paynted Queene Elizabeth beholding sadly the one and the other example, & ouer her head is written *Elizabetha Henricorum filia*, for that she is discended of both these Henryes, and the sentence written beneth is *E duobus elige*, choose which you wil of thes two.⁶⁴

⁶¹ [Persons], 1593, fol. 12^r.

⁶² Stapleton, 64.

⁶³ For similar strategies in music dedicated to Becket, see Emery, 27.

⁶⁴ [Persons], 1593, fol. 12^v.

By bringing Elizabeth I into the picture, the focus of the entire devise pointedly shifts from there and then to here and now: from the commemoration of Thomas of Canterbury, the condemnation of Henry VIII, and the extolling of Henry II's repentance, to what were immediately pressing concerns in 1592 about the persecution of Catholics in England. More specifically, the focus was now the situation of those in the colleges abroad like the one in Seville. Elizabeth's presence and position complicates the message of the devise unmistakably, rendering impossible an interpretation limited to that conveyed by the Latin caption at the top of the paper—the triumph of Becket's sainthood—or to the paired historical persecutions by the two Henrys featured in the English version of the title. Rather, the piece read as a whole presents a turning point. It directly challenges the current English monarch, who just a year earlier had approved the most restrictive and punitive measures yet leveled against English Catholics during her reign in the proclamation *A declaration of great troubles pretended against the realme by a number of seminarie priests and Jesuits* (1591).⁶⁵ Its enactment immediately intensified coercive action against English Catholics in general, and seminary priests in particular. It is clearly in this context and that of the Catholics' worldwide, largely negative reaction to the proclamation⁶⁶ that the audience was intended to understand the construction of the next rank of the devise, where two collegians present the queen with one Latin poem each:

AD ELIZABETHAM *Angliae Reginam Alumni Collegij Anglicani Hispalensis*:

[To Elizabeth, queen of England, the students of the Seville English College:]

The first Scholler sayeth thus.

*Regibus Henricis atavis proavisque Britaunis [sic]
Edita, & hoc ipso nomine, nata patre:
Cerne quid acciderit, bellum est vtrisque nefandum
Cum Thoma, at dispar finis vtrique fuit.
Hic gemitu vitam tulit, iste furore gehennam,
Quid speres, timeas, quidque sequaris habes.*

[Elizabeth, your ancestors and forefathers were Henrys, British kings,
That you descend from, and this same name was your father's, to whom
you were born.

Give heed to the outcome: both waged conflict unjustly
on a Thomas, but each came to a different end.

This one endured groaning for a lifetime, the other an eternal hell of rage,
Be careful what you wish for; whatever you strive for, you get].

⁶⁵Hughes and Larkin, 3:86–95.

⁶⁶Works by Joseph Creswell, Thomas Stapleton, Ribadeneira, and the Philopater are commented on in *Nevves*: [Persons] 1593, 14^r–19^v.

The second Scholler in effect vttereth the same sence but in other words as followeth.

*Concipit Henricus scelus impium atroxque secundus,
At scelus octauus aggrauat octagies [sic].
In Christi famulum fremit is, furit alter, at iste
Tetrius, hoc vitae finis vtrique probat.
O vtinam iusto perpendas pondere vtrumque:
Et spectes atauum, non imitere patrem*
[The crime the second Henry commits is impious and cruel,
But the eighth makes it eighty times worse.
One rages, one raves at Christ's servant, but this wretch
More foully: each one's life, by its ending, is proof.
Oh, if only you'd weigh them both on even scales
And look to your ancestor, leave your father's example alone].⁶⁷

It shal not neede that I expounde thes verses vnto you, & much lesse that I put them into English poesie seing my skill and vse therin is not great: the somme is that they doe propone vnto her maiestie, the acts and endes of both thes kings hir progenitors, wishing her rather to follow the example of king Henry the second, that repented his sinnes, then king Henry the eight that died in the same.⁶⁸

As the author of *Nevves* states directly, Elizabeth is invited to adopt the model of Henry II and shun the example of her father. Writing about the Seville college event, Christopher Highley has interpreted this scene through an historical lens, casting it as a dynastic dilemma reflective of religious and political confrontations in the late sixteenth century over issues of historical and genealogical legitimization.⁶⁹ Certainly, the piece unambiguously shows the models of the queen's ancestors as lessons to be learned from history: the path on the right side, Henry II's commitment to repentance leading to salvation, and the left path, its undesirable and aberrant alternative. Such an exercise of transtemporality was ubiquitous in the celebration of Saint Thomas of Canterbury that day in the English college. The speeches were imbued with parallels between the past and the present, some of them subtle allusions to circumstances that the audience would immediately relate to their own turbulent religious, political, and military current circumstances.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ I'm grateful to Victor Houliston for his suggestions in this translation.

⁶⁸ [Persons], 1593, fol. 13^r.

⁶⁹ Highley, 2008, 180–81.

⁷⁰ Persons, 2024, 239.

Other analogies spoke more directly to the audience, invoking the personal situation of English Catholics. A particularly emotional touch would seem to have come in the Latin *oratio* when Worthington, describing Becket's exile, gradually enhances the rhetorical tone, culminating with:

Can anyone be said to be happier (hearers) than Thomas, who suffers these things?
Or can anyone be imagined more miserable than Henry [III], who instigates them?
Even so, Thomas, secure with God as your guide, and accompanied by angels,
blessed is that land which receives you; wretched, that which has sent you away;
miserable, the one that has cast you out! I am conscious that I am utterly distressed
by this consummate crime committed by my native land, and many things occur
to me indeed, which would make me wail bitterly over it.⁷¹

That Worthington was himself among the banished rendered him an embodiment of religious exile for his audience. This was both affective and cogently strategic. Similarities between Becket's martyrdom and the execution of English Catholics in Elizabethan England was purposeful: they connected English seminaries with their proselytizing mission.

Similar exercises of historical transposition were frequently carried out in Jesuit colleges, including English seminaries. Alison Shell has examined how Latin history plays were used to explore "the didactic import of history, with particular emphasis on its applicability to the future."⁷² But outside of religious communities, and other groups directly suffering the impact of the persecution, many Spaniards had also become acquainted with the appeal to learn specifically from the errors in the English past thanks to Ribadeneira's *Ecclesiastical History*. His version of the schism—a "cluster-bombing" propaganda, in Alexander Samson's words⁷³—presents the reader at its closure with two paths not unlike the ones Elizabeth has in the devise: "Todos estos exemplos deuemos nosotros tener delante, para huyr los malos, e imitar y seguir los buenos, que este es el fruto que desta historia deuemos sacar"⁷⁴ [We should emphasize all these examples, to avoid the evil, and to imitate and follow the good, as this is the fruit that must be taken from this history].⁷⁵ Adhering to the Ciceronian notion of history as life's teacher, Ribadeneira prompted learning from past examples as

⁷¹ Persons, 2024, 245.

⁷² Shell, 213.

⁷³ Samson, 287.

⁷⁴ Ribadeneira, 1588, 379 (*Historia ecclesiastica* 2, conclusion).

⁷⁵ Weinreich, 544.

guidance for navigating oneself, as a manner of advice literature.⁷⁶ Popular accounts of Elizabeth, especially in *avisos* (news) disseminated among Catholics on the Continent, frequently resorted to the supernatural, with dreams predicting the final destination of the last Tudor queen, by showing her father in hell as a premonition and warning of the kind of end she would have, should she follow his path.⁷⁷ In all these texts, the implications of the lessons of history transcend the present and are projected into what is to come.

In the genealogy of monarchs, what is to come is known as succession. Though conspicuously unmentioned in the devise, the silent presence of the topic of succession cannot be more obvious: Elizabeth's ancestry in the two Henrys provides her not only with blood lineage but also with moral and religious models of behavior for a monarch whose posterity was hampered by lack of progeny. By December 1592, the date of the Seville event, Elizabeth was almost sixty years old. She had no issue and no named heir, which seriously preoccupied her subjects in England, even as it gave exiles hope for a Catholic succession.⁷⁸ (One possibility, proposed by the Jesuit Robert Persons, was Philip II's daughter Isabella Clara Eugenia [1566–1633].⁷⁹) And certainly, even if not manifestly expressed,⁸⁰ both the past and the future of Elizabeth's lineage underlie a full understanding of the devise.

Not incidentally, a few months before the Seville Becket celebration, royal succession had been at the center of the Valladolid visit of Philip II, his heir Prince Philip, and Isabella Clara Eugenia, whose presence intimated her claim to the English throne. "Above two hundred . . . ingenious devises . . . Emblemes, and Hieroglyphicks,"⁸¹ were on display, most of them intended to extol the king and to get his support for the English mission. But the visit, which Freddy Dominguez has described as "highly choreographed and laden with meaning," had other purposes as well.⁸² Poems published only in the Spanish version of the celebration, and in a copy of *epigrammata* sent privately to the prince himself, reveal their leitmotif: the fruitful continuity of the Spanish lineage and

⁷⁶ Indeed, according to Freddy Dominguez, 2016, Ribadeneira used history as a mirror for princes for the future Philip III.

⁷⁷ See also, for rumors of this kind, Hunt.

⁷⁸ McCoog, 2016; Tutino; Houlston, 2007, 71–92.

⁷⁹ Persons [Doleman, pseud.], 1594. For Houlston, the *Neuves* pamphlet bridges Persons's previous works calling for armed intervention in England, and those proposing a Catholic successor to the English crown: 2001; 2015.

⁸⁰ Perhaps in avoidance of the risk of being accused of sedition according to the Treasons Act, although, as one of the speakers in the second part of *Neuves* brings up, this should not apply outside England: [Persons], 1593, fols. 37^v–38^r.

⁸¹ [Persons], 1592c, 52.

⁸² Dominguez, 2020, 105–11.

its political and religious virtues, looking both at the past and into the future.⁸³ Some emblems allude, by contrast, to the void in Elizabeth's succession, casting it almost as a competition between the English and Spanish monarchs. In a brief poem, Elizabeth, in a soliloquy, disparages fears of Philip, given his age. Immediately, however, she is mockingly contradicted by the poetic voice of the verses:

"Non est cur metuas (ait Elisabetha) Philippum,
Languidus extremum sustinet ille diem."
Fallitur: elapsos deus illi protulit annos,
Discessit languor, vis juvenilis inest.
Non moritur Phoenix, quamvis sit mortua Phoenix,
Quando Philippus obit fata, Philippus erit⁸⁴

[“There is no reason,” says Elizabeth, “why you should fear Philip. He is sick and awaits his last day.” But she is mistaken. God has extended his life for some extra years. Languor has gone and youth's strength is there. The phoenix does not die, even if the phoenix be dead. When Philip meets his fate, there will be still a Philip].⁸⁵

In the Valladolid celebration, the question of succession thus strips bare Elizabeth's self-deception. By contrast, a few months later in Seville, what visitors and students seemingly first encountered was a genealogical quandary of a different nature. Rather than contesting Elizabeth's legitimacy or reiterating the need for a Catholic successor, the devise speaks directly to issues confronting the English mission and seminaries. The dynastic models established by the two Henrys, their persecutions of Becket alive and dead, and their subsequent repentance or lack thereof point to Elizabeth while offering her a transformative blueprint and, consequently, a hoped-for easing of contemporary persecution of Catholics.⁸⁶

Yet even in Seville, genealogical questions were at least implicit, if not directly addressed. As the single surviving poem, the devise only partially conveys the celebration. The Valladolid precedent suggests that other pressing concerns about the succession might have been raised in Seville, especially in the context of the recent dismantling of the so-called plot of the Spanish blanks.⁸⁷ If so, they are not recorded. The second part of *Nevves* includes a

⁸³ Biblioteca Nacional de España (hereafter BNE), MS 2492, fol. 57^v. Cano Echevarría and Sáez-Hidalgo et al., 43–44.

⁸⁴ Cano Echevarría and Sáez-Hidalgo, 2009, 304–05; BNE, MS 2492, fol. 28^v.

⁸⁵ Cano Echevarría and Sáez-Hidalgo, 2009, 304.

⁸⁶ Tutino, 59.

⁸⁷ Anti-Jacobite Scottish Catholic earls and Jesuits tried—with little success—to enroll Philip II to invade England, dethrone Elizabeth, and return both countries to the old faith. According to Tutino, 50–51, this plot had a significant impact on Persons's succession writings. Kewes, 56–58.

disquisition on Elizabeth's succession, though.⁸⁸ Whether this means that Persons, composing the *Nevves*, sought to compensate for the absence of the topic in the Seville event, or that he hoped to provide a separate thematic coherence to each part of the pamphlet, one can only elucidate. But what is certain is that the selection of materials from Becket's day in *Nevves* foregrounds Elizabeth's moral dilemma by obliquely alluding to succession.

GOOD SHEPHERDS AND TYRANTS

In the Seville commemoration of Becket, besides the morality play of the two Henrys' attitudes, Elizabeth's dilemma was also reinforced politically. Of particular relevance for understanding this dimension of the devise is the leitmotif of the Latin sermon on John 10:11 preached on the occasion: "*Bonus pastor animam suam dat pro ouibus suis* the good Pastor giueth his life for his sheep."⁸⁹ The scriptural passage was established in liturgies dedicated to Becket.⁹⁰ The political dimension of the Seville devise, given the involvement of two monarchs in the death and desecration of the saint, registers unavoidably alongside the religious. Thus, the Henrys' antagonistic role in the hagiographies of Becket earned them the label of "tyrants," understood as "religious persecutors or oppressors," in the sense mentioned above. The semantic step needed to invoke the wholly political "absolute ruler or despot" was slight, and alien neither to viewers of the devise nor to the readership of *Nevves*.⁹¹ The nature of the political tyrant and the identification of persecution with tyranny were topics of common discourse.⁹² In the context of the Becket commemoration in Seville, this came with large consequences: it would promote the medieval archbishop "as a martyr for rights and liberties, rather than just a worker of saintly wonders," as Peter Marshall has pointed out.⁹³ By 1592, that trope had also been disseminated among English Catholic exiles. Lucy Underwood has identified two sermons on Becket preached in 1589 and 1590 at the Venerable English College in Rome, in which the lack of good shepherds in England was lamented as the cause of its

⁸⁸ Tutino, 51–61; Kewes, 56–58; McCoog, 2016, 259–60; Houliston, 2007, 71–92. Persons continually pressed for this.

⁸⁹ [Persons], 1593, fol. 5^r.

⁹⁰ Langenbahn.

⁹¹ *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "tyrant." <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/>.

⁹² On contemporary debates about tyrants and tyrannicide, see Höpfl, 224–62; and Merle, 92–95. Conejero-Magro, 13–19, has examined the Anglo-Spanish dimension and its literary impact in England.

⁹³ Marshall, 2020, 297, 301.

present catastrophic state.⁹⁴ A deliberate amphibology, the metaphor in the Roman sermons alludes both to the dearth of priests in England as a result of the Elizabethan persecution and to its cause: the absence of a good political ruler. Although investing the image of the good shepherd with political meaning was by no means new, its usage by exiled Catholics added a dramatic edge to the circumstances of their religious persecution under allegations of treason.⁹⁵

Central elements of the Seville devise bring forth a comparable political-religious dualism of the good shepherd/ruler versus the tyrant. By presenting Elizabeth with the dilemma, “*E duobus elige*, choose which you wil of thes two,” the devise operates like a visual *speculum principum*, inviting the monarch to apply her discernment to make the right decision. (Readers of Ribadeneira’s *Historia ecclesiastica* would have been familiar with the technique.) Philip’s earlier Valladolid visit again has relevance: Students at the English seminary there had explored royal *iudicium* in an exercise of exegesis of psalm 72, “*Deus iudicium tuum Regi da, et iustitiam tuam filio Regis* endow the King with your judgement, and the King’s son with your justice,” applying it not to Elizabeth but to Philip II and his son:

thoughe it [the psalm] were written properlie and peculiarly of Christ himself, yet by secundarie application, and by some similitude, it maie also verie aptelie be accommodated to this most christian King, and his son, that are so principall ministers of Christ, and do imitate so manifestlie his kinglie vertues.⁹⁶

By making the two Philips “principall ministers of Christ” and imitators of his “kinglie vertues,” the students’ exposition of the psalm indirectly identified the royal Spaniards as good shepherds. In the explanation of the first verse, both the Spanish monarch and the prince were depicted as adorned with “judgement and justice . . . two principall perles, and precious stones which among others did adorne and greatelie beautifie an Imperial crowne.”⁹⁷ To be clear, nowhere in the Valladolid celebrations—or in Seville—is Elizabeth presented as lacking judgment (indeed, her capacity to discern is integral to the point); but in the context of other writings by Catholics in exile condemning the moral blindness of tyrannical English Protestant rulers, the difference suggested is trenchant.⁹⁸ The imagery in the speeches, poems, and emblems displayed during the 1592 royal visit to Valladolid contrasts the differing treatment of English exiles by

⁹⁴ Underwood, 22.

⁹⁵ For the origins of this trope, see Freeman. King, 54, has argued that the metaphor of the good shepherd was behind pastoral imagery of Elizabeth.

⁹⁶ [Persons], 1592c, 25.

⁹⁷ [Persons], 1592c, 33.

⁹⁸ In the Roman Latin play *Thomas Morus*, Cacodaemon tempts Henry VIII: Shell, 215–16.

Philip II and Elizabeth, powerfully evoking the good shepherd versus tyrant opposition: protection versus persecution, shelter versus banishment, life versus martyrdom. The first emblem, or hieroglyph, printed in Persons's *Relation* is highly illustrative of the iconographic and symbolic language applied to each monarch:

In one faire table there were painted three fierce and cruell lions tearing men in pieces, and a fourth lion more goodlie than the rest, fighting against the other three, and taking men from theyr jawes, and bearing them towards a faire and strong Castel purtred in the same table for their defence, and over this one lyons head was written theis words in Latine. "*Eripio non rapio*," that is "I take awaie to deliver and not to devoure," and for that the one lion and the Castell are armes of Spaine, and three lions of England.⁹⁹

Employing the widely recognizable visual elements of royal heraldic symbols as well as popular stories originating in bestiaries, emblems like this clarified the opposing attitudes of the two monarchs toward English Catholics and rendered Philip II and Elizabeth as exemplars of the good and the bad ruler, respectively. Philip III visited the English college in Valladolid in 1600, two years after his father's death, and the students replicated the format, tone, and message of Philip II's previous visit with comparable speeches, poetry, and hieroglyphs. These again portrayed the Spanish monarch as protector and the English monarch as persecutor, and utilized animal symbolism—for example, an eagle represented Philip III, and a snake, Elizabeth I.¹⁰⁰ A few weeks later, the contrast was underscored by a visit from the new queen, Margaret, during festivities honoring the *Vulnerata* (Wounded), a statue of the Virgin iconoclastically defiled by English soldiers during the Sack of Cadiz in 1596.¹⁰¹ This, as Shell has pointed out, the seminarians took as symbolic of their own plight, and hence as an image of current English Catholicism.¹⁰² Importantly, the pamphlet produced for this celebration feminizes the dynamics of the event. The Spanish queen is presented as the earthly deputy of the Virgin, the celestial queen,¹⁰³ thus painting both as active defenders of Catholicism, in patent opposition to—and therefore in

⁹⁹ [Persons], 1592c, 52–53.

¹⁰⁰ The Spanish account of the event was published in Ortiz, 1600a; an English version soon followed: see Rivers; Cano Echevarría and Sáez-Hidalgo et al., 45–51.

¹⁰¹ The Spanish account of the *Vulnerata* festivity was published in Ortiz, 1600b. The English translation remained manuscript: Archivum Venerabilis Collegii Anglorum de Urbe (hereafter AVCAU), liber 1422, fols. 49^v–72^v. Cano Echevarría and Sáez-Hidalgo et al., 51–55.

¹⁰² "Catholics interpreted the remains as a unique combination of statue and relic": Shell, 201, 200–07). On the *Vulnerata*, see Burrieza Sánchez; and Davidson, 2007a.

¹⁰³ "It is generally esteemed as ordayned and disposed with particular prouidence of God . . . that the maiestie and greatnesse of the only Queene of heauen should bee more notorious and

competition with—Elizabeth.¹⁰⁴ Anne J. Cruz has seen in such confrontational language and imagery allusions to the Anglo-Spanish military conflict that would only end after Elizabeth’s death.¹⁰⁵

Spanish audiences were accustomed to interpreting the allegorical language, imagery, and conventions of emblems and moral drama. All these were common elements in public performances during religious festivities.¹⁰⁶ Still, for most audience members, the portrayal of an unusually thoughtful Elizabeth in the Seville devise must have posed an interpretive challenge. Her location, neither on the right nor on the left side but between the examples of the good shepherd and the tyrant, differs from the way the queen was usually depicted. Verbal representations of Elizabeth in the Spanish territories frequently cast her as belonging more on the left—tyrannical—side of the devise, though with a remarkable range of nuance.¹⁰⁷ In the devise of the Henrys, she was depicted “sadly”—that is, seriously, thoughtfully—considering the examples of her predecessors, a good and a bad ruler. Such an attitude cannot be found elsewhere in Spanish pictorial or verbal portraits of the English queen.¹⁰⁸

Among English Catholics, however, Elizabeth’s excommunication in 1570 had encouraged vituperation.¹⁰⁹ Although this language rarely included the term *tyrant* directly—an assertion considered high treason since the 1571 Treasons Act—descriptions of the state of England under her rulership made clear that she was mirroring one, and she was often identified with the biblical Jezebel.¹¹⁰

better understood in the humble obeysance and reuerence of the only Catholicke Queene of the earth done to her image”: AVCAU, liber 1422, fol. 56^v.

¹⁰⁴ Such a competition was topical throughout the event.

¹⁰⁵ Cruz.

¹⁰⁶ García Bernal, 278, 289–303.

¹⁰⁷ Usunáriz, esp. 97; Burguillos; Highley, 2005, 168–69. After her death and the end of the Anglo-Spanish war, Cervantes treated Queen Elizabeth more mildly in the short story “La Española Inglesa,” a portrayal that has puzzled scholars: Samson, 305; Forteza, 130–55.

¹⁰⁸ Mesa Higuera.

¹⁰⁹ Crosignani, McCoog, and Questier, 86–89. On Catholic demonizations of Elizabeth and the responses prompted by them, see Lake, 2016. Hackett, 130–32, has discussed Sander’s and Rishton’s views of Elizabeth; see also Velasco Berenguer about the Roman and Spanish contexts of Elizabeth’s excommunication.

¹¹⁰ Ribadeneira uses the adjective *tyrant* to refer to Henry VIII rather than Elizabeth. Later texts, though, would apply it to the queen. See, for instance, the 1597 “Memorial on the Succession of the King of Spain to the Crown of England,” whose last section states the “impediments which ought to bar this tyrant queen Elizabeth of England from possessing the crown”: Persons, 2024, 874, 880. The second part of *Neuves* describes the disastrous state of England under Elizabeth. For her designation as Jezebel in Spain, see Forteza, 112–13.

English colleges on the Continent performed plays like *Captiva Religio* (Captive religion), staging how the tyrannous ruler was cruelly putting English Catholics in prison,¹¹¹ and in Valladolid, seminarians presented themselves as “wearied and beaten with the tempestuous waves and surges of the sea of persecution, and with the fierce winds of affliction and tribulation, oppressed with tyranie and crueltie, with banishment and prisons, with torments and martyrdoms.”¹¹² The contrast seems significant enough to invite questions. Why would the English seminarians in Seville, at their initial public venture, one so important that perhaps the future of the college depended on its positive reception, have preferred an image of Elizabeth pondering the invitation to change her course of action rather than a derogatory one? Why present their Spanish audience with a centerpiece apparently at odds with their usual attitudes toward her?

PROPAGANDA: USING MARTYRS AND THE MISSION

It is very likely that two factors prompted the Seville students to offer such a singular portrayal of the queen in the 1592 devise: first, the transnational nature of the event, and, second, the different levels of communication with, and between, its several audiences. Certainly, commemorating Becket immediately after the foundation of St Gregory’s English College in Seville could appropriately be seen as a manner of celebrating the start of their new community, evoking a fellow countryman saint. Opening the celebration to guests was perhaps a bold decision, considering the precarity of the situation and premises, which Persons and the students began occupying but four weeks earlier. This was, however, an entirely strategic invitation. Having overcome Spanish qualms about the foundation of the English college in Seville, Persons had secured the support of Philip II and “sedulously (and successfully) cultivated” the patronage of local authorities.¹¹³ Still, this support coexisted with some Spaniards’ misgivings that these Englishmen might be Protestants, spies, or simply competition for alms rather than sharers of a common goal—the return of Roman Catholic authority to England.¹¹⁴ Inviting the upper echelons of Sevillian society to the festivity of the most renowned English saint was not merely an act of gratitude for their patronage. It was intended to inform—while assuaging concerns—about the

¹¹¹ Shell, 190.

¹¹² [Persons], 1592c, 48.

¹¹³ Persons, 2024, 153–54; Murphy, 5–7; McCoog, 2012, 113–17.

¹¹⁴ McCoog, 2013; 2012, 114–15. Persons, 2024, 4–6.

English mission and their colleges, a strategy that would be key to their reception in Spain.¹¹⁵

The Seville Becket festivity thus combined multiple purposes in a single event addressed to two different audiences: the English Catholics—mostly priests and seminarians—and the local Spanish notables. For the community of English exiles, the mirroring capacity of Becket’s saintly life and death was at the center of the celebration. This model was provided not primarily by the devise but by the first sermon, colored with high-flown rhetorical diction in Latin—not in Spanish.¹¹⁶ The choice of language can hardly be unintentional.¹¹⁷ Rather, the use of Latin points at a specific section of the audience: educated, religious men like the English Catholic students, for whom hearing about Becket meant refashioning history to suit the needs of present times, a technique identified by Shell as common in exile writing.¹¹⁸

The second sermon of the event was delivered in Spanish. Although the text has not survived, the succinct summary provided by *Neuves* confirms that in Seville languages were selected for different appeals:

the effect therof for it vvas to giue the people a reason of so many English mens comming forth of England in these dayes, what were the true causes and necessities therof, what ther vsage was at home, what their end abroade, and what particuler purpose and profession these youthes that cam for study sake to Siuil had before their eyes.¹¹⁹

The Spanish sermon, unlike the Latin sermon or the devise itself, thus had the clear purpose of apprising the local audience about the Englishmen’s mission. Spanish was chosen to ensure a positive reception by local authorities and neighbors in Seville.

Keeping locals informed about the English mission and the persecution of Catholics in England became one of Persons’s priorities as part of his strategy for

¹¹⁵In his first Spanish pamphlet, Persons was already focused on this, emphasizing the difference between “Catholic and heretical Englishmen”: 1590, fol. 71^{r-v}).

¹¹⁶Persons, 2024, 235–36.

¹¹⁷Adapting the language and the content of news on the mission to the target audience became a habitual practice among exiled English Catholics. See, for instance, the *avisos* (news) sent by Richard Verstegan to Persons, with letters in English and despatches in Spanish, to be distributed, respectively, to local Jesuits and the Spanish court: Persons, 2024, 180–85.

¹¹⁸Shell, 187.

¹¹⁹[Persons], 1593, fol. 11^r.

influencing the public sphere.¹²⁰ In order to reach a wider audience he resorted to print, transforming the purely informative into real propaganda. Persons's first Spanish printed work, *Relacion de algunos martyrios* (Relation of some martyrdoms, 1590), focuses on both the newly founded Valladolid college and the suffering of Catholics in England, for the clear purpose of raising support.¹²¹ This kind of news spread quickly in manuscript and in print, sometimes doubling its effect by including metapropaganda promoting recusants' publications: for example, in response to the restrictive and punitive 1591 proclamation against English Catholics, the *Nevves* pamphlet comments on books published by Stapleton, Persons, Joseph Creswell (1556–1623), and Ribadeneira.¹²² The events in the Valladolid and Seville English colleges and these publications in both languages fed each other in this information campaign. The Spanish pamphlet of the 1592 Valladolid royal visit adds a section on the English seminarians who take up the mission of England, and on the final aim of their training: “El fin deste Colegio . . . es, que los estudiantes que en el se crien, acabados sus estudios, y ordenados de Sacerdotes se partan a Inglaterra a ayudar a la conversion de aquellas almas, hasta dar la vida en la demanda [The aim of this College . . . is to ensure that the students educated in it, after completing their studies and being ordained priests, they go to England to help in the conversion of those souls, to the point of giving their lives in the enterprise].”¹²³

The missionary role and the attempt to convert England thus often ended in martyrdom. As Shell has demonstrated, “from the 1580s onwards . . . the martyrological ideal was persistently instilled by imaginative means into boys and young men at the English Catholic colleges and seminaries on the Continent.”¹²⁴ They were prepared for this end with visual and textual depictions both of recent martyrdoms as well as of historical figures.¹²⁵ By the time the Seville college was founded, martyrdom was inextricably connected to

¹²⁰ Dominguez, 2020, 97–117; Lake, 2007, 59–61, 82–85. Lake and Questier, 604–06; Persons, 2024, 326–32. Verstegan also argued for the affective value of publishing these accounts in the vernacular: Persons, 2024, 533–35.

¹²¹ Persons, 1590, fols. 62^r–76^r.

¹²² [Persons], 1593, fols. 14^r–19^v.

¹²³ “De los que ogaño van del Colegio Ingles a la mission de Inglaterra,” in [Persons], 1592b, 78^v.

¹²⁴ Shell, 226.

¹²⁵ Cano Echevarría and Sáez-Hidalgo, 2014. Niccolò Circignani (ca. 1530–ca. 1597) designed a series of martyrdom frescoes to inspire the seminarians in the Venerable English College in Rome, which, together with Durante Alberti's *Martyrs' Picture* (1581), represent “a complex spatial and pictorial expression of the nature of the exiled recusant project and of the purpose of the English mission”: Davidson, 2007b, 23. See also Dillon, 2002, 170–276; and, more recently, 2021.

the fates of those who, once ordained as priests and returned to England, would frequently face arrest and execution.

Martyrdom accounts of this type were integrated into the information campaign aimed at Spaniards and into news accounts.¹²⁶ After Persons's *Relacion de algunos martyrios*, listings of priests and seminarians captured and executed in England became a subgenre of its own, providing supporting evidence not just of the persecution but of the "fruits" of the seminaries on the Continent.¹²⁷ Rather than dwelling on the loss of one of the faithful, the news accounts usually emphasized martyrdom's value as an act of atonement "for the deliverance of the Church and their brethren," as William Allen (1532–94) contended,¹²⁸ pointing at the potential impact for conversion or repentance. Famously, Henry Walpole converted while attending the execution of Edmund Campion (1540–81), after being splashed with drops of his blood. In Walpole's estimation, this martyrdom "converted ten thousand people on the spot."¹²⁹ This number was sometimes thought to include their persecutors. As the Seville devise illustrated, an earlier historical instance of this had been Henry II.

Thus, an extraordinary feature of the devise is how the complex synergies of its design encapsulate a capacity to communicate at various levels. Expanding from the central theme of Becket's "double" martyrdom, the topical displacement gradually shifts emphasis to foreground his "tyrants"—the two Henrys—in the first and second rank. The next temporal transposition, from the past to the present between the second and the third rank, does not lose focus on a tyrant figure, however. Quite the contrary: Becket's story continues to mirror the plight of English Catholics through this third rank as well, with Elizabeth at the center as their current persecutor, a much-too-veritable and unremitting reality, especially after Elizabeth's 1591 proclamation condemning priests and Jesuits, issued the year before the Seville event. The queen's "beholding sadly the one and the other example" similarly echoes the historical model of Henry II following Becket's martyrdom. Should Elizabeth continue the persecution of Catholics, the same eternal fate that has befallen her father would await her. The alternative path, chosen by Henry II, depicts a not-infrequent product of martyrdoms: the persecutor's repentance. Thus, the blood shed by missionary priests who had trained in seminaries like St Gregory

¹²⁶ Dominguez, 2020, 100–04.

¹²⁷ Juan López Manzano, the rector of the Valladolid college, published a list, later reprinted by Ribadeneira: Weinreich, 733–66. Similar catalogues, with updates of new martyrs, were distributed as broadsheets, which also points at a wide readership. See also Pollen, 191–94.

¹²⁸ Dillon, 2002, 12; 2021, 464–68.

¹²⁹ Simpson, 462.

could be read as reifying Elizabeth's possible repentance and consequently changing her anti-Catholic policies. Such a message was intended to resonate visually with the bilingual audience of the Seville event.

The question of whether this was contemporaneously realistic, however, is more vexing, but necessary to ask if the devise is to be fully understood. It was definitely a question in the air at the time. As early as 1580 Campion noted that Jesuits had made a "league . . . never to despair your [Elizabeth I's] recovery."¹³⁰ As Freddy Dominguez has shown, in later texts produced in Spain to "inspire changes of behaviour," the role of these seminaries was promoted for Spanish readers.¹³¹ Spanish involvement was presented as essential for the success of the English mission. Francisco Arias de Bobadilla (1537–1610), Count of Puñonrostro, published a lengthy and articulate justification (ca. 1600) for the role of the English colleges in Spain.¹³² After a preamble with the inevitable comparison between English seminary priests and Becket, motives of "piety" and "honor and Christian nobility" are advanced, along with "temporal commodity": "god hath so disposed the affaires of Spain, and knit them so together, with the proceedings of Ingland that the tranquility, security, & weale publick of the one wholly dependeth of the others conuersion."¹³³ Nor was Elizabeth's change of heart ruled out. The pamphlet publicizing the Valladolid *Vulnerata* event presents the Virgin Mary and Queen Margarita of Spain (1584–1611), religious antagonists of Elizabeth I, as prospective mediators for her salvation:

I will not omitt to make mention in this place of the great hope conceiued by diuers principall persons of much pietie and discretion, that the sacred Queene of heauen mother of mercie may with this occasion and notable example of the catholicke Queene of Spayne mollefie the hart of the Queene of England, and open her eyes to looke to her saluation whilst shee hath tyme: and noew at least in her declining age to seeke for pardon at Gods hands amending the errors of her life past . . . : Besydes that shee knoweth full well, how king henry the 8. her father procured before his death to undoe the iniquities he had committed, and returne his kingdome agayne to the union of the catholicke church . . . consider[ing] the grevous chastisement that expecteth her in the

¹³⁰ "To the Right Honourable, the Lords of Her Majestie's Privy Council [Campion's Challenge]," in Campion, 10. The attempt to convert Elizabeth started very early in her reign: in the early 1560s Jerónimo Osório da Fonseca (1506–80), Bishop of Algarve, wrote her an epistle urging her both to return to Catholicism and to accept papal authority: Lockey, 39–48.

¹³¹ Dominguez, 2020, 88.

¹³² "Motivos para favorecer los seminarios," in Ortiz, 1600a, 53^v–60^r. English version in Rivers, 70–79. Cano Echevarría and Sáez-Hidalgo et al., 47–48.

¹³³ Rivers, 77.

next world iff (which God forbid) she should dye impenitent, for the innocent bloud shed by her commaundment, and the soules that haue perished by her meanes and occasion, And in fine the continuall and feruent prayers of these English Seminaries cannot fayle to haue some notable effect, as for conversion should be.¹³⁴

Here, mirroring the Seville devise, Elizabeth has the opportunity to eschew eternal damnation by reversing her anti-Catholic policies and converting to Catholicism. And while the *Vulnerata* festivity in Valladolid feminizes the context of the event, rendering the Virgin and the Spanish queen protagonists in the mediation, both here and at the Seville Becket event the point is made that ultimately it is the English Catholic seminarians and priests who, with prayers and the “giving of their lives,” facilitate that mediation. The significant emphasis, then, is on the seminaries’ potential capacity for “action from the distance,” to borrow Mark Netzloff’s words,¹³⁵ or, as Shell has it, “diplomacy by remote control,”¹³⁶ projected from the English Catholic colleges in Spain toward England. This is the important message meant for both Spaniards and the seminarians themselves.

Although the neatly symmetrical, allusive, and symbolic design of the devise does not include evil counselors in the emblem, they are nonetheless palpably present in the repentance discourse and in the *Nevves* pamphlet. Ribadeneira (and Sander) had remarked pointedly that, “at the end of his life and in his last agonies, he [Henry VIII] wished to return to his senses and be reconciled with the Church.” What frustrated this attempt was “the flatterers and rascals to whom he had surrendered in life”¹³⁷—that is, the evil counselors. In this, Catholics agreed, Elizabeth also mirrored her father. Thus, the political debate described in the second part of the *Nevves* revolves around the influence of Elizabeth’s counsellors.¹³⁸ A number of interlocutors discuss the calamitous political situation in England, blaming Burghley for it as well as for the 1591 proclamation, and even the fact that the queen never married. He is accused of having taken “into his owne handes or to his frendes, some part of the gouernment, which this man [Burghley] now hath possessed wholly, hauing bin to the Queene both husband, and master, counceller, and gouernour thes many years.”¹³⁹

¹³⁴AVCAU, liber 1422, fol. 61^r.

¹³⁵Netzloff, 243.

¹³⁶Shell, 204. See also Lake and Questier for a discussion of English Catholics’ influence on the public sphere.

¹³⁷Weinreich, 323; Ribadeneira, 1588, fols. 166^v–67^r (*Historia ecclesiastica* 1.49).

¹³⁸[Persons], 1593, fols. 20^r, 22^v–23^r, 25^{r-v}, 34^r–35^v.

¹³⁹[Persons], 1593, fol. 35^r.

The second part of *Nevves* therefore adds to what has been characterized as “a whole flurry of ‘evil counsellor’ tracts issued from continental presses in response to the 1591 royal proclamation.”¹⁴⁰ Such tracts included Stapleton’s *Apologia pro Rege Catholico Philippo*, Persons’s *Philopater*, and Verstegan’s *A Declaration of the True Causes of the Great Troubles Presupposed to Be Intended against the Realm of England*, all of them published in 1592, thus representing of-the-moment debate at the time of the Seville celebration. Verstegan’s *Declaration* is of particular interest in relation to the devise, since it opens by asking the reader to recall Elizabeth as “a princesse yonge and beautifull”—and, crucially, also innocent, a sort of prelapsarian Eve at a moment before a serpent in the form of “a sly Sycophant” (Burghley) falsely persuaded her to “break the unity of God’s Church” and to pursue war with Spain.¹⁴¹ Her “tyranny” against Catholics was to be viewed consequently as reversible, as long as she detached herself from Burghley’s influence, depicted as responsible for her eventual damnation—unless God prevented it.¹⁴² Persons’s *Nevves*, then, would be in line with these tracts, which, as Peter Lake has remarked, “might hope . . . to save the queen, from her evil counsellors certainly, but also perhaps from herself as well.”¹⁴³ Similarly, the devise, though initially focused on tyrants, presents the salvation of Elizabeth I as a plausible outcome, resulting from the seminarians’ missionary role and their fellow priests’ martyrdoms, as it had happened before with Henry II.

CONCLUSION

The devise is just one of the many poems and emblems the seminarians at the English College of St Gregory in Seville created to celebrate the Feast of Saint Thomas in 1592. The commemoration, the first public event at the college, functioned as the college’s letter of introduction, its means of explaining to the local authorities the reasons for founding this new seminary—the persecution of Catholics by Elizabeth I—and the prospective benefits the English college would yield by improving the situation in England. What is known of that celebration is limited to Robert Persons’s partial *Nevves* account: the devise discussed here was but one of many on offer that day. Even what fragmented information remains serves to remind us of the multiple foci such presentations were meant to serve. The devise reached out to the English and the Spanish in the audience in different ways: reinforcing the training of the former and moving the latter to support and sponsor the newly founded college. A

¹⁴⁰ Questier, 82; Houliston, 2001, 387–90; Lake, 2016, 372–75.

¹⁴¹ Verstegan, 8, 52–53; Questier, 83.

¹⁴² Persons [*Philopater*, pseud.], 1592a, 206–07; Lake, 2016, 375.

¹⁴³ Lake, 2016, 375.

comparison with earlier celebrations in English colleges in Spain, such as the one in Valladolid, shows rich thematic variety and a complex, multilayered presentation of messages and appeals to the audience. In Seville, the informative and promotional character of the event raised the ante on possible achievements of the English mission by envisioning English Catholics as able to implement Elizabeth's conversion. In that sense, one can only agree with Netzloff's view that the Continental colleges enacted a “surrogate public sphere within the context of diaspora.”¹⁴⁴ Of necessity this took a variety of forms. One of these was the devise presented in Seville on the Feast of Saint Thomas in 1592. More than a mere act of information, it was, rather, the enactment of engagement with the recusant religious and political agenda through a transnational milieu of cultural hybridity.

The portrayal of Elizabeth facing a political and moral dilemma in the Becket devise is unique when compared to other Catholic depictions of her “tyrannical” persecutions, even those representing her as subject to manipulation by evil counsellors like Burghley. The tantalizing prospect that Elizabeth might take the path of repentance and revert persecution shows both English Catholic exiles' hopes for relief and their determination to continue their mission. For Spanish patrons, such an unusual image of Elizabeth may have dissipated fears and reassured their support of the seminaries, the prospect dangling before them that further Spanish efforts on behalf of the English diaspora might still bear fruit.

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¹⁴⁴Netzloff, 243.

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