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The Politics of Public Relations: Concepts of Image, Reputation and Authority in Henry VIII's England

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THE POLITICS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS: CONCEPTS OF IMAGE, REPUTATION
AND AUTHORITY IN HENRY VIII'S ENGLAND

A Thesis

Submitted by the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of History

by
Lyndsi M. Lewis
B.A., Louisiana State University, 2012
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ABSTRACT

Henry VIII ruled England from 1509-1547, producing some of the most identifiable and enduring figures and events in English history. This was largely due to the king's skill at image manipulation and communication. This thesis focuses specifically on the period from 1509-1536, during which the whims of the king led to the rise and fall of two queens, the destruction of three ministers, and arguably the most significant religious and political controversies of the sixteenth century. It was the age of humanism, reformation, and the birth of modern political theory and practice. In the midst of this upheaval, the crown used primitive forms of public relations theory to justify the king's divorce from his first wife Catherine of Aragon in favor of his mistress, to break with Catholicism, and to establish supremacy of the newly created Church of England.

Henry would have five other wives throughout his reign, but none is more notorious than Anne Boleyn. She was at the heart of the conflict in this period. This thesis examines the rise and fall of Queen Anne as an example of Henry VIII's use of systematic image communication to destroy those who threatened his image as king. This work argues that the fall of Anne Boleyn was a crisis in gender relations that facilitated a larger-scale public relations crisis. It was this public relations crisis that fundamentally threatened Henry's honor and authority, ultimately leading to Boleyn's undoing. This thesis will use Boleyn as a framework for understanding Henry VIII's championing of his honor and authority above all and his use of public relations to communicate this right to the throne of England.

INTRODUCTION

If the arrest was sudden, the execution was long expected and cruelly overdue. Following several weeks' imprisonment and four more days' delay awaiting the arrival of the executioner from Calais, Anne Boleyn, former queen of England, prepared for the final scene in the closing act of a remarkable life and career. Like every other aspect of her infamous life, she rose brilliantly to the occasion. Dressed in a gown of resplendent grey damask with a crimson kirtle underneath, the color of martyrdom, and a mantle trimmed in ermine, she presented a somber and dignified figure on the morning of May 19, 1536. This was all in stark contrast to her former persona. Gone were the vivacious, witty flirtations, seductive glances, and extravagant fashions that had carried her to the throne of England and then down to these final moments. The picture of grace and modesty, Boleyn beseeched the eager crowd of exclusive witnesses gathered inside the Tower of London to honor and obey her one-time husband, Henry VIII. Even in utter disgrace she charmed and fascinated.

Boleyn knew all too well that adoration was fleeting and the public fickle. Dubbed "the scandal of Christendom" by her rival and Henry's deposed first wife, Catherine of Aragon, her much-maligned six-year affair with the king had shaken England to its political and religious core. More importantly it established Boleyn as the worst sort of "she-devil" in the eyes of most English people. In pursuit of their marriage, Henry brought the country through years of religious strife and political upheaval, having broken with Rome and established the reformed Church of England when they finally wed in January 1533. Many of her contemporaries and historians alike credit Boleyn with

encouraging and furthering the English Reformation. She is either villain or saint depending upon who is asked. Over the course of her career Boleyn collected an impressive list of enemies and allies who were at times interchangeable; as they were on the morning of her arrest on May 2 by the order of her husband and with the cooperation of one-time ally Thomas Cromwell, the king's secretary. The queen soon found herself accused of adultery, incest and plotting to kill the king. Her own brother, George Boleyn, was named among her alleged lovers. She was tried on May 15 by her uncle Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, against damning testimony from her sister-in-law, Jane Parker, Lady Rochford. Abandoned and betrayed, the queen was found guilty on all counts and sentenced to death by beheading.

“If any person will meddle of my cause, I require them to judge the best,” Boleyn charged those gathered to witness her death. “And thus I take my leave of the world and of you all,” she continued. But Boleyn has never truly left us. She lives on defiantly in the pages of historical fiction, plays, television, movies and most importantly, in the works of scholarship. With her death came the new life of her enigma, a rebirth into historical prestige. The severing of her “little neck” forged earthly ties that have persisted beyond the grave and across centuries. She has been vilified and maligned in popular culture and for an unfortunately significant portion of history. Since the sixteenth century, her reputation has been marred by the bias of her contemporaries and historians alike who have touted the image of the ambitious, social-climbing and power-hungry shrew that led Good King Harry to religious and political disaster. Later, during her daughter Elizabeth I's reign, her image was resurrected and enshrined as the Mother of the English Reformation. In reality, Boleyn was neither saint nor villain, but rather the co-conspirator

in and later victim of an early, yet sophisticated, form of Tudor public relations and branding. The true Boleyn lies somewhere between exaltation and denigration, beneath the slander and defamation that have dominated her historical legacy for more than five centuries.

Even before her execution, Henry VIII began the systematic process of erasing Boleyn from the recorded legacy of his reign. Dozens of seamstresses, carpenters and stonemasons were employed to blot all traces of her queenship from the royal residences of England, no small task as Henry had been vigorous in symbolically enthroning her in almost every inch of his homes during their courtship.¹ Boleyn's initials, emblems, mottos, portraits and the innumerable entwined H's and A's that adorned the walls and ceilings were all made to be as if they had never existed. This leaves modern historians with only trace evidence of the true woman beneath the scandal. With no primary sources from Boleyn herself, rumor has run rampant over the centuries. Theories range from her guilt in hundreds of alleged affairs to the miscarriage of a deformed fetus, which led to charges of witchcraft, as explanations of her downfall. Many have posed the question, "How could he do it?" What would motivate a king to order the execution of an anointed queen for the first time in English history? More importantly, what would make that same king attempt to systematically purge all records of her existence from the history books after the great lengths he had gone in order to make her queen in the first place?

This thesis will attempt to answer these questions. The basis of this work is inspired by the theories of two Tudor historians whose research focuses on very different,

¹ Susan Bordo, *The Creation of Anne Boleyn: A New Look at England's Most Notorious Queen* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), x.

yet as this analysis will argue, closely related aspects of the period. Kevin Sharpe's *Selling the Tudor Monarchy: Authority and Image in Sixteenth-Century England* examines with newly ascribed intentionality and complexity, the Tudors' self-branding and public relations savvy in negotiating their legitimacy and authority after scooping the crown of England from the battlefield. Sharpe's chronicle details the numerous and sophisticated ways with which each monarch developed and maintained his public image, which was closely linked to his honor and authority. He suggests that the court was the arena in which rulers "sought to establish and sustain their authority, enhance their standing and reputation and refute and neuter criticism and opposition."² This was most often done through words and images in art of various forms and through ritual and performance. Sharpe's analysis suggests that the business of Tudor government was the art of securing compliance. He places less merit on patronage than on imagery and perceptions of authority as essential to maintaining this compliance. No Tudor mastered this more effectively than Henry VIII. Most scholars agree that Henry's reign ushers in new emphasis on and new attempts to control ideas of power through the royal word, images, buildings, festivals and other displays. Nowhere did he negotiate this power more effectively than through Tudor politics.

An inescapable part of human life, politics has certainly evolved and grown in complexity in the modern age, though its core functionality remains the same. Its foundation has always centered on image manipulation, modes of representation and media of communication.³ But is it anachronistic to refer to Tudor "public relations," a

² Kevin Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy: Authority and Image in Sixteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), xxiv.

³ Sharpe, xxiii.

term that only arose in the twentieth century, to discuss the politics of the sixteenth? This thesis argues “no.” The idea of image manipulation and rhetoric aimed at presenting a favorable self-representation is hardly novel. In fact, the origins of public relations reaches back to ancient times if the work of Cutlip, Center and Broom is to be believed. They suggest “the genesis of public relations actually dates to ancient civilizations.”⁴ Kings of ancient India used royal spies to test public opinion and spread positive rumors about the crown while Iraqi farmers in 1800 B.C. used pamphlets to communicate best practices for issues ranging from how to sow crops to dealing with mice.⁵ Much as modern-day politicians are more concerned with “political campaigns, elections and broadcasts...emphasizing appearance and image more than substantive issues,” the rulers of early modern Europe employed the best artists to depict their majesty and the most notable scholars and intellectuals to communicate the prestige of their courts and produce the written records of their reigns—essentially helping them to construct their authority.⁶ As Sharpe points out, historians writing about politics of the past often do their subjects a disservice by failing to explore them in these early-twentieth and twenty-first century terms.⁷ By dismissing these modern theories and their definitions as implausible in application to the politics of the past, we limit our understanding and insight into what actually happened all those centuries ago. Scoffing at the idea that Henry VIII and his government could have ever possibly employed

⁴ Mary P. Schoen, “Museum-Public Relationships: Exploring the Relationship Management Theory of Public Relations” (master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 2005), 8.

⁵ Cutlip, Center and Broom, as cited in Mary P. Schoen, “Museum-Public Relationships: Exploring the Relationship Management Theory of Public Relations” (master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 2005), 8.

⁶ Sharpe, xv.

⁷ Sharpe, xxiii.

something as modern as political public relations campaigns, no matter how rudimentary their semblance to present day, places limitations upon the field of historical study.

Public relations in the past is most often dismissed as propaganda by modern theorists, though modern public relations professionals are still scathingly dubbed “spin doctors” much like their historical counterparts. Merriam-Webster defines propaganda as *the spreading of ideas, information, or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person*. Public relations is defined as *the activity or job of providing information about a particular person or organization to the public so that people will regard that person or organization in a favorable way*. The argument can certainly be made that modern public relations is essentially a cleaned up, moralized version of its antiquated cousin propaganda. Both aim to present a certain image about what they are selling. Both are carried out by presenting an image to the public, a negotiation of sorts between audience and information provider. The only difference is that projecting a negative image of others is frowned upon in our modern age and more directly defined as defamation.

In the context of this discussion, image is synonymous with authority. Coincidentally, the cardinal rule of modern-day public relations theory argues, “Perception is reality.” Somewhere, Henry VII is applauding. Stay tuned. As Henry VIII demonstrates, when this authoritarian image was threatened, the consequences were often disastrous. Of all the Tudors, he is the most effective at wielding these public relations and marketing strategies against his enemies. Its effects last down to the present day, influencing how towering historical figures such as Richard III, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, Thomas Cromwell and Henry VII himself are remembered by historians and the

general public alike. Without a doubt, Anne Boleyn is the most prominent victim of this Tudor public relations arm.

Suzannah Lipscomb's chapter, "The Fall of Anne Boleyn: A Crisis in Gender Relations?" in the collection *Henry VIII and the Court: Art, Politics, and Performance* provides the second part of this analysis. Lipscomb's interpretation of Boleyn's downfall is strictly gendered in nature, blaming her death on factors related to the relationship between the sexes in early modern England. She argues that Boleyn's personality caused her to fall victim to gender roles within the culture of courtly love and flirtation. Lipscomb places great merit on the role of courtly love, honor, and a crisis in gender relations as the catalyst for these events. The inner tensions of ideas of masculinity and femininity, and consequently the notion of honor, are at the heart of her interpretation.⁸ An individual's honor was an important means by which standards of behavior and social relations between men and women were regulated in early modern Europe.⁹

Religious beliefs provided the structure of Henrician society and the relationship between the sexes. The "sexual politics of religion" must be analyzed in order to understand the role of religion in society, and therefore women's place within it. Sixteenth-century English society was one in which religion, as well as all other aspects of life, was influenced by the ideas about the two sexes.¹⁰ The notion that women were inferior to men was widely accepted. The Bible provided an age-old blueprint for sexual relations that was taken to heart in the most literal way. Theology permeated society and

⁸ Suzannah Lipscomb, "The Fall of Anne Boleyn: A Crisis in Gender Relations?" in *Henry VIII and the Court: Art, Politics, and Performance* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 305.

⁹ Laura Gowing, "Women, Status and the Popular Culture of Dishonour," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1996): 225.

¹⁰ Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England: 1500-1720 (Christianity and Society in the Modern World)*, New ed. (London: Routledge, 1996), 1.

provided the gender constructs by which the sexes related to each other. When women stepped outside of these clearly defined boundaries, they challenged the fundamentals of social life and threatened the masculine identity that was so dependent upon the established gender code.¹¹ Women who attempted to act independently of these social constructs subverted the gender order and threatened men's very sense of identity.¹² Contemporary religious ideas also created a world in which women were seen as the epitome of sexual depravity and sin. At the same time, an essential part of the male identity was having the power to rein in women's voracious sexual appetites. Society placed a clear link between a man's sexual potency and his wife's fidelity. Men whose wives cheated were seen as husbands whose "lack of sexual dominance led their wives to adultery."¹³ Being seen as a cuckold was a devastating blow to one's manhood.

Henry's court was the height of chivalry, a cultural construct based solely on ideas of traditional gender roles, during Boleyn's time in power. Within it one's manhood or womanhood was essential to the overall construction of one's honor. In a world dominated by the "ritual flirtation" of courtly love, elite women were expected to play the dual role of desired courtly beloved while preserving their sexual purity and chastity.¹⁴ This was especially true for queens, who were to be loved by all their male courtiers. Such a dance was navigated with great care since it was at the center of women's honor. This model of feminine honor—passive, chaste, obedient—did not fit Boleyn.¹⁵ In discussions of female honor, "chastity essentially meant passivity, the avoidance of

¹¹ Crawford, 97.

¹² Crawford, 17.

¹³ Lipscomb, *The Fall*, 301.

¹⁴ Lipscomb, *The Fall*, 305.

¹⁵ Gowing, 225.

sin.”¹⁶ When women took on characteristics of activity, associated with male honor, as Boleyn often did, they found themselves in danger of upsetting the social equation. Lipscomb suggests that “a vivacious, flirtatious woman” such as Boleyn could easily turn from “the accepted position as desirable but passive into the unacceptable desiring and active.”¹⁷ This overzealous play at courtly love made the accusations of multiple affairs brought against Boleyn seem far more probable than they actually were. It also accounts for Henry’s ruthless pursuit of her death after she had so bruised his manhood and therefore his honor. Most detrimental to Boleyn, Lipscomb suggests that news of her alleged infidelities wounded Henry in two crucial ways. It indicated his inability as a man to satisfy his wife and by extension, his prowess as a king.¹⁸ This study will carry Lipscomb’s analysis a step further by arguing that this affront to Henry’s manhood and honor projected an image that was not compatible with his carefully cultivated authority as a king, thus Boleyn was eliminated.

Marrying and building upon Lipscomb and Sharpe’s theories, this thesis will demonstrate that a crisis in gender relations threatened Henry VIII’s image and authority as king, thus leading to Boleyn’s downfall. Essentially, the fall of Anne Boleyn came about due to a public relations crisis. The result will provide a more complex and complete picture of not only the death of Anne Boleyn, but also the motivations and methods of the man who gave the order. To do so, a thorough examination of Henry’s use of public relations to first establish himself, and later to create and destroy Boleyn’s image and reputation is essential. A detailed discussion of the ways in which Henry

¹⁶ Gowing, 226.

¹⁷ Lipscomb, *The Fall*, 305.

¹⁸ Lipscomb, *The Fall*, 305.

cultivated his image during his early reign, and the motives behind his doing so will help to explain the actions he took in the later years of his involvement with Boleyn.

Furthermore, with the intention of being more than a re-evaluation of Anne Boleyn's downfall, this study has dual functions. The first is to establish that Henry VIII, like all of the Tudors, did in fact use rudimentary forms of what we would call twentieth-century public relations as an essential tool in establishing and maintaining his own image and also wielding it as a powerful political tool against his enemies. Secondly, having established this first aim, this thesis will present the downfall of Anne Boleyn as one of many examples in which a king's image and authority trumps all—even love, infatuation, title and marriage.

CHAPTER ONE: “PERCEPTION IS REALITY”

Foundations of a Dynasty

Henry VIII is not the lone anomaly in his canny wielding of public relations and branding practices. The entire Tudor dynasty is nothing if not a study in pageantry and camouflage. The spectacles of the Tudors dazzle and distract most modern admirers and their contemporaries alike from the reality of their precarious claim to and hold on the English throne. The epicenter of this political pageantry was the court, which its rulers revolutionized and streamlined for their own purposes and which was the lifeblood of Tudor innovation and power. The Tudors were the users and makers of tradition and their court was one run by monarchs very much like “a shrewd businessman with a keen eye for PR.”¹ The first objective of this work aims to establish how Henry VIII “persuaded sometimes reluctant people to follow controversial courses and to not only obey them but regard them as sacred” through various forms of public relations. In order to do this, an understanding of the birth of the Tudor dynasty and its image communication tradition is essential. This tradition is all the more impressive given that it grew out of a dynasty which began with the unlikely triumph of the son of an unlikely English noble family.

As the son of the disinherited Beaufort family descending from John of Gaunt, Henry Tudor should have never legally been king of England.² By the time of his death in

¹ Derek Wilson, *In the Lion's Court: Power, Ambition, and Sudden Death in the Reign of Henry VIII* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 36.

² From John of Gaunt, son of King Edward III, and his mistress Katherine Swynford. The children of this union bore the name Beaufort and were disinherited from the throne of England by Letters of Patent of King Henry IV in 1399.

1509, Henry VII, first of the Tudor kings, had achieved the impossible. He overcame a fragile claim to the English throne and seized power on the field of Bosworth in 1485, extinguished any threat of a return to civil war, and established the first untroubled succession England had seen in almost a century. This was no small feat, and the battles had been hard won. The Tudor family he founded is arguably the most important dynasty to be seated on the English throne. Two major themes defined the Tudor dynasty and influenced the actions and choices of its monarchs during their rule. The paramount issue was the fear, of the early Tudors especially, of a resumption of the Wars of the Roses that ravaged England prior to Henry VII's conquest. As a result, the early Tudors' reigns, Henry VIII's especially, were defined by an obsession with providing an adult male heir, often by extreme measures, to succeed them. The second major theme of the period centers on the persistent question of legitimacy that haunted and at times threatened the dynasty. Ensuring that these fears of illegitimacy and political chaos never came to fruition preoccupied early Tudor monarchs.³ They also heavily influenced their stance in politics, religion and international relations.

Wedged between two of England's most notorious monarchs--Richard III and his own son, Henry VIII, the significance of Henry VII's reign is often overlooked. His rule was a period of transition in which the bloody instability of the fifteenth century gave way to a gloriously peaceful time of renaissance and reform. These dawning years of the Tudor dynasty set the stage upon which Henry VIII would later dominate. Understanding the reign of Henry VII reveals much about the house of Tudor and the family that would

³ Both Henry VII and Henry VIII dealt with these fears directly. Edward VI's reign, while brief, was rocked by political instability. Mary Tudor would bring about her own ruin in pursuit of a Catholic marriage an heir and Elizabeth I's entire reign was plagued by questions of marriage and the succession.

define England's true Golden Age.⁴ Still, and most importantly for the sake of this thesis, Henry VII's reign faced troubling questions from the outset regarding his right to the crown. The tactics he employed in order to hold on to it are of great importance. The new king struggled to maintain order over a restless nation still healing from political trauma and war, all while failing to eradicate questions of his own legitimacy as king. His marriage to Elizabeth of York united the warring houses of York and Lancaster, ending the civil wars of the previous decades. His victory at Bosworth effectively wiped out his fugitive past as an exile in France due to his indirect, but still existent, claim to the throne. Now known as Henry VII, Tudor appeared out of nowhere as the rightful king come home to reclaim his throne. Thus began the great masquerade that would be his reign.

With no large family to support him, little land of his own, even less governmental experience and reliant on the flimsy loyalty of Yorkists whose true allegiance lay with his wife, Henry, though king in name, was in a most precarious position. He clung to the hope that if he "looked, behaved and ruled like a king, perhaps the exhausted, traumatized country of England would come to believe he was one."⁵ Unlike his son after him, Henry VII was constantly haunted by the threat of civil war, real and imagined, weathering several rebellions throughout the 1490s. His mistrust of the nobles, who had for decades wielded their own independent power and wealth with devastating results for the monarchy and country, pushed him to seize more power for the crown. This along with his sophisticated network of spies and exclusive privy chamber

⁴ Thomas Penn, *Winter King: Henry VII and the Dawn of Tudor England* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), xxvii.

⁵ Penn, 11.

placed Henry VII less as subject to the law and took legislation more and more under his own personal control. His reign redefined what power and status meant, laying the foundation for his son's own policies.

Henry VII provided the model after which all other Tudor monarchs fashioned themselves. His greatest achievement was in making the court the hub of his authority, the central office of his campaigns. Unlike his less successful predecessors, he made his court the center of power in England, more specifically power centered on the king himself. This early form of personal monarchy and display would be one that Henry VIII would perfect during his own reign. Unlike the loose standards employed by the Yorkists before him, Henry VII was determined to preside over a court of dignity and splendor conducted without slackness or informality. "Rules should be rigidly observed and the royal person revered and respected."⁶

Rather than the traditional image of Henry VII as a money-hoarding cheapskate, new studies of the first Tudor king reveal him as a great lover of display who spent copious amounts of money on the joust, the hunt and other representations of royal prowess and wealth when it suited his needs.⁷ Henry quickly realized that the crown came with a certain expectation for ostentation, and as a "a king by conquest rather than by descent," he obliged in the forms of elaborate displays at feasts, tournaments and other forms of pageantry in order to uphold his legitimacy and reputation.⁸ In these times, Henry laid his notorious frugality aside in the interest of preserving royal prestige as he paid great attention to outward image communication. For example, his wedding feast

⁶ Eric Simons, *Henry VII: The First Tudor King* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1968), 22.

⁷ Simons, 87.

⁸ Ralph Dutton, *English Court Life from Henry VII to George II*, 1st ed. (London: Batsford, 1963), 18.

was of a caliber that none of his predecessors could have hoped to better. Elizabeth's coronation in 1487 was yet another opportunity for Henry VII to demonstrate to the country that “he could successfully emulate the pageantry of the Plantagenets” from whom he had taken the throne.⁹

Despite failing to inspire love, Henry was particularly successful in the employment of imagery to negotiate authority. His concern with public display was in direct relation to his dynastic insecurities.¹⁰ He made great efforts to demonstrate prestige through the rituals of church and state: Elizabeth of York's elaborate coronation and the sponsoring of elaborate jousts, progresses and feasts. “The early Tudor court was designed to impress and it succeeded,” even if it was “a confidence trick.”¹¹ Henry VII launched extensive campaigns in an effort to overcome the insecurities and questions of legitimacy about his reign by stamping virtually everything from books to architecture with images of the dynastic badge.¹² He gave thirteen tournaments in the last years of his reign and was known for his gilded armor, bejeweled trappings and outfits festooned with red and white roses that subtly constructed and displayed Tudor brand identity and authority at such events.¹³ Often called the Union Rose, the Tudor's crest was created and adopted by Henry VII upon his marriage to symbolize the union of the White Rose of York and the Red Rose of Lancaster. Henry was also the first English king to incorporate the enclosed, imperial crown in his imagery. First appearing on the sovereign of Henry VIII in 1489, it was borrowed from the Holy Roman Emperors who had used the image

⁹ Dutton, 19.

¹⁰ Sharpe, 66.

¹¹ Sharpe, 62.

¹² Sharpe, 62.

¹³ Sharpe, 62.

since the 1000s. Kings of England had been using the closed crown since the fifteenth-century, but Henry's use of it on his coinage brought it before the public in an unprecedented way. It effectively branded England as an empire and world power, an identity that Henry VIII would manifest early in his reign and one that would become the very fabric of Britain in the coming centuries.

Undoubtedly, the first Tudor presided over "a reign in which public display was integral."¹⁴ Henry VII, like his son after him, also employed great displays of wealth and prestige through architecture. The king built numerous chapels during his reign, but the crown of his architectural splendor was the palace of Richmond, formerly Sheen. Henry made it "by far the most magnificent of all royal residences," when it was rebuilt following a fire in 1499.¹⁵ Despite Henry's well-documented displays of authority, they pale beside the later Tudors' magnificent pageantry. As the originator of the personal reign and innovator of communication of authority and image manipulation, Henry VII's political and economic tactics provided a firm springboard from which Henry VIII launched himself into a greatness that all but eclipsed his father.

The King of Hearts

Having set the backdrop upon which Tudor theatrics would unfold for more than a century, it is essential to examine the nature of Henry VIII's accession and character during the years leading up to 1526, or Henry and his image and reign pre-Anne

¹⁴ Sharpe, 62.

¹⁵ Dutton, 24.

Boleyn.¹⁶ A young King Henry VIII was concerned with only two things: entertaining himself and establishing a glorious international reputation. As the king's tutor, William Blount, Lord Mountjoy wrote to Erasmus in the first months of Henry's reign, "[o]ur king's heart...is set upon virtue, reputation and eternal renown."¹⁷ How Henry went about establishing that reputation is of vital importance. First, an understanding of the applied theory and methodology of this study is necessary. For the purposes of this thesis, an application of the "post-modern" to the "early modern" is necessary. Nineteenth and twentieth-century historians have long thought of political history strictly in terms of "affiliations, struggle for place and ideological contests."¹⁸ Dismissing the modern political experiences of "carefully crafted rhetoric, posed images, and choreographed spectacles," as subjects of intellectual and cultural history, if not other disciplines entirely, has severely limited the scope and depth of the study of political history.¹⁹ If the present has much to learn from the past, certainly modern cultural constructs can better inform events of the past. A habitual aversion to presentism within the field has limited the possibility that "present experiences may open questions about and perspectives upon the past that lay unasked or unexplored by earlier generations."²⁰ Nowhere is this more apparent than in the nuances and complexities of political history. This thesis demonstrates that a dialogue between present and past is, and has always been, essential to the study of history.

¹⁶ Eric Ives' suggested date based on a 1527 letter written by Henry to Anne in which he suggests he has 'been now above one whole year struck with the dart of love' (T. Stemmler, ed., *Die Liebesbriefe Heinrichs VIII an Anna Boleyn* (Zürich, 1988).

¹⁷ S.W. Haas, "Henry VIII's *Glasse of Truthe*," *History* 64, no. 212 (October 1979): 353-62.

¹⁸ Sharpe, 2.

¹⁹ Sharpe, 4.

²⁰ Sharpe, 1.

The meanings of several terms as applicable to this thesis must be outlined. The “public relations” referred to in this research is a combination of the following definitions: it is both “the strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” and “the professional maintenance of a favorable public image by a famous person.”²¹ In the case of the Tudors’ public relations efforts, this means they strove to communicate strategically a favorable (legitimate and authoritative) public image to their publics (subjects) in order to establish, and later maintain as favorable, the ancient working relationship between monarchs and their subjects. An essential component of authority, honor, legitimacy and any of the other characteristics that allow kings to rule is that of customer buy-in. Monarchy was certainly nothing if not a business transaction. In order for a king to maintain the authority he claimed to have, his subjects must be complicit in the relationship by allowing him to exercise it. Henrician citizens were certainly not aware of this social construct, and this thesis in no way argues this. But Tudor rulers were, to varying extents. The civil wars preceding their rule aside, the revolutions of the seventeenth century demonstrate clearly what results from a breakdown in this ambiguous and vital relationship. This argument in no way places all of the power on the subjects of Henrician England or oversimplifies what led to the seventeenth-century civil wars. The king was still the king and his authority was not questioned. Rather the English civil wars are an example of what can happen once a king has lost authority, and by extension, legitimacy, in the eyes of his people. Certainly as the Tudor dynasty continued, the early anxiety that will be discussed below lessened with each new

²¹ As defined by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and the Oxford Dictionary, respectively.

succession, but early Tudor rulers were acutely aware of their power and legitimacy being tied directly to the acceptance and loyalty of those over whom they ruled. Why else, as this thesis will demonstrate, did Henry VII go to such great lengths to obtain the loyalty of his nobles, the support of the Church and to establish himself as embodying all the glorious characteristics of kingship?

Applying modern theories of public relations to Henry VIII's reign also allows for the assertion that communication of Tudor authority was heavily reliant on an early culture of consumerism. Much like the modern culture of capitalism relies on securing compliance, via subliminal advertising and public relations campaigns used to persuade consumers to purchase a product, cultural politics of the past allowed the Tudors to secure compliance from their subjects by persuading them of their authority as monarchs. The effectiveness of such campaigns weighs heavily on the success of branding, or the culture or feeling that a product or company projects to its customers. For the purposes of this study, think Henricus Rex L.L.C. The nature of branding dictates that it is not controlled by the company itself, but rather by its consumer, meaning the effectiveness of a brand is only as good as the customer's feeling about the person, product service, or company. Much like one's personal reputation might lie largely outside of the individual's control, so does a company's, or in this case a ruler's, brand. The Tudor brand, or the feeling that Henry's subjects would have towards his authority and rule, is "not what you say it is--its what *they* (consumers or subjects) say it is. The best you can do is influence it."²² This influence is essential as a brand is a promise to the consumer, establishing what they can expect from the company and it also differentiates a particular

²² Marty Neumeier, *Zag: The Number-One Strategy of High-Performance Brands: A Whiteboard Overview* (Berkeley, CA: New Riders, 2007), 19.

brand from its competitors. For example, the Tudor brand needed to be differentiated from the Plantagenets as the lawful and true kings of England with the sole authority to sit on the throne. A brand is constructed in equal parts by iconography (logos, design, imagery, i.e. crests and portraiture) as well as emotional buy-in (the manipulation of both social anxiety and desire, i.e. patronage and personal monarchy) to create a sense of compliance and loyalty among the masses. Essentially, “the Tudors had to persuade the subjects of England...of their right to rule.”²³ Using this modern context defines “early modern authority as a negotiation rather than an autocratic enactment.”²⁴ And if the coming revolutions of the next centuries in both England and France were any indication, it would appear that kings, like companies, served at the pleasure of their customers.²⁵

Thus power and authority were no longer simply the weapons of a king, but rather the product of “complex negotiations between rulers and subjects.”²⁶ As Sharpe’s theory of cultural politics (the idea of power and authority as a cultural phenomenon rather than a force outside of or dominant over a culture) suggests, power and authority were not something that rulers simply possessed by right, but rather communicated to their subjects through cultural constructs of display such as progresses, festivals, tournaments, coronations, portraiture and writing. Henry’s subjects in turn, recognized and accepted Tudor authority, making them “not merely subject to but the shared authors, that is makers, of power.”²⁷ In order to remain on the throne, the Tudors secured “the compliance of subjects through careful acts of representation--in words, images and

²³ Sharpe, 6.

²⁴ Sharpe, 7.

²⁵ Neumeier, 19.

²⁶ Sharpe, 9.

²⁷ Sharpe, 9.

spectacular performances that did not simply reflect or enact power but helped to construct it.”²⁸

Presenting and maintaining an image of legitimacy was essential and foremost in the mind of Henry VIII. An understanding of his accession and the very early years of his rule is the foundation for interpreting the rationale behind many of Henry’s actions throughout the rest of the reign. Like his father before him, he was a most consummate public relations man. As demonstrated by his father’s reign, this Tudor proclivity for image cultivation was born of necessity. In fact, the first of Henry’s public relations campaigns centered on touting his father’s image as the heroic king who brought justice, order, and peace to war-torn England, as well as placing the crown on sound financial footing. He was determined to protect his father’s reputation while simultaneously forging his own. In reality, the first Tudor monarch was a deeply troubled, suspicious and paranoid man whose reign was marred by oppression, extortion and terror by an avaricious ruler who inspired fear rather than love.²⁹ Despite the Tudors’ best efforts, this romanticism veils a “dark prince,” as his first biographer, Francis Bacon described him. The last decade of Henry VII’s rule saw the claustrophobic reign of an ageing and paranoid king in stark contrast to his promising young son.

Understandably then, Henry VIII’s ascension in 1509 was hailed as a new beginning, a springtime, after the winter of his father’s suspicion and paranoia. Certainly countless new reigns had been welcomed with exuberant expectations, yet this one was particularly joyous for both subjects and king. For Henry, it marked the end of a long and stifling childhood spent under the oppressive thumbs of a severe father and grandmother,

²⁸ Sharpe, 6.

²⁹ Penn, xxv.

releasing him into the intoxicating arena of power and freedom for the first time in his seventeen years of life. He inherited a throne made miraculously secure by his father, a fortune greater than any English monarch before him, and the most war-weary and obedient subjects in all of Christendom. These same subjects rejoiced in the first stable succession of an adult male heir in a century. England, and Henry too, breathed a collective sigh of relief as it stood on the precipice of abundance, peace and prosperity for the first time in generations. The “magnificent, liberal and bullish” Henry VIII’s early reign was characterized, at least initially, for its perceived glory and splendor in comparison to the long, clouded years of his father’s.³⁰ Henry did not disappoint. He shone like the sun emerging from eclipse, taking even the few who knew him well by surprise at the sudden turn in his character. Though always charming and charismatic, he had been more reserved during his father’s iron-gripped reign. This newly unleashed Henry was wealthy, determined, and brimming with youth. He was also dazzling in physique and appearance, incredibly well educated and, at least at the start, a man determined to be a just and legendary ruler. William Blount, Lord Mountjoy, wrote with breathless glee to Erasmus in 1509 describing the new reign as the Promised Land flowing with “milk and honey and nectar.”³¹ The new king, however glorious, was also an unlikely one. The death of his brother Arthur in 1502, mere months after his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, “transformed Henry’s condition.”³² The often-overlooked second son was propelled into the sunny brilliance of heir apparent almost overnight.

³⁰ Penn, 352.

³¹ The Correspondence of Erasmus, Letters 142-297, Volume II, 1501-1514, 215.

³² J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 4.

Emerging from beneath the towering shadows of his father and brother fueled Henry's early approach to his rule. His father had wasted no time in promoting the legitimacy of his reign by claiming the texts upon which authority in early modern Europe was validated: "scripture, law, and history."³³ His son would follow in his footsteps, placing great value on historical references, traditional laws of kingship and authority, and scripture. From the start it was clear that he would be a king very much concerned with forging his own image and reputation, which he set about cultivating almost immediately through "officially sponsored...royally generated media."³⁴ As the first stable successor to the throne in nearly a century, Henry was the proverbial guinea pig in terms of carrying on a lasting dynasty. Filling his father's shoes while still making his own way was vitally important to the young king. Not only did the new reign promise wealth and prosperity, Henry VIII also came into his new position determined to meet some of his own personal expectations. A sixteenth-century monarch was required to be many things. Henry's desire to appear to the world as "the cultivated prince, the warrior king, the chivalrous knight, the caring Christian and God's anointed lieutenant," at varying times throughout his rule, each of which will be examined in further detail, fueled his passion and talent for effective image projection.³⁵ Henry would wholeheartedly commit to each of these roles throughout the course of his reign. Though the parts he played were inevitably fleeting, "there was nothing insincere or halfhearted in his performance" of each.

³³ Sharpe, 48.

³⁴ Dale Hoak, ed., "The Iconography of the Crown Imperial" in *Tudor Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 77.

³⁵ Michael A. Graves, *Henry VIII: Profiles in Power* (London: Longman, 2003), 9.

The Cultivated Prince

While something of an enigma upon coming to the throne, Henry was not wholly unprepared for the demands of a personal monarchy. Like a human firecracker, he was stunning, bright, impossible to miss, but also quite unpredictable and dangerous, especially to those who drew too close. Most notably, one of the new king's first acts of policy was to clean house politically. In July 1509, Henry ordered a number of high-profile commissions to investigate the actions of his father's political advisors. The king claimed to have received word that English law had been subverted and that the good governance of his realm hung in the balance. He readily appointed high-ranking officials, many of whom had served Henry VII, to investigate further. Ironically, the old king's counselors were now responsible for rooting out offenses for which they themselves were responsible.³⁶ Certainly a scapegoat was needed. Among the first to be called into question were the doings of his father's most valuable financial advisors, Edmund Dudley and Richard Empson. Uncovering details of the innermost workings and offenses of the old reign would prove problematic for the accusers and present a less than favorable image of Henry VII himself, something no one wanted to uncover. The commissioners grappled with how to make a fabricated charge stick without soiling their own reputations. In a brilliant stroke of pragmatism, Empson's and Dudley's indictments were conveniently not based on any offenses committed under the old regime, but rather on "scraps of circumstantial evidence...distorted into highly speculative charges of treason" surrounding the succession.³⁷ Essentially the two were accused of plotting to

³⁶ Penn, 367.

³⁷ Penn, 367.

control the young Henry VIII, on pain of death, for their own purposes at his father's passing. Following a law Henry saw passed through his first parliament in 1509, both men were eventually sentenced to a traitor's death of hanging, drawing and quartering following futile defenses at farce trials. A series of others imprisoned without trial would soon follow throughout the remainder of this first year of Henry's reign. Ironically, many of Henry's closest advisors applauded the executions, blind to the glaring fact that even at seventeen Henry had demonstrated that when he wanted something, he got it, whatever the cost to procedure, details of legality or any other obstacle standing in his way.

Many overlooked this telling character flaw, focusing instead on Henry's embodiment of "the Renaissance ideal of the man of many talents with the qualities of the medieval chivalric heroes whom he so much admired,"³⁸ being highly intelligent; skilled in Greek, Latin and French as well as disciplines ranging from mathematics to theology. He was also particularly gifted in music and other courtly graces, and as his contemporaries report, was a conditioned athlete and formidable martial opponent. Most importantly, he also possessed the famous Tudor penchant for skillful image manipulation and communication and was widely admired in diplomatic circles for his "talents and virtuosity."³⁹

The young king was admired not only for his intelligence, but also his looks and impressive stature; standing at six feet two inches tall, he towered over most men of his time. The Venetian ambassador described the young king in 1515 as "the handsomest potentate I ever set eyes on" with auburn hair, athletic build and catlike graces.⁴⁰ This

³⁶ Alison Weir, *Henry VIII: The King and His Court*, Reprint ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 4.

³⁷ Graves, 9.

³⁸ Letter dated 1515, by Piero Pasqualigo, quoted in Sebastian Giustinian, *Four Years at the Court of Henry VIII* (London, 1854), I, 83.

included his wardrobe, which often presented him dripping in jewels, cloth of gold, rich silks and satins in bold colors, and festooned with the feathers of exotic birds. Particularly in his early reign, the young king was characterized by extravagance, gross misuse of money on gambling and other sport, and a preoccupation with impressing everyone he came into contact with. A man of seemingly endless energy, Henry was quick to laugh, genial and idealistic, yet simultaneously vain, impulsive, high-strung and prone to emotional outbursts. He was also decidedly intractable. Though decision making did not come easily to him once he had decided upon something, nothing would deter his course, leading Thomas Wolsey to warn on his deathbed: “Be well advised and assured what matter ye put in his head, for ye shall never pull it out again.”⁴¹ Still, Henry was beloved of the English people immediately simply for his youth and charisma, although his popularity was far more under his control than previously understood.

Henry’s first concern in 1509 was not merely popularity, but security.⁴² Within days of his ascension, he openly declared his intention to marry his brother’s widow, Catherine of Aragon. What a new king needed more than almost anything, as a major aspect of royal power, was a secure dynasty through his male heirs. As a result of the Tudors’ precarious hold on the throne, nearly all their lives were defined by an obsession with meeting the vital need for an adult male heir to succeed them. In Henry’s case, this would come by extreme and unprecedented measures. A vital part of one’s manhood rested on the ability to produce sons. For kings this increased tenfold. Just as his own mother’s prompt fecundity had strengthened his father’s hold on the throne, Henry knew

³⁹ George Cavendish, *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*, ed. Richard S. Sylvester, Early English Text Society No. 243 (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 179.

⁴⁰ Graves, 10.

that a royal marriage and heirs would serve to support his own authority and prowess. For this a wife was immediately required. But not just any wife would do, for Henry in particular. The institution of royal marriage was a lucrative and calculated business in early modern Europe. Kings required not only a queen, but a queen of powerful position who would bring influential alliances between nations. Catherine brought with her ties to the formidable and wealthy Spanish Empire, lending Henry still more legitimacy and power in the form of a young and pretty queen who was adored by the court and the English people. Henry and Catherine were wed on 11 June 1509 at Greenwich, ushering in the honeymoon phase of his reign in which he played the role of devoted husband in the flush of youth and love. During these years England was governed by a young and capable king who adored his beautiful queen. Henry's chief desire was to please Catherine and he was almost always with her--having the midday meal or dinner in her chambers, confiding in one another, and "taking his pleasure as usual with the Queen."⁴³ He wore their entwined initials on his sleeves at the joust and styled himself "Sir Loyal Heart." Catherine, in turn, adored him.

Tantamount to a monarch's *maiestas*, or the blend of dignity, magnificence and power, which was necessary to ensure both the obedience of subjects and the respect of fellow monarchs,⁴⁴ was the reputation that preceded them. Just how skilled Henry would be in protecting, communicating and negotiating his own *maiestas* remained to be seen. He set about cultivating his own almost immediately and in various ways throughout the 15-teens and twenties by employing a system of calculated displays of opulence and majesty. Perhaps the strongest weapon in the Tudor public relations arsenal was the time-

⁴¹ Cited by Weir, *Henry*, 15.

⁴² David Loades, *The Tudor Court*. (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1987), 6.

honored tradition of royal pageantry, or the series of traditional displays that accompanied the reign. This “language of symbolism” was universal and vital to Henry’s communication of his authority.⁴⁵

The height of Tudor pageantry, with its stunning “magnificence, symbolism and image projection,” was the coronation.⁴⁶ Henry’s, which Sir Thomas More described as “the beginning of our joy,” did not disappoint.⁴⁷ True to form, the king exploited fully the festivities and imagery that accompanied his coronation, which serves as the first model for the pageantry that would occur throughout his reign. Polydore Vergil remarked that “a vast multitude of persons” flooded London when the date of his coronation was announced. “[E]verybody loved him,” Vergil wrote of the ceremony, likening Henry to Edward IV “the most warmly thought of by the English people among all the English kings...and for that reason [Henry] was the more acclaimed and approved of by all.”⁴⁸ On 23 June, “color, magnificence, symbolism and images were all present, projecting the crown’s wealth, power and territorial claims”⁴⁹ as the young king, flanked by nine riders bearing trappings representative of England’s territories, travelled from the Tower to Westminster Palace the day before his coronation. He was dressed in ermine-trimmed crimson velvet, a coat of gold, and dripping in diamonds, rubies, pearls and other precious stones.⁵⁰ Days of feasts and celebrations followed. The first of an endless stream

⁴³ Loades, *Court*, 5.

⁴⁴ Graves, 12.

⁴⁵ Thomas More, *Coronation Ode of King Henry VIII*, 1509, ln. 13.

⁴⁶ *The Anglica Historia of Polydore Vergil A.D. 1485-1537. Edited with a Translation by Denys Hay. Camden Series LXXIV* (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society: London, 1950), 151.

⁴⁷ Graves, 13.

⁴⁸ Edward Hall, *Hall's Chronicle Containing the History of England, During the Reign of Henry the Fourth, and the Succeeding Monarchs, to the End of the Reign of Henry the Eighth, in Which Are Particularly Described the Manners and Customs of Those Periods. Carefully Collated with the Editions of 1548 and 1550.* (London: Printed for J. Johnson [etc.], 1809), 507-510.

of poems and songs praising the king's honor and virtues, imbuing him with chivalric ideals, began in this period. John Skelton's poem "Laud and Praise Made for Our Sovereign Lord the King" identified Henry as, "the prince of high honour" and "as king moost sovereign that ever Englonde had."

The king's noble attributes had to be communicated in more than the words of court flatterers. Henry saw to it that his majesty, power and right to the throne were clear through various, more permanent forms of art and architecture as well. Down to the present day, his palaces are shining examples of his use of iconography as a means of communicating the Tudor brand and his own power. Prior to Henry and Anne Boleyn's entwined initials, the royal palaces of England displayed Catherine's badges caught up with Tudor roses and crowns. During the elaborate coronation tournaments staged at Westminster Palace in June 1509, "a great Croune Emperiall" was displayed everywhere throughout the architecture of palace.⁵¹ When Charles V visited London in 1522, Henry demonstrated his love of historical allegory. He made sure to bring the emperor to Winchester Castle to see King Arthur's Round Table, dating from the reign of Edward I (1272-1307), which Henry had painted "with the figure of a robed and bearded king in majesty" holding orb, sword and imperial crown. Though labeled "Kyng Arthur," the visage was that of Henry himself signifying his authority, honor and himself as heir to a great English king of legend.⁵²

Large, elaborate palaces were also a symbol of the strength and staying power of the monarchy. Henry VII's palace at Richmond was built to symbolize the permanence of

⁴⁹ Hall, 510.

⁵⁰ Martin Biddle and Beatrice Clayre, *Winchester Castle and Great Hall* (Winchester: 1983) 40, cited in *Tudor Political Culture*, 83.

the Tudor dynasty.⁵³ Consequently much of Henry VIII's reign was spent building and rebuilding the various homes he had inherited from his father. "No English sovereign ever owned as many houses as Henry VIII, and spent so lavishly on a lifestyle deliberately calculated to enhance his own prestige."⁵⁴ When little could be done to help Westminster and the White Tower's cold and bleak accommodations, Henry began to acquire and build new royal residences. Between 1519-1523, the king purchased or converted four new royal residences including Beaulieu and St. George's Chapel at Windsor. Not to mention the temporary palace erected upon the Field of Cloth of Gold in 1520, which was both a spectacular display abroad and egregiously expensive. From Cardinal Wolsey Henry obtained Hampton Court and Whitehall, both of which were transformed into "magnificent settings in which he could strut before an admiring English elite and the Ambassadors of Europe," whose dazzled reports home strengthened his international reputation.⁵⁵ The shrewdly discerning Nicolo Sagudino, secretary to the Italian ambassador, commented during a visit from the French that "his Majesty exerted himself to the utmost, for the sake of the ambassadors...that he may be able to tell his King Francis what he has seen in England, and especially with regard to his Majesty's own prowess."⁵⁶ The acquisition of these and many more residences was not simply for the purpose of comfort or avarice. They were, chiefly, the staging ground for Henry's public relations campaigns and projections of various images for the benefit of both foreign and native audiences alike. The palace and the court became the podium from

⁵¹ Neil Samman, "The Progresses of Henry VIII, 1509-1529" in *The Reign of Henry VIII: Politics, Policy and Piety*, ed. Diarmaid MacCulloch (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 59.

⁵² Weir, *Henry*, 2.

⁵³ Graves, 30.

⁵⁴ Letter dated May 3, 1515, by Nicolo Sagudino, quoted in Giustinian, *Four Years at the Court of Henry*, I, 81.

which Henry, with the aid of various props, music and dance, could perform the pageantry of kingship both literally and figuratively. He was a veritable male peacock, unfurling his tail of wealth and prestige to a dazzled court on almost every occasion.

The king certainly enjoyed literal playacting in his youth and even into his later years, always taking on the role of most virtuous, honorable, chivalrous or desirable. It was during one such masque performance that one theory suggests he met Anne Boleyn. In a March 1522 pageant staged for the Imperial ambassador at York Palace, Henry, in the role of “Ardent Desire,” along with friends, endeavored to rescue eight imprisoned maidens representative of various virtues guarded by those of folly, bearing names such as Scorn and Disdain. The Lady Anne Boleyn, in the befitting role of Perseverance, is said to have been among those maidens who needed rescue.⁵⁷ Naturally, the masque ended with victory for the king and his mates and concluded with much dancing. In figurative terms, Henry’s lavish palaces and court provided the ideal atmosphere of fanfare and grandeur to communicate and manipulate his image effectively. After all, the epicenter of Tudor public relations pageantry lay in the court. Without question it was the single most essential tool that the Tudor dynasty wielded in communicating their legitimacy and authority across generations on the throne of England. The “fast communication network” it contained made it the most effective launching pad for Tudor authority.⁵⁸ Rumor ran rampant at court and rapidly spread to the countryside from those who lived in this information hub via letter or royal proclamation. One of its primary functions was to act as the vehicle through which the monarch maintained their *maiestas*. Henry worked tirelessly to protect this *maiestas* as the essence of his rule and essential to

⁵⁵ Hall, 630-32.

⁵⁶ Graves, 39.

both the nature and successes of his domestic policies and to the outward, national expression of these successes.⁵⁹

An examination of the various ways that Henry communicated his authority and bestowed favor upon his favorites like Boleyn requires an understanding of the nature of this court. Revolutionized and modernized under their rule, the court was the lifeblood of Tudor innovation and power, which Henry VIII used to his full advantage. While the court was a center for outward dissemination of the king's campaigns, part of its success was also in its inward attraction. Perhaps the most crucial weapon in the Tudor branding arsenal was the system of personal monarchy, which made the court and the presence of the monarch the center of wealth and advancement. This power was exercised by direct, personal delegation from the ruler and was a hot commodity for his courtiers. The king had "a way of making every man feel that he is enjoying his special favor," More commented to John Fisher. With all the skill of a puppeteer, Henry kept his subjects at chase. First jesting, then charming, then commanding, he dazzled them with his majesty and drew them ever closer with his charms. The nature of personal monarchy, which capitalized on social anxiety and desire to be near the king's majesty, allowed for more effective control of his authority and image. Policy was what he decreed it to be; advancement and honor were his gifts and at his disposal due to his authority, wealth and the admiration he inspired. For example, Henry created 37 peerage titles during his reign. Essentially, the monarch's person personified the court community.⁶⁰ This personal

⁵⁷ Loades *Court*, 8.

⁵⁸ Eric W. Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn: The Most Happy'* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004), 6.

monarchy was a unique theme of all Tudor reigns and was an essential lubricant of the process of government.⁶¹

This social and political structure played an essential role in facilitating the king's public relations campaigns, like the making and unmaking of Boleyn. Personal monarchy meant that to courtiers the king's authority was synonymous with royal favor. Royal favor also played a major role in the delegation of power and position. The king gave power to the men he liked and trusted and they in turn acted to maintain his favor and trust.⁶² The lifeblood and currency of the English court was royal favor, a system established by Henry VII and fueled by the fear of over mighty nobles. This form of currency made any and everyone who hoped for power and advancement beholden to the monarch. Whether received from the king himself or through a trickle down system from those who had his direct favor, it was the most desirable commodity in England. Having the king's favor meant immeasurable opportunity for power, wealth and influence. Competition and factionalism were further consequence of personal monarchy. The power struggle that centered on the monarch's favor sparked a power struggle between courtiers around monarchs themselves, making "the ritual of petition and response...part of the liturgy of politics."⁶³ The consequences that flowed from this personal monarchy determined the shape of courtiers' lives. As Eric Ives suggests, politics were court politics, decisions were court decisions and promotion and advancement could only be achieved at court. Understandably then, Anne Boleyn was first and last, a phenomenon of the court.

⁵⁹ Loades *Court*, 3.

⁶⁰ Ives, *Life and Death*, 6.

⁶¹ Loades *Court*, 3.

The extension of the court was the royal progress, a vitally important instrument of Tudor government and in communicating Tudor authority to the laity who were not in London's central axis. "By visiting the localities, a monarch reinforced his authority and was presented to his subjects against a background of ceremony and ritualised splendor."⁶⁴ In fact, the institutionalized court of Henry VIII's time was a direct descendent of medieval kings' nomadic courts which progressed throughout the kingdom almost constantly. These mostly took place in the summers and were distinguished by the lodging where the monarch took residence (Henry's movements amongst his various official royal homes was not counted as a progress). Only those in which significant political calculation was taken in having the monarch stay at his nobles' residences and religious houses counted as an official royal progress. They were more than a mere travelling caravan of the royal court, but rather "the showing of a Prince to win men's hearts."⁶⁵ The progress had been a much-utilized tool of Henry VIII's father to win the loyalty of his people following Bosworth. For his first progresses in 1510 and 1511, Henry embarked on impressive and wide-ranging travels to the midlands and north of England, an unusual feat for a monarch to travel so far afield of the court.

Progresses centered on the hunt and tournaments, the king's favorite pastimes, but they were not conducted merely for the king's pleasure or purely for display. Henry never did anything with a single motive. It was through these mediums that he enacted some of the most important acts of kingship. He entertained and met with the most prominent men in the region by having them join him on a hunt or rewarding them with the most liberal

⁶² Samman, "The Progresses," 59.

⁶³ A.H. Thomas and I.D. Thornley, *The Great Chronicle of London*, 215, in Samman "The Progresses," in *The Reign of Henry VIII: Politics, Policy and Piety*, ed. Diarmaid MacCulloch (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 59.

spoils of the day. Allowing this prestigious and fleeting experience of becoming the king's boon companion secured the admiration and loyalty of the men who enforced Henry's authority in the provinces. The ritual of the hunt was Henry's own way of communicating with his subjects his prowess as a man and monarch as well as exacting loyalty, making it a vital aspect of patronage.⁶⁶ Progresses were also a calculated way to keep Henry's nobles properly subdued via the considerable financial strain of hosting the royal court. This was both a great honor and burden as noblemen spent large sums of money making ready for the monarch's arrival. This too further nurtured the system of competition born of personal monarchy as nobles vied for the attentions of the sovereign. Perhaps most importantly of all, Henry's progresses served to strengthen the bond between the monarch and his localities, ensuring that all of his subjects bought into the Tudor brand.

A cultivated prince also knew that he was only as good as those with whom he was surrounded. Henry spent significant amounts of money patronizing some of the greatest thinkers and artists of the age, whose writings and depictions of him only served to inflate his carefully cultivated image and reputation. Although his close relationship with the famous artists like Hans Holbein would come later in the reign (post-1526), discussed in further detail in Part II of this work, there are a handful of portraits of the young Henry by unidentified artists. One 1520 piece shows the king placing a ring upon his right hand, a symbol of his devout piety. Another in 1513 depicts the Battle of the Spurs with Henry at the center, accepting the surrender of a French lord, communicating the king's military prowess. In 1525, Henry demonstrated his patronage savvy when he

⁶⁴ Samman, "The Progresses," 65.

persuaded the whole Horenbout family of artists, the inventors of portrait miniatures, to leave the service of Margaret of Austria for the court of England, quite the triumph and scandal of the time.⁶⁷

Aside from his appreciation of the arts, Henry also fancied himself a humanist scholar and desired to be recognized as such by learned men. In May 1509, he lamented to Lord Mountjoy that he longed for greater knowledge, to which Mountjoy replied that this was not his concern, rather he should focus on patronizing learned men. Henry fervently responded, “Certainly; We could hardly live without them.”⁶⁸ As such his gifts to Cambridge and Oxford were substantial and he often took pupils of particular promise into his fold. During his reign Henry appointed the Oxford scholar and mathematician John Robyns as his chaplain and would ultimately turn to the authority of university men over the Church for a final verdict on his divorce. Highly educated in the classical, humanist fashion, Henry’s effortless talent for intellect was the joy of Thomas More, Erasmus and others like them. “The King’s Majesty has more learning than any English monarch possessed before him,” More declared.⁶⁹ True to his humanist education, Henry was also uncommonly talented in music, being a gifted composer and singer as well as player of the flute, harp, and lute among others. Italian ambassador Sebastian Giustinian reported to Venice that the King of England “plays well on...almost every instrument; sings and composes fairly.”⁷⁰

As a result of Henry’s own talents and interests, the English court hosted some of the most famous musicians and composers of the age during his reign. The king’s

⁶⁵ Loades, *Court*, 128.

⁶⁶ Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII: Volume I, 51.

⁶⁷ Cited in Weir, *Henry*, 9.

⁶⁸ Giustinian, I, 76.

favorite and one of the most prestigious, the Dutchman Philip van Wilder, was appointed a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber in recognition of his talents. In addition, the writings of poets like John Skelton, who in “The Douty Duke of Albany” compared Henry to the likes of Hercules, King Solomon and Prince Hector of Troy, further supported Henry’s own claims of prestige, honor and magnificence. This patronage contributed considerably to Henry’s personal image as a cultured monarch, attracting not only accomplished musicians, but also sculptors, architects, and painters from across the Continent. It was not long into his reign before the Tudor court was competing with the cultural centers in Europe.

Though Henry’s ascent to the throne had gone relatively smoothly, he would soon learn the sophisticated nuances between being crowned king and the day-to-day demands of kingship itself. Certainly by 1512, the beginning of lifelong sporadic warfare with France, Henry found himself at a pivotal crossroads when it came to the tone and legacy of his reign. A decision between being a peaceful, diligent king who set his sights on building a secure and prosperous England like his father or an ambitious conqueror like his idol Henry V before him, demanded settlement almost immediately. Ultimately Henry’s choice was not simply between peace or war, rather it was between new and old.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Scarisbrick, 21.

The Warrior King

One of the most important aspects of Tudor reigns and a king's *maiestas* was the age-old tradition of militarism. Consequently, Henry VIII was expected "to be, or to have been, an active leader in war."⁷² Victory in warfare was essential to a king's honor, a fact that ensured that the first twenty years of Henry's reign were dominated by foreign affairs. It was here that the king looked for his fulfillment and authority as a ruler. The years from 1509 to 1518 in particular saw Henry modeling himself as a young warlord. According to several contemporary sources, the first thing the new king had done was to announce his plans to resume the Hundred Years War with France. In doing so "Henry would lead England back into her past," away from the quiet prosperity it had known and back into the messy squabbles of Europe.⁷³ The young king squandered many of his father's achievements in the process. Henry's desire for martial glory would cost England much; monetarily, as his foreign escapades soon drained the enormous fortune Henry VII had amassed in the royal treasury, and diplomatically, as the new king's international ambitions reignited tensions with the Scots whom his father had successfully pacified through the marriage of Henry's sister Margaret to James IV in 1503.

Since antiquity the image of a king was characterized by victory in war.⁷⁴ A mere two generations before him, the kings of England were shining examples of this ideal--invading and ruling almost the entirety of France. Only a few decades removed from the legend of these glorious French campaigns, for Henry the memory of the Black Prince

⁷⁰ Loades, *Court*, 1.

⁷¹ Graves, 21.

⁷² Loades, *Court*, 1.

and Henry V's military prowess were fresh, and more importantly, attainable once more. He certainly fashioned himself after the likes of Edward I, Edward III and Henry V, even commissioning the translation of a work detailing the early life of the latter. Though a student of humanism, which championed peace and justice as the marks of a true Christian prince, Henry and his nobles remained "a hereditary military caste nourished on the cult of war and chivalry."⁷⁵ While Henry would become a supporter of these humanist ideals in the coming years, early in the reign the new king was fixated on the world of King Arthur and his knights and the promise of Camelot. This world praised heroism, chivalry and military prowess above all. A medieval king, the likes of the heroes Henry so admired, was marked by his chivalry and spectacular military prowess. This social and political construct, combined with the echoes of England's former glory of a lost kingdom and throne, urged Henry across the Channel in 1513.

Henry VIII carried on the tradition of English kings since the twelfth century by calling himself king of England and France as Edward III had first done in 1340. Naturally, this did little to ease the tensions between the two nations over the next two hundred years. As the Venetian ambassador aptly noted in May 1509, the new king was "liberal and handsome, a friend of Venetians and enemy of France."⁷⁶ Henry would war with France throughout his reign with conflicts arising in 1513, 1522-23 and 1544. His coveting of France had a two-fold agenda: it was a communication of his honor in a just war to reclaim his inheritance of the French throne, as well as a ripe opportunity for "a personal expression of a macho-martial king."⁷⁷ His campaigns there were certainly

⁷⁴ Scarisbrick, 22.

⁷⁵ LP, I, 17.

⁷⁶ Graves, 172.

chiefly about dynastic acquisition, but also very much about demonstrating Henry's personal honor, chivalry and courage as a warrior king and heir to historical legend. The king's vested interest in warfare also ran parallel to the reputations and strivings of his fellow rulers. Thanks to his father's inward-facing policies, England was behind the curve on the European stage when Henry ascended as the young lion amongst the more established and experienced monarchs of Europe. The formidable Louis XII of France and cunning Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian had spent their lives absorbed in war-making and Henry was determined that he, and England, would compete with them on the international stage. The approval and respect of his peers was also essential to Henry's legitimacy and establishing a glorious international reputation. This made him determined that "more than anything else, he would be one of them."⁷⁸

Henry's natural ally against France was his wife's Spanish homeland, a formidable friend for it had been Catherine's parents Ferdinand and Isabella who had finally unified the Spanish kingdoms. In November 1511, Anglo-Spanish forces moved to conquer Aquitaine, though it was not until the arrival of an English envoy at the court of France in April 1512 announcing a formal declaration of war that a career of military disappointments officially began for Henry. He would spend the next several years as a pawn of Spain and the Holy Roman Empire, aligning with both to attain his dreams of conquering France and restoring honor to England once more. Spain would repeatedly leave England to flounder in military fiascos while Maximilian's self-serving machinations would dissuade Henry from taking Normandy in 1513 after winning Tournai. Still, Henry pursued France with a single-minded determination. In a joint effort

⁷⁷ Scarisbrick, 23.

with the Empire, Henry landed in Calais at the helm of his first royal campaign in June 1513. Henry would taste his first military victory at the Battle of the Spurs at Therouanne that August. Though not particularly glorious (it was merely a horse chase of the French, who miscalculated the English position and fled), Henry collected hostages in the form of a duke, a marquis and the vice-admiral of France from the debacle. From here, Henry went on to take the town of Tournai, a French stronghold on the Netherlands-French border, in lavish fashion. His continental successes were lauded as the first English victory in France in seventy-five years. These victories coupled with Catherine's defeat of the Scots at the historic Battle of Flodden during that same summer, where most of the Scottish aristocracy, noted clergymen and King James himself were killed in a crushing defeat, put the young king well on his way to redeeming England's military reputation. Henry had proven himself on the field of battle, led an army, laid sieges and occupied cities, and had been acclaimed and honored by the Church, the giver of God's, and therefore, royal authority. Most importantly, he had won the respect and acknowledgement of an Emperor, who now called him son and brother. When Tournai fell, Maximilian allowed Henry to enter first, following behind him a few days later in a sign of deference. Henry wrote to Margaret of Savoy that the Emperor was as kind to him as if he were his own father.⁷⁹ It was gratifying for a young king to be treated this way by an established fellow monarch.⁸⁰

This concern for his peers' approval went far beyond the mere angst of youth, but rather to the core of successful monarchy. Henry came to his throne in his late teens and at a pivotal moment in European politics. Within the first decade of his reign the older

⁷⁸ LP, I, 2170.

⁷⁹ Diary of John Taylor in LP, I, 2391.

generation of monarchs rapidly died out (Louis XII in 1515, Ferdinand in 1516, and Maximilian in 1519) giving way to a new generation of kings, all brimming with ambition and possibility. This bred tension over power and position between the three traditionally warring nations of Spain, France and England, each of which jockeyed for papal favor and power. Here again, it was essential for Henry to be seen as a worthy competitor. Henry's principal rival by far was Francis I, the young king of France with whom he competed with until his own death in January 1547, with the French king beating him by remaining on his throne by just three months longer. Aside from Francis, Henry was particularly concerned with Charles I of Spain, later Charles V Holy Roman Emperor (to Henry's great displeasure), darling of the Pope and ruler of vast lands including Spain and the formidable Hapsburg Empire. England would shuffle alliances between France and the Empire for decades afterward based on the more appealing opportunity. Henry's dealings with these rivals would fuel English foreign policy in a deeply personal way, defining much of the early and last years of his reign. As we shall see, he would become particularly preoccupied in between.

Aside from his continental squabbles, Henry was also forced to turn an eye North to Scotland. The fragile peace that his father had solidified went to pieces almost immediately upon Henry's ascension. Several politically damaging incidents ranging from snubs⁸¹ to murder⁸² weakened the Scots' commitment to peace. Henry's war against France was the final straw, leading to the strengthening of the traditional Franco-Scottish alliance and a Scottish invasion while the king was on campaign in 1513. Their defeat

⁸⁰ Margaret Tudor did not inherit a valuable some of jewels following her father's death.

⁸¹ The English killed the Scottish warden of the Marches and a naval commander at sea.

added yet another jewel to Henry's prestigious crown as a ruler fully capable of occupying a hostile region and staving off an invasion.

This lust for military glory, though appearing dormant at times as more advantageous directions presented themselves to him, would stay with Henry for his entire reign. One might say this was his true calling, surviving his better known interlude as theologian and peacemaker in the 1530s, Henry would finish his reign as he had begun it, at war.⁸³ No matter how much time passed, it appeared that "the image of the royal warrior could not be separated from the sensitive royal honor."⁸⁴ Henry displayed this honor in two ways: internationally as the great general and domestically in his prowess on the jousting pitch and, as we have seen, in theatrical entertainments.⁸⁵

The Chivalrous Knight

In tandem with his dreams of military lordship, the medieval ideal of the virtuous knight appealed most especially to Henry. When they could not be slaked in actual combat, his youthful energies found satiation in the outlet of the idealized world of knight errantry. He presided over a reign that "witnessed the Indian summer of the age of chivalry."⁸⁶ The king's favorite display of chivalry was the joust. As a result, chivalric tournaments rose to new levels of frequency and extravagance during his reign. They became glittering social events that allowed Henry to display his prestige and wealth. Days of tournaments and games followed Henry's coronation in 1509, providing yet

⁸² Scarisbrick, 24.

⁸³ Graves, 37.

⁸⁴ Graves, 37.

⁸⁵ Weir, *Henry*, 116.

another opportunity for Tudor branding. Green and white roses and pomegranates (symbolizing Henry's marriage to Catherine and England's union with Spain) decorated the battlements and lozenges of Westminster Palace throughout the festivities.⁸⁷

Tournaments served the dual purpose of entertaining the court and communicating to the public images of England's honorable and chivalrous king. In early 1510, the king made his official debut in the lists. He quickly established a stellar international reputation in this arena. He excelled at horsemanship, falconry, wrestling, tennis and dancing as reported by various sources. In archery and hand-to-hand combat, he knew no match. While on his first military campaign in Calais in 1513, Henry put the archers of his regiment to shame, having "surpassed them all, as he surpasses them in stature and personal graces."⁸⁸ When Tournai surrendered on this same campaign, Henry staged a dazzling tournament in which he provided a display of personal horsemanship that impressed many foreign nobles, including Margaret of Savoy. Henry jousted "marvellously" reported a Venetian ambassador in 1515, a result of the relentless training for the competition, and was as Alison Weir suggests, "literally obsessed" with the chivalric sport.⁸⁹ For the next fifteen years his personal prowess at the tournament would be a hallmark of his image. His success in this area also partially compensated for his lackluster performance in real warfare.⁹⁰

The tournament was "the ultimate theater of chivalry,"⁹¹ an outgrowth of warfare itself and a major aspect of Tudor court politics. The court was the hub of chivalry, sport

⁸⁶ Hall, fol. 4v.

⁸⁷ LP, I, 2391.

⁸⁸ Weir, *Henry*, 118.

⁸⁹ Loades, *Court*, 27.

⁹⁰ Weir, *Henry*, 117.

and festivities and Henry was wholeheartedly committed to all of these. His personal involvement and enthusiasm for the tournament and joust were renowned throughout Europe, making the events an integral part of England's international prestige. They were often accompanied by much allegory and pageantry. On one occasion, Henry arrived at the jousts dressed as Hercules himself. Achieving honor at the joust was nearly as prestigious as attaining glory in battle and success at the lists was almost synonymous with royal favor. To drive the point home, participants in the games literally entered their names in the competition upon a "Tree of Chivalry." Chivalry was "a potent force in the symbolism of monarchy, and in the intense competitiveness of the dynasties of western Europe."⁹² No Tudor monarch exercised the power of chivalry within court politics more effectively than Henry VIII. He also greatly enjoyed the tradition of courtly love, "an integral element in chivalry," that was "central to the life of the Tudor court and elite."⁹³ This social construct too had its place in the tournament. Jousts were typically held in honor of the ladies of the court, who gave favors to their chosen knights to wear at the lists. At the conclusion of the day's competitions, the champion received accolades from the Queen or the highest-ranking lady present, pitting men against one another for the recognition of a desirable woman. This system of relations between the sexes on a public stage will be vitally important when discussing the fall of Anne Boleyn.

Chivalry certainly involved its fair share of frivolities, but above all it was an institution built on the marriage of Christian virtues such as modesty and self-restraint

⁹¹ Loades *Court*, 2.

⁹² "The Early Life of Anne Boleyn Part Two—The Court of Margaret of Austria," The Anne Boleyn Files, accessed April 8, 2012, <http://www.theanneboleynfiles.com/6816/the-early-life-of-anne-boleyn-part-two-the-court-of-margaret-of-austria/>.

and the traditional heroic ideal.⁹⁴ As a “moral champion” the chivalric knight was far more than a mere warrior. Projections of courtesy, piety and justice were also essential to his honor. Perhaps the ultimate embodiment of this man were the heroes of antiquity whom Henry emulated at seemingly every opportunity. The tradition of the Order of the Garter, England's highest and most coveted order of chivalry, was an example of the power of chivalry in the politics of personal monarchy. “Henry VIII with his passion for ancient chivalric values and his policy of accentuating his own magnificence” was a champion of this traditional order, which had been revived during his father’s reign. The Order comprised twenty-five Knights Companions who could be appointed by the king alone at annual meetings at court. These were conducted with much pomp and ceremony. Seizing any and all opportunities for branding and image communication, Henry’s Knights dressed in “a blue velvet mantle with a Garter on the left shoulder”⁹⁵ and silk garters embroidered with Tudor roses about their legs marking them as the king’s men and identifying Henry as the fount of honor. The king additionally decreed the official collar worn by the Knights to consist of twelve Tudor roses set within blue garters and interspersed with twelve tasseled knots. Receiving the Order was a mark of great honor but also a sign of personal friendship with the king. It was subsequently coveted by many nobles of the court. Henry knew all too well that an honorable king was accessible to his subjects when necessary. It was his duty to placate the peerage to a certain extent, and the Order served as one of his chief vehicles through which to reward his favorites and pacify grumblings.

⁹⁴ Loades, *Court*, 1.

⁹⁵ LP, III, 2, 2968.

A good king was also merciful, taking his responsibilities as a “good lord” as outlined by chivalric code seriously. Good lordship was essential to the process of authority. In exchange for the deference and loyalty of their subjects, kings were expected to not only interpret and enforce the laws of the realm, but also to call his leading nobles to counsel, mediate their quarrels and to employ and reward their services.⁹⁶ Most of these functions, like all other aspects of Henry’s reign, were carried out on the public stage. With the skill of a media mogul, Henry began his rule by issuing a general pardon to all offenders except those charged with treason, murder and felony on 23 April 1509, making his first image to his people that of a just monarch. He also famously offered a very staged (a plea for mercy was given by Queen Catherine on bended knee with unbound hair) and public pardon to rioters in London following “Evil May Day” 1517⁹⁷ for which the king was again lauded as merciful and loving. Henry prided himself on his abilities to appear both merciful and fearsome, charming and unnerving in his majesty, and above all, the very definition of an educated, talented and chivalrous knight. In short, prior to 1521 at least, Henry was “a youth wholly absorbed in dance and song, courtly love and knight-errantry.”⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Loades, *Court*, 2.

⁹⁷ J.G. Nichols, ed., “The Chronicle of the Grey Friars: Henry VIII”, in *Chronicle of the Grey Friars of London*, Camden Society Old Series, Volume 53, (London, 1852), 30.

⁹⁸ Scarisbrick, 16.

The Godly Prince

If Henry “began his reign as a warrior...bent on the splendid and heroic,”⁹⁹ a significant shift occurred around 1517 as the king also relished in his reputation as a godly prince. By the late 1510s, Henry may have found warfare to be not nearly as glorious as he had had imagined. It was in fact extremely expensive, easily frustrated by the ever-fluctuating balance of European politics and was all around more trouble than it was worth. Thus, “the king changed his persona.”¹⁰⁰ This change was solidified by the Treaty of London signed in 1518 when, “on a stage prepared by Wolsey, he [Henry] stood forth as the peacemaker of Europe, amidst a blaze of high diplomacy, banquets, revels and pageants.”¹⁰¹ Still, this new Henry was no less egotistical or competitive than the old. His lust for establishing his own glory and magnificence had never wavered through the years of being the chivalrous knight and warrior king, but rather warlike means no longer served Henry’s end. If as Michael Graves suggests, England could never really compete with the wealth and sheer size of its continental counterparts in France and Spain, it could, with Henry as its figurehead of course, cultivate an image of power through appearing as mediator and the king the Christian peacemaker between the two nations.

A significant occurrence in European politics had created the ideal opening for England once again to assert itself on the international stage. The merger of the Spanish and Holy Roman Empires when Charles V was crowned emperor in 1519 leveled the

⁹⁹ Scarisbrick, 16.

¹⁰⁰ Scarisbrick, 97.

¹⁰¹ Scarisbrick, 97.

playing field in Europe substantially and placed England in a powerful new position. Prior to the merger, there had been four competing powers in Europe; after there were only three--England, France and the Empire, which now included Spain. Though England could not compete with either independently, France and Spain were equally matched in wealth and power. This made England the new table turner in the balancing act between the two nations and meant that England's, and Henry's, friendship was now a highly valuable commodity. It was into this new political arena that Henry introduced the new, peaceful facet to his image.

To this point in the reign, Henry successfully established an honorable and impressive reputation at home and abroad, but he had not done it alone. It is during this phase of Henry's rule that the formidable Thomas Wolsey emerged into prominence. Wolsey would be instrumental in aiding Henry in transforming his image. He was appointed Lord Chancellor in 1514, a position he would hold until 1529. With Wolsey's advent and his own maturation as king, Henry's foreign policy shifted from open warfare to political wheeling and dealing in which England appeased both players, Charles V and Francis I. As a new "erstwhile devotee of peace,"¹⁰² Henry diligently and wholeheartedly preached it from 1518-21 as he found this new image as popular in Rome as powerful as that of the accomplished warrior and sportsman. He recognized Wolsey's talents and accomplishments as yet another feather to garnish his many public relations hats. Though Henry had the luxury of Wolsey's expertise and the ability to pick and choose when he would be heavily involved in matters of state, he was by no means a puppet king or even an uninformed one. The young king who so often only wanted to dance and hunt rather

¹⁰² Scarisbrick, 83.

than assume royal duties was also “a man who, time and again, could show a detailed grasp of foreign affairs, and hold his own with, if not out do, foreign ambassadors; pounce on something Wolsey had missed, assess a situation or proposal with steely swiftness and exactness and confidently overrule his minister.”¹⁰³ Wolsey was his most trusted and capable advisor, but Henry was certainly aware of the major business of the kingdom even at the height of his youth and impetuosity. As he matured in his crown and as a man, Henry would take more and more of his realm’s business into his control. This is not to discredit the widely held theory that prior 1521-2, Henry was only sporadically interested in the day-to-day running of his kingdom. He certainly let Wolsey take the lead, though he never surrendered full control.

The king’s chancellor was, above all, wholly bent on making peace with France and worked tirelessly to achieve it during his time in favor. A shaky peace between France and England had fallen apart when Louis XII died in 1514 due to tensions surrounding the rise of Francis I. Still, Wolsey pressed and by January 1518, the chancellor and his king hatched the mutually satisfying Treaty of Universal Peace that would not only solve all squabbles on the continent, but would crown Henry as the architect and Prince of Peace to all of Christendom. The plan, introduced in October 1518, bound all the great powers of Europe to “universal and perpetual” peace on pain of total warfare in which all other signees would unite against any party that broke this agreement. It was sealed by the aforementioned Treaty of London, which was celebrated throughout Europe. The culmination of England’s new friendship with France resulted in one of Henry’s most memorable and spectacular instances of pageantry, the Field of

¹⁰³ Scarisbrick, 46.

Cloth of Gold in 1519. Though very little of political significance was actually achieved (France and England were back at war within three years), Henry's contemporaries hailed the Field of Cloth of Gold as the eighth wonder of the world. A stunning display of England's opulence, grandeur and honor, the meeting was designed to "bring the chivalries of two nations together to joust and tilt, feast and dance--instead of to fight."¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, the meeting "proclaimed the new man" Henry had become "yet more loudly."¹⁰⁵ This *rapprochement* between the nations of England and France was a turning point in Henry's career and solidified his new image as peaceful Christian king. "For the warrior-king of England, heir to Edward III and Henry V, to kiss Francis on the cheek was a significant act."¹⁰⁶ Henry towed the line of peace diligently and determinedly for three years before the open aggression between Francis and Charles once again drew England off the sidelines in 1522.

"No one could have been a more dutiful son of the Church than Henry VIII in 1521."¹⁰⁷ Henry valued the support and approval of Rome as the source of much of his honor and authority. The pageantry of his court revolved around religious devotion. Several of the most important court days were pulled directly from the Christian calendar, including Michaelmas, Christmas, Twelfth Day and Easter. He also insisted upon courtiers using the triple bow (signifying the Holy Trinity).¹⁰⁸ With Wolsey at the helm, Henry became the golden child of Christendom in the early 1520s. From 1519-20 he strove to appease the Church in earnest. Following the prestige of the Field of Cloth of

¹⁰⁴ Scarisbrick, 79.

¹⁰⁵ Scarisbrick, 82.

¹⁰⁶ Scarisbrick, 74.

¹⁰⁷ Loades, *Court*, 29.

¹⁰⁸ Graves, 33.

Gold, and the later collapse of these treaties, Henry's appetite for glory and authority had to be satiated elsewhere. This time, he turned to the Church.

The Catholic Church was the ultimate authority, even above kings, in early modern Europe. The Pope, as Christ's vicar on earth was the head of all Christian kings. The Church was also the giver and taker of salvation, as the common belief was that the road to heaven only lay through Catholicism. The Church was the very pillar of society and the final source of power and authority in Europe. Religion pervaded society from the lowliest of the population to its highest seat, royalty. It is particularly significant that only a representative of the Holy See could ordain royalty at their coronation in a Catholic Church. This simple act summarized the relationship between kings and the Church, as Rome was the founder and reinforcer of royal authority. The ritual of the coronation was a sacred one as a ruler was consecrated as divine only after this ceremony had taken place. This holy right, given by God himself and only bestowed upon a ruler by the Church, was the essence of authority in sixteenth-century Europe. A major factor in the deference paid to kings by their subjects lay in the overarching and pervasive power of the Church and ultimately the salvation of one's soul. To disobey an order from the only vehicle through which an afterlife was offered meant eternal damnation. Rebellion or questioning a ruler or the Church's authority was a sin against God. In short, Catholicism decreed that it was the will and law of God that kings be sovereign and unquestioned rulers.

Henry recognized that he was beholden to the Church, for his legitimacy and authority like his father before him. In line with his new image, the king of England began in earnest to win the approval of Rome. In 1519 he announced in an elaborate

letter to the Pope himself that he would venture on a crusade.¹⁰⁹ Under humanist tutelage, in 1521 Henry was named Fidei Defensor (Defender of the Faith) by Pope Leo X based on his work *Defense of the Seven Sacraments*, which in an ironic turn of foreshadowing, affirmed the Church's authority. Henry's talent for expressing his views on religious law would prove to be valuable in the later dissolution of his first marriage and the subsequent defense of his own religious policies. His use of the printed word was invaluable to securing his image as both a godly prince and God's lieutenant later in the reign.

God's Anointed Lieutenant

This persona is significant to arguments made in the second half of this thesis and will be discussed in greater detail there. Following his break with Rome, Henry would be cut off from this traditional source of authority. His very identity as a ruler demanded reevaluation. The ways in which he would reconstruct his authority and honor are of great significance to the legacy of his reign. It also marks the start of the period of Henry's reign for which he is best known. While this aspect of his identity, as God's anointed, was certainly existent and important throughout his entire reign, he began to communicate this image in earnest with the advent of Anne Boleyn and the English Reformation which resulted from the political conflict their relationship created. The years of peace, without their martial heroics, left Henry "restless, if not aimless."¹¹⁰ This was something to be feared in any man, let alone a king, and particularly Henry as he

¹⁰⁹ Scarisbrick, 105.

¹¹⁰ Scarisbrick, 97.

approached middle age. As England would soon learn, this overflowing and unchanneled vitality would lead its king down unusual and controversial paths.

Initially Henry would use his authority to act in defense of the Church when Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses appeared on the theological scene, essentially sparking the Great Schism of the Reformation. By 1521, Lutheranism had spread to England where it took root in universities and amongst those of humanist learning. Soon heretical (according the Church) texts and pamphlets were circulating in England despite the authorities' efforts to suppress them. Henry, theologian and scholar that he was, felt compelled to engage Luther in his *A Defense of the Seven Sacraments*. This engagement took place in defense of Henry's own image and authority. He believed kings could not allow heretical movements such as Lutheranism to take root because they encouraged social division, and even revolution, which severely undermined the "the very body politic made up of Church and state"¹¹¹ which shared a closely entwined relationship. More importantly, these new ideas "robbed princes and prelates of all power and authority," threatening the very fabric of his rule.¹¹²

Sixteenth-century monarchs were perceived as semi divine beings, not mere men but the Lord's Anointed, His deputies on earth, and called by divine right to dominion over his subjects.¹¹³ Thus obedience to this established authority was a religious duty, according to the Church of Rome. Matters of theology were meant for the concern of those best qualified to interpret it (i.e. those in power such as kings, clergymen and other high ranking Church officials) and not the laity. The reformation's egalitarianism in

¹¹¹ Weir, *Henry*, 230.

¹¹² Henry VIII, Rev. Louis O'Donovan, ed. *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum: or Defence of the Seven Sacraments (Classic Reprint)* (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1908), 312.

¹¹³ Weir, *Henry*, 21.

reference to religion was “a threat to the established concepts of order and hierarchy in a Christian society.”¹¹⁴ Henry’s work was also a self-serving bid to once again place himself amongst the elite ranks of the other kings of Europe. Both Charles V and Francis I had titles bestowed upon them by the Church, “The Most Catholic King” and the “Most Christian King” respectively, and Henry had been seeking his own since around 1512. While truly outraged by what he read in Luther’s works, he also saw them as his opportunity to procure his own title from Rome. As we have seen, he was indeed rewarded.

Publishing such a work in defense of the Church’s authority was the perfect combination of Henry’s skill and the modernity that would prove invaluable to the king in the coming years. The Renaissance rocked European society and politics to its core. While an age of display, learning and advancement, it was also one of technological innovation. The advent of the printing press in 1440 changed the face of mankind forever. Aside from being at least partially responsible for the spread and success of the Reformation, the printing press also “transformed the presentations and perceptions of princes.”¹¹⁵ These early modern monarchs were some of the innovators of strategic dissemination of written and image-bearing communication, a cornerstone of modern day public relations. In contrast to modern times, early modern public relations professionals used these tools to negotiate their authority rather than necessarily presenting a likeable image. While his father too issued numerous royal proclamations in his time, Henry VIII was the first of the Tudors to establish authority based on the royal word, often directly intervening in print to challenges and criticisms of policies vital to his rule. From the

¹¹⁴ Weir, *Henry*, 231.

¹¹⁵ Sharpe, 1.

outset of his reign in 1509 Henry used royal proclamations as a vital tool in communicating his policies to the common people. Later, he also wrote and circulated verses, songs and translations that publicized his policies and regal power and continued to write pamphlets in response to the teachings of Protestants for several years.¹¹⁶ For example, a March 1529 proclamation expressly forbids heresy in the form of unlicensed preaching and in heretical books.¹¹⁷ He would fully assume the role of God's lieutenant later in his reign, after the rise of Boleyn. The pivotal importance of the printed word to Henry's reign will be discussed in further detail post-1526.

Like his father before him, Henry drew heavily on piety and historical allegory as the source of much of his authority as king. As a young ruler who had succeeded to the throne without challenge, he modeled himself after the great kings and warrior legends of the past to establish much of his majesty and honor. He drew upon the Church and pious tradition to establish his authority and sovereignty as an anointed, unquestionable king of England. Henry ruled in a time when it was increasingly important for a king to be both warrior and a man of learning. Traditional royal virtues of bravery, chivalry, justice and piety remained an essential aspect of Henry's *maiestas* but the advent of the Renaissance and Reformation demanded the evolution of the Christian Prince, making the world and a king's role in it a very different place from the one in which his father ruled. Where Henry VII laid the groundwork, his son's advancement of the art of representation and new styles of self-projection and publicization "fundamentally transformed the culture of authority and the monarchy itself."¹¹⁸ Whatever monsters were to come, Henry had

¹¹⁶ Sharpe, 84.

¹¹⁷ Paul L. Hughes, & Larkin, James F., ed., *Tudor Royal Proclamations, Volume I: The Early Tudors (1485-1555)* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), item 122, ix.

¹¹⁸ Sharpe, 85.

wasted no time establishing and presenting himself to the world as “a prodigy, a sun-king, a *stupor mundi*.”¹¹⁹ The very early years of his rule saw a king presiding over a world of romance, mythology and lavish allegory.¹²⁰ Soon enough the displays of his wealth and the prestige that he took such personal joy in, would become colored by political his agenda, but early in the reign the world was a lighter, merrier place. Court pageants portrayed the roses and pomegranates of England and Spain united, reflecting the devotion of a young king to his queen. He dripped in wealth and majesty and charmed almost all who encountered him. The new regime was utterly stunning.

What the new king would become would prove equally stunning to his subjects. For all his charms, Henry harbored a dark side. His great charm could give way all too easily to rages and shouting, these most often fell on those he once claimed to love. Lord Privy Seal Thomas Cromwell was well advised by his predecessor and Henry’s one-time friend and mentor Thomas More in 1532 that he should “ever tell him (Henry) what he ought to do, but never what he is able to do,” for “if the lion knew his own strength, hard were it for any man to rule him.”¹²¹ More was imprisoned in 1534 for refusing to swear the Oath of Succession. As an example of Henry’s arbitrary wielding of the law, More was executed for treason for rejecting the king’s new title as Supreme Head of the Church after Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy in November 1534. Based on the Treason Act of February 1535, More’s words and deeds were punishable by death. Yet, how could he be charged with a crime that had not been made a treasonable offense until after he had committed it?

¹¹⁹ Scarisbrick, 20.

¹²⁰ Scarisbrick, 20.

¹²¹ William Roper, “The Life of Thomas More, Knight” in *Two Early Tudor Lives*, ed. R.S. Sylvester and D.P. Harding (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962), 228.

In addition to this charming knack for fabrication and single-minded determination, Henry was highly-strung, unstable and possessed an alarmingly ruthless streak of cruelty. As psychoanalyst J.C. Flügel suggested, he may have also suffered from an Oedipus complex, resulting in a desire for, and yet horror of incest, which will be key in discussing Boleyn's downfall. All of these attributes, good and bad, came together to form a king as formidable as he was captivating, who wore his regality with splendid conviction.¹²² These same convictions would serve the king of England well in his efforts throughout the reign to assert and maintain his image and authority, which he would wield most frightfully on those closest to him. Still Henry's greatest feat was perhaps keeping the general loyalty of his subjects. Though rebellions would arise and subsequently be crushed, for the most part Henry's popularity did not wane in the face of his reforms and cruelties. His subjects still revered him as a great king who had England's interests at heart.¹²³

¹²² Scarisbrick, 17.

¹²³ Weir, *Henry*, 25.

CHAPTER TWO: “*NOLE ME TANGERE, FOR CEASAR’S I AM*”

As the saying goes, “well-behaved women seldom make history.” Cliché these words may be, but there is no denying their truth regardless of time and circumstance. The sixteenth century would produce more remarkable women in Church and State than any prior to it, the majority of whom rose to recognition because of their inability to simply fall in line. Anne Boleyn is certainly among the most remarkable of this sisterhood. She was hardly the first or the last of her kind when she rose to power in the late 1520s. Henry would entertain a string of alleged and confirmed mistresses throughout his reign, but none would be as significant as Boleyn. Unlike her predecessors at Henry’s court, she was the archetypal elite royal mistress, who not only consorted with a king, but changed history in the process, joining the ranks of Katherine Swynford (founder of the Tudor line through the Beauforts) and Alice Perrers (mistress to Edward III and the living prototype for Chaucer’s Wife of Bath). Though in substantial company, Boleyn’s feats would surpass them all when in May 1533 she became the first mistress in history to take the place of an anointed, living queen, proving if nothing else, that she was a pioneer. This precedent was nearly a decade in the making, the process of which shall be discussed in further detail here. Having established Henry VIII’s formidable talent for image manipulation and communication to establish and maintain his own authority, a thorough examination of the public relations methods through which he justified his quest for, made and destroyed his mistress-Queen is necessary to the argument of this thesis.

First, an introduction to Anne Boleyn, and her formative years is appropriate. As one of three children of Thomas Boleyn and Elizabeth Howard, Boleyn was born in

Norfolk to a well-off family with ties to the formidable house of Howard, one of the oldest and most powerful English noble families. There is much contention among historians about the year in which she was born and in what order she and her siblings George and Mary came into the world. Ives' theory of 1500 as her birth year, behind Mary and before George is the most likely and generally accepted. This birth date is based on Boleyn's brief placement as a maid of honour in 1513 to Margaret Habsburg, Archduchess of Austria.¹ As she would later prove, the Boleyns were of ambitious stock. Her father's position as a successful courtier and diplomat, serving first as ambassador to the Habsburgs and then to France, afforded his children exposure to the very best that Europe had to offer in the way of education and opportunity. Anne Boleyn's dispatch to the Habsburg court in summer 1513 would alter the course of her life. Though she spent only a year there, it was a deeply significant one. Margaret's court was the hub of decorum, elegance and art in Europe, and Boleyn was a quick study. It was at this worldly court that she learned the French language, wit, charm, grace, and developed an appetite for the arts that would later carry her to the English throne. Like her future husband, Boleyn was an exceptional child, precocious and charming. Those who encountered her during her youth recalled quite vividly that she learned quickly and was the ideal student in all ways of the court. After only a brief time with her, Margaret herself wrote glowingly of "how bright and pleasant for her young age" she found Boleyn and that she was "more beholden to you [Thomas Boleyn] for sending her to me than you are to me."² The most important aspect of Anne's education under Margaret of Austria

¹ This was a post reserved for young teenagers, not children as Boleyn would have been if the 1507 birth date were accepted.

² Ives, *Life and Death*, 19.

was the access to culture. For a century Flanders had been the cultural heart of northern Europe, a situation from which Boleyn greatly benefitted, being immersed in a world of art, books, music, and learning. Boleyn's training here facilitated her endeavors throughout her life and her future achievements can in many ways be directly linked to her experiences in Burgundy.

A typical shift of Henry's diplomatic aims forced Boleyn to leave Margaret's court in August 1514 for France to serve first Mary Tudor in her brief marriage to the Dauphin and later the French queen, Claude. In France, Boleyn received invaluable lessons in the art of observation and imitation. It was here, at Europe's most notoriously erotic court that she acquired one of her most appealing qualities: a disarming and overt sexuality and gift for flirtation. At the sophisticated and promiscuous French court, her skills were refined so that by the time she was recalled to England in 1522, her famously cultivated European persona was complete. Without a doubt her continental education provided Boleyn with the tools needed to take the English court and the king himself by storm.

Upon her return to England it became increasingly clear that coquettish sexuality was not the only weapon in Boleyn's arsenal. It was often commented upon by her peers that her mannerisms were distinctly French rather than English, providing her with an exotic allure that set her apart from other ladies so that "no one would ever have taken her to be English by her manners, but a native-born Frenchwoman."³ There was simply no one at court who could rival her intellect and polish. Though she was not considered a traditional English beauty (fair and blonde), Boleyn was swan-necked with powerfully

³ Lancelot de Carles, *La Grande Bretagne devant L'Opinion de Francaise*, ed. G. Ascoli, (Paris: Gamber, 1927), lines 53-4.

expressive eyes that “invited conversation,” which she “knew well” how to use, and lovely dark hair that nearly made up for her sallow complexion.⁴ Her allure was not based in looks, but rather in personality and intelligence. Her continental education had given her an irresistible style all her own. Also in terms of style, not much has changed in the last 500 years. The French court in the sixteenth century was a fashion hub with clothing distinctly different, more lavish, and impressive than any other court in Europe. The French had reputation for extravagance and excess, particularly in style of clothing. Anne wore her dresses and hoods cut in the French fashion, drawing even more notice to herself at the English court. Lancelot de Carles once described her as inferior to many in beauty “but for behavior, manners, attire and tongue she excelled them all.” Based on Ives’ timeline, Boleyn would have cut quite the figure when she arrived again on English soil as a 22-year-old in the flush of youth, dressed to kill, and with a charming French lilt to her speech. She was a true Renaissance woman and one who did not go unnoticed.

Boleyn was initially brought home to wed her Irish cousin James Butler, her family’s rival for the earldom of Ormonde. Their union was to mend the feud by marriage, though the arrangement never came to fruition and she remained in England where she soon attracted a slew of admirers, first the married poet Thomas Wyatt and later Henry Percy, future earl of Northumberland. Most historians agree that Wyatt’s love in particular, though ardent, was unrequited. In his poem “Whoso List to Hunt,” he writes of Boleyn as a deer being hunted down (by Henry) and out of Wyatt’s own reach because she declares “Caesar’s [the king] I am.” Whether Boleyn flirted in return is uncertain, but the general consensus remains that Wyatt loved her from afar. Things did get particularly

⁴ de Carles, as cited in Weir, *Henry*, 258.

messy when it came to Percy however, as he was already betrothed to Mary Talbot, though this did not stop him from binding himself to Boleyn as well.⁵ Though the rumors that they consummated a secret marriage have not been proven, it is clear that there was some sort of inappropriate affair between the two and at Henry's command, Wolsey, who kept the young Percy in his household, refused to allow him to break the original match. Percy was eventually berated by his patron for his "peevish folly"⁶ and sent home to his father to find his wits once more. This, according to George Cavendish, marked the beginning of the enmity between Wolsey and Anne Boleyn.⁷ This debacle would come back to haunt Boleyn in 1532 when Mary Talbot petitioned for a divorce on the basis of Percy's dalliance with the then soon-to-be queen Anne. If these early suitors and those later accused of adultery alongside her were any example, any man who loved Boleyn met with heartache and great troubles. Whatever trifles she may or may not have been involved in upon her return to England, it is clear that by 1527 the king so fancied her that "almost everything began to grow out of frame and good order."⁸

"The Concubine" and the Beast

It is impossible to map an exact timeline of Boleyn's rise in Henry's affections. Though the "when" of the story remains a mystery, the "how" is more easily deciphered. An understanding of the king's mindset and circumstances in the mid-1520s can provide

⁵ Cavendish, 29.

⁶ Cavendish, 30.

⁷ Cavendish, 34.

⁸ Cavendish, 29.

a good starting point. Having firmly established himself as the King of English Hearts, Henry grew increasingly restless as he approached middle age. His years as peacemaker of Christendom had proven tiresome and perhaps more trouble than they were worth and the king began to look toward new pursuits. These often involved the various ladies of his court, as the king was prone to the “overmuch love of women.”⁹ Henry’s turn as “Sir Loyal Heart” had been short-lived and not much missed. Though rumors of paramours had surrounded the king since his first campaigns in France, the exact moment when Henry strayed in his marriage is unknown. No doubt it was within the first five years of his union as he took up with Elizabeth Blount, Catherine's lady-in-waiting, shortly after the New Year 1514. She bore the king a son, Henry Fitzroy, in 1519 before being neatly and quietly married off. Mary Boleyn soon followed in 1521. She likely carried on with the king until 1526 and may have borne him yet another bastard son.¹⁰ Whatever happened prior to Boleyn’s arrival, it was common knowledge that the king “never spared a man in his anger nor a woman in his lust.”¹¹

Henry had tired of his marriage rather quickly, and Catherine was helpless to remedy the situation as she could provide no male heir. From 1524 onward, Henry and his advisors had become increasingly anxious about the matter of the succession. This was particularly so following a jousting accident in March when the king came within an inch of dying without an heir, bringing terrifying flashbacks to the civil wars of the previous generation. By this time Catherine was in her late thirties and had not had a pregnancy in five years following several stillbirths, miscarriages and the death of an

⁹ Cited in Weir, *Henry*, 123.

¹⁰ Based on 1535 comments made by John Hale, vicar of Isleworth, LP, VIII, 567.

¹¹ Weir, *Henry*, 123.

infant prince in 1511. Their sole living child was Princess Mary, a girl who could not hold the throne. For all these reasons, Henry had been secretly questioning the validity of his marriage since around 1522.¹² If Catherine had produced an heir, no doubt Boleyn's story would have been very different as noble women, particularly queens, were only as powerful as the sons they bore and the successions they secured. As one of her predecessors Elizabeth Woodville, married to the rapacious Edward IV, had demonstrated, fertility and a wealth of sons secured one's unrivaled position as queen.¹³ A son was demanded and on this front Catherine had failed. By 1525, there was a real fear of dynastic crisis and the resumption of civil war, making the king and his council increasingly desperate. Boleyn could not have timed her ascent more aptly.

All of this put the king in the perfect mindset for Anne Boleyn, who out of ambition or virtue (perhaps both), refused to become his mistress. This did not deter the king in any way as evidenced by Henry's appearance at the joust on Shrove Tuesday 1526 in the guise of a lover tortured, his costume emblazoned with a man's heart engulfed in flames bearing the phrase "Declare, I dare not."¹⁴ As Alison Weir suggests, the king, by all appearances, had fallen in love for the first time in his life. His early boy-like awe of Catherine was eclipsed by a passion that only Boleyn could awaken in him. Henry's devotion to Boleyn has often been dismissed as simply a randy and arrogant king who was unable to resist being denied. The "chase" was certainly a strong factor in Henry's devotion, but evidence also suggests that there was a substantial relationship and

¹² According to his confessor John Longland who said in 1532 that he had first heard rumblings of a divorce from the king "nine or ten years ago."

¹³ Edward was notoriously promiscuous but remained famously devoted to his wife, in part due to the ten children (two of whom were sons who lived past infancy) she bore him throughout their marriage.

¹⁴ Hall, 707.

compatibility between the doomed couple. The two were temperamentally very similar. Perhaps in the end, they were far too alike. Like Henry, Boleyn was more than intelligent, she was an intellectual. She had cut her teeth on the works of some of Europe's most influential scholars and evangelicals during her time in France. She grew up reading the commentaries of Jacques Lefevre d'Étaples and the poetry of Clement Marot. She was also greatly versed in the humanist genre, owning an early French translation of the Bible by Jean de Rely. While in France she kept company with women of the highest moral standards, learning and theological opinion. She was mentored by Margaret, Queen of Navarre, who famously used her position as queen to further the new religion that was spreading throughout Europe.

Aside from the scholarly and theological pursuits that would make them a formidable partnership in the coming years, the king and his mistress also shared the same talents and interests. How could Henry, a man known for his love of hunting, sport, games, and dancing, not be charmed by a woman who was his match in these in every way. Boleyn's skills and grace as a dancer "rivalled Venus" reported the French chronicler Pierre de Bourdeilles Brantôme.¹⁵ She was also "imbued with as many outward good qualities in playing on instruments, singing, and such other courtly graces as few women were of her time."¹⁶ Unlike Catherine, who had been reared under strict piety, which called for a woman to be seen and not heard, Boleyn enjoyed revelry, hunting, riding and card games. Trained as a courtier, not a queen, who need not learn the art of flirtation as most of their matches were made while still in the cradle, Boleyn was quick, witty and socially savvy. Her exceptional education and intellect almost

¹⁵ Cited in Bordo, 43.

¹⁶ William Thomas, as cited in Denny, 16.

commanded that she engage in not just superficial banter, but debate, with the men of Henry's court, setting her apart from many women of her rank. "Her wit and intelligence marked her out" to the king and "her very difference was a challenge" to the notoriously competitive Henry. Still, the king's attraction to Boleyn certainly went beyond sexual desire to include "common enjoyments, compatible interests, intellectual stimulation and shared political purpose."¹⁷

With a clear picture of why Henry pursued Boleyn, it is important to understand how she advanced to such heights. Various theories surround the nature of Henry and Boleyn's relationship. Joanna Denny posits that she was forced into courtship and a marriage that was a calculated and necessary evil in her aims to bring the true religion to England from her new seat as queen.¹⁸ Then there is the ambitious and unfeeling Anne Boleyn who heartlessly unseated a queen and drove a king to madness for her own selfish ambitions.¹⁹ And finally, there is the image of a young woman who was swept away in a passionate love affair that would lead to her undoing by her murderous tyrant of a husband.²⁰ Truth lies somewhere within each of these theories. What is clear is that the king had tired of his wife and settled on an annulment shortly before or just as Boleyn entered the picture. Though she was not the cause, her presence provided an ever more appealing incentive for divorce. Here too, Henry was wholeheartedly committed to his beliefs. The king passionately felt that he had sinned against God in marrying his brother's widow and as a result their union had not been blessed with male issue, and more importantly, never would be. And as Henry had demonstrated time and again, once

¹⁷ Bordo, 38.

¹⁸ Denny, *Anne Boleyn: A New Life of England's Tragic Queen*.

¹⁹ G. W. Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

²⁰ Paul Friedmann, *Anne Boleyn: A Chapter of English History, 1527-1536*. (London: Macmillan, 1884).

he set himself on a course of action, nothing would deter him. On 22 June 1526, he went to Catherine's chamber to announce his plans to petition the pope for an annulment, definitively opening the Pandora's Box that would be known as "the King's Great Matter," and a match of wills between two very stubborn women.

The key to Boleyn's rise was the fact that the court of England had long been modeled after those of the continent. In order to produce an appearance of prestige, the English court deliberately utilized elements of extravagance blended with chivalry, arts and culture. Thus, there was a demand for charming, adept courtiers with an air of European sophistication, something Boleyn had in ready supply and is well documented as using to her advantage. It was this complex socio-political system that facilitated her meteoric rise. Women were often the currency by which advancement was gained at court. Thomas Wyatt suggested that in order to gain position and favor, a man must be willing to provide "thy niece, thy cousin, thy sister or thy daughter."²¹ Anne Boleyn the woman is synonymous with this system of currency at Henry VIII's court, for it was her arsenal of wit, charm and grace that allowed her to work the system to her ultimate advantage. By 1527 Henry was utterly besotted with Boleyn and "so swayed by his passions," that he intended to replace Catherine with her.²² But the more Henry pursued her, the more Boleyn resisted his advances. Henry, used to getting what he wanted by any means necessary, was nearly driven mad by this apparent stringing along. The seventeen surviving letters he wrote to her during their courtship attest to the king's apparent madness that Cavendish earlier alluded to. "My heart and I surrender ourselves into your

²¹ Cited in Denny, 14.

²² Spanish Ambassador Mendoza reported August 16, 1527 in *Calendar of State Papers: Spain*, Vol. 3 Part II, 1527-1529, ed. Pascual de Gayangos (London, 1877), 152, pp. 323-338.

hands,” the king wrote in one, while in another he hurriedly closes, “no more for fear of tiring you.” Henry’s affections only escalated with time so that soon he liked and trusted “above everyone, the mademoiselle Anne” reported French ambassador Jeanne du Ballay. Henry soon realized that his dual interests met in Boleyn: final possession of his mistress and a new queen with whom to make legitimate sons. Henry’s desire for a divorce went public in early 1527. Soon after the king proposed marriage to Boleyn, who agreed and completely changed her tactics by summer of that year. The king applied for papal dispensation in August.²³

Since Henry would not be deterred from his new love and he was determined that his marriage should end, the king needed to ensure his will was achieved and above all, accepted without question. He took the first steps toward the most significant public relations campaign of his reign in 1527 when his intentions were made known and quickly became “the scandal of Christendom.” Unbeknownst to all parties involved, Henry and Boleyn’s ill-fated marriage would not take place until 1533 and would come at a much higher price than anyone could have imagined. Henry certainly did want to be free of Catherine and able to marry Boleyn, but he was bent on keeping his carefully cultivated image unharmed in the process. He wanted it declared and acknowledged that it had not been right for him to marry Catherine and understood that he wanted to take another wife “not for any carnal concupiscence, nor for any displeasure or like of the Queen’s person or age,” but because of a “certain scrupulosity that pricked my

²³ This would come back to haunt Boleyn during her fall as the dispensation alludes to the fact that the king had prior relations with her sister, Mary. Henry would use this argument to invalidate their marriage in 1536.

conscience.”²⁴ Ever concerned with his reputation, Henry sought “legitimacy and exoneration” above all.²⁵

This thesis will explore three interwoven campaigns of Henry’s in detail: first, his justification of the divorce, and later his campaigns for the Supremacy, and third, his legitimization of Boleyn. All three campaigns championed the same notion and image: “Henry VIII as a humanistic...philosopher king, a learned and temperate ruler who solicits the counsel of wise men assembled at his court, in the universities, and in the two houses of Parliament,” “displaying an image “designed to assure the realm that such a king, guided by such good counsel, was directing the government’s actions in what everyone recognized were dangerous times.”²⁶ Furthermore, this approach suggested that Henry was moral and conflicted, welcoming open debate and truthful counsel rather than “encouraging his subjects not to think him a tyrant.” In reality, this discourse was extremely limited as Henry saw to it that stipulation after stipulation were set in place for challenging his belief. Not just anyone was allowed to participate in this discourse. Only court counselors and those legitimately connected to the king and his interests were taken seriously. And furthermore, only “philosophical inquiry into a general question” would be accepted in discussing the king’s matter, which “diluted criticism’s of the king’s specific actions.”²⁷ Whatever his claims, Henry left little room for opposition.

Henry “took an active and independent role in enlisting support and organising the debate” surrounding his marriage.²⁸ He assembled a team of theological experts and

²⁴ Cavendish, 86.

²⁵ Suzannah Lipscomb, *1536: The Year That Changed Henry VIII* (Oxford: Lion UK, 2010), 38.

²⁶ Warner, 3.

²⁷ Warner, 3.

²⁸ Virginia Murphy, “The First Divorce: Literature and Propaganda” in *The Reign of Henry VIII: Politics, Policy and Piety*, ed. Diarmaid MacCulloch (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 141.

placed Wolsey at the helm of the whole endeavor, to “study the scriptures for him, bolster his position and garner the support of the universities of Europe.”²⁹ The king and his council were met with obstacles from the outset. Again European politics deeply affected English affairs. Henry’s chief opposition and Catherine’s greatest champion was her nephew, Charles V, who was by November 1528 “much displeased with The King” and would be “more so if the divorce proceeded.”³⁰ As previously mentioned, Charles commanded vast lands and immense power on the continent, even in Rome. Pope Clement VII wavered in granting Henry his divorce for fear of offending the Emperor. By this time, the Catholic Church was in full crisis mode as the Reformation inflamed Europe. Rome needed every ally it could find, particularly in the Holy Roman Empire where the schism had originated. Naturally, Charles’ support of Rome was of utmost importance to the Pope. The Holy See simply could not risk angering such an essential and powerful ally. Charles was not only invested in the state of Henry’s marriage due to family loyalty, he had also been engaged to Mary Tudor since 1522 and very much wanted to protect her royal interests. Putting aside her mother and demoting her as illegitimate would sharply diminish the prestige of an English marriage.

Calculating public relations man that he was, Henry soon recognized the need for a systematic campaign not only to bring Rome on board, but also to educate the English public, both literate and illiterate, of the justice of his cause. From the outset, he followed a coherent policy: first, attacking the legitimacy of the papal bull that had allowed his marriage in 1509, and then communicating the justice and necessity of his own cause.³¹

²⁹ Lipscomb, *1536*, 38.

³⁰ LP, IV, 4908.

³¹ Murphy, 136.

In defending his divorce and communicating his divine right to end his marriage, Henry returned to two of his first loves: the printed word and art. Here Sharpe suggests Henry used public relations most brilliantly to garner support for his divorce and claims for Supreme Headship of the Church of England. He fervently clung to scripture in defending his authority in these matters, particularly in the divorce. In justifying his aims here, Henry drew upon the new persona he had recently created for himself as a most Christian king. His argument for setting Catherine aside was based on the ultimate authority: the Word of God Himself. The king cited two verses in Leviticus, which cautioned that it was a sin for a man to marry his brother's wife and declared that the union would be childless.³² Henry had married Catherine by virtue of a papal dispensation due to her first marriage to his brother Arthur, which Catherine swore to her dying breath had gone unconsummated, making it one of the great mysteries of history. Still, in Henry's mind his marriage was divinely unlawful, outside of the realm of even a pope's dispensation. More conveniently, this reality justified the stillbirths, miscarriages, and most of all, the lack of a son. This would have been a sound argument were it not for the fact that Henry was married to perhaps the most pious queen in Christendom. Catherine quickly retorted with Deuteronomy 25:5 which instructs a man to marry and care for his brother's wife if his brother dies without male issue, placing the royal couple at a firm impasse. The king had "laid his hand on a crucial weapon" in the holy word. Before long he had "talked, thought, and read himself into a faith of the justice of his cause so firm that it would tolerate no counter-argument and no opposition" and more importantly "it was not only his right to throw aside his alleged wife, but his duty--to

³² Leviticus 18:16 and 20:21.

himself, to Catherine, to his people, to God.”³³ Thus the persona of the Lord’s Anointed Lieutenant was born.

“Where the Word of a King is there is power.”

“In the beginning was the Word,” reads the opening line of the Gospel of John, a simple phrase that defines God’s authority and omniscience. Here scripture figures divine authority as *logos*.³⁴ “Like God’s Word, the word of a king created, made and unmade, determined and judged; the royal word was a sacred bond.”³⁵ The kings of England had subscribed to this notion of divine right to rule since 1413, as indicated by the royal motto *Dieu et mon droit*. Royal authority in early modern England was synonymous with acts of speaking and writing, particularly for a monarch like Henry. A major component of the power of Henry’s word came in its timing. The printing press had revolutionized society on the eve of Henry’s divorce crisis. It made royal authority more textual and literal in its power as the king’s words could now be held in the hand and read hundreds of miles away from his person. The printed word expanded royal authority, making “proclamations and declarations indispensable media of royal authority and royal representations.”³⁶ From the outset of his reign Henry recognized and championed the power of the written word and was uncommonly skilled in deploying “publication as a medium of sovereign utterance.”³⁷ The books he read and the knowledge he drew from

³³ Scarisbrick, 152.

³⁴ Sharpe, 85.

³⁵ Ecclesiastes 8:4; Sharpe, 85.

³⁶ Sharpe, 85.

³⁷ Sharpe, 86.

them had formed the basis of his sense of kingship. Inventory records of his effects demonstrate a massive library of hundreds of texts, including the Bible, scriptural commentaries, works of ancient philosophy and the new learning of humanism, and more importantly, works on royal and ecclesiastical authority that he almost certainly consulted during his quest for divorce. Indeed, it would be the works that Boleyn shared with him by reformist scholars that influenced Henry to finally break with the authority of Rome.³⁸ With the advent of his divorce Henry's reliance on books deepened acutely. As the conflict fueled rumor and outrage at home and abroad, Henry quickly realized the need to control the royal word, and by extension, his own authority. There is not much difference from modern politicians' use of speechwriters and publicists to communicate and entice audience buy-in to their ideals and campaigns.

Henry employed his own rudimentary version of these press aides, communicating his position through royal letters, speeches and oratory, royal proclamations (especially during the debate over the Supremacy), sermons, and the writings of others in defense of his motives. The authority in the royal letters in defense of Henry's divorce lay in that they "functioned sometimes simultaneously, as command, admonition, licence, grant, gift and intimate gesture," often "intimating violence and love" they were a vital performance of Henry's rule.³⁹ In a letter to the Pope in 1528, Henry combined a pressing of his suit "as urgent as it is upright" with the intimate promise of eternal support in the voice of a "suppliant" who did "strenuously implore...the favor of the Apostolic See," in "conceding our just and sacred cause."⁴⁰ In the

³⁸ Tyndale's *The Obedience of a Christian Man*.

³⁹ Sharpe, 92.

⁴⁰ Muriel St. Clare Byrne, *The Letters of Henry VIII*, 61-2, cited in Sharpe, 92.

arena of diplomacy, Henry's letters could be likened to the displays of strength and power the king employed at the Field of Cloth of Gold.

As a student of humanism Henry was well trained in the skill of oratory and could and did speak well. However, tradition in early modern England often dictated that others speak on behalf of the king, much like modern speechwriters and press secretaries. Thomas More acted as the king's unofficial orator from the time he was appointed Lord Chancellor in 1529 to his resignation in 1532. This was especially true in parliament. In 1530, More presented the king to his audience as the "shepherd, ruler and governor of his realm," intimating the king's unrivaled authority within his kingdom and over his "flock." All the while, More praised Henry as a "most faithful, virtuous, and most erudite prince." James Warner even suggests that More's appointment to lord chancellor was partly to bolster Henry's reputation as eager and open to hear the interpretations of wise counsel as More was a well-known champion of Rome.⁴¹

More was not the king's only mouthpiece. When England and France jointly declared war on Spain in 1528, the king ordered Wolsey to summon Justices of the Peace and others to Star Chamber to defend Henry's decision to engage which he urged his audience to report back to their counties and localities.⁴² When the king himself did speak, it was sparingly and on great occasions. Henry ordered all of his speeches to be fully reported in the chronicle of the reign that Edward Hall was commissioned to write. He delivered a personal speech at the disastrous papal legate court at Blackfriars in 1529 airing his "troubled...spirits" that so distracted him that he could "scantly study anything

⁴¹ Warner, 59.

⁴² Sharpe, 95.

which should be profitable for my realm and people.”⁴³ Again he masterfully appealed to anxieties surrounding the succession in a passionate speech at Bridewell before his nobles. During this address, he recalled the civil wars of the generation before when “mischief and manslaughter continue[d] in this realm between York and Lancaster” by which “the realm was like to be destroyed.”⁴⁴ Henry claimed that this was the only reason, not a dislike for the queen or the desire for another mistress, that he even broached the subject of a divorce. Following his remarks, he ordered his auditors to “declare to our subjects” this mindset and intent “according to our true meaning.”⁴⁵ This connection of the survival of the realm to the divorce was a powerful argument in his favor.

While letters, speeches and other forms of publication were invaluable to Henry’s cause, especially since the advent of the printing press and increasing literacy rates, for the majority of the king’s subjects “the royal word was experienced, heard, read and seen” in the form of proclamations nailed on doors, read aloud by the sheriff or circulated in village ale houses.⁴⁶ In September 1530 and June 1535 Henry issued proclamations first restricting and then abolishing papal authority in England.⁴⁷ In a July 1535 commission, Henry’s subjects were again reminded of the offense of praemunire and forced to acknowledge Queen Catherine as Dowager Princess as she was summarily stripped of royal style.⁴⁸ These early royal press releases were a testament to the skill of

⁴³ Sharpe, 95.

⁴⁴ Hall, 754-5, as cited in Sharpe, 95.

⁴⁵ Hall, 747.

⁴⁶ Sharpe, 97.

⁴⁷ Hughes and Larkin, 197 and 229.

⁴⁸ Hughes and Larkin, 209.

Tudor branding, for when subjects saw the royal seal or name of the king's printer on a document "they would have understood that the text was doing official service: stating the king's views, representing the king as he wanted others to see him."⁴⁹ In these documents Henry again uses the sophisticated negotiation of authority between himself and his subjects. Royal proclamations contained not only the sovereign's decree, but also a "rationalization" or justification of the order to "ensure broad popular acceptance" thus incorporating "both the assertion of royal authority and argument for royal authority."⁵⁰ This is not to suggest that these proclamations did not inspire fear and obedience through excessive threatening of the king's grave displeasure and a myriad of other punishments ranging from forfeiture to "fire and sword."⁵¹ Indeed, proclamations combined "threats of harsh punishments" with "language of grace and mercy" so that Henry represented himself as "like God, a king of both dreadful justice and mercy."⁵² Much like the word of God, men benefitted from reading and obeying the royal word in order avoid eternal damnation, as well as rather uncomfortable physical circumstances.

Sermons delivered by Henry's priests and bishops also served as a powerful tactic in communicating his cause to the people. In Tudor times in particular, the sermon was both "the voice of the king and government as well as that of the preacher."⁵³ This use of piety as "the mouthpiece of the administration" is exemplified in the prolific Paul's Cross sermons delivered for more than 100 years in the courtyard of Old St. Paul's Cathedral in

⁴⁹ Sharpe, 110.

⁵⁰ Hughes and Larkin, xxiii; Sharpe, 98.

⁵¹ Hughes and Larkin, no. 129, 245.

⁵² Sharpe, 98.

⁵³ Sharpe, 112.

London.⁵⁴ This site, “a platform for [Henry’s] regime. . . .crucial in shaping English opinion, in London and beyond,” was often the epicenter of oratorical warfare between the opposing sides of the king’s Great Matter and the Supremacy, with theological heavyweights backing their chosen bishop to preach for or against a certain cause.⁵⁵ On this site where royal proclamations were often read, the king saw to it that sermons endorsing whatever policy he was pushing at the moment were preached to large and attentive crowds. The shift in religious politics as Henry took on Rome saw the crown seeking to take increasing control over this pulpit. When news of Henry’s divorce became public, pulpit wars broke out across England with Paul’s Cross as the epicenter. In March 1532, Henry had someone arrested for preaching against the divorce in “the great church,” a great matter when considering “the capacity of the Crown to put chosen men into the Paul’s Cross pulpit on special occasions.”⁵⁶ Contemporary reports suggest homilies prohibiting the marriage of a brother’s widow,⁵⁷ against the papacy⁵⁸ and in favor of the royal supremacy⁵⁹ all took place here. It was also here that sermons were preached denouncing Elizabeth Barton, the Maid of Kent, and one of the greatest domestic opponents of the divorce. Henry and Boleyn’s secret marriage was also announced at St. Paul’s to disgruntled crowds on Easter Sunday 1533. Henry was livid at this reaction, berating the Lord Mayor and demanding that the crowd and the pulpit be

⁵⁴ Torrance Kirby and Stanwood, P. G., eds., *Paul's Cross and the Culture of Persuasion in England, 1520-1640 (Studies in the History of Christian Traditions)*(Boston: Brill Academic Pub, 2013), 14.

⁵⁵ Richard Rex, “Paul’s Cross and the Crisis of the 1530s” in *Paul's Cross and the Culture of Persuasion in England, 1520-1640 (Studies in the History of Christian Thought)*, 107.

⁵⁶ LP, V, 589; Rex, 109-110.

⁵⁷ LP, VII, 266 cited in Rex, 110.

⁵⁸ LP, VIII, 1019 cited in Rex, 111.

⁵⁹ Simon Matthewe, *A Sermon made in the cathedrall church of saynt Paule at London, the XXVII. day of Iune, Anno. 1535*. London: Berthelet, July 1535. As cited in Rex, 115.

fully under control in future.⁶⁰ Once again using the power of the royal letter, the king sought to justify the Supremacy (passed in 1534) in a June 1535 piece to his bishops instructing them to arrange sermons “against the usurped authority of the bishop of Rome [the Pope].”⁶¹ These sermons “presented and justified royal actions and programmes in the language of scripture and providence”⁶² and most importantly, reminded subjects of the obligation to obey their ruler.

Nowhere was Henry’s campaign for justification more fiercely fought than in the printed word. Virginia Murphy describes the king’s “polemic campaign” to publish a succession of “the king’s books” or treatises written by members of his theological circle or by Henry himself in defense of his divorce, as the backbone of his six-year-long endeavor. Henry actively commissioned these treatises, “supervised their preparation and contributed to their composition.”⁶³ These typically opened with an address justifying his divorce and then focused on the succession and appealed to fears about the lack of male issue. This was a stroke of brilliance really, as modern public relations also posits cultivating an emotional culture that its target audience must buy into. The first of these treatises was produced in summer 1527 as a debate between Robert Wakefield and Catherine’s soon-to-be ally Bishop John Fisher. In it Wakefield wrote, “in the name of the king himself” that Henry had been much troubled about the validity of his marriage and upon examining holy scripture, settled upon two verses which justified his anxieties. Thus, in consideration of his salvation, peace of mind, and security of his realm, he would put the matter to the decision of more learned men than he for a final

⁶⁰ LP, VI, 391; Rex, 110.

⁶¹ Rex, 115.

⁶² Sharpe, 112.

⁶³ Murphy, 136.

determination. Centering on the final lines of Leviticus 20:21 which the Latin text of the Vulgate translated as “they shall have no children,” Henry instead argued that the more authoritative Hebrew translation read, “they shall have no sons,” thus negating any counter argument for the existence of Princess Mary. “Leviticus was thus cleverly made to fit Henry’s situation exactly.”⁶⁴ Furthermore, as this instruction came from the Word of God himself, it was a divine law and only God, not even the pope, could dispense from it.

Next the king presented a book “containing the reasons and causes moving the mind of his majesty” to a gathering of bishops and others skilled in divine law. This same book, by commission of the king, was presented to Pope Clement and Cardinal Lorenzo Pucci in March 1528. Another copy was also given to Cardinal Campeggio who was soon appointed as Wolsey’s co-judge in hearing the king’s case at Blackfriars. This work was more moderate than its predecessor in 1527. It opened with the king’s request for a ruling on the matter, followed by a collection of scholarly opinions and instead of outright denying all authority of popes, it questioned whether Julius II could have properly dispensed such a situation as Catherine having married Henry’s brother. By 1529, the king’s “spiritual learned council”⁶⁵ had produced yet another official work, *Henricus Octavus*, which officially outlined the king’s suit and was presented at the papal legate of Blackfriars where the king hoped the matter of the divorce would be settled on English soil. This same council was instrumental in securing the votes of university scholars when in 1530, Henry threw out Rome as a determinant and turned to the learned of

⁶⁴ Murphy, 139.

⁶⁵ LP, V, 685.

Europe for a ruling. Edward Foxe and Stephen Gardiner traveled to Oxford and Cambridge to present the king's cause to its faculty.

In 1531, Henry's campaign turned for the first time to the printing press. The king's printer, Thomas Berthelet, first published *Determinations of the Universities*, which presented the favorable findings of the king's cause, gathered by the king's agents in 1530, from seven international universities.⁶⁶ This work discreetly did not mention the king's matter in any direct way. Instead it reported first, that both natural and divine law prohibited the marriage of a man to his brother's wife and secondly, that the pope had no authority, therefore, to dispense such marriages. This work served as a support of the findings of English universities like Oxford and Cambridge who also weighed in on the matter. *Determinations* "is the first of the king's books to imply, perhaps as a means of exerting pressure on the pope, that the government was considering taking practical steps in England to achieve the divorce."⁶⁷ The work suggested that "a Christian should not obey a pope who commanded him, contrary to divine and natural law, to marry or remain wed to a woman already related by blood or marriage."⁶⁸ Furthermore, the work argued that bishops should not allow persons involved in such marriages to stay in them, citing several examples of bishops who had defied the pope in granting dispensations for such marriages.⁶⁹ This was a subtle call for bishops to rule in the king's favor by suggesting that if the pope would not act justly, it was their duty to intervene. The work also called for individual Christians to stand against the pope's threats of excommunication if they

⁶⁶ Murphy, 155.

⁶⁷ Murphy, 155.

⁶⁸ Murphy, 155.

⁶⁹ One of whom was Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury, had refused to absolve an earl for marrying a relative.

felt they had married against divine law, outlining the duty of a Christian and “his private conscience.”⁷⁰ More than anything else, the publication of this work suggests that by late 1530 Henry was nearly decided on taking more independent action from Rome to achieve his aims.

When it became clear that Rome was not the solution to Henry’s troubles, he ordered the publishing of *A Glass of the Truthe* by the royal printer as a last ditch effort “to persuade the pope, the learned of Christendom and his own subjects that his marriage to Catherine of Aragon was unlawful and invalid.”⁷¹ Murphy describes this work as “the crossroads” between the two controversies of the Supremacy and divorce when it was published in 1532,⁷² just a year before Henry’s definitive break with the Church of Rome. The work expounded on arguments made in *Determinations* and opened with an address to “the gentle readers and sincere lovers of the truth”⁷³ outlining “the most plain truth of our loving and most noble prince’s cause.”⁷⁴ *Glass* is set up as a conversation between a lawyer and a priest who agree with one another completely on the validity of the king’s cause. This subliminal set up masterfully appeals to English xenophobia and the unity between a monarch and his subjects by intimating an “us against them” mentality, and not of temporal versus spiritual, but rather “between English patriots and hostile foreign powers such as the See of Rome.”⁷⁵ It also challenges the jurisdiction of the king’s case, which had been moved to Rome following Catherine’s ingenious appeal to do so at Blackfriars. An incensed Henry himself had been summoned to Rome in 1529. Many

⁷⁰ Murphy, 157.

⁷¹ Sharpe, 105.

⁷² According to Murphy’s timeline, who cites the reading of it by a priest at St. Albans as the determinant.

⁷³ Henry VIII, *Glass*, 385.

⁷⁴ Henry VIII, *Glass*, 386.

⁷⁵ James Warner, *Henry VIII's Divorce: Literature and the Politics of the Printing Press* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), 42.

scholars suggest that as early as this point, the king had begun to ponder other solutions for his woes. In arguing that jurisdiction in Henry's case belonged to English bishops and not Rome (building on arguments made in *Determinations*), *Glass* introduced the essential new policy that ultimately secured the king his divorce. These political overtures were expedited by the fact that Boleyn was pregnant by late 1532, forcing Henry to take decisive action in early 1533 when the two were secretly wed to ensure the unborn child was seen as legitimate. By May 1533, English Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer officially annulled the king's marriage to Catherine. Henry had successfully convinced those who mattered anyway, that his marriage was indeed illegitimate. He was supported by divine law which trumped any dispensation from Rome and which was evidenced in his lack of a male child. Now that his "great matter" had at long last been settled, Henry's government turned its attention to the next of the king's great campaigns: defending the break with Rome and the Royal Supremacy.

The divorce crisis and Henry's bid for Supremacy ran parallel. As Scarisbrick suggests, had there been no quest for divorce, the king would likely have not taken issue with Rome. Henry's hostility towards Rome had been slow burning and had taken time to develop into outright denial of papal authority in England. This progression is best seen in the treatises and works he published over the six years of his divorce campaign. In the end, the king had successfully asserted that the pope's authority was trumped by God's. He would take it a step further in 1533 by determining that the divine right of kings, who "never had any superior but God,"⁷⁶ trumped popes as well. Henry was now convinced of his unique position as God's anointed deputy on earth, believing that Supreme Headship

⁷⁶ LP, II, 1, 1313.

was his birthright, and he expected others to believe it too.⁷⁷ Henry wrote letters, issued proclamations and published works by himself and by others in support of this belief. In the writings of the prominent scholars of the time, particularly once the break with the Rome occurred, Henry was often referred to as Moses (law-giver and deliverer of his people from bondage), Paul (the spiritual counselor of his people), and above all David (chosen one of God and vanquisher of Goliath, here meaning Catholicism).⁷⁸

Henry's favorite medium to communicate his Supremacy was through art, which was again employed brilliantly to sell his policies. The modern world places brand image and brand recognition as key to commercial success and cultural and political authority.⁷⁹ The origins of such ideas can be traced back to before the sixteenth century as the early modern period "marked a transition to a greater concern with identity and display, "particularly for monarchs."⁸⁰ Sharpe identifies the first record of the word "recognition" in relation to a royal title in a statute dating to the time of Elizabeth I, signifying a shift in ideas about and representations of royal authority. Once again the Renaissance transformed mankind, as rulers became patrons of the arts that flourished in this period and also took keen new interest in their own visual representations. In this era royal portraiture emerged, with family and dynastic galleries popping up throughout the royal houses of Europe. Rulers strove to enhance their standing both at home and abroad, fashioning themselves as the heads of their newly emerging realms. As a result, the depiction "of their rule, their dynasty, and their person took on great import."⁸¹ The

⁷⁷ Lipscomb, *1536*, 39.

⁷⁸ J.N. King "Henry as David: The King's Image and Reformation Politics" in P.C. Herman, ed. *Rethinking the Henrician era. Essays on Early Tudor Texts and Contexts*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 87—9.

⁷⁹ Sharpe, 129.

⁸⁰ Sharpe, 129.

⁸¹ Sharpe, 130.

newly emerging “technologies of representation,” through portraiture, coinage, woodwork, and engraving, became a concern vital to the princes of Europe. This in turn opened new avenues for success to artists as the courts of Europe provided new employment, prestige and markets for those who won the favor and renown of the rulers they served; in turn “a new breed of artists with international reputations attracted the attention of rulers in what soon became a highly competitive world of image and display that was characteristic of early modernity.”⁸² This was the arena in which Henry VIII ruled. No English monarch has established a more lasting visual (brand) recognition.⁸³

Henry’s image is undeniable, and the most commonly recognized, even by those not familiar with English history. From early in his reign, he appreciated and understood the role of art as “the politics of his image” in serving as an advertisement of martial prowess, a diplomatic token, and a symbol of his personal authority painted on to the records of the law.⁸⁴ As Sharpe suggests, this is due in large part to his patronage of the artist Hans Holbein. Coincidentally, it was Anne Boleyn who gave Holbein early entry into the realm of royal patronage. His first royal commission was to design displays and portraiture for the queen’s coronation in 1533.⁸⁵ The artist would define the Henrician monarchy with his outstanding works, which to this day make Henry, the most recognizable English monarch.⁸⁶ Holbein arrived in England for the second time in 1532 where he soon became renowned for his extraordinary talent for representing his sitters with almost photographic realism.⁸⁷ Holbein would be vitally important in redefining the

⁸² Sharpe, 130.

⁸³ Sharpe, 130.

⁸⁴ Sharpe, 131.

⁸⁵ J. Rowlands, *Holbein: The Paintings of Hans Holbein the Younger* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1985), 72-3 and 81.

⁸⁶ Sharpe, 130.

⁸⁷ Lipscomb, 1536, 95.

king's image post-1532 as the divorce and break with Rome "dictated a change in the image of the king" and demanded "new, more polemical and personal modes of his visual representation."⁸⁸

One such post-Supremacy piece depicts Henry "standing upon a mitre with three crowns, having a serpent with three heads coming out of it and having a sword in his hand wherein is written Verbum Dei," depicting Henry's overthrow of the papacy and his claim as Supreme Head to present and mediate God's word to his subjects.⁸⁹ The royal arms and badges as well as the Tudor Rose were not only placed on royal proclamations as a tool of branding, but also appear on countless items including cups, plate, pots, spoons and even bedclothes and furniture. The king's badges were associated with other symbols of royalty including the sun, as depicted on basins or lanterns, associating the king with light, and with Christ himself, who purported to be the Light of the World.⁹⁰ In Miles Coverdale's 1535 edition of the Bible, Holbein's cover page art depicts Henry "like a little god, handing the Bible down to the prelates and lords" indicative of his new role as spiritual authority.⁹¹ The piece was doubly powerful and highly circulated throughout the realm because it depicts Henry not only as an enthroned king and godly monarch, but also as a godlike figure himself.⁹² Another 1535 painting by Holbein portrayed Henry as a prince of "unparalleled wisdom and prudence," receiving gifts from a kneeling Queen

⁸⁸ Sharpe, 131.

⁸⁹ D. Starkey, ed. *The Inventory of Henry VIII: Society of Antiquaries MS 129 and British Library MS Harley 1419* (1998), no. 10632, 238. As cited in Sharpe, 132.

⁹⁰ St. Clare Byrne, 137. As cited in Sharpe, 149.

⁹¹ John N. King, *Tudor Royal Iconography: Literature and Art in the Age of Religious Crisis*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) 57-60. As cited in Graves, 34.

⁹² Graves, 34.

of Sheba.⁹³ John King too asserts that the onset of Reformation in England “entailed a fundamental transformation of the public image of the monarch.”⁹⁴ Henry was determined to project an image of himself as religious leader of the nation. Tudor monarchs were ordained by God to protect and lead the realm, therefore obedience was not only a duty to God but an action in self-interest.⁹⁵ Most notably in 1536, fresh on the heels of Boleyn’s scandalous downfall, Holbein produced the most defining and well-known portrait of Henry to come out of the reign. More significantly, “it marked a departure from previous representations of the king” in that Henry is depicted forward facing, looking directly into the frame, disembarking from his previous portraits painted from the side as was tradition during his father’s reign.⁹⁶ This demonstrated a more aggressive, direct and unchallengeable Henry imbued with strong, virile, ultra-masculine qualities. “It was a portrayal that not only radiated majesty and authority but one that inspired awe, even fear, in those who viewed it,”⁹⁷ signifying the marked shift in the kind of ruler Henry would be moving forward. The original mural resided in Whitehall palace before it was destroyed in the late seventeenth century, but multiple copies survive of it. Lipscomb suggests that it is now the primary image through which Henry is identified and as a result, the characteristics that it imbues are now also ones we associate with the Tudor king.⁹⁸ Due to this consummate skill of image building, Henry ended his reign as a great king in the eyes of his subjects. By the time of his death, despite obvious character

⁹³ John N. King “Henry VIII as David: The King’s Image and Reformation Politics” in *Rethinking the Henrician Era: Essays on Early Tudor Texts and Context*, ed. P.C. Herman. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 87-89.

⁹⁴ Hoak, 104.

⁹⁵ Loades, *Power*, 5.

⁹⁶ Lipscomb, *1536*, 95.

⁹⁷ Susan Foister, *Holbein and England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004) 11-22. As cited in Sharpe, 70.

⁹⁸ Lipscomb, *1536*, 95.

flaws and questionable religious policies, Henry had become “the symbol and embodiment of England to a degree which none of his predecessors...had attained.”⁹⁹

"Brunet, that did set our country in such a roar."

Thus read the original opening lines of Thomas Wyatt's poem about Boleyn. He later changed it to "Brunet, that did set my wealth in such a roar" for subtly's sake. By the early 1530s Henry had been successful in his campaign to “impose his fiction on the world” or had managed to at least make his version the dominant story of a newly emerging nation.¹⁰⁰ But this had its price, as does any hard won victory. The king had undergone a slow process of refinement into a budding tyrant. His challenging of Rome's authority had grown into outright rejection and the establishment of himself as the final authority in all things. The frustrations and setbacks of six years had taken its toll on Henry, who was no longer quite as shiny, bright and youthful as he had been when the journey began. Having examined in detail the efforts he made to justify his divorce and supremacy, we must now turn to what Boleyn was doing during these years and what the king did for her benefit. She was by no means a passive figure, but rather an active agent in the monumental changes that enveloped England during the period. While it is well established that Boleyn was not the cause of the divorce, she certainly did her due diligence to ensure the goal was achieved. The couple had become ever closer, co-conspirators and partners in every way, except sexually of course. While the court had made Boleyn, she quickly demonstrated that she had no intention of playing its games

⁹⁹ Loades, *Court*, 31.

¹⁰⁰ Sharpe, 128.

traditionally and soon set about making her own rules. By gaining first the king's desire, and later respect and devotion, Boleyn played the game so magnificently that by 1527 she was in control of the king himself. The Abbot of Whitby, in describing the political state of England wrote: "The King's Grace is ruled by one common stewed whore, Anne Boleyn, who makes all the spirituality to be beggared, and the temporality also." The Venetian ambassador described her as "a young woman of noble birth, though many say of bad character, whose will is law to him, and he is expected to marry her should the divorce take place."¹⁰¹ In 1528 Boleyn gave Henry a copy of William Tyndale's evangelical work *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, which asserted it was against divine order for princes to submit to the Church in Rome. Tyndale stressed that it was in fact kings, not the pope, who were meant to have no superior on earth. As such, kings were to be obeyed without question, as they were subject to God alone. This idea of Henry's supremacy and direct position under God became a strong conviction and "like all his firm convictions, it was not easily moved" once planted.¹⁰² It was Boleyn who planted some of these seeds. She empowered the king to wield such absolute authority that no one would question him when he demanded the head of a queen on a platter just eight years later.

Initially, Boleyn was content with Wolsey's attempts to procure a settlement through a papal annulment, but she soon became convinced that the cardinal was half-hearted about her marriage to Henry. It is well documented that Wolsey and Boleyn did not see eye-to-eye. It is equally well recorded that she begrudged Wolsey his earlier

¹⁰¹ Venetian Ambassador Mario Savorgnano, letter dated August 25, 153. *Calendar of State Papers Relating To English Affairs in the Archives of Venice*, Vol. IV, 682.

¹⁰² Lipscomb, 39.

injury to her heart with his interference in her affair with Henry Percy and did what she could to work against his interests. By 1529, she had tired of Wolsey's failure, aligning herself with the faction plotting to get rid of the minister. She decisively blocked his communication with the king following his disgrace in 1529 after the failure of the legatine court at Blackfriars. The king's increasing impatience reached its breaking point when Wolsey was accused of praemunire, summarily stripped of his royal offices, and banished from court. He died in disgrace on his way to London to stand trial for treason. Many of the cardinal's supporters blamed his destruction on Boleyn, whom the cardinal called "the nyght Crowe," always in a position to caw in the king's ear.¹⁰³ In her encouragement of the king, acting as the prize to be won from the uphill battle for his divorce, Boleyn made few friends and a great deal more enemies. Opposed both abroad and at home, the only thing that kept her in power was Henry's surprisingly unwavering devotion.

At least initially, Henry made every effort to appear a morally conflicted yet devoted husband. He continued to share Catherine's bed and dined with her regularly, performing every husbandly duty short of intercourse in the early years of the divorce quest. As the quest grew longer and more difficult, Boleyn's power and position at court grew more and more prominent. Henry, who had remained cautious in flaunting a new lover while the pope considered his case, grew increasingly emboldened as the legal proceedings of his divorce drew longer. He began elevating Boleyn's position and status as a signal to the country of his intentions, doing everything short of marrying her to demonstrate that Boleyn would be queen of England.¹⁰⁴ Lodging her at great expense at

¹⁰³ Cavendish, 137.

¹⁰⁴ Denny, 178.

some of the finest houses in England, Henry saw to it that Boleyn kept great state fit for a queen. Attended by ladies-in-waiting, trainbearers and chaplains, Boleyn was queen in all but name. She occupied the consort seat at banquets, dressed in gowns of purples, which were reserved strictly for royalty.¹⁰⁵ The king himself gifted these to her. Henry bedecked her in jewels, furs and all the traditional trappings of a monarch. By the early 1530s, Boleyn was openly honored as the king's mistress while Catherine was virtually ignored. Courtiers flocked to pay their respects to the new head lady at court.

Henry also set about elevating the Boleyn family, as his next queen must be seen to be from good, noble stock. In 1529, Anne's father, already Viscount Rochford from Mary's time in the king's bed, was raised higher in the peerage and received the titles of Earl of Wiltshire and Ormonde (giving Anne the courtesy title of Lady Rochford) and later Lord Privy Seal. In doing so, Henry decisively sided against Butler's claim to the Ormonde title. That summer Henry took Boleyn on progress with him, displaying her to the people. The lovers remodeled much of Wolsey's original work together at Hampton Court Palace, known as their love nest till this day. It was during this time that Henry famously had those entwined H's and A's carved into every possible surface of the palace. That summer was a golden one for Boleyn. "Above everyone" du Bellay noted was "Mademoiselle Anne," whose word was law to the king.¹⁰⁶ By 1531 Henry formally separated from Catherine, making Boleyn his unchallenged mistress at court, being shown every deference as a queen would be. That same year accounts show the Duke of

¹⁰⁵ As decreed in the 1510 Act of Apparel which stated that only the immediate royal family could wear cloth of purple. See Maria Hayward, *Rich Apparel: Clothing and the Law in Henry VIII's England*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 29.

¹⁰⁶ Alison Weir, *The Lady in the Tower: The Fall of Anne Boleyn*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 294.

Milan being advised to treat her as a force in her own right and to set his ambassador with the task of winning her over.¹⁰⁷ By fall 1532 it became clear that king's paper-thin patience was nearing its end. In September, Henry ordered the refurbishing of royal apartments in the Tower of London in preparation for Anne's coronation and Catherine, in disgrace at Bishop's Hatfield in Hertfordshire, was forced to give up her royal jewels while Boleyn lived like a queen.

The king's awareness of image and representations of legitimacy had not wavered during the years of tumult and he remained ever the PR man when it came to his choice of future queen. In preparation for a pivotal diplomatic mission to France where Boleyn wrote to a friend "that which [she] has been so long wishing for will be accomplished,"¹⁰⁸ Henry made her Marchioness of Pembroke in order to "increase her status and give her equal rank with some of the noble ladies whom she would meet in France."¹⁰⁹ Henry and Boleyn traveled to Calais in October 1532, where she was honored openly as his queen with a great train of ladies. Having gained the renewed enmity of the Emperor, Henry sought to bolster his friendship with King Francis I of France during the trip. The two sovereigns met at Boulogne and discussed, among many things, the king's matter. Francis promised his support and influence in Rome to bring about a favorable outcome for Henry. Some days later Francis traveled back to Calais with Henry where he gifted Boleyn a large diamond and spent an hour talking with her in a window seat following a masked dance at which Boleyn had been his partner.¹¹⁰ Overall the mission to France had

¹⁰⁷ Ives, *Life and Death*, 259.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Eustace Chapuys to the Emperor, August 26, 1532, Calendar of State Papers, Spain, IV, II, 986.

¹⁰⁹ Weir, *The Lady*, 320.

¹¹⁰ Account of the king's visit to Calais, in LP, V, 1484.

been a success. It was during this trip that many historians suggest Boleyn finally gave in to Henry's wishes and conceived the princess Elizabeth. She was certainly pregnant by December. The couple secretly married in January 1533, and she was recognized as queen on Holy Saturday that April. The pageantry of her coronation celebrations displayed some of Henry's grandest public relations skills of the reign. Henry and Boleyn's triumphal entry into London was intended as "an official and public affirmation" presenting the pregnant Boleyn "as rightful and fertile queen, as reassurance of the security of the dynasty and realm, and proclamation of Henry as a righteous ruler who had followed his conscience and God's will and who was careful for the welfare of his subjects."¹¹¹

It was during this time that Boleyn adopted her own crest, a falcon (associated for generations with the Ormondes, which her father had adopted upon being named early in 1529) alighting upon a bed of roses. Ives suggests this choice too was calculated by both Henry and his wife. First, it symbolized that "with the advent of Anne, already pregnant, life would once more burst forth from the apparent barrenness of the Tudor stock"¹¹² as indicated by the bloom of roses. The imperial crown worn by the falcon doubly illustrated Boleyn's impending coronation and "was a deliberate allusion to the claims Henry had recently emphasised that he had the powers of an emperor in his own kingdom and so was entitled to reject papal authority."¹¹³ Even more fittingly, the falcon is often associated in heraldry as "one who does not rest until the objective is achieved."

¹¹¹ Sharpe, 166.

¹¹² Ives, *The Life*, 221.

¹¹³ Ives, *The Life*, 222.

Nearly two weeks later, Boleyn was welcomed into London for her coronation and greeted with pageants and other displays linking her to St. Anne, her holy namesake and mother of the Virgin Mary, as well as speeches associating Boleyn with the fruitfulness of St. Anne, establishing her as the future of the English nation. Here again, her falcon heraldry was exalted in a child's reading during the ceremony:

Honour and grace be to our Queen Anne,
For whose cause an Angel Celestial
Descendeth, the falcon (as white as [the] swan)
To crown with a diadem imperial!
In her honour rejoice we all,
For it cometh from God, and not of man.
Honour and grace be to our Queen Anne!

The coronation procession and pageantry presented her “as a classical heroine, saint and fertile mother who heralded for England a golden age.”¹¹⁴ More importantly, the words of numerous poems like the aforementioned also clearly indicated that Boleyn was set on the throne not by Henry VIII, but by God himself.

“And wild for to hold, though I seem tame”

In reality, England stood on the precipice of an unknown world, not a golden one, in 1533. Its king, spurred on by the promise of one woman and his own arrogance, had broken with the Church of Rome, deposed a rightful queen and married his mistress. For all those involved, whether friend or foe of the Boleyn cause, the victory was an uncertain and fragile one. The Imperial ambassador and champion of Catherine of

¹¹⁴ Sharpe, 167.

Aragon, Eustace Chapuys, described it best in his account of Anne's attendance at Mass in April 1533: "It looks like a dream, and even those who take her part know not whether to laugh or to cry."¹¹⁵ This dream would turn to night terror almost three years to the day. But until then, Boleyn had a rather large mess to make. The fact remained that royal mistresses, no matter how charming or loyal, are never much liked, especially when they become queen. Boleyn and her family had not been popular from the start. Many at court saw them as grasping upstarts. The English people were loyal to Catherine and detested Henry's choice of mistress, often hissing at her when she went hunting with the king. On one occasion, Henry's subjects yelled "Back to your wife!" as the royal train passed.¹¹⁶ In 1531, a hostile mob of thousands descended on the London house where Boleyn was dining, forcing her to make a rapid escape by barge.¹¹⁷ She was equally unpopular abroad. During their monumental visit to France in 1532, not a single French royal lady made herself available to receive Boleyn with both Francis' queen and sister refusing to entertain "the King's whore." Her apparent religious beliefs were even more troubling. Much of the political hostility towards Boleyn stemmed from the religious overhaul, which, much at her urging, her husband was imposing on the kingdom. She and her family were known supporters of the evangelical movement and had long encouraged and counseled the king in breaking with Rome. They became more and more radical as the years of the divorce dragged on.

Like Henry, Boleyn too was hardened by the long years of conflict. They had made her "haughty, overbearing, shrewish and volatile, qualities that were frowned upon

¹¹⁵ LP, VI, 351.

¹¹⁶ *Calendar of State Papers, Spanish*, as cited in Weir, *The Lady*, 286.

¹¹⁷ *Calendar of State Papers, Venice*, IV, 701.

in wives.”¹¹⁸ In one of her many poor public relations choices, by 1530 Boleyn had adopted as her motto “*Ainsi sera, groigne qui groigne*” or “This is how it will be, grudge who likes” in response to her detractors. She clearly did not intend to bend to propriety or the new rules that would apply to her when she became queen three years later. Ives suggests that it was during this period that she adopted more radical attitudes and brazen displays so that by 1533 she had lost nearly all sense of caution or of the precariousness of her position. Boleyn found the transition from mistress with the upper hand to compliant and deferential wife an impossible one. Her high-handedness had offended and alienated many of her onetime allies by the time of her marriage. One of the most damning of the fallouts came with her uncle, the Duke of Norfolk. Though he had once been a pivotal bolster in Boleyn’s early campaign to win the king’s affections, by 1533 her brashness and temper had permanently severed their alliance. Unbeknownst to Boleyn at the time, this was a devastating loss to her faction as Norfolk was the realm’s leading peer and one of the foremost members of Henry’s Privy Council. He was widely respected and known to be ruthlessly ambitious. It would be Norfolk who presided over her trial in 1536. Still, having been unchallenged for so many years had hardened Boleyn’s resolve and lost her much in the way of tact and discretion and this would cost her dearly. As both she and Henry would quickly learn, what was required of a queen was a training very different from the “education” that court women such as she received in France.¹¹⁹

What Henry had admired in a mistress and friend proved problematic in a queen. The popular literature of the age demanded behavior that was the very antithesis of who

¹¹⁸ Weir, *The Lady*, 10.

¹¹⁹ Bordo, 39.

Boleyn was. Anne of France's *Lessons for My Daughter* perfectly describes the expectations of queenship in sixteenth-century Europe. First printed around 1520, the work outlined in detail the requirements and proper behavior of a queen. It identifies chastity, obedience, and above all, silence, as the chief duties of queenship. Furthermore, when a queen did speak, she should do it not for debating or entertaining, but to comfort, reassure, and serve others. Juan Luis Vives' *The Education of a Christian Woman*, written expressly for Boleyn's stepdaughter Mary, reminds women that they are "the devil's instrument" and gives instruction on how to vigilantly guard their chastity from temptation. Proper women were to abstain from reading anything but scripture and the work of scholars of the highest moral worth and to avoid any vainglorious adornment in dress or behavior. Above all, they must refrain from engaging in the witty banter common at Henry's court, the language of courtly love, which was the gateway to sexual immorality. This was a lesson Boleyn would have done well to consider. In fact, conversation between the sexes should be prohibited, even between siblings, as it was best for a true lady to "have as little contact with men as possible."¹²⁰ Married women were prohibited from dancing, banqueting or really any form of revelry or gaiety.

These works, esteemed by the English, were the antithesis of what Boleyn had been taught. Her idea of pleasing female conduct, learned at the French court, was more along the lines of Baldassare Castiglione's. In his *The Book of a Courtier*, women were advised to cultivate "a certain pleasant affability" that was pleasing to men but still did

¹²⁰ Juan Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2000), 127.

not cross into inappropriate “unbridled familiarity.”¹²¹ Walking this “tightrope between vivacity and modesty” was no easy task for any female courtier, let alone the queen, who was under the most scrutiny of all.¹²² Essentially, women of the court were to entertain their boisterous male counterparts while still projecting feminine delicacy, making the whole song and dance of femininity a balancing act that required great skill and social discernment. Men were sexually aggressive, while women had specific sexual boundaries that they could not cross. They “should be physically desirable and could engage in flirtatious, even sexually provocative talk (and should, when to do otherwise would shame the men or mark her as a prude), but her social performance must never raise doubts about her virtue.”¹²³ Again we shall see Boleyn's failure to heed these warnings. This antithetic existence demanded constant vigilance, a quality that Boleyn had long ago abandoned as Henry's unrivaled consort. In short, it was very difficult to be a proper royal lady in sixteenth-century England. Where vivacity was expected, chastity was still required. Boleyn had played this game brilliantly when she first arrived at court. She bobbed and weaved and pirouetted on the “tightrope” of courtly femininity. Once she wed Henry in 1533, officially becoming his Queen, the game changed, and Boleyn never quite adapted. The fire and vivacity that had allured Henry for nearly a decade was certainly not becoming or favorable in a queen, no matter how unconventionally she came to her crown or how passionate her husband's love. Boleyn seemed to have forgotten, or rather never learned, that Henry loved nothing more than his own honor and

¹²¹ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier from the Italian of Count Baldassare Castiglione*, Daniel Javitch, ed., Charles S. Singleton, Translator, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002) 176-177.

¹²² Bordo, 40.

¹²³ Bordo, 41.

authority as king. In the end, it would be the very weapon that had won Boleyn her crown that would unseat it: her own nature.

Though she was initially untouchable even after they married, Boleyn's failure to deliver on her promise of a son began to etch cracks in her marriage. The princess Elizabeth was born on September 7, 1533 and from all accounts, the king was not unnerved by the birth of yet another daughter. The general consensus is that the marriage remained on solid ground until early 1536, though it was not without its troubles. When the king's eye began to stray shortly after the birth of Elizabeth, Boleyn's shortcomings as wife and queen were put on full display. When in 1534 she attempted unsuccessfully to banish a young woman who had caught Henry's attention, he brutally warned that "she had good reason to be content with what he had done for her, for were he to begin again, he would certainly not do as much."¹²⁴ She argued with the king in public, was said to have mocked him privately and often appeared forlorn in his presence. In February 1535, Boleyn had reached near hysteria while conversing with the Admiral of France while watching Henry flirt with a court lady at a banquet. That same month she became so desperate to keep her hold on the king that she planted her own cousin, Madge Shelton, in the king's way as his mistress in an effort to have a loyal mistress who would not turn against her with the rival factions at court.¹²⁵ More problematically, Henry likely met Jane Seymour while on progress during the summer of 1535. Seymour was one of Boleyn's maids of honor and many accounts suggest the queen was livid upon learning of her husband's particular interest in her lady. Though given Boleyn's and Henry's natures, the marriage was often stormy, it appears to have flourished almost until the end. What it

¹²⁴ LP, VII, 1193.

¹²⁵ As cited in Weir, *The Lady*, 14.

lacked, fidelity aside, was the vital outside support from the court and nation. Once again, a woman's only surety in the world were her sons. Boleyn's failure to produce a male heir kept her position ever open to both political and personal threat. Unlike Catherine, who had wed the king out of dynastic decree, Boleyn had won her husband through years of scheming and she knew all too well the necessity of keeping his affections. Opposed on almost every front, she was on her own. Unlike Catherine's just cause, no one but her family and clients would bat an eye should the king lose interest and set her aside. Boleyn was vulnerable as the foundation of her influence rested heavily on the king's capricious affections.

Aside from Henry, Boleyn did have the support of the powerful faction she had built around herself. Chief among them were her father, brother, and brother-in-law, William Carey, and Norfolk in the early years. Outside of her own family, she also counted Thomas Cranmer, Thomas Audley, who became Lord Chancellor in 1533, and Henry Norris as allies. Proof of her influence can be found in the rise of these gentlemen. By the time of her fall, her father was lord privy seal, the Archbishop of Canterbury was Thomas Cranmer, and Thomas Cromwell was the king's principal secretary and minister. All of these positions prior to 1532 had belonged to those loyal to Catherine of Aragon and her daughter Mary.¹²⁶ Factions were merely the creation of private calculation, but could express the permanences of family, friendship, locality or upbringing. Still, the system at its heart existed to promote objectives that were primarily personal, and calculations could and often did change.¹²⁷ Boleyn's abandonment in her hour of need

¹²⁶ Ives, *Anne Boleyn*, 260.

¹²⁷ Ives, *Anne Boleyn*, 124.

would be a direct example of recalculations among some of the supporters within her faction.

The events of the spring of 1536 would determine the rest of Henry's reign and shape the course of the remainder of Boleyn's brief life. The new "year of three queens"¹²⁸ began for the royal couple with grand triumph. At long last Catherine of Aragon died on 7 January making Boleyn "now... truly queen." The next day the royal couple appeared at court "in joyful yellow from top to toe and Elizabeth was triumphantly paraded to church."¹²⁹ Here again was Boleyn's lack of subtlety displayed. Her "choice of garb was no less than a calculated insult to the memory of the woman she had supplanted."¹³⁰ A "carnival-like celebration of Catherine's death" was held the following day on 8 January by the king and queen.¹³¹ The cherry on top lay in Boleyn's three-month pregnancy with what she was sure was a son and the world seemed ripe with possibility.

Disaster struck some weeks later when the king was thrown from his horse at the joust and lay unconscious for hours, once again putting terror into the heart of England which still had no male heir. Boleyn attributed the miscarriage of her son "with much peril of her life" on 29 January to the king's near death.¹³² This was a huge disappointment to the king and intensified Henry's fears that God's hand could also be against this marriage. According to Chapuys, the royal couple's relationship became strained following the loss of a second son. He cites an argument in which Henry claimed

¹²⁸ R.W. Hoyle.

¹²⁹ Ives, 295.

¹³⁰ Weir, *The Lady*, 18.

¹³¹ David Starkey, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 549.

¹³² George Wyatt, cited in Weir, *The Lady*, 7.

“clearly that God did not wish to give him male children” to which Anne allegedly replied that Henry had no one to blame but himself for he had broken her heart when she saw he loved others.¹³³ Still, Henry stood by her and the couple had reconciled by late February. Though the marriage was tumultuous, as Weir suggests, “he could not afford to lose face after his long and controversial struggle to make her his wife, nor would he admit that he had been wrong in marrying her.”¹³⁴ Crucially, as late as mid-April 1536 the king was still making every effort to have Charles V recognize Boleyn as queen.¹³⁵

“*Circa Renga Tonat*, Thunder Rolls Around the Throne”

Undoubtedly “all discussion of the fall of Anne Boleyn ends in the ultimate unresolvable paradox of Tudor history: Henry VIII’s psychology.”¹³⁶ The king’s psychological state in the spring of 1536 is essential to understanding his clinging to his honor so aggressively and the destruction of Anne Boleyn. Henry was not the only man of his age “intoxicated” with honor.¹³⁷ The concept was of vital importance in sixteenth-century England as it was used to justify gender roles. For an honorable man this meant “masculinity, upholding patriarchy, controlling women and defending one’s good name,” were all vital parts of one’s image.¹³⁸ The characteristics of one’s manhood were wrapped up in marriage, control of the household, the use of reason, sexual prowess, physical strength and courage. “In the noble and chivalric world in which Henry VIII operated, the

¹³³ LP, X, 351.

¹³⁴ Weir, *The Lady*, 11.

¹³⁵ According to Ives.

¹³⁶ Eric Ives, “The Fall of Anne Boleyn Reconsidered,” *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 107, No. 424 (Jul., 1992), 664.

¹³⁷ Lipscomb, *1536*, 55.

¹³⁸ Lipscomb, *1536*, 55.

paramount place for demonstrating physical strength and manly courage was the joust,¹³⁹ which Henry's accident in January 1536 had ensured the king would never do again. The fall had opened an old wound on his thigh that would never fully heal and chronically ailed him for the remainder of his life. Until this point, the king prided himself, and staked much of his honor and authority as king, upon his athletic prowess. When this was taken from him, Henry's very identity underwent a significant shift. Faced with disability as well as yet another frightening brush with death, he found himself staring middle age in the face, no small feat for a king who purported to be larger than life. The epitome of sixteenth century masculinity lay in the "rambunctious energy" displayed by "a man of excess" in his strength, courage, display and riotousness.¹⁴⁰ Henry had always been such a man, although he seemed now a very subdued one who had been made to face his mortality. 1536 marked the end of the king's active life and a major aspect of his honor.¹⁴¹ It also resulted in the loss of a major component of his identity as a man and authority as king.

These circumstances would surely leave anyone feeling vulnerable and in the midst of an identity crisis. For a king, and a man such as Henry, it could spell disaster. Presiding over a country in religious tumult at a crucial and defining period of his reign, Henry had taken a major blow to his royal image, and thus his authority, something he could not afford to have threatened. Once again, the king would be forced to reinvent himself. He would turn more heavily to display and allegory in his later reign to communicate his authority as king (and Head of the Church) to compensate for the loss

¹³⁹ Lipscomb, *1536*, 55.

¹⁴⁰ Lyndal Roper, cited in Lipscomb, *1536*, 62.

¹⁴¹ Lipscomb, *1536*, 63.

of his military and sporting prowess. This certainly adds a layer of understanding to the scene in 1536, but still the questions remain: how and why could Henry allow the execution of an anointed queen?

There are many ways to tell a story and the fall of Anne Boleyn is one of the best examples of how facts can be interpreted to produce differing outcomes. Her spectacular downfall has been blamed on everything from “factional intrigue, diplomatic maneuvering, theological battles and supernatural paranoia.”¹⁴² There is much debate amongst historians about what Boleyn *did* to ensure her own downfall. Many theories place credence on her miscarriage in late January. If Chapuys’ third-hand report is to be believed, following the loss Henry confessed that he believed he had made the marriage seduced by witchcraft and therefore considered it null and void. The king then determined that he could take another wife.¹⁴³ From this account also stems the suggestion that the fetus was deformed, which ultimately led to charges of witchcraft and Boleyn’s undoing, though there is no historical evidence to support such a theory.¹⁴⁴ Still other accounts suggest that it was Boleyn’s activity as a reformer and political power that spelled her ruin due to court factionalism.¹⁴⁵

What is certain is that the loss of a son was a severe blow to the royal couple. Rumors ran rampant that the queen was unable to conceive an heir and the king’s eye still wandered. Whatever his commitment to his marriage, Henry’s phase of monogamy was over. Still his actions in support of his marriage from February to April 1536 demonstrate

¹⁴² Greg Walker, “Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn,” *The Historical Journal* 45, no.1 (2002): 2.

¹⁴³ Charles Wriothesley, *A Chronicle of England During the Reigns of the Tudors from Ad 1485 to 1559: (Volume 1)* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1875), 33.

¹⁴⁴ Theory argued by Retha Warnicke in *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn: Family Politics at the Court of Henry VIII*.

¹⁴⁵ Joanna Denny in *Anne Boleyn: A New Life for England’s Tragic Queen* and Eric Ives in *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn: The Most Happy*, respectively.

his remaining loyalty to Boleyn. In fact, the king launched a rather aggressive campaign upon Charles V to recognize Boleyn as his wife and repent of the wrongs he had done to Henry during the years of the divorce. This months-long series of negotiations, much aided by Cromwell himself,¹⁴⁶ reached their climax during Easter 1536. In a deliberately staged series of events to provoke formal recognition of Boleyn, Chapuys was invited to court on the pretense of speaking with the king. Instead he was greeted by Anne's faction and invited to visit the queen and kiss her hand, which Chapuys politely declined to do. Instead he was accompanied to Mass where, as Henry and Boleyn descended the royal pew, the queen stopped and bowed to the ambassador. In a brilliant stroke of diplomatic maneuvering on Henry's part, etiquette demanded that Chapuys do likewise, finally recognizing Boleyn as queen.¹⁴⁷ In a later letter Chapuys noted that many were "somewhat jealous at the mutual reverences required by politeness which were done at the church."¹⁴⁸ Once again Henry had gone to great lengths to legitimize Boleyn as his wife and queen nearly a month to the day before she would be executed.

Many historians suggest that the final blow was her falling out with Cromwell and the subsequent sermon campaigns Boleyn launched with her chaplains to modify the royal policy on monastic funds. In a brilliant use of allegory on Boleyn's part, her chaplain John Skip's infamous Passion Sunday sermon comparing Cromwell to the evil Old Testament advisor Haman whom Queen Esther triumphed over in the king's affections, was preached on 2 April 1536.¹⁴⁹ Though the king and Cromwell were furious

¹⁴⁶ Walker, 9.

¹⁴⁷ LP, X, 699.

¹⁴⁸ LP, X, 720.

¹⁴⁹ LP, X, 615.

at the slight,¹⁵⁰ Henry's telling overtures with Boleyn and Chapuys took place nearly three weeks later on 18 April indicating that the queen's actions, while rash and unbecoming, did not seal her fate.¹⁵¹ While the sermon did not spell disaster in Henry's eyes, it was catastrophically damaging to the queen's relationship with her strongest ally, Thomas Cromwell. The deaths of both of Henry's former favorites, Wolsey and More, were on Boleyn's hands and no doubt present in Cromwell's mind. The secretary had much reason to be fearful, and murderous too. As previously established, Anne made few friends. Cromwell was certainly the most powerful and independent of them. While he was partner and co-conspirator with the queen in many court policies, his power ultimately came directly from Henry. The system of patronage is crucial to this equation. Just as Boleyn's only claim to power lay in the king's affections, the power of those she surrounded herself with rested solely on that same influence she drew from the king. So when it was suddenly withdrawn in April 1536 with charges of treason, adultery and incest, there was no one around the queen to come to her aid, save Cromwell whom she had turned against her.

Boleyn's fall when it came was rapid, incandescent, and accompanied by the finest display of smoke and mirrors, pyrotechnics and theatrics of Henry's reign. Just as in all his other campaigns to make her, he quickly unmade her in masterful fashion. The king was heard around court saying he believed that "upwards of 100 gentlemen" knew Boleyn carnally. He praised God for delivering him and his children from "the hands of that accursed whore," and composed a tragedy, which he carried about in a little book

¹⁵⁰ Skip was interrogated and censured for "preaching seditious doctrines and slandering the king's highness" and his counselors. LP, X, 615.

¹⁵¹ LP, X, 699.

and offered for people to read. On Ascension Day he wore white for mourning. In June, his parliament would pass the Second Act of Succession, bastardizing Elizabeth and declaring his marriage to Boleyn illegitimate. Most notably, and to the scandal of contemporaries, Henry accelerated his budding relationship with Jane Seymour quite publicly and caroused with ladies of the court openly. In fact, he was betrothed to Jane Seymour on the day of Boleyn's execution. Indeed, "you never saw a prince or husband show or wear his (cuckold's) horns more patiently and lightly than this one does."¹⁵² It is here that Lipscomb's theory of a gender relations crisis as the impetus for Boleyn's fall comes into consideration.

It is well established that Boleyn and her fellow-accused were innocent of the crimes they were charged, with even contemporaries questioning the lack luster evidence against them.¹⁵³ The motive for the accusations is what remains unclear. Despite Chapuys' reports, Boleyn was never formally charged with witchcraft and there is no evidence to support claims of a deformed fetus as the impetus for such accusations. Theories of Henry simply tiring of his wife are also unlikely. Mere weeks before her arrest the king was still fighting in Boleyn's corner for legitimacy, not the actions of a man who shortly planned to dispose of her. While he was clearly no longer besotted with Boleyn as he had once been, he was still very much committed to his marriage in name at least, thereby negating the arguments that the miscarriage was the last straw or that he simply wanted her removed in favor of Jane Seymour. Had Henry wanted to get rid of Boleyn there were far "less humiliatingly intimate"¹⁵⁴ ways to go about doing it. A man

¹⁵² As cited in Lipscomb, *1536*, 88.

¹⁵³ There was so little evidence in fact, that many were concerned that the king's honor would be damaged even further by an unjust trial and execution; Cavendish, 458-9.

¹⁵⁴ G.W. Bernard, "The Fall of Anne Boleyn," *English Historical Review* 106, no. 420 (July 1991): 584.

with such a keen sense of the crucial connection between honor and princely authority would not have willingly cuckolded himself simply to be rid of his wife. Henry may have been bored with Boleyn, disappointed that she had not delivered on her promises, and certainly frustrated with her rash behavior, and perhaps had even come to dislike her as some historians have suggested, but “none of these things was likely to bring about her destruction.”¹⁵⁵ Instead, the king had made the mental adjustment from viewing and treating Boleyn as the love of his life to simply his honored queen and the mother of his children.¹⁵⁶ This transition proved a difficult pill for his wife to swallow.

The more plausible, long-standing theory of court factionalism as the impetus for her death, while valid in many aspects, still leaves much to be desired in its version of a Henry who could “be bounce[d]...into decision” by those around him.¹⁵⁷ As this thesis has demonstrated, Henry VIII was an intelligent, shrewd and skilled ruler with an awareness of and penchant for image building and manipulation. A king who so masterfully and directly wielded his power and authority up until this point does not fit with the naive ruler described in this theory. While damaged by the fall of January 1536, Henry was certainly not beaten, nor would he have simply let go of the reins of his court and kingdom at one of the most crucial periods of his reign. Conversely, he would have been more sensitive and determined than ever to cultivate and defend his image and honor, personally. This theory suggests that Cromwell and Boleyn’s political enemies, chiefly the Seymour family, conspired to undo the queen and skillfully tricked Henry into playing along. The main line of evidence used to suggest that Cromwell plotted against

¹⁵⁵ Walker, 14.

¹⁵⁶ Walker, 14.

¹⁵⁷ Ives, *Life and Death*, 321.

Boleyn is a letter by the ever-hopeful Chapuys that suggests Cromwell told him that he had “set himself to devise and conspire the said affair.”¹⁵⁸ The problem with this lies in translation and context. Chapuys’ original letter was written in French. One translation suggests that Cromwell planned and carried out a premeditated plot against Boleyn. However, when taken within the context of the entire letter, the phrase reads as if Henry had given Cromwell the authority to discover and bring to an end Boleyn’s time in power.¹⁵⁹ It appears that the “affair” which the secretary refers to was in fact the investigation, trial and execution, not the planning itself. In this context, the letter negates the argument of an easily manipulated king, and instead suggests the more plausible view that Henry was at the helm and charged Cromwell with pursuing it further once the king was informed of the rumors. This stands to suggest that the king was not the puppet of, but rather a beneficiary of, factionalism at court. Instead when he was informed of the allegations against the queen, he ordered an investigation and did not openly turn on his wife until confession and revelations of the queen’s inappropriate conversations with others were revealed and she was arrested. Cromwell certainly had motive, good reason to be concerned about the queen’s enmity, and perhaps intent to take the queen down, but cannot be singularly responsible for contriving a plot over political disagreements. This argument instead suggests that Cromwell was indeed growing increasingly desperate in the weeks prior to the queen’s arrest. Certainly after Easter the lines had been clearly drawn: either the queen or himself. But his rescue, when it did come, was rather more impeccably timed luck than pure maniacal ingenuity. Cromwell was the messenger of court gossip, not the author of a grand plot. Cromwell was certainly a formidable political

¹⁵⁸ LP, X, 1069.

¹⁵⁹ Lipscomb, *1536*, 75; Walker, 28.

animal, but as he and Boleyn would soon enough learn, Henry VIII surpassed them both, and one more frightening than anyone could have possibly imagined in 1536. Instead of factionalist tensions being the sole impetus of Boleyn's fall, these events "predisposed the king to be more responsive to the accusations of adultery when they came."¹⁶⁰

With Cromwell as the eager facilitator, the question then remains what was the direct impetus for the investigations launched into the queen's honor in April 1536? The answers lie in Boleyn's very nature and the briar patch that was the system of courtly love at the Tudor court. Again, much historiographical focus is placed on her actions in 1536 rather than on what she *said* in those crucial weeks leading to her undoing.¹⁶¹ The queen's conduct since her marriage in 1533 had been less than ideal from a gender and public relations standpoint. Anne Boleyn was inappropriate in almost every sense of the sixteenth-century definition for queen and wife. She was scandalous, and could be rash, vindictive and arrogant when pushed to it. Her aggressive role in politics and religion were tolerable so long as she enthralled the king, but it was her lack of discretion in the way of gender roles and queenship, and ultimately the irreparable damage done to Henry's authoritarian image because of it, that led to her undoing.

The problem with royal mistresses, or newly-minted over mighty queens, lay in the power they drew from the kings they served. Boleyn is best known for her systematic seizure of this power, which she wielded most effectively in politics and religion. Throughout history, women and power have made for an uneasy combination. If, as French historian Joan Scott suggests, gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power, then the vitriol heaped on Boleyn by her contemporaries is certainly

¹⁶⁰ Walker, 16.

¹⁶¹ My theory sides with the works of Greg Walker and Lipscomb.

understandable.¹⁶² Sixteenth-century society saw female power as savage and immoral. “A woman promoted to sit in the seat of God, that is, to teach, to judge or to reign above man, is a monster in nature, contumely to God, and a thing most repugnant to his will and ordinance,” scoffed John Knox.¹⁶³ His view of female power and influence reflected the opinions of patriarchal early modern society at large. Naturally, like those who had gone before her, Boleyn is often depicted as the biblical Jezebel, sexually corrupt, immoral and manipulative. Sexual corruption or dishonor was a concept and process, of which Boleyn is a prime example, with a power all its own; it was an invaluable social tool of conformity applied most powerfully to women in sixteenth-century Europe.¹⁶⁴

It would be this tool of sexual dishonor that would end Boleyn’s time in power. As previously discussed, women had a certain role to play within the Tudor court. This concept was wrapped up in female honor. “The requirement of female chastity had a passive quality; the chaste woman was modest and non participative, submissive and docile.”¹⁶⁵ In terms of modesty, Boleyn failed miserably as evidenced in 1532 on the eve of her triumphal visit to France when she ordered gowns made in the fashion of the “wanton creatures” of the French court that were “singularly unfit for the chaste.”¹⁶⁶ The appointment of several bishops who were Boleyn’s allies between 1532 and 1536 shows she did not refrain from participation in the politics of the realm. Her interference was so great that Chapuys named her “the principal cause of the spread of Lutheranism in this country.” Her actions on Passion Sunday alone showed her to be anything but submissive

¹⁶² Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis.” *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 1053-75.

¹⁶³ Mary Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 239.

¹⁶⁴ Gowing, 225.

¹⁶⁵ Lipscomb, *The Fall*, 292.

¹⁶⁶ Polydore Vergil, cited in Weir, *Henry*, 321.

and her constant “dancing and sporting” was certainly not docile. Against this backdrop were Boleyn’s more private shortcomings. Her household was lively, flirtatious and significantly less formal than Catherine’s had been. The atmosphere in her chambers was more spirited than most and there she often entertained many gentlemen of the court, who praised her beauty and professed their love for her above all others as courtly love dictated. “This was the way to secure patronage and reward, and, provided it was not pursued too ardently, to win the favour of the king” who delighted in possessing something many could not have.¹⁶⁷ The pastimes of the queen’s chambers would soon be shown to be most ardent and indeed, out of hand.

Entertaining these gentlemen callers would prove to be an unwise pursuit, for this was where the rumors of the Boleyn’s adultery originated as “the queen’s incontinent living was so rank and common that the ladies of her privy chamber could no longer conceal it” and the king’s advisors were informed.¹⁶⁸ One of these ladies was Elizabeth Browne, Lady Worcester. In an argument Lady Worcester’s brother, who was treasurer of the royal household, accused her of immoral conduct at court as the child she carried may not have been her husband’s. She then replied that if he was accusing her of sexual immorality, then her behavior was certainly not the worst and he should rather look to the queen, naming her relationships with several courtiers including her own brother and adding that “[Mark]Smeaton could tell more.”¹⁶⁹ This theory is based on a 1,000-line poem written in 1535-6 and published in 1545 by Lancelot de Carles, bishop of Riez, who was visiting England at the time of the scandal.¹⁷⁰ Courtier John Hussey lends more

¹⁶⁷ Walker, 19.

¹⁶⁸ LP, X, 873.

¹⁶⁹ G. W. Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 597.

¹⁷⁰ Bernard, Weir, and Lipscomb all reference this work as a potential impetus.

credence to de Carles' claims as he also named Lady Worcester as the original source of the rumors in reports to those living outside of London.¹⁷¹ Boleyn herself commented while imprisoned that Worcester's fragile pregnancy was in danger because of "the sorrow she took for me."¹⁷² G.W. Bernard suggests that it was Lady Worcester's brother, not Cromwell, who then took this information to the council, and furthermore that Henry ordered an investigation launched but that should the charges prove false, the accusers would be punished.¹⁷³

While Worcester's accusations were alarming, the conflict came to a head during May Day weekend (29-30 April) 1536. Boleyn was seen having at least two public conversations during this time that would prove to be her undoing. First a spat with Mark Smeaton on 29 April saw Boleyn and the court musician in an alcove. The queen herself reported their conversation while imprisoned: she asked him why he looked so melancholy and suggested that if he were sick with love for her, he was indeed beneath her. The musician hastily replied that "No, no, madam, a loke sufficed me" and walked away.¹⁷⁴ This conversation lacked propriety in Smeaton's familiarity with the queen. For a courtier to dismiss a queen's question as "no matter" and to walk away without being dismissed suggests an air of informality not befitting a queen. Smeaton was arrested the next day, likely because he was already under suspicion with Worcester having named him as one of the queen's lovers and also because his lowly station gave him less protection. He was the only of the accused to confess to carnal relations with the queen,

¹⁷¹ LP, X, 953 and 964.

¹⁷² LP, X, 793. Bernard suggests that this was because of guilt and that Worcester named her daughter Anne when she was born out of penitence, *Fatal Attractions*, 597.

¹⁷³ Bernard, *Fatal Attractions*, 597.

¹⁷⁴ LP, X, 798.

being the impetus for the headhunt within Boleyn's household. In fact, it was "absolutely key" to everything that followed, whipping the investigation into frenzy as "suddenly rumor became fact" and "everything was believable."¹⁷⁵ At this stage, the king was probably informed of the confession as Henry made two telling decisions indicating his growing suspicion of his wife's guilt: first he cancelled Boleyn's company on a 2 May trip to Calais and made arrangements to travel alone a week later, and secondly, determined to continue with the May Day jousts that weekend.¹⁷⁶ This is further supported by the account of Scottish theologian Alexander Alesius, who witnessed on Sunday 30 April, a charged conversation between the king and queen which saw Boleyn holding Elizabeth in her arms, pleading with Henry as he looked out of an open window at Greenwich. Henry's fury was evident and "it was most obvious to everyone that some deep and difficult question was being discussed."¹⁷⁷

That same weekend Boleyn argued with another one of her other favorites, Henry Norris. She questioned Norris as to why he had not recently gone through with his marriage, to which the gentleman replied he would "tary a time." Boleyn then reprimanded him saying that if the king died,¹⁷⁸ he "would loke to have me." Norris swiftly replied that if ever any thought crossed his mind he would rather his head struck off. Boleyn then threatened that "she could undo him if she would" and the two "felle owt."¹⁷⁹ This challenge to Norris was "provocative, unseemly, and indiscreet" behavior for a queen and was referenced and exaggerated in her indictment, suggesting that Boleyn

¹⁷⁵ Lipscomb, *1536*, 79.

¹⁷⁶ LP, X, 789.

¹⁷⁷ Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, Elizabeth, Volume 1 – 1558-1559, 1303.

¹⁷⁸ A treasonable offense to even imagine the king's death. See Statutes of the Realm (London, 1817), III 26 Henry VIII, c. 13, 508-9.

¹⁷⁹ LP, X, 793.

“conspired the death and destruction of the king, the queen often saying she would marry one of them as soon as the king died.”¹⁸⁰ George Walker suggests that Boleyn knew she had gone too far in this exchange and her threat to undo Norris was a self preservation tactic of the “if you tell anyone I will take you down with me” nature; this is further supported by the fact that Norris went to swear on the queen’s honor only hours before he was arrested after the argument.¹⁸¹ Boleyn’s exclamation upon being imprisoned supports this theory: “O Norris, hast thou accused me? Thou art in the Tower with me and thou and I shall die together!”¹⁸² Norris was arrested on 1 May following an abrupt departure from the May Day festivities with the king who had invited him to ride back to Whitehall with him. Henry accused Norris of adultery with the queen upon their arrival at the palace. Norris vehemently denied it, even when Henry offered pardon if he would simply tell the truth. This indicates that it was indeed Henry who was at the helm of these investigations since he would be so bold as to confront and interrogate Norris himself.¹⁸³ These were not the actions of a passive king who had placed control of the situation in his advisors’ hands. Up until this point, Henry had set Cromwell with the task of sniffing out evidence and had quietly rearranged his diplomatic plans accordingly, but this conversation with Norris, coupled with Smeaton’s confession, appears to be the tipping point. The next day, 2 May, Boleyn and her brother George were summarily arrested. The queen had spent the morning at Mass and leisure when a messenger arrived demanding her to report before the King’s Council. From there she was interrogated and then sent to the Tower.

¹⁸⁰ Lipscomb, *The Fall*, 298; LP, X, 786.

¹⁸¹ Walker, 23; LP X, 793.

¹⁸² LP, X, 793.

¹⁸³ Walker, 28; Lipscomb, *1536*, 81.

Once imprisoned, she relayed a similarly inappropriate conversation with Francis Weston in which he confessed he loved neither his wife nor Boleyn's cousin Madge Shelton. Instead he loved "wone in hyr howse better then them bothe." When the queen asked who, he replied "It ys yourself."¹⁸⁴ These conversations with her male subjects "appear improper" as Boleyn's "hunger for romantic admiration is more than usually evident."¹⁸⁵ The rules of courtly love dictated that Boleyn graciously receive male adoration, not actively seek it. Here was her fatal mistake. The queen had "conducted herself badly, encouraging compliments and attentions, and delving too deeply," into the private lives of her male admirers.¹⁸⁶ This overzealous play at courtly love made the accusations of multiple affairs brought against Boleyn seem far more probable than they actually were. Furthermore, as the investigation continued with manic fervor, new details emerged. The queen was said to joke openly with her favorites about the king's shortcomings, particularly his sexual inadequacies. She allegedly told her brother that the king had neither virtue nor vigor in bed.¹⁸⁷ She was eventually charged with adultery, incest and plotting to kill the king and his children. These charges may seem fantastic to the objective observer, but in Henry's mind, "no crime was unthinkable in a woman who could betray him."¹⁸⁸ In his eyes, Boleyn was a loose cannon, unpredictable in effect upon the crown's authority, and now clearly a direct threat to the royal family's life.

According to Cromwell, Boleyn and her co-conspirators were discovered when their actions became so outlandish they could no longer be ignored.¹⁸⁹ His assertion that

¹⁸⁴ LP, X, 793.

¹⁸⁵ Patricia Thomson, *Sir Thomas Wyatt and His Background* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964), 35.

¹⁸⁶ Thomson, 35.

¹⁸⁷ LP, X, 908.

¹⁸⁸ Walker, 29.

¹⁸⁹ LP, X, 873.

all parties were guilty must be taken with a grain of salt due to his own biases against the queen, but the assertion that her behavior was so flagrant that it could not go unnoticed seems plausible based on Boleyn's prior history of inappropriate public outbursts. Rumor undoubtedly had an enormous impact on personal reputation.¹⁹⁰ The queen had failed utterly to take Castiglione's advice that an honorable female courtier be "circumspect, and...careful not to give occasion for evil being said of her, and conduct herself to that she may not only escape being sullied by guilt but even the suspicion of it."¹⁹¹ Boleyn's careless public conduct tainted her image and more importantly, the image of her husband. The news of her alleged infidelities wounded Henry in two crucial ways: by indicating his inability as a man to satisfy his wife and by extension, his prowess as a king.¹⁹² Furthermore, it endangered the very fabric of England as "adultery in a king's wife weigheth no less than the wrong reign of a bastard prince, which thing for a commonwealth ought especially be regarded."¹⁹³ Most damningly, women's adultery upset the social order and gender hierarchy upon which society was based, suggesting that the very glue of society rested upon male potency.¹⁹⁴ If such a shortcoming were found in a king, the effects could be devastating. Lipscomb suggests that in the early modern mind governance of one's household was closely linked to governance of the realm, for "it is impossible for a man to understand how to govern the commonwealth,

¹⁹⁰ Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 103.

¹⁹¹ Castiglione, 151 as cited in Lipscomb, *The Fall*, 299.

¹⁹² Lipscomb, *The Fall*, 335.

¹⁹³ William Thomas, *The Pilgrim*, 56. As cited in Walker, 26-27.

¹⁹⁴ Fletcher, 101. As cited in Lipscomb, *The Fall*, 300.

that doth not know how to rule his own house...so that he that knoweth not to govern, deserveth not to reign.”¹⁹⁵

This concept was, in Henry’s mind, the last definitive strike against Boleyn. He surely recognized that he had erred in marrying her and needed to salvage his fragile reputation as a capable man and king to his subjects and the wider world who were always watching. Henry’s carefully cultivated image of authority, and the Tudor brand itself, now stood in grave danger. A king could not be seen to make mistakes, be cuckolded, and certainly not have his authority challenged by his own wife. Anne Boleyn had been for years, but perhaps only just now did the king see, the great scandal of his reign. Even Thomas Cranmer in a letter in defense of Boleyn to the king conceded, that “your honor is highly touched” and that “God had never sent you a like trial.”¹⁹⁶ Furthermore, Cranmer assured his wounded sovereign that the queen's actions were “only to her dishonor, not yours.” But on the contrary, Boleyn’s alleged infidelity sorely wounded her husband’s honor as “above everything else, it was a man’s business to avoid being made a cuckold.”¹⁹⁷ Cranmer’s letter alone stands as testament that the risks were too great for Henry to ignore. As previously outlined, an honorable man displayed characteristics of “masculinity, upholding patriarchy, controlling women and defending one’s good name.” Boleyn had wounded Henry’s masculinity in her alleged straying in their marriage, which by extension threatened his ability to uphold patriarchy and order by controlling and satisfying his wife. The only bit she had left to him in this equation was the ability and duty to defend his good name, which the king did to the fullest extent.

¹⁹⁵ John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *A Godlie Form of Householde Government* (London, 1612), 36. As cited in Lipscomb, *The Fall*, 303.

¹⁹⁶ LP, X, 792.

¹⁹⁷ Fletcher, 103.

Furthermore, Henry was aware that she was widely unpopular and her removal would meet with public approval. This guarantee of little political backlash made the decision that much easier to make. Unlike his long campaigns to justify Catherine's removal, Boleyn could be dealt with neatly, quickly and with no great public outcry, a public relations crisis' dream.

What had become clear by April 1536 was that Henry's marriage to Boleyn was synonymous with his own human frailty (in many ways of her own doing, but in others out of her control) in an arena where a monarch must be either a force of nature, God-like in authority and regality, the epitome of manly prowess, or nothing at all. In sixteenth-century England, one's honor was essentially one's brand. As in modern public relations, this brand was a major component of one's public image and fiercely protected. For men it was essential to maintaining control; for women it could be a matter of life and death. The defense of royal honor was a driving force and "one of the motivating principles in Henry's life."¹⁹⁸ Prior to Boleyn, Henry had already demonstrated the extreme lengths to which he would go to defend his honor. In 1519, on the urging of his council, he had dismissed in disgrace some of his most intimate boon companions after many became convinced that they were responsible for Henry's "incessant gambling, which has made him lose of late a treasure of gold."¹⁹⁹ Their raucous behavior had also proven a diplomatic embarrassment in 1518 while in France as they rode wildly through the streets of Paris with the French king harassing the population.²⁰⁰ When this threat to his honor

¹⁹⁸ Graves, 34.

¹⁹⁹ Giustinian, II, 271.

²⁰⁰ Hall, fols 67-68v. As cited in Graves, 35.

was revealed to him, Henry dismissed those closest to him who threatened his royal image, proving his treasuring of his honor above all, even those he claimed to love.

The fall of Anne Boleyn was certainly a crisis in gender relations that was the impetus for a larger-scale public relations crisis as her actions upset not only interpersonal gender relationships (calling into question her husband's honor), but also jeopardized the way Henry was viewed by the public, thereby threatening his authority as a monarch and drawing into question his ability to rule. Boleyn's utter failure to conform to the new role she had ascended to as Queen of England had brought dishonor upon her husband, besmirching a royal image that was nearly 30 years in the making, and thereby threatened the fragile hold he had on a kingdom rife with religious and political strife. A series of events beginning in January 1536 with the king's fall and the miscarrying of their son were finally tipped over by the public relations crisis born of Boleyn's unseemly conduct with her male admirers. Henry did not invent the charges, but was rather shocked, devastated, and persuaded by the accusations, accounting for his ruthless pursuit of her death. Though there were barely sparks, let alone a fire, there had accumulated in the queen's household enough smoke by late April 1536 to substantiate claims of adultery--in the queen's joking at Henry's sexual inadequacies with her brother, in her threats against Smeaton, ill-timed with his pending arrest and confession less than twenty-four hours later, and most damningly in her brazen talk of the king's death with Norris. The threat to Henry's *maiestas* was far too imminent and Boleyn's last offense far too great as the king, like all men of the age, prized his honor and the public reputation it upheld, above all else.

EPILOGUE

The reign of Henry VIII produced some of the most magnificent and enduring figures in English history. During the years from 1509-1536, the whims of a king saw the rise and fall of two queens, the creation and destruction of three ministers (Wolsey, More, and Cromwell), and arguably the most significant religious, intellectual, and political controversies of the sixteenth century. It was the age of humanism, reformation, and the birth of modern political theory and practice. It also saw the rise of primitive public relations, branding, and marketing theory and the ways in which those in power negotiated and influenced mass opinion “by a deliberately crafted image of the king.”¹ The divorce crisis and defense of Anne Boleyn marked the king’s “first prolonged attention to public affairs”² and revolutionized the deliberate usage of imagery, allegory and display as a form of active image manipulation and control that could be wielded as a tool to obtain what Henry most desired.

The King’s Reformation brought about a crisis of representation. In breaking with Rome Henry divided the realm and discredited a vital traditional discourse and image of kingship: the monarch as a figure of piety, orthodoxy and protector of the Catholic Church and defender of the faith.³ Kings might be the Lord’s Anointed, but it was only through the Church that one could reach the Lord. It was the Church that lent increased sacred and secular authority to kings. Thus Henry was faced with the formidable challenge of “restructuring and redefining his royal position as well as re-presenting his

¹ Warner, 2.

² John Guy, *The Public Career of Sir Thomas More*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) 97-9. As cited in Warner, 48.

³ Sharpe, 68.

authority, of rewriting and refiguring his kingship, and kingship itself.”⁴ He cultivated new constructs of authority based on biblical theology, which supported his claims of the divine right of kings who drew their authority not from a pope, of whom there was no mention in Holy Scripture, but directly from God himself. Henry’s quest to provide his dynasty with an heir and consequently, to “re-script and re-present kingship” through sophisticated public relations campaigns are his legacy. Out of necessity, he “systemized” governmental arts into “a program of representation that was novel in intensity and kind.”⁵ With the assistance of advisors and impresarios alike, Henry redefined statecraft, making the art of ruling and communicating one’s authority a rhetorical and spectacle performance. He understood the sophisticated and vital relationship between image communication and authority so much so that he once warned: “I shall look on any injury offered to the painter [Holbein] as [an injury] to myself.”⁶

Placing himself at the helm, Henry masterfully navigated the stormy seas of divorce, supremacy and cuckoldry with steely determination and shrewd business savvy. He wrote treatises arguing for his divorce and Supremacy, ordered sermons preached throughout the land upholding his own authority as God’s Lieutenant, commissioned poets, artists, theologians and historians to justify his actions and authority in their written and artistic records of his reign, “his ministers encouraged playwrights to ‘set forth and declare lively before the people’s eyes the abomination and wickedness of the bishop of Rome...and to declare and open to them the obedience that...subjects by God’s and men’s laws owe[d]’ the king.”⁷ In addition to proclaiming his own agenda, he

⁴ Sharpe, 68.

⁵ Sharpe, 68.

⁶ Sharpe, 69.

⁷ Sharpe, 69.

effectively neutered opposition by controlling the early press through the use of the royal printer and censorship so effective that Chapuys complained that no one was permitted to preach at Paul's Cross save those who were loyal to the king's cause and pushed his agenda. He made and unmade those around him as their goals and positions aligned or fell out of alignment with this hard won and carefully maintained authority.

The tragic figure of Anne Boleyn is synonymous with this defining period of Henry's reign, and is much responsible for helping construct the popular image of Henry known to modern audiences. Her bid for queenship and later swift destruction demonstrate some of Henry's most skillful and calculated public relations efforts. Undoubtedly, it was significantly easier and more expedient for Henry to undo her than to make her popular. Traditional interpretations of Boleyn have made her the victim of tiresome vacillation between the polar ends of the female archetype of either whore or angel. In reality she was an amalgam of the two: a woman of passionate conviction and erudition, but also one fatally flawed with rash vindictiveness and disregard for the subtleties of monarchy. Her shortcomings as a dutiful queen, both politically and personally, fatally intersected with her husband's championing of the honor and authority he so fiercely and painstakingly constructed, communicated, and maintained at all costs. As the evidence suggests, no one person can be blamed for plotting to overthrow her, but rather a systemic, aptly timed crisis in both gender, and by extension public relations, resulted in her death in 1536 and the turning point in Henry's career as a monarch and image communication aficionado. There is a marked shift in the mode and methods of communicating a new, hyper-masculinized image of Henry VIII directly resulting from

the blow to his honor caused by his late queen. The year 1536 and the destruction of Anne Boleyn marked the end of an era and the beginning of a new and more frightening one in both Henry's reign and his use of public relations methods to ensure his authority as king.

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