

An Analysis of the Intersection of Power and Gender Expectations in the Lives
and Reigns of Catherine of Aragon and Mary I of England

An Honors Thesis for the Department of History

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Introduction

In April of 1534, Catherine of Aragon wrote to her daughter Mary, "...the time is come that Almighty God will prove you; and I am very glad of it, for I trust He doth handle you with a good love...but one thing I especially desire you, for the love that you do owe unto God and unto me, to keep your heart with a chaste mind...not thinking or desiring any husband for Christ's passion."¹ At one point, Catherine had been the lauded and adored Queen of England and the wife of King Henry VIII. When writing this letter, she was sequestered in an old monastery and entirely isolated from her daughter. In turn, her daughter had once received the best female education in the country and lived as a princess in the English court.² As Mary received this letter, she was also isolated from court and her father, King Henry VIII of England, had demoted her succession to the English throne.³ At a difficult moment for mother and daughter, Catherine chose to remind Mary of her commitment to virginity and God. In a time of crisis, both mother and daughter turned to gendered ideals like chastity for foundation and guidance.

¹ "Letter of Katharine of Aragon to Daughter Princess Mary," English History, February 24, 2015, <https://englishhistory.net/tudor/letter-katharine-aragon-daughter-princess-mary-april-1534/>. Note: Due to the COVID-19 shut down of Tufts University and its library, I was unable to attain the original printed source to cite this letter. See: Anne Crawford, *Letters of the Queens of England, 1100-1547* (University of Michigan: A. Sutton, 1994).

² Garrett Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1941), 213.

³ D.M. Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 187.

In this thesis, I analyze the intersection of gender and power as it pertains to two prominent women from the middle of the Tudor era of English history (c. 1500-1558). Catherine of Aragon and Mary I of England were both queens who ruled in a time of social and religious turmoil and whose gender interacted with their royal power in nuanced and tumultuous ways. Not only were they direct relations who communicated with each other extensively, but they also had a striking number of unexplored parallels between them. Both married foreign spouses in efforts to tie together England and Spain, which led to delayed and complicated marriage negotiations. Both had to contend with geopolitical conflict between England and Spain. After marriage, they both struggled with infertility and had to engage with this struggle in the public eye. Furthermore, they were both devoutly Catholic during a time of religious turmoil in England and suffered because of their public support of Catholicism. At the same time, their main difference highlights an essential divergence in power: Catherine was a queen only by marriage, while Mary was a queen in her own right and momentarily ruled independently, without a husband by her side.

I have narrowed the parallels in these women's lives down to three main concepts: marriage, childbearing, and Catholicism. All three concepts represent absolute ideals for women of the time, and Catherine and Mary interacted with all three in ways that attempted to support and eventually counteracted their power in court and across the country. Furthermore, the difference in the foundation of influence and stability for both women impacted these aspects of feminine idealization. Catherine lost power and authority because she was unable to live up

to these gendered expectations, due to forces outside of her control. The fluctuating periods of stability and instability in her life exemplify how central these expectations were. In contrast, Mary's extensive power as queen regnant created situations in which she had to choose between being an ideal woman and being an ideal ruler. Their differences in power changed the impact of gender ideals, but for both women there was an inherent conflict between power and the feminine ideology of the time. In this thesis, I argue that political and royal power conflicted with the gender ideals of this time period, contributing to turmoil and discord in Catherine and Mary's lives. Catherine's source of power came from the fulfillment of certain female ideals, as a wife and a mother, while Mary's power was rooted in the succession of her father's dynasty, and she became a queen in her own right. Catherine did not have access to enough power, while Mary had access to so much that she became the scapegoat for unfavorable choices. The difference in sources of power emphasizes the fickle nature of power and gender expectations, which caused both women to struggle to maintain a position of influence.

In order to avoid ambiguity, I define the term "power" as follows: both an access to opportunity and the ability to create opportunities for oneself when none are present. This definition stems from several theoretical studies on the nature of gendered power, and these studies encompass the ways in which power cannot be defined. First, Anna Becker argues that a gendered definition of power cannot simply be the absence of women from political and public participation. This argument centers on the fact that women did participate in public arenas and

politics. The removal of their participation with a definition of “power” is factually inaccurate.⁴ Whether or not one has power cannot be measured by the degree of their participation in political and social life. Jessica Munns and Penny Richards promote a strictly religious interpretation of power, arguing that religious influence can accurately measure an individual’s power.⁵ While I concur with this measurement, their analysis does not fully encompass my definition of power, because Catherine and Mary had opportunities and influence outside of a strictly religious arena. This discrepancy introduces a second idea about the definition of “power” utilized in this thesis. I use concepts like “influence,” “stability,” and “authority” as tools that indicate a presence and utilization of power. While these terms are not synonymous with power, their presence implies an access to opportunity and the ability to manufacture new opportunity.⁶

Marriage, Childbearing, and Catholicism

During the Tudor Era in England, marriage was the most important social and personal milestone in the lives of most women outside of motherhood.⁷ Not only did marriage mark the beginning of adulthood for regular and noble women,

⁴ Anna Becker, “Gender in the History of Early Modern Political Thought,” *The Historical Journal* 60, no. 4 (December 2017): 844, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X17000061>.

⁵ Jessica Munns and Penny Richards, *Gender, Power and Privilege in Early Modern Europe*, Women and Men in History (Oxfordshire, England ; New York: Routledge, 2014), 96, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tufts-trial/detail.action?docID=1757020>.

⁶ See also: “The Case of Agentic Gender Norms for Women in Early Modern Europe” by Allyson Poska and *Percieving Power in Early Modern Europe* by H.K. Francis

⁷ Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 79.

but it also included religious symbolism and represented the sanctification of sexual intercourse.⁸ Furthermore, the role of a wife defined the appropriate social customs for adult women. As Merry Wiesner-Hanks has noted, "...the ideal wife was obedient, chaste, cheerful, thrifty, pious, and largely silent..." Laws attempted to restrict female involvement in public life. Female authority, actions, and existence were limited to the domestic sphere of home and family. Some women had access to education or opportunities outside their homes, but economic and social restrictions encouraged marriage to enforce the identity and appropriate actions of women.⁹

The legal codes of marriage from this time period reflect the strict roles in which married women were placed. Once married, a husband automatically received all of his new wife's property and money. This law further justified the concept of a husband's patronage over his wife.¹⁰ In order to prevent complete destitution, laws did require are husband to provide for his wife. As this code became enmeshed with societal custom, a wife's identity became completely intertwined with her husband's identity. Their individualities, legally and culturally, were one.¹¹ Wiesner-Hanks argues that such restrictive laws represented "male notions and worries more than real female actions."¹² Thus, one can discern that these laws were written not in reaction to excessive female

⁸ David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 288.

⁹ Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 76.

¹⁰ Fairchilds, *Women in Early Modern Europe 1500-1700*, 70.

¹¹ Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 44.

¹² Wiesner, 43.

involvement in public affairs, but as a way to prevent this underlying fear held by those men in charge of social and legal order. Marriage and martial laws enforced spheres of seclusion that combined a stage of life for a woman with intense restriction and rigid rules.

In her work, Wiesner-Hanks provides background for the restricted public action of women and wives. She argues that these restrictions stemmed directly from the restraining institution of marriage and mirrored those motivations and goals that established this social structure in the first place.¹³ This argument correlates with Cissie Fairchilds' discussion about the relation between traditional marriage and social acceptance of male domination. Fairchilds emphasizes how this social acceptance came from legal stipulations that allowed for a husband to control his wife's entire economic access. However, with this domination came the extensive responsibility of providing for his wife, and men were expected to do so just as much as they were expected to rule dominion over their wives.¹⁴

After marriage, a woman was expected to fulfill a second expectation: motherhood. It was the next logical step after the establishment of adulthood by marriage, and childbearing was the ultimate goal and purpose of marriage.¹⁵ Birth was almost an entirely female process, and very few men or male doctors were involved in any aspect of childbearing. Thus, this particular ideal was unique in that childbearing remained the full duty and responsibility of women and wives. As will be shown, most wives who could not bear children successfully were

¹³ Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*. 44.

¹⁴ Fairchilds, *Women in Early Modern Europe 1500-1700*. 70.

¹⁵ Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 83.

blamed for the tragedy, and the compartmentalization of this blame proved strong for both Catherine and Mary.¹⁶ David Cressy addresses this analysis, arguing that while biology controlled a woman's prenatal progress, the cultural ideals of childbearing at the time gave birth its true social meaning. Childbearing was the ultimate and absolute purpose of a woman.¹⁷

In England, childbearing took on even more importance because the concept of "primogeniture" defined the inheritance system. This concept stipulated that the first-born son received the full inheritance of a family, excluding any other sons and all daughters. A son provided a clear path for inheritance and eased the transition from one generation to the next.¹⁸ For aristocratic women, whose families retained vast wealth and influence, the pressure to produce a son was immense. Royal titles, estates, status, and wealth all passed down to the first-born son, and wealthy women held a responsibility to stabilize generations of the family with a son.¹⁹ Catherine felt these pressures more intensely than Mary, but both women were subject to intense scrutiny concerning childbearing during their time on the throne.²⁰

Childbearing was directly connected to religious ideals of the time, especially concerning Catholicism, which was the dominant religion in Europe at

¹⁶ Wiesner, 85.

¹⁷ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*, 15.

¹⁸ Katherine Crawford, "Revisiting Monarchy: Women and the Prospects for Power," *Journal of Women's History; Baltimore* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 168, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2012.0006>.

¹⁹ Crawford, 170.

²⁰ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 47.

the beginning of Catherine's time in England.²¹ The pain and suffering of childbearing represented God's punishment for Eve's original sin, through which a woman was saved.²² Attempting to avoid pregnancy was considered a sin, and a woman's ability to bear children reflected her commitment to faith.²³

Furthermore, according to Constance Jordan, a woman was a *persona mixta*, in that she was equal to man "as one of God's creatures," but in the hierarchy of creation, she was symbolically created second, and a woman was directly connected to that second place through Eve's original sin and childbearing.²⁴

Outside of the specific religious history of this time period, the idealized gendered views encompassed the ways in which a woman dedicated herself to her Christian faith. Specifically, there was reverence for female saints who showed their piety by emulating perfect wives and mothers and completing household duties. Women could prove their dedication to God and Christianity by obeying gender hierarchies.²⁵ The concept of "housework-as-discipline," identified by Frances Dolan, cemented this pattern, and full commitment to gender roles

²¹ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 112.

²² Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*, 17.

²³ Cressy, 18.

²⁴ Constance Jordan, "Woman's Rule in Sixteenth-Century British Political Thought," *Renaissance Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (1987): 421, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2862518>.

²⁵ Frances E. Dolan, "Reading, Work, and Catholic Women's Biographies," *English Literary Renaissance* 33, no. 3 (2003): 338, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43607502>.

represented full commitment to religious ideas.²⁶ Simplicity and a lack of grandeur also stood as symbols of faith for laywomen.²⁷

For more powerful women like Catherine and Mary, there existed other forms of symbolic piety. Wealthy Catholic women of time were revered for their piousness in the form of contributions to the religious intellectual community. They used financial contributions to religious and intellectual institutions to enhance the public view of their piety. They also drew on the idea of a “spiritual mother,” a wealthy female individual who sponsored religious thought and dispersion. Catherine, in particular, embraced this concept and was a patron throughout her time in England.²⁸

It is important to note that, despite rigid societal expectations, there was a gap between theory and reality. While the expectations for regular women were clear, not all women were entirely dutiful and subservient. Furthermore, most women were not completely powerless during this time period. For women in a position to rule, it was actually easier than ever by 1500 to be politically powerful. Fairchilds argues that this trend is due to the fact that a political or monarchical ruler was no longer expected to lead troops into battle personally, nor was that ruler required to be “...the head administrator of a vast impersonal government,

²⁶ Dolan, 340.

²⁷ Dolan, 348.

²⁸ Kor Bosch et al., “Strategies of Catholic Identity Formation c. 1510-1560 (Chronicle),” *Franciscan Studies* 70 (2012): 325, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43489701>.

as the eighteenth century sovereigns would be.”²⁹ As mentioned above, queens had the opportunity to be religious paragons of piety and charity.³⁰ The promises of power for elite women of this time period extended to relationships within the court. James Daybell argues that the Tudor period was ripe for aristocratic female political involvement. The growth and strength of a ruler depended on patronage and a symbiotic relationship between a ruler and the aristocracy. Because this system depended mainly on money, wealthy women had the chance to become involved in court politics, and women of power, like queens, could engage in political relationships.³¹

Aristocratic women could participate directly in the political processes of court, giving them more political power than the average woman.³² These women could petition the king on behalf of their husbands and engage in patronage to their surrounding communities, through economic and religious means.

Aristocratic women also dabbled in political agendas and engaged politically with the men around them. For example, aristocratic women aided in the orchestration of the fall and eventual execution of Anne Boleyn, who had fallen out of favor with the English court in the 1530s.³³ Though their paths to power had to be more nuanced than those of their male counterparts, aristocratic women were not to be underestimated.

²⁹ Constance Jordan, “Woman’s Rule in Sixteenth-Century British Political Thought,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (1987): 421, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2862518>.

³⁰ Fairchilds, 269.

³¹ Daybell, “Introduction: Rethinking Women and Politics in Early Modern England” 3.

³² Harris, 274.

³³ Harris, 276.

Upper-class women had other roles of power outside of politics. Socially, these women dealt in complex networks in order to secure marriages for their children. This networking included visits to estates and contracts arranged by mothers of the two prospective spouses.³⁴ Interestingly, this option was not available for royal women, because their marriages were so political that multiple parties, generally male, overtook the process. This took away autonomy from the bride and separated that marriage from her own personal interests, thus threatening those interests and her power.³⁵

Due to their royal status, Catherine of Aragon and Mary Tudor interacted with power and gender ideals in more intense and impactful ways than common women or lower-status aristocratic women. Given the political intricacies of gender and power, the power of a queen was easily doubted and disrupted. Catherine's disparity in power exacerbated the challenges she faced surrounding these ideals. The more she attempted to lean on archetypes of the perfect wife, mother, and pious Catholic, the more unstable these archetypes became. She suffered under the fault of these female ideals, as they restricted her autonomy in marriage and the ability to practice her religion. Furthermore, Spanish influence and outsiders affected her ability to attain gendered expectations in ways she could not control. These ideals interacted with the various challenges in her life to exacerbate her loss of power, during her penniless first years in England to her struggle with infertility and the backlash against her Catholic faith as a result of Henry VIII's divorce. Catherine was able to rule successfully by Henry's side for

³⁴ Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England" 260.

³⁵ Harris, 265.

a time as an ideal of a Catholic mother figure. However, unprecedented challenges to these ideals created an environment in which womanly obedience and Catholic dedication became less important in her marriage and in the public eye. These gender expectations enhanced her lack of power, intensifying the instability in her life.

In contrast, her daughter Mary had extensive power and influence after she became a queen in her own right and ruled independently. Nevertheless, attempts to embrace feminine ideals exacerbated issues related to her power. In Mary's case, her access to power led to direct conflict with the feminine ideals she attempted to achieve through marriage, childbearing, and her loyal Catholicism. As a woman in the public eye, any and all public action directly conflicted with the idealized image of wife and mother, who were supposed to be sequestered and silent. While Catherine struggled due to a lack of power exacerbated by social paradigms, Mary had to encounter the opposing forces of the two, and she suffered in the public eye because of it. Female ideals challenged the power of both women, despite their different situations and the different ways in which power impacted their lives.

Literature Review

Both Catherine and Mary have been studied as part of a larger focus on Tudor history. However, most of the current and past research is biographical and does not delve fully into the gendered nuances of their time as rulers. An impetus of this analysis was Joan Scott's "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical

Analysis.” In this work, Scott discusses the intersections of power and gender, emphasizing how gender cannot be defined by the absence of power.³⁶ With this nuance, I separated the current secondary research into three main categories: biographical sources about Catherine and Mary I, gender-focused analyses about the general female experience during this time period, and sources that discuss the history of Catholicism in the Tudor era.

Biographical sources about these two women emphasize several specific themes. In the sources about Catherine’s life, authors focus on her struggle and victimization with limited analysis of her power. The main works I studied for background about Catherine’s life were *Catherine of Aragon* by Garrett Mattingly and “Reprinting Tudor History: The Case of Catherine of Aragon” by Betty Travitsky. I also reviewed *Catherine of Aragon* by Giles Tremlett and *Catherine of Aragon: An Intimate Life of Henry VIII’s True Wife* by Amy Licence.³⁷ In my thesis, I mainly cite Mattingly’s work, as it remains the most comprehensive biography and includes more information about Catherine’s early life in England. All of these works focused on Catherine’s downfall at the hands of her husband, Henry VIII, and her struggle with infertility, and I add to these sources by providing a analytical narrative of her power and influence as a Catholic figure at

³⁶ Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1060, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1864376>.

³⁷ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*. Betty S. Travitsky, “Reprinting Tudor History: The Case of Catherine of Aragon,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (1997): 164–74, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3039332>. Amy Licence, *Catherine of Aragon: An Intimate Life of Henry VIII’s True Wife* (Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2016). Giles Tremlett, *Catherine of Aragon* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010).

the beginning of her reign. I also provide extensive gendered analysis and a discussion about the inherent conflict between female ideals and power in her life.

Mary I was not the most famous or longest ruling English queen. Thus, historians have a tendency to discuss her as an afterthought to more prominent individuals in her story, like Elizabeth I, Henry VIII, or Anne Boleyn. Sources like *The Age of Elizabeth: England under the Later Tudors, 1547-1603* by David Palliser generally discuss Mary in the context of Elizabeth. While these sources do not fully recognize Mary's importance, they do not victimize her, unlike historical analyses of her mother.³⁸ Because she was a queen in her own right, there has been a recent trend towards discussing Mary in the context of her own reign. The main biographical sources that discuss Mary in her own right are *The Reign of Mary Tudor* by David Loades, "Mary Tudor as 'Sole Queen'?: Gendering Tudor Monarchy" by Judith Richards, and "Gender Difference and Tudor Monarchy: The Significance of Queen Mary I," also by Judith Richards. These sources centered their focus on her marriage, and I extend their analysis by looking at the intersection of gender and power in the contexts of childbearing and Catholicism.

A few more recent sources examine Mary's role as a woman. These works include *Mary I: Gender, Power, and Ceremony in the Reign of England's First Queen* by Sarah Duncan and "The Monarchical Republic of Mary I" by Alice

³⁸ David Palliser, *The Age of Elizabeth : England under the Later Tudors, 1547-1603* (London: Longman, 1992), 47. See also: *Early Modern Queens Revived and Revised* by Caroline Hibbard, "Elizabeth as Sacred Monarch" by Carole Levin, and *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power*

Hunt. Both of these sources focus on the ceremony and symbolism that countered and interacted with the complex role of gender within Mary's reign. Hunt discusses the ways in which Parliament took extra steps to legitimize Mary's reign before and during her coronation, steps that had not been previously taken with any male ruler.³⁹ Duncan analyzes how Mary's struggles with infertility challenged the core of her power as a woman.⁴⁰ Rex Richard discusses Mary's reign in terms of her achievements for the Catholic Church in *The Tudors; Personalities and Practical Politics in the Sixteenth Century*.⁴¹ I add to these studies by comparing Mary's experience with her mother's, given the difference of status as queen by marriage versus queen regnant.

In the biographical studies of both women, a common historiographical theme stands out. All of these authors, along with those who are not mentioned, emphasize the ways in which outside forces impacted the marriage and lives of these women and victimized them in their own reigns.⁴² There is limited discussion about the internal effects of gender expectations, and the focus remains on what happened to them from an external standpoint. I add to these externally

³⁹ Alice Hunt, "The Monarchical Republic of Mary I," *The Historical Journal* 52, no. 3 (2009): 564, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40264190>.

⁴⁰ Sarah Duncan, *Mary I: Gender, Power, and Ceremony in the Reign of England's First Queen* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 102.

⁴¹ Richard Rex, *The Tudors; Personalities and Practical Politics in Sixteenth Century England* (United Kingdom: Stroud, 2002), 64. See also: "Of Rose and Pomegranet the redolent pryncesse": Fashioning Princess Mary in 1525" by Stephen Hamrick

⁴² Other sources that examined this include: "Anne of Denmark and the Historical Contextualization of Shakespeare and Fletcher's Henry VIII" by Susan Frye, "Gender Difference and Tudor Monarchy: The Significance of Queen Mary I" by Judith Richards, "The Reign of Mary Tudor: Historiography and Research" by David Loades, and "To Promote a Woman to Beare Rule: Talking of Queens in Mid-Tudor Engand" by Judith Richards.

focused explanations by delving into the complexity of the female role in childbearing and the expectations placed on these women to produce heirs.

To understand these gendered nuances, my research draws heavily on a second category of sources, a wide-ranging group of gender-focused analyses. This scholarship examines the roles of women in everyday life, the complexities of female court life, and the classic female experiences of marriage and childbearing. The main authors and works that I used are as follows: *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* by Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Women in Early Modern Europe 1500-1700* by Cissie Fairchilds, "Introduction: Rethinking Women and Politics in Early Modern England," by James Daybell, and "Family and Community in the Early Modern Period" by Frances Dolan. These authors present informative but generalized overviews of female lives in early modern Europe. I extend these overviews by examining how expectations for normal women changed for women in the highest positions of power.

Daybell and Dolan focus on the background of the submissive role of a wife in Early Modern England, as well as the interaction between Tudor politics and these gender roles. They also offer analyses about the extent to which these women were autonomous and conscious of their gender roles and the impending conflict between those gender roles and queenly power. In "Introduction: Rethinking Women and Politics in Early Modern England," Daybell examines the Tudor era as a whole, through a gendered lens, arguing that the Tudor monarchy was ripe for female involvement because of the close relations between a king and the aristocracy, and the dependency of each party on the other. Socialization

within the court was necessary for a successful reign, and it fit perfectly into the mold of gender roles.⁴³ Dolan extends this argument by discussing how family and community intertwined within female identity and acted as sources of strength, validation, and protection for women of this time period.⁴⁴ With such a strongly defined aristocratic community, both Catherine and Mary theoretically had the opportunity to form strong royal identities, but the realities of other factors, including unattainable aspects of gender expectation, challenged this prospect.

A large body of scholarship centers on the constricting and rigid gender ideals for women of Early Modern England.⁴⁵ While there is not much attention to

⁴³ Daybell, "Introduction: Rethinking Women and Politics in Early Modern England." 3.

⁴⁴ Frances E. Dolan, "Family and Community in the Early Modern Period," *Journal of Women's History; Baltimore* 22, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 305-314, 327, <https://search.proquest.com/genderwatch/docview/840244426/abstract/554049C7DC454EEBPQ/1>. 306.

⁴⁵ Other sources that examined this include: "Early Modern Queens Revived and Revised" by Caroline Hibbard, "How Do Women Rule? ...Just Like Men" by Christine Stolba, "Revisiting Monarchy: Women and the Prospects for Power," Catherine Crawford, *The Family, Sex, and Marriages in England, 1500-1800* by Lawrence Stone, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England* by James Daybell, "Woman's Rule in Sixteenth-Century British Political Thought" by Constance Jordan, *Women of the Renaissance* by Margaret King, *Women, History, and Theory* by Joan Kelly, "Politics and Political History in the Tudor Century" by Stephen Alford, "Queens and Claimants: Political Insecurity in Sixteenth-Century England," Carole Levin, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England" by Barbara Harris, "The London Pageants for the Reception of Catherine of Aragon: November 1501," Sydney Anglo, "Campaign to end a marriage: 1527-33" by Diarmaid MacCulloch, "Changing Places: The Marriage and Royal Entry of Philip, Prince of Austria, and Mary Tudor, July-August 1554" by Alexander Samson, "Matters Impertinent to Women': Male and Female Monarchy under Philip and Mary" by Glyn Redworth, "The Female Monarchy: A Rhetorical Strategy of Early Modern Rule" by Cristy Beemer, "The Monarchical Republic of Mary I," Alice Hunt, "Beyond Women and the Family: Towards a Gender

the exact ways in which Catherine and Mary had to interact uniquely with these roles, these sources set up the possibility of this analysis, and I extend their work by looking at the ways in which these roles challenged or bolstered the power of Catherine and Mary. Clearly, as queens, the two women could not be silent, submissive, or sequestered into a certain community, and the publicity of their lives created a dissonance with these roles.

A final group of sources focuses on a gendered analysis of pre- and post-Reformation Catholicism. The main works in this category include Frances Dolan's essay "Reading, Work, and Catholic Women's Biographies" and David Cressy's *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual Religion and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*, among many others.⁴⁶ These sources emphasize a combination of ritual, Catholic piety, and womanhood. In her work, Dolan examines how reverence for female saints translated into reverence for wifely duties and household chores as forms of religious devotion; she describes this idea

Analysis of the Reformation" by Merry Weisner, "The transformation of tradition in the sixteenth century" by Felicity Dunworth

⁴⁶ I also used sources for general scholarly background about the Protestant Reformation and changes in the Catholic Church post-Reformation, but the most helpful sources were those with a gendered lens. Sources pertaining to the Reformation include: *Church and Society in England 1000-1500* by Andrew Brown, *Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400 – 1580* by Eamon Duffy, and *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* by Ethan Shagan. Other relevant sources pertaining to a gendered study of Catholicism at this time include: "The Birth of Feminism: Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England/The Rule of Women in Early Modern Europe" by Hannah Wojciehowski, "Religion and Social Obligation in Early Sixteenth-Century London" by Susan Brigden, "Strategies of Catholic Identity Formation c 1510 – 1560" by Kor Bosch, and *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* by Christopher Haigh

as “housework-as-discipline.”⁴⁷ I argue that this concept, along with the emphasis on simplicity and poverty as forms of devotion, created unattainable standards for Catherine and Mary, as their specific roles as women in the ultimate position of power conflicted with the ideals of devout female Catholic worship.

Cressy extends the analysis of the role of Catholicism in women’s lives by examining the various rituals of a woman’s life and analyzing how Catholicism affects these rituals. For example, marriage was the essential moment in marking the transition from adolescence into adulthood for a woman, and included the consecration of sexual intercourse.⁴⁸ For Catherine and Mary, their delayed marriages kept them in perpetual adolescence in the eyes of the public and challenged their standing as mature women. Cressy connects childbirth and Catholicism by providing theological history that emphasizes the link between childbearing and original sin.⁴⁹ These ideas followed Catherine and Mary throughout their lives, holding them responsible for the political, personal, and religious consequences of an inability to conceive.

These gendered analyses emphasize how the rituals of female life and Catholicism connected to each other in England in this time period. I extend this evaluation to examine the ways in which these Catholic ideals did not and could not fit into the unique lives of queens like Catherine and Mary. Because of the unusual marriage delays and the difficulties in childbearing for both women, they could not capitalize as much on the various tropes and reverences for Catholic

⁴⁷ Dolan, “Reading, Work, and Catholic Women’s Biographies.” 304.

⁴⁸ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*. 288.

⁴⁹ Cressy. 18.

women. This struggle, combined with the political unrest caused by religious tumult, challenged their power as women and as leaders.

The field of Tudor History has been studied extensively, and I am aware of the wide field of research to which I am contributing. However, I have found a unique area of analysis in the concentration of gender expectation and its relation to these women in positions as rulers. I also compare the lives and experiences of this mother-daughter pair with close ties to Spain, a useful comparison that I have not found in any of the secondary source material. Many sources examine gender roles of regular women of this time period, or the political impacts of these roles on Catherine and Mary, but I analyze the ways in which these roles and expectations directly conflicted with the realities of their lives. I argue that these roles were not only restrictive and demanding, but also made it impossible for Catherine and Mary to reconcile their gendered ideals with their power. This conflict is center of my analysis.

Methodology and Chapter Outline

My contribution to this topic is the gendered analysis of two queens in a way that has received little attention from scholars. I do not introduce any “new” facts or information about the Tudor Dynasty or the individual lives of Catherine of Aragon or Mary I of England. Instead, I look at their lives, reigns, rise and fall through the lens of gender expectation, answering the following questions: What was expected of them as women? What was expected of them as rulers? How did these two sets of expectations collide? To answer these questions, I use primary

sources such as letters, court documents, and church documents. These sources allow first-hand accounts of events during the reigns of these two women, and they provide a window into the thoughts and feelings of multiple individuals about certain gender expectations. For example, I found several letters that discuss the fertility issues of Catherine and Mary. Some were written by these women themselves, others by ambassadors or associates writing to individuals outside the courts. As part of the purpose of this thesis was to give these women agency in their own stories, it was essential that I use their own voices. According to James Daybell and Rosemary O'Day, letters from this era identify subjects of social importance, and while they are not necessarily narrative in nature, they show opinions and intent. The very subject of a letter demonstrates what was socially and politically relevant at the time.⁵⁰

I have organized my analysis into two chapters. In my first chapter, titled "The Unstable Power of Catherine of Aragon," I trace Catherine's life from her celebrated arrival in England at the end of the fifteenth century to her death in 1536. With this narrative, I examine the impact of marriage, childbearing, and Catholicism in her life. Starting with her marriage to Arthur, future king of England, and moving through a decade of financial instability after Arthur's death, I present the circumstances in which she married his brother Henry VIII. The turmoil of her early years in England directly connects to her commitment to her second marriage and embodies the ways in which marriage was stabilizing

⁵⁰ Rosemary O'Day, "Tudor and Stuart Women: Their Lives through Their Letters," in *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England*, by James Daybell, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 131.

and central to her life. Simultaneously, in a Catholic England, she engaged publicly and fervently with her faith, which was central to her role as queen and spiritual mother. Unfortunately, this centralized role of power began to crumble as she struggled with infertility in the mid-1510s and 1520s. Multiple miscarriages and public pressures to produce a male heir overshadowed her primary influence as an ideal woman and queen. Even though she was able to have a daughter, Mary, an inability to bear any other children threatened the power she had carefully cultivated from gender norms. Furthermore, geopolitical conflicts between England and Spain also called into question her loyalty and the viability of her Catholic faith in England. With all three aspects of her female identity in question, Henry VIII's decision to divorce and exile Catherine cemented her powerlessness, and the gendered expectations that had initially empowered her now exacerbated her fall. For Catherine, uncontrollable circumstances, like infertility and foreign affairs, conflicted with gendered ideals, which were just as central to her rise as they were to her downfall.

In my second chapter, I explore the same three concepts in the life of Mary I of England, Catherine and Henry VIII's only child. Mary's life has several striking parallels to the life of her mother, with one key difference: Mary was on the throne as queen regnant and ruled England in her own right. Thus, her access to power was more extensive than her mother's and depended less on compliance with certain gendered expectations. However, this access to power created even greater opportunity for conflict between power and gender, as Mary experienced throughout her life. Again, I trace the impact of marriage, childbearing, and

Catholicism in Mary's life, taking into account the difference in power from her mother. Mary suffered directly from her parents' divorce and faced persecution for her Catholic faith throughout her adolescence and until she took the throne at the age of thirty-eight. Similar to her mother, she was at the mercy of the kings of England, in this case, her father Henry VIII and her brother Edward VI. She also had delays and challenges in her marriage negotiations and did not marry until 1554. She married a Spanish prince, Philip II, and the marriage was deeply rejected by public opinion. This situation exemplifies the ways in which her more empowered status allowed for more conflict between gender roles and power. As a woman, she had to get married, but, as a leader of a country, this marriage sparked fear of Spanish influence and control – a fear that Catherine also encountered. Mary's infertility only exacerbated the unstable convergence of gender, foreign conflict, and power, and she and Philip were not able to produce any children during their marriage. Compounded by an unwelcome and strict policy concerning the revival of Catholicism in England, Mary's reign showed the opposite end of the spectrum as her mother's. Specifically, for Mary, more access to power only exacerbated and publicized the conflicts between this power and the gender roles with which she had to comply.

With my conclusion, I emphasize the main differences between Catherine and Mary's interactions with power. Catherine's power was grounded in the gendered expectations of the perfect wife, the giving mother, and the pious Catholic woman. However, these expectations created an unstable source of power, and that instability was exacerbated once she was unable to access these

ideals, due to divorce, infertility, religious conflict, and outside influences of geopolitical disagreement. In contrast, Mary's source of power was far more stable – she was rightfully and independently the Queen of England. But, as queen regnant, the divergences between power and gender ideals became even more publicized. Public conflicts included a negative response to her marriage, a rebellion, discussions concerning her infertility, and the nickname of “Bloody Mary,” which negated her commitment to the faith and trivialized her impact as queen. I also emphasize the importance of a discussion about the histories and contexts of these women, outside their struggles due to gender expectation. Finally, I extrapolate the impact of this thesis and these women in the study of women's history, and the importance of gender analysis to understand past and present issues with gender.

Chapter One: The Unstable Power of Catherine of Aragon

Introduction

As Catherine of Aragon entered London in November of 1501, her arrival represented the culmination and promise of years of political and marital alliances and treaties. The symbolism of the reception reveals the extent to which the monarchy valued references to past royal and political symbols of power at this time. Allusions to cosmic and heavenly supremacy, with constellations on pageantry backdrops, celebrated the earthmoving power of the king and queen.¹ Furthermore, the procession represented her physical and symbolic journey to be a ruler in England, and performances celebrated her honor, noblesse, and virtue.² Finally, references to Catherine's ancestors gave her clout, recognition, and power within the marriage, court, and England. These references include Alphonse the Wise of Castile (r. 1215 – 1284), and emphasized how the power of a child came from ancestors – bringing the importance of childbearing into view.³

England and Spain, the two most powerful Catholic kingdoms in Europe, finally united under this marriage between Catherine of Aragon and Arthur, the son of King Henry VII of England. Arthur was the future king of England with Catherine by his side. As she processed, Catherine carried with her the influence and power of generations of strong, Catholic, Spanish rulers. Catherine's family

¹ Sydney Anglo, "The London Pageants for the Reception of Katharine of Aragon: November 1501," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 26, no. 1/2 (1963): 53–89, <https://doi.org/10.2307/750570>. 62

² Anglo, 56.

³ Anglo, 66.

represented the ultimate Catholic power. Her ancestors had led crusades against Muslims and Jews in Spain, concentrated wealth and power locally and abroad, and celebrated and stimulated cultural, literary, and artistic progression throughout Spain. Her parents were King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, who unified Spain with the expulsion of Iberian Muslims. They were cornerstones of Catholicism in Europe at the time. Catherine also had English heritage and was related to Henry IV of England on her father's side and John of Gaunt on her mother's side. Both were considerable figures in English history and provided her with the ability to legitimize Henry VII's reign as a Tudor.⁴ As Catherine entered the gates of London in an extravagant procession, she carried with her promise, power, faith, virtue, and influence.

Her arrival signified more than a decade of negotiations between her parents, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, and King Henry VII of England.⁵ She had been married by proxy in 1499 to Arthur, but she had not arrived in England until November of 1501.⁶ The discussion of the pageantry offers perspective into the actual and symbolic importance of Catherine in an English context. The historical and metaphysical references underline how important England considered her to be; show the ways in which she took her role as queen seriously; and explain why she eventually refused to give up that role under pressure.

⁴ Tremlett, *Catherine of Aragon*, 54.

⁵ Anglo, "The London Pageants for the Reception of Katharine of Aragon." 53.

⁶ Anglo, 54.

Undoubtedly, Catherine was an influential and important historical figure. Thus, there exist a multitude of sources concerning her life and the consequences of her eventual divorce. While Garrett Mattingly's book includes a general discussion of the events of her life, Betty Travitsky draws on various publications and editions of the work "Instruction of a Christian Woman: by Juan Luis Vives (1523)" to chart the changing memory and public image of Catherine during the later years of her life and past her death.⁷ Both Mattingly and Travitsky underscore how Henry VIII's actions consistently affected her power as a queen, wife, mother, and Catholic individual. They also emphasize how her infertility overshadowed her reputation for elegance, intelligence, and grace.⁸ Mattingly discusses Catherine's connection to Spain and the changing perception of Spanish loyalty, and how this international context challenged her standing in the various roles she played.⁹

However, these sources do not extensively analyze the course of power throughout Catherine's life, especially during her early years in England, nor do they holistically consider facets of female life that affected her beyond just her divorce. As her story is central to the formation of the Church of England, and her husband was so notorious, many of these sources tend to victimize Catherine, placing her in the role of the helpless casualty in the narrative of Henry's story. But Catherine engaged politically for more than a decade before the collapse of

⁷ Travitsky, "Reprinting Tudor History."

⁸ Travitsky.

⁹ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*. 228. See also: *Early Modern Queens Revived and Revised* by Caroline Hibbard and *Revisiting Monarchy: Women and the Prospects for Power* by Katherine Crawford.

her marriage. As will be shown below, she used her high level of education to expertly participate in foreign policy while Henry fought in France.¹⁰ She advocated for her daughter in the face of threats concerning succession.¹¹ At the end of her life she lacked opportunity and agency, but that does not mean she failed to engage with the public successfully and wield royal influence before this time.

In order to fill this hole in the history and analysis of Catherine, I have chosen to focus my analysis on personal letters and official documents, now made available digitally by Her Majesty's Post Office.¹² As I am looking at the ways in which the less-studied early life of Catherine affected and impacted her later life, these letters offer a personal insight into those earlier years, which have been largely overlooked in the historical scholarship. As discussed by Daybell, letters present a unique perspective on the fluidity between public and private life, and focusing on letters "has lead to a range of truly interdisciplinary inquiries, including literary, lexical, historical, social, cultural, paleographical, manuscript, and gender-based." The words on the page offer insight into social and political expectations of the time.¹³

In this analysis, I discuss three facets of Catherine's power. Marriage, childbearing, and Catholicism intertwined extensively in her life, and these three

¹⁰ J Brewer, ed., "Grants in June, 1513," in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 1, 1509-1514* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1920), 920–40, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol1>.

¹¹ "Letter of Katharine of Aragon to Daughter Princess Mary."

¹² "British History Online," accessed April 11, 2020, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/>.

¹³ James Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6,9.

pillars seemed to offer her the chance to retain and protect her influence, both as a leader and a woman. At the beginning of her reign as Queen of England, with the promise of future heirs and years of happiness, Catherine was undeniably powerful. However, the same concepts that offered her opportunity eventually turned against her in changing political and social circumstances. These opportunities countered her ability to act in the traditional norms of a woman at the time. Thus, while Catherine suffered from changing political tides and was subject to a foreign religious shift she could not control, she was not a helpless or hapless victim. She struggled with constricting gender expectations and unrealistic understandings of fertility, but her history of leadership and influence is just as important and significant as her later life of duress.

Early Struggles

Catherine's arrival in England was a high point at the beginning of years of struggle during the first decade of the 1500s. The first disruption occurred with the death of Arthur in August of 1502. They had only been married for a couple months, and his death thrust Catherine into social and political limbo, placing her at the mercy of her father, foreign ambassadors, and King Henry VII himself. Her family still owed a dowry to Henry VII, and without the support or stability of a husband, she was placed in financial peril. This peril was only exacerbated by the communications between her parents and Spanish dignitaries.¹⁴ Given the political significance of her marriage, Catherine encountered multiple individuals who

¹⁴ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 25.

acted for their own self-interests in the name of the Spanish crown. In December of 1501, before Arthur's death, Don Pedro de Alaya, a Spanish ambassador in England, wrote to Queen Isabella concerning Catherine's dowry. According to Don Pedro, King Henry VII was frustrated because he wanted the gold plates promised to him by the Spanish crown, but he only received receipts of the plates.¹⁵ Don Pedro countered by explaining to Queen Isabella, "[I]t was custom in this country for husbands to give their wives all they want, which the Prince his son would do, according to his rank, and as his honor required."¹⁶ Don Pedro attempted to assuage Henry VII's financial frustrations on behalf of Ferdinand and the Spanish crown, and after Arthur's death, the financial issues only became more dire. Catherine, and these third-person negotiations challenged her own autonomy.

Catherine's position in England quickly became even more precarious. Gone were the days of astrological symbolism and historical representations of power – instead, she lived at the purse and mercy of King Henry VII. Marriage discussions continued for Catherine, including the consideration of Catherine marrying Henry VII himself after his wife died, as well as the possibility of Catherine marrying Henry VIII, future king of England.¹⁷ Discussions such as these also involved the extensive considerations of Catherine's virginity. According to canon law, she could not marry her husband's brother, but given the unique nature of her marriage to Arthur by proxy, and the extensive time the two

¹⁵ Bergenroth, "Don Pedro de Alaya, Spanish Ambassador in England, to Queen Isabel of Spain" 5.

¹⁶ Bergenroth, 7.

¹⁷ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 25, 50.

spent apart, Catherine remained adamant that the marriage was not consummated. Therefore, the two were not married in the eyes of God, and Catherine could still be married to a different family member. Despite the papal dispensation eventually received in the latter part of the decade, rumors and accusations concerning Catherine's virginity continued even after her eventual marriage to Henry VIII.¹⁸

Catherine's trials increased mid-decade when her mother Queen Isabella died in 1504. Her father Ferdinand was far less of an ally; he wanted to focus on the consolidation of his own power across Italy and France instead of the plight of his daughter in England. Furthermore, after Arthur died, and Catherine was awaiting the papal dispensation to approve the marriage to his brother Henry VIII, she was in severe debt to the English crown and had to pawn jewelry and other valuables to keep herself and her household afloat. This debt had accumulated since she arrived at the end of the fifteenth century. Ferdinand and Henry VII continued to disagree about the completion of her dowry payment. On top of this, she had accumulated living expenses, which would have been paid for by the English crown had she been a part of the family, but Arthur's death put this position in question as well.¹⁹

The letters she wrote to Ferdinand during this time exemplified her desperation. By December of 1505, meddling individuals like Don Pedro de Alaya involved themselves so deeply in the financial issue that Catherine had no autonomy over her own living situation. She wrote to her father, "Hitherto I have

¹⁸ Tremlett, *Catherine of Aragon*, 110.

¹⁹ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 26, 61, 66, 90, 91.

not wished to let your highness know the affairs here, that I might not give you annoyance...[but] that which troubles me more is to see my servants and maidens so at a loss, and they have not the wherewith to get clothes; and this I believe is all done by the hand of the doctor [Don Pedro de Alaya].”²⁰ Catherine explained how Don Pedro “negotiated that the king should dismiss all my household, and take away my chamber-equipage, and send to place it in a house of his own, so that I should not in any way be mistress of it.”²¹ At a time when she should have been giving birth to children and ruling beside her husband, she had to fight her alleged allies for attention and aid from an absent monarch.

This experience was her first encounter with the unstable nature of power sourced from marriage, and she became a widow at the age of sixteen. Beatrice Moring and Richard Wall examine how the discussion of widowhood has involved victimization. They refute the idea that success for widows could only involve remarriage by examining the lives of several different widows who established businesses and had economic success after the passing of their husbands. They emphasize a discussion about the economic achievements, lives and wellbeing of women who did not remarry.²² Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner also deconstruct stereotypes of widowhood by emphasizing the diversity of different widows’ experiences. Some took over households, some started

²⁰ G. Bergenroth, “Letter of Katharine of Aragon to Her Father, King Ferdinand II, 1505,” in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 1, 1485-1509* (London: British History Online, 1862), <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol1/pp376-379>.

²¹ Bergenroth.

²² Beatrice Moring and Richard Wall, “Conclusion,” in *Widows in European Economy and Society, 1600-1920*, NED-New edition (Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 249, 251, <https://doi.org/10.7722/j.ctt1p6qq5g.14>.

business, and some did suffer without economic opportunity. Interestingly, most aristocratic women were in more comfortable and strategic position and had more options.²³ However, as a royal, Catherine did not have the opportunity to engage in entrepreneurship to make her own money. In the position of highest power, she had the fewest options. Stuck between marriage treaties and without the constructs of marriage to support and protect her, she remained in limbo. Catherine suffered as a widow during this time.²⁴

By 1509, Henry VII began to turn on Catherine as well. Nearly ten years of unpaid debts had compounded when she wrote to her father, “To tell the truth, my necessities have risen so high that I do not know how to maintain myself...it is impossible for me any longer to endure what I have gone through and still am suffering from the unkindness of the King and the manner in which he treats me...”²⁵ Catherine was entirely disempowered by her situation and her inability to influence the powerful people around her. Her stability centered on a successful and fruitful marriage, and there were few alternatives once that marriage to Arthur fell apart.

In 1509, Spain and England reached an agreement: Catherine was to marry Henry VIII, Arthur’s younger brother and now the future king of England. While the debts were not completely covered, the Spanish crown paid the rest of her

²³ Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner, eds., *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Women and Men in History* (New York: Longman, 1999), 14. See also: “Women, Charity and Community in Early Modern Venice: The Casa Delle Zitelle” by Monica Chojnacka.

²⁴ Cavallo and Warner, 197.

²⁵ Bergenroth, “Letter of Katharine of Aragon to Her Father, King Ferdinand II, 1505.”

dowry in 1508, and Henry VII died on April 21, 1509. With his father's death, Henry VIII became King of England, and Henry VII's animosity towards Catherine did not carry over to his son.²⁶ Spain was still a powerful influence in the European continent, and Henry VIII had his sights set on France – a military goal that would be unreachable without Spanish aid. Thus, Catherine and Henry married in June of 1509.²⁷

Ceremony of Marriage and Coronation

After Catherine's hardship in the first decade of the 1500's, she welcomed the initial stability of her marriage to Henry VIII. By all accounts, their marriage was successful. The English court embraced Catherine, who balanced Henry's lightheartedness. According to Mattingly, "In the seven years of her widowhood, she had learned to rely on herself, make her own decisions, [and] keep her own counsel."²⁸ Finally fully a part of the English monarchy, Catherine no longer struggled in the limbo of financial and personal uncertainty.

This celebratory marriage was followed by an even more celebratory coronation, confirming Henry and Catherine's place in social, religious, and political history. This event was recorded by Tudor chronicler Edward Hall, and occurred on June 24, 1509. Hall described how the coronation ceremony took place in Westminster Abbey and detailed how the Archbishop of Canterbury

²⁶ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 125.

²⁷ Mattingly, 124, 154.

²⁸ Mattingly, 134, 136.

himself placed the crowns on the two royals' heads.²⁹ The role of the archbishop emphasized the divine right with which Henry and Catherine ruled. Christian symbolism played a significant role in their power, as a source and a support. Through this ceremony, God's own servant on earth anointed them, and these events echoed the fanfare that Catherine received a decade earlier. The king and queen were considered by the public to be gifts sent to the country by God – religious reference and opulent celebration solidified their power. Seated to the left of her husband, the King, Catherine momentarily represented both female and political authority.³⁰

Role as Queen Consort

In the first years of the marriage, Catherine and Henry ruled together, with Catherine helping while Henry was away fighting in France. In June of 1513, Henry issued a decree that officially made Catherine his regent as he left to fight in France “for the preservation of the Catholic religion...”³¹ According to this decree, Catherine was “Regent and Governess of England, Wales, and Ireland.” She could request funds, issue warrants, bestow honors on Catholic dioceses, and sign for the King on official documents.³² Given the restrictions on women in this period, it was notable that Henry granted Catherine the autonomy to exercise direct political power. Catherine was also made “Governor of the Realm and

²⁹ Jennifer Loach, “The Function of Ceremonial in the Reign of Henry VIII,” *Past & Present*, no. 142 (1994): 52, www.jstor.org/stable/651196.

³⁰ Loach, 66.

³¹ Brewer, “Grants in June, 1513.”

³² Brewer.

captain general of the forces for home defense,” and she directed a successful military campaign in Scotland, a departure from normative female activity at the time.³³ While some aristocratic women engaged in court politics or acted alongside their husbands to promote family prospects and business, only a select few wielded such extensive political autonomy.³⁴ Aristocratic women influenced political agendas, while Catherine enacted her own agenda on behalf of her husband and did so successfully.³⁵ As a political figure, Catherine thrived.

Catherine had to reconcile wifely duties with royal leadership early in her marriage. In September of 1513, when Catherine informed Henry of a military victory that occurred under her guidance in Scotland, she wrote, “...this battle hath been to your Grace and all your realm the greatest honor that could be, and more than you should win all the crown in France...your humble wife and true servant.”³⁶ In this letter, however, Catherine tried to reconcile her role as a powerful political figure with her more submissive role as a wife. Catherine balanced both roles by informing her husband of this military victory, but placed that victory in the context of his own extensive military conquests. She equated “humble wife” with “true servant,” attempting to be both powerful in her role as queen and humbled in her role as wife and woman. Even at the most successful

³³ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 157.

³⁴ Jordan, “Woman’s Rule in Sixteenth-Century British Political Thought,” 432.

³⁵ Harris, “Women and Politics in Early Tudor England,” 276.

³⁶ J Brewer, ed., “Katherine of Aragon to Henry VIII September 16, 1513,” in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 1, 1509-1514* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1920), <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol1/pp1012-1023>.

points of her marriage to Henry, the inherent conflicts of power and womanhood existed.

Alongside these personal conflicts arose issues around foreign policy that inevitably affected Catherine and threatened her stability. Beginning in 1513, due to her attempts to engage in Spanish-friendly foreign policy in her role as Queen regent, Catherine became trapped between her support for her English husband and the actions of her Spanish father. She tried to mediate a treaty that would unite Spain and England against the Holy Roman Empire in the fight for France. This treaty would have given England more resources and a better chance to conquer French territory.³⁷ But, by 1514, Ferdinand had broken his treaty with England and joined forces with Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, thereby frustrating Henry's plans for France. In response, Catherine attempted to realign her alliances with England and English interests, and turned politically on Ferdinand, but the damage to her public image was permanent. Furthermore, by isolating herself politically, she could no longer rely on Ferdinand once her marriage deteriorated in England.³⁸

In 1518, Catherine attempted to mend Spanish-English relations by aligning herself with the new Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, who was her nephew. However, this political move contradicted the goals of Henry's other advisors, like Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, who managed to pit Catherine and Henry's policies against each other as a way to break the trust between the king and Catherine – trust that was already fragile given the excessive strain on their

³⁷ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 98.

³⁸ Tremlett, *Catherine of Aragon*, 203.

marriage due to previous foreign policy failures with Spain, and the growing recognition of Catherine's infertility. The final straw occurred when Charles V agreed to a betrothal to Mary, Henry and Catherine's only daughter, but then jilted her for a Portuguese princess. This was the ultimate insult to Henry, and another Spanish betrayal that reflected poorly on Catherine, her family, her heritage, and her commitment to the English crown.³⁹

This period of time, in which Catherine had to reconcile her political autonomy with her duties as a wife, involved issues with her Spanish allegiances, complicating an already difficult balance of power. This experience emphasized that this political power, while wielded expertly by the queen, was ultimately temporary and fluctuating. While Catherine thrived as regent and was celebrated as an ideal Catholic woman, she struggled with her main duty as queen: to produce male heirs. Despite the birth of their first child, Mary, in 1516, Catherine's prowess and talent as a political leader were soon forgotten as the focus shifted towards the absolute necessity of a son.

Hardships of Motherhood

Catherine experienced hardships from infertility in many forms, and her position of power only exacerbated these challenges. While her marriage to Henry VIII was initially happy, healthy, and beneficial, childbearing and infertility began to plague the couple soon after they were married. By 1510, she had already suffered several miscarriages, and she continued to have miscarriages and

³⁹ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 137, 157, 164, 204, 206, 228.

stillbirths until her daughter Mary was born in 1516. Mary birth announcement and christening description indicated the importance of her birth, recording “they entered the church, which was hung with cloth of needlework garnished with precious stones and pearls.”⁴⁰ Even though Mary was a daughter, and not a son, Catherine was devoted to her, and committed herself to advocating for Mary’s education, marriage, and future.⁴¹ Unfortunately, she was the only child Catherine and Henry would have, and while Catherine continued to become pregnant until 1518, she did not give birth to a healthy child again. By 1526, there was consensus that Catherine would not produce an heir.⁴²

If marriage was central to the life, role, and wellbeing of a woman, childbearing held just as important a position. According to Cressy, childbirth had both religious and cultural significance during this time.⁴³ It represented Eve’s original sin and the original grace of Christianity, and through childbirth, a woman suffered and was saved by that grace.⁴⁴ Sexual intercourse and procreation were undeniably essential to a queen’s role as mother and creator of an heir. Childbirth was also unique given the almost entirely female participation – men were completely removed from the process and women were the experts. This expertise was central to womanhood, and failure to participate in the process of

⁴⁰ J Brewer, “Christening of Princess Mary,” in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 2, 1515-1518* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1864), 1573, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol2/pp429-447>.

⁴¹ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 187.

⁴² Mattingly, 235.

⁴³ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*, 17.

⁴⁴ Cressy, 17.

childbearing threatened an individual's very existence as a woman. Due to primogeniture, the bearing of sons held extra importance, as a son solidified and stabilized a family for the next generation.⁴⁵ For Catherine, a healthy male heir would have solidified her power as a woman and as a queen and stabilized the Tudor dynasty.

An indicator of the importance of childbearing involves the gossip and rumors concerning Catherine while she was pregnant. According to Daphna Oren-Magdor, "the difficulty in clearly identifying whether a woman was pregnant increased the sense of anxiety around reproduction and made it difficult to deal with fertility problems."⁴⁶ Gossip and rumor existed far before and far after Catherine's struggles with fertility, but the fact that she would not know if she were pregnant only fueled rumors and enticed discussions about the same fact. Furthermore, while some assume gossip is woman's work, men were equally willing and just as likely to discuss intimate details of another's life.⁴⁷ Everyone in the entire country understood the importance of Catherine's pregnancies. The added pressure to an already stressful and important situation did not help ease reactions with each miscarriage and stillbirth.⁴⁸

Records specify how fellow courtiers discussed and analyzed Catherine's pregnancies. Usually, the gossips were two individuals who had a stake in the

⁴⁵ Crawford, "Revisiting Monarchy."

⁴⁶ Daphna Oren-Magdor, *Infertility in Early Modern England*, 1st ed. (United Kingdom: University of St. Andrews, 2017), 25.

⁴⁷ Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 273. See also: *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, Sex in Early Modern London* by Laura Gowing.

⁴⁸ Oren-Magdor, *Infertility in Early Modern England*, 28.

potential power of an heir. Chancellor Diego Fernandez recorded an example of this to King Ferdinand. In this letter, written in May 1510 against Catherine's wishes and without her permission, Fernandez informed Ferdinand that "The last day of January in the morning her Highness brought forth prematurely a daughter...the affair was so secret that no one knew it..."⁴⁹ He also noted, "...and by his infinite mercy [the Lord] has again permitted her to be with child. This your Highness is to believe, for it is as true as I am a man. Her Highness denies it to all the world and to the King, but to me she has told it that she is since three months..."⁵⁰ Outside of the religious and cultural pressures of childbearing and infertility, Catherine had to contend with untrustworthiness and gossip within her own household. Fernandez wrote to her father about highly important but delicate information about her body and her child without her permission. The personal and strategic nature of royal childbearing created an inherent dichotomy that both emphasized and contributed to the pressures of childbearing for politically powerful women.

In 1518, Henry himself wrote to his political and religious advisor Cardinal Wolsey about Catherine's current pregnancy, which would be a daughter who died shortly after birth. In this letter Henry noted, "Two things there be which be so secret that they cause me at this time to write to you myself; the one

⁴⁹ G. Bergenroth, ed., "Chancellor Diego Fernandez to King Ferdinand," in *Calendar of Letters, Despatches and State Papers Relating to the Negotiations between England and Spain: Preserved in the Archives at Vienna, Simancas, Besançon, Brussels, Madrid and Lille* (H.M. Stationery Office, 1868), 35, https://books.google.com/books?id=i9kLp42IVN0C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

⁵⁰ Bergenroth, 35.

is that I trust the queen my wife to be with child...”⁵¹ In this letter, Henry was upbeat, hopeful, and positive. He wrote to Wolsey to explain how and why he was changing certain political plans so Catherine did not have to move from their current residence.⁵² This exemplifies the intense expectation placed on each subsequent unsuccessful pregnancy and depths of the inevitable pain and disappointment.

An exceptionally damaging blow to Catherine came with the birth of Henry’s illegitimate son, Henry Fitzroy, in 1518. First, this son challenged Mary’s status as heir. According to Stephen Hamrick, Henry Fitzroy wielded the enormous power of being a male alternative to Mary’s female ascension to the throne, and his power was solidified when Henry VIII bestowed upon him titles and ranks that put him above all non-royal nobility.⁵³ Hamrick gleans these interpretations by analyzing a poem written by a supporter of Mary in response to Henry Fitzroy’s recognition by Henry VIII. This poem, “My ladie pryncesse daughter to king harry the VIII,” was authored by William Newman, an educated Catholic who emphasized Mary’s unique claim to the throne to defend against supporters of the male heir.⁵⁴

Most importantly, this birth proved that Henry could, in fact, have a son. Given the mysteries of childbirth, it was hard to determine the “fault” of any

⁵¹ “King Henry VIII to Cardinal Wolsey,” accessed January 2, 2020, <http://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item101079.html>.

⁵² “King Henry VIII to Cardinal Wolsey.”

⁵³ Stephen Hamrick, “‘Of Rose and Pomegarnet the Redolent Pryncesse’: Fashioning Princess Mary in 1525,” *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 40, no. 2 (2017): 35–62, www.jstor.org/stable/26398555.

⁵⁴ Hamrick, 37.

infertility. As Oren-Magdor writes, “medical explanations of infertility...embodied the gendered order...the medical explanatory model for infertility was therefore inextricably connected with the religious model.”⁵⁵ Thus, Catherine’s infertility was, to an extent, explained through doubts in her piety and morality. This became connected to the birth of Henry Fitzroy, which pointed the blame decidedly at the queen. It was not a coincidence that by this time, Catherine was no longer involved politically in Henry’s rule, and Cardinal Wolsey had solidified himself as Henry’s main political and spiritual advisor. Even more symbolic was the fact that the last time Catherine was pregnant was the same year Henry Fitzroy was born.⁵⁶ The aforementioned political power was severely affected by her infertility and her perceived inability to fulfill her main role as procreator. Catherine’s infertility did not just mean a lack of children, but a lack of power, influence, and stability, and it threatened her position as wife of Henry and queen of England.

Outcomes of Infertility

During the mid-1520’s, two discussions came light that embodied both Catherine’s struggle with childbearing and the unrealistic pressures and expectations of this process as a royal. First, Henry VIII and Wolsey began to identify the continued infertility as a sign from God concerning the sanctity and impropriety of Catherine and Henry’s marriage. According to Henry and Wolsey, the infertility that Henry and Catherine experienced represented a curse enacted

⁵⁵ Oren-Magdor, *Infertility in Early Modern England*, 52.

⁵⁶ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 135, 236.

by God to punish Henry for marrying his brother's wife.⁵⁷ Even though, at the time of their marriage, the pope had issued a dispensation and assured the couple that their marriage was sanctified under God, Henry and Wolsey now pointed to a verse in Leviticus, which stated "if a man takes his brother's wife, it is impurity...they shall be childless."⁵⁸ Years earlier, Catherine's virginity was publicly established when she married Henry VIII, demonstrating that her marriage to Arthur had not been consummated. Henry and Wolsey now turned on Catherine and began the proceedings to acquire a second papal dispensation, which would state that the marriage was a sin and should be annulled.⁵⁹

This new strategy of Wolsey and Henry connected to the second development that emphasized and exacerbated Catherine's experiences with infertility. By May 1527, Catherine became aware of her husband's new mistress, Anne Boleyn. While Catherine had become used to Henry's infidelity and did not assume this to be any different than past dalliances, Henry VIII and Anne developed an infamous and intimate relationship. As their bond became stronger, Catherine was pushed farther and farther away from power, as both a mother and a queen.⁶⁰ Most significant about this relationship was the emotional connection between the two, and their relationship became stronger as Catherine's influence faded. In particular, Anne was determined to keep her reputation pristine, and

⁵⁷ Mattingly, 245.

⁵⁸ "Leviticus 20:21," ESV Bible, accessed January 2, 2020, <https://www.esv.org/Leviticus+18:16;Leviticus+20:21;Deuteronomy+25:5;Matthew+22:24;Mark+12:19;Matthew+14:3%E2%80%93;Mark+6:17;Luke+3:19/>.

⁵⁹ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 250.

⁶⁰ Mattingly, 248.

refused to become just another mistress of Henry's. Thus, their relationship was passionate but remained unconsummated.⁶¹

Meanwhile, Cardinal Wolsey wrote to Henry explaining the details of a conversation in which he had accused Catherine of sexual relations with Arthur, accusations she ardently refuted.⁶² Catherine's apparent inability to bear sons was not only being used to push her out of power, but was also a strategy for another individual to replace her in the role of queen, mother, and procreator. Anne and Henry VIII's relationship continued to grow after 1527, and Catherine's power and influence decreased accordingly.⁶³

The combined political and cultural aspects of childbearing created an impossible problem for Catherine and contributed to her eventual fall from power at the hands of Henry VIII. While, at the time, childbearing was considered to be in the realm of women, and women controlled the process and the expertise, this perceived "control" was not a reality given the biological complications and intricacies inevitable in childbirth.⁶⁴ Infertility threatened the very existence of her marriage – what was a political marriage at this time without children? The interconnectivity of marriage and producing an heir, on which Catherine based

⁶¹ G.W. Bernard, "'The King's Great Matter': Henry's Divorce and Anne," in *Anne Boleyn, Fatal Attractions* (Yale University Press, 2010), 38, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1npjv0.9.

⁶² J Brewer, ed., "Cardinal Wolsey to Henry VIII," in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 4, 1524-1530* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1875), 3217, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol4/pp1465-1477>.

⁶³ G.W. Bernard, "'Whose Pretty Dukkys I Trust Shortly to Kiss': Henry VIII's Infatuation with Anne," in *Anne Boleyn, Fatal Attractions* (Yale University Press, 2010), 25, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1npjv0.8.

⁶⁴ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*, 15.

her power and stability, exacerbated the situation. As queen, Catherine's childbearing took on another level of significance, which eventually was used against her. Childbearing presented a special challenge to queenship. The expectations of healthy male births at that time, given the extensive medical complications possible, created a scenario in which Catherine had very little chance of success. As the pressure mounted, the chances of a healthy son decreased with her age and health. This analysis can be measured by the fact that the year 1526 represents both the point at which she was no longer expected to have children and the point at which Henry began to consider drastic measures to remove her from power, via a Reformation.

Impact of Religious Environment

A discussion about Catherine in the context of the English Reformation requires an analysis of the religious environment of this time period. As emphasized above, a large portion of Catherine's influence came from her strong Spanish-Catholic background. However, this influence would also wane. In 1517, Martin Luther ignited religious change in Germany by posting his "95 Theses," a list of criticisms and proposed changes to the Catholic Church.⁶⁵ Initially, the English crown defended the Catholic faith and continued to do so for fifteen years. Henry was so committed to the Catholic Church that he wrote a document

⁶⁵ Eamon Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c.1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 220.

titled *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*, or *The Defense of the Seven Sacraments*.⁶⁶ This written work directly challenged Luther's criticisms of the Catholic Church and earned Henry the title of "Defender of the Faith." His work was hugely popular, and Henry continued to observe Catholic piety and work alongside the Catholic Church to mutually enforce power.⁶⁷ Thus, when the crown's position officially changed in 1532, it was not without extensive study, debate, and political consideration on the part of Henry and his advisors. In 1532, the crown enacted laws that established the Church of England as a separate entity from the Catholic Church and made Henry VIII the head of that church.⁶⁸

Three individuals contributed extensively to Henry's eventual split from the Catholic Church and divorce from Catherine. First, Cardinal Wolsey was present at the beginning of annulment and divorce discussions with Henry. He worked closely with Henry in studying and analyzing the aforementioned Leviticus verse, while manipulating foreign policy to turn against Catherine's favor.⁶⁹ Second, Thomas Cranmer was an educated individual initially committed to academia. Henry recruited him in 1529 to organize the religious arguments for divorce for distribution to public officials in order to drum up support for Henry's actions.⁷⁰ Finally, Thomas Cromwell joined this years-long process in order to craft the final solution: separation from the Catholic Church. This separation

⁶⁶ J.J. Scarisbrick, "The Virtuous Prince," in *Henry VIII* (Yale University Press, 1997), 111, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1bh4bhn.10.

⁶⁷ Scarisbrick, 113.

⁶⁸ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c.1580*, 212.

⁶⁹ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 245.

⁷⁰ Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 109.

included an announcement declaring the Pope to be a heretic and placed Henry at the head of the new Church of England.⁷¹

The English Reformation undermined Catherine's position and persona as an ideal Catholic queen. The concept of a Catholic "spiritual mother" celebrated intellectual and religious contributions by pious, educated, and elite women.⁷² She came from a prominent family that epitomized rule by Catholic faith, and initially, Catherine found great power and a solid identity in this Catholic structure that politically and personally supported her. In the earlier years of her marriage, when the prospects of multiple children and strong births still prevailed, Catherine held onto the "spiritual mother" ideal. However, as infertility and marital strife became her reality, Catherine's stability in this narrative faltered.⁷³

Catherine's Catholic identity, her struggles with infertility and the strength of her marriage interconnected with Henry VIII's infatuation with Anne Boleyn. Thus, as the decade of the 1520's progressed, the situation for Catherine, in terms of power and autonomy, worsened. While the exact timing is uncertain, Catherine became aware of Henry's annulment plans some time between 1527 and 1528, at the same time that tensions were arising between Henry VIII and the Pope, who would not grant an annulment as quickly or easily as Henry wished.⁷⁴ Cardinal Wolsey and Henry's attempts to keep her unaware and without legal advice further disempowered Catherine. This is evident in a letter written to Henry by

⁷¹ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 315.

⁷² Bosch et al., "Strategies of Catholic Identity Formation c. 1510-1560 (Chronicle)," 325.

⁷³ Fairchilds, *Women in Early Modern Europe 1500-1700*, 269.

⁷⁴ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 244.

Wolsey explaining a conversation that Wolsey had with the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Warham. Their discussion was about a different conversation that Warham had had with Catherine, in which she had pleaded with the Archbishop for religious and legal guidance concerning the divorce proceedings. Wolsey reported that the Archbishop responded to Catherine's plea for help by saying "he [Warham] was ready and prone to give unto her his council in anything that concerned or touched only herself but in matters concerning your highness and here he would nothing do without knowledge of your [Henry's] pleasure."⁷⁵ This quote emphasizes Catherine isolation in this struggle. With decreasing support for the Pope and the Catholic Church by the political elite, she could no longer depend on traditional Catholic tropes to provide a stable power source and identity in the eyes of the public. To be pro-Catherine or pro-Catholicism was to be anti-Henry and anti-crown.

As Catherine and Henry's divorce became a reality in the late 1520's, the impact of religion involved numerous actors. Officially, Thomas Cranmer was in place to help determine an answer to the king's "Great Matter," the title given to the issue of divorce.⁷⁶ This Great Matter depended on the Bible verses contained in Leviticus, chapters eighteen and twenty. Verses in these chapters forbade a man from marrying his brother's wife, and even though the couple had received a papal dispensation before they married in 1509, Henry worried that their continued infertility was a sign of God's displeasure, and the marriage was in fact

⁷⁵ "Cardinal Wolsey to Henry VIII, July 5, 1527," 1527, SP1/42, f.156r-158r, The National Archives, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/the-english-reformation-c1527-1590/henry-viiiis-divorce-1527/>.

⁷⁶ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 235.

doomed. The Great Matter encompassed nearly five years of political and religious tumult, with discussions between the English crown and Rome becoming increasingly tense into the early 1530's. Furthermore, Thomas Cranmer attempted to use the Great Matter to transition his career from religious to political. While the concerns about Henry's marriage did pre-date the rise of Anne Boleyn and Thomas Cranmer, their involvement escalated the situation to thoughts of complete annulment and divorce.⁷⁷ It was an inevitably impossible strategy for Catherine to rely on her Catholic strength to defend against personalized and specific attacks on her womanhood, her ability to serve as a wife, and her very relationship with God. Her main defense crumbled as Catholicism lost favor.

During this time of religious and political turmoil in England, foreign allies attempted to come to Catherine's aid, though they did not have the desired effect of defense and success. Catherine was not the only one fighting – her Spanish allies across Europe, including Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, stepped in to influence the Pope's decision about her marriage and the actions of Henry VIII. In letters between Charles and his advisors, one sees Charles' intense fury about the treatment of his aunt. His advisor Rodrigo Niño wrote to Charles in

⁷⁷ MacCulloch, 41, 44, 45.

See also: "Campaign to end a marriage: 1527-33" by Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Church and Society in England 1000-1500* by Andrew Brown, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* by Christopher Haigh, *History, Memory, and the English Reformation* by Alexandra Walsham, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* by Ethan Shagan, *Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c.1580* by Eamon Duffy, *Success and Failure in the English Reformation* by Christopher Haigh, and *The Recent Historiography of the English Reformation* by Christopher Haigh.

1531, reporting, “The Emperor's letters delivered to the Prior of St. John and Pole, asking them to revoke and annul the opinions they had given in the Queen's divorce case: but he (Niño) fears that this and all similar measures will have very little effect, as the King of England is determined to divorce the Queen *de facto*, and to contract a marriage with another woman.”⁷⁸ While Henry and Catherine’s divorce would not be finalized until three years later, Charles and his advisors understood the impending threat in 1531 and wrote tirelessly to the Pope to encourage him to decide against annulment.

Charles continued in later letters of 1531, revealing the extent to which Henry attempted to influence the Pope’s decision and implementation thereof. When asking about letters he had sent to both Catherine and the Pope about the Great Matter, he writes, “...Although it is not easy to deliver them to the persons for whom they are destined with safety to the latter, as the King of England has appointed guards to watch closely that no letter from the Pope to his Nuncio passes the frontier.”⁷⁹ While Henry and Thomas Cranmer maintained that the divorce focused on biblical implications and consequences, some of the European elite had other thoughts. In a consultation furnished by a minister to Pope Clement VII, this minister wrote, “But the true reasons for the King's request for a divorce are not to be sought in his pretended scruples of conscience, but in his carnal lust. It is well known that he has already chosen the lady he intends to marry, and it is

⁷⁸ Martin Hume, “Rodrigo Niño to the Emperor,” in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 8, 1545-1546* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1904), 413, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol8/pp571-580>.

⁷⁹ Martin Hume, “The Emperor to Mai,” in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 8, 1545-1546* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1904), 415, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol8/pp571-580>.

currently asserted that his proposed bride is related to him in the same degree of affinity as the Queen...”⁸⁰ And, as the divorce proceedings continued, with increased inaction from the Pope, Charles V wrote, “The Emperor is extremely astonished at the manner in which the proceedings relative to the divorce case of his dear aunt the Queen of England are being conducted. It would indeed be strange if it were otherwise, for the justice of the Queen’s case is so clear, and the injustice done to her so evident...”⁸¹

The religious turmoil present towards the end of Catherine’s marriage created several insurmountable and conflicting issues. Initially, Catherine’s main source of power was her strong Catholic background, her Spanish and English heritage, and her faith and piety. She represented the ideal woman of faith. However, this foundation began to crumble as her infertility challenged the idea of the “spiritual mother,” and her husband began to consider other martial options. Simultaneously, the religious context of the Reformation and the relation between Henry’s own unhappiness and a highly global and influential religious movement left Catherine defenseless against intertwining religious and legal battles. Scholars like Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas Cranmer exacerbated this conflict by using Catherine’s plight to further their own careers and establish themselves within Henry’s new church and new religious order. Finally, as Catherine attempted to

⁸⁰ Martin Hume, “Consultation Furnished by a Minister to Pope Clement VII,” in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 8, 1545-1546* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1904), 423, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol8/pp571-580>.

⁸¹ Martin Hume, “The Emperor to Mai,” in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 8, 1545-1546* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1904), 420, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol8/pp571-580>.

turn to foreign allies for aid, the complex history of Spanish-English relations and clear religious delineations prevented her from receiving help and saving her own marriage. Catherine's issues within her own marriage, and the inevitable conflicts caused by unrealistic expectations of childbearing represented matters contained within cultural and societal beliefs about the correct and righteous actions of women. The impact of Catholicism affected her rule as queen in a far more complex and nuanced manner and interconnected all three concepts of her life and her reign.

Conclusion

As a final defense, Catherine cast aside the power bestowed upon her by her own queenship and emulated the humble wife. She no longer attempted to imitate a "spiritual mother" or any sort of motherly role. This strategy was evident in the first apex of the Great Matter, which culminated in a show trial on June 22, 1529, orchestrated by Thomas Cranmer and intended to show the religious arguments against Catherine and Henry's marriage. However, during this trial, Catherine delivered a speech that emphasized how she had been the ideal wife. In this speech, according to an onlooker, she begged Henry, "to consider her honor, her daughter's, and his; that he should not be displeased at her defending it, and should consider the reputation of her nation and relatives, who will be seriously offended."⁸² She delivered this speech on her knees, in front of Henry, and the

⁸² J Brewer, ed., "Du Bellay to Francis I, June 22, 1529," in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 4, 1524-1530*, vol. 4 (London: H.M.

onlooker also noted the reaction of the other women in the court, writing “If the matter was to be decided by women, he would lose the battle; for they did not fail to encourage the Queen at her entrance and departure.”⁸³ At this point in the marriage crisis, Catherine entirely abandoned all pretense of political or royal power. In the end, she relied only on her ability to fulfill wifely duties to defend against attacks on her marriage. In her eyes, true power resided in gendered ideals, not in the flashy political or religious power around her. In the end, for Catherine, the queenly power she so expertly wielded was unusable.

After this speech and show-trial, the Great Matter officially turned against Catherine. The Pope was reluctant to decide whether the marriage could be annulled, and even though public opinion was still with Catherine in 1532, her marriage was declared null and void by Parliament on May 23, 1533.⁸⁴ While Pope Clement VII eventually declared the marriage between Catherine and Henry to be “good and valid in the eyes of God,” he did not do so until March of 1534, after Henry had already married Anne Boleyn, and right before Catherine was exiled to a remote residence in Kimbolton in May of the same year.⁸⁵

The most tragic outcome of this affair was the way in which Catherine’s relationship with her only child was used against her. As Catherine fell from power, and Mary grew older, Henry used Mary as a pawn against her mother.⁸⁶ Specifically, Henry kept the two apart while he attempted to divorce Catherine

Stationery Office, 1875), <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol4>.

⁸³ Brewer.

⁸⁴ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 363.

⁸⁵ Mattingly, 387, 391.

⁸⁶ Mattingly, 186.

and marry Anne, for fear they would collude and collaborate to remove him from power. Regardless of the accuracy of this fear, the pain Catherine and Mary felt was undeniably real. This pain is evident in a letter written from Catherine to her daughter in April 1534 – after the marriage of Henry and Anne, the birth of their daughter Elizabeth, and close to the end of Catherine’s life. In this letter, Catherine wrote to Mary about her father’s demand that Mary take an oath that invalidated her parents’ marriage and her own right to succession of the throne. Catherine wrote, “Answer with few words, obeying the King your father, in everything, save only that you will not offend God and lose your soul...”⁸⁷ In trying to guide and protect her only daughter, Catherine created more challenges for Mary, which exacerbated the tension between Catherine and Henry. Sadly, Mary and Catherine would not be together again before Catherine died in 1536, seven months before Anne Boleyn was beheaded.⁸⁸

It would be easy to point to her marriage as the main reason for Catherine’s fall from power. While her marital role was incompatible with her political power, her struggles with childbearing threatened her ability to even fulfill that marital role, and the impact of Catholicism made her vulnerable to a whole host of criticisms, especially concerning foreign relations and affairs. The interconnectivity of all three of these concepts can explain the extent to which an unfavorable court dismissed Catherine. While it is futile to wonder what might have been, one must consider the irreparable damage of the loss of all three of these potential sources of power for Catherine. Had Catherine been able to have a

⁸⁷ “Letter of Katharine of Aragon to Daughter Princess Mary.”

⁸⁸ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 416.

son, or rely on her public favor in the eyes of Europe's Catholic population, Henry may not have dared to dismiss her so publicly. This three-pronged attack weakened her defenses.

Catherine's marriage was long and tumultuous and encompassed nearly every aspect of female life in early modern England. Her peaks and falls from power show us that nearly every single construct of her political and personal marriage, as it pertained to her unique female role, eventually became an unstable source of power. Furthermore, due to the distinctive nature of her position as a queen, she encountered challenges by outside forces, such as foreign policy conflict and opportunistic individuals. These external influences could not be controlled or challenged by traditional female roles, as their power and direction came from the male privilege of the time period. Her attempts to utilize political power undermined her position as a wife and mother, and her struggles with fertility and disloyalty within her marriage undermined all political and religious opportunities for power.

Chapter Two: Mary I and the Struggles of a Queen Regnant

Introduction

In 1536, at age twenty, Mary Tudor wrote the following to her father, Henry VIII: “I do recognize, accept, take, repute, and acknowledge the king’s highness to be supreme head on earth, under Christ, of the church of England; and do utterly refuse the bishop of Rome’s pretended authority.”¹ With this statement, Mary denounced her commitment to Catholicism and accepted her father’s extensive religious reform. She continued, “I do freely...acknowledge that the marriage formerly had between his majesty and my mother, the late princess dowager, was by God’s law and man’s law incestuous and unlawful.”² Here, Mary denounced her mother and challenged her own ability to succeed to the throne after her father’s death, even though she was his oldest child. Such dramatic action represented the dire nature of Mary’s situation after the death of her mother in January of 1536, when Mary wrote this letter.³ Mary’s struggles matched her mother’s—both were disempowered and rejected by the reigning king. Furthermore, at this point, Mary was not in line for the throne at all, and her religion was weaponized against her until she wrote the above letter, surrendering.

The journey Mary traveled from this vulnerable position to Queen of England, eighteen years later, has been studied in the academic community.

¹ “Letter of Princess Mary to King Henry VIII, 1536,” English History, February 22, 2015, <https://englishhistory.net/tudor/letter-of-princess-mary-to-king-henry-viii-1536/>.

² “Letter of Princess Mary to King Henry VIII, 1536.”

³ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 416.

However, as emphasized by the historiography in the introduction, the academic studies of Mary's life and history discuss her only in the context of Henry VIII or Elizabeth I – rarely is she understood to be her own individual ruler. Outside of purely narrative and biographical works, the main voices concerning Mary's reign have thus far been David Loades and Judith Richards. Loades and Richards both consider a gendered analysis for Mary, especially as it relates to her unpopular marriage to Philip I of Spain.

According to Loades, Mary had opportunity and power through a strategic marriage, the birth of heirs, and Catholic-backed foreign policy, but the backfiring of public opinion concerning her marriage disrupted all of these avenues of power.⁴ According to Richards, Mary lost power through her marriage not because of public opinion, but because she lost her status as a pure and virginal female figure. Before her marriage, Richards argues that Mary was “a mature woman, with an impeccable sexual reputation,” and it was the loss of this status that contributed most to her downfall.⁵ However, none of these sources discuss the striking parallels and differences in Mary and Catherine's lives, nor are there broader considerations about the impact of geopolitical interactions between England and Spain. The foreign relations between these two countries affected both Mary and Catherine in a gendered context.

⁴ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 465. See also: “The Reign of Mary Tudor: Historiography and Research” by D. M. Loades

⁵ Judith M. Richards, “Mary Tudor as ‘Sole Quene’?: Gendering Tudor Monarchy,” *The Historical Journal* 40, no. 4 (1997): 27, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2640128>. See also: “The Reign of Mary Tudor: Historiography and Research” by D.M. Loades, “The Monarchical Republic of Mary I” by Alice Hunt, and *Mary I: Gender, Power and Ceremony in the Reign of England's First Queen* by Sarah Duncan.

Using a group of letters written by Mary and those around her in court, I argue that while Mary had similar struggles to her mother concerning infertility, her position as queen regnant created even more obstacles concerning public popularity, the geopolitical consequences of her marriage to a Spaniard, and her relationship with Catholicism. Her issues with infertility mirrored those of her mother, but her marriage and her religious convictions created far more public impact, given her status as queen. In a way, Catherine did not have enough power, but Mary had access to too much power, which gave others the ability to directly blame and villainize Mary. She was not made a victim, but she was made a scapegoat.

Coming to the Throne

Mary's journey to the throne as Queen of England spanned nearly forty years and encompassed extensive political and religious change in England. Her power as a royal was diminished from the beginning of the Great Matter in 1527 until 1544, when Henry VIII reinstated her in the line of succession before his death in 1547.⁶ Throughout this time period, she endured hardship and isolation, a struggle made evident through a letter she received from Princess Elizabeth. Elizabeth was Mary's half-sister, the daughter of Anne Boleyn, and the future Queen Elizabeth I of England. However, during the mid-1500's, Elizabeth and Mary suffered a similar fate. In this letter, Elizabeth discussed Catherine Parr's recent remarriage after Henry's death in 1547. Elizabeth wrote, "neither you or I,

⁶ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 22.

dearest sister, are in such a condition as to offer any obstacle thereto, without running heavy risk...I think, then, that the best course we can take is that of dissimulation, that the mortification may fall upon those who commit the fault.”⁷

Mary and Elizabeth had to walk the delicate line between independent survival and loyalty to the crown, as indicated by this letter. While Mary was close to Catherine Parr, this letter indicates tension within that relationship, which shows another difference between Mary and Elizabeth – during her reign, Mary’s mother was respected by England, regarded as a true dignitary, educated, political, and devoutly pious. Elizabeth’s mother was the reviled Anne Boleyn, arguably one of the most infamous women in history. It is important thus to analyze Mary’s reign with consideration for the influence of her mother. This influence most clearly manifested itself through Mary’s devout Catholicism, which matched Catherine’s historical devotion to the faith.⁸

Despite the strength that Catherine derived from Catholicism, Mary struggled from her adolescence to when she took the throne, in part because of this devotion to Catholicism. After Catherine’s death in 1536, Mary was kept isolated from the rest of the English court, and at the time of Henry’s death, she had been demoted to second in line for the throne, cementing her status as an illegitimate child in the eyes of the English law.⁹ Once Edward VI took the

⁷ Mary Anne Everett Green, ed., “Letter LXXXIX: Princess Elizabeth to Princess Mary, 1547,” in *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain: From the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary* (H. Colburn, 1846), 193–94.

⁸ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 9.

⁹ John Edwards, “Struggling with the Younger Brother, 1547–1553,” in *Mary I* (Yale University Press, 2011), 64, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1nq95m.10.

throne, after the death of Henry VIII, he accelerated his father's Protestant reforms and continually threatened Mary's ability to practice her faith. As King of England, Edward controlled Mary's household and purse. In a letter from 1549, she wrote to Edward asking that various members of her household be returned to her service. As Mary wrote, "I would (the same being not offended) in most humble wise beseech you to give me leave to be a suitor until your highness for my poor servants, that it may stand with your pleasure...to grant them liberty to serve me as they have done..."¹⁰ Mary had to plead to keep her Catholic servants and had to defend her very right to hear mass alone.¹¹ This lack of control mirrors Catherine's experiences in her first decade in England, but Mary's time in limbo extended for more than thirty years. Furthermore, while Catherine's struggle centered on finances, Mary's turmoil centered on her own Catholic beliefs. Catherine's problems were fixed with a marriage to Henry VIII, but Mary's problems extended far into the religious and cultural issues of England at the time.

Once Edward VI became king, Mary took her place as second in line to the throne. In fact, in Catholic countries across Europe, Catherine was considered to be the only wife of Henry VIII, making Mary first in line for the throne and the

¹⁰ Mary Anne Everett Green, ed., "Letter XCVIII: Princess Mary to King Edward VI, 1549," in *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain: From the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary* (H. Colburn, 1846), 212–18, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=Szv5nSNYBUcC&printsec=frontcover&pg=GBS.PA327>.

¹¹ Mary Anne Everett Green, ed., "Letter CXIX: Princess Mary to King Edward VI, 1551," in *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain: From the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary* (H. Colburn, 1846), 256–58.

only legitimate child.¹² According to the perspective of these devout Catholics, Edward was the illegitimate ruler. While this did not have a drastic impact on Edward's reign while he was in power, this support did foil his council's efforts to remove Mary from the line of succession completely.¹³ When Edward succeeded to the throne in 1547, he was only nine, and by 1553, he had fallen very ill. In the last months before his death, a scheme formed to change the line of succession and add another person, Lady Jane Grey, in front of Mary. Jane Grey was the great-granddaughter of Henry VII, and had the support of the Protestant elites attempting to hold onto power in court.¹⁴ To add more complexity, Edward VI was still a minor in the eyes of the English legal system, so there was confusion as to whether or not he was even allowed to participate in these proceedings. He then died on July 6, 1553.¹⁵ Four days later, Jane Grey and Edward's supporters declared her to be Queen of England and Ireland. However, the support of the public was not as strong as they had anticipated, and by July 19, supporters and aristocrats took their money and fled, in response to the threat of military action by Mary.¹⁶

This saga represents an added complexity to Mary's journey to the throne. Alongside the threat to her Catholicism, Mary also experienced specific challenges due to her gender and the possibility of her role as England's first queen regnant. Over time, these two characteristics of her rule tended to

¹² Hunt, "The Monarchical Republic of Mary I," 560.

¹³ Edwards, "Struggling with the Younger Brother, 1547–1553," 66.

¹⁴ Edwards, 78.

¹⁵ John Edwards, "A Year of Two Coups, 1553," in *Mary I* (Yale University Press, 2011), 88, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1nq95m.11.

¹⁶ Edwards, 97.

exacerbate the concerns in the eyes of those who did not support Mary on the throne. This situation highlights a key difference between Mary and Catherine – namely, that Mary was a queen in her own right, while Catherine was a queen by marriage, under a king. Mary’s status as queen regnant created a unique situation in which female roles, like wife and mother, had amplified significance but seemingly poised a heightened threat to the stability and wellbeing of England.

The extensively delayed process of marriage is another example of this dichotomy. For Catherine, the delay occurred because of financial complications, but for Mary, the delay in marriage centered on continued isolation during her adolescence and the threat of foreign influence. For the first thirty-eight years of her life, continued attempts to arrange a marriage fell through again and again. At first, she was a somewhat undesirable bride, given the isolation and persecution from her father and the historic downfall of her mother. Furthermore, at the time in which she should have been in court and marital negotiations should have been a focus of foreign policy, she was exiled from the English Court as Anne Boleyn took advantage of Mary’s absence to establish herself.¹⁷ After the reestablishment of Mary’s succession, the impact of her queenship and the threat of a foreign king ruling England continued to hamper negotiations.¹⁸

This delay was also impacted by religious contentions in England at the time; while Henry and Edward were Protestant, Mary remained Catholic throughout her marriage negotiations.¹⁹ Similar to Catherine, and traditional at the

¹⁷ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 13.

¹⁸ Edwards, “Struggling with the Younger Brother, 1547–1553,” 71.

¹⁹ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 10.

time, Mary was not extensively engaged in her own marital negotiations. In a letter from Mary to Thomas Cromwell in 1539 concerning negotiations with a Duke of Bavaria, Mary wrote “I beseech you ever to say and answer for me: I shall not, God willing, disapprove your saying in the same, while the breath shall be in my body...”²⁰ At the same time that Mary penned this letter, other negotiations were occurring between her representatives and a Portuguese prince named Don Luis.²¹ Both of these negotiations failed. While Mary’s source of power differed from Catherine’s, she remained removed from her own marital discussions in the same way. Typical of the time, she could not separate her own negotiations from the religious and geopolitical influence of those around her. Her own power as future queen created further obstacles, and marriage was not the problem-solving safe haven for her that it was for her mother.

Cultural Conflicts of a Queen Regnant

By 1554, the Protestant King Edward VI had died, and Mary succeeded the throne – without a husband. For Catherine, marriage was the entrance into political power. For Mary, as queen regnant, she had to exercise political power without the support or stability of marriage. She was a woman endowed with power, alone, which was far less acceptable than a woman acting with power in

²⁰ Mary Anne Everett Green, ed., “Letter XLI: Princess Mary to Lord Cromwell, 1539,” in *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain: From the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary* (H. Colburn, 1846), 89–90,

<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=Szv5nSNYBUcC&printsec=frontcover&pg=GBS.PA327>.

²¹ Green.

accordance with her husband.²² Judith Richards examines the ways in which history has mischaracterized the perceived threat of female power. She analyses a quote from an infamous Protestant of the time, John Knox, who wrote, “To promote a woman to beare rule, superiortie, dominion, or empire above any realme, nation, or citie, is repugnant to nature, contumelie to God, a thing most contrarious to His reveled will and approved ordinance, and finalie it is the subversion of good order, of all equitie and justice.”²³ While this quote is striking, and oft cited, Richards argues that this point of view was not entire representative of how the public felt about Mary taking the throne as an unmarried woman. Specifically, people preferred male leadership not because they villainized women, but because male leadership was more stable for “...interests in property, inheritance, hierarchy, and legal constraints.”²⁴ Thus, as Mary could not emulate this symbolic stability, she engaged with other aspects of her female identity to establish the same solidity of power. Specifically, she emphasized her purity and virginity as proof of her integrity and strength as a woman. She used these female ideals to evoke power and idealism and subverted submissive female characteristics to bring stability until a husband could join her to truly quell the discomfort.²⁵

In addition to her status as an unmarried woman, Mary also had to contend with the growing religious strife in England as she prepared to take the crown.

²² Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 156.

²³ John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstruous Regiment of Women* (1558, n.d.), <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-first-blast-of-the-trumpet-against-the-monstruous-regimen-of-women-1558>.

²⁴ Richards, “Mary Tudor as ‘Sole Quene’?,” 29.

²⁵ Richards, 27.

While she remained Catholic, her faith was constantly tested at every age. This is evident in the multitude of letters and court documents that reflect her faith before and during her reign. In 1536, she wrote the aforementioned letter to her father, Henry VIII, accepting him as head of the Church of England and resigning herself to the public acceptance of this faith.²⁶ Mary wrote this letter in the aftermath of her own mother's death, and Henry VIII had prevented contact between mother and daughter for two years before Catherine died. In Henry's eyes, Catherine was radicalizing Mary towards Catholicism, though this has been disputed.²⁷ Mary remained submissive and isolated in this sense until Henry's death in 1547, at which point her nine-year-old half-brother took the throne. While the religious persecution continued, the circumstances had changed. First, Edward, at nine, was no Henry VIII, and even within his own court, there were disputes about the extent to which Edwards would be changing his father's church.²⁸ While Edward tried to force his sister's submissiveness in the way Henry did, the tables had turned. Mary was no longer young and impressionable, and at thirty-three, she was not afraid to counter Edward's actions.

A report to Edward's Privy Council from 1551 exemplifies this shift. The report details the delivery of a message to Princess Mary, in which Edward restricted Mary's ability to hear mass alone. He now wanted full her conformity to Protestantism. According to the report, the message informed Mary "...that the King's Majesty's pleasure was we should also give straight charge to her

²⁶ "Letter of Princess Mary to King Henry VIII, 1536."

²⁷ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 341.

²⁸ Edwards, "Struggling with the Younger Brother, 1547–1553," 69.

chaplains, that none of them [should be] present to say any Mass, or other divine service.” In response, Mary replied, “when the king’s Majesty, said she, shall come to *such* years that he may be able to judge things himself, his Majesty shall find me ready to obey his orders in religion: but now in these years, although the good sweet king have more knowledge than any other of his years, yet is it not possible that he can be a judge in these things.”²⁹ With this quote, Mary challenged her brother’s authority based on his age, while also changing her own narrative from the submissive princess of 1536 to a strong, matured woman of 1551. No longer did she fear Edward’s threats to take away her priests or restrict her ability to hear mass. While Edward enforced Mary’s isolation until his death in 1553, her matured attitude towards him represented a drastic shift from the powerless demeanor she had towards her father.

Her status as an unmarried Catholic created challenges for Mary, especially as a woman and most especially as a woman in power. Not only did she break norms by remaining unmarried in her thirties, but as a woman destined for inevitable political power, she also had to contend with a history of religious strife in her country. Even though Elizabeth’s historic reign overshadows Mary’s role as queen in historiography, the cultural implications of Mary becoming queen are not to be understated. Mary’s ability to overcome marital delay and religious discrimination to eventually become the first queen regnant of England allow us to understand the significance of her novel position. At a time of intensely rigid

²⁹ “Report to the Privy Council of the Delivery of Their Message to Princess Mary,” August 29, 1551, SP10/13/35, f.71r-71v, The National Archives, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/the-english-reformation-c1527-1590/mary-writes-to-edward-vi/>.

gender roles, she both voluntarily and involuntarily lived her life in opposition to these roles.

Consequences of an Unpopular Marriage

At the age of thirty-eight, several months after her coronation in 1554, diplomats finally completed a marriage agreement between Mary I, Queen of England, and Philip II of Spain.³⁰ However, given the fear of instability that accompanied a foreign king, the English public did not support this marriage. According to Sarah Duncan, a queenly role was considered to be second to the role and power of the king. The public considered a queen to be a foil to a king's strength and power, and a queen countered the strength of injustice with acts of mercy and clemency.³¹ The English public feared that the English queen would be far less impactful and involved than the new Spanish king. Even though Mary was an English queen in her own right, tension arose due to confusion and misunderstanding about how her claim to the throne would interact with the traditionally gendered roles of political power for English monarchs.³²

Mary's marital tensions paralleled with and diverged from Catherine's experience as a foreign ruler. Both marriages involved Spanish and English individuals and resulted in inevitable tension. Coming from Spain, Catherine was in a very similar position as Philip. But, while her journey to the English throne

³⁰ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 212.

³¹ Sarah Duncan, "Queens' Mercy during the Reigns of Mary I and Elizabeth I," in *Queens and Power in Medieval and Early Modern England* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska, 2009), 33.

³² Duncan, 37.

was not without troubles, she was not considered to be a threat based on her home country – in fact, she was an asset.³³ In opposition, Philip, as a Spanish prince, represented many different manifestations of gendered and geopolitical unrest within England and greater Europe at the time, and his arrival brought tensions to light in a way that Catherine’s arrival did not because of her gender.

This discomfort with a foreign leader reached its apex with the uprising known as the Wyatt Rebellion, which occurred as Philip made his way to England.³⁴ According to a letter from royal aristocrat Sir Hugh Pollard to Mary I in 1554, “a traitorous conspiracy against our person and state royal, have of late, and still do, maliciously publish many false rumors of the coming of the high and mighty prince, our dearest cousin the prince of Spain...”³⁵ Sir Pollard assured Mary that “...the great number of our good subjects of that our county of Devon have shewed themselves well willing to obey and serve us...” but a following letter reported, “the Duke of Suffolk, and his brethren...forgetting their truth and duty of allegiance which they owe to God and us...revolted, and maliciously conspired together to stir our people and subjects most unnaturally to rebel against us...for the restitution of the true Catholic Christian religion.”³⁶ The Duke of Suffolk, alongside loyal men, attempted to incite revolt against Mary’s future

³³ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 47.

³⁴ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 199.

³⁵ Mary Anne Everett Green, ed., “Letter CXXXI: Sir Hugh Pollard and Others to Mary I, 1554,” in *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain: From the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary* (H. Colburn, 1846), 285–87.

³⁶ Mary Anne Everett Green, ed., “Letter CXXXIII: Nobility of England to Mary I, 1554,” in *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain: From the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary* (H. Colburn, 1846), 287–89.

husband Philip and the Catholic loyalties of the throne, in favor of a Protestant future. The unrest at the thought of a female ruler, a Catholic monarchy, and a foreign king led a member of the aristocracy to drastic action, proof of the sincerity of this fear.

In the negotiations between Mary and Philip, it is important to note that the marriage actually favored the English, similar to the ways in which Catherine's marriage also had favored the English. Catherine brought prestige and legitimacy to the Tudor line, as mentioned earlier, and solidified Spanish and English relations. In Mary's marriage, Mary and Philip's future children had every right to both the Spanish and English crown, but if Mary died childless before Philip, Philip would have no right to the English crown and would step down as England's king after Mary's death.³⁷ Thus, this Wyatt Rebellion was not a response to actual military or geopolitical threat, but to the gendered idea of that threat, as perpetuated by Mary's unique state as queen regnant, and her commitment to Catholicism.

Despite this uprising, Mary's advisors encouraged her to continue with marital preparations, writing a joint letter that stated, "...to the intent our good subjects shall fully understand upon how false a ground the said traitors build, and how honorably we have concluded to marry with the said prince, we send until you the articles of our said convention of marriage."³⁸ In response to the uprising, the Duke of Sussex encouraged Mary to come to the region of unrest, as he wrote her, "We do therefore charge and require you, as you tender the surety of our

³⁷ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 121.

³⁸ Green, "Letter CXXXIII: Nobility of England to Mary I, 1554."

person, and the preservation of this your native country, that, raising all forces of able men...you do with the same, in warlike manner, repair towards us with all possible speed.”³⁹ Mary visited Suffolk to symbolically quell the unrest, and she made plans to deliver one of the most powerful and important public speeches of her reign.

This speech, commonly referred to as the “Guildhall Speech,” was given in direct response to the unrest concerning her choice of husband, as well as her status as an unmarried but powerful woman. It represented the epitome of the direct opposition between Mary’s roles as wife, mother, and queen. In opening the speech, she began forcefully, with the statement, “I am the right and true inheritor to the crown of this realm of England; I not only take all Christendom to witness, but also your acts of parliament confirming the same.” She established her power within the male-dominated tradition and governmental system of England. Shortly after this statement, she continued, “I am your queen, to whom at my coronation...I was wedded to the realm and to the laws of the same.”⁴⁰ In contrast to her previous statement, she evoked her power through strictly female roles and terms, making her role as queen analogous to her role as a wife to the nation. With this, she placed herself in a lesser position of power, given the secondary role of a woman within a marriage. She used this speech to establish her power in both

³⁹ Mary Anne Everett Green, ed., “Letter CXXXIV: Earl of Sussex to Mary I, 1554,” in *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain: From the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary* (H. Colburn, 1846), 289–190.

⁴⁰ “Queen Mary I’s Speech at the Guildhall,” English History, February 9, 2015, <https://englishhistory.net/tudor/queen-mary-1-speech-at-the-guildhall/>.

male and female contexts, in order to quell unrest concerning a female ruler, while simultaneously defending her position as one.⁴¹

Mary's dichotomous strategy continued later in the speech, as she recognized and discussed her status as a childless woman. She used this status as both a strength and future hope for the country. Specifically, she stated "For God I thank him...I have hitherto lived a virgin, and doubting nothing but with God's grace shall as well be able so to live still." These statements, and several following, emphasized how this marriage to Philip was not one based on a desire for sexual intercourse – perhaps referencing her father's infamous marital plights. She evoked the strength of the ideal Catholic woman, as well as the power of purity, virginity, and the Virgin Mary. Several sentences later, she referenced her future and possibility of motherhood with the statement, "if...it might please God that I might leave some fruit of my body behind me to be your governor, I trust you would not only rejoice there at, but also I know it would be to your great comfort."⁴² With this sentence, she attempted to subdue the aforementioned fears of instability as a result of female rule. She also evoked the comforting power of a traditional female role of mother .

Cristy Beemer supports this analysis by further deconstructing specific syntax and vocabulary in the Guildhall Speech. Beemer focuses on Mary's use of "apophasis," a rhetorical device that employs irony to "deny what is actually

⁴¹ "Queen Mary I's Speech at the Guildhall."

⁴² "Queen Mary I's Speech at the Guildhall."

affirmed.”⁴³ According to Beemer, Mary “pretends to cede to societal conventions of women’s behavior while breaking them.”⁴⁴ As discussed above, Mary avoided referring to herself as a submissive spouse and instead referred to the coronation as a marriage ceremony, thereby evoking traditional understandings of marriage without having to take on an overtly subservient role. Later in her speech, Mary mentioned her childbearing and future children by using the word “progeny,” which was a term generally used to refer to a king’s heirs and offspring. With this term, she indicated that her fertility was as important as a male ruler’s ability to have children.⁴⁵ In this speech, Mary countered the restrictions of her own gender roles while simultaneously empowering herself with both traditional and nontraditional metaphors of male and female power.

Despite the challenge of balance that Mary endured, she and Philip continued into courtship in 1554 as he landed in England and made his way to London. In a letter Mary wrote to Philip, she continued the arranged negotiations, writing, “Although you have not privately written to me since our alliance has been negotiated, so it is that, feeling myself so much obliged by the sincere and true affection which you bear me, which you have as much confirmed by deeds...I could not omit signifying to you my good wishes.”⁴⁶ Later the same

⁴³ Cristy Beemer, “The Female Monarchy: A Rhetorical Strategy of Early Modern Rule,” *Rhetoric Review* 30, no. 3 (2011): 259, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23064026>.

⁴⁴ Beemer, 259.

⁴⁵ Beemer, 263, 265.

⁴⁶ Mary Anne Everett Green, ed., “Letter CXXXV: Queen Mary I to King Philip,” in *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain: From the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary* (H. Colburn, 1846), 290–91.

year, as Philip finally ended his journey from Spain and across England to London, Philip and Mary married on July 25, 1554. The symbolism of their marriage ceremony and Philip's later coronation continued to represent a balancing act on Mary's part. This strategy ensured the appearance of a gendered equilibrium while establishing Mary as England's true ruler.

This balance led to some symbolic contradictions within the ceremonies. During the wedding, Philip sat to the left of Mary, in the seat of the consort, while Mary sat to the right, in the seat of dominance and the traditional seat of the king. While Spanish sources attributed this to the fact that Philip had not actually been crowned yet, English sources indicated that this seating emphasized English dominance.⁴⁷ At the same time, both Philip and Mary were dressed in white and gold at the ceremony, and, as Alexander Samson describes, "In this sense, his wedding outfit transformed Philip symbolically into a queen consort. This was paradoxically, then, a wedding of two queens, two monarchs whose visual identification with each other may also have been intended to suggest a kind of equality between them in terms of power."⁴⁸ Another symbolic difference involved the scale of the marriage ceremony, as it compared to the coronation. While traditionally, the coronation was a much larger affair, in this instance, both the marriage and coronation were celebrated with extravagance and gusto, and Mary sat in the seat of traditional power on both occasions.⁴⁹ However, after both

⁴⁷ Alexander Samson, "Changing Places: The Marriage and Royal Entry of Philip, Prince of Austria, and Mary Tudor, July-August 1554," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 36, no. 3 (October 1, 2005): 762, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20477489>.

⁴⁸ Samson, 765.

⁴⁹ Richards, "Mary Tudor as 'Sole Quene'?" 910.

the marriage and the coronation, Philip began to engage with traditionally king-ly symbols. Publications proclaimed on behalf of the “King and Queen’s most excellent Majesties,” and he was seated to the right in official court occasions.⁵⁰

For all of the conflict and concern surrounding their marriage, Mary and Philip were only married for five years and only lived together in England for about a year and a half. While Philip tried to integrate into English court, he was alienated and suffered from the English aristocracy’s xenophobic attitudes – proof that the efforts to quell fears about a foreign king had failed. These attitudes extended to attendants and his personal court, all of whom had traveled with him from Spain. These individuals recorded their experiences for the Spanish court, writing, “The English hate us Spaniards, which comes out in violent quarrels between them and us, and not a day passes without some knife-work in the palace between the two nations.”⁵¹ Another attendant wrote, “not a single Spanish gentleman has fallen in love with one of the [English aristocracy] nor takes any interest in them, and their feelings for us are the same. They are not the sort of women for whom Spaniards feel inclined to take much trouble or spend their substance...”⁵² These quotes exemplify a strong difference between Mary and Catherine’s marriages. For Catherine, the first years of her marriage represented a

⁵⁰ Richards, 914.

⁵¹ Royall Tyler, “A Spanish Gentleman Who Accompanied Philip to England, Also Addressed to a Gentleman of Salamanca.,” in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 13, 1554-1558*, vol. 13 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1954), 72, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol13/pp55-71>.

⁵² Royall Tyler, “An Account of the Negotiations at Brussels of Lord Paget and the Other English Envoys,” in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 13, 1554-1558*, vol. 13 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1954), 101, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol13/pp76-95>.

sanctuary and the solution to years of financial woes, loneliness, and abandonment in a foreign country. But for Mary, her marriage created conflict and strife among all players, both foreign and domestic. Marriage did not save or empower Mary, given the drama of the public backlash, the Wyatt Rebellion, and Philip's own reluctance to engage in England. Mary's position of power, compounded by her gender, created unimagined obstacles for her marital status, and marriage and power competed against each other in her life to create an immense challenge. Diverging from the traditional role of her mother, Mary's power suffered as a result of her marriage.

Challenges of Childbearing

The discussion surrounding Mary's own body remained constant throughout her life in the public eye and intensified during the later part of her life. Numerous court letters examined, analyzed, and criticized her body, all in the name of determining a pregnancy. In 1554, a Spanish court attendant wrote, "When younger she was considered, not merely tolerably handsome, but of beauty exceeding mediocrity. At present... The Queen, however, is not at all beautiful... she is of white complexion and fair, and has no eyebrows. She is a perfect saint, and dresses badly."⁵³ Given the aforementioned xenophobia and hostile court reaction, Spanish descriptions and discussions about her body and

⁵³ Royall Tyler, "An Account of What Has Befallen in the Realm of England since Prince Philip Landed There, Written by a Gentleman Who Accompanied the Prince to England and Was Present at All the Ceremonies, in the Shape of a Letter to Another Gentleman, a Friend at Salamanca.," in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 13, 1554-1558*, vol. 13 (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1954), 37, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol13/pp30-39>.

potential pregnancies continued to portray negative opinions about Mary and her ability to bear children. Intense discussion about the image and scrutiny of her body only continued as pregnancy rumors swirled.

The impact of a child for Mary and Philip cannot be understated. An heir would have solidified the continued succession of the Tudor line and ensured Philip's legitimacy and power within England, bringing more stability to a volatile situation. Furthermore, this child would have been both the monarch of England and the monarch of Spain, allowing for extensive, continental power over threatening countries like France.⁵⁴ This stability did not become reality. Mary and Philip remained childless their entire marriage, a fact made evident in the multitude of letters discussing Mary's fertility. These letters tracked the timeline of possible pregnancies and extrapolated about the geopolitical consequences of those pregnancies.

These geopolitical consequences included the impact a child between Mary and Philip could have had on the Catholic Church. Count Giovan Tommaso Langosco di Stroppiana, who wrote to a Spanish Bishop concerning Mary and a possible pregnancy, authored the first of these letters, written on September 19, 1554. He wrote, "The Queen is with child. I have personal reason to believe it, as I have noticed her feeling sick...besides which her doctor has given me positive assurance...for the peace and good of the kingdom it was ardently to be hoped that she might bear children to establish and make safe the success of the undertaking to which she has set her hand, namely, the restoration of the Catholic

⁵⁴ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 219.

religion and faith.”⁵⁵ Even in this early mention of a pregnancy, Count di Stroppiana emphasized the geopolitical importance of a future heir, especially as that importance related to Catholicism. According to this letter, an heir would further stabilize Catholic Restoration, and the religious context of the pregnancy discussion continued into the following months. In October of 1554, courtier Ruy Gomez de Silva wrote to an attendant in the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, the cousin of Mary I and the father of Philip II. In this letter, de Silva informed the recipient, “The latest news I have to write to you is that, as his Highness is writing to the Emperor, the Queen is with child. May it please God to grant her the issue that is so sorely needed to set affairs here to rights and make everything smooth.”⁵⁶ Again, the author referenced God’s work and the implicit understanding of the potential impact of this pregnancy on Catholicism.

As Mary’s supposed pregnancy continued, scrutiny and speculation became more intense. In November of 1554, another courtier wrote a letter to Charles V, stating, “The Queen is in excellent health and three months with child. She is fatter and has a better colour than when she was married, a sign that she is happier...the King also is, and his contentment will become greater as time goes on, for things are greatly improving...”⁵⁷ While reports continued in this fashion

⁵⁵ Royall Tyler, ed., “Count Giovan Tommaso Langosco Di Stroppiana to the Bishop of Arras,” in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 13, 1554-1558*, vol. 13 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1954), 61, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol13/pp39-55>.

⁵⁶ Royall Tyler, “Ruy Gómez to Francisco de Eraso,” in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 13, 1554-1558*, vol. 13 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1954), 71, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol13/pp55-71>.

⁵⁷ Royall Tyler, “Luis Vanegas to the King of the Romans,” in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 13, 1554-1558*, vol. 13 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary

throughout the beginning of 1555, conflicting statements began around May of that year, with a letter from courtier Simon Renard to Charles V, on May 6. He wrote, “A few days ago there was a rumour that the Queen had given birth to a child, whereupon the people of London and several other places held great rejoicings, with bonfires, true evidence of joy.”⁵⁸ Six weeks later, another letter from Renard to Charles V read, “Everything in this kingdom depends on the Queen's safe deliverance. Her doctors and ladies have proved to be out in their calculations by about two months... If God is pleased to grant her a child, things will take a turn for the better. If not, I foresee trouble on so great a scale that the pen can hardly set it down.”⁵⁹ Again, courtiers and officials outside of the marriage emphasized the religious impact of an heir, as well as the grave importance concerning the continuation of the Tudor line.

While Catherine’s pregnancy rumors, discussions, and hardships lasted more than a decade, Mary’s struggle lasted less than a year. By September of 1555, discussion of the Queen’s pregnancy dissipated. As Charles V wrote to a Spanish courtier, “The Queen was well also, although there is no longer any hope

Office, 1954), 99, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol13/pp76-95>.

⁵⁸ Royall Tyler, “Simon Renard to the Emperor, May 6, 1555,” in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 13, 1554-1558*, vol. 13 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1954), 214, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol13/pp39-55>.

⁵⁹ Royall Tyler, “Simon Renard to the Emperor, June 24, 1555,” in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 13, 1554-1558*, vol. 13 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1954), 216, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol13/pp39-55>.

of her being with child.”⁶⁰ Mary’s pregnancy turned out to be a phantom pregnancy, and she and Philip remained childless for the rest of her time on the throne.⁶¹

While the discussion concerning Mary’s pregnancy was intense, it differed from the overwhelming and catastrophic context in which courtiers discussed Catherine’s pregnancies. A final quote concerning Mary’s struggles exemplifies this difference. Written by a Spanish aristocrat to Charles V in September of 1555, it read, “As there is no hope of fruit from the English marriage, discussions are going on everywhere about the consort to be given to Elizabeth, who is and will continue to be lawful heir unless the King and Queen have issue.”⁶² This quote discusses the very situation that prompted Catherine’s entire downfall: the birth of a son. Thirty years later, the ascendance of another woman was a simple and neatly accepted solution to Mary’s infertility. Furthermore, given the age at which she married, there were no continued efforts to become pregnant again and again, unlike what Catherine had to experience.⁶³ While Mary’s ability to bear children was important, and her infertility disadvantaged her, her existence as a queen regnant made the idea of another queen regnant less scary, an idea proven

⁶⁰ Royall Tyler, “The Emperor to Don Luis Sarmiento de Mendoza, September 14, 1555,” in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 13, 1554-1558*, vol. 13 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1954), 245, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol13/pp55-71>.

⁶¹ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 302.

⁶² Royall Tyler, “Licentiate Gamiz to the King of the Romans,” in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 13, 1554-1558*, vol. 13 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1954), 249, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol13/pp55-71>.

⁶³ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 223.

by the general acceptance and eventual celebration of Elizabeth's reign after Mary's death.

Motherhood and childbearing interacted with Mary's power in a unique way. For Catherine, the entire focus of her time in England, her role as queen, and her own power and stability depended on childbearing. For Mary, her power was officially protected and ordained. Though she was childless, she remained Queen of England in her own right. While an unpopular marriage and religious strife threatened this power, she nonetheless remained queen – she could retain power in a way her mother could not. Another difference involves the timelines of infertility. Catherine struggled for more than a decade, but Mary was only thought to be pregnant once, as described above, from September of 1554 to the summer of 1555. After the false pregnancy, Philip left England for nearly two years on military campaigns, and Mary no longer had the chance to try to become pregnant.⁶⁴ Overall, pregnancy did not impact Mary's life and power as extensively as it impacted Catherine's experience as queen.

This does not mean infertility had no effect on Mary's queenship. While infertility detracted from Catherine's power, it represented an unattainable facet of power for Mary. Childbearing would have solidly established Philip and Mary as English monarchs together and stabilized Mary's Catholic reforms. As Samson notes, "Mary, however, had remained both king and queen whether willingly or not, perhaps largely because of her inability to occupy that most important of

⁶⁴ Loades, 228.

royal roles, producer of heirs.”⁶⁵ As a woman, Mary could not be the male ideal of power, but she also could not engage with idealized female power. As a married woman without a child, she could no longer emulate a virgin queen, as insinuated by her Guildhall Speech, nor could she represent a fertile, mother-figure queen, as her own mother attempted to be. She had neither facet of power to tap into, and while her ascension protected her status as queen regnant, infertility emphasized the challenge that political power imposed on her womanhood.

Impact as a Catholic Monarch

Mary’s historical prominence focuses most strongly on the Catholic reforms enacted under her reign. While the portrayals of these reforms are generally negative, she did attempt an overarching and empowering Catholic restoration – a gargantuan task, given the Protestant reforms enacted by the previous two kings and the inevitable public turmoil this restoration caused.⁶⁶ Beginning in 1553, as she was preparing to take the throne shortly after the death of Edward, Mary commanded the Privy Council, “First to the intent god from whom all goodness descends may be truly preached & reverently served and obeyed, some grave men well learned in the scriptures and of good life and conversation are to be chosen to set an order in matters of religion.”⁶⁷ With this statement, she reestablished Catholic leadership within England, tasking higher-

⁶⁵ Samson, “Changing Places,” 782.

⁶⁶ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 158.

⁶⁷ “Memoranda of Council Business,” August 4, 1553, SP11/1/5, f.8r-9r, The National Archives, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/the-english-reformation-c1527-1590/mary-tudors-priorities/>.

ranking Catholic loyalists to begin the Restoration. She continued, “all such superfluous men charged as [Protestant] have of late crept in are to be taken away.”⁶⁸ Not only did she attempt to restore Catholicism, but she also punished those who remained loyally Protestant. These punishments, which led to her unfortunate nicknames such as “Bloody Mary,” overshadowed important and impactful reforms, affecting her political power and challenging her role as a woman.⁶⁹

After the initial statements to the Privy Council, Mary’s religious agenda continued, and by 1554, her government achieved a general restoration to the national Catholic Church practiced by Henry VIII and Catherine before their divorce.⁷⁰ In another Privy Council meeting, Mary discussed potential strategies to mediate public backlash. Namely, “Touching punishment of heretics me thinketh it ought to be done without rashness...especially within London, I would wish none to be burnt without some of the councils presences... there is over much want of good preachers, and such as should with their doctrine overcome the evil diligence of the abused preachers in the time of the schism.”⁷¹ In Mary’s

⁶⁸ “Memoranda of Council Business.”

⁶⁹ See: “A Dual Monarchy, 1554-1555” by John Edwards, “A Year of Two Coups” by John Edwards, “Battle for England’s Soul, 1553-1558” by John Edwards, “Struggling with the Younger Brother, 1537-1553” by John Edwards, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* by Christopher Haigh, “Reading, Work, and Catholic Women’s Biographies” by Frances Dolan, “Survival of the Catholic Faith in the Sixteenth Century,” by Henry Lucas

⁷⁰ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 236.

⁷¹ “Directions from Mary Tudor to the Privy Council,” December 1554, SP14/190, f.133r-133v, The National Archives, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/the-english-reformation-c1527-1590/mary-directs-council/>.

eyes, the violence was unwanted but necessary, and her mention of conversion and restoration via priests and dedicated members of the church, instead of violence, indicates the sincerity of this agenda for her.

Mary's Catholicism remained sincere throughout her reign, and her commitment to restoration encompassed more than violence and the involvement of loyal priests. Specifically, her council established new colleges and monastic institutions, trained new priests, and made efforts to return exiled and banished individuals who would not convert under Henry VIII and Edward VI. Her government also established an extensive propaganda campaign. As noted by John Edwards, large printing and propaganda efforts attempted to counteract the violent Protestant rhetoric surrounding the reforms. Furthermore, Mary focused efforts on educational institutions, attempting to cleanse these universities and make them fit for traditional Catholic teachings.⁷² According to Edwards, the violence that accompanied Mary's interactions with Catholicism did not represent the main focus of her restoration attempts, and more subtle and nonviolent strategies remained the most effective.⁷³

Historians remember the violence as the most prominent restoration strategy conducted by Mary and her government. However, this violence metamorphosizes when viewed under a gendered lens. As Duncan has emphasized, historical arguments slander Mary for a lack of mercy towards Protestants, and the public press of the time referred to her as both "Bloody

⁷² John Edwards, "Battle for England's Soul, 1553–1558," in *Mary I* (Yale University Press, 2011), 246, 250, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1nq95m.15. See also: "Reading, Work, and Catholic Women's Biographies" by Frances E. Dolan

⁷³ Edwards, "A Year of Two Coups, 1553," 264.

Mary” and “Jezebel.” However, this violence resulted from Mary’s attempts against appearing too merciful, which would show weakness and threaten the already unstable English crown in the eyes of the public.⁷⁴ Furthermore, it is important to note that “Bloody Mary” was a nickname bestowed upon the queen by aforementioned John Knox, who already protested Mary as a queen and any form of Catholic rule. From this perspective, “Bloody Mary” was based in anti-Catholic propaganda.⁷⁵

Despite the misunderstandings of this moniker, it is undeniable that Mary did sanction violence as part of her attempts to restore the Catholic Church to power in England. Specifically, the burning of nearly three hundred Protestants between 1554 and 1558 cemented her role as “Bloody Mary”.⁷⁶ Generally concentrated in the southern part of the country near London, these burnings, alongside imprisonments and threats against numerous others, defined Protestants as a distinctly persecuted minority. This distinction reinforced their sense of what Loades refers to as “eschatological purpose,” or their understanding that the Lord tried and tested their religious commitment to Protestantism through this persecution. As a result, Mary’s direct persecution generally reinforced Protestant commitment. Alongside individual persecution, Mary encouraged small-scale battles against iconoclasm and dedicated resources to suppressing heretical writings and books. Overall, according to Loades, her restoration attempts relied too heavily on “judicial weapons of suppression and punishment” and state-

⁷⁴ Duncan, “Queens’ Mercy during the Reigns of Mary I and Elizabeth I,” 35.

⁷⁵ Edwards, “Battle for England’s Soul, 1553–1558,” 226.

⁷⁶ Duncan, “Queens’ Mercy during the Reigns of Mary I and Elizabeth I,” 229.

sanctioned violence, embodying male symbols of strength. These strategies countered the calm piety of an ideal Catholic woman. This reliance weakened her arguments for Catholic restoration and exacerbated decades of religious tension. At the end of her reign, the Catholic Church was neither fully restored nor fully stable.⁷⁷

In the eyes of Catholic supporters at the time, Mary's rise to the throne represented a true miracle. Despite thirty-eight years of adversity, she sat on the throne as a Catholic queen with a legitimate claim and the power to re-establish Catholic dominance in England.⁷⁸ However, her strong actions polarized public opinion and exacerbated the conflict between her womanhood (an ideal she was already unable to achieve) and her royal power. Even though she had the support of English Catholics for her reforms, a large portion of the country stood against her because of her gender, her religion, or both. While there is no doubt that her Catholic convictions were sincere, Mary used this Catholicism as a battering ram, while her mother had used it as a safety net. Both were challenged by outside forces, but with Mary's more established political power, she was better able to strike back against the persecution, potentially to her detriment. As a queen regnant, she had more power and ability to fight for her faith, but wielding that kind of power directly threatened those not comfortable with a woman on the throne. Thus, history emblazoned her as "Bloody Mary." Finally, while Catherine tried to play the role of "spiritual mother" for English Catholics, Mary tried to use

⁷⁷ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 333, 336, 341, 435.

⁷⁸ Loades, 152.

her political power to force a re-legitimization of Catholicism. Both strategies were ultimately unsuccessful.

Conclusion

Mary's experience as a woman, a royal figure, and a Catholic differed in some regard from her mother, Catherine of Aragon. The root of these differences centered on the inherent conflict between established power and gendered expectations. While Mary's road to a traditional queenship was long and arduous, English law ultimately protected her power. Thus, Catherine's womanhood was a potential source of power, if she could have achieve gendered ideals, but Mary's established position as queen was her source of power, clashing with gendered-based ideals. As mentioned above, Catherine did not have enough power, while Mary had almost too much. Disempowerment played more into gendered ideals than did empowerment, and Catherine died leaving a more favorable impression than Mary.

Mary's marriage was the most destructive aspect of her attempts to balance womanhood with political power. Specifically, her position as queen created a unique situation in which she had to fight a hyper-masculine and hyper-powerful portrayal, while still assuring her country that she would not hand over the power of England to a foreigner. The impact of Spanish-English tensions cannot be understated, and primary sources document how tenuous this relationship was. Foreign tension plagued both Catherine and Mary, potentially because they could not successfully manipulate geopolitical decisions while

maintaining traditional female roles. Furthermore, Mary could have gained public support and aided in countrywide unity if she had been able to produce heirs, but the idea of childbearing did not affect her power in the same way it affected her mother's. The expectations and modernizations of the time reduced the intense pressure for an heir. While childbearing completely controlled her mother's life, Mary did not suffer under the same weight. In examining the effect of Catholicism on her power as a female ruler, we find a similar situation to marital effects – it was not that gender alone affected public perception, but it was the combination of gender and power that created a violent and negative perception of Mary's attempts at Catholic restoration. For Catherine, powerlessness compounded her need to accomplish gender expectations. For Mary, her access to power made that accomplishment even harder.

Conclusion: Mother and Daughter

Catherine of Aragon and Mary I of England represent the direct conflict of gender roles and power in Tudor England. Their paths and struggles were not identical, but their stories reflect the isolating and challenging ways in which gender roles interacted with their positions of influence as royal women. While Catherine's struggles came from an unstable and inconsistent source of power, Mary's issues arose due to a direct juxtaposition of power and gender. Both situations left the women powerless against the impact of outside forces and foreign conflict and restricted their autonomy. The parallels between their experiences with power and gender expectations of the time, like marriage, childbearing, and piety, emphasize the lack of control they had over their opportunities for influence and stability.

Historical analysis has cast aside Catherine and Mary as victims in their own narratives. I do not attempt to argue that they were not victims, but it is vital to recognize that there is more to the story of their lives than public divorces and rumored pregnancies. They had rich histories and contexts, and they both achieved success in their time on the throne. Catherine signed treaties for Henry while he was in France, and Mary ruled as the first independent queen regnant. Unfortunately, these successes could not overcome the conflicts between gender and power that they encountered. For Catherine, the instability she encountered reduced her power, while Mary had to juggle gendered expectations and sanctified power. As I have argued throughout this thesis, Catherine did not have

enough power, while Mary had too much. Had they been non-royals, they could have had several different options to avoid such public conflicts. Namely, with such wealth and piety, either could have entered an abbey and lived as a nun. However, the very existence of public pressures made their situations even worse. These women were stuck in a cycle of gender constructs that eliminated defensive strategies and resolutions.

Catherine of Aragon: Power Sourced from Gender Ideals

In her time on the throne, Catherine encountered a multitude of unprecedented challenges to her power and influence, as a woman and as a ruler. However, due to the gender expectations she tried to fulfill, her role as a woman exacerbated these unfortunate circumstances. The inconsistency and fragility of these female ideals created an underlying instability in the source of her power, leaving her ill equipped to defend herself against internal, external, and public pressures. Catherine's marriage to Henry VIII perfectly exemplifies the fickle and unstable nature of power garnered from marriage. In 1499, she was a wealthy, influential, historic, pious Spanish princess arriving in England for a marriage that greatly benefitted the Tudor dynasty and solidified relations between England and Spain.¹ Shortly after arriving, she was thrust into turmoil and uncertainty with the death of Arthur and spent the next ten years in England at the mercy of Henry VII, with little help from the foreign bodies that sent her to England.² With her

¹ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 27.

² Bergenroth, "Letter of Katharine of Aragon to Her Father, King Ferdinand II, 1505."

stability and power based in the ideal of marriage, any threat or removal of that marriage created compounding instability and powerlessness. The basis of her influence in England no longer existed; therefore, neither could any of her power. This crisis momentarily resolved itself with her marriage to Henry VIII in 1509, and she was able to regain her status as the ideal wife and leader, even when Henry was away and she ruled in his place.³ During this time, marriage and feminine ideals played to her advantage, as she finally cultivated a life in England.⁴

But once again, power and stability based in marriage left her unprepared for the dire situation that arose once her infertility became apparent. Marriage and childbearing encompassed her entire purpose, as ordained by God.⁵ By grounding her stability in marriage, she inherently grounded that stability in having a child. Once that became unattainable, she lost the opportunities and influence she once had. Each of these ideals compounded the consequences of each other, and the impact and power of marriage was decimated by infertility. By 1526, Catherine was no longer expected to bear children, and without this expectation or possibility, her marriage began its final decline.⁶ One she was unable to fulfill the social and religious expectations of womanhood, there was little ground on which she could justify her position of power.

³ Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 124.

⁴ Brewer, "Grants in June, 1513."

⁵ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*, 121.

⁶ Bernard, "'The King's Great Matter,'" 42.

Catherine's religious piety remained her final chance at stability, but actions outside of her control, like those of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, threatened the very existence of Catholicism in England. Without other facets of power and influence to rely upon, Catherine lost another battle. While infertility weakened her image of "spiritual mother," external forces had an even larger impact on the religious turmoil of the time. Furthermore, her Catholic Spanish ties only worked against her as the two countries drifted further and further apart.⁷ Her loss of influence due to the decline of Catholicism was not a direct result of unstable gendered ideals, but the concepts exacerbated each other and put Catherine in an increasingly powerless position.

Catherine's decline from power represents the instability of centering influence on gendered ideals. While marriage momentarily provided her with power and a position of importance, in which she thrived, this ideal could not stand up to external pressures or the domino effect of challenges to her marriage and fertility. Catherine's experience was a perfect storm of personal struggle, outside actors, geopolitical conflict, and an inflexible source of power. Her stability relied on unachievable ideals, which left her defenseless in the face of public pressures from her father Ferdinand, and Henry VIII himself. The issue was not that Catherine did not try to conform to female roles, but that she had few alternative opportunities for power once those female roles proved unattainable. Power and gender interacted in her life with a cruel nature and tragic results.

⁷ Hume, "Rodrigo Niño to the Emperor."

Mary I of England: The Conflict of Preordained Power

Source of power represented the main departure between Mary's experience and Catherine's experience. While Catherine had no choice but to derive power from the completion of gendered ideals, Mary had a more solidified and protected source of power, as she was a queen in her own right, and able to rule independently. Catherine and Mary both had recognition and influence due to powerful ancestors, but Mary had a stronger connection to England itself, and English law protected her position with a consistency that Catherine did not have.⁸ However, this protection did not make Mary's experience with power and gender any easier. Instead, her status as queen regnant thrust gendered conflicts to the forefront of public view. The pressures of being England's first female queen regnant forced Mary to confront the inherent contradictions between female ideals and public royal power. Even though she did not need to utilize gendered expectations to gain power, her reign also grappled with the conflict between power and gender roles. The two concepts aggravated each other.

Like her mother's marriage, Mary's marriage to Philip perfectly exemplifies this conflict. As a queen in her own right, her actions had more intense and far-reaching consequences. When her father married a Spanish royal princess, who benefitted England at the time, the English public lauded and celebrated the couple.⁹ When diplomats finalized Mary's marriage negotiations to Spanish royal prince, an entire county revolted, and royal members of the court

⁸ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 15.

⁹ Anglo, "The London Pageants for the Reception of Katharine of Aragon," 64.

mutinied.¹⁰ Such deep fear about the realities of a woman's place in a marriage directly conflicted with Mary's duties of leadership as queen regnant. Her speech at Guildhall underscores the conflict between the two forces in her life. Mary had to command power through ancestral references, vow her chastity to her country, and quell fears of foreign influence all in the same public appearance.¹¹ And while the speech is strong and powerful, she was ultimately unable to fully and publicly find a compromise between her power and her gender.

Her struggle continued after she and Philip married, as they tried to have a child. Once public opinion established and accepted her infertility, the balance between power and gender became even more unattainable, because she could no longer fulfill either ideal. Once she married, she was not the dominant ruler in the relationship, and the power transferred gradually to Philip. After marrying Philip, and with an inability to have children, she was neither an ideal ruler nor an ideal mother. She no longer could fulfill the expectations of a wife or a queen, and she quickly began to lose influence.¹² Social constructs that once worked against each other in her life were no longer even accessible. In this way, her experience was similar to her mother's because neither queen could depend on idealized femininity to protect them.

As Mary struggled with an unpopular marriage and infertility, she held fast to her Catholic faith and committed her reign to an English Catholic Restoration. While the financial and social repercussions of her attempts at

¹⁰ Green, "Letter CXXXIII: Nobility of England to Mary I, 1554."

¹¹ "Speech of Mary I, 1554 – The History of England," accessed December 2, 2019, <https://thehistoryofengland.co.uk/resource/speech-of-mary-i-1554/>.

¹² Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 275.

Restoration did have an affect on Catholic stability in England, they also produced historic backlash. Namely, her Restoration efforts created even more fractures in an already tense and complex environment. Given the unpopularity of her husband and the previous forty years of religious tension in England, such efforts created extra challenges and strife and cemented a public opinion swing against her.¹³ This is evident in the historic nickname she received – “Bloody Mary.” The nickname itself represents a misogynistic interpretation of Mary’s intentions behind the Catholic Restoration, but it exemplifies the extent to which this facet of power contradicted her gender ideals. Her actions were bold, targeted, and violent, characteristics that go directly against the idealized woman of the time period. Compounded by a loss of influence in her marriage and as a mother figure, her religious actions conflicted with the gendered ideals she strove to achieve.

Final Note: An Impact on Elizabeth I

Catherine and Mary’s difficulties undoubtedly affected the reign of the following Tudor royal, Elizabeth I. Arguably the most famous English monarch, and a timeless symbol of female power, Elizabeth ruled independently and unmarried on the English throne from 1558 to 1603 and reigned over a period of political stability, cultural growth, and a global expansion of English influence.¹⁴ I chose not to include Elizabeth I as a focus in the main body of my thesis because

¹³ Edwards, “Battle for England’s Soul, 1553–1558,” 233.

¹⁴ Mary Beth Rose, “The Gendering of Authority in the Public Speeches of Elizabeth I,” *PMLA* 115, no. 5 (2000): 1077, <https://doi.org/10.2307/463274>.

of the extensive existing literature concerning her interactions with gender ideals and power. However, Elizabeth did face the exact same issues between gender and power as Catherine and Mary, and I find the comparison between the three of them to be particularly poignant. Instead of trying to reconcile the two opposing concepts and expectations, as Catherine and Mary attempted to do, Elizabeth instead “traded off” between aspects of each construct. Instead of trying to fulfill both ideals, she selected aspects of each to connect her power to historical influence and gendered expectations.

Carole Levin explores this concept in her chapter “Elizabeth as a Sacred Monarch,” from her book *Heart and Stomach of a King*. Specifically, Elizabeth famously and publicly centered her image on her virginity, establishing herself as a Virgin Queen and emulating religious and social constructs of the idealized virginal woman. This image even extended to the geopolitical forces of England, as colonizers named “Virginia” for their virgin queen.¹⁵ Simultaneously, she emulated more masculine traditions of power. She dressed in lavish clothing and flaunted her wealth, ignoring the expectations of modesty and silence for women of the time.¹⁶ As the monarch of England, she was the head of the Church of England, established by her father, Henry VIII. The religious authority that this position provided countered the more demure concept of the “spiritual mother,” but Elizabeth also used this position to engage in more feminine ideals.

¹⁵ Carole Levin, “Elizabeth as Sacred Monarch,” in *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, 2nd ed., Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 16, <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/stable/j.ctt5hjkp7.6>.

¹⁶ Levin, 12.

Throughout her reign she provided a “healing touch,” a tradition in which the monarch could heal physical or spiritual ailments with a single touch. For Elizabeth, this referenced the feminine roles of caretaker and healer.¹⁷

There are few analyses of the extent to which these two previous queens influenced Elizabeth’s actions, but given the tumultuous years that Elizabeth lived through, one can consider the possibility of influence. In speeches to the public, Elizabeth used her hardships under her father and siblings’ reigns to her advantage, emphasizing how she gained wisdom and strength from the ordeals she faced.¹⁸ With her policy of religious tolerance, she avoided much of the religious strife that Catherine and Mary faced.¹⁹ Undoubtedly, Elizabeth navigated the conflicts between power and gender in a way that Catherine and Mary were unable to. However, to do so, she had to give up certain opportunities, like marriage and children. In terms of political power and historical esteem, Elizabeth was undoubtedly a success. But the power she gained came at a sacrifice of gendered opportunities. These differences between Catherine, Mary, and Elizabeth prove the fickle and dynamic relationship between feminine ideals and empowerment.

In reclaiming the narratives of women like Catherine and Mary, I want to show how certain women can make an impact, even if their successes are not include in their own historical narratives. Examining gender and power allows us

¹⁷ Levin, 16, 19.

¹⁸ Rose, “The Gendering of Authority in the Public Speeches of Elizabeth I,” 1080.

¹⁹ John Edwards, “Regime Change,” in *Mary I* (Yale University Press, 2011), 338, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1nq95m.18.

to consider the ways in which we have misconstrued the two concepts. I do not argue that gender is incompatible with power; rather, the rigid expectations placed women of this time inhibited women's abilities to engage in power, influence, wealth, and stability. It is easy to understand and appreciate Elizabeth I's contributions to English history, culture, and influence. But even when the successes of historical women were not so prominent, celebrated, or appreciated, they still lived and learned and deserve a narrative of their own. In "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," Scott writes, "...gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power...if significations of gender and power construct one another, how do things change?"²⁰ This quote encompasses Catherine and Mary's experience, as the gender roles they encountered acted as a sign of lesser power. In their lifetimes, they could not enact a change on the system of power and gender. But, by living their lives, and enduring the challenges they encountered, they allowed historians to identify the system itself, a contribution that cannot be understated. Even if they did not understand it at the time, Catherine and Mary forever impacted English history and women's history through their struggle for power.

²⁰ Rose, "The Gendering of Authority in the Public Speeches of Elizabeth I," 1067, 1073.

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