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WILLIAM ELDERTON'S LADIE MARQUES IDENTIFIED

In 1569, William Elderton published *A proper new balad in praise of my Ladie Marques, whose death is bewailed, to the tune of New lusty gallant*.¹ The identity of Elderton's 'ladie marques' has been the subject of speculation for many years because the epitaph lacks one important detail: the marchioness's name.

The only woman to be created marquess in her own right was Anne Boleyn, as other women gained the title marchioness only as a corollary of their husbands' designation. Elizabeth I's mother was, of course, long since dead by the time of Elizabeth's accession. It is conceivable that a loyal subject of Elizabeth I might choose to eulogise Anne in an attempt to win favour and impress the queen, despite the fact that more than thirty years had elapsed since Anne's execution. For example, Anne's former chaplain, William Latymer, dedicated his *A briefe treatise or chronickille of the moste vertuous ladye Anne Bulleyne, late quene of England* to Queen Elizabeth. Although only a draft in manuscript remains and it is unknown whether a version of the text was ever presented to Elizabeth, the dedication shows that Latymer hoped

¹ William Elderton, *A proper new balad in praise of my Ladie Marques, whose death is bewailed, to the tune of New lusty gallant* (London, 1569).

that the ‘excellente vertues, and princelye qualities wherewith your majesties dearest mother, the moste gracious ladye, queen Anne, was adornid and beautified’ ‘might not be utterly forgotton, but be commended to ymmortall memory’.² Maria Dowling suggests that Latymer ‘was anxious to rescue her memory from obliquy’ and that his chronicle was intended to rehabilitate Anne’s reputation as well as to influence her daughter to follow a Protestant policy.³ She adds that ‘Elizabeth would have no memory of her mother, and Latymer may have wished to redeem Anne in her daughter’s eyes’.⁴ Nevertheless, *A proper new balad*’s few details do not match the facts surrounding Anne Boleyn’s death and burial. Elderton describes how ‘vnder the roufe of sweete Saint Paull, / There lyeth my Ladie buried in claye’. After her execution, Anne’s body was laid to rest in the Tower of London’s parish church, St Peter ad Vincula. Anne Boleyn was not, then, Elderton’s lady marquess.

The title ‘Lady Marques’ was nonetheless in common use for a marchioness during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Hyder E. Rollins suggested that *A proper new balad* was written in honour of Elderton’s ‘special patroness’. He went on to point out that this patroness had ‘been variously identified as the Marchioness of Winchester, the Marchioness of Southampton, and the Marchioness of Dorset’.⁵ The marchioness of Winchester, Elizabeth Paulet, died in 1558, so the extremely long gap between her death and the publication of the ballad, not to mention her burial in the parish church of St Mary, Basing, make her an unlikely candidate for Elderton’s lady marquess. The first marquess of

² Maria Dowling, ‘William Latymer’s Chronickille of Anne Bulleyne’, *Camden Miscellany*, xxx (1990), 46.

³ Dowling, ‘William Latymer’s Chronickille of Anne Bulleyne’, 30 & 32.

⁴ Dowling, ‘William Latymer’s Chronickille of Anne Bulleyne’, 30.

⁵ Hyder E. Rollins, ‘William Elderton: Elizabethan Actor and Ballad-Writer’, *Studies in Philology* xvii (1920), 208.

Winchester, William Paulet, outlived his wife by more than thirteen years and did not remarry, so the title of marchioness did not pass to his son's wife until 1572. The last marchioness of Dorset was Frances Grey, wife of Henry Grey, marquess of Dorset, who is better known to history as the duke of Suffolk. Again, Frances Grey's death in 1559, ten years before the ballad was published, makes her unlikely to be Elderton's lady marquess. Their marriage produced no sons and a father's titles did not pass to any female offspring in their own right.

Rollins's suggestion that the lady marquess might be the marchioness of Southampton is spurious, as the title has never existed. However, the title 'marquess of Southampton' was erroneously used for the marquess of Northampton in the early eighteenth-century edition of *The History of That most Eminent Statesman, Sir John Perrot* and this confusion has been perpetuated into the twenty-first century.⁶ The mix up over the title of the marquess of Northampton leads us to a much more likely candidate for Elderton's 'ladie marques'. Northampton's wife, Elizabeth Parr, died on 2 April 1565, much closer to the date that the ballad was published than Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth Paulet or Frances Grey. A renowned beauty, Elizabeth Parr was also the sister-in-law of Henry VIII's final wife, Katherine Parr, who developed a warm relationship with all three of her royal step-children, Mary, Elizabeth, and Edward. Perhaps Elizabeth Parr's relationship with Katherine Parr endeared her to the young queen Elizabeth when she needed to appoint her own gentlewomen. De Quadra described the intimacy of the two Elizabeths in 1561, during one of Elizabeth I's illnesses, commenting that 'the Marchioness [of Northampton] and Lady Cobham consider the Queen

⁶ Anon., *The History of That Most Eminent Statesman, Sir John Perrot* (London, 1728) 29; Rory Rapple, *Martial Power and Elizabethan Political Culture: Military Men in England and Ireland, 1558-1594* (Cambridge, 2009)

in a dangerous condition', implying that the marchioness was in a position to know the truth about the queen's health.⁷ In September 1654, the Spanish ambassador in London, Guzman de Silva, wrote to the Duchess of Parma describing the close relationship of the two women:

As your Highness knows the marchioness of Northampton is a great favourite of the Queen, and I am gaining the goodwill of her intimates, so as to gain more influence over her mistress. She is a person of great understanding, and is so much esteemed by the Queen that some little friction exists between her and Robert [Dudley].⁸

It is conceivable that de Silva was exaggerating the importance of the marchioness in order to impress the Spanish king, Philip II. Nevertheless, his comments show that Elizabeth Parr was close enough to the queen to be cultivated as a source of information. In April 1564, Queen Elizabeth gave Parr permission to travel to the Low Countries in order to seek a cure for the breast cancer that would ultimately be the cause of Parr's death twelve months later.⁹ She later paid for Parr's funeral.¹⁰ Conclusively, Elizabeth Parr was interred in St Paul's Cathedral.

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Preston

⁷ 'Simancas: September 1561', Calendar of State Papers, Spain (Simancas), ed. Martin A. S. Hume (London, 1892), I, 212.

⁸ 'Simancas: September 1564', Calendar of State Papers, Spain (Simancas), ed. Martin A. S. Hume (London, 1892), I, 382.

⁹ 'Elizabeth: April 1564, 1-15', Calendar of State Papers Foreign, Elizabeth, ed. Joseph Stevenson (London, 1870), VII, 93.

¹⁰ 'Lady Marques of [Northampton]', Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reigns of Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, 1547-1580, ed. Robert Lemon (London, 1856), XXXVI, 250.

