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**WITH THIS RING, I SURRENDER: POLITICS, RELIGION, AND MARRIAGE IN
SHAKESPEARE AND TUDOR ENGLAND**

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Abstract

The ideas I wish to explore in this paper are the overarching themes of politics, religion, and marriage in the Tudor period under the rule of King Henry VIII from 1509 to 1547. By exploring the motives behind the Protestant Reformation and the laws of both marriage and faith held by Henry VIII, the cultural instability he created can be traced directly back to his marital choices. The popular opinion of the period on Henry VIII's behavior can be seen in William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Henry VIII*. Though written a generation later, all three plays present intriguing parallels to the scandalous Tudor court, and suggest a need for a resistance to marital hierarchy, which continues into the modern age with the breakdown of the social and gender hierarchies. Marriage in the 21st century is taken for granted as a private event, where a Tudor marriage was cause either for worldwide celebration or anxiety, depending on the alliances made or destroyed by the spousal union. The evidence of Tudor life left behind in letters, manuscripts, and law gives fascinating insight into the machinations and intrigues that often conspired to make a marriage, and the religious and marital revolutions of this period changed the face of love, marriage, and religion in western culture forever.

The revision of marriage roles after the Protestant Reformation (1517-1648) and the centrality of both marriage and faith held in the authority of the single male figure of Henry VIII created cultural instability. William Shakespeare's plays, recreations of the 16th century religio-political structure, suggest that these changes left room for resistance to hierarchy whose effects continue into the modern age. These revolutionary ideas were often played out on the popular stage in such famous Shakespeare plays as *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Measure for Measure*, and the eponymous *Henry VIII*, which chronicles the events of the English Reformation, a fascinating moment of religious and political revolution in Christendom. The role of husbands and wives in the Tudor period was ever-changing. Many good and not so good wives were cast aside from their husbands simply because the king made it possible. Whereas in the 21st century marriage is mostly viewed as a private affair, the Tudor world revolved around the private information delivered by spies to ensure that those in power maintained prominence over others. When the welfare of an entire country revolves around one person, there are those who will sacrifice their happiness and well-being to the service of others, and this notion carries into the realm of marriage. While it is impossible to know exactly what drove the men and women of the Tudor court to such self-sacrifice, the evidence of the lives they left behind provide extraordinary clues into the public and private realms of Tudor life.

We like to hearken back to days gone by when things were simpler, chivalry thrived and women were fawned over and protected by the men who loved them. The reality of these simpler times is that men and women were pawns in the game of life, subject to the whims of their fathers, masters, and kings. Even the intimate moment of choosing a soul mate was rife with the heavy influence of economic and social considerations, and these factors are still major

considerations in the 21st century. Two people were united to bring together two families, two pieces of land, or two large fortunes, never mind two like personalities or two sweethearts.

A courtship may start with a look, a glance, maybe a passing word. Someone you have known many years or someone you have just met may suddenly catch your eye. Two consenting adults, free from any constraints that could deny them pleasure, may speak to whom they please, see whom they please, and, most importantly, marry whom they please. For those of us in the 21st century this is an ideal courtship, the beginning of something wonderful that may impact the rest of our lives. However, for the people of the Tudor court a good match was something akin to insider trading tips, newly marriageable women and men to be pursued at all costs. A love match was an impossible goal, the dream sequence of a young man or woman shoved into bed with a spouse more than twice their age and seemingly on the threshold of death. Courtship was a very different custom in the Tudor period, when the “so called freedoms which individuals experienced in marriage choice could be rather superficial and transient in the face of contemporary realities” (O’Hara 30). The much lauded match one chose to pursue to the altar was not a personal matter, but rather one to be undertaken by the immediate and extended family to uncover who was available, whether they were worthy enough to be married into the family and act with their protection and goodwill.

One of the most interesting places to look at courtship is in the English domain of King Henry VIII, most famous for having six wives, beheading two and divorcing the rest. A man so many times married was certain to become an expert in the courtship rituals of the high and mighty aristocracy, as there was no one higher or mightier at the beginning of his reign, save the Pope and the Almighty. The courtship of King Henry VIII of England and Katherine of Aragon, the Dowager Princess of England, was as much a match of convenience as it was of love.

Katherine had been married in a grand ceremony to Henry's older brother Arthur, Prince of Wales when he turned fifteen, but Arthur and Katherine had been betrothed practically since birth. While growing up in the palace of Alhambra in Spain, Katherine was accustomed to being addressed as both the Infanta of Spain and Princess of Wales as an indication of her future magnificence. However, this politically perfect match was overshadowed by the unstable nature of the English throne. Arthur's father Henry VII had picked up his crown at the battle of Bosworth in 1485, with the betrothal between his first born son and Spain's youngest daughter occurring only four years later to cement both Henry VII's dynasty and Ferdinand and Isabella's political aspirations. Such political courtships were rife with double dealing and obstacles such as no peasant couple's courting could ever imagine.

One such obstacle arose when Katherine was finally ready to appear in England to be married. Henry VII had ended the War of the Roses between the Houses of Lancaster and York for the throne when he took it himself. Henry VII had attempted to stem the flow of Yorkist anger in the aftermath by marrying Elizabeth of York, sister to the young princes presumably murdered by Richard III in the Tower of London and the heirs to the English throne. The symbol of the Tudor rose, red and white combined, represented the union of the families, and with the birth of Henry VII's son Arthur all clamoring for the throne should have been silenced by the arrival of a son to inherit. However, at the time of the Infanta's proposed crossing to England there sat in the Tower of London a man called Edward Plantagenet, Earl of Warwick and the Yorkist heir to the throne of King Richard III that Henry VII had claimed for himself at Bosworth. At the insistence of Katherine's parents, Edward was found guilty of conspiracy and treason with the help of an agent provocateur, and beheaded. Despite the now unequivocal safety of her throne, as a devout Catholic, Katherine must have felt great apprehension in beginning her

new life with a man's blood on her hands, however indirectly she was involved. If such a thing as karma exists, Henry VII and Prince Arthur received their share when the heir died a scant five months after he and Katherine of Aragon married. The proposed cause of death was the "sweating sickness," an extremely common ailment in the Tudor period which began very quickly and within twenty-four hours almost always ended with painful death. Extremely contagious, the horrified royal family separated husband and wife when news of the disease broke, not necessarily in fear for Katherine's life, but for that of the child she could be carrying in her womb.

After the death of the Prince of Wales, no child appeared, and the inheritance was passed to Henry, Arthur's younger brother and only remaining male child of Henry VII. When the new Prince of Wales and future king Henry VIII inherited the title, he also came into possession of his dead brother's widow, deeply in debt and pawning her own plate and jewels to feed herself and her household. Bound by that most ancient of chivalric codes, "honour demanded that Henry should marry her, as by so doing he would rescue her from penury and dishonor...and win her undying gratitude" (Weir 70). Their courtship was unconventional at best, taking place over several years and without any declared intent to marry, though Henry seemed to truly care for the widowed princess, and she would do whatever was necessary to keep the throne of England in her grasp.

When a royal couple decided to court, it was not a private matter. If the match was approved by the heads of the two families, assorted family members could be recruited to act as "go-betweens". Letters and love tokens could be sent through these methods, and go-betweens were so ingrained in popular culture that "several...Shakespearean comedies and tragedies make play with intricate complexities and problems attendant upon courtship. The proverbial figure of

the go-between is employed in diverse ways as a device in dramatic complication or resolution” (O’Hara 102). The position of go-between could even become a legal one. Some agreements passed between the two parties could only be considered valid if the go-between had the proper authorization, and the acceptance of whatever it was the go-between had to offer immediately constituted agreement (O’Hara 103). Katherine most likely used her ladies in waiting to send notes or letters to Henry, as she was often kept out of sight of the court for extended periods of time by his father.

During courtship, sentimental love letters were most likely more prevalent than legal documents, but not as important to preserve. James Daybell explains in his book *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England*, “ritual exchanges of letters were...part of early modern courtship practices” (225). Unlike the paltry text messages or e-mails of the current century, a love token in the form of a letter displayed so serious an intention towards the recipient that they were pertinent evidence in disputed courtship cases “as evidence of matrimonial intent” (Daybell 225). The disappearance of the ritual of letter writing as a method of courtship can be attributed to the obvious reasons of the introduction of new technologies and the increase and volume of the times a couple may communicate with one another, lessening the value of these interactions which would take months to complete in the Tudor period. While it could be said that the words sent into cyberspace remain there forever, it is impossible to recall them unless one has possession of technology and skills beyond that of the general masses. Love letters, unless physically destroyed, endure forever.

When marriage was finally agreed upon by the heads of the families and a dowry settled upon, plans for a wedding could begin. Weddings in the Tudor period, as in the present day, were festive occasions meant for the gathering of family and friends to witness the beginning of

the two people being joined together as one. As weddings provided an almost purely social event in an age where church service was the highlight of the week, much time and energy were put into the planning and execution and there are accounts for weddings being used in the arts to denote a comedic and happy end. Many of the past wedding traditions remain in the 21st century and as Sid Ray states, “the Christian marriage ceremony has changed very little from the Tudor period—the ritual specified in *The Book of Common Prayer* (1559) is still the standard...The dramaturgy of the ceremony is still followed in which the father hands the daughter over to the husband, a ritual that enacts the transfer of ‘ownership.’ (Ray). Much like the romantic comedies of the 21st century, the end is not complete without a resolution, whether human or divine, and a marriage or coupling of the main characters.

Marital customs were often used to show the submission of the woman to both her father and her new husband. The language of the marriage ceremony reflects that submission with the bride promising to “obey” in addition to “love and cherish” her husband. Traditionally, the groom does not have to “obey” but only love and cherish his new bride (Ray). The wedding ceremony customs also differed by county in England. Closer to the cities, the rituals of marriage followed Protestant doctrines, but farther away, the old Catholic and some pre-Christian rituals were practiced, such as the custom where the woman stooped down to the man’s foot and lifted his leg up as if helping him onto a horse. If this custom was too old to be practiced in the Tudor period it was certainly remembered and referred to. Other old traditions also existed such as broom jumping or “hand-fasting”, an old Pagan custom where the clasped hands of the bride and groom are tied with a cord in a show of faith and the desire to unite and become one body (Ray). With the religious obligations completed, the party could finally begin.

Half-drunk with wine and the abundant love of the couple, wedding guests prepared for a celebration that could last anywhere from a few hours to days at a time. The juxtaposition of such a holy sacrament with the “eating, drinking, dancing, music, jesting, and sexual innuendo” (Cressy 350) earned the censure of many church officials, but as they were a custom, they continued. David Cressy’s book *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* describes the wedding of a wealthy man named Jack of Newbury and his wedding procession as follows:

Jack of Newbury’s bride was led to church according to the manner in those days...between two sweet boys, with bride laces and rosemary tied about their silken sleeves...There was a fair bride cup of silver and gilt carried before her, wherein was a goodly branch of rosemary gilded very fair, hung about with silken ribbons of all colours; next was a great noise of musicians that played all the way before her; after her came all the chiefest maidens of the country, some bearing bride cakes, and some garlands of wheat finely gilded, and so she passed into the church (Cressy 356).

Such tokens carried by the bride or her attendant were often present in the ceremony for good luck or superstitious items to ward off the devil. The little wheat cakes carried by the bride’s chosen maidens were broken over the bride’s head to bestow good luck and fertility.

While Jack and his bride were married inside the church, traditionally weddings before the Reformation began at the door or on the porch of the church. According to Cressy, the church door “...was the point of entry where the sacred and secular domains intersected, an especially appropriate place to inaugurate the spiritual and social conditions of holy matrimony” (336). The current practice of being married at the altar of a church came after the Reformation with the

desire for the couple to be at the spiritual heart of the church. However, much to the chagrin of the church, a formal ceremony was not necessary for matrimony. Legally men and women could be married if they exchanged vows in the present tense (*de praesenti*, “I marry you”) before a witness, and they were legally betrothed/contracted if they exchanged vows in the future tense (*de futuri*, “I will marry you”). If they exchanged *de futuri* vows and also had sexual intercourse, they were legally married. But the ringing of the “banns” at the church made it all official in the eyes of the community.

This change in marriage practices after the Reformation may reflect the need of King Henry VIII to place himself at the center of all spiritual and secular matters within England and take not only the title Defender of the Faith, but Supreme Head of the Church in England in 1534. This Tudor view of marriage followed religio-political doctrines based on a model of marriage that mirrored the workings of the monarchy. The husband was king of his household; the wife was his deputy and advisor. The children and servants were the common people. It was hierarchical and inviolate. The purpose of marriage was to be “fruitful and multiply” and the husband and wife were expected to provide “due benevolence” to each other. The stability of the state rested on the stability of marriages throughout the commonwealth. The duties of husband and wife were codified in marriage tracts and reinforced by homilies written by state officials and preached from the pulpits every Sunday. The duties were considered equitable if not equal. Marriage was the lynchpin of post-Reformation politics; everyone had to marry or risk suspicions of being a Catholic, which was a treasonous offense.

At the heart of Reformation politics and marriage was Henry VIII himself. Unable to produce a son with his wife Katherine of Aragon after almost twenty-five years of marriage, Henry was persuaded by his advisors as well as his mistress Anne Boleyn to seek an annulment

for his marriage with his constant and loyal queen. Although he and Katherine of Aragon had obtained a special dispensation from the Pope to marry in 1509, Henry was seeking to annul their marriage on the basis that he had broken the law laid down in the Bible “If there is a man who takes his brother’s wife, it is abhorrent; he has uncovered his brother’s nakedness” (King James Bible, Leviticus 3:20:21). At Henry’s behest, an ecclesiastical court was convened to try the validity of the marriage. On the death of her first husband Prince Arthur, Katherine had sworn that the marriage had never been consummated, leaving her free to marry; specifically, she was free to marry Henry and retain the title Princess of Wales and future Queen of England.

The marital woes that triggered such a profound change throughout the English nation were caused, as many things were in that period, by chance. With the infant mortality rate showing that “2 per cent of babies born...died before the end of their first day of life...5 per cent within a week, 8 or 9 per cent within a month, and 12 or 13 per cent within a year” (Cressy 117), it had been a source of great comfort to the realm that Henry VII, having come to the throne during the violent uprisings of the War of the Roses, had produced two sons, the coveted ‘heir and a spare’. Arthur, the firstborn Prince of Wales, had been raised as a leader, a boy who would be a man that recognized and fulfilled his destiny. The loveable Prince Henry, or Hal as he was fondly called, seems to have experienced a great deal of amusement and enjoyment without much to concern or vex him. When Katherine was brought to England to be Arthur’s bride, the inner matchmaker in every English man and woman glowed with approval. Prince Henry gave the princess away to Arthur after which “Prince Arthur and his bride made their vows in full view of the crowds before proceeding into [St. Paul’s] Cathedral for the nuptial mass, which the whole court attended” (Weir 33). The wedding was lavish as “marriage feasts at that time were occasions for hilarity and bawdiness...Arthur was feeling ‘lustful and amorous’ and was anxious

to be alone with his pretty wife” (Weir 33). Katherine and Arthur were then put to bed by the court. A special drink called ‘posset’ was given to the young couple for courage, and to loosen them up so that they could perform their sacred duty to their country.

The Oxford English Dictionary describes posset as “a drink made from hot milk curdled with ale, wine, or other liquor, flavoured with sugar, herbs, spices, etc., and often drunk for medicinal purposes” and it signaled to wedding guests that while all official ceremony may be over, the most important union was soon to occur. After retiring from the revels, the couple were “undressed by their attendants, then brought to the nuptial chamber where they sat side by side in the great tester bed whilst the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London blessed the bed and prayed that their union might be fruitful” (Weir 33). These events, some twenty odd years into the future, would come back to haunt Katherine. What loomed large before her was the question of the physical consummation of her first marriage to Prince Arthur. Had they indeed fully coupled, a great sin would have been committed in the eyes of the Catholic Church concerning her subsequent marriage to Henry. While in Leviticus the Bible forbids a man to marry his brother’s wife, citing childlessness as their punishment, after their marriage Henry and Katherine were certainly far from infertile. From the first months of newly wedding bliss until the bitterness of their contentious divorce, Katherine was pregnant no less than four times. She had in fact given birth to a son and heir, named Henry after his father, in January 1511 whose birth was feted with jousts and great tournaments. His death a few weeks later in February plunged the royal family and the nation into mourning, but infant death was understood in the Tudor period in ways that people of the 21st century cannot comprehend. As the data shows, infant death was a constant occurrence and, though the prince was dead, the royal couple could certainly produce another. Both Katherine and Henry were beautiful, young, and fertile; thus

another heir and the necessary 'spares' would follow. After some time when they failed to materialize, the petulant Henry needed someone to blame, and his patient princess would be the first in an ever increasing queue of targets to feel his wrath.

If one were to go digging through English archives, or perhaps even those of the Vatican, a transcript of Henry's trials and petitions for divorce would most likely surface. In the Tudor period these trials, once made public, were quite unpopular as the people of England loved and revered Katherine, some citizens having known her as the only queen all their lives. She had inspired and led the English army to victory at the Battle of Flodden in 1513 when Henry was away in France, subsequently removing the threat of constant war with the Scots in the north. Despite judgment from the Pope himself that the marriage "always hath and still doth stand firm and canonical, and the issue preceding standeth lawful and legitimate" (Weir 267), Henry had his way and Katherine was banished. She died forgotten and forsaken in a castle in the English fenlands with her best wishes for Henry traced in a letter (Weir 296-297). William Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, written some years after the demise of the Tudor dynasty, looks back on these events and attempts to recreate them for an audience in a stylishly intense and dramatic way indicative of Shakespeare's brilliance for bringing words to life.

Henry VIII is directly based on those events that destroyed the hopes of a princess to please those of a mere girl. The reader must ask, why did Shakespeare take so long to create a play based on some of the most tumultuous events England had ever experienced since the Norman Conquest? Scholar Russ McDonald begins to unravel the mystery, writing "...Shakespeare's history plays were to some extent dramatic experiments, narrative plays whose dramatic kind and emotional impact, positive or negative, depended somewhat on the historical episode being staged" (McDonald 90). Shakespeare very cleverly delayed writing the play until

ten years after the death of England's beloved Queen Elizabeth I, the sovereign daughter of the bloated and tyrannical Henry VIII and his 'bewitching' second bride Anne Boleyn. Elizabeth would have figuratively lost her head (and Shakespeare literally) if such a play had ever come to light. With Elizabeth safely dead and buried, Shakespeare could entertain her successor and make a killing at the box office. In an ironic twist of fate, as Henry VIII burned the Catholic church in England to the ground and built the Church of England from its ashes, the performance of Shakespeare's play *Henry VIII* burnt the original Globe Theater to the ground "because wadding from the guns fired for Cardinal Wolsey's ball in a performance on 29 June 1613 set fire to the thatched roof and the theater burned to the ground" (Richmond 219). In the play, a proud, regal queen is on her knees before her king and master, pleading for absolution and for him to turn from thoughts of an unholy marriage back to their perceived domestic bliss. Both reader and historian might wonder what such a majestic mother figure would say to the king's majesty to change his mind, and Shakespeare does not fail his audience, and has Katherine deliver the poignant words:

Sir, I desire you do me right and justice;
And to bestow your pity on me; for
I am a most poor woman, and a stranger,
Born out of your dominions: having here
No judge indifferent, nor no more assurance
Of equal friendship and proceeding" (2.4.11-16).

It is sadly evident that Katherine is calling upon the love she and Henry once shared to spare her the public and private misery of a divorce. She came to England as a foreign princess, as is shown by the use of the word "stranger", and now it is her very foreignness that works against

her. The daughter of a passionately Catholic woman, Queen Isabella of Castile, Katherine does not share in Henry's fervent wish to release England from the bonds of Rome and the papacy. In the play, when Katherine does learn there is a trial proceeding against her to test the validity of her marriage, the Pope sends papal legates to come to her aid, and eventually declares their marriage to be good and lawful in the eyes of God. Katherine's belief that a dispensation allowing her marriage to Henry when they were young adults should set the matter at naught, but she naively misunderstands Henry's zeal. As a woman forty-eight years of age, the time has since passed for her to bear children, and her looks have begun to suffer. Historically six years older than Henry, in later years they made a mismatched pair at state events, the king in his prime saddled by a queen of no use to the dynasty.

Henry knew that it was not a problem for him to produce children, as he had at least one bastard child, Henry Fitzroy whom he created Duke of Richmond and Somerset. The problem therefore lay with the queen, and as Henry could no longer have sexual intercourse with her and expect a favorable result, she was to be replaced. For a queen in the Tudor period it was of course natural to assume her husband had been unfaithful, but never before had the power of another woman been so great. In Shakespeare's play Katherine is offended, and rightly so, as she beseeches Henry to explain, "Alas, sir, / In what have I offended you? What cause/ Hath my behavior given to your displeasure/ That thus you should proceed to put me off/ And take your good grace from me?" (2.4.16-20). Shakespeare's words for Katherine are gripping because she is literally fighting for her life. When Katherine asks why she is to be "put off", she truly believes that if she can convince Henry of God's compassion towards their marriage, Henry will return to her with renewed feelings of love. She implores him, the court, and God to remember:

Heaven witness,

I have been to you a true and humble wife...

Sir, call to mind

That I have been your wife in this obedience

Upward of twenty years, and have been blessed

With many children by you (2.4.20-35).

Shakespeare and Katherine both make it a necessity to mention the royal children Katherine and Henry had produced, as they dispelled the idea put forth by the clergy that in marrying, Henry and Katherine had violated the law in Leviticus that a man should never marry his brother's wife lest he be punished with infertility. This trial forces Henry and Katherine to relive some of the most painful moments in their lives, from recognizing that they had only one living child, their daughter Mary, and coming to terms with the fact that throughout the span of their twenty-four year marriage, Katherine had given birth to only one son, Prince Henry. That the baby died fifty-three days later is no fault of either Katherine's or Henry's, but demonstrates that not even royal couples were exempt from heartache. Had the boy lived, Katherine would certainly not have been brought to trial; Henry would have been content with his mistresses.

With no hope of a son from Katherine, the only way to get a legitimate heir to the throne was to make one with a new, fertile wife. Henry had his heart set on the mysterious and fiercely anti-Rome Anne Boleyn, who with all the grace and charm of a practiced courtier, promised Henry the son he most desired, if only he could rid himself of Katherine, his devoted Catholic wife. Shakespeare is able to pass judgment on Henry through the words he gives to his wife. To publicly air the business of the crown as he did was scandalous, and seemingly done so that

Henry could replace a beloved queen with a commoner. The religious views of Shakespeare himself are unclear, but in Katherine's condemnation of Henry's Protestant ideas of divorce, Shakespeare may be using her as a surrogate for his own opinions on the Reformation. Katherine reminds Henry of what is due to her as a princess of one of the most powerful Catholic nations in the world, a nation that could inflict considerable damage on isolated England, should the queen be disgraced unlawfully. Katherine (or perhaps Shakespeare) reminds Henry and the audience that his Catholic father, King Henry VII, would never have endangered the nation in such a way:

The king your father was reputed for
A prince most prudent, of an excellent
And unmatched wit and judgment. Ferdinand,
My father, King of Spain, was reckoned one
The wisest prince that there had reigned by many
A year before. It is not to be questioned
That they had gathered a wise council to them
Of every realm, that did debate this business,
Who deemed our marriage lawful (2.4.43-51).

In publicly shaming Henry, Shakespeare paints an interesting picture for his audience. An august and aging queen begging her husband for mercy before all the pomp and circumstance of a court that would be glad to see her fall is intolerable to imagine, but may be the best chance the queen has of carrying her point. Though a monarch, the character of Katherine is wise enough to appeal to the chivalry in Henry that once prompted him to wear her favors in the joust and style himself her 'Sir Loyal Heart'. To shame him and flatter him by turn, Katherine may have succeeded in forcing Henry to, as Shakespeare writes, "spare me, till I may/ Be by my friends in Spain

advised, whose counsel/ I will implore. If not, i' th' name of God, / Your pleasure be fulfilled!" (2.4.51-55). Unfortunately for Katherine, the iron and tyrannical will of the king was set on her removal.

The end of the marriage and with it over two decades of relative peace and prosperity would prove to be a fatal blow for England. Not since the Norman Conquest of 1066 had England seen the widespread and all-consuming change it faced in the years after the divorce of Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon. Yet Katherine fought until the bitter, painful end. One can only wonder why she was so obstinate in opposing the will of the king. As the daughter of Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand, Katherine was raised from the cradle as a dutiful woman and Christian warrior. From a very early age she had been betrothed to Henry's older brother Arthur and saw England as her destiny, which imbued her with a sense of pride that perhaps only those born royal can achieve. No matter what man was by her side, Katherine believed she was Queen of England, and carried that belief to her grave.

Katherine's replacement, Anne Boleyn, stands out as one of Henry VIII's best known wives because she is the most controversial. Her hypnotic and romantic hold on Henry, along with his long denied desire of having a son to inherit his crown, forced him to take both secular and religious law solely into his own hands: he broke from the Catholic Church. This was an advantage felt keenly by Anne Boleyn's family, as the king's goodwill often made the fortunes of many of their relatives and friends. When Henry VIII married Katherine of Aragon, England and Spain were brought into an unbreakable alliance that would defend them against the despised French. These advantages acquired by marriage could also be used as weapons against the queen when Henry was displeased. When King Francis I of France's army was all but obliterated at the Battle of Pavia in 1525 and Francis himself was captured by Katherine's nephew, the Holy

Roman Emperor Charles V of Spain, Henry VIII believed they would enter France as victors and take their pick of the spoils. Henry planned to be crowned King of France, but was soon double crossed when Charles V allowed Francis to be ransomed back to his countrymen. When Henry VIII finally cast Katherine aside for Anne Boleyn, he did so only after creating her father Earl of Wiltshire and Ormond and her brother George Viscount Rochford, titles which would be passed down through the male line for eternity. It is a testament to the iron will of Anne Boleyn that she too was given a title and lands from the generous king. She was created Marquess of Pembroke, the first hereditary peerage title ever granted to a woman, on September 1, 1532.

Anne Boleyn encouraged the repudiation of Catholic laws that housed the very sanctity and security of marriage and with Henry's break from the Catholic Church and the Pope, Anne Boleyn helped endanger the fate of every woman who ever thought she would remain with her husband until death. In addition to the upheaval within the church, this break with the Prince of Rome encouraged Henry VIII to submit to his more tyrannical urges. While divorces, though very uncommon, did happen, a Catholic woman had the security of knowing that under religious law her husband could not cast her off. She would not see her rightful place given to a brighter, younger, prettier thing that would yank her hard won privileges out from under her. Although she helped Henry realize his potential as an absolute ruling monarch, Anne Boleyn was not safe from Henry's jealous and paranoid musings. As Anne and Henry's marriage became increasingly volatile and the promised son never appeared, Henry began to yearn for yet another wife. Anne was thrown into the Tower of London and charged with seducing him with witchcraft, and with adultery, high treason, and incest with her brother George, Viscount Rochford. She was sentenced to beheading and executed on Tower Green on May 19th 1536, with a sword specially dispatched from France for a quick, dignified death. The Protestant upstart Anne Boleyn had

pretensions to the throne that many say she did not deserve. The idea of marriage to a king was only a dream to most, but Anne Boleyn's single-minded ambition to catch and keep the king's affection is something that is to be admired, despite the cost for both herself and for England. Ten days after her death, Henry married Jane Seymour, to whom he became engaged the day after Anne's death. Jane Seymour's brother Edward was made a Knight of the Garter, a personal and exclusive honor from the king, and after the king's death was for a short time regent to Henry and Jane's son, King Edward VI.

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare stages for his audience the ideal submissive and shrewish women, juxtaposing them as a Tudor historian might do with Anne Boleyn and Jane Seymour. While not an allegory of the Tudor court, the play presents interesting parallels between the characters and the historical figures in the wake of the precedents set by Henry's courtships and marriages. As in the Tudor world, marriage is the answer in Shakespeare's plays to both protect the obedient woman and 'break' the shrew with the harness of marriage. The oldest daughter of the merchant Baptista, Katherine, or Kate, as she is nicknamed, is a practical thinker and schemer like Anne Boleyn. She knows her mind and keeps a wise counsel with herself, making her unfit for any man except one that can match her wit and talents. She is censured and labeled a shrew as a mark of her disobedience. From the start of the play, it seems as if this condemnation by the town of Padua has enveloped and disturbed Kate to the point where she will physically strike anyone who angers her. In act two, scene one of the play, we find Kate chasing her sister Bianca around the house with Bianca's hands tied. She cries to Bianca, "Of all thy suitors, here I charge thee, tell whom thou lov'st best. See thou dissemble not." (II.I.8-9). When Bianca tries to find the deeper meaning to her sister's accusations, perhaps jealousy or self-loathing, she is struck across the face for her trouble. Here enters their father,

and the reader finds some insight to the inner workings of the mind of Katherine. Anne Boleyn, like Katherine ran a tight ship when she became Henry VIII's queen. With a superior and controlling attitude much like Kate's, Anne's ladies were required to be good and virtuous, and Jane Seymour took an early lead as one of the most transparently kind and gracious among the new queen's ladies in waiting, sickly sweet like the docile Bianca.

In the play, it is clear that Signor Baptista favors his youngest daughter. The fact that he establishes a decree that his lovely little daughter cannot marry before his shrewish, foul-tempered one is evidence enough that Baptista wants to keep Bianca around for as long as possible. Of the two, Katherine is definitely the more modern woman, but Bianca is more desirable. When Petruchio enters into her life, Katherine views him as the enemy. She is no fool, and she knows that she is to be married off to whoever her father can get for her, in this case the *only* man her father can get for her. Historically, the case was the same for both Anne Boleyn and Jane Seymour. Despite being wealthy women from aristocratic families, they had absolutely no personal rights either with regard to their futures or to their choice of men who would inhabit those futures. Despite Kate's obvious exasperation and unwillingness to speak to Petruchio in the beginnings of their courtship, there is a sexual chemistry present that is quite modern in its origins. Unlike the fluid poetry and elegant graces of courtiers in the Middle Ages, Petruchio's wooing speech becomes a bawdy romp suitable for nothing but the gutter. Kate warns Petruchio to beware her wasp's sting which he thinks resides in the tail of the wasp. Kate corrects him by saying that the sting actually resides in the tongue. When Petruchio finally asks whose tongue she refers to, Kate tells him that it is "Yours, if you talk of tales, and so farewell." (II.I.220). Petruchio then shocks the virgin shrew by exclaiming, "What, with my tongue in your tail? Nay, come again, good Kate, I am a gentleman." (II.I.221-222).

Caught in a naughty innuendo about her genitals twisted from the words of her very own mouth, Kate strikes Petruchio. Her behavior, quite unlike what was demanded of a woman from her time and class, seems to amuse rather than enrage Petruchio. Anne Boleyn was volatile just like Kate when she and Henry engaged in their illicit seven year courtship, allegedly refusing to have sex with Henry until she was a married woman to preserve her reputation. Anne's fiery spirit and temper seems to have been enough to keep Henry intrigued and besotted enough without resorting to amusements of a more sexual nature. Petruchio is thus set in his task, as he tells Kate, "Thus in plain terms. Your father hath consented that you shall be my wife, you dowry 'greed upon, and will you, nill you, I will marry you...For I am he am born to tame you Kate, and bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate conformable as other household Kates." (II.I.270-279). At last finding her match in a man, Kate lets Petruchio set women back one hundred years as he seems to tame her wild spirit. He starves her and deprives her of sleep so that he may be able to mold her into a proper wife of her station. While in the 21st century two people may be allowed to marry for love, much of the ritual of marriage has been replaced by the great pomp and spectacle of "platinum weddings". The progression of courtship, weddings, and married life are rites that have taken place for thousands of years. This progression has shifted from the gaining of wealth, land, and status to that of finding comfort, love, and happiness, something that never would have occurred to Anne Boleyn or any other aristocratic woman.

In contrast, no such methods would be needed to tame the heart of Kate's mild, sweet sister Bianca. The foil of her sister, Bianca is a model of compliant femininity. She is a romantic dreamer who is content to live life within the safe, closed walls of her father's home. Like Bianca, Jane Seymour was a provider to her family at their country seat of Wulf Hall, content only to roam the gardens and rooms of the hall. Jane and Bianca both have no trouble allowing

men to influence their lives. As Lucentio informs Bianca secretly during a Latin lesson, “*Hic ibat,*” as I told you before; “*Simois*” I am Lucentio; “*hic est,*” son unto Vincentio of Pisa; “*Sigeia tellus,*” disguised thus to get your love.” (III.I.31-33). Unlike her realistic and sensible sister, Bianca lets this man lead her all the way to the altar, without so much as mentioning it to her father. Bianca is foolish for acting on her romantic ideals, and she is quite lucky that Lucentio believes, “At last, though long, our jarring notes agree, and time it is, when raging war is done, smile at scrapes and perils overblown.” (V.II.1-3). Within this pair of sisters Shakespeare gives us a representation of the two different roads marriage can take, embodying the two queens whose courtship experiences with the same man were so markedly different. Katherine and Petruchio chose to be realistic, logical thinkers who would not allow their thoughts or opinions to be overshadowed by anyone. In fact, each would defend their notions fiercely, right or wrong, simply because they were theirs. In the case of Bianca and Lucentio both are content to idealistically live back in the days when knights in shining armor saved demure damsels from distress. From deep reading of both *Henry VIII* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, it can be said that Shakespeare thought the past was best left in the past, and looked forward towards a new future that would be brighter than anything that had come before.

As Henry’s tyranny and matrimonial conquests progressed, many of the aristocratic families had queen-making down to a system. According to Alison Weir in *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, Catherine Howard, Henry VIII’s fifth wife was brought to court by her family “with detailed instructions as to how to attract the King’s attention” (413). A cousin of Anne Boleyn through the maternal line, Catherine’s elevation to throne demonstrates just how fickle Henry VIII’s nature could be. The Boleyn and Howard families were shamed immediately following the conviction and death of Anne and her brother George, the only son and heir. The father

Thomas died just three years after their deaths, while the second sister Mary Boleyn remained in a kind of self-exile for the rest of her days. The head of both the Boleyn and Howard families, Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, was instrumental in placing both Anne and Mary Boleyn in the king's bed, and his failures did not stop him from trying a final time to place a Howard queen on the throne. After being disappointed time and time again in his marriages and statecraft, Henry's health was slowly deteriorating at forty-nine, while Catherine was entering the prime of her life at a scant fifteen or sixteen years old when she married the king in 1540. Desperate to prove to himself and the court that in his declining years he was still attractive to young women, Henry singled Catherine out, showering her with "substantial grants of lands confiscated from convicted criminals" (Weir 416). While most girls plotted with surprising tenacity to secure a life partner, Catherine Howard was plotting not just for a husband, but for a throne as well. Marrying Henry would place her on the throne of England, something the Howard family had achieved once before with the king's marriage to her cousin Anne Boleyn.

Catherine Howard had grown up under the lax eye of her step-grandmother Agnes Tilney, Dowager Duchess of Norfolk and her romantic entanglements within that household would seal her fate as another wife of Henry's to meet the axe. Common in aristocratic houses of that time, the young maids of honor in the Duchess' house would all sleep together in a communal bedroom. Many years later when Catherine was under scrutiny for treason as an adulterous queen, former roommates and women who had known the young Catherine came forward to say they had witnessed Catherine Howard participating in sexual acts with Francis Dereham, a young man in the employ of her step-grandmother, which was corroborated with a love letter to Dereham from Catherine's herself (The National Archives). The explosive news that they had possibly pledged themselves as husband and wife was also discovered, making her

marriage to Henry VIII invalid. As the great saying goes, “The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away” and in England in 1542, Henry VIII the most sovereign lord and master, was eager to snatch away the throne Catherine had so deviously taken from him. The possibility that Catherine and Francis had both pledged themselves and consummated the union was a common theme in many popular plays of the time, most famously in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*.

In this problem play by Shakespeare, it seems that every character stands to lose something that is dear to them, just as Catherine Howard was primed to lose her throne (and her head), just barely worn in. Like Juliet, Claudio’s contracted wife in *Measure for Measure*, Catherine Howard is fast becoming aware that she, and each character in *Measure for Measure*, loses something, not always to be regained. It is intriguing that not only loss but sacrifice are distinct events in Henry VIII’s England, and the distinction that Shakespeare seems to make is found between self-sacrifice and the sacrifice of self. Claudio’s lover and *de futuri* wife Juliet is one of the first to make a sacrifice in the form of her imprisoned lord. She is condemned to the contempt of her countrymen because she “falling in the flaws of her own youth, /Hath blistered her report” (2.3.11-12). Already Juliet’s honor and good standing have been sacrificed, and she now must sacrifice Claudio, her beloved husband but also the agent of her destruction. Catherine Howard’s husband was also the means of her downfall, but whether the blame lies with Henry VIII or Francis Dereham must forever be debated.

Though Claudio seems intent on the fact that Juliet was pre-contracted to him, “upon a true contract...she is fast my wife” (1.2.118-120) but beyond their two selves a more uncertain view of their union is to be found. Claudio explains in his hasty entreaty to Lucio that “We do the denunciation lack/ Of outward order...for propagation of a dower/ Remaining in the coffer of her friends, /From whom we thought to hide our love/ Till time had made them for us” (1.3.121-

126). Juliet's family and friends object to the marriage, making it impossible for them to wed, as they would have no way to live without a dowry from Juliet's family. The immediate questions then become: What does Claudio have to hide? Why would Juliet's family object to her joining with Claudio? His camaraderie with Lucio may lead reader to the conclusion that Claudio like Lucio is a frequent visitor to the bawdyhouses. Like Claudio, Catherine Howard had a checkered past, and wished to forget all and forge ahead as queen of a nation, but her secret was eventually drawn out.

As if a reflection of Catherine Howard before Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury who along with Henry VIII would decide her fate, the Duke in the play inquires of Juliet "Repent you, fair one, of the sin you carry?" (2.3.19) and the meaning of this question intrigues the reader. Does the Duke simply wonder whether Juliet is ashamed of her sexual acts before marriage? Or does he literally mean the sin she carries, Claudio's unborn child? She herself is forgiven for the acts committed, but further sacrifices will be made by her child, who will carry the stigma of illegitimacy if Claudio's life is not spared. As it stands in act two, Claudio will be beheaded although both he and Juliet entered into their contract with good faith. Juliet will be left "neither maid, nor widow, nor wife" (5.1.183), a punishment much threatened in the play but never met with by any character. Both Juliet and Catherine are to be pitied, since they sacrificed their virginity under what they thought was the safety of the ancient law, and instead that law, to push the parallel, will now sacrifice Juliet and Katherine's promised husbands and perhaps themselves.

When the Duke's tricks and schemes have finally worked their magic and insured Claudio's release from prison, there is no loving reunion between man and *de futuri* wife. They are overshadowed by the Duke's (most likely) unwelcome advances towards his object Isabella.

The Duke bids them only “She, Claudio, that you wronged, look you restore” (5.1.523) which the reader must take to mean marriage, the only way to honorably solve their predicament. The ending of the play is extremely unsatisfactory, and Juliet is dealt the worst hand out of the characters. The Duke gets to play around in disguise, Isabella does not have to sacrifice her body and immortal soul, Angelo the “virgin-violator” (5.1.43) is punished with only a marriage, and Claudio cools his heels in jail and let others work to free him. Juliet loses her good name, her husband, all sense of future security, not to mention her figure. Grievous wrongs are done to her, and she deserved more reward than she received for not only her patience but her perseverance. The same could be said of Catherine Howard, a pathetic girl not yet out of her teens when she was put to death. *Measure for Measure* is not a metaphor for the trials of Catherine Howard, but it cannot be denied that both she and Juliet face heartache in consequence for their rash decisions. Catherine’s youthful flange of the established rules and hierarchies may have caught the eye of the king, but when the executioner’s axe caught her around the neck it is possible she wished she had not been so carefree.

Popular fiction of the 21st century takes a more romantic view of these Tudor unions, whether they are between friendly countries or warring English aristocratic families. Famed Tudor historical writer Philippa Gregory hypothesizes for her readers (very convincingly) that Katherine of Aragon and her first husband Prince Arthur fell deeply in love upon their marriage, and together planned a glorious future for England in which they would rule side by side, sharing the work and the glory. For Gregory, imagining the royal pair as blissfully wed, the much debated marriage had been consummated, but in secret. In *The Constant Princess* when Arthur is upon his deathbed he orders his bride to keep the consummation an eternal secret, so that Katherine may marry his brother and have the heirs they never would. In this narrative, Arthur’s

plans and hopes for his country fall to his sixteen year old wife, unsure of her own future in a new place. This fictionalization is heartrending, an unlikely course of events, popularized by a historical fiction author writing for an audience clamoring for tales of Tudor romance and intrigue. No matter what Katherine's real or fictional motives might have been in denying the consummation of her marriage to Arthur, she nonetheless set a series of events into motion that concluded with a golden age of English history, spearheaded not by a son of Rome, but the Protestant daughter of England, Elizabeth I. That William Shakespeare chose to reimagine and immortalize Queen Katherine and King Henry's struggle in his plays demonstrates to readers just how deeply marriage affected not only the king, but his country as well. A bride's family, dowry, and political connections all had a profound effect on her adopted state. Should a marriage succeed, the populace was assured health, wealth, and protection from their enemies. If the marriage should fail, the state too would fail. The Tudor monarchs of England revolutionized the way the state was run, by holding not only political but religious power as well. England became a vast empire, continuing well into the 21st century and impacting the way the world and ideas on love and marriage evolved. Disease, war, and revolution almost destroyed the Tudor dynasty at its very beginning, but the rose which carries their name continued to blossom until the very end.

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