MARY BOLEYN: "A GREAT WHORE, INFAMOUS ABOVE ALL"

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in
History

Charlotte

2018

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ABSTRACT

CHRISTINE MORGAN PLOUGH. Mary Boleyn: "A Great Whore, Infamous Above All" (Under the direction of DR. AMANDA PIPKIN)

This thesis is a case study that explores the life and influence of Mary Boleyn, royal mistress to King Henry VIII from 1522-1525. The intent is to present an analysis of primary documents in combination with secondary sources, which provide crucial context in regards to religion, politics, and gender, provide a comprehensive understanding of mid-Tudor court life. This thesis discusses the wider context of Mary Boleyn's immediate family and their opportunities for increased political power during this period. Boleyn's early life and education, tenure as royal mistress, and later life of continued royal favor are integral to the theory of this historic woman's influence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a great deal of appreciation to the archivists at both the British Library and the National Archives in Kew. Their assistance with primary documents and paleography guides proved invaluable to the research for this thesis. Additionally, I must take the space provided to sincerely thank two dear friends and fellow historians, Bethany Holt Gregory and Susan Abernethy, who encouraged and inspired me by asking thoughtful questions throughout this process. To my general reader and highly skilled editor, Catherine, thank you for letting me share this research with you. Finally, a debt of gratitude is due to my committee who consistently made themselves available for independent study courses and who provided direction with which I was then able to navigate complicated primary sources and archives. Without their incredible guidance, this thesis would have been entirely impossible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"[I] was in bondage, and glad I was to be at liberty."[1] The words of Mary Boleyn are so powerful, one can almost hear her declaration as if it was shouted from a rooftop. Indignant, self-assured, unapologetic; adjectives not frequently used to describe an early modern woman, yet these descriptors are well placed with Mary Boleyn. This woman found herself at the center of political and religious change during the 1520s and 1530s, and spent much of her early life advocating for her family and her religion. However, this declaration comes from the only surviving document that shows that Mary was also perfectly capable of advocating for herself.

The Boleyns, a Protestant family in England,[2] were quite possibly the most influential at Tudor court, advocating for religious reform and establishing political divides that would last decades.[3] Over time, their personal beliefs and political influence at the English court grew strong enough to sway a king. The family's meteoric rise to power was a culmination of three key areas of influence: the service of multiple family members to kings and queens, both in England and France, their success in obtaining the highest quality of education, and their strategic political alignment at court. The research within this thesis will revisit the story of Mary Boleyn, who gained fame (or infamy) and power by becoming a royal mistress to King Henry VIII between 1522 and 1525. In this study, I attempt to analyze the rise to power seized by Mary Boleyn as an iconic royal

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[1] Mary Boleyn, Letter to Sir Thomas Cromwell, England, 1534, *LP VII*, 1655.
[2] John Foxe, *The Actes and Monuments of the Christian Church*, volume 6, *The Reign of King Henry VIII*. Part 1 (John Day: London 1563), 319-321.
[3] Retha M. Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn,* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge), 1989, 152-158.

mistress in both England and France who, along with her family, intentionally changed the landscape of England and influenced her king and country socially and politically.

Mary Boleyn, the eldest daughter of the prominent Boleyn family, is an oft forgotten or under-developed character in Tudor studies and literature. Much of the reason for this is a lack of surviving primary sources that mention Mary during her most active early years between French and English courts from 1514-1536.[4] Historiography frequently glosses over the fact that Boleyn began her royal career as a lady-in-waiting in France, during which time she is believed to have been a royal mistress of King Francis I prior to her return to England, after which she engaged in a more widely acknowledged affair with Henry VIII.[5] While it is an oft held belief that Boleyn was simply a pawn in her family's plot to put her sister, Anne Boleyn, on the throne, the pattern of royal affairs by Boleyn suggests a more plausible conclusion: originally, the Boleyns had every intention of securing a position of prominence for *Mary.* There is, however, no evidence to suggest that Mary or her family initially sought to remove then queen, Katharine of Aragon, from the throne.

Like the royal mistress before her, Mary likely gave birth to at least one of Henry VIII's illegitimate children.[6] While Mary's life is commonly and repeatedly downplayed as "unimportant" in popular fiction and entertainment, in actuality, her life was a magnificent success. Frequently eclipsed by the stories of her sister, Anne, Mary Boleyn attained an unmatched quality of life for the time that eluded other members of her

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[4] Her age during these years is approximately 14-36.
[5] In fact, historian Retha M. Warnicke argues it is unlikely that Mary ever traveled to France, an argument that has been refuted by more current works by Alison Weir and Josepine Wilkinson.
[6] Anthony Hoskins, "Mary Boleyn Carey's Children – Offspring of King Henry VIII?," *Genealogists' Magazine* Vol. 25 No. 9, (March 1997) 345.

family, yet hers is a story that so often is disregarded in the vast body of historical writing about the Boleyns. Specifically, Mary lived a life of happiness and sustained royal favor, she escaped the executioner's block of which Henry VIII was so fond, and she married for love, an offense only forgiven when the actors were of high nobility.

This thesis will build upon Alison Weir and Josephine Wilkinson's biographies of Mary Boleyn.[7] The monographs were assembled by the careful sorting of personal records, marriage licenses, and employment records in order to accurately identify the cities in which Boleyn lived and her major life experiences. More specifically, Alison Weir actually utilized Wilkinson's monograph as a foundation for her own research. The result is that the two works are fairly similar and demonstrate the methodology of historians searching to find the "truth" of their subject. Also, both avoid any further analysis of the existing personal correspondence of Boleyn and the significance of primary sources in terms of gender history or early modern nobility. Weir and Wilkinson write to place Boleyn on a timeline, not to give any assertions regarding her significance in history. In fact, their arguments are consistent with the idea that Mary was a passive player in the larger schemes of her father Thomas Boleyn and her sister, Anne.

Articles written by historian Laura Saxton assert that the discussions of Mary Boleyn, those published within the last decade, are evidence of a feminist movement in modern-day academia.[8] This shift is slowly giving voices to women who are overshadowed or forgotten despite their contributions to history. Saxton praises the

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[7] Alison Weir, *Mary Boleyn: the Mistress of Kings* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2012); Josephine Wilkinson, *Mary Boleyn: The True Story of Henry VIII's Favourite Mistress* (London, United Kingdom: Amberley Publishing, 2010).

[8] Laura Saxton, "The Infamous Whore Forgotten: Remembering Mary Boleyn in History and Fiction." *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal,* n19 (2013), 92-105.

increase in fictional works depicting Boleyn, and believes, although flawed, these works have sparked a conversation and generated public interest in Boleyn.

Genealogist Anthony Hoskins has contributed to Boleyn's story with a more scientific analysis.[9] In particular, Hoskins works to place land and income grants as well as promotions awarded to the Boleyn family, in conjunction with the birth of Mary's two children. In the pursuit of proof for Henry VIII's paternity of Boleyn's children, Hoskins' analysis, together his work with death and funeral records of the time, offers invaluable insight. If proven, paternity would provide motive for King Henry VIII's sustained favor, motive that likely influenced his decision to spare Mary from execution as well as to continue documented support of her children through education and positions at court. Furthermore, Hoskins' research tells the story of how of land and income grants came to be gifted to Mary's father, brother, and husband. These gifts and grants are indicative of King Henry's affection, but also the power of the Boleyn family who successfully weaved themselves into the royal circle long before there was even an opportunity for Anne Boleyn to become a mistress or queen.

While Hoskins argues that Mary Boleyn's son was the illegitimate child of Henry VIII, the primary sources he uses to prove his point are extremely biased and purely circumstantial. In deeper analysis of the quotes and personal accounts of Mary Boleyn's children, it has become clear that Hoskins' primary sources would have been motivated politically to claim a Boleyn child as heir in an effort to discourage Henry VIII's marriage to Anne Boleyn on claims of incest.[10] For example, Hoskins uses a quote by

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[9] Hoskins, "Mary Boleyn Carey's Children – Offspring of King Henry VIII?," 345-352.
[10] Bruce Thomas Boehrer, *Monarchy and Incest in Renaissance England: Literature, Culture, Kinship, and Kingship*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

John Hale, the vicar of Isleworth, in which he identified Mary's son, Henry Carey, as being the illegitimate son of Henry VIII. However, this statement was made as part of Hale's final declaration before being executed on the charges of rebuking Henry VIII's remarriage to Anne Boleyn. The circumstances hardly provide an unbiased foundation for the claims. While Hoskins' claims about Mary's son have been difficult to prove, the argument for the paternity of her daughter is much more plausible based on granting behaviors, royal favor, and a consideration for commissioned artwork by Steven van der Meulan that shows a striking physical resemblance between Mary's daughter and Henry VIII's second daughter, Elizabeth I.

More contemporary discussions of Mary Boleyn have served to pique the interest of inquirers into this period, as feminists and genealogists join historians in piecing together Mary's life. Unfortunately, what these studies do not do is present Mary's personality, her religious tendencies, her education, her societal role as a woman, or her political motivations for becoming a royal mistress. This omission is not caused by a lack of documentation as there are primary sources written by Mary, her family, and her peers that provide insight into all of the previous questions regarding Boleyn's agency and influence. Previous historiographies have focused solely on Boleyn's biography and the statements of facts such as her year of birth, foreign residence in France, and the like. They do not attempt to interpret or analyze primary sources written by Mary, nor do they utilize sources written by women similar to Mary in order to better place her life in context with Tudor women at court.

In addition to the social and political context of Tudor court, this thesis will address the social and gender norms of French court, where Mary and her sister, Anne spent several years in service to the royal family. It is my supposition that the roots of their reformed thought can be traced back to the French court where reformed ideas and political thought, especially for women, were beginning to emerge. Using academic anthologies written by gender historians such as Jacqueline Broad and Karen Green, who analyze the shifting political thoughts and actions of women in early modern Europe, and Merry Weisner-Hanks, who explains the evolution of women's roles in religion and society, a broad overview of women's political thought and involvement can be identified.[11] More specific ideas in this thesis are developed based on Caroline Zum Kolk's article on the library of Queen Claude, which provides a more detailed assessment of the inclusion of French noblewomen in the development of literature, art, and patronage, while identifying the specific women at French court who were encouraging agency in politics and religion.[12] These studies are all used together in an effort to understand the education and social involvement the Boleyn women would have experienced during their time in France, which can be attributed to the ways in which they conducted themselves in similar matters once they returned to England.

In the case of Mary Boleyn, presenting the "story" of her life, rather than isolated fact-finding, is a superior method of discovery. A fact-based story that allows an audience to identify with the historical subject is essential when exploring and giving a voice to complex historical influences. Thankfully, narrative history leaves room for an

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[11] Jacqueline Broad and Karen Green, *A History of Women's Political Though in Europe, 1400-1700,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe,* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
[12] Caroline Zum Kolk, "The Household of the Queen of France in the Sixteenth Century," *The Court Historian,* 14:1, (2009).

historian's interpretation of events and documents while allowing the historian to include more personal details about their subject and paint a bigger picture of their setting. Although narrative historical accounts, such as Natalie Zemon Davis' *The Return of Martin Guerre,* have been controversial, authors who cite sources effectively and implement sources on the periphery of narrative storytelling, often reveal deeper meaning than previous interpretations. [13] In this thesis, investigative research into the micro-history of Mary Boleyn is motivated by a desire to question previous historiography on this topic in an effort to expand the understanding of women's roles in the facilitation of large-scale political and religious movements such as the Reformation.

Following in Davis' footsteps for the creation of an in depth micro-history, this thesis will analyze and provide historical interpretation of Mary Boleyn's personal correspondence, royal grants and income, as well as the shifting gender norms of mid-Tudor era, Mary's education and promotion of reformed religious thought, and the power of her own children at Tudor court. These factors all work together to prove that, although Mary Boleyn was dishonorably discharged from court, she was able to exercise remarkable agency as demonstrated by her elopement with her second husband and her ability to live out her life in relative safety. Both of these factors are also indicative of a larger pattern of personal independence seen primarily in upper class women in early modern English history.

To provide further context for Mary's story, the following chapters will include primary documents that address the stories of men and women who moved in Mary's social circles as well as the response of religious leaders such as Rodolfo Pio, Bishop of

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[13] Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).

Fraenza, and Cardinal Reginald Pole. These men targeted both Mary and her sister in their efforts to discourage Henry VIII in his divorce from Katharine of Aragon and his developing reform efforts. Other sources utilized in the following chapters include documents from Henry VIII's *Letters and State Papers*, which detail accounts of royal finances and gift giving practices, as well as the accounts from *The Great Wardrobe*, which detail court entertainment and expenses. Furthermore, interpretations of personal letters of the men and women who surrounded Mary Boleyn at court, the eyewitness account of court biographer Edward Hall's *Chronicle,* which details social norms and international relationships between England and other European countries, and the only surviving letter written by Mary Boleyn will all be incorporated within the analysis of Mary's story. All together, these sources are pieces in a puzzle that has yet to be assembled in a way that provides not only wider view of the significance of Mary Boleyn, but that also demonstrate the position of the Boleyns in the context of court life at this time. The thesis, as a whole, will follow Mary Boleyn and the peripheral movement of her father, sister, and husbands from 1515 through 1536 and will also briefly address the lives of Mary's children who lived during the reigns of both Queen Mary I (1553-1558) and Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603). The diversity of these sources will create space for an analysis of more primary sources than any other current publications that address Boleyn.

The first chapter of this thesis will set the scene by detailing the way Henry VIII's court functioned. Primarily it will focus on the development of court factions, which were defined by a combination of strong individuals, and networks of allied families who, ultimately, created contentious political divides based on personal ambition, power, and

religion. These factional splits separated Catholic from Protestant, new money from old money, titled men from royal favorites, and friends from advisors.

Henry VIII surrounded himself with friends and favorites at court and was a king who was easy to manipulate and sway yet, unlike previous monarchs with a similar disposition, this king was in full control of his mind and body. Noble men and families with ulterior motives and personal ambitions flourished under this king who could be easily persuaded and who still held absolute power. The factional court of the mid-Tudor era was in constant flux and men were able and willing to change their alliances to be involved with factions that would promote their self-interest. A brief discussion of the family as a whole at mid-Tudor court will also reveal that not all family members adhered to political and religious factional splits and this is the start of a wider discussion of gender and agency during this time period.

The second chapter will delve further into the gendered expectations of women in both French and English courts. There was often movement between the two courts and men were more likely to serve as ambassadors while women were often expected to live and be educated in the ways of foreign courts. This makes for quite fascinating dynamics between genders when those foreign-educated women returned to their home country to marry and serve English monarchs. It will address the following questions such as “What was the public role of women,” “How were women educated,” “How was French court different from English court,” and “What social or political opportunities did women create for themselves once married?” The recorded voices of women from this period are used in this chapter to piece together a wider understanding of gender norms and agency.

Additionally, this second chapter will divulge the early rumblings of reform that began at French court and slowly trickled over to England.

During the years of mid-Tudor reign (1515-1530) women frequently commissioned literature, art, and theatre from artists who aligned with their religious or political beliefs, thus revealing their factional alliances with a more public audience. Some of the greatest female thinkers of this period, such as Margaret de Angoulême in France, became popular during the mid-Tudor era for increased female education and reformed thought.[14] The roles of women as free thinkers and influencers began to grow and this second chapter will identify the varied ways women began to exercise agency leading up to the Reformation.

Finally, the third chapter will combine the revelations and analyses of chapters one and two and apply them to Mary Boleyn as a case study. Mary Boleyn's role in pre-Reformation England is even more essential to study as her role as a royal mistress afforded her the opportunity to influence Henry VIII in private. This case study aims to humanize Mary and does so by analyzing her education, the favors bestowed upon her family, and the favor shown to her and her children later in life, indicating that she was a woman held in regard by Henry VIII and his advisors.

It should be acknowledged that this case study is a challenging one since Mary Boleyn herself did not leave many historical traces. Regardless, the context provided between the first two chapters and the primary sources written by or about Mary can be used to put together the puzzle of this woman's life and influence. And this is a vital

[14] Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 154.

exercise, for without the first Boleyn mistress, there may never have been a later Boleyn queen.

The research presented in this thesis will provide context for the mid-Tudor reign of Henry VIII and his court culture and address several factors that reflect changing gender norms, religious and political upheaval, and policies made by a king more concerned with his public image than with the well being of his country.[15] It is also the hope of this author that the case study in chapter three will encourage other historians to observe women, specifically royal mistresses, with a fresh, humanized perspective. Women have been present at every major event in history, whether as observers or as active influencers and, in many cases, a great disservice has been done to these women simply because their names do not appear on rosters or grants. Similar to Davis' now famous story of Martin Guerre, the examination of Mary Boleyn's life in this thesis is aided by supposition, but very much kept in check with the sources of the past. Mary's role and influence as a royal mistress to Henry VIII demonstrates that each member of the Boleyn family was intentional in their attempts to alter England's political and religious landscape by gaining favor and power through factions and gender norms.

[15] Jeanne H. McCarthy, "The Emergence of Henrician Drama 'in the Kynges absens,'" *English Literary Renaissance,* 39, no. 2 (n.d.), 247.

Chapter 2: Court Factions and Hierarchy

During the reign of England's Henry VIII (1509-1547), a powerful distinction began to develop that defined the king's favorites, his supporters, and his enemies. This distinction is referred to as "factions." For Mary Boleyn and her family, the rise of factions was, in part, the secret to their success. The Boleyns' political influence began to take root as early as 1520 when Mary wed William Carey, a member of the king's privy chamber. Mary's father also began to rise through the political ranks at court by using his exceptional social and diplomatic skills to earn Henry VIII's trust and, eventually, dependence. With Mary's husband and father in key positions within the hierarchy of Tudor court, her chances of being noticed, and even heard, greatly increased.

An idea that was perpetuated during mid-Tudor reign is that one influential family cannot exist while another holds power or favor;[16] a sentiment echoed in the constant feud between highly ranked families such as the Boleyns and the Seymours, who famously placed the women in their families as royal mistresses in an effort to both undermine major factions and further their family interests. The personal leanings of each member of the Boleyn family towards religious reform and the start of the English reformation coincide so perfectly it is almost as if they planned it. Henry VIII's shifting affection from Mary Boleyn to Anne Boleyn provides for fourteen uninterrupted years of Boleyn female influence over Henry VIII (1522-1536), but by 1536, the winds of royal favor shifted and the Seymours finally rose to power.

The Tudor dynasty began with Henry Tudor (Henry VII) in 1485. Henry Tudor's

[16] Robert Shephard, "Court Factions in Early Modern England," *The Journal of Modern History* 64, no. 4 (December 1992), 740.

right to the English throne was claimed on a battlefield and was fairly weak in comparison to other noble families who still held positions at court such as the third Duke of Buckingham.[17] Because the Tudors were monarchs without an especially strong dynastic claim to the throne, factional alignments at court had the power to make or break not only powerful families but also the king. There are several ways to identify the factional splits at Tudor court, but it requires a bit of creativity. Throughout mid-Tudor reign, the groups change as Henry VIII either responds to or rejects ideals politically, religiously, or in terms of alliances between France and Spain. Allegiance in court factions was not concrete and personal ambitions often diluted the factional powers at play.[18]

In addition to letters and petitions, there is another set of records that has proven insightful for the study of faction fluidity over time. The records of plays, pageants, and revels indicate that within the medium of court entertainment, Henry VIII put his favorites on display. Significantly, the names of female participants are included in many of these sources, which can provide insight into royal mistresses or brief affairs. Mary Boleyn was no exception to this rule and appeared as the main character in at least one court revel.[19] Sorting through records of Richard Gibson's *Great Wardrobe* and comparing them to Edward Hall's *Chronicle* affords us the opportunity to piece together the wider picture of mid-Tudor court. Many of the names that appear on the lists of revel participants also appear on the rolls of court payment and are found to have been in service to the king or queen. Those noble persons in attendance at court revels could

[17] The Tudor claim was through a maternal line as opposed to Buckingham whose claim was paternal.
[18] Shephard, "Court Factions in Early Modern England," 724-726.
[19] Revels 1522, in Revels: Miscellaneous 1519, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, Volume 3, 1519-1523, pp. 1558-1559.

correctly assume that they were among the most powerful noblemen and women and in the enviable position of having earned Henry VIII's personal favor.

Aware of the power of factions, Henry VIII, early in his reign, took steps to ensure loyalty and support. Moving beyond public pageantry, Henry VIII built alliances at his court through his gifting and granting behaviors, as well as through the development of private and public offices.[20] Specifically, this king chose to create concrete political positions for his loyal friends and favorites. Originally, Henry VIII failed to understand the concept of balancing old nobility and new and until 1519 his court was filled with young men his own age together with his childhood friends whom he elevated into titles and peerages.[21] Moving into the 1520s, following an event known as "the removal of minions," the balance between old and new was finally struck and Tudor court saw the employment, entitlements, and factional alliances of nobility who had spent the past decade searching for like-minded alliances.

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Personally - and politically - motivated factions began to form at the start of Henry VIII's reign in 1509 and, over the course of his reign, they developed into more permanent and identifiable groups. Starting in September of 1518, Henry VIII invested a new post within the royal household, "Gentleman of the privy chamber."[22] To this position were appointed some of Henry VIII's most trusted companions: Edward Neville, Arthur Pole, Nicholas Carew, Francis Bryan, Henry Norris, and William Coffin. In an ever-evolving political landscape, these men found that their informal visits with their

[20] Greg Walker, "The 'Expulsion of the Minions' of 1519 Reconsidered," *The Historical Journal* 32, no. 1 (March 1989), 2.
[21] Walker, "The 'Expulsion of the Minions' of 1519 Reconsidered, 2.
[22] Walker, 1.

friend, the king, had now become a matter of political significance. Over time, these gentlemen understood that their new place at court afforded them with opportunities to privately implore the King for personal favors and grants, but they were also being deployed on diplomatic missions to foreign courts and had greater influence within the King's household.[23]

Men in the privy chamber formed the first major faction of Tudor court. The king staffed his private household with a combination of personal friends, extended family members, and long-term loyal subjects.[24] These positions included ancient titles such as Knights of the Body or Groom of the Stool.[25] Attending the king during his leisure time and assisting with his personal hygiene or bodily protection may not sound glamorous, but the men who filled these roles had direct and private access to Henry VIII. One of the wealthiest men at Tudor court, William Compton, remained Groom of the Stool for years despite his wealth, because it was the best way for him to access the king. Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, who believed men in these prestigious household positions threatened his own power over Henry VIII, later removed Compton from the chamber position.[26]

The second type of faction that appeared during Henry VIII's reign is identified by Matusiak as the privy council and is the politically motivated faction at court because the men in this group were discussing and influencing treaties and policies.[27] In this realm, alignments had a specific goal in mind such as religious reform or the creation of

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[23] Shephard, 724.
[24] John Matusiak, "Faction, Intrigue and Influence at the Mid-Tudor Court," *History Review* 72, no. 2 (March 2012), 3.
[25] Tracy Borman, *The Private Lives of the Tudors: Uncovering the Secrets of Britain's Greatest Dynasty,* (Grove Press: NY, 2016), 96-97.The duties of Groom of the Stool were varied and included packing the king's belongings for trips or tours, attending to his personal hygiene, even managing money and household accounts.
[26] Borman, *The Private Lives of the Tudors,* 144-145.
[27] Matusiak, "Faction, Intrigue and Influence at the Mid-Tudor Court," 3.

treaties in support of English alliances with France or Spain. Where employment in the privy chamber benefitted men who were vying for personal wealth and status, the men in the privy council were exercising ecclesiastic law, political discussions, and law-making in an effort to impose power over the people of England and the king as a ruler. One of the main motivations that developed within these groups was the "total destruction" of opposing factions.[28]

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In 1519, only one year after the privy chamber was established, four of Henry VIII's appointments, Neville, Carew, Bryan and Coffin, were removed from their positions as gentlemen and sent to perform duties outside of the court and far removed from their King. The French king, Francis I, remarked that this event was symbolic of "a new world in England" created by the minions' removal.[29] The sudden vacancy of four highly coveted positions allowed room for new appointments. In keeping with the pattern of employing friends and family, Henry VIII promoted one of his cousins, William Carey, to the position "Knight of the Body." Six months later, in 1520, Carey was married to Mary Boleyn and became the Boleyn family's strongest tie into the king's privy chamber.

The "removal of minions" in 1519 is still shrouded with uncertainty and has led many historians to question what may have led Henry VIII to restructure his privy chamber and displace his close, personal friends.[30] Is it at all significant that their replacements were men whom Edward Hall described as the more sober. "sad and

[28] Shephard, 740.
[29] Walker, 2.
[30] Ibid., 2.

auncient" Knights of the Body? [31] This statement indicates a shift from younger men, whom Henry would have treated as friends rather than employees, to older men steeped in the court traditions of the previous monarch, Henry VII. There are two theories that are interconnected and fairly persuasive about this "expulsion" and both emphasize the curious use of the privy chamber to influence diplomacy, as well as the reality that these men had heightened influence within Henry VIII's household.[32]

The first theory centers on a diplomatic visit to France that occurred in May of 1519. At this time, England and France were once again at odds and many of Henry VIII's gentlemen of the privy chamber had been sent as ambassadors to France to represent him and his diplomatic interests.[33] Upon their return, these privy chamber members brought with them an excitement about the more licentious French court that included gambling, unruly behavior, and sexual misconduct the likes of which will be discussed further in chapter two.[34] The English court was far more reserved than the French court and Henry VIII, likely influenced by his staunchly Catholic queen, soured on the behavior of his chamber diplomats. He removed his Francophile friends from his privy chamber after allegedly losing quite a sum of money during a night of gambling.

The subsequent "expulsion" of these gentlemen after a night of gambling seems quite sensational on the surface but refutes the idea that these men were removed simply because of their disposition to French court. If that were true, Henry VIII would have removed far more powerful men from his circle of influence, including his brother-in-law and best friend Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, who was consistently inclined to

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[31] Edward Hall, *Chronicle*, (printed for J. Johnson; F.C. and J. Rivington; T. Payne; Wilkie and Robinson; Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme; Cadell and Davies; and J. Mawman; London, 1809), 598.
[32] Walker, 6.
[33] Ibid., 5.
[34] Ibid., 7.

support the French; however, Brandon remained unscathed at court. This line of thinking suggests that Henry VIII considered court culture more of a motivation than politics. The king's concern for his public image after losing at gambling shows that the reorganization of his privy chamber was more about neutralizing court culture and less about French-leaning politics. At least two "minions," Carew and Bryan, returned to court within a few months of their expulsion and socialized once again with the king, although they were not reinstated to their positions in the privy chamber.[35] Henry VIII's willingness to forgive the transgressions of his closest friends is apparent throughout his reign and several of his mistresses received royal grants and support long after the conclusion of their affairs. Even Thomas Boleyn was reinstated at court within only one year of the execution of his daughter, Anne.[36]

Court Revels and Political Spectacle

Consistently, research about Henry VIII and his court relationships with the Boleyns in particular, includes a discussion of court theatre and entertainment. Famously, Anne Boleyn appeared in numerous court revels alongside Henry VIII and her participation was not only a public display of affection, but also a public declaration of her importance in the hierarchy of Tudor court.[37] However, the stories of the Boleyn women on a public stage fall squarely on the shoulders of Anne when, in reality, Mary Boleyn and Elizabeth Blount, the mistress who preceded her, were both featured in courtly revels.[38] The details of Mary's time as a court actor will be discussed at length in the case study of chapter

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[35] Ibid., 16.
[36] Wilkinson, *Mary Boleyn: The True Story of Henry VIII's Favourite Mistress,* 3520.
[37] W.R. Streitberger, *Court Revels 1485-1559*, (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 274; Edward Hall, 597.
[38] Elizabeth "Bessie" Blount.

three, but the development of court entertainment and the importance of noble participants will be the focus of the following section.

Beginning with Henry VII, commissioning court spectacles of all sorts to entertain nobility and visiting ambassadors became not just a norm, but also a necessity. Notably, over the course of the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII, court spectacle became so central to aristocratic culture that several permanent positions were developed at English court during this period, including a royal occupation called the Master of Revels.[39] This position required its keeper to write and produce court entertainments, sometimes in conjunction with the king himself. Regardless of an abundance of high-ranking spectators, Henrician court spectacles often alluded to the personal struggles and triumphs of kings both as individuals and as monarchs. The men privileged to be called Master of Revels during the Henrician era had held long-standing positions at court either in managing the royal wardrobe or in music composition and loyally served both Henry VII and Henry VIII.[40]

The most insightful and comprehensive source to study in reference to court revels was written by Edward Hall (b.1497-d.1547), the official royal biographer of Henry VIII. Hall was present at every major event of the middle and late Tudor reign and his *Chronicle* is an unmatched account of Henrician drama. Several patterns emerge when reading Hall's work, which primarily focus on descriptions of court entertainment or lavish diplomatic events. In this source, special attention is given to revels and traditional displays of power in coronations and marriages, while the less colorful stories of taking prisoners or negotiating treaties fall to the wayside.

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[39] Streitberger, *Court Revels 1485-1559,* 8.
[40] Streitberger, 239. The three most frequent Masters of Revels were Richard Gibson, William Cornish, and Henry Guildford.

The rhetoric used in the *Chronicle* to describe revels emphasizes traditional ideals in regards to court hierarchy, which plays an important role at Henrician court. Whether Hall meant to write with that emphasis or whether he just did so naturally based on social norms is hard to say; however, in his description of at least four revels during Henry VIII's reign, he uses phrases that indicate the grand, exciting revels were still expected to be orderly. The participants and actors were determined by rank and status. Each revel had a clear beginning and end and can be identified by Hall's indication of the way that players entered and exited. Throwaway phrases such as "the Kyng leadyng the Quene, entred into the Chambre, then the Ladies, Ambassadours, and other noble menne, folowed in ordre" show a consistent and expected directive.[41] The social status of participants was intentionally addressed and the uniformity of costumes did not always neutralize the status quo.

While a comprehensive record of participants for each revel was not kept or has since been lost, research using the records of costumes kept by one of the Masters of Revels, Richard Gibson, combined with the eyewitness account of Edward Hall, can be used to identify more clearly which noble persons participated in major revels. For example, the pageants and revels in which the Boleyn sisters participated are documented within these sources. Gibson's wardrobe records are especially crucial to the study of court revels because the existence of rank in revels is also found within the description of costumes. Based on court rules and sumptuary laws of the time, certain fabrics were outlawed for participants based on their rank. For example, in the pageant *Chateau Vert,* in which Mary Boleyn appeared as an actor, Henry VIII wore a costume of velvet or cloth of gold, the lords and ladies around him were clothed in yellow satin, while the

[41] Hall, 514. The 1510 Shrovetide revels.

acting troupes beneath noble status wore wear diverse colors of silk and black.[42]

Unfortunately, Henry VIII's love of disguisings means that hierarchy, when applied to costuming, is not a hard and fast rule and the king often broke his own sumptuary laws by allowing his close friends to dress similarly to himself during revels.[43] Regardless, Hall goes on to describe fabrics, accessories, and jewels for almost every major event entry; descriptions that Gibson's *Great Wardrobe* accounts corroborate.[44] The biggest and most consistent omission in Hall's *Chronicle* is the identification of a complete list of female revel participants, but Gibson's wardrobe list helps fill in the blanks and has been instrumental in this discussion of women and gender at court, especially for royal mistresses and ladies in waiting.

Pageants and disguisings were the two main forms of revels in which Henry VIII was most likely to participate or even attend.[45] The terms "disguisings" and "pageants" are defined in the following terms: a "pageant" is described as a revel in which the participants appear upon or interact with a large set piece that has been built specifically for the revel.[46] At Tudor court, pageants were often constructed to simulate gardens or castles, even small mountains or rocks.[47] The term "disguising" refers to any revels where the participants are all dressed similarly and use facemasks or headdresses to conceal their identity but then reveal themselves at the end, providing an element of surprise. [48] The surprise is identified in eyewitness accounts by the word "Sodaynly," or

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[42] Richard Gibson, *Revels Accounts* E36/217, pp. 1559.
[43] Borman, 136. At the Christmas celebrations of 1524, Henry VIII and Charles Brandon attended the festivities dressed in matching outfits.
[44] Gibson, *Revels Accounts,* E36/217.
[45] Also defined as entertainment.
[46] Streitberger, 7.
[47] Ibid., 103.
[48] Ibid., 4.

suddenly.[49] Pageants and disguisings often included the Children of the Chapel, a professional group of young performers who were frequently paid to participate in revels under the tutelage of William Cornish.[50]

Prior to Henry VIII, customary theatre etiquette dictated that the king and court would attend revels strictly as audience members, which allowed the upper classes to keep their distance from working-class men in the troupes while still patronizing their art.[51] When Henry VIII became king, he reduced the number of acting troupes that were commissioned to perform and became an active player himself. The political dramas and Renaissance writers introduced by his father were no longer used as a tactic to support Tudor rule. Instead, dramas and monologues were replaced by short interludes that consisted mostly of music and dancing.[52]

Although on the surface the difference in court entertainment style seems a matter of personal preference, there is an underlying factor in the change, a factor that can give historians deeper insight into the Tudor kings as men and their ability to prioritize and rule wisely. For Henry VII, court drama and the employ of great writers and acting troupes created the existence (not just an impression) of a court with "intellectual substance."[53] The king, who had spent most of his life in exile and won his crown on the battlefield, had something to prove to his country. The court of Henry VII was walking head first into a Renaissance and encouraged England to follow suit.

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[49] Janette Dillon, "Hall's Rhetoric of Performance," *English Literary Renaissance Inc.* 34, no. 1 (2004), 9.
[50] Streitberger, 262-67. Streitberger records payments for plays or interludes on Jan 6, 1516, Jan 4, 1517, Mar 8, 1517, Jan 6, 1519, May 1, 1519, Jan 6, 1520, and twice on April 1, 1520.
[51] McCarthy, "The Emergence of Henrician Drama 'in the Kynges absens,'" 244-245.
[52] McCarthy, 239.
[53] Gordon Kipling, "Henry VII and the Origins of Tudor Patronage," *Patronage in the Renaissance*, ed. Guy Fitch Lytle and Stephen Orgel (Princeton, 1981), p. 132.

In 1509 the progressive nature of drama at court came to a halt when Henry VIII ascended to the throne. While he is rightly credited with improvement of music and a more visually stunning court revel, the heavy, dramatic productions at court ceased.[54] On numerous occasions when Henry VIII declared a dispute with countries such as France or Spain, the disagreement was more personal in nature. In short, Henry VIII did not disagree with France, he disagreed with Francis I. Unfortunately for Henry VIII, his personal ego and disposition to "play" with his friends and chamber members was detrimental to many aspects of his reign, not just his father's budding Renaissance.

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Despite the fact that Henry VIII no longer commissioned drama, the fact remains that several excellent plays and dramatic works *were* created during this time period. The question now becomes, who *was* commissioning drama and what can be learned from the subject matter? Not surprisingly, some of the people closest to Henry VIII were patronizing political dramas. The new trend that began to emerge was that aristocratic and noble families could present drama within the comfort of their own homes. Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, Secretary Thomas Cromwell, Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer, Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, and even Henry VIII's wife, Queen Katharine of Aragon, attended and supported plays for their dinner guests and households.[55] Of note is the inclusion of Queen Katharine of Aragon in the list above. With the development of household performances and private family patronage, it has become increasingly clear to historians that noble families were commissioning dramatic

[54] McCarthy, 233.
[55] Walker, *Plays of Persuasion: Drama and Politics at the Court of Henry VIII,* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 8.

theatrical works to entertain their friends and family members with politically driven messages.[56] Additionally, it is in drama and political theatre that women begin to exercise more agency in both public and intellectual spheres, including women related to the Boleyns such as Mary Howard Fitzroy, a devoted Protestant and cousin of Mary and Anne Boleyn.

There are three productions in particular that give a better understanding of theatre in Henrician England and provide insight into the ways the aristocratic families stepped up to fill the theatrical void left by their self-aggrandizing king. Similar to court, household productions were used to influence friends, guests, and even the local subjects of the host.[57] The shift from court theatre to household theatre allowed noble families to quietly secure alliances, show support for their king, and mock the factional families who opposed them. The following discussion of privately commissioned theatre will provide insight into two of Henry VIII's most trusted advisors and his wife, Queen Katharine. These are presented to provide precedent and context for the possible private activities of other families closely associated with Henry VIII and his advisors, including the Boleyns and the Howards as well as the participation of women in Tudor entertainment.

The first political play is titled *Hick Scorner.* The drama is connected to Charles Brandon who commissioned the play in 1514 and presented it to his household just shortly after receiving his ducal title, Duke of Suffolk.[58] The year 1514 suggests that within five years of Henry VIII's accession, aristocratic families were already beginning to test the efficacy of private commissions. The practice does not seem to be gradual and

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[56] McCarthy, 261.
[57] Walker, *Plays of Persuasion,* 7, 40.
[58] Ian Lancashire, *Two Tudor Interludes: The Interlude of Youth, Hick Scorner,* (Manchester University Press, 1980), 5.

possibly indicates that Henry VIII encouraged the private drama trend after making a conscious decision to alter the court theatre traditions of his father. In analysis, the production is closest to what would now be classified as a "Morality" play, which depicts a main character, usually a virtue, who is tempted by a vice but with the help of companions or advisors, the hero overcomes temptation and appears victorious at the end. *Hick Scorner's* plotline was structured similarly but there are two ways this production differs from a traditional morality play and are significant to Charles Brandon and the politics of the time.

First, the play is actually a satire that walks the line of black comedy. The humor is geographically specific to Charles Brandon's jurisdiction, and the playwright jokes about realistic and dark topics such as imprisonment and murder in the dialogue.[59] The darkness of this humor is unusual for a morality play where the comedy tends to be more tongue and cheek.[60] Alongside the jokes about murder, the play actually describes the violent behavior step-by step. One stanza reads:

> Every man bear his dagger naked in his hand
> And if we meet a true man, make him stand,
> Or else that he bear a stripe.
> If that he struggle and make any work,
> Lightly strike him to the heart
> And throw him in the Thames quite. [61]

[59] The area of Southwark as identified by Walker, *Plays,* 40.
[60] Walker, *Plays,* 47.
[61] Unknown, *Hick Scorner,* Lines 413-18. All line numbers correspond with Lancashire, *Two Tudor Interludes.*

Beyond the murder itself, dramaturgical consensus is that the line that describes how to dispose of the body is quite jarring.[62] However, the uncensored violence of *Hick Scorner* is the main clue into the second difference between this satire and a morality play.

Curiously, the character "Hick" is not the hero of the play. "Hick" only enters the play approximately one third of the way through and delivers four comedic monologues before disappearing again, never to return at any point in the play. Without the monologues delivered by "Hick" the play would be much more similar to a morality play and the action would not change dramatically.[63] The implications of this factor are that the character "Hick" was inserted as an afterthought into a traditional morality play. The character is a comic presence and at times nonsensical showing that the inclusion of the character was strictly to mock "Hick." Considering these attributes, it is historically imperative to determine what real-life person "Hick" represented along with reasons why the mockery of this character would have been important to Charles Brandon.

In the early months of 1514, Henry VIII's claim to the throne was challenged by a man named Richard "Hick" de la Pole.[64] Remarkably, de la Pole also claimed the title Duke of Suffolk.[65] After the execution of Richard's older brother (who made similar claims), de la Pole fled to France. He garnered some support for his cause in France and planned to sail to Scotland and gather supporters there before marching south to England. At the time, the threat of this man who had legitimate, albeit weak, claims to these titles, would have made court, and its periphery, hyper aware of an invasion and impending battles. Yet, de la Pole was unable to march on England and was forced into further exile

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[62] Walker, *Plays,* 37.
[63] Ibid., 43.
[64] Expanded versions of this story can be found in both Walker, 43-45 and Lancashire, 239-42.
[65] The ducal title had previously been a family title for the Poles but was revoked by Henry VII.

after the failed coup. For Charles Brandon, his ducal title was in the line of fire and a play mocking "Hick" would have been a great joke within his household and likely a good way to laugh off the tension of that brief threat while emphatically supporting Henry VIII.

The second dramatic production is one of only three political plays Henry VIII is known to have attended. Commissioned by Cardinal Wolsey, the unnamed play was a tragedy performed for Henry VIII, the visiting French king, Francis I, and French ambassadors in late October of 1527. The Cardinal was hosting the event to celebrate a treaty between France and England who had joined forces in an effort to shut out the Spanish Emperor, Charles V. Two years earlier, the Emperor had taken both the Pope and the French king, Francis I, as his prisoners of war.[66] To free the king, the French royal family had to send two sons to Spain as collateral and the events threw Europe into frenzy. One of the primary negotiators for the release of both the Pope and Francis I was Cardinal Wolsey.[67]

According to court biographer Edward Hall, the tragic political play performed at the treaty celebration was based on these real-life events and placed an "anonymous" Cardinal as the main character who negotiated the freedom of the Pope and the French king.[68] After his triumph, the captive French royal children then asked the Cardinal to free them from Spanish imprisonment, which he does, and all the characters celebrate the Cardinal for creating peace and saving Christendom. Following the action, Henry VIII,

[66] 1525.
[67] In conjunction with Francis I sister, Margeurite de Angoulême.
[68] Hall, 734-735.

Charles Brandon, and two other member of the privy chamber rose to perform a dance.[69] Henry VIII stayed for the entirety of this court tragedy, perhaps motivated by the opportunity to dance at the end.

Hall's *Chronicle* includes a brief discussion of the way this tragic play was received by its audience, recalling that "wisemen smiled & thought that it sounded more glorious to the Cardinal than true to the matter in dede"[70] and he writes that the common people who heard about the play "spake sore against the Cardinal & sayd that the Frenchmen did never good to England, and for the Cardinal's pleasure we should forsake our olde fredes and receive our olde enemies."[71] In short, noblemen and aristocratic audiences did not find the Cardinal's real life response to the event to be nearly as heroic or important as the play suggested.

The recorded responses to the play, although presented without personal commentary, also imply that Hall understood that Spain had committed a diplomatic crime by kidnapping the Pope and Francis I, yet he believes it significant to record that the people of England still preferred the alliance with Spain to the alliance with France. The account of Cardinal Wolsey's response to the court's feedback was that he issued an announcement forbidding any man or woman to comment on the king, the queen, or any of their affairs.[72] In essence, a gag law. Public sentiments favoring Spain and the pressure for noble men to appease their subject, were likely some reasons why Wolsey's initial attempts to obtain a divorce for Henry VIII were unsuccessful.

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[69] Ibid., 735. The treaty between the kings and banqueting events leading up to the play can be found on 734. The dancing chamber members are identified as Sir Edward Neville and the Marques of Exeter, Henry Courteney.
[70] Ibid., 735.
[71] Ibid., 735.
[72] Ibid., 735.

Katharine of Aragon commissioned the third and final play that rounds out this discussion, and it was a court drama called *Godly Queene Hester (*printed in 1561). The action of the play is uniquely female-driven, biblical in nature, and it is only the second recorded drama in English dramatic canon that features a female heroine as the main character. The drama follows the story of the Jewish queen, Esther, who is portrayed as the heroine of the play, and it details her righteous struggle against the villain Aman whose objective was to eradicate the existence of all Jewish people in the kingdom by exerting his influence over her husband, the king, in order to achieve these sinister goals.

The timing of the play's performance, in 1529, is similar to the time when Katharine, a devout Catholic, was struggling against Cardinal Wolsey's pre-Reformation dissolution of Catholic monasteries and reflects the real-life personal and moral struggles of the queen.[73] Religiously, the parallels are undeniable. This play depicts the story of a devout queen locked in a struggle to protect herself and her people against a corrupt religious advisor and a malleable king. In many ways, this play rings more true than any other production in this discussion, and the inclusion of the king's character, who seemingly does not have a complete understanding of the consequences of his decrees, is an incredibly powerful statement for a queen to make in a public setting.

While the play does not explicitly discuss the personal romance between Queen Esther and her husband, King Ahasueres, the biblical implications of this play go beyond the public discord between a queen and a royal advisor. The story of Esther is also a story of a woman who became queen to a king who had set aside his first wife as punishment for her disobedience. One of the main morals of the story was that an obedient and

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[73] Jeanette Dillon, 'Powerful Obedience*: Powerful Queene Hester* and Katharine of Aragon,' *In:* PETER HAPPÉ, and Wim HŰsken, eds., *Interludes and Early Modern Society: Studies in Gender, Power and Theatricality* (Rodopi, 2007), 117.

faithful wife was the ideal wife and a king should have no reason to set aside his queen if she displayed these virtues.

To strengthen the correlation between the play and Katharine's struggles in 1529, the dialogue actually echoes Katharine's personal speeches and appeals for justice in the matter of her divorce.[74] In court she consistently addresses Henry VIII directly and lays out examples of her obedience to him, which, she argued, should prevent him from setting her aside--an argument the play emphasizes.[75] This play was an overt display of her position as a queen who felt called to work against powerful men who created oppressive laws and decrees against her and her Catholic subjects and yet somehow it still manages to defend the integrity of the king.

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In the end, it was the men and women at the core of Henry VIII's court who contributed most to the development of political drama and used this tool to influence their friends, families, and local subjects. Drama addressed everything from impending war over the crown to the very personal subject of marriage and divorce and could be used to support or defame noble persons who posed a threat to the established hierarchy at court. Later, a few productions appeared after the fall of Anne Boleyn to reinforce the charges of witchcraft, incest, and adultery that were brought against her. Henry VIII even composed the songs for one such production that was performed at court. The king was more disposed to lavish entertainments that allowed him to participate as an actor and show off his favorites, as demonstrated by Mary Boleyn's participation in the *Chateau*

[74] Although not verbatim, many of the lines in the play are similar to the recorded speeches of Katharine.
[75] Dillon, *Powerful Obedience*, 122.

Vert, although this preference was, perhaps, damaging to his diplomatic reputation in favor of elevating the court's perception of him as in individual. Regardless, the reign of Henry VIII can be credited with the development of a tremendous body of musical composition and political drama, which solidified the expectation that European courts were to be places of both entertainment and diplomacy.

Grants and Gifts

Factional men at court measured much of their success and power by the grants and annuities gifted to them by Henry VIII. In many ways, the *State Paper Commission* is the best set of financial records for tracing the rise and fall of factions at mid-Tudor court. By association, the lists can help gender historians, in particular, identify times of heightened female influence based on the types of grants and the frequency of grants given in correlation to that particular woman's male family members. It is this method of primary source interpretation that motivates the below study on Henry VIII's granting and gifting patterns specifically from 1519-1533. While the king did give some grants to women specifically, in this section, the research is most concerned with the grants given to men or families, such as the Boleyns, who had strong factional ties.

Henry VIII not only gave grants and annuities to his friends and trusted advisors, but a second favorite activity of this king was engaging these same friends in gambling games. Several records of payments to his revel partners are recorded in Henry VIII's *State Paper Commission,* including a payment to his cousin, William Carey, who bested Henry in a game of tennis at Richmond.[76] It is also a theory that the priceless Passano treasures were possibly payments from Henry VIII to a diplomat, Giovanni Battista da

[76] *State Papers Commission,* SP1/18, entry 152. February 16 and 18, 1519. Payment of 2s. 8d.

Passano, as a gambling debt settlement.[77] Historians have posited that during their affair in the 1520s,[78] Mary Boleyn won a valuable piece of jewelry from Henry VIII while gambling, reminding him once again that he was a poor match for the gambling skills fostered at French court.[79] Mary's spoils, although not technically a romantic gift, were still later reclaimed by her sister, Anne Boleyn, and returned to the royal treasury, indicating that the piece of jewelry was worth quite a sum and possibly a point of contention between the two sisters.[80]

Further evidence that the king's newly created positions were socially and financially beneficial is demonstrated in the *State Paper Commission* list of monthly grants. Men appointed to posts such as Groom of the Stool and positions in privy chambers appear with consistency in the lists. The most frequent names among them are William Compton, Henry Norris, Charles Brandon, Henry Guildford, and Thomas Boleyn, all men who play definitive roles in Tudor English court history. Grants appear by month and year within the lists, but the record also includes expenses incurred based on the noble families who were residing at court rather than on their own personal estates. For example, an entry from November of 1519 indicates that "the ladies Bullain" (the ladies, Boleyn) were present for a series of meals.[81] This relatively small detail actually sheds light on the impending rise of the Boleyn family. Previous historians such as Weir and Wilkinson write that the eldest daughter, Mary, was absent from court records from

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[77] The Passano treasures include a gold chalice and two choir books of silver that were once housed in Westminster Abbey but now lie in the private ownership of the Passano family. Theories are that gambling was the reason Henry VIII gifted them, although Passano was a successful diplomat between England and France and a personal friend of Cardinal Wolsey and the Duke of Norfolk. It could have been a reward for service.
[78] Exact dates are unknown but the consensus is between 1522-1525.
[79] Retha M. Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn.*
[80] *The Privy Purse Expenses of King Henry the Eighth from November MDXIX to December MDXXXII.*
[81] SP1/19 ff. 117-118, entry 528.

1515-1520; however, this entry makes it clear that there are two women at English court with the last name Boleyn at the end of 1519. Likely this is the start of Mary's courtship with the king's cousin, William Carey.

What is surprising about many of the grants given to men is that they were the types of grants that would not pass to wives should the husbands pass away from illness or old age. Many of those grants, such as land or income grants, would revert to the crown when the grantee died, leaving wives poor and destitute. There are a handful of grants given to women who had petitioned the king for continued ownership of their husband's lands and incomes but, more often than not, the grants would go back to the crown or pass to the eldest son. Either way, grants could be both reward and curse for those families who came to depend on those annuities for survival.

Beyond money and land, Henry VIII granted many titles to his favorites at court. His best friend Charles Brandon was created Duke of Suffolk in 1514, then, in 1532 and Thomas Boleyn was elevated to Viscount of Rochford during same ceremony in which Henry VIII acknowledged his illegitimate son, Henry Fitzroy, and gave him peerages.[82] Women were also granted titles as the king saw fit, with two women being given titles in their own right. For example, without a husband by her side, Margaret de la Pole was created Countess of Salisbury and received appointment as a caregiver to Henry VIII's children. Similarly, an unmarried Anne Boleyn was created Marquis of Pembroke, that title being significant in that it is the male title, as opposed to Marchioness, the female title and as such, she became the most powerful non-royal woman in England.[83] This title grant was the first hereditary peerage granted to a woman in England and was bestowed

[82] SP1, Vol. IV, Pt.1. June 1525.
[83] September 1532.

upon her prior to her first official appearance as Henry VIII's mistress during an international trip to meet Francis I.[84] However, her execution in 1536 meant that the title did not pass to her children or any other members of her family.

Factional Families

While the factions that formed between families lasted for years, factional agreement was not as strong *within* families. However, despite husbands and wives (or children) disagreeing on ideals of religious reform,[85] it does not seem that these disagreements held the dramatic consequences found between the male heads of families who were pitted against each other. Rather, it would seem that families whose members held different beliefs continued to function and support each other. One particular family that demonstrates this pattern is the Howards. During the Henrician era, the Howards were the most powerful noble family in England. The patriarch, Thomas Howard, was the 3rd Duke of Norfolk and also held the title of Earl. The Dukes of Norfolk are believed to have been staunch Catholics but also were famously supportive of the rise of the evangelical Boleyns and, later, the neutral queen, Catherine Howard.

Surprisingly, upon Anne Boleyn's rise to the throne and Katharine of Aragon's displacement, the Duke of Norfolk seemingly never found fault with his wife, who refused to attend the new queen's coronation because she loved the former queen so much.[86] England's most famous family was starting to show their divide. The Duchess'

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[84] Eric Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn, (*Wiley-Blackwell, 2008*), 158.*
[85] Nicola Clark, 'A 'Conservative' Family? The Howard Women and Responses to Religious Change During the Early Reformation, c.1530–1558,' *Historical Research*, vol. 90, no. 248, (May 2017). The Howards are one example of a family that was not religiously unified.
[86] Clark, *A Conservative Family?,* 322. She refused to attend Anne Boleyn's coronation in 1533 'from the love she bore to the previous queen.'

refusal to support Anne Boleyn was significant for a number of reasons, the first being that Anne was her niece. The Duchess of Norfolk protested her own family's rise to the throne in favor of supporting a set-aside queen. Secondly, the Duchess' daughter, Mary, was married to Henry VIII's illegitimate son, Henry Fitzroy, and was in line to become a queen herself. The resistance to Anne's elevation was an acknowledgement that the Duchess chose to support her son-in-law's claim to the throne over any potential children Anne may have. Finally, the Duchess was making a political statement that was in direct opposition to that of her husband yet she was never punished for her stance. This anecdote is remarkable in showing that women not only had personal and religious agency, but they were also allowed to fluctuate in the formation of factions. This anecdote is an excellent example of the burgeoning political agency Tudor-era noblewomen were beginning to exercise. With female relatives, like the Howards, taking such an active stance to support their individual political beliefs, it is reasonable to consider that the Boleyn women, with their French education and court presence, would have behaved similarly.

Although the Howards were Catholic by identity, it turns out they were willing to conform if it meant retaining power and favor. A physical example of this mentality survives in the family home, Arundel Castle. The fortress boasts two private chapels, a Catholic chapel and an Anglican chapel. A stunning wrought iron door with glass panels and a heavy curtain on each side of the door is all that separates the two chapels. Effectively, the chapels are a visual statement about England's slow turn to reformed thought. While the Howards were willing to construct a chapel to support their king, they were not willing to destroy their traditional Catholic chapel to do so.

Despite Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk's, personal Catholic beliefs, his daughter, Mary Fitzroy, was considered an evangelical and in her later life she was a patron for many Protestant writers and tutors.[87] She also served as a lady-in-waiting to her cousin, Anne Boleyn, and, after her husband died and left her widowed, Mary Fitzroy lived amicably under the same roof as her father. The Duke of Norfolk was a powerful presence at Tudor court and maintained his religious stance all while building alliances within the king's household, yet the Howard ladies openly made their own statements and displays in contrast to their patriarch. For historians such as Clark, the study of families as a whole is increasingly important if a full picture of Tudor court aristocracy and female agency is ever to be painted. Based solely on the study of the Howards, agency is much more complex and affected the potency of court factions far more than previously believed.

Summary

The objectives of noble families at the court of Henry VIII were played out in employment and favors, political and familial alliances, and public entertainment. More striking is the complacency of the king in regards to being publicly manipulated as suggested by Katharine of Aragon's play. A characteristic of Henry VIII is that he was willing to uproot royal tradition and sacrifice the well being of his court and subjects if it meant he could achieve his personal goals in marriage, power, war, and public perception. The development of factions permeated every facet of mid-Tudor court and shaped gender agency, theatre, politics, and religion. The king's love of his friends and

[87] Clark, 'A 'Conservative' Family?,' 323-326.

family outweighed the traditions of previous English monarchs and ambitious families at court quickly caught on to this preference.

Unlike his father and children, Henry VIII was also far more lenient toward men who would challenge his claim to the throne, which likely contributed to factional fluidity and the continued court presence of disloyal noble families who supported other potential rulers throughout Henry VIII's reign. His father and children were much more willing to exile or execute rivals, which staved the rampant development and lasting effects of factions.[88] In addition to Henry VIII's granting habits and his weakness for gambling and playing favorites, the records of court entertainment can be analyzed to provide the wider perspective of how families, like the Howards and the Boleyns, and their factions were strategically placing themselves in the king's favor.

The most effective pathway to influencing the mind of a king was found in the incorporation of the smartest women from each factional family into Henry's love of play. This will be addressed in the next chapter in an effort to better understand the motivations and participations of women at mid-Tudor court. As has been established, the very basic lines of factions did not apply to these women and the proof of their public involvement in revels and drama shows that a public life was entirely possible for women.[89]

[88] Queen Mary I executed Jane Grey. Queen Elizabeth I executed Mary Queen of Scots.
[89] Or at least women of a certain rank.

Chapter 3: Women and Gender at Court

Frequently, historians turn to the voices and experiences of men to understand the political and social implications of historic events. While this perspective is credible and understandable because of the wealth of primary source material, it does leave out the stories of half the population who observed or affected history. The stories of women can and must be incorporated into historical analysis. Whether those stories are of specific women or of women as a collective, the truth remains: they were there.

The experiences of women who lived at court or were employed by noble persons at court can be challenging to trace for the simple reason that it was customary for families to send their daughters to be ladies-in-waiting to noble women and royalty at courts all across Europe.[90] Becoming a lady-in-waiting at the courts of France and Austria was an ideal position for young English ladies who needed to learn foreign languages, music, manners, and skills such as embroidery; all of which would have been appealing to potential husbands or perhaps even earned these ladies a place in the household of the Queen of England.

Considering the education and reform of foreign courts, together with women's political involvement, which is evidenced by letters and gifts, changes in agency during this time period can be seen within one of the most powerful families at mid-Tudor court, the Boleyns. The Boleyn women are often described as ambitious, political, religious, and very much involved in the public sphere of English court. The following chapter will address the gendered experiences of women much like the Boleyns by analyzing the

[90] If records of these ladies do exist, they likely exist in the national archives of these European countries.

importance of letter-writing, fashion, and political agency, all of which were tools used for their advancement, in order to provide context for the social norms of the time period.

More specifically, this chapter explores the education and social expectations of women, like Mary and Anne Boleyn, who were present at the French and/or English court. During Henry VIII's reign, France was England's closest royal rival both geographically and socially. The education and reformed thinking that was provided, even expected, from the French court certainly impacted the women who grew up in France similarly to Mary and Anne, and then later returned to England as adults. Subsequently, their influence once back in England, informed many of the policies that Henry VIII and his advisors implemented in the 1520s and beyond. That influence was evident in many pursuits including writing and correspondence, to social norms in regards to religion and sex. In retrospect, it is clear that this cultural shift created opportunities for women to exercise agency and independent thought and, eventually, to challenge the traditions of king and country.

The impact of cross-cultural education is apparent in the study of letter writing and correspondence during this period. Although it has been established that few primary sources have survived the span of centuries to present day, the few that do survive offer keen insight into the power of persuasion as demonstrated in the art of correspondence. It is possible to analyze these documents and their importance based on who was writing, what they were requesting. For upper class women, the very action of writing a letter is indicative of an expectation that they would be granted their requests. Petitions written by women to kings, letters between friends, and letters between families can all provide a better understanding of the lives and personalities of noble women at court. This chapter

will delve into letters written by early modern noble women and will highlight the effective use of persuasive communication in societal advancement, which will also be applied to this thesis' case study in chapter three.

Before addressing the complexities and implications of letter writing, readers can benefit by first studying the educational roots of the politically active women in early modern Europe. Mary Boleyn, the subject of this thesis' case study, and other women of similar station, began their education and social observations at the French court of Francis I and his queen, Claude. Hence, it is in France where this analysis of female agency will begin.

Education and Employment at French Court

As a woman employed as a lady-in-waiting at French court, Mary Boleyn was exposed to noble women who were highly educated and, in some cases, reformed thinkers. In this thesis, reformed thinking does not necessarily associate with Protestant thinking. Rather, it is used as a term that means society was beginning to accept that corruption plagued the Catholic church and slowly began to reject traditions such as confessions in favor or a more personal relationship with God. French court and its structure functioned similarly to English court in that a queen or noblewoman expected her ladies-in-waiting to follow her example in fashion, hobbies, and even religious leanings.[91] Women such as Queen Claude of France and her sister-in-law Margaret de Angoulême[92] patronized authors and artists who often aligned with their own personal

[91] Sharon L. Jansen, *Anne of France: Lessons for my Daughter* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 35. Anne de Beaujeu instructs her daughter to dress and behave however her mistress or queen demands.
[92] Later, Queen of Navarre

beliefs.[93] Consequently, ladies-in-waiting observed these women who promoted reform and, likely, were asked to follow suit.

The catalogued library of Queen Claude provides incredible insight into the authors and ideals the women at French court, such as Mary Boleyn, would have been introduced to. The library includes works by Christine de Pizan and Giovanni Boccaccio, both of whom wrote books and manuscripts that detailed the role and social expectations of women in the early modern world. These works even advocated for women to be placed in positions of power.[94] Alongside these books exists a copy of a book entitled *Lessons for my Daughter* written by the medieval French queen, Anne of de Beaujeu. Originally written to pass along words of wisdom and personal anecdotes to her daughter, Anne de Beaujeu's book became a medieval bestseller, published in three editions over thirty years. [95] The book was utilized as a handbook for early modern queens of France and the ladies in their households, which, by 1514, included Mary Boleyn and by 1515, included her sister, Anne. The height of the books' popularity spanned 1517-1535 before disappearing from court culture.[96]

One unique aspect of this particular book is worthy of note. While the book was intended to encourage women in the pursuit of virtue, Queen Anne de Beaujeu downplays virtue as an inherent female quality and instead, presents virtue as a tool women can learn how to use. One famous line from the book reads:

> Further, take care to tell no tales to anyone at all, because sometimes even those who do so justly, with reason and good intentions, are later

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[93] Warnicke, 25-28; Broad and Green, *A History of Women's Political Though in Europe, 1400-1700,* 68-70.
[94] Cynthia J. Brown, *The Queen's Library: Image-Making at the Court of Anne of Brittany, 1477-1514,* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 308.
[95] Jansen, *Anne of France,* viii.
[96] Ibid., viii.

> hated for it and suffer a great deal. And so that all goes smoothly, I counsel you to mind your own business…if by chance it happens that you know something, take care that you do not reveal it…
>
> Do not confide to anyone that which can affect your honour, unless it is something that strains your heart to conceal, and then confide only inside the family.[97]

Advice such as this describes a common royal mentality that revealing personal weaknesses should be kept to a minimum whenever possible. Royal family secrets were to remain private unless trustworthy family members may have been able to help solve a problem. The lack of surviving documentation between the Boleyn family members indicates this lesson may have been taken to heart or that they were diligent in destroying correspondence in an effort to maintain an extreme level of privacy. It is quite possible that this royal "code" may have been one of many factors that contributed to the general lack of preserved primary sources written by women in early modern Europe.

The reemergence of *La Querelle des femmes*, or literary quarrels about the role of women, is also important to the discussion of gender shifts during this time period. Introduced in the Middle Ages, these meetings were frequently hosted by women and encouraged discourse and the sharing of accepted materials such as pamphlets and manuscripts, even story-telling or musical performances.[98] These meetings found strong footing once again in the early modern period, especially on the European continent.[99] The height of these types of gatherings in France did not occur until 1540 with the *Querelle de Amyes,* which was a trend of pamphlet writing in which authors praised or vilified the culture of French court women and sex. By this time, it was widely believed

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[97] Ibid., 35.
[98] Julie Campbell, *Literary Circles and Gender in Early Modern Europe: A Cross-Cultural Approach (Ashgate, EIU: 2006), 12*.
[99] Campbell, *Literary Circles and Gender in Early Modern Europe, 5*.

that the men and women at French court led lives of licentiousness.[100] Perhaps the study of *Lessons for my Daughter* was popularized in an effort to discourage the declining court moral culture, a culture that would later haunt Mary Boleyn and the reputation of her family.

Interestingly, the number of women at French court rose significantly during Boleyn's time serving in France. According to existing primary records, the number of women employed by the royal family increased to its highest number in 1523 under Queen Claude of France.[101] That number continued to increase under subsequent queens but Queen Claude employed the most ladies of any queen up until that point as the chart below evidences. Zum Kolk's chart is the most complete compilation of female employment and payment at French court based on the surviving primary documents from each French queen. This chart accounts for the full range of female employees for the queens, from kitchen maids to ladies-in-waiting. One effect of the increase of female employment was that the court, and its virtue, was progressively difficult to police, and the culture at court became far more sexually free. Kolk suggests this is because both men and women were "little accustomed to such propinquity," a concern that grew as a result of increased numbers of household employees.[102] The way court countered this growing concern was to look the other way. As long as the gossip was kept to a minimum

[100] Walker, 'Minions,' 15. See footnote 53, which lays out primary sources such as Sir Thomas More, and at least one play, both of which describe French courts' vanities, sexual freedoms, and fashions.
[101] Caroline Zum Kolk, "The Household of the Queen of France in the Sixteenth Century," 10.
[102] Zum Kolk, 21.

and the honor of individuals remained in tact, no questions were asked.[103]

The Size and Relationship of the Households of the King and Queen of France (1286–1786)[25]

YEAR	HOUSEHOLD OF THE KING	HOUSEHOLD OF THE QUEEN	PERCENTAGE
1286	98	47	48 %
1315	96	61	64 %
1490	318	109	34 %
1494–5	366	88	24 %
1498	**286**	**253**	**88 %**
1523	540	285	53 %

Figure 1. This table is a list of employment statistics from the French royal household. Compiled by Zum Kolk using surviving primary documents. [104]

As with any society, there is always a group that stands outside of the prescribed traditions or norms of the time. Despite the sexual freedoms that came with an over populated French court, women were still classified into two primary social categories—the virtuous and the unvirtuous.

"La dame est tantot une coquette, bonne a seduire ou a acheter,

tantot un miroir de vertu…"

"The lady is sometimes a coquette, good to seduce or to buy, sometime a mirror of virtue."[105]

Joukovsky's quote suggests that within societal norms of the time, there were two primary ways to classify a woman. Based on the quote, Joukovsky believed a woman was

[103] Ibid., 21.
[104] Chart appears in Zum Kolk but has been edited to show only through 1523. For full chart, please see Zum Kolk, "The Household of the Queen of France," 10.
[105] Francoise Joukovsky, "La querelle des femmes," *Magazine Litteraire* 319 (1994): 51, as cited and translated in Campbell, 97.

either used according to male discretion or a woman chose to conduct herself in the ways in which men instructed. The former idea playing into the idea that women were "pawns" who did not or could not act as individuals, while the latter idea suggests that women could be "players," choosing to act in harmony with the will of man. Mary Boleyn is often painted as a "pawn," however, this thesis aims to provide context that suggests she was a "player," or possibly something even more removed. For example, historian Julie Campbell suggests there is a third classification of women that that arose outside traditional stereotypes and neither involved the will of men nor shunned the sexual freedoms of court. The woman who sought to elevate herself and her status with a combination of intellect and strategic intimacy is the "other" in the sixteenth century. While few in number, we do know that these women contributed greatly to history as is evidenced by Mary and Anne Boleyn, in particular.[106]

These women who broke the classification mold inspired authors to either praise their ambition or blame them for the disintegration of virtue, a fate that can be evidenced by posthumous literary works describing women such as Anne or Mary Boleyn, who exercised agency in a way that included sexuality.[107] Also noteworthy about the label of "other" is the suggestion that these women—who pursued status elevation in this way—fell into a minority group. They were oft subject to gossip at court and, if unsuccessful in their efforts, could have destroyed their reputation or, arguably worse, their family's reputation. In France, there was a fine line of acceptable behavior and secrecy was best. Women who tried and failed to marry above their station submitted to removal from court

[106] Campbell, 97-98.
[107] For example, John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs.*

or quickly arranged marriages to thwart any negative attention directed towards their families, both of which are concerns that characterize the Boleyn family's rise to power.

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Although France was a Catholic nation at this time and the royal family did not acknowledge the Reformation movement as early as its English counterpart, the royal women were beginning to discuss and adopt some of Luther's suggested reforms. For example, Margaret de Angoulême was known to speak in her trusted circles about the idea of a man or woman being able to have a personal relationship with God that circumvented church authorities and the Virgin Mary.[108] When reformed thought is mentioned in this chapter, it does not refer to embracing all of Martin Luther's 95 theses. Rather, the term is used to indicate that noblemen and women acknowledged that some ideas were logical, even necessary, in the face of an increasingly corrupt Catholic system, which had long valued power and money over salvation.

English ambassadors living in France and observing the court would have been familiar with the subtle changes in religion and education that developed within the French royal family. Because of their prominent positions, foreign ambassadors, such as Thomas Boleyn among other advocates of reformed thinking, were offered the privilege of placing their daughters in high-visibility roles in the court of Queen Claude and Margaret de Angoulême. As early as 1515 it is supposed that Thomas Boleyn was actively smuggling reformist pamphlets from France to England, although the source of the pamphlets is unclear as is his means of dissemination once back in England. It is possible that foreign ambassadors with reform sympathies recognized the shift in thought

[108] Weisner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 154.

at court and seized the opportunity to secure spots for family members in higher court factions by supporting the changing ideals.

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Outside of reading, writing, and practicing virtue, ladies at court were developing their own thoughts and beliefs. A woman could learn the complex workings of the female sphere by observing the powerful women for whom she worked. While lower-class women experienced greater limitations of choice in regards to religion, finances, and marriage, the upper-class world of court allowed women to use their agency to advocate for reform or even marry for love. Elopement was not frequent but it was an opportunity that noble women took advantage of in moments of personal liberation. The English princess, Mary Tudor, made one such move.

In 1514 the sister of Henry VIII, Princess Mary Tudor, traveled with an entourage, which included Mary Boleyn, to France so she could marry the French king, Louis XII. Unfortunately, less than three months after the wedding, Louis XII died and left Queen Mary Tudor a widow. Upon her imminent return to England as a dowager Queen she would likely have been remarried to another king or high-ranking nobleman as a pawn in England's efforts to secure alliances.[109] What no one could have expected was that the dowager Queen Mary had already chosen her new husband. She wed Charles Brandon, Henry VIII's best friend, in secret at the Hotel de Clugny on March 3, 1515 with just ten witnesses. Among the witnesses was the newly crowned French king, Francis I, who had encouraged the match to prevent England from forming an alliance with Spain.[110]

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[109] "Dowager" being a term used to describe a widowed royal woman.
[110] Alison Weir, *Britain's Royal Families: The Complete Genealogy* (London: Random House, 2011) 152.

Adding to the drama, the elopement was an act of treason against Henry VIII, but the dowager Queen Mary and Charles Brandon took their chances. The event not only enraged the English king, but also likely set the dowager queen's household on edge. Any number of charges could have been leveled against her ladies-in-waiting, including conspiring against Henry VIII. Luckily for the dowager Queen and her ladies, Henry VIII had mercy and only charged his sister and her new husband a fine in exchange for royal pardon.

While Henry VIII's initial reaction was that of anger, his willingness to pardon the action raises the question: was elopement a frequent occurrence for royal women? The dowager Queen's secret wedding, it turns out, was not the first time a royal woman had eloped without familial or regent approval nor would it be the last. In truth, the Tudor family would not have had any claim to the throne during the Wars of the Roses had dowager Queen Catherine de Valois not eloped with Owen Tudor in 1421 and started a second family.[111] Other women who exercised agency in their marriages during a Tudor reign include not just Lady Mary Boleyn,[112] but Lady Catherine Grey,[113] Lady Mary Grey,[114] and even the future queen of England, Anne Boleyn, was briefly engaged in secret.[115] Considering the noble status of all of these women, elopement seems to have been an option, although an outlier, for high-ranking ladies with *direct* ties to the royal

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[111] Their legal marriage has not been proven at this point. The two had six children whose legitimacy was never legally disputed and all used the surname "Tudor." Owen Tudor and Catherine de Valois remained together until her death in 1437.
[112] Older sister of future queen, Anne Boleyn. Eloped with John Stafford in 1534.
[113] Younger sister of executed queen, Jane Grey. Eloped with Edward Seymour in 1560.
[114] Older sister of executed queen, Jane Grey. Eloped with Thomas Keyes in 1565.
[115] To Henry Percy in 1523. Upon discovery, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey prevented the marriage from being carried out. It is suspected that this prevention was at the request of King Henry VIII who was, by 1523, conducting his affair with Anne's sister, Mary.

family. At this time it is less clear whether noble women who were not directly related to a future or former ruler took this risk.[116]

Women in Politics at Tudor Court

In an effort to create a more complete understanding of early Tudor politics as experienced by upper-class women, an emphasis on gendered perspective is imperative.[117] Although rare, evidence does exist to support the idea that the king's chamber, court patronage, and the social court itself did, in actuality, include upper-class women who contributed to Tudor political history. One of the most important ways women were allowed into the political sphere was in the arrangement of marriage for their children.[118] Women were not only welcome to participate in this way, but were often more involved in negotiation than their husbands. Evidence of this practice is seen as early as the 1470's when a woman name Elizabeth Stoner wrote to her second husband to tell him that she had been approached to negotiate a marriage for her daughter in his absence.

> And so at after dinner they had their communication for the said matter whereby I understood their dispositions… Wherefore I answered and said in this wise: that though she were my child, as she is, I could not answer that matter without you nor not would do.[119]

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[116] This line of questioning does not include widowed women who later became mistresses but never re-married such as the Countess of Pembroke in 1601.
[117] Eric Ives, *Anne Boleyn* (Oxford, I986), viii; Ives avoids the male-dominated interpretations of traditional accounts in his biography and attempts to shed light on the female experience at Tudor court.
[118] Barbara J. Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England", *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Jun., 1990), Cambridge University Press, 261.
[119] Elizabeth Stonor, Christine Carpenter's reprint of C.L. Kingsford, *Stonor Letters and Papers, 1290-1483* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 176, as cited in Malcolm Richardson, "'Masterful Woman': Elizabeth Stoner and English Women's Letters, 1399-c. 1530," [Aldershot, England ; Ashgate, 2005].

Elizabeth Stoner is one example of the type of women who were *most* politically active and who were, as a result, included in marriage negotiations. Noble women who participated in negotiations such as these were often widows who did not have a traditional family hierarchy but still had to provide the most basic arrangements for their children.[120] This is most likely the explanation as to why Stoner was asked to negotiate a marriage without her second husband's opinion.[121] The evidence raises questions of whether or not widows were also allowed more agency in deciding to re-marry. If so, the cultural norms would have affected the way widowed women with children, like Mary Boleyn, chose second husbands. Clearly, second marriages were less valuable for women based on their faction affiliation and social rank.

According to Harris, upper-class women both facilitated and benefitted from patronizing one another. Noble families would often place their daughters into the employ of upper-class women who could help the young girls with education, personal networks, and even arranging marriages.[122] Such would have been the now infamous relationship between families such as the Boleyns or Seymours, and the Tudors. The discussion of female political power is described best by Merry Wiesner-Hanks who writes, "…through the arrangement of marriages, [women] established ties between influential families; through letters or the spreading of rumors, they shaped networks of opinion; through patronage, they helped or hindered men's political careers."[123]

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[120] Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England," 260-261.
[121] Malcolm Richardson, "'Masterful Woman': Elizabeth Stoner and English Women's Letters, 1399-c. 1530," 48-49. This letter was also written in English and is one of the earliest examples of a woman author writing correspondence in vernacular.
[122] Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England", 262-263.
[123] Wiesner-Hanks, 240.

Although Dowager Queen Mary Tudor's elopement with Charles Brandon in 1515 initially caused the couple to fall out of royal favor, their household would have benefitted in several ways once their Mistress was married to Henry VIII's best friend. As a member of the king's inner circle and privy council, Charles Brandon would have had unparalleled access to both Henry VIII and his wife's ladies-in-waiting. Close friends of the king with access to his privy chamber were known to help the king move around his various palaces and conduct his quiet affairs. With Mary Boleyn living and working at court in 1522, she may have benefitted from this system of privacy and mobility between her station in dowager queen Mary's Tudor's household and her brother's royal chambers. By 1525, the factional ties between families such as the Boleyns, the Howards, Charles Brandon, and the Tudors were unmatched in terms of privacy, networking, and accessibility.

Beyond patronage and employment, women were also far more physically mobile than previously believed. The picture of the early modern woman bent over her needlework is an image that is no longer accurate in light of recent interpretation of primary sources. For example, married women received their parents and in-laws with some frequency and would often visit extended family as well in hopes of securing patronage.[124] In instances where travel and face-to face interactions were more difficult, the primary form of communication and negotiation between upper-class women was gift giving.

Sending gifts between noble families was one way that women could secure long-distance relationships not just with other women, but also with noble men. Gift giving allowed women to control how upper-class men and women accessed resources and

[124] Harris, 265.

goods, which they could then re-gift to even better connected families in exchange for their own favors. For example, Lady Lisle frequently sent gifts of wine or furs, even pets, to men in Henry VIII's privy chamber and, in return, she secured the allegiance of noble men in positions of political power. One example of a favor requested in exchange for gifts is evidenced in correspondence in which Lady Lisle solicited high-ranked noblemen and requested that they advocate for her daughters to be placed as ladies-in-waiting to the English queen.[125]

For many years the Lisle family lived on royal assignment in Calais and sent French foods and specialty wine to their peers in England.[126] The gifts were expensive and exotic and Lady Lisle knew that her gifts were the best way for her noble peers to experience said luxuries or even re-gift these precious resources in exchange for their own favors.[127] What is even more significant about this practice is that the exchange of goods for favors was neither secretive nor were they received negatively. Regardless of marital status, some women, including Mary Boleyn, even went so far as to embroider shirts and gift them to Henry VIII for New Year's gifts.[128] The research conducted for this thesis did not reveal any correspondence to or from Mary Boleyn in terms of gift-giving or exchanges, but that does not mean those letters do not exist. Perhaps requests for her favor were addressed to her husband and may be found with further research. However, what we do know, is that gifts were considered a form of currency for women

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[125] *Lisle Letters,* iv, no. 870.
[126] Harris, 266.
[127] Harris, 265-268.
[128] Maria Hayward, *Dress at the Court of King Henry VIII* (Routledge, 2007), 111– 2. For noblewomen, embroidery was a display of skill, a declaration of a life of leisure, and a way to display wealth through the materials used.

and the going rate for factional alliances and the elevation of families to court was expensive.

The public acceptance of this practice and the open correspondence between men and women challenges previous perceptions of women's roles in the public and private spheres. The boundary line in Tudor court politics seems blurred and malleable. If women were allowed to openly participate in major negotiations such as marriage and employment with patrons, their opinions in political matters would have been permissible, even valuable. With Henry VIII on the throne, a king known for his susceptibility to influence, together with the rise in the political and physical mobility of women at Tudor court, it follows that a woman could have used her position as a lady-in-waiting or even as a royal mistress to influence social norms and religious reform. Where gift giving was not possible, the history books show that women were able to rely on their skills of written persuasion to further their causes.

The Art of Early Modern Correspondence

Letter writing and correspondence were instrumental for women as mothers, wives, lovers, sisters, and rulers. The correspondence of early modern women that survives is a rare and exciting way to listen in on private conversations or even learn more about the personalities of the writers. As demonstrated by the quote written by Mary Boleyn that began this thesis, surviving letters and rhetoric allows historians to consider the scarce writings of lesser-known women and include them within larger patterns of agency and individual identity. While some women exchanged short, concise letters, others wrote lengthy requests, reprimands, or petitions. As Mary's petition will show in a later chapter,

the most important letters were not those of polite updates, but rather, they were letters meant to stir action or reaction with the use of purposeful and forceful rhetoric. To better understand the power of Mary's petition to Henry VIII, it can be useful to identify the elements of letter writing that women developed during this period and then used as tools of influence.

Letters do pose a problem for historians in terms of bias and, too often, there is evidence of a much larger body of correspondence with only one surviving letter as is the case with Mary's petition. The simple fact that one letter survives is indication that more existed and understanding the social and political context of the time period is one powerful way to determine the purpose for the letter and the expected response from the addressee. Historian Natalie Zemon Davis argues that letters provide significant weight in the analysis of both the writers and the details of their subjects.[129] Toward that end, the determination of whether the writers used scribes or wrote in their own hand helps historians decipher deeper meaning behind the relationship between author and receiver or even secrecy of information.[130] Furthermore, gender historians Couchman and Crabb astutely point out that the persuasive impact of a letter is directly related to the relationship between author and addressee. A woman with no power or prestige could not expect that her letter to a high-ranking noble man would be taken seriously. However, a mistress, sister, or wife would have entirely different expectations in terms of their reader's response, possibly even the reader's obligation to respond.[131]

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[129] Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 20.
[130] Jane Couchman and Ann Crabb, *Women's Letters Across Europe, 1400-1700: Form and Persuasion*, (Aldershot, England ; Ashgate), 2005, 9.
[131] Couchman and Crabb, *Women's Letters Across Europe, 1400-1700*, 12-13.

One of the most interesting facets of letter writing history is that letters were often read out loud to the addressee by whoever delivered them. Many factors contributed to this practice, including the use of different languages as dictated by the subject matter. For example, Latin would have been used to convey business or legal matters while French may have been used instead of vernacular. As a result, women who were writing back and forth may have written more vaguely or even less frequently if there was a question as to whether their letter would be delivered unopened and read only by the addressee. Postscripts may have included phrases such as "burn this letter after reading" or perhaps a cipher may have been included that only the recipient could translate.[132] Women went to great lengths to keep correspondence private as the sixteenth century progressed and, in some cases, it was safer not to write at all. Along with the social expectations that women keep private matters private except in case of emergency, these social practices are particularly important when considering primary sources or lack thereof. [133]

When corresponding with government ministers or even kings and queens, women took extra care to write with strong rhetorical content. In instances of petitioning a king or minister, oral delivery could be helpful by allowing emphasis and story telling, which better communicated and persuaded their cases.[134] For women requesting grants, pardons, or favors, the person delivering the letter was less of a concern in terms of privacy; rather, it became important that the deliverer be considered important either

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[132] James Daybell, "Privacy and the Social Practices of Reading Women's Letters in Sixteenth Century England," (Aldershot, England ; Ashgate, 2005), 151. Famously, King Charles I and his wife, Henrietta Maria wrote to each other during the Civil War in code and cipher. Most of the surviving letters have been decoded to date. Ciphers not only included private plans but could also be used to discuss more personal topics such as sex.

[133] As taught in France.

[134] Daybell, "Privacy and Social Practices," 158-159.

personally or politically, to the recipient- perhaps a reason why Mary Boleyn wrote her petition to Thomas Cromwell instead of Henry VIII directly. Letters were best if short and concise to ensure the recipient would read or hear the full letter. For longer letters it was not unheard of for the secretary or scribe to include the most important points of the letter on the outside for quick browsing. For example, Lord and Lady Lisle prepared to petition Henry VIII in 1539, and their servant gave them the following advice: "forsee well what you write, and that the matter be shortly concluded, for else his Grace will not take pain to read it."[135]

The evolution of letter writing in the sixteenth century is an evolution from private to public and less so of form and content. For upper class women, this was their best way to communicate, to plan, to gossip, and to facilitate change. Letters that survive bring to life the women who believed they had either earned or deserved the granting of their requests and went to great lengths to ensure delivery at exactly the right time as well as to safeguard privacy upon receipt. Rhetorical content was less embellished and more concise, even firm in some cases.

The inclusion of women in some familial and political negotiations allowed them to correspond with men, but also to write on the behalf of men should they be absent. Marguerite de Angoulême[136] was one such woman who stepped in to act politically when the Holy Roman Emperor took her brother, King Francis I, captive. Marguerite was used as the go-between from King to Emperor and even referred to herself using masculine

[135] John Husee to Lord Lisle, 30 June 1539, *The Lisle Letters,* 5, letter 1466, as cited in Daybell, 158.
[136] I have referred to her as "de Angoulême" for consistency; however, she was Queen of Navarre at this point in time.

terms such as *serviteur.*[137] Noble women quickly realized the importance and influence of letter writing, which became a powerful—and accepted—tool of power, for those ladies at English and French court.

Court Fashion: Battle of the Dresses

For noble men and women vying for social and factional power at Tudor court, one of the more public displays of royal favor was depicted through fashion. Because of sumptuary laws, which restricted luxuries and imports such as food or fabric to upper classes, a person's rank was visible to the naked eye. An even more dramatic way to use fashion as a statement was to wear fabrics and colors that may have been gifts from a man or woman in a higher position, a tactic used by mistresses and illegitimate children as a subliminal message to the court. The glitz and glamour of Tudor fashion was far more than a display of wealth, it was a statement of self-import. Queens, particularly those threatened by mistresses, were also known to invest heavily in wardrobe expansion and updates while mistresses wore their position, quite literally, on their sleeves. For both men and women, fashion was the fastest, most concrete way to declare one's place in the court hierarchy.

Under the reign of Henry VIII, sumptuary laws were changed four times: in 1510, 1514, 1515, and lastly in 1533. His predecessors and successors made their own changes, but King Henry truly understood the need for luxury regulations.[138] For this king who was concerned with creating the perception that the Tudor kings were the rightful

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[137] This conjures thoughts of the future Elizabeth I of England who also described herself in masculine terms.

[138] Maria Hayward, *Rich Apparel: Clothing and the Law in Henry VIII's England,* [Routledge; 1 edition, 2009], 17. The first sumptuary law was passed by Edward III in 1337 and the last law was repealed by James I in 1604.

monarchs, sumptuary laws provided him a pathway to ensuring his visual display of power. Following Henry VIII's accession to the throne in 1509, the *Act Against Wearing of Costly Apparel* was passed (in 1510) and within its rules, the color purple was reserved only for monarchs. Some of the other laws expanded restrictions to include cloth of gold and fur sables, a favorite item of Henry VIII.[139] However, the laws included allowances for the king to permit specific persons to wear these restricted items.[140]

Such restrictive laws were justified by the king's administration on both economic and moral grounds. For example, the laws that limited foreign imported fabrics were passed for the purpose of protecting the English wool industry. At the same time, social pressure to purchase materials beyond one's means was perceived as prideful or even lustful. In this case, the regulations served to ensure that men and women in poverty were not spending their money on "frivolous" clothing and accessories.[141] Surprisingly, these laws seem to have been directed mostly to men. Regulations on the dress of women do not appear explicitly in the sumptuary laws with the exception of a 1483 law that stated wives "may weare that their husbands doe, and so may thair sonnes and daughters, being under their tuition."[142] Within Henrician laws, the only mention of women is the declaration that the laws should not be 'prejudiciall nor hurtfull to eny Woman' and the restrictions of men did not necessarily apply to their wives and daughters.[143]

Evidence that the laws did not apply to women can be found in portraiture from the time. Artists and painters such as Hans Holbein would detail the clothing of their

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[139] Hayward, *Rich Apparel,* 18-19.
[140] Hayward, *Rich Apparel*, 39. "'grant and give licence and authority to such of his subjects as his grace think convenient to wear all and such singular apparell on his body or his horse as shall stand with the pleasure of the king's grace'.
[141] Hayward, 17.
[142] Edward and John Gough Nichols, *Literary Remains of King Edward the Sixth* (New York: B. Franklin, 1963), 497, as cited in Hayward, 22.
[143] Hayward, 21.

sitters, which gives insight to the exemptions enjoyed by women, primarily noble women. A portrait of Lady Elizabeth Audley (c. 1538) depicts "[a] red velvet (?) gown [which] has a square neck, fitted bodice, large red over-sleeves and cloth of gold under-sleeves. Her smock has an embroidered neckline and cuffs. She has rings on her right hand, long and short pearl- and gem-set necklaces and a round pendant pinned to her bodice. She wears a French-style hood."[144]

For numerous reasons, the sumptuary laws were difficult to enforce in large part because exemptions applied to more than half of Tudor England's population, including those men the king saw fit to exempt, and also those persons outside the law such as clergy members.[145] As has already been demonstrated here, Henry VIII broke his own rules at court and even appeared at a court Christmas celebration in 1524 dressed in matching clothing with his best friend, Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk.[146] Beyond the challenge of the multitude of exemptions, the punishments posed for offenders were nominal, ranging from time in the stocks to fines or confiscation of clothing items.

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Perhaps the most dramatic rivalry at court that played out in fashion would be between Katharine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn. Boleyn should have never been able to challenge Queen Katharine on the fashion stage; however, as an emerging royal mistress, Anne was famously gifted jewels and fabrics for her wardrobe, even nightgowns made of satin.[147] Although the affair was not considered to be of any special import at the start,

[144] Ibid., 230.
[145] Ibid., 335-6.
[146] Borman, 136.
[147] Borman, 147.

the wardrobe accounts of Katharine of Aragon indicate that the queen began to take Anne's presence at court seriously.[148] The Catholic Queen, known for darker and more conservative dress, doubled her wardrobe allowance during the rise of Anne Boleyn between 1527 and 1528.[149] The royal wardrobe now included more color but the queen never adapted the French cuts that are now famously associated with Boleyn.[150] Not only was it important to the queen to assert her position and appear more rich and regal but, in many ways, the change was likely a last effort to encourage her husband Henry back to the marriage bed in her waning child-bearing years.

Boleyn's affinity for and insistence upon wearing the French style of hoods and necklines only showed the growing political influence of herself and her family during this period. Supporting a French way of dress directly challenged the more pious style of the Spanish queen. In fact, as early as 1519, Henry VIII had turned his fashion eye to the French court and hired John de Paris, a Frenchman, as his personal tailor, further encouraging the English court's rivalry with France.[151] Adding salt to the wound, Boleyn had the words "*Ainsi sera, groigne qui groigne"* embroidered into her household livery. This is translated to "This is how it is going to be, however much people grumble."[152]

Furthermore in 1531, Katharine was still personally making shirts for her husband by hand and each piece included a 'red Spanish stitch.'[153] Since shirts are considered the most intimate piece of clothing because they sit next to the skin, Boleyn saw this act as the final straw in the public battle of clothing. Katharine was asked to stop making the

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[148] Following Henry VIII's declaration that he was questioning the validity of his marriage to Katharine in June 1527.
[149] Borman, 148.
[150] Ibid., 148.
[151] Ibid., 106.
[152] Ives, *Anne Boleyn,* 173-5; Borman, 148.
[153] Hayward and Ward (eds), *The Inventory of King Henry VIII, Vol. II,* 178.

shirts and shortly thereafter she was banished from court altogether. Boleyn then chose to commission various shirt-makers from that point forward, as indicated by the Privy Purse Expenditures.[154]

Following the execution of Boleyn in 1536, the French style of fashion, which she favored, was all but forbidden and the new queen, Jane Seymour, reintroduced a decidedly more English fashion. Dresses with slightly more conservative cuts and higher necklines became the norm, while the French hood was replaced with the English gable. English materials were used more frequently, and the patterns and designs in fabric and embroidery became more naturalistic—true to traditional English fashions.[155]

The drama of Tudor court fashion added the element of visibility to fame and fortune in a way that had not been utilized previously. The changing styles indicated a constant shift in loyalties between Spain and France and frequently cycled both of those fashions out in favor of English styles, indicating a period of more nationalistic views. Exemptions of women from sumptuary laws made it far more glamorous to live at court and provided a stage upon which some of the most famous (or infamous) rivalries played out. The evolution of sumptuary laws continued to be used by Henry VIII's children who each spent time on the throne. Specifically, Elizabeth I made some of the most dramatic sumptuary laws during her reign and finally included women—far from surprising since this was the group she needed to most outshine.[156]

In short, elite women in England and France were finding their place in the public sphere and they were finally finding their voices openly with gifts and letters and with

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[154] Nicolas, N. H. ed. (1827), *The Privy Purse Expenses of Henry VIII*, (London: W. Pickering).
[155] Borman, 167.
[156] Elizabeth I limited the colors of her ladies at court to black and white for a time, making her stand out in radiant colors, embroideries, and fabrics.

subtle passivity in fashion. The years of Henrician reign afforded increased and varied opportunities for women to exercise agency, and the most likely reason for this is that the nation was finally experiencing a period of peace. No longer were women keeping the home while their husbands, fathers, and sons were away and the "survival" mentality of the Wars of the Roses was finally past. In peacetime, women quickly found new and affective ways to advocate for their families and became integral members noble families.

Chapter 4: Mary Boleyn: A Case Study

This chapter is a focused study of Mary Boleyn beginning with the years leading up to her royal affair, years which shaped her personal beliefs and behavior, and continuing through the years she spent as a royal mistress to Henry VIII, which expedited her family's rise to power at court. Her later life is largely undocumented and cannot be discussed in as much depth; however, during the years after the Boleyn family fell out of favor with the king, history shows Boleyn's children enjoyed an undeniable continuation of privilege. This observation strongly suggests that Mary's place at court was far more influential than that of a pawn for her father or a placeholder for her sister, Anne. When combined, the context of power and hierarchy at mid-Tudor court outlined in chapter one and the context of gender expectations and development discussed in chapter two, the reader is thus prepared to trace the life events and elevated position of Mary Boleyn with the logical foundation necessary for historical analyses and suppositions.

Mary's term as royal mistress will be analyzed using documents from the National Archives in London, including *Letters and State Papers*, accounts of royal finances and gift giving practices, accounts from *The Great Wardrobe*, the personal

letters of the men and women who surrounded Mary Boleyn at court, and finally, the only surviving letter written by Mary, herself. All of these sources adequately demonstrate the position of both Mary and her family by providing the context of court life in terms of politics, religion, and gender at this time. This chapter will follow Mary Boleyn and the peripheral movement of her father, sister, and husbands from 1515 through 1536. This chapter will also briefly address the lives of her children who lived during the reigns of both Queen Mary I and Queen Elizabeth I and received continuous royal favor throughout their lives.

Historians generally write off Mary's affair with Henry VIII as conjecture based on circumstantial evidence.[157] But it is possible to identify the financial and social benefits the Boleyns received as a result of her royal affair. Historians such as Alison Weir and Josephine Wilkinson have laid foundational work for the study and interpretation of Mary Boleyn's life, but largely ignore any indications that Mary was an active player in Tudor politics. Eric Ives, biographer of Anne Boleyn, famously wrote, "what is known about Mary Boleyn could be fit onto a postcard with room to spare." He is not wrong in regards to documents written by or to Mary. However, it is possible to understand Mary Boleyn's influence, as both a woman and a royal mistress, by putting together the events that are known about her life and analyzing the shifting attitudes at court even during her undocumented years.

Mary's position as a royal mistress is believed to have spanned from March 1522-1525 and can be characterized as both influential and productive. Though the dates are

[157] It is widely acknowledged that Mary Boleyn was also a royal mistress to King Francis I of France prior to her affair with Henry VIII. Unfortunately, the details of that affair are unclear and the evidence is purely circumstantial. Regardless, Weir and Wilkinson agree that the affair has a place in Mary's biographical discussion.

not explicitly confirmed by primary sources, as this chapter will show, Mary's increased involvement in court revels and the continual expansion of her family through childbirth, which was frequently met with royal grants, these three years are the most likely period of her affair. Her father and husband both received grants of land and income during those years that were far more frequent and lucrative than in subsequent years. While Mary Boleyn never received monetary gifts, the *State Papers* indicate that Henry VIII bestowed his favors upon her husband instead. Coupled with the rise of court factions, which most often saw the Boleyns displacing royal advisors who opposed them, it is clear that Mary's role was more significant than that of a subdued royal mistress. Rather, she was the ultimate distraction while her family positioned themselves politically for the subsequent decade of Boleyn power.

One way Mary Boleyn wielded influence during mid-Tudor reign is through religious reform. It is one supposition that reformist ideals were introduced to Henry VIII much earlier than previously believed. Historians have frequently attributed Henry VIII's religious reform and dramatic break from Catholic Rome with his second wife, Anne Boleyn, who became queen in 1530; however, Mary Boleyn was at court and holding the king's ear as early as 1522. The Boleyn agenda likely originated as an effort to sway the king and his court towards reform. Considering there was no previous precedent, it is not a reasonable belief that the early moves for power by the Boleyns were part of a larger plot to overthrow Queen Katharine of Aragon. Additionally, the willingness of both Mary and Anne to become mistresses is a matter of historical disagreement suggesting that even becoming a royal mistress may not have been the family's ideal method of facilitating change. Regardless of the original intentions of the Boleyns, they were able to

promote reformed thinking at mid-Tudor court and they certainly perpetuated those ideas from both personal and political platforms.

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Mary's preparation to become a social and political influencer began in 1514, the year she became a lady-in-waiting and began her life at royal court in France in the service of Princess Mary Tudor. Mary traveled with a royal entourage to France to serve the princess permanently as a lady-in-waiting and to assist with the princess's wedding to the French king, Louis XII. While historians mostly accept this part of Mary's life, there are a few voices of dissent for even this first recorded historical event in Mary's life. The records of the royal entourage indicate that the trip from England to France included one "M. Boleyne" and the use of only a first initial has caused some concern in interpreting this primary source.[158] Because Anne Boleyn also served at French court during this time period, it has been suggested that the "M" refers to Anne rather than Mary and is an abbreviation of the word "Mademoiselle." However, research proves this to be an incomplete interpretation of this primary source. In cross referencing this event in English records with French records, an account of payments to a "Marie Boulonne" is recorded.[159]

Additionally, while Anne did travel to France to serve Queen Mary Tudor, she traveled from her position at Austrian court where she served Queen Margaret of Savoy. Anne's father, Thomas Boleyn, had served briefly as an ambassador to Austria and made quick friends with the queen, which allowed him to secure a position for Anne as early as 1513. It would not have made sense for Anne to travel from Austria to England and back

[158] Weir, 1227.
[159] Ibid., 6064. This spelling is the French spelling of Boleyn. The name also appears as Bullen and Bullain in primary sources.

to France, as this is a trip that would have taken weeks to complete. While Anne was expected to participate in the wedding events of 1514, payment records indicate she did not arrive in France until early 1515, well after the wedding.[160] The initial "M" listed together with the logistics of travel, and the cross-referenced accounts would indicate that on this particular list, the "M" stands for "Mary."

What can be known about Mary Boleyn and her early education in France comes from considering French court culture. The book *Lessons for My Daughter* was widely distributed and used as a handbook for all ladies-in-waiting at French Court. Even though historians cannot prove the duration of Mary Boleyn's time spent in France, her position at court would have required her to read and follow the lessons and tools laid out in its pages.[161] Outside of reading, writing, and practicing virtue, a teenage Mary Boleyn was developing her own thoughts and beliefs. One of the ways she learned about the world was through observation of the powerful women she worked for. The court culture in which Mary Boleyn lived, allowed women to wield influence and use agency to advocate for their families, religious reform, even to marry for love.

Employed as a lady-in-waiting, Mary Boleyn would have been present within Queen Mary Tudor's household at the time of her royal elopement with Charles Brandon in France. While it cannot be proven that Boleyn was a witness to the wedding, she would have observed her mistress's display of female agency with some fear considering it was possible to charge the queen's household with treason as well. The elopement ended without any charges and the king openly welcomed his sister and brother-in-law

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[160] Ibid., 6066-6067.

[161] Mary was at French court for at least six months serving Mary Tudor, but it is my belief that she remained in France for up to four years (1515-1519) although I do not believe she lived at court for the duration of those years.

back to England. This event is significant to Mary Boleyn and her observation of societal norms based on rank and status within the royal family, in particular.

In her later life, Mary Boleyn chose to also elope with her second husband, a man well below her social station. This was a decision that incurred the ire of Henry VIII as well, but she and her husband were eventually granted pardon. It would be reasonable to consider that Mary's early experiences serving the Dowager Queen in 1515 shaped her understanding of how women at court could exercise agency, granted they stood in a position of power. This event was also Mary's first experience with the possibility of being implicated in the crimes of a queen she served. Perhaps this encounter prepared her for the later experience of being considered an accessory to the crimes of her sister, Anne.

Mary's father, Thomas Boleyn, was a long-time ambassador to France and would have been familiar with the subtle changes in religion and education that developed within the French royal family. He placed both of his daughters in prominent positions serving Queen Claude and, likely, Margaret de Angoulême. He was successful in elevating his family through these means because by the time records indicate that Mary Boleyn returned to English court in 1519, she was valued as a lady-in-waiting to royal women both in France and England, while her father had become an invaluable diplomat representing the interests of both Henry VIII and King Francis I.[162] Although there is no concrete evidence to show that Mary remained in France following the brief reign of Queen Mary Tudor, historian Alison Weir posits that Mary's unaccounted for years 1515-1519 were spent in France. The records of French court and payments to ladies-in-

[162] The rivalry between Henry VIII and Francis I is legendary and was rooted in the fact that Henry VIII believed he was the rightful king of France. His claim spurred social and diplomatic rivalries that continued for decades.

waiting are incomplete and have gaps, in some places, of several years at a time. This makes it difficult to identify which queen or noble woman Mary served although it is supposed to have been Queen Claude based on Mary's history of royal service to the previous queen. Additionally, Weir suggests that Mary may have spent time living with a noble family in a town called Brie-sus-Forges following her rumored affair with Francis I and just before her return to England in late 1519.[163]

Only a few short months after the expulsion of the minions in May 1519, Mary Boleyn was present at Tudor court and her future husband, William Carey, received a position elevation into the privy chamber. Recent biographers of Mary Boleyn such as Alison Weir and Josephine Wilkinson seem unsure of the reasoning behind Mary's reappearance at English court at this time; however, there are several explanations that can be offered for the move.

The first theory about Mary's removal from France is that the expulsion of the minions in 1519 made Thomas Boleyn realize that Henry VIII was souring on the temporary peace between France and England. As an Englishman working in France, the biggest show of solidarity with his king would have been to remove his eldest daughter from French court and bring her home to marry an English nobleman. The second explanation is that an outbreak of plague moved through France in 1519 and, out of concern for his children, Thomas Boleyn may have removed Mary from court as a measure of protection. This does not, however, explain why his other daughter, Anne, was allowed to remain in France. Therefore, this theory is weak at best.

The third and final explanation for Mary's return to England in 1519 is one of a more scandalous nature. Although the exact dates are not known, it is widely accepted that

[163] Weir, 1813-1830.

Mary Boleyn had engaged in a brief affair with King Francis I. The affair was very short and very private and is only mentioned explicitly in one primary source written by Rodolfo Pio, the Bishop of Faenza, who was the Pope's official representative in France from 1535-1537. These years were the very height of Europe's consternation over Henry VIII's break from Rome. In 1536, Pio attempted to vilify the Protestant Boleyn family and create a scandal over Anne Boleyn's claim to be the Queen of England. [164] In a letter written by Pio, he claims to be relaying the words of Francis I and then defames Anne and reveals the affair with Mary:

> "Francis said also that they are committing more follies than ever in England, and are saying and printing all the ill they can against the Pope and the Church; 'that woman' pretended to have miscarried of a son, not being really with child, and, to keep up the deceit, would allow no one to attend on her but her sister, whom the French King knew here in France '*per una grandissima ribalda et infame sopre tutte,*" (a very great whore and infamous above all).[165]

In the analysis of this document, it must be stressed that Pio was extremely biased against the Boleyn family and the claims were an attempt to discourage Henry VIII from his divorce of Catholic Katharine of Aragon and subsequent marriage to Protestant Anne Boleyn.[166] A consideration of the wording in this document can be complex, however, it is likely that the Cardinal wrote "…her sister, whom the French King knew here in France" and used the word "knew" in the biblical sense.[167]

The very specific laws in regards to incest during this period indicate that any carnal knowledge of a woman's immediate family constituted incest. It would be on these

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[164] Weir, 67.
[165] Rodolfo Pio, Letter to Prothonotary Ambrogio on the 10th March 1536, *Letters and Papers*, x.450. Pio's disdain for the Boleyns is clear by his refusal to write about them by name. Additionally, he suggests that Anne faked a pregnancy and miscarriage for attention but historians agree that she *was* actually pregnant and miscarried a son.
[166] Saxton, 102.
[167] Weir, 1490.

grounds that Pio slandered Mary Boleyn and attempted to vilify Henry VIII's second marriage to Anne. In determining the validity of Pio's claims, we must go even further than the observation that Pio's letter was religious or political propaganda. A man such as Pio would have been close to King Francis I and privy to the gossip both at French court and in Rome. Therefore, historians must take his letter seriously as a revelation of Mary's involvement with the French king. However, the claim that she was "infamous above all" is certainly hyperbole as only one other document addresses the possibility of this affair and, based on primary sources, it was not evidently discussed at the time of its occurrence. This particular phrase has also been interpreted by Weir as another indicator that Francis I is referring to an intimate knowledge of Mary because Pio specifically mentions the French king as opposed to referencing the general thoughts of others at court.[168] Although we know the influx of ladies at French court led to a licentious court culture as outlined in chapter two, no further have been made to suggest Mary conducted other affairs in France. As far as documentation can suggest, Mary Boleyn's only affair in France was with Francois I and Pio's claims about her character and reputation are reasonable but difficult to prove considering his bias.

Despite the claims of Mary's affair, the reasons behind her return to England are still unclear. It is impossible to say whether Thomas Boleyn removed her in response to her actions or in an effort to stop rumors because the exact dates of the affair are not known. Based on Mary's age, an affair in 1518 or 1519 would make the most sense, as she would have been 18 or 19. Regardless, the move back to England was timely for Mary and her father both diplomatically and in regards to her reputation. It was also ideal timing for Mary to make an advantageous marriage.

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[168] Ibid., 1490.

Thomas Boleyn brought his eldest daughter, Mary, home from her position in the French court and placed her as a lady-in-waiting as early as October of 1519 (if not earlier) to Dowager Queen Mary Tudor in an effort to stay relevant in a tricky political chess game.[169] Thomas Boleyn then arranged a marriage between his daughter and William Carey, the king's cousin, who had been elevated to the privy chamber some time between November 1519 and February 1520 in response to the new positions that became vacant as a result of the expulsion.[170] This marriage is further indication that the Boleyns wanted to show diplomatic and political support of their king and understood, even in the early stages of this new privy chamber, that it would be a political victory for Mary Boleyn to marry into the establishment.

In 1520 Mary married William Carey and, in 1522, she appears in court records alongside her former mistress, the Dowager Queen Mary of France at English court. Many historians have supposed that Boleyn's reappearance at English court is in the employ of the English queen, Katharine of Aragon; however, there is no documentation that lists Mary Boleyn as a paid lady-in-waiting within the queen's household. Considering this detail, a much stronger supposition would be that Boleyn was actually at court as a lady-in-waiting in the service of her former mistress, now Dowager Queen, Mary Tudor who resided at Tudor court intermittently. Their shared French language skills and long history as Mistress and lady-in-waiting make their continued relationship likely. Mary Boleyn's early life and development had fostered relationships with close members of Henry VIII's family and Privy Chamber. All of these factors culminated in

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[169] *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII, vol. III: 1519 Aug 15-1520 Apr 15,* Fol. 85-87, 491.

[170] Found in *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII, vol. III: 1519 Aug 15-1520 Apr 15,* Fol. 117-118, 528.

1522 when Mary Boleyn was invited to participate in Henry VIII's favorite pastime, court revels.

Court Revels

The increased emphasis of revels under Henry VIII's reign trickled into court politics where participation in revels became an important tool for families and individuals to assert their position at court and in royal favor. For women especially, participation must be analyzed with the knowledge that Henry VIII frequently included and featured his mistresses in court entertainment. Mary Boleyn is no exception and the only recorded appearance she made in a court entertainment was as the featured women in the pageant *Chateau Vert*. This pageant was performed at York Palace, the home of Cardinal Wolsey, Henry VIII's main advisor, on March 4, 1522. The revel included over a dozen members of noble and high-ranking men and women at court. C*hateau Vert* was the last in a series of three days of revels and jousts to impress Spanish ambassadors who had traveled to England to facilitate the Anglo-Imperial Treaty of 1522. In this treaty, among other things, Henry VIII was negotiating a marriage between his daughter, Princess Mary, and the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. However, Henry VIII was not the only man at court attempting to impress the Spanish. In fact, it was Henry VIII's closest advisor, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, who was using this event to forge his own relationship with the Spanish ambassadors.

Previously, Cardinal Wolsey had been closely aligned with the French, who had promised to back his efforts to become Pope upon the death of Pope Leo X.[171] However,

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[171] Sydney Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 178.

in 1522, there is a marked shift in Wolsey's loyalties, indicated by his willingness to host the pageant and subsequent banquet at his residence. Historian Sydney Anglo deduces that once Wolsey realized Henry VIII would in fact align himself with Spain's Charles V, he altered his plan of action and secured Spanish support in his bid to become Pope. This turn of events reveals further insight into the underlying political purpose of the pageant.

In his account of the pageant, contemporary biographer Edward Hall lists the noble male participants in *Chateau Vert* as Henry VIII, Charles Brandon, Nicholas Carewe, Anthony Kingston, Anthoney Knevet, Nicholas Darrel, Anthony Browne, and the Earl of Devonshire. [172] In contradiction to previous historians' claims that Hall lists the complete noble cast, Hall's account does not, in fact, list the noble women who participated in *Chateau Vert.* The women are, however, mention by the Master of Revels, Richard Gibson, who kept a record in the accounts of the office of the *Great Wardrobe,* which details the costumes made for the following women: Mary Tudor Dowager Queen of France, the Countess of Devonshire, Jane Parker, Mistress Browne, Mistress Danet, Mistress Karre (Mary Boleyn Carey), the newly arrived Anne Boleyn, and an unnamed lady of the court. [173] This list includes an entry for the Children of the Chapel as well, but those actors were most likely men.

Hall describes the set pieces and decorations as depicting a love story in which a

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[172] Hall, 630-31. Edward Hall was employed by Henry VIII to not only write the history of previous kings, but to also attend court events and record their extravagance or the important men and women in attendance. The Tudor monarchs were all obsessed with making large displays of wealth in an effort to appear more legitimate as rulers. Edward Hall's accounts are likely geared towards shows of wealth and strength of networks between Henry VIII and his subjects.

[173] Revels 1522, in Revels: Miscellaneous 1519, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, Volume 3, 1519-1523, 1548-1559. Every complete list of noble participants has listed women and men and cited Edward Hall. However, the names of ladies comes from a completely different primary source which leads me to believe that this incorrect citation was made once and then simply copied into other secondary works. Neither Mistress Browne nor Mistress Danet are referred to with their first names, however it is generally supposed that both women were named Elizabeth.

lady has rejected the love of a man.

> His courser was…embroidered with. L. L. L. of Golde, and vnder the letters a harte of a manne wounded, and greate rolles of golde with blacke letters, in whiche was written, *mon nauera*, put together it is, *ellmon ceur a nauera*, **she hath wounded my harte**...[174]

The translation reads:

> His courser was…embroidered with. L. L. L. of Gold, and under the letters a heart of a man wounded, and great rolls of gold with black letters, in which was written, *mon nauera*, put together it is, *ellmon ceur a nauera*, **she hath wounded my heart**...

The costumes, banners, and set pieces of this production are surprisingly intimate and seem almost unbefitting thematically for such a public court performance on such a political occasion, which usually featured more elements of tradition and ceremony.[175] Although allegorical themes were common in Tudor court, the storyline of this particular pageant is neither based on any specific biblical stories nor is it considered as a recycled version of productions performed at earlier court events. Although the characters are based on biblical virtues, it is my conclusion that this pageant was written to stand alone and, based on the costumes and set pieces, to explicitly portray the theme of unrequited love.

The plotline of the pageant as described by Hall involves eight noble ladies who portray the Virtues *Beauty, Honor, Perseverance, Kindness, Constance, Bounty, Mercy, and Pity*. The Virtues were held captive in the pageant, which was built to resemble the exterior of a castle. Below the Virtues on a lower platform stood their captors, the Children of the Chapel dressed as *Danger, Disdain, Jealousy, Unkindness, Scorn, Malebouche [sic], and Strangeness*. Finally, the noble men appeared in disguise dressed

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[174] Richard Gibson, *Revels Accounts* E36/217, p. 1558-1559.
[175] Dillon, "Hall's Rhetoric of Performance," 12-14.

as *Ardent Desire, Amorous, Nobleness, Youth, Attendance, Loyalty, Pleasure, Gentleness,* and *Liberty* and proceed to save the Virtues from captivity by launching an assault of fruits on the castle, thus chasing away the Children of the Chapel. The pageant was concluded with a dance and a surprise reveal of identity.[176]

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Although Henry VIII most certainly participated in *Chateau Vert,* he did not appear as the lead character, "Ardent Desire," which is uncharacteristic of this king who loved attention and pomp. Instead, historian Marie Axton has argued that he appeared as "Loyalty."[177] The importance of Henry VIII playing this role would point to his efforts to impress the Spanish ambassadors by implementing the subliminal message that he was faithful to his then wife, Katharine of Aragon, the aunt of Emperor Charles V. Another major theory put forth by historians is that Henry VIII commissioned this pageant and its disguises in an attempt to win Mary Boleyn Carey as his mistress. If both of these theories are accurate, the character the King played, "Loyalty," was both political grandstanding and an attempt to discreetly win the affection of a woman.

This attention to discretion is in keeping with the pattern of secrecy Henry VIII kept around his affairs in the earlier years of his reign. In many ways, his insistence on secrecy up until 1525 is in direct contrast to his later, very public affection for Anne Boleyn who notoriously broke the rules and expectations of being a royal mistress. The evolution from Henry VIII's attention towards Mary to his later attention towards Anne is an indication that the pageant was not intended to focus on Anne as several historians have suggested. Instead, this display better supports the theory that the pageant was

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[176] Hall, 631.
[177] Marie Axton, "The Tudor Mask and Elizabethan Court Drama," in M. Axton and R. Williams, eds., *English Drama: Form and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 29-31.

performed to subtly engage Mary Boleyn Carey, who played the role of "Kindness." If the theory of Mary Boleyn being the object of the pageant and the King's affection is correct, then the theme of rejected or unrequited love can be interpreted as meaning Mary was not initially responsive to Henry VIII's advances.

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While the script, if there ever was one, no longer exists for the *Chateau Vert,* some of its music still remains in the archives. Although not officially attributed to the pageant, the song "Yow and I and Amyas"[178] survives in the papers of William Cornish (sometimes "Cornysh") who was the Master of the Children of the Chapel from 1509 to 1523. The song, composed by Cornish, has been linked to *Chateau Vert* based on the description of scenery included in the lyrics as well as the names of the featured characters, which are included in the storyline of the composition.[179]

Cornish's arrangement tells the story of a knight named "Desire" who has arrived at a castle to save a lady, "Pity." The lyrics include a line about the knight having to explain his arrival to "Strangeness" and being assured by "Kindness" that the lady "Pity" would escape with him. The piece is structured into two stanzas of the narrative followed by a repeated chorus where "Desire" implores "Pity" to escape with him into the "green wood." Here is an excerpt of the song:

> Yow and I and amyas
> Amyas and yow and I
> to the grene wode must we go Alas
> yow and I my lyff and amyas (repeated refrain)
>
> The knyght knokett at the castell gate.
> The lady meruelyd who was therat.

[178] A form of Latin, meaning "loved."
[179] Streitberger, 113. *Court Revels* 112-4 and *PRO* SP1/29 (ff. 228v-237r).

To call the porter he wold not blyn.
The lady said he shuld not com In.

The portres was a lady bryght.
Strangenes that lady hyght.

She asked hym what was his name.
He said desyre yor man madame.

She said desyre what do ye here.
He said Madame as yor prisoner

He was cownselled to breffe a byll.
And shew my lady hys oune wyll.

Kyndnes said she wold yt bere.
and Pyte said she wold be ther.

Thus how thay dyd we can nott say.
we left them ther *and* went ower way.[180]

While this song may seem to be a quaint ditty or even a lucky peek into storytelling and court revels, its value runs much deeper. Only two previous historians have mentioned this song but neither took the opportunity to analyze its immense significance.[181] Beyond offering a rare look into court drama, the song represents a pivotal moment in Mary Boleyn's life in that this is an event that makes it easier for historians to identify the true start of her affair with Henry VIII. The first hint at Mary Boleyn Carey's prominent placement in this particular pageant comes from analyzing the simple, but revealing storytelling. Of the twelve noblemen and women who represented virtues, the song only mentioned four by name and made those roles active: Desire,

[180] This song can be heard at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVfeZYPUeN8
[181] For example, Streitberger.

Strangeness, Kindness, and Pity. Of those four, one was a male (Desire) and one was part of the Children of the Chapel (Strangeness), leaving only two featured roles for the noble women of court. Mary Boleyn Carey appeared before the court and played the role of "Kindness." There is no lyrical nod at all to Anne Boleyn or her role "Perseverance," further disproving the theory that Anne Boleyn was of importance at this time.

Secondly, this song tells a story from start to finish, leading to the conclusion that there were no subsequent songs for this pageant; its story is complete. With this in mind, it is significant that Mary be given a featured role, an honor that was not given to the king's sister and fellow participant, Dowager Queen Mary Tudor. While the Boleyns had spent almost a decade working to increase their power and influence at court, this is the very moment that they stepped into the wings while Mary diverted everyone's gaze and accepted the spotlight.

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In efforts to explore the theory that Mary Boleyn was not initially receptive to the king's advances, the very clear themes of unrequited love in *The Chateau Vert* have been discussed multiple times over. However, there are two unrelated documents, which indicate Henry VIII's pursuit of Mary Boleyn was deemed less than honorable or at the least that she was not initially receptive to the idea. Her possible hesitation to comply with her king's affections is immortalized in a treatise written by Cardinal Reginald Pole in 1538.[182] This Cardinal, like Rodolfo Pio in France, would have had strong feelings about Henry VIII's break from Rome; therefore, this document must be considered

[182] From 1538-1540 there was an influx in written materials that worked to improve the posthumous perception of Anne Boleyn and this letter is an indication that Mary Boleyn's reputation was a part of that revisionist attempt. This is a fascinating aspect of memory history that currently is under represented in the Boleyn story and will be discussed further in the Epilogue of this thesis.

carefully, with the knowledge of political bias or religiously fueled ulterior motives. Cardinal Pole wrote very specifically that Henry the VIII had "violated" Mary and even kept her as his concubine. Historian Alison Weir gives an excellent history of the word "violate" and its evolution of meaning over time concluding that, by the mid-fifteenth century, the word certainly meant physical ravishment or rape, a meaning that lasted until the late sixteenth century and beyond.[183] Unfortunately, this was not the first such accusation against the king, giving reason to question Henry's character and Mary's participation in the affair. Documented from 1537, the year before Cardinal Pole's accusations, there are state papers, which indicate that a peasant man brought grievances against King Henry VIII for stealing away his wife and keeping her captive until he was bored with her.[184]

Ultimately, the very existence of these inflammatory documents is remarkable but both should be dismissed from the discourse of Mary Boleyn's story. In regards to Henry VIII's affairs, he often chose women below his social station and patterns within his known affairs prove it was extremely unlikely that he had an affair with a common woman, much less a peasant. A king with such a need to prove himself and elevate his public perception would never have risked his image for a peasant. Henry's country home, often referred to as "Jericho," was supposed by many to be something of a harem. This theory has also never been proven, nor would its existence indicate the presence of peasant women being held against their will. The negative characterization of Henry is also in extreme conflict with what we know about his patience with Mary's sister, Anne

[183] Weir, 114.
[184] Ibid., 115.

Boleyn, who was able to convince Henry to wait almost six years before she gave in to him – without dramatic incident.[185]

Without any other primary sources that discuss Mary's hesitation or Henry's misconduct, this is unfortunately not a facet that has scholarly agreement. Regardless, it is most reasonable to believe that men with a political or religious agenda who were determined to undermine their protestant movement wrote these letters to appeal to papal supporters while questioning the moral integrity of non-papists and perpetuating ideas of witchcraft and sin. Whatever the truth is about the beginning of this relationship, by 1522 the affair had begun and, to the delight of the Boleyn family, the social climbing and scheming would soon pay off.

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Only one year after the supposed start of Mary Boleyn Carey's affair with Henry VIII, Mary realized she was pregnant. For royal mistresses, this development was a triumph and a guarantee for a financially secure future. Surely if Bessie Blount and her son, Henry Fitzroy, were any indication, Mary would have believed this pregnancy could change her life. As a married woman, Mary's pregnancy did not cause much gossip at court and there are no documented rebukes of her or the king amidst this new development. The men of the Boleyn family soon discovered that they would be rewarded for their silent compliance with the affair – fulfilling their hopes of advancement in court.

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[185] Elizabeth Norton, *The Boleyn Women: The Tudor Femmes Fatales Who Changed English History*, (London, United Kingdom: Amberley Publishing, 2014), 105.

At the start of the affair in 1522, William Carey was appointed the keeper of the King's wardrobe. In addition, he was granted manor lands on the estate of New Hall in Essex and was named as the bailiff of three other estates, also in Essex.[186] Mary Boleyn Carey's pregnancy in 1523 brought William two more manors over which he was chief steward, and he began receiving an annual annuity from the Crown.[187]Similarly, Thomas Boleyn profited from Mary's affair and subsequent pregnancy. Following the announcement of Mary's pregnancy in 1523, Thomas Boleyn was appointed a Knight of the Garter and became henceforth known as Sir Thomas Boleyn.[188] Not only was Sir Thomas correct in assuming that William Carey was an ambitious son-in-law who would climb the social ladder at court, but Sir Thomas was also redeemed in his belief that Mary would bring him power and prestige at English court.

In June of 1524, Mary Boleyn Carey gave birth to a daughter, Catherine Carey. King Henry never officially acknowledged the child, but the appointments and favors bestowed upon Mary's father and husband show that Henry was possibly rewarding their compliance with his affair as well as creating a stable financial life to care for his daughter. To avoid speculation, Henry never gave any gifts to Mary directly and there is no evidence that has been uncovered to suggest that Mary Boleyn abstained from being intimate with her husband at this time. Despite that lack of written evidence, there are multiple instances of circumstantial favors from the king, which suggest that Catherine Carey was the illegitimate daughter of Henry VIII.

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[186] Wilkinson, 65.
[187] Ibid., 66.
[188] Ibid., 67.

Lady Catherine Carey Knollys[189]

Queen Elizabeth I[190]

Catherine Carey was appointed as a maid of honour to Henry VIII's fourth wife, Anne of Cleves in 1539, at the age of 15. Henry, who famously executed his second wife, Anne Boleyn, would have had no reason to bestow favor or court positions on his "niece" from a disgraced family unless there was a very real possibility that Catherine was his child. Furthermore, Catherine Carey was granted permission to marry to Francis Knollys in 1540. Knollys was soon after given the title "Sir" Knollys and was granted, by an Act of Parliament, the position of Gentleman Pensioner as well as the manor house of Rotherfield.[191] Finally, upon Catherine Carey Knollys' death in 1568, her cousin or possible half-sister, Queen Elizabeth I, paid for Catherine's funeral, which has been described as "opulent." Fueling the discussion of royal paternity, Catherine's funeral

[189] Steven van der Meulan, *Portrait of a Pregnant Lady*, probably Lady Catherine Carey Knollys (n.p., 1562), Oil on Canvas.
[190] Steven van der Meulan, *Elizabeth I*, (n.p., 1563), Oil on Canvas.
[191] Hoskins, 348.

documents were first discovered amongst the burial records of monarchs such as Henry III, William III, Queen Anne, and Queen Caroline.[192] Catherine Carey Knollys was the only funeral document found in this collection belonging to a non-monarch.[193]

Mary's affair continued after the birth of Catherine Carey in 1524 and she became pregnant once again, giving birth to a son, Henry Carey, in March of 1526. In Tudor England, it was common practice to end any intimacy with a woman who was pregnant to ensure the safety of the unborn child. For this reason, most historians agree that this second pregnancy ended the affair of Henry VIII and Mary Boleyn Carey in 1525. The king's separation from Bessie Blount took place under similar circumstances and timing. Henry Carey's paternity is not as easily identified or agreed upon through documents, as is Catherine Carey's paternity. Although Mary became pregnant during 1525 when her affair is assumed to have been active, it is not as frequently suggested that Henry VIII was the father of Henry Carey. Although William Carey and Thomas Boleyn received new annuities and rewards of land in 1526, the rewards were granted prior to Henry Carey's birth. The timing makes clear that at the time of the grants, it was still unknown whether Mary Boleyn Carey would have a son or a daughter, and therefore the grants were probably given as a reward for loyalty and good service to the Crown. Like Catherine Carey, Henry Carey was given an appointment at court although his exact position is not identified as specifically as Catherine's and he did not appear at court until 1545, nearly six years after his sister.[194]

[192] Ibid., 348.
[193] Ibid., 348.
[194] Ibid., 349.

In 1528, William Carey died suddenly of the sweating sickness, leaving Mary Boleyn Carey with no income and no home in which to live.[195] Carey's lands and annual income that had been granted to him by Henry VIII were returned to the crown. Keeping in mind that Mary was never granted any lands, money, or positions of her own, the royal gifts belonged solely to her husband and, following his death, she was left without any means. As was customary at the time, King Henry VIII gave guardianship of Mary's son to her closest and most stable relative, then royal mistress, Anne Boleyn.[196] As Queen Anne's ward, Henry Carey was fed, clothed, and well educated, effectively releasing Mary Boleyn Carey from her financial obligations to raise a son.[197] This turn of events may offer explanation as to why Henry Carey appeared at court later than his sister. As a royal ward, Henry Carey likely lived with and received an extended education alongside his cousin, the future Queen Elizabeth I.

In adulthood, Henry Carey was granted the title Baron Hunsdon by King Henry VIII. Since Hunsdon is a castle in which Henry VIII had his own children educated, it could imply that Henry Carey was also in residence at Hunsdon as a child.[198] Queen Elizabeth I shared a close and affectionate relationship with Henry Lord Hunsdon and paid for his burial, which was in a royal style similar to his sister, Catherine Carey Knollys. Queen Elizabeth I had a magnificent tomb built for Henry Lord Hunsdon in Westminster Abbey alluding to the fact that he may have been her half-brother.[199] With the exception of genealogist and historian, Anthony Hoskins, who argues vehemently that Mary Boleyn Carey's children were both descendants of King Henry VIII, there is no definitive ruling,

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[195] Norton, *The Boleyn Women*, 140.
[196] Warnicke, 82. For the wardship, *Letters and Papers,* V, 11.
[197] Ibid., 141.
[198] Hoskins, 349.
[199] Ibid., 349.

of course, due to the discretion of Mary's affair as previously discussed, and a lack of official acknowledgement for either of her children.

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It is documented that after the death of William Carey in 1528, Mary Boleyn petitioned her father, Sir Thomas, to allow her and Catherine to live with him at the family castle at Hever after her home was reallocated to the crown. Sir Thomas rejected her request, which suggests that he and his daughter not only fell out of touch, but also that there was tension between them. Sir Thomas' refusal to provide help for his daughter and granddaughter forced an extremely bold response from Mary. Knowing her elevated station in court and in the king's mind, Mary had the wherewithal to take her grievances against her father directly to Henry VIII. It is unknown whether or not Mary ever requested to keep her husband's lands but it is known that she defied her father and believed the King of England would support her. In the end, she was entirely correct in her assumption and the king ordered Sir Thomas to take in his widowed daughter and grandchild.[200] The original petition written by Mary does not survive but the king's response to her petition remains in tact and was part of a love letter written by Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn, in which he addresses the "extreame necessity" of Mary and declares that Sir Thomas "owes it to his honour" to aid his daughter. In addition to instructing Sir Thomas to take in his widowed daughter, Henry VIII also transferred a 100 pound annuity from William Carey's estate to Mary Boleyn.[201]

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[200] Weir, 181.
[201] Warnicke, 82. The annuity is discussed in *Letters and Papers,* V, 306. The full love letter is found in *Letters and Papers,* IV, 4410, *Harleian,* IX.

This petition is the first of two times Mary wrote a letter to petition Henry VIII for assistance in her personal life although she and her first husband, William Carey, both petitioned Anne Boleyn to ask for her support in the elevation of Eleanor Carey, William's sister and a nun, into the position of abbess at St. Edith's nunnery at Wilton. Anne's request for Eleanor's promotion to abbess is the only primary document that survives from that interaction between her and Mary.[202] The response to this request is, once again, found within one of Henry VIII's love letters, rather than an official state document. He rejected the Boleyn-Carey request on the grounds that Eleanor Carey had questionable morals and he could not, in good conscience, give her the abbess position.[203]

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The second marriage of Mary Boleyn was an elopement without royal permission. The marriage of Mary Boleyn to William Stafford in 1534 echoes the elopement of her friend and former mistress, the Dowager Queen Mary Tudor, to Charles Brandon almost twenty years earlier. The crown employed Mary's second husband, William Stafford, who was a humble soldier with no titles. Additionally, he was the second son of his family and never stood to inherit either money or land. The marriage was kept secret until Mary attended an event at court and appeared very obviously pregnant. Marriage without royal permission had the potential to be considered treason and, to add insult to injury, Anne Boleyn was having trouble conceiving a royal heir. Mary's bold appearance at court would have touched a more personal nerve for her sister and both Mary and William were asked to leave court indefinitely, although the order was later withdrawn. The only family member recorded as being unwilling to forgive the transgression is

[202] Ibid., 81. *Letters and Papers,* IV, 4197, 4408.
[203] Ibid., 81. *State Papers,* I, pp. 314-15; *Letters ad Papers,* IV, 4477, *Harleian,* XIII.

Mary's father, Thomas. Perhaps because of the family's royal affiliation in 1534, Thomas had hoped to arrange a marriage between Mary and another nobleman or lesser royal. He certainly would have resented that she eloped and effectively removed herself as a player in his political chess game.

The only surviving document written by Mary Boleyn is a letter that she wrote to Henry VIII's then secretary, Thomas Cromwell, to petition for forgiveness after her elopement was discovered. The letter is formal and follows the traditional structure of letters written at this time,[204] but it is full of emotional words such as "bondage" and "liberty," which suggest that Mary had endured a period of suffering after her first husband's death and her subsequent impoverishment. This letter shows that she found a personal freedom in love and a second marriage. Also, at first glance, the letter seems to be asking for forgiveness or mercy for going against tradition and marrying without royal permission. However, by the end of the letter it becomes clear that Mary does not go so far as to apologize for her elopement, but rather she justifies the elopement in very personal, emotional terms. Finally, the recipient of the letter, Thomas Cromwell, is also significant. As the king's secretary, Cromwell had become extremely powerful in England and yet Mary believed that she had the right (and status) to send him a request for pardon. As detailed in chapter two, the very act of sending the letter indicates she also believed her request would be granted.

Master Secretary,

> After my poor recommendations, which is smally to be regarded of me, that am a poor banished creature, this shall be to desire you to be good to my poor husband and to me. I am sure that it is not unknown to you the high displeasure that both he and I have, both of the King's Highness and the Queen's Grace, by reason of our marriage without their knowledge, wherein we both do

[204] See Chapter 2 for a list of letter-writing elements.

> yield ourselves faulty, and acknowledge that we did not well to be so hasty nor so bold, without their knowledge. But one thing, good Master Secretary, consider: that he was young, and love overcame reason; and for my part, I saw so much honesty in him that I loved him as well as he did me; and was in bondage, and glad I was to be at liberty.[205]

Considering the strong rhetoric of this petition, the assumption that Mary was a pawn without agency or individual thought would be a poor interpretation. Mary's language in this document suggests that she knew exactly how to handle herself, how to ask for what she wanted, and shows that she considered herself a woman of status throughout the remainder of her life. This letter also demonstrates that Mary understood that, as an immediate family member of a monarch, she was required to ask for permission to marry; yet she made a conscious decision to contravene that tradition. Lack of documentation and perhaps the *over* discussed story of Anne Boleyn, makes it appear as though Mary played a lesser part in history. In actuality, she chose to live the remainder of her life as a liberated woman, unabashedly in love with her husband, and away from the storm of court life.

This primary source is key to a correct interpretation of the life of Mary Boleyn, in that it presents the voice of a strong, self-assured woman. There is hope that more documentation yet exists, maybe even under an unexpected surname or nickname considering her many marriages and her very shrouded time in the English court. Most certainly, this strongly worded letter is reflective of a life of ambition, of courage, and of self-determination all of which have an underlying theme of survival. On many occasions, history reveals that Mary Boleyn displayed agency and self-advocacy despite the threat of a ruined reputation and, ultimately, she avoided execution. She quite

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[205] Mary Boleyn, Letter to Sir Thomas Cromwell, England, 1534, *LP VII*, 1655.

possibly preserved the Tudor lineage. Clearly, Mary Boleyn was far from "unimportant" in the changing landscape of Tudor England. Rather, her documented history suggests she wielded influence to affect change in many respects.

The social and gendered expectations of upper-class women at court was not the stifled, proper existence frequently described in books and biographical histories. If anything, the inclusion of women in social negotiations reveals they directly contributed to their family's power. The first eight recorded years of Mary Boleyn's life (1514-1522) show her moving and working for numerous members of the royal family, observing diplomatic events, networking with the royal family, performing for an international court audience, and using her French sensibilities to intrigue an English court. The more information uncovered about Mary's early life before becoming a mistress, the more believable the theory is that she was willing and able to participate in her family's plans to gain power and rule factions.

Although her family and a majority of her peers never treated Mary Boleyn as an important political presence, or even as a successful mistress, Mary found ways to demonstrate that she was bold and strong, both characteristics that were reserved for the highest ranked and best-connected women of Tudor England. Her role in the royal court of England paved the way for Anne's success and rise to power and without her, the Boleyns may never have risen to the incredible level of influence they enjoyed—or at least not as quickly as they did. That influence allowed Sir Thomas Boleyn to place Anne in Henry VIII's social circles as soon as Mary's affair ended. Not only does her long-term affair give credence to paternity arguments stating that Mary gave birth to at least one of

Henry VIII's children, but also, she carved a path for Anne Boleyn's infamous claim to the throne and her even more infamous execution.

Epilogue

Protestant writer and university lecturer John Foxe (1516-1587) worked as a private tutor for the Howard family and, more specifically, Mary Howard Fitzroy, in the 1540s. Known for her protestant faith and active social involvement in the commissioning of artists and tutors who favored her beliefs, Mary Fitzroy found a lifelong friend and advocate in Foxe.[206] However, with the first wave of religious persecution under Queen Mary I, Foxe fled to France and took with him primary documents detailing the persecution of Protestant leaders and families in England.[207] Following the death of Queen Mary in 1558, and the ascension of Queen Elizabeth I that same year, Foxe returned to England with his now famous manuscript, *The Acts and Monuments of the Christian Church.*[208] His years of financial support from the Howard family and his years in exile resulted in a remarkable synthesis of the history of Protestantism in England. With Elizabeth I on the throne, Foxe expanded his manuscript to include the stories of more recently persecuted men and women of the "sincere religion,"[209] including executed queen, Anne Boleyn. The manuscript was published in 1563 and is an example of a primary source that explicitly identifies Boleyn as a practicing Protestant. The writing and publishing of this manuscript was an incredibly brave feat considering its address of the religious persecution of Anne and her family whose legacies were within living memory.

Although Foxe's attempt to redeem Anne Boleyn does not make specific mention of Mary Boleyn, the work does emphasize the religious agreement between the Boleyns,

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[206] Clark, 323.
[207] John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs: An Edition for the People,* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1911), x.
[208] This is the true title of Foxe's manuscript although it has become more commonly known as *The Book of Martyrs.*
[209] Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments of the Christian Church,* (London: Day, 1558), 319.

Henry VIII, and Elizabeth I, "in whose royal and flourishing regiment we have to behold, not so much the natural disposition of her mother's qualities, as the secret judgment of God in preserving and magnifying the fruit and offspring of that godly queen."[210]

Though some historians[211] have claimed that England did not truly have a Protestant queen until Catherine Parr (Henry VIII's sixth wife), Foxe's manuscript claims the Boleyns as not only Protestants, but also martyrs.[212] Despite this document's failure to specify Mary Boleyn, in hindsight it can be inferred that to redeem and claim Anne (and Elizabeth), is to redeem and claim the family, as a whole. Surely he would have specified if Anne was the only Boleyn deserving of such a posthumous honor and revisionist discussion of history. Refreshingly, Foxe does not attempt to identify the ways in which Anne Boleyn affected the country, either positively or negatively, rather he details her financial patronage, her support of religious leaders, and his perception of her character based on his own observations and the observations of her surviving family members, including his friend, Mary Howard Fitzroy.[213]

Similarly, this thesis has attempted to address the behaviors, religious leanings, and impact that can be traced throughout Mary Boleyn's years of advocacy and advancement at court. Understandably, Foxe's manuscript alone cannot shed light on Mary, but in combination with the primary sources used throughout this text as well as the insights gained from numerous secondary interpretations, the document can be used as further context. Additionally, it is a first step into the memory history of the Boleyns as it applies to literature, poetry, and songs from the latter half of the 1550s. This is a

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[210] Ibid., 321.
[211]
[212] Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, 319. Martyr as implied by the title of the book and inferred in his discussion of her execution.
[213] Clark, 321.

discussion for another day, perhaps, but it is indicative of yet another perspective for the Boleyn story.

Mary Boleyn never reached the social or political heights of her siblings or parents, yet she remains a topic of conversation and curiosity both within the historical field and, more recently, in pop culture and literature. Her very inclusion in the discourse, although limited, infers her involvement in the religious and political events of pre-Reformation Tudor court. Additionally, her ability to advocate for reform of her own volition and understanding is supported by her early influences and education.

Unlike the Howards whose true religious leanings are obscured by personal ambition and a family that did not have factional agreement, the Boleyns are consistently tied to religious leaders, politicians, and artists, who were Protestant. As evidenced in the title of Retha M. Warnicke's monograph *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn,* this family is also frequently described as a family that rose and fell in quick succession. However, this thesis has attempted to provide a far wider context for the social advancement of this family and, in some ways, refute the idea that the family ever truly "fell," their lasting favors being extended to Mary Boleyn and her children. Under the rule of Queen Elizabeth I, a new generation of Boleyn-Carey children found their own prominent roles at court while authors such as Foxe began to reframe the perception of the family for laypersons across the country.

While several primary sources cited in this thesis are popularly utilized in discussions about Henry VIII and his court, this thesis has taken several steps towards a deeper analysis in an effort to pin point key moments of Mary Boleyn's time as a royal mistress. For example, the use of the *Letters and State Papers* to identify Mary's return to

England, which is recorded in the expenses of a breakfast at court, all the way to the first concrete date associated with the start of Mary's affair with Henry VIII based on the performance and textual significance of *Chateau Vert.* In all the research conducted for this thesis, the song "Yow and I and Amyas" is only mentioned in two previous secondary sources and was never analyzed in either. The interpretation of the story, the main characters, and the audience in attendance are all employed in a new way, which truly adds to the credibility of Mary's role as royal mistress.

One Boleyn family member that has been admittedly underrepresented in this case study, is George Boleyn, the younger brother of Mary and Anne. His exclusion from this narrative is not because he is less influential or powerful. On the contrary, he was a privy chamber member and praised musician at court; however, this study was meant to focus on gendered experiences as related to Mary Boleyn. George never rose to the same positions as his father and he was executed along with Anne in May 1536. Combined with a lack of secondary sources about George, he simply did not factor in strongly enough for the subject of the case study. Perhaps he will be the next Boleyn to receive the posthumous corrective history.

The intention behind this study of Mary in particular was to present the idea that she may have been an early influencer of, certainly Henry VIII, and possibly ladies at court, in the shift towards reformed thought. An analysis of her early life in France and the women who employed her, her father's religious leanings, her strong self-advocacy in letters, and her support of at least one known religious leader, all suggest that her role at mid-Tudor court was far more politically active than royal mistresses who preceded

her.[214] Considering all of these factors, which are supported by primary source materials, it would be a miscalculation to believe Mary was not among the first voices of influence for reform for Henry and his court. The effects of her influence were two-fold. The first being that she and her family directly presented Henry VIII with a new framework for the advancement of his personal power. Secondly, Mary served as a precursor to Henry VIII's break with Rome, which, in turn, affected the general population of England.

Mary Boleyn was placed in a position of courtly influence, which she held for approximately three years, and her reputation as a royal favorite was one she was able to draw upon for the remainder of her life. While many women shared Mary's gendered experiences and learned skills, very few could claim the same success and longevity of influence. The combined effects of her education, reformed thought, and royal favor, facilitated the early rumblings of Reformation that permanently altered the political and religious trajectory of England. It is my deepest hope that this case study has shown that Mary Boleyn deserves more acknowledgment for her likely contributions to pre-Reformation England than she has previously received. As this study ends, it seems fitting to reiterate the emboldened words of this woman who seized early opportunities to exercise agency in the interests of herself and others, "[I] was in bondage, and glad I was to be at liberty."[215]

[214] Specifically Henry VIII's previous mistresses.
[215] Mary Boleyn, Letter to Sir Thomas Cromwell, England, 1534, *LP VII*, 1655.

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Appendix A

Court Spectacle Chart[216]

APPENDIX 1

Elements of performance	1 Funeral	2 Revels	4 Tournai	5 Pardon	6 Jousting	7 Arraignment
Places	Richmond, St George's Field, London Bridge, St Paul's, Westminster privy chamber, great chamber, hall, chapel	Parliament Chamber, Westminster	Tournai: Port Fountayne, church, market place	Westminster Hall	unspecified	Blackfriars Hall
Duration and Sequence	9 + 3 days (funeral proper)	1 evening	1 day (or part)	1 day (or part)	1 day	1 day (or part)
Date	9–11 May 1509 (funeral)	Shrove Sunday 1510	Sunday 2 October 1513	Thursday 22 May 1517	June 1517	28 May 1529
Named and ranked personnel	Bishop of Rochester, Sir Edward Howard, Garter King at Arms, Treasurer, Steward, Chamberlain, Treasurer and Controller of King's household, prelates, mourners, King's chapel, King's servants, mayor and aldermen, commoners	King, Queen, Essex, Wiltshire, Fitzwater, Edward Howard, Thomas Parr, Princess Mary, ambassadors, lords, ladies, gentlemen, torchbearers	King, Edward Guildford, William Fitzwilliam etc, henchmen (nobility), esquires, heralds, sergeants at arms, ladies, gentlewomen, other citizens	King, Cardinal, Norfolk, Suffolk etc, John Gelson, lords, council, mayor and aldermen, prisoners	King, Suffolk, Dorset, Essex, Surrey, Sir Edward Guildford, ambassadors, gentlemen, armourers, judges, heralds	King, Queen, D. Sampson, Cardinal of York, legates, bishops, proctors, Queen's Council, ladies, gentlewomen
Ceremonial order	Procession: chapel and prelates, King's servants, mourners; city religious added in front of King's chapel, mayor and aldermen, commoners	King, Queen, ladies, ambassadors, other nobles; Mask entry: King and Essex, Wiltshire and Fitzwater, Edward Howard and Thomas Parr; Queen and ladies take their places "in their degrees"	King, henchmen, heralds and sergeants at arms	Order of entry implied as above	Arrivals first of King and company, then of Suffolk and company	Legates' arrival
Numbers	9 mourners, 5 coursers, 6 lords, 3 masses	6 ladies, 2 ladies		400 men and 11 women	two bands of 13 men, 125 attendants on King, 506 spears	2 legates, 4 bishops
Costume, symbolic elements	black mourning dress, chariot hangings, costuming of King's image, display of arms	masking costumes of other nations: Turkish, Russian, Prussian, Moorish, Egyptian	"best apparell"	City liveries (best) shirts, halters	rich, matching apparel identifying each band, gold letters, letters C and M	see props

Figure 2. This is a table compiled by Dillon to show a series of theatrical performances and ceremonies along with participants, themes, and literary value.

[216] Chart created by Janette Dillon and can be found in its original form in Dillon, *Hall's Rhetoric,* 18-20.

APPENDIX 1 *Continued*

Elements of performance	1 Funeral	2 Revels	4 Tournai	5 Pardon	6 Jousting	7 Arraignment
Props and lighting	chariot, hearses, image of King, crown, orb and scepter, banners, pencels, cushions, long and short torches, tapers	swords (cimiteries), hatchets, chains, torches	"peces of warr" (axe, spear, etc), sword, canopy, staff torches	ropes, halters	lady's sleeve on King's helmet	"Crosses, Pillers, Axes, etc"
Entrances and exits; Beginning and ending; Rhythm of events	corpse brought out from privy chamber; setting out of chariot procession; entry into St. Paul's; mourners' departure; voidy; repose; last departure and feast	withdrawal and re-entry; move from one element to the next; departure to lodgings	entry into city; entry into church; move to lodging, re-entry to market place; final departure from city to camp	King comes to W. Hall; commands prisoners to be brought forth; entry of prisoners; taking down of gallows; prayers said for King	King comes to tiltyard end; event ends with banquet and "muche pastyme"	Summoning of King and Queen; arrival of the legates; Queen's departure
Scripted speech	Sermon; Herald's cry for King's soul; Herald's cry "Vive le roy . . ."		King's summoning of those to be made knights; Herald's proclamation to citizens	King's command; Cardinal's reprimand to city and prisoners; prisoners' cry for mercy; King's		Summoning of King and Queen; reading of legates' commission; summoning of King by name,

Figure 2 cont'd.

Appendix B

Most Frequent Factional Alliances

Foreign Politics	Reform	Catholic/Conservative	Crown Claimants
France: Cardinal Wolsey King Francis I Archbishop Cranmer Nicholas Carew George Neville Mary Tudor Brandon Family Boleyn Family Howard Family Seymour Family **Spain:** Katharine of Aragon Eustace Chapuys Emperor Charles V	Archbishop Cranmer Sir Thomas Howard Thomas Cromwell Queen Anne of Cleves Queen Catherine Parr Sir Henry Norris Sir Thomas Wyatt Sir Frances Weston Sir William Cecil Grey Family Brandon Family Boleyn Family Carey Family	Emperor Charles V Margaret Tudor Edward Stafford Catherine Howard Eustace Chapuys Stephen Gardiner Queen Mary Tudor (I) Thomas More Nicholas Carew George Neville Henry Courtenay De la Pole Family Seymour Family	Edward Stafford- 3rd Duke of Buckingham Richard de la Pole Lady Jane Grey, niece of Henry VIII, cousin to his children.

Figure 3. This table demonstrates the most frequent alliances and their common purpose. Factions were fluid and this table does not reflect changes that took place after 1536.