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"A SUBJECT WITHOUT SUBJECTION":  
ROBERT DUDLEY, EARL OF LEICESTER, AND *THE*  
*PRINCELY PLEASURES AT KENELWORTH CASTLE*

Ilana Nash

When Queen Elizabeth I went on progress, traveling through the countryside and stopping at the homes of noble families, her hosts were expected not only to feed and house her, but to divert her with entertainments that ritualized the loyal and harmonious relationship between monarch and subject. Despite the survival of several texts, few critics have studied country-house entertainments as a literary genre; *The Princely Pleasures at Kenelworth Castle*, the series of entertainments staged by Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester in 1575, has received some attention, but usually either as a side-note in a general discussion of Robert Dudley or as an isolated case, removed from the context of other country-house entertainments.<sup>1</sup> *The Princely Pleasures* can be best understood as a participant in this distinct genre.

Entertainments are perhaps the most personal genre of Elizabethan literature. Unlike the later court masques, entertainments were always performed in private homes and often incorporated the house or surrounding landscape into the dramatic action. The texts addressed the specific biographical circumstances and sentiments of the hosts, who often appear as characters, portrayed either by themselves or by allegorical proxies. To understand an entertainment, one must understand the biography of its host and the nature of his bond with the queen. Nowhere is this more true than with *The Princely Pleas-*

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<sup>1</sup>The most recent addition to the scholarship on this subject is the second chapter in Susan Frye's *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Frye reads this entertainment, as I do, "in relation to external events that also helped construct them in the first place" (56), but she confines her treatment of external events to a discussion of Dudley's desire for England to enter the Netherlands' war against Spain. She does not discuss Leicester's biography and the unique exigencies of the entertainment genre, as I will do.

ures. When read in light of Dudley's life, character, and relationship with Elizabeth, this entertainment reveals deep ambiguities toward the monarch's absolute authority, ambiguities which Dudley expresses in his aggressive pursuit of a marriage with Elizabeth and in his self-aggrandizing rhetoric, both of which prevent the entertainment from successfully fulfilling the genre's conventional goal of demonstrating humble obedience from host to monarch. Before analyzing the entertainment itself, then, we must begin by understanding the features of Robert Dudley's life that influence *The Princely Pleasures*.

### Family Honor and Self-Opinion

Robert Dudley's keen awareness of his own exalted position as Elizabeth's favorite and as a member of an important family formed one of the most constant themes of his life. The Spanish Bishop Quadra, residing in England, mentions Dudley in a 1560 letter to Count de Feria: "Not a man in England but cries out at the top of his voice that this fellow is ruining the country with his vanity."<sup>2</sup> The third generation of Dudleys to hold high office, Robert took pride in his family's tradition of serving Tudor monarchs, despite the uncomfortable fact that both his father and grandfather had been executed for treason.<sup>3</sup> He suffered the sins of his fathers all his life, never fully escaping snide references like this one from the anonymous *Leicester's Commonwealth*, a virulent attack on Dudley's excessive power and privileges, which notes with malicious glee that he was a "meane peer...noble onlie in two descentes, and both of them steyned with the Block."<sup>4</sup> The Dudleys tended to be sensitive about their heritage;

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<sup>2</sup>Public Record Office, Bishop Quadra to Count de Feria, 7 March 1560, *Calendar of Letters and State Papers Relating to English Affairs Preserved Principally in the Archives of Simancas* (London: 1892-99), vol. I, no. 91, 133 (hereafter cited as CSP Spanish).

<sup>3</sup>The Dudleys first came into eminence with Edmund Dudley, Robert's grandfather, who served as undersheriff of London and as Speaker of the House of Commons under Henry VII. Edmund's zealous and creative taxation measures pleased the king, but infuriated the English people, to whose wrath the young Henry VIII eventually sacrificed Edmund by executing him. Edmund's son John assumed leadership of Edward VI's reign after Protector Somerset's execution; he rose to become Duke of Northumberland (one of England's very few and earliest non-royal dukes) in 1551. His orchestration of the attempted Lady Jane Grey coup resulted in his execution by Mary Tudor.

<sup>4</sup>*The Copie of a Letter Written by a Master of Art at Cambridge, to his Friend in London, concerning some talke past of late between two worshipful and grave men, about the present state, and some proceedings of the Erle of Leycester and his friendes in England* (n.p., 1584),

in fact they were not entirely an upstart family, for John Dudley descended from Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, although the noble blood had been diluted by transmission through the female line. Offered an earldom at the start of Edward VI's reign, John Dudley used his tenuous descent from Beauchamp to support his ambitions, requesting and receiving the prestigious earldom of Warwick. Dudley then adopted Beauchamp's badge, the bear and ragged staff, as the symbol for his own family.<sup>5</sup>

Robert Dudley inherited his father's sense of family pride and the ambition that accompanied it, even waging a rather obnoxious campaign to deprive Lord Berkeley of Berkeley Castle on the grounds that the property had once belonged to a Beauchamp.<sup>6</sup> He displayed the bear and ragged staff on every suitable object: his armor, his portraits, even the architecture of the buildings he added to Kenilworth Castle. When writing to Elizabeth, Dudley would sometimes refer to his elder brother Ambrose and himself as "your *ursus major* and *minor*."<sup>7</sup> Biographers note that the Dudley clan was unusually close-knit and loyal to each other, even in times of extreme stress and misfortune. After their father had been charged with treason, the Dudley brothers—John, Ambrose, Robert, Guildford, and Henry—were imprisoned together in the Tower of London. A wall in the room they occupied bears a carving, done by the eldest brother, of the bear and ragged staff, beneath which appear his and his father's name, "Iohn Dudley," and a border of flowers whose significance is explained in an unfinished poem:

Yow that these beasts do wel behold and se  
 May deme with ease wherefore here made they be  
 With borders eke wherein [there may be found]  
 4 Brothers names who list to serche the grounde.<sup>8</sup>

The floral wreath contains symbols for each of the brothers' names. This touching device suggests that, even when faced with disaster

26. Later printings appear under the better-known title *Leicester's Commonwealth*, which I use when citing this tract.

<sup>5</sup>Derek Wilson, *Sweet Robin: A Biography of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, 1533-1588* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981), 313 n. 12.

<sup>6</sup>See Alan Kendall, *Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester* (London: Cassel, 1980), 142.

<sup>7</sup>Public Record Office, Robt. Earl of Leicester to the Queen, 16 January 1570, *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, Addenda*, vol. VII, *The Reign of Elizabeth, 1566-1579* (London, 1871), no. 31, 198 (hereafter cited as CSP Dom., Add.).

<sup>8</sup>Cited in Derek Wilson, 61. The words in brackets are Wilson's conjecture for that incomplete line.

because of their father's schemes, the Dudley boys thought less of their own personal plights than of the bond that joined them as a proud and loving family.

The danger of single-minded devotion to family honor is that it can compete with loyalty to a monarch. John Dudley's attempt to supplant Mary Tudor with the Protestant Jane Grey reveals concern for family honor as well as for religious or political issues: he married his son Guildford to the girl he hoped to make queen of England. The Dudleys' conviction of their own worthiness and their commitment to each other recalls Mervyn James's description of honor among noble families:

A man's very being as honourable [was] transmitted to him with the blood of his ancestors, themselves honourable men. Honour therefore was not merely an individual possession, but that of the collectivity, the lineage. Thus the man of honour would be likely to hold, even after faithfulness to the king or lord had been broken, to the bond between the lineage and himself. Other loyalties were liable to be jettisoned.<sup>9</sup>

Robert Dudley's commitment to family honor never placed him in as extreme an opposition to royal authority as his father's had, but his strong sense of pride, based on both family and individual accomplishment, led him to see himself as Elizabeth's near-equal.

An incident recorded in the *Black Book of Warwick* relates the prestige that the Dudleys held in their local shires, and the respect that Dudley therefore felt was due him.<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth restored the earldom of Warwick to the Dudley family by granting it to Ambrose in 1561. Ten years later, Ambrose and Robert, by then the Earl of Leicester, traveled to Warwick to observe the Order of St. Michael on Michaelmas. The town's officials were eager to welcome the noble brothers, both because Ambrose was the lord of their shire, and because they hoped that Leicester would choose Warwick as the location for the hospital he planned to build. Debating whether to greet the lords outside the town limits, as they would do for the monarch, they decided "that the said Lords being but subjects must not have

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<sup>9</sup>Mervyn James, *Society, Politics and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 325. James places this phenomenon at the roots of the Northern Rebellion of 1569 and states that such a devotion to lineage was especially strong in old northern English families. While the Dudleys were neither anciently noble nor Northern, the evidence of their lives suggests a set of values concordant with those James describes.

<sup>10</sup>*The Black Book of Warwick* (Warwick: Henry T. Cooke and Son, n.d.), 29-40.

such Duety as the prince...therfre it was not thought mete to go out of the towne." Their distinction between subjects and monarch infuriated Leicester, who felt he deserved the same treatment as Elizabeth would have received; he

expected...that they wold have mett him on the waye and receivid him w<sup>h</sup>out the towne in some semely manner the rather for that he cam downe so nobly accompanied and to shewe himself so honorably amongs them.

Angry at the town officials, Leicester hid himself indoors and would not speak to them. Finally, after sufficient apology, they were permitted "into the garden where the said Earle out of the [window] might see them but they could not see him"; he then made them promise henceforth to behave "more dutifully to his L[ordship]."

His perception of his magnificence appears again in the St. Michael's ceremony, for which he dressed entirely in white velvet lined with cloth of silver and studded with precious gems. The author of the *Black Book* describes him as "a sight worthie the beholding," adding that "in the eis of this writer he semed the only goodliest psonage made in England." Resplendent in princely garb, revered in the shire his family controlled, and behaving very much like England's "only goodliest psonage," it is no wonder that Leicester was eventually described as "a subject without subjection."<sup>11</sup> This attitude often placed him in difficult positions with Elizabeth. Although he enjoyed her affection and special favor throughout his life, they frequently clashed over issues of authority, the issues that pervade his 1575 entertainment for her.

### Robert Dudley and Elizabeth I

Robert Dudley's rise in Elizabeth's court was nearly unequalled. His status as her favorite stemmed partly from his famous good looks and chivalric panache, but also from the parallel tracks their lives had followed: they grew up together at court, studied together under Roger Ascham, and were even imprisoned in the Tower at the same time during Mary Tudor's reign. Dudley himself said of their relationship, "I have known her better than any man alive since she was eight years old."<sup>12</sup> On the first day of her reign she made him Master of the Horse, the first in a long line of titles, posts, monopolies, and grants of land that followed. She displayed her trust and affection for

<sup>11</sup>*Leicester's Commonwealth*, 55.

<sup>12</sup>De la Forêt, *Dépêches*, 6 August 1566, quoted in Kendall, 5.

him most strongly when, stricken with smallpox in 1562, she instructed her councilors that Robert Dudley was to become the Protector of the Realm in the event of her death. Upon recovering her health Elizabeth appointed him to her Privy Council, making him one of the most influential men in England, and created him Earl of Leicester two years later.

From the start of Elizabeth's reign, her close affiliation with Dudley led to rumors of marriage, despite the fact that he was already married at that time to Amy Robsart. Such rumors were the inevitable result of the atmosphere Elizabeth's single status created; courtiers who sought her favor found themselves in a position similar to that of a suitor seeking the affections of a remote and elevated mistress. Elizabeth encouraged the conflation of court and courtship that led the men in her service to figure their dealings with her in Petrarchan tropes. In Dudley's case, the required courtship came easily because of the mutual affection he shared with Elizabeth. A letter from Bishop Quadra to the king of Spain in 1560 indicates the resulting rumors:

Lord Robert told somebody, who has not kept silence, that if he live another year he will be in a very different position from now. He is laying in a good stock of arms, and is assuming every day a more masterful part in affairs. They say that he thinks of divorcing his wife.<sup>13</sup>

Whether he thought of divorcing her or not is unclear, but after Amy Dudley in fact died later that year under bizarre circumstances, rumors of foul play plagued Dudley for the rest of his life. No one can say certainly whether he contrived his wife's death, or whether it was simply the worst case of bad timing ever to befall him. But it is surely true that, after Amy's death, his high position and his life-long association with the queen gave him the strongest claim of any Englishman to be her husband. Further inspired by his own magnificent self-perception, and desiring a type of favor from the queen that no other man could boast of, he earnestly pursued her hand in marriage. He met with no success. In 1565, he staged a play at court which showed a debate between Juno, goddess of marriage, and Diana, goddess of chastity; Juno won the debate, whereupon Elizabeth turned to the Spanish ambassador seated beside her and said, "this is

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<sup>13</sup>Bishop Quadra to the King, 28 March 1560, CSP Spanish, vol. I, no. 95, 141.

all against me."<sup>14</sup> She enjoyed the courtship, but insisted on her right to remain single.

Despite her evasions, Dudley continued to pursue Elizabeth, which she somewhat encouraged by forbidding him to pursue other women. Her various flirtations continued, however, and her refusal to tolerate any show of jealousy from Dudley left him in a frustrating position. One episode perfectly captures the tense ingredients of their relationship: their mutual jealousy, his arrogance, her corrective humiliation of him, his despondence, and her eventual forgiveness. In the summer of 1565, Elizabeth began a brief dalliance with Thomas Heneage, to which Dudley angrily retaliated with a dalliance of his own. Displeased by this perceived insubordination, the queen was cold and ungiving towards him for several weeks. The issue arose again later that year when a "gentleman," possibly Heneage himself,<sup>15</sup> taunted Dudley during a Christmas game at court by commanding him to ask the queen "which was the most difficult to erase from the mind, an evil opinion created by a wicked informer, or jealousy.... The Queen replied courteously that both were difficult to get rid of, but that, in her opinion, it was much more difficult to remove jealousy." Resenting this apparent reference to his recent troubles with Elizabeth, Dudley vented his anger on the other man with characteristic hauteur, threatening to "castigate him with a stick." Heneage protested that such talk was not appropriate among equals; "the only answer Lord Robert gave was that this gentleman was not his equal, and that he would postpone chastising him till he thought it time to do so." Hearing of Dudley's presumptuous behavior, Elizabeth threatened to "lower him as she had at first raised him," reminding the earl that the high position which he viewed as inalienably his was in fact hers to revoke any time she saw fit. Dudley grieved loudly at this reprimand, shutting himself up for four days,

and showing by his despair that he could no longer live; so the Queen, moved to pity, restored him again to her favour; yet...his good fortune, if perhaps not impeded, will at least have been delayed a little, for it had been said that she would shortly proclaim him Duke and marry him.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Guzman de Silva to the King, 12 March 1565, CSP Spanish, vol. I, no. 286, 404.

<sup>15</sup>Identified thus by Derek Wilson, 178.

<sup>16</sup>Public Record Office, Giacomo Surian, Venetian Ambassador in France, to the Signory, 19 February 1566, *State Papers and Manuscripts relating to English Affairs, existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice* (London, 1890), vol. VII, no. 359, 374-5.



This serio-comic episode highlights the combination of staged and genuine feeling that marked their relationship: Dudley's performance as the scorned lover dying of despair won him his pardon, but his anxiety over her romantic intrigues and her threats to erase the stature that he saw as his patrimony is real enough. She had demonstrated her complete control over his position years earlier, in 1560, when first planning to raise him to an earl. Perhaps wary of incurring public anger by elevating him so soon after his wife's suspicious death, or perhaps simply wanting to check his complacency, she waited until the last possible moment and, instead of signing the papers, slashed them with her quill and said that his family had been traitors for three generations.<sup>17</sup> He had to wait another four years before she finally gave him his earldom.

The fluctuations of his fortunes with Elizabeth caused Dudley great distress. He lived in fear of displeasing her, and when such an event did occur, he could become deeply depressed. In 1567, out of the queen's favor for an unstated reason, he wrote to Nicholas Throckmorton:

Foul faults have been pardoned in some; my hope was that one only might have been forgiven—yea, forgotten to me. If many days' service and not a few years' proof have made trial of unremovable fidelity enough, without notable offences, what shall I think of all that past favour which...remained towards me, thus to take my first oversight as it were an utter casting off of all that was before?<sup>18</sup>

The grief this time is written privately, not performed publicly, and attests to the real anguish that could result from Dudley's continual efforts to please an elusive and temperamental queen.

Elizabeth's refusal either to marry Dudley or let him marry elsewhere had the serious consequence of preventing his begetting an heir. By 1573 Robert and Ambrose were the only Dudley brothers still alive, and Ambrose had no sons. Dudley wrote a letter around this time to an unnamed woman—probably Douglas Sheffield, with whom he had been conducting a clandestine affair for some time, and who was pressing him to marry her:

If I should marry, I am sure never to have favour of them [i.e., Elizabeth] that I had rather yet never have wife than lose them, yet is there nothing in the world next that favour that I would not give

<sup>17</sup>Kendall, 37.

<sup>18</sup>Robt. Earl of Leicester to Sir Nicholas Throckmorton, 4 May 1567?, CSP Dom., Add., vol. VII, no. 73, 29.

to be in hope of leaving some children behind me, being now the last of our house.<sup>19</sup>

For a member of the proud Dudley family, being the last of his house must have caused great sorrow. He had to realize at some point that Elizabeth would probably never marry him, but he sacrificed his own dynastic concerns for a long time in the hopes that she would relent. A year and a half later, he gave his hope its strongest, most desperate expression in his entertainment for the queen at Kenilworth. When Dudley prepared for Elizabeth's visit in 1575 he was still her favorite, and still shared a close connection with her; but he was also aging, anxious, and tired of losing the power struggles that characterized their years of acquaintance.

### *The Princely Pleasures I: Sovereignty and Deity*

Susan Frye's analysis of Dudley's entertainments for Queen Elizabeth focuses on Dudley's firm Protestantism and his desire that Elizabeth send military aid to the Netherlands in their fight against Spain.<sup>20</sup> But Dudley's desire for a military command in the Netherlands informs only part of the entertainment's imagery. This series of extravagant plays, feasts, musical shows, acrobatics, and firework displays, which lasted for three weeks and involved spectacular expense, repeatedly illustrates the two constant themes of Dudley's life: a belief in his exalted status, and his desire for Elizabeth to recognize and increase that status. One desired effect was a Netherlands commission; the other was her acceptance, at last, of his proposals of marriage.

Dudley relied for the expression of his concerns on his authors, who would have worked hard to please him. Known to be one of the greatest patrons in England of scholars, philosophers, and poets, Dudley received hundreds of dedications from ambitious men of letters like George Gascoigne, the principal author of *The Princely Pleasures at Kenilworth Castle*.<sup>21</sup> Although the team of poets that

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<sup>19</sup>C. Read, "A letter from Robert Earl of Leicester to a lady," *Huntington Library Bulletin* 9 (April 1936): 25; quoted in Kendall, 148.

<sup>20</sup>Frye, 57ff.

<sup>21</sup>For a complete account of Dudley's career as a patron, see Eleanor Rosenberg, *Leicester, Patron of Letters* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955). The entertainment's other authors included Richard Mulcaster, Master Hunnes of Her Majesty's Chapel, George Ferrers, Masters Paten and Goldingham, and Master Badger, beadle of Oxford University, to whom Leicester's position as chancellor of that university might have been of special interest.

devised the entertainment owed loyalty to Queen Elizabeth, they were keenly aware of the bounty that could follow their service to the Earl of Leicester, and would have striven to portray him in the light that he wished. The entertainment thus reveals divided loyalties, for it advertises Dudley's puissance as well as the queen's.

A country-house entertainment was, however, the least appropriate venue possible for expressing pointed personal concerns, for this genre traditionally displayed the host's humility and servitude. Country-house festivities routinely consisted of ceremonies and spectacles that praised Elizabeth as supremely benign and omnipotent, for in this genre, "The prince is shown himself not only as he is (as a compliment) but as he should be—as, indeed, he ideally is."<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth's sovereignty received its most fundamental expression in the hosts' reiterations that she truly owned the property, which they only held for her as tenants. When she visited the Earl of Hertford at Elvetham, the queen heard a speech that welcomed her into the house: "All is thine; each part obeys thy will; / Did not each part obey, the wholl should perish."<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, in order to acknowledge the queen's kindness, and hoping to ensure its continuance, hosts regularly provided her with costly gifts. Hertford gave her a precious jewel; Sir Henry Lee, who entertained the queen at Woodstock after her visit to Kenilworth, gave her a jewel-encrusted gown. Despite differences in detail, then, nearly all entertainments for Elizabeth relied on these three fundamental requirements: unconditional praise of her power, a statement of the host's obedient subjection, and the presentation of costly gifts by the host to his monarch. *The Princely Pleasures at Kenelworth Castle* violates, to varying degrees, every one of these requirements. A genre designed to praise the hierarchical relationship between ruler and ruled cannot sustain its shape under the pressure of portraying two opposed and equally authoritative figures. The entertainment thus collapses on itself, and ultimately delivers as many insults as compliments to the queen's sovereignty.

Gascoigne takes the traditional compliment to Elizabeth's sovereignty one step further by representing the queen as a goddess, an innovation which thereafter became commonplace in Elizabethan royal entertainments. In deifying the queen, this entertainment bears a similarity to the later masque genre, which Stephen Orgel has said

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<sup>22</sup>Jean Wilson, *Entertainments for Elizabeth I* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1980), 9.

<sup>23</sup>Cited in Jean Wilson, 105.

contains "a belief in the hierarchy and a faith in the power of idealization," for deification "expresses only the most benign aspects of absolute sovereignty."<sup>24</sup> The metaphor works because gods and monarchs share the ability to determine the fates of the mortals/subjects beneath them; both have transformative power, for while a god can change the shape of one's body, a monarch can change a subject's rank and circumstances at will. Robert Langham's *Letter*, one of two extant texts describing the Kenilworth festivities, relates how Elizabeth demonstrated her transformative power on the ninth day of her visit to Kenilworth: she created five knights and cured nine people of "the peynfull and daungerous diseaz, called the kings evell, for that Kings and Queenz of the Ream, without oother medisin (save only by handling and prayerz) only doo cure it."<sup>25</sup> By figuring Elizabeth as a deity, the entertainment heightens the god-like power she herself displays when she transforms her subjects into higher ranks and healthier bodies. Each of the entertainment's attempted compliments to Elizabeth's divinity, however, is tinged with a degree of ambivalence; the authors create supernatural representations of transformative power, which they partially undercut with hints of that power's dark consequences. Dudley felt ambivalent about his queen's transformative power: it enabled her to create him Earl of Leicester and restore the family's earldom of Warwick to his brother Ambrose, but it also underlay the threats to "lower him as she had raised him" with which Elizabeth had long taunted Dudley when he showed too much aggression or self-importance.

Elizabeth's identification as a deity begins with her arrival on the night of July 9. A figure dressed as Hercules, carrying a large club, stands guard as porter at the castle gate and greets the queen's procession with officious bluster:

What stirre, what coyle is here?  
 come back, holde, whether now?  
 Not one so stout to stirre,  
 what harrying have we here?<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1975), 51-52.

<sup>25</sup>Robert Langham, *A Letter*, ed. R. J. P. Kuin (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983), 58.

<sup>26</sup>*The Complete Works of George Gascoigne*, ed. John W. Cunliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1910), vol. 2, 92. Further references to this edition will appear parenthetically in the text.

But when he sees the queen, he is "overcome by viewe of [her] rare beutie and princelie countenance," and admits her to the castle with this speech:

oh God, a peereless Pearle,  
No worldly wight no doubt,  
    some soveraigne Goddes sure....  
Most worthy welcome Goddes guest,  
    whose presence gladdeth all.  
Have here, have here both club and keyes  
    my selfe, my warde I yeelde. (93)

Any figure could have served the function of a doorkeeper; why does Gascoigne specifically identify this porter as Hercules, when his comic, submissive role here is so far removed from his portrayal in classical mythology? Even more puzzling, Hercules breaks tradition by giving Elizabeth not only the keys to the property (a common act of fealty in country-house entertainments) but also his club, his symbol of manly strength. The answer lies, I believe, in a veiled association between Hercules and the Earl of Leicester. While nothing in the text explicitly insists on such a link, Hercules' and Dudley's biographies bear mutual resemblances which suggest the negative potential of transformative power.

Greek myth relates how the Pythian priestess told Hercules that "henceforth he should take the name of Heracles, meaning 'Hera's Glory,' undoubtedly because the Labours he was about to undertake would result in the goddess's glorification."<sup>27</sup> The hero's title, then, originates from the woman he serves. Hera instigates Hercules' labors by manipulating circumstances in order to enslave him. She both drives him to perform and impedes his performance with storms, fits of madness, and other obstacles. The strongest man in the world, Hercules must struggle in a system of power that centers on a crafty and vindictive goddess. It does not take a great leap of imagination to see a parallel between the classical hero and the English earl. A later scene in the entertainment specifically links Elizabeth with Juno, Hera's Roman counterpart; in a pastoral play, Gascoigne represents Elizabeth as a nymph named Zabeta who lives under Juno's auspices. Indeed, Elizabeth's power system here threatens Hercules even more than Hera's did in myth. In the queen's service as Kenilworth's porter, the archetype of manly strength is reduced to a comic, bumbling

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<sup>27</sup>Pierre Grimal, *Dictionary of Classical Myth*, trans. A. R. Maxwell-Hyslop (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 193.

doorkeeper. Her mere presence causes him easily to surrender his club, the last symbol of his powerful identity, suggesting that her transformative powers have unmanned mythology's greatest man.

Once Hercules establishes Elizabeth's divine identity, other episodes in the entertainment continue to dramatize her ability to transform characters' shapes, estates, locales, and dispositions. In one of their many mixtures of real myth and pure imagination, the entertainment's authors invent a "Lady of the Lake," who claims to have lived imprisoned in the castle's mere, or lake, since the days of King Arthur. On the ninth day of the queen's visit, an actor dressed as Triton glides across the mere and tells Elizabeth the Lady's sad history: pursued relentlessly by Merlin's "inordinate lust," she finally "inclosed [him] in a rocke" and thus incurred the wrath of Merlin's violent cousin, Sir Bruce Sauns Pittie, who "in revenge of his cosin...did continuallie pursue" her. Neptune observed her plight and—apparently *avec pittie*—"envyroned hir with waves" in the Kenilworth mere to hide her from Sir Bruce, where she has languished ever since (102). In the fiction of the entertainment, the Lady's deliverance can come only from "a better maide then herself." Triton thus begs Elizabeth simply to show herself, which translates the Lady from thrall to freedom. This scene claims to praise Elizabeth's power to transform, but again undercuts the praise; the Lady of the Lake's same supernatural capacity to change people's states—her deception and imprisonment of Merlin—is portrayed as a dangerous skill which leads to her own persecution.

The final episode of the *The Princely Pleasures*, again purporting to celebrate Elizabeth's divine capabilities while complaining of the damage they can cause, revives the theme of transformation. The tropes of Petrarchan courtship that underlay so much of Dudley's relationship with the queen reappear in a tale told by Gascoigne himself, dressed as the forest god Sylvanus. He tells of an Olympian deity named "Ahtebasile" ("Elisabetha" backwards), loved by many but cold and remote:

Her rare giftes have drawne the most noble and worthy personages in the whole world to sue unto hyr for grace. All which she hath so rigorously repulsed, or rather (to speake playne English) so obstinatly and cruelly rejected, that I sigh to thinke of some of their mishaps....I could tell your highnesse of sundry famous and worthy persons, whome shee hath turned and converted into most monstrous shapes and proportions. As some into Fishes, some other

into fowles, and some into huge stony rocks and great mountains.  
(124-5)

He points out to her the bushes and trees that line the road, all of which he claims are Ahtebasile's metamorphosed servants. Dudley appears represented by a holly bush named "Deep Desire," which, in its previous human form, "was such an one as neither any delay could daunt him: no disgrace could abate his passions, no tyme coulede tyre him" (126). Dudley's relationship with Elizabeth—his unflinching pursuit, her unflinching refusal—is once again dramatized as having "unmanned" him, this time reducing him to a bush. By trapping men in inanimate prisons, Elizabeth repeats the Lady of the Lake's crime of unmanning and entrapping Merlin in a rock, the crime from which the Lady's misfortunes sprang. The entertainment thus claims to praise transformative power, but actually portrays it as a curse, an agent of misery and frustration.

Gascoigne voices Dudley's frustrations most clearly and poignantly as he concludes his tale with the following plea:

Therefore I do humbly crave in [Deep Desire's] behalfe, that you would either be a suter for him unto the heavenly powers, or else but onely to give your gracious consent that hee may be restored to his prystinate estate. Whereat your highnesse may be assured that heaven will smile, the earth will quake, men will clap their hands, and I will alwayes continue an humble beseecher for the flourishing estate of your royall person. (131)

These lines suggest rather powerfully that by 1575, Dudley had had enough of the exhausting uncertainty of courting Elizabeth. By asking her to "be a suter for him unto the heavenly powers" he asks her either to let him win "Ahtebasile" or to let him go. She did neither; three years later he married Lettice Knollys in a secret ceremony which, when the queen discovered it, angered her so badly that she threatened to throw him in the Tower of London—another negative display of her power to transform a man's estate.

At Kenilworth, however, marriage plans to Lettice Knollys were still far in the future, and Dudley made vigorous attempts to persuade Elizabeth to take him as her consort. The strongest example of his dictatorial courtship appears in a pastoral play by Gascoigne that presents a contest between Juno and Diana. This was the same scenario that had caused Elizabeth displeasure ten years earlier, when

she had said that Dudley's little play was "against me."<sup>28</sup> One wonders why Dudley had apparently not learned better after a decade. The play was canceled at the last minute, but it survives in the text of *The Princely Pleasures*, and since it was originally intended for performance, presumably with Dudley's approval, its contents deserve attention.

The play relates the fortunes of Zabeta, a nymph whose name is a version of Elizabeth, who once dwelled with Diana but left her for Juno seventeen years ago (i.e. in 1558, the year of Elizabeth's accession). Juno took the nymph under her protection and made her a queen, implying that sovereignty rightly belongs only to married people:

How necessarie were  
for worthy Queenes to wed  
That know you wel, whose life alwayes  
in learning hath beene led. (119)

Still a virgin for the time being, Zabeta must ultimately marry in order to retain the gift of sovereignty which Juno has granted her. Gascoigne thus implies that, as a virgin, Elizabeth rules on borrowed time. The play contains a further insult in its portrayal of Diana; weak and passive, she bears little resemblance to her characterization in mythology. Lacking the authority or charisma to keep her nymphs, she mourns the loss of Zabeta and hunts mournfully for her through the woods. The goddess of the hunt is too unskilled to find her quarry without assistance, however, and must ultimately beg her father's help. Jove locates Zabeta but then, favoring Juno's side of the contest, turns against his daughter: "Jove in heaven would smile to see / Diana set on shelve" (120). Unwilling to disobey her snide father, Diana meekly abandons her cause "not as I would, but as I must" (118). The paragon of female strength and autonomy, a symbol of Elizabeth's virginal state, sacrifices her desires and bends to the will of a man. This startlingly hostile play appears almost as an antidote to the earlier portrayal of an emasculated Hercules; Dudley's authors ultimately give male authority the last word, and the word is that Elizabeth must marry.

Langham notes wryly that on the day scheduled for this play's performance, Elizabeth seems to have nearly left Kenilworth abruptly: "A this day also was thear such earnest talkk and appoint-

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<sup>28</sup>See note 14 above.



ment of removing that I gave over my noting, and harkened after my hors."<sup>29</sup> Perhaps Elizabeth heard of the intended play's plot, and became angry enough to want to leave; alternately, her anger may have stemmed from something else, and Dudley quietly canceled the play himself after seeing the queen's mood. Either scenario suggests that Elizabeth would not have appreciated the play's message.<sup>30</sup> The following month at Woodstock, Sir Henry Lee entertained the queen with a play about a young princess who cannot marry her beloved because of his lower station. At first unhappy, the princess eventually realizes that her duty to her state outweighs her desire to wed. Elizabeth apparently liked this play quite well, requesting that "the whole in order as it fell, should be brought to her in writing."<sup>31</sup> Lee understood the requisites of the entertainment genre, specifically that the monarch's chosen self-image (in this case, virginity) must be maintained and idealized, not destroyed.

### *The Princely Pleasures II: Dudley's Self-Promotion*

Despite the cancellation of his marriage play, Dudley did not lack for opportunities in *The Princely Pleasures* to press his suit upon Elizabeth. A marriage proposal must present the suitor as favorably as possible, and for Dudley, convinced of his own magnificence, that meant commissioning an entertainment that advertised his own authority and high position nearly as much as it did the queen's. As noted above, this agenda complicates the usual function of a country-house entertainment; it is difficult to laud Elizabeth's absolute sovereignty while simultaneously suggesting that she share it with someone else. The result of the entertainment's divided loyalties is that every scene designed to praise Elizabeth also, obliquely or directly, praises Dudley as well.

*The Princely Pleasures* referred often to English history, a tactic for praising the queen indirectly by praising her nation; she descends from the distinguished line of rulers who have shaped Britain into its present glorious form, and her identity as queen merges with that of her country. Dudley's presence haunts each of the entertainment's historical references. The most fundamental appeal to historic inter-

<sup>29</sup>Langham, 59.

<sup>30</sup>Frye asserts that Elizabeth censored the play herself, but offers no evidence for this claim. In fact, neither Langham's *Letter* nor Gascoigne's text explain the reason, and since no other sources exist, we must treat the question as unanswerable.

<sup>31</sup>J. W. Cunliffe, "The Queenes Majesties Entertainment at Woodstock," *PMLA* 26 (1911): 102.

est is Dudley's choice of venue, for while he owned many estates, Kenilworth stood out as an especially ancient castle which had played crucial roles in English history. Even the castle's name was believed to derive from two Saxon kings, Kenulph and Kenelm.<sup>32</sup> Dudley had a family connection to the castle as well, for it had once belonged to his father. Elizabeth restored the castle to Robert Dudley in 1564, and he invested a fortune in expanding and rebuilding the historic structure, a task which reached completion only shortly before Elizabeth's 1575 progress. Gascoigne loses no opportunity to herald Dudley's role in the castle's reconstruction: in one episode, a Savage Man (Gascoigne dressed in ivy) refers to the earl as "he who but of late / This building here did lay;" Eccho replies, "Dudley" (99). This painful rhyme emphasizes that Dudley has "laid" the foundations for another chapter of Kenilworth's illustrious history; his very name portrays him as Elizabeth's co-custodian of a great English tradition.<sup>33</sup> To that same end, Dudley orchestrated substantial celebrations for July 17, St. Kenelm's day, including a performance by a group of players from Coventry that dramatized England's defeat of the Danes centuries before. Each reference to England's past and Kenilworth's place within it offers a compliment not only to the queen, but to the host who is clever enough to exploit the calendar and the significance of his property as further evidence that he is a fit mate for England's ruler.

Further compliments to Dudley interfere with those to Elizabeth in the entertainment's many Arthurian episodes, which flatter Elizabeth because of the Tudor family's claimed descent from King Arthur. Upon Elizabeth's first approach to the castle, six larger-than-

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<sup>32</sup>Langham, 38. The Lady of the Lake repeats this tale when she greets Elizabeth, and the entertainment's Latin verses refer to the castle as "werda Kenelmi." The property itself figures prominently in several historic episodes: it is named in Magna Carta as one of the castles required from John by the Barons as sureties; it was the site of a major battle between forces of Henry III and Simon de Montfort, a conflict which produced the Dictum of Kenilworth; it housed an incarcerated Edward II before his removal to Berkeley Castle, the site of his murder. Twice during *The Princely Pleasures* characters appear who offer long blazons of the castle's history, its previous owners, and the bygone kings of England.

<sup>33</sup>Kenilworth's first major reconstruction had occurred during its ownership by John of Gaunt. (See Sir William Dugdale's *Antiquities of Warwickshire* [London, 1656], 165.) His tenure as the castle's owner was probably known; it therefore might not be unreasonable to suggest that, as the second significant revisionist of Kenilworth, Dudley was conscious of taking his place beside the patriarch of England's royal family, Elizabeth's great-great-grandfather.

lifesize dummies holding trumpets deck the battlements while real trumpeters hide behind them and play a fanfare: "And by this dum shew it was ment, that in the daies and Reigne of K. Arthure, men were of that stature. So that y<sup>e</sup> Castle of Kenelworth should seeme stil to be kept by Arthurs heirs and their servants" (92). This remark compliments both guest and host, for both share responsibility for maintaining the splendor of King Arthur's era. The Savage Man's conversation with Echo reiterates this double compliment:

And what meant those great men? which on the walles were seen:	
They were some Gyants certainly, no men so bigge have bene.	Eccho: Have bene.
Have bene? why then they served King Arthur man of might.	
And ever since this castle kept for Arthurs heyres by right.	Eccho: Right. (98)

As Arthur's heir, Elizabeth resurrects the glory of his age. John and Robert Dudley, the most recent owners of Kenilworth, are the "great men" who "this castle kept, / for Arthurs heyres by right." The "right" refers ambiguously either to Elizabeth's right to inherit Arthur's glory, or Dudley's right to "keep" it. The Lady of the Lake further emphasizes Kenilworth's Arthurian history by recounting the castle's past, its previous owners (beginning with Arthur himself) and mentioning Sir Roger de Mortimer who, while managing the castle for Edward I in the thirteenth century, staged a self-consciously Arthurian series of tournaments entitled "The Round Table."<sup>34</sup>

This catalog of owners does not offer the unadulterated compliment it should, for it mentions Elizabeth only indirectly as Arthur's heir. Meanwhile, Dudley appropriates this history both by asserting his knowledge of it and by reiterating his family's role in Kenilworth's past. As Frye notes, "an Arthurian view of Dudley's past conveniently predicted his present successes and erased the queen's ability to take them away,"<sup>35</sup> effectively neutralizing the transformative powers that he found so disturbing.

Elizabeth quickly sensed presumption in the speeches that should have been purely submissive. She answered the Lady of the Lake with a famous reply: "We had thought indeed the Lake had been ours, and doo you call it yourz noow? Well we wyll heerin

<sup>34</sup>Dugdale, 164.

<sup>35</sup>Frye, 68.

common more with yoo hereafter."<sup>36</sup> This arch remark may also have been prompted by her greeting from Hercules, which had occurred only moments before; the porter's failure to expect her arrival, or even to recognize her at first, suggests a less than wholehearted acknowledgement of the monarch's feudal ownership of the castle.

Dudley's reluctance to humble himself before the queen affected even the most fundamental and most important of the entertainment's ceremonies: the presentation of gifts to the queen. In one sense, of course, the entirety of *The Princely Pleasures* was a type of gift in its luxurious variety of spectacles, music, and feasting, but this sort of gift flatters the giver more than the recipient. Langham notes toward the end of his *Letter*:

Such a wizdom and cunning in acquiring things so rich, so rare, and in such abounds: by so immens and profuse a charg of expens....what may this express, what may this set oout untoo us, but only a magnifyk minde, a singular wizdoom, a prinsly purs, and an heroicall hart? If it were my theam...too speake of hiz Lordships great honor and magnificens [I could] say a great deal more.<sup>37</sup>

Here we see acknowledgement of the same "magnifyk" image Dudley projected on his visit to Warwick four years earlier; Langham's impression bears testimony to the lofty self-perception that colors this "gift" to the queen.

In 1591 Elizabeth visited Rycote, the home of the Norrises, who were "among her closest and most trustworthy friends,"<sup>38</sup> and all of whose sons served Elizabeth as soldiers. The Rycote entertainment demonstrates gift-giving at its best: Henry, Lord Norris presents the queen with several gifts, all of them costly, all symbolic of the services his absent sons performed for her, and each accompanied by a letter from the son who sent it. The son posted in Ireland, for example, sent "a Darte of gold, set with Diamonds" and a letter with the motto written in Irish, "I flye onely for my soveraigne."<sup>39</sup> This ritual allows every member of the family to give the queen a very expensive, tangible gift that symbolizes the nature of his service and expresses his total loyalty and obeisance to her. While not all entertainments discharged their gift-giving duties with such georgous

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<sup>36</sup>Langham, 41.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>38</sup>Jean Wilson, 47.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 48.

perfection, they usually included material gifts of high cash-value that were personal both in nature and in delivery—placed directly into the queen's hands by the host or a character who symbolized him.

Dudley's gifts to Elizabeth during the Kenilworth festivities rarely conform to this standard. The first tangible gifts Elizabeth receives are a series of objects representing various gods, which Dudley had placed on the posts that lined the bridge into Kenilworth castle. Most of these gifts consisted of foodstuffs or live game: wheat from Ceres, fruit from Pomona, and an assortment of birds from Sylvanus, the god of fowl. Among the last objects were

two ragged stavez of sylver, as my Lord givez them in armz, beautifully glittering of armooour therupon depending, Bowz, Arrooz, Sheeld, Head pees...and such like for *Mars* gifts the God of war.<sup>40</sup>

Only Mars's gift of silver—advertising Dudley with his family badge of the ragged staffs, and indecorously reminding the queen of his desire for a military post—has any monetary value. Demanding and self-aggrandizing, this “gift” is doubly ungenerous in its positioning: what good will the silver do Elizabeth when it is stuck up on a post, out of reach, and clearly incorporated as a part of the storytelling in a way that makes retrieving it impossible?

Functioning more to reflect well on Dudley than to please his royal guest, these were “gifts” in name only—yet he seems to have exalted in that name, displaying more ungracious self-promotion by referring to the gifts repeatedly. In the dialogue cited briefly above, the Savage Man interrogates Echo about the fanfare that accompanied the queen's arrival:

but what meant all those shifts?	
Of sundry things upon a bridge?	
were those rewards or gifts?	Echo: Gifts.
Gifts? what? sent from the Gods?	
as presents from above?	
Or pleasures of provision,	
as tokens of true love?	Echo: True Love.
And who gave all those gifts?	
I pray thee (Echo) say?	
Was it not he who but of late	
this building here did lay?	Echo: Dudley.
Oh Dudley, so me thought:	
he gave himself and all,	

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<sup>40</sup>Langham, 42.

A worthy gift to be received,  
and so I trust it shall.

Eccho: It shall. (99)

Gascoigne not only reiterates Dudley's so-called generosity four times, in case Elizabeth had missed the point; he also interprets it for her as part of Dudley's proposal of marriage, for surely she shall accept his gift of "himself and all."

The marriage issue reappears even when Dudley finally does give Elizabeth a gift that observes the entertainment genre's conventions. A procession of gods and goddesses, performed in the final week of Elizabeth's stay, passes before her and names the gifts that they bestow upon her. Once again, most are intangible (Jupiter, for example, boasts of having provided fine weather), but Elizabeth does at last receive a noteworthy present: "golld cheynez, Ouchez, Jewels of great price and rich attyre."<sup>41</sup> The splendor of these gifts is somewhat dimmed, however, by coming from Juno, the goddess of marriage; Dudley insisted on salvaging the message of his canceled pastoral. Refusing to place himself in a role of submission to Elizabeth, he assigns the giving of his only "real" gift to the goddess who represents his own agenda.

Langham does not record Elizabeth's reaction to this gift, but surely its significance was not lost on her, and it may explain why she seems to have quit Kenilworth rather suddenly. Gascoigne reveals that "The Queenes Majestie hasting her departure from thence, the Earle commanded master Gascoigne to devise some Farewel worth the presenting" (120). The result is the tale in which Sylvanus begs Elizabeth to take pity on Deep Desire, either aiding his quest for Ahtebasile, or allowing him to go free. For his own part, Deep Desire (an actor—or perhaps Dudley himself—clad in holly branches) begs, "Live here good Queene, live here, / you are amongst your friends.....and Mars would be your man" (129).

The self-aggrandizing and insulting entertainment had, however, made obscure the question of whether Elizabeth was actually "amongst friends." By withholding the unconditional praise of the queen and the total subjection of its host, *The Princely Pleasures* failed to perform the imperatives of its genre. It thus became a useless weapon in Dudley's arsenal of ambition, for Elizabeth's only reaction seems to have been a somewhat ill-humored one. The entertainment became known almost immediately for its failure to please the queen, despite its spectacular lavishness. Although Gascoigne's

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 66.

innovation of deifying Elizabeth became a commonplace in the entertainment genre and later in Elizabethan poetry, the extant texts of other entertainments show that no other host attempted to divide his flattery between Elizabeth and himself. Near the end of his *Letter*, Langham wonders whether the visitors to Kenilworth had come "for duty too her Majesty, or loove to hiz Lordship, or for both."<sup>42</sup> His comment reflects the divided loyalties that prevent the entertainment from dramatizing a harmonious, hierarchical relationship between monarch and subject. The character of a country-house entertainment depends on the character of its host and his relationship with the queen; Dudley's pride, his frustration with Elizabeth, and his aggressive desire to dictate the quality of her favor doom *The Princely Pleasures* to self-destructive ambiguity.

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 74.