

## *The Write Place At the Write Time*

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### **Exploration of Theme**



"Emergence I" by Ken Steinkamp; [www.kensteinkamp.com](http://www.kensteinkamp.com)

*In this section, we aim to explore themes in popular literature, poetry, plays,*

*art and music. In doing so, we gain new understandings and learn more through the words of the greats and the potent images of our collective histories. Write in, tell us your interpretations of your favorite works, and feel free to suggest the next piece of culture we research to divine its theme! Contact us! [themes@thewriteplaceatthewritetime.org](mailto:themes@thewriteplaceatthewritetime.org)*

In the spirit of this winter season, we will be exploring the themes and origin of the song "Greensleeves" which has perplexed historians over the centuries, remained a melodic delight with many derivatives including the famed Christmas hymn, and still maintains an element of mystery today.

"Greensleeves" is in the form of a romanesca. Though its formal publication dates surfaced in the latter part of the sixteenth century, there is much speculation about its origins. As many bards were in the habit of not claiming their works at the time, there is an ambiguity about English folk songs from this time period. A rumor that has sustained ground over time is that accomplished Renaissance man, King Henry VIII, composed the romantic melody and penned the lyrics for Lady Anne Boelyn. Though never fully proven, the rumor holds sway upon the following factors:

-Henry's education and schooling was of the finest quality as it seemed his brother would take the throne and Henry would enter the church. A highly skilled composer and musician, he often used these forms of expression.

-The lyrics to "Greensleeves" tie in closely with letters King Henry had written to Lady Anne during their courtship while he strove to win her favor. The lyrics reflect their situation, gifts given- concerning fine cloth used in medieval periods, symbols such as the color green which meant love at that time and the romantic tension between them. Lady Anne was at first seemingly reluctant to King Henry, drawing on his passions for her- playing hard to get so to speak as the vain King was used to compliance in such matters.

While some contend that the tune is Elizabethan in origin, coming to popularity after Henry's reign, the style of the song and its timeline were never confirmed. Some argue that green on the sleeve symbolized grass stains to imply a scandalous affair outdoors. However, most maintain that it did mean "love" in that period.

So hauntingly beautiful is the melody that it was given alternative lyrics by William Chatterton Dix. Many know it as the Christmas hymn "What Child Is This?"

"What Child is this who, laid to rest  
On Mary's lap is sleeping?  
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,  
While shepherds watch are keeping?  
This, this is Christ the King,  
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;  
Haste, haste, to bring Him laud,  
The Babe, the Son of Mary..."

What follows are some of the verses to the original "Greensleeves" and excerpts of letters from King Henry VIII to Lady Anne Boelyn:

First Verse

"Alas, my love, you do me wrong,  
To cast me off discourteously.  
For I have loved you well and long,  
Delighting in your company.

Second Verse

So must I meditate alone  
Upon your insincerity.

Third Verse

If you intend thus to disdain,  
It does the more enrapture me,  
And even so, I still remain  
A lover in captivity.

Fourth Verse

I have been ready at your hand,  
To grant whatever you would crave

Fifth Verse

Thou couldst desire no earthly thing,  
But still thou hadst it readily.

Seventh Verse

I bought thee petticoats of the best,  
The cloth so fine as it might be;  
I gave thee jewels for thy chest,  
And all this cost I spent on thee.

Nineth Verse

My men were clothed all in green,  
And they did ever wait on thee;  
All this was gallant to be seen,  
And yet thou wouldst not love me.

Last Verse

Ah, Greensleeves, now farewell, adieu,  
To God I pray to prosper thee,  
For I am still thy lover true,  
Come once again and love me."

Quotes from love letters written by Henry to Anne in the 1520's:

"...having been for more than a year now struck by the dart of love, and being uncertain either of failure or of finding a place in your heart and affection..."

"...thus, for lack of time, darling, I make an end of my letter, written with the hand of him which I would were yours."

A partial verse from "Greensleeves"-

"Oh, why did you so enrapture me?

Now I remain in a world apart

But my heart remains in captivity."

Whatever the origin of the piece may be, it is one that captured hearts and imaginations time and again through it's different variations. Write in and tell us what you think! What does the song mean to you? Give us your feedback: [themes@thewriteplaceatthewritetime.org](mailto:themes@thewriteplaceatthewritetime.org)

To see an actual love letter written by King Henry to Lady Anne while the song is performed, visit: [http://web.mac.com/musicksmonumentdownl/Musicks\\_Monument\\_Foundation/Love\\_letter\\_of\\_King\\_Henry\\_VIII\\_to\\_Anne\\_Boleyn.html](http://web.mac.com/musicksmonumentdownl/Musicks_Monument_Foundation/Love_letter_of_King_Henry_VIII_to_Anne_Boleyn.html)

References and Recommended reading for varying points of view:

<http://www.the-tudors.org.uk/greensleeves.htm>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greensleeves>

The 'Youtube' video featured below plays an instrumental version of "Greensleeves" by the multi platinum-selling group, Mannheim Steamroller, accompanied by scenes from the hit Showtime series *The Tudors*, starring Jonathan Rhys Meyers as King Henry VIII and Natalie Dormer as Lady Anne Boelyn. The series is produced by Peace Arch Entertainment for Showtime in association with Reveille Eire (Ireland), Working Title Films (United Kingdom) and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and is filmed in Ireland. International distribution rights are owned by Sony Pictures Television International. *The Tudors* was nominated for the Golden Globe for Best Drama Series in 2007. It is a powerful historical drama with incredible detail and character development, created by Michael Hirst.

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[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Tudors#Production](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Tudors#Production)

<http://www.sho.com/site/tudors/home.do>

<http://shop.mannheimsteamroller.com/>





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