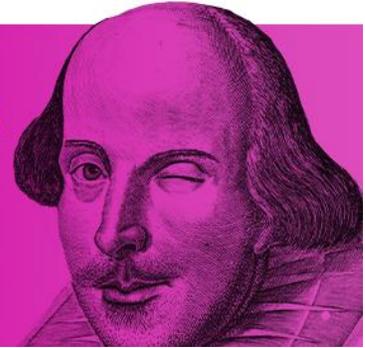


ASIDES



ASIDES 1.5, SIX, Queens of the Castle

Date: May 26, 2020

Featuring: Regina Buccola, Sara B.T. Thiel, Adrianna Hicks, Andrea Macasaet, Abby Mueller, Brittney Mack, Samantha Pauly, Anna Uzele

The Ladies in Waiting: Julia Schade (Assistant Music Director, Conductor, Keyboard); Kimi Hayes (Guitars); Stacy McMichael (Electric Bass); Sarah Allen (Drums)

Regina Buccola: Henry VIII had six wives.

And if that weren't astounding enough, he was married to the first one (at a time when we think of, you know, like very low life expectancy, *dragons*, etc.) — Catherine of Aragon — they were married for 24 years, and he went through the remaining five of his wives over the course of just *eleven* years, from 1536 until his death in 1547.

Sara B.T. Thiel: Hello and welcome back to ASIDES from Chicago Shakespeare Theater. I'm Sara B.T. Thiel, Public Humanities Manager at CST. In the final episode in our first season of ASIDES—CST Scholar-in-Residence Dr. Regina Buccola takes a closer look at the true stories of Henry VIII's six wives. This talk was recorded on May 21, 2019 as part of the Theater's annual Scholar Luncheon.

Gina Buccola is Professor of English and Chair of Humanities at Roosevelt University in Chicago, where she specializes in Shakespeare, non-Shakespearean early modern drama, and Women's and Gender Studies. When Gina was a PhD student at the University of Illinois, Chicago, she interned with the Education Department at Chicago Shakespeare, and has been a mainstay of CST adult education and teachers' professional development programs ever since.

So, without further ado, I'll turn it over to Gina.

RB: Three Catherines, two Annes, and one Jane—divorced, beheaded, died after childbirth, divorced, beheaded, and, finally, widowed! We were all, like, "Yes! She did it!" So the nominal sameness here—you know, same names—covers over a more significant sameness among these women, which is the fact that all but two of the six wives (numero uno, Catherine of Aragon, and number four, Anne of Cleves) were local girls. Extremely local, actually. Like, as in: they worked for whichever wife they were in a lady in waiting for, usually (with one exception). They were at his own court. So, at a time when most heads of state of foreign, you know, countries, were making other foreign alliances elsewhere for political and diplomatic reasons, Henry did not do that. He practiced this very interesting and curious isolationist strategy (as we know) in some of his religio-politics. But also he did it in the context of the people he chose as spouses. His repeated marriages to women from among his own coterie, therefore, constituted something that was remarked upon by other heads of state, just as much as his frequent changing of wives was.

The political context in which Henry made all of these moves was, of course, always significant. And so, I'm going to sketch out a little bit of all of that context in the brief time that we have to talk about all six of these people today, while also focusing on the impact that he had on these women, and that they had on him. I'd like to hopefully flesh out a little bit the dismissive shorthand that frequently covers characterization of these women, even in recent (embarrassingly, even in recent) historical works that are ostensibly focused on them. So, David Starkey's massive volume *Six Wives* offers the following summation on the very first page: "among the women (at least as conventionally told) there is almost the full range of female stereotypes: the Saint, the Schemer, the Doormat, the Dim Fat Girl, the Sexy Teenager, and the Bluestocking" (xvii).

Correctives to come.

In a roughly thirty-minute lecture (I was also saying to some of you), you know, if we do the math there, I should allocate roughly five minutes to each of these people. But I'm not going to do that, because, the first two (obviously) loom much larger in the popular consciousness and also in the impact that they had on Henry and on English politics, than the remaining four do.

Catherine of Aragon (a.k.a. the Saint) was betrothed to Henry's older brother, Arthur, first, but he unexpectedly died six months after their 1501 marriage. Political wrangling ensued for another eight years. I think there's a tendency, you know, when we look back to telescope or collapse this history. Eight years, she was sort of adrift in England during her widowhood, as Henry VIII and her parents, Ferdinand and Isabella, used her as a political bargaining chip. Catherine was left alone, without financial resources or many allies upon whom she could rely throughout this time in a foreign land. So, after

close to eight years of royal bickering and brinksmanship, the path was eventually cleared for her to marry the future Henry VIII in 1509.

The Norton anthology reproduces the “table of forbidden marriages” from William Clerke’s *The Trial of Bastardy*, which was published in 1594. Prominent within that table is the assertion “A man may not marrie his Brother’s Wife.” Catherine averred that her six-month marriage to Prince Arthur had not been consummated, and on those grounds she and Henry received a papal dispensation to wed. However, this is at odds with the initial treaty with Ferdinand to betroth her to Henry in the first place, which notes the *need* of papal dispensation on the grounds that she *had* consummated the marriage to Arthur. Appeals to the Pope thus bracketed Henry’s marriage to Catherine of Aragon, as over twenty years later, he once again sent delegates to the Pope, asking to annul their union on precisely these grounds— forbidden affinity — once he had succumbed to the charms of Anne Boleyn.

Catherine took the pomegranate—which is a traditional symbol of fertility—as her personal badge. She proved fertile enough, but her pregnancies alternately did not come to term, or her children failed to thrive. She conceived a child almost immediately after their marriage, but this first pregnancy ended in the still birth of a girl at about six or seven months. Letters to her father make clear that Catherine took this as a double failure on her part—a dead daughter was far less desirable for someone married to a king than a living son, and she well knew this. Almost exactly a year later, she gave birth to a son who was promptly named Henry, and celebrated throughout London, but he died shortly after birth. In 1513, Henry led troops into battle in France, and the Scots took his absence as an occasion to invade England. A heavily pregnant Catherine took over as head of the English force, delivering a stirring speech just before their victory at the Battle of Flodden. One month later, she delivered another son who died shortly after birth. A year later, another still birth occurred, of another prince and potential heir.

Alison Weir conjectures that this 1515 still birth may have resulted from Catherine’s distress over conflict between her husband and her father, Ferdinand II of Aragon. Supportive up until now, Henry began to be dissatisfied with his wife and her inability to produce a viable heir. They seemed to have made things up enough for Catherine to conceive again over the course of 1515, because in February 1516 she finally gave birth to her lone child to survive, Mary Tudor (the future Mary I of England).

Henry’s mistress Elizabeth (or Bessie) Blount gave birth to a son, promptly christened Henry Fitzroy (a surname that Henry concocted to gesture toward his royal parentage). Once the boy grew into a stout and healthy six year old, Henry granted him his own estate and, in a lavish public ceremony, elevated him to the Duke of Richmond and Somerset. Henry likely kept many mistresses over the years and probably fathered at least two other illegitimate children (more on that in a moment); the Duke of Richmond

is the only one that he acknowledged. Given the public display, Queen Catherine was justifiably nervous that her own daughter might now be passed over in the succession in favor of an illegitimate son. Little did she know that her real problem would arrive across the English Channel from France just a few years later.

Anne Boleyn had been educated in France, sent there originally as a waiting woman to Henry's sister, Mary. In 1522 the pair returned to England as English relations with France soured, and Anne took up residence in the English court. Her sister, Mary, had had an affair with Henry, covered by her marriage to the nobleman William Carey. It is possible that Mary Carey's children, Catherine and Henry—note the names—were fathered not by her husband, but by the King. There was no royal fanfare associated with them, though.

Anne Boleyn's French court exoticism made her popular at court, and she gained the attentions of many men, including the courtier-poet Sir Thomas Wyatt, and Henry Percy, heir to the Earl of Northumberland. However, Henry Percy was already betrothed to another and when he attempted to break off this prior contract in order to marry Anne, the powerful Cardinal Wolsey intervened to block him. Historian Martin Hume conjectures that this is because Wolsey knew that Henry VIII had taken an interest in Anne, too. However, Anne was a woman who carried grudges, and this interference in her affairs early on gave her a significant one against Wolsey.

To save her reputation from the rampant gossip that Anne had already consummated her relationship with Henry Percy before it was broken off, she was sent away from court for a few months following the dissolution of that relationship (and the restoration of his prior marriage contract). When she returned, it was as a waiting woman to Queen Catherine, which, of course, put her directly in the orbit of King Henry VIII. Bessie Blount had also served in Queen Catherine's household and thereby met Henry. By 1526, not only Anne but many others at court were well aware of the shine that he had taken to her. In one of those facts that makes you wonder why anyone bothers to write fiction, the love letters that Henry wrote to Anne are in the library at the Vatican, probably because they were entered into testimony during what came to be known as "the King's Great Matter": his quest to put aside Catherine and marry Anne. These letters demonstrate that Henry was a man accustomed to getting what he wanted, and far from subtle about it.

The first one to survive from 1527 reads (almost in its entirety):

In turning over in my mind the contents of your last letters, I have put myself into great agony, not knowing how to interpret them, whether to my disadvantage, as you show in some places, or to my advantage, as I understand them in some

others, beseeching you earnestly to let me know expressly your whole mind as to the love between us two.

It is absolutely necessary for me to obtain this answer, having been for above a whole year stricken with the dart of love, and not yet sure whether I shall fail of finding a place in your heart and affection, which last point has prevented me for some time past from calling you my mistress; because, if you only love me with an ordinary love, that name is not suitable for you, because it denotes a singular love, which is far from common. But if you please to do the office of a true loyal mistress and friend, and to give up yourself body and heart to me, who will be, and have been, your most loyal servant, (if your rigour does not forbid me) I promise you that not only the name shall be given you, but also that I will take you for my only mistress, casting off all others besides you out of my thoughts and affections, and serve you only. I beseech you to give an entire answer to this my rude letter, that I may know on what and how far I may depend. . . . Written by the hand of him who would willingly remain yours, H.R. ([Source](#))

Yeah, it's not subtle.

The wily Anne had had ample opportunity to observe the different ways in which royal mistresses might be treated during her time in the French court and through the differential treatment accorded Henry's mistress, Elizabeth Blount, and her regal son Henry Fitzroy, the Duke of Richmond, and her own sister (and possible children) who had a more furtive relationship with Henry. Therefore, Anne engaged in an elaborate and tricky dance with Henry, well documented in this letter: flirting with him enough to keep him ardently attracted to her, but holding him at arm's length, so that she would not be compromised. Hence her "Schemer" moniker in David Starkey's schema.

Anne Boleyn (Andrea Macasaet)

He wanted me
Ha, obviously
Kept messaging me
Like everyday
Couldn't be better
Then he sent me a letter
And who am I kidding I was prêt à manger

Queens (Adrianna Hicks, Abby Mueller, Brittney Mack, Samantha Pauly, Anna Uzele)

Ooh hoo

Anne Boleyn (Andrea Macasaet)

Sent a reply

Queens (Adrianna Hicks, Abby Mueller, Brittney Mack, Samantha Pauly, Anna Uzele)

Ooh hoo

Anne Boleyn (Andrea Macasaet)

Just saying hi

Queens (Adrianna Hicks, Abby Mueller, Brittney Mack, Samantha Pauly, Anna Uzele)

Ooh hoo

Anne Boleyn (Andrea Macasaet)

Ur a nice guy

I'll think about it maybe xo baby

RB: She used her sexuality for leverage, angling probably initially for some sort of official recognition as his mistress like that enjoyed by Bessie Blount, and then, only eventually—as the extent of Henry's determination to dissolve his marriage to Catherine in quest of a son became widely understood at court—hatching the idea of becoming his second wife.

Ironically, Cardinal Wolsey had already been working behind the scenes to detach Henry from Catherine before he began pursuing Anne. The initial idea was to marry Henry to another strategic foreign ally, or someone else of the royal blood within England itself. Wolsey thus unwittingly pulled at the thread of Henry's first marriage in a way that would usher in his own destruction once the King married a woman Wolsey never intended him to marry, who held a deep and abiding grudge against him.

As I mentioned before, the strategy Henry ultimately decided to pursue in order to separate from Catherine was to cite her prior marriage to his brother—a ludicrous legal fiction, given their twenty-four-year marriage. However, it was also a dangerous path to tread, given the well-known fact that Henry had been in a sexual relationship with Anne's sister, Mary. As if his abrupt claim that he had suddenly developed problem with being married for twenty-four years to his brother's former wife weren't cynical enough, Henry wanted to put her aside on a basis that could also be used to invalidate his relationship to Anne herself. Additionally, malicious court gossip began to rumor it abroad that Henry had dallied with Anne and Mary's mother, too—even venturing to the salacious whispered possibility that Anne was his own daughter. When confronted with

this accusation, Henry responded indignantly, “never with the mother!” (Hume 133 n.1). Oh, Henry.

Martin Hume notes the convenient legal shape-shifting in which Henry engaged. Prior to 1533 (the year of Henry’s marriage to Anne), *any* sexual relationship grounded in affinity of the kind that he had to her was a bar to marriage in canon law. After Henry declared himself the head of the Catholic Church of England in 1531, an Act of Parliament was passed in 1533 which modified canon law to remove sexual relationships outside of marriage from the list of forbidden degrees of affinity. As if by magic, once Henry decided to set his marriage to Anne aside, too, this Act of Parliament was reversed, restoring relationships both licit and illicit to the list of forbidden degrees of affinity (Hume 133 n.1).

Catherine objected to Henry’s claim that their marriage was invalid not only for her own sake, but also for that of her daughter, Mary, who would, thereby, be declared illegitimate. Henry used a series of legal maneuvers to force the hand of Catholic clergy in Parliament. Once he had them cornered, they offered Catherine a “deal”: if she agreed to end the marriage on the grounds that she wished to pursue a religious life, Henry would grant her lands and moneys she later ended up forfeiting, as well as the legitimacy of Mary as an heir. The implacable Catherine, feeling that she had a strong card, refused. You see, she was the aunt of Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, who now held sway over the Pope and the papal court. Her refusal to comply thus created diplomatic deadlock. Wolsey and the proto-Protestant Thomas Cranmer were dispatched to strong-arm Pope Clement into agreeing to hear Henry’s case for putting Catherine aside.

In 1529, Henry and Catherine were called to appear before the Legatine Court held by Cardinal Wolsey and Cardinal Campeggio at Blackfriars. If any of you saw the 2013 production of *Henry VIII* here at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, you may remember an arresting scene starring Catherine. Indeed, the court confrontation between them was already such good political theater that Shakespeare didn’t really do much, other than crib from the historical record to create this scene. According to these records, Catherine dropped to her knees to appeal to Henry and the cardinals. She said, in part:

Sir, I beseech you for all the love that hath been between us, and for the love of God, let me have justice. Take of me some pity and compassion, for I am a poor woman, and a stranger born out of your dominion. I have here no assured friends, and much less impartial counsel...

Alas! Sir, wherein have I offended you, or what occasion of displeasure have I deserved?...

When ye had me at first, I take God to my judge, I was a true maid, without touch of man. And whether it be true or no, I put it to your conscience. If there be any just cause by the law that ye can allege against me either of dishonesty or any other impediment to banish and put me from you, I am well content to depart to my great shame and dishonour. And if there be none, then here, I most lowly beseech you, let me retain my former estate...

[\(Source\)](#)

Catherine would concede nothing to the purpose.

Catherine of Aragon (Adrianna Hicks)

You got me down on my knees, please tell me what you think I've done wrong?
Been humble, been loyal, I've tried to swallow my pride all along
If you can just explain
A single thing I've done to cause you pain
I'll go...
No?

RB: The only way forward was to break with Rome, **19:58-20:05: a move suggested by Thomas Cromwell of *Wolf Hall* fame, if you have watched the mini-series and/or read the novels by Hilary Mantel.** Over the course of the early 1530s, Henry did precisely that. Once it became clear that all signs pointed toward Anne's successful union with Henry and her elevation as queen, she gave Henry what he had been fighting for all of these years: her love, both body and heart. She was pregnant when they had a secret marriage ceremony in January 1533 — before his marriage to Catherine was officially dissolved.

Although they were locked in battle over Henry and the throne for years, Anne and Catherine actually shared some important character traits. Like Catherine, Anne was extremely stubborn about the rights she felt she had as Queen. She did not scruple to speak sharply to courtiers and officials—like Wolsey—who crossed her, and her wrath when Henry continued to have a wandering eye among the court ladies after they were married knew no bounds. Also like Catherine, Anne proved prone to miscarriages. Finally, like Catherine, the one child that Anne bore to term who lived was a girl—the future Elizabeth I.

Anne and Henry may have started out well-suited in imperiousness and narcissism, but once they were married her high-handed ways began to chafe. The people hated her—she was routinely booed on progresses, the King openly importuned to return to his first wife, who was now living as the Dowager Queen on the fiction that she was now just the widow of Arthur. **Right? I know..I mean it's ridiculous. 21:37 - 21:41**

Hated by the common people, Anne had been the subject of poetry in the tradition of courtly love before becoming Henry's wife **21:48-21:51 (some of Wyatt's sonnets, for example)**. Indeed, some of Henry's own writing to Anne is written in this courtly love tradition. However, once she became queen this trend continued apace, and sometimes the lines blurred between courtly compliment and genuine lust.

1536 proved a pivotal year: "Catherine died, which meant that Henry could repudiate his second marriage [to Anne] without reaffirming his first one. Anne miscarried. [Thomas] Cromwell [who had been so instrumental in helping Henry to Anne] turned against [her]. And Henry took off in pursuit of a new love: another lady in waiting at court, Jane Seymour" (Starkey 589). Anne's tart tongue got her into irrevocable trouble by the end of April 1536. She sharply rebuked the court musician Mark Smeaton for mooning after her as not of sufficient standing to merit a hand in her game of courtly love. She also mixed it up with Henry Norris, Henry's personal favorite among his courtiers. As Chief Gentleman of the Privy Chamber and Groom of the Stool (an office involving exactly what it sounds like, but nevertheless coveted for the private one-on-one access it gave one to the monarch), Norris was not a man to be trifled with, but trifle Anne did. Still single, Norris was a highly desired bachelor at court who had been a sometime lover of one of Anne's cousins. Anne quarreled with him about his indecisiveness regarding her cousin, Madge Shelton, and said "You look for dead men's shoes. For if aught came to the King but good, you would look to have me" (qtd. in Starkey 566). There's treason in them words.

As Starkey puts it, "some of Anne's ladies had high-powered brothers and husbands and, in the echo-chamber of the Court, such an incident could not be kept quiet. By the afternoon, Henry himself knew" (Starkey 567). Inside of a week, Mark Smeaton and Henry Norris had been committed to the Tower. Under the tender ministrations of Thomas Cromwell's torture chambers, Smeaton cracked and confessed adultery with the Queen. Her fate was sealed. Arrested herself, Anne talked and talked and talked — no torture necessary. Her efforts to clear herself only ended up catching more men in the web: Sir Thomas Wyatt, her own brother, and a cast of many others. Whispered rumors that her last miscarriage had been of a male child so malformed that it must be demonic, a product of witchcraft, easily gave way to belief that the much-misliked Queen had committed not merely adultery, but incest. Her head was as good as off.

Jane Seymour was one of Anne's ladies in waiting, and she used her playbook when it came to parrying King Henry's romantic interest in her. Like Anne, she was surrounded by powerful men at court who advised her behind the scenes about how best to play her hand. Thus, when Henry sent her an extravagant gift of a purse full of money with a cover letter in his own hand, the wily Jane kissed the letter and returned both it and the

money to the bearer, flinging herself to the ground to communicate a verbal message back to the King via his own messenger, which was:

[She] begged Henry to consider that she was a gentlewoman of good and honourable parents, without reproach, and that she had no greater riches in the world than her honour, which she would not injure for a thousand deaths, and that if he wished to make her some present in money she begged it might be when God enabled her to make some honourable match. (qtd. in Starkey 589)

Translation: I'll take your money, and your love . . . if you marry me. Henry, therefore, did not see Jane without a chaperone from her family from then (mid-March) until Thomas Cranmer — a Protestant-leaning theologian who had helped Henry make the case for his marriage to Anne — declared that same marriage invalid in May. Anne was decapitated within days of this decree, and Henry and Jane were betrothed. By the end of the month, they were married. Jane assumed her state at Henry's side by the beginning of June 1536. As David Starkey acerbically puts it: "Henry's first divorce took seven years; his second, less than as many weeks" (592). Likewise, his courtship of Anne had taken seven times as long as his whirlwind pursuit of Jane Seymour. No "Doormat" she.

In the wake of Henry's disastrous second marriage that had produced neither stability at court nor male heir, Jane portentously selected a phoenix rising to new life from a fiery conflagration as her personal symbol.

Jane is often skipped over as the short-timer who did the task expected of her—providing a male heir to the throne (in the person of the future Edward VI)—and then piously dying as she recuperated from her hard labor. However, as Starkey and Martin Hume point out, during her short time as Queen she jeopardized her standing with the king more than once in her attempts to steer him back into a loyal relationship to Rome and to the Pope. The Pilgrimage of Grace—a northern uprising against Henry as head of the Catholic Church in England and in support of full restoration of the monasteries and convents he had begun to dissolve and absorb—occurred during Jane's short reign. A devout Catholic, she appealed to Henry repeatedly on behalf of the rebels—risking his ire. **28:07**

26:36 Jane Seymour (Abby Mueller)

You know, people say Henry was stone-hearted. Uncaring. And I'm not sure that he was.

Anne Boleyn (Andrea Macasaet)

Yeah actually come to think of it there was this one really cute time where I had a daughter and he chopped my head off.

Jane Seymour (Abby Mueller)

Okay, okay, I know his times with the Queens before me had been hard enough. But they were also full of fire. He raged and stormed at them and—because they're both absolute badass monarchs—they raged and stormed right back. But I didn't do that. Instead, I stood by him—like I was made of stone—I stood firm.

RB: Shorthand history sometimes credits Anne Boleyn with the turn to **28:11 Protestantism** in England. The truth is much more complicated than that. Once the lay monarch Henry had the clerical bit in his teeth, he pursued an opportunistic mix of Protestant ideas (like stripping churches, monasteries and convents of their riches) while continuing to cling to Catholic practice (high Latin mass, and a church hierarchy that differed only in putting him—rather than the Pope—at the top of it). Court factions composed of religious conservatives who wanted to return to the Catholic fold and reformers who wanted to fully turn to **28:46 Protestantism** battled for ascendancy for the remainder of his reign. Jane and her family were in the former camp; his subsequent wives oscillated between the two factions in ways that stoked religio-political conflict throughout the country.

A male heir provided at long last, Jane succumbed to puerperal fever and in short order the thoughts of Henry's councilors turned once again to the advantages of a foreign marital match. Given Henry's heavy-handed conduct of the Great Matter and the subsequent disaster of that marriage plus the fact that he already had a clear male heir from his third marriage to Jane, negotiations were a bit more challenging than they had been in the past. Another complicating factor was the ambiguous position that Henry occupied with respect to the Protestant religion. The purge of Catholic-leaning nobles connected to the Pilgrimage of Grace continued apace after Jane's death, but Henry did not embrace Protestantism fully, either, leaving councilors like Cromwell little room to argue that a ranking woman of either religion would be safe in his court.

By 1539, Cromwell set his sights for a second time on a possible European marital alliance that he had eyed in the immediate aftermath of Anne's death as well: the Duchy of Cleves. Initially, the idea was an alliance forged on the basis of a betrothal between Princess Mary and the heir to Duke William of Cleves, but eventually the idea of marrying Henry himself to one of William's daughters came to the fore. After all, the ideal scenario for a reigning monarch is the situation that the current Windsors enjoy: an heir, and a spare. A second son would offer greater lineal security.

Henry did not meet Anne of Cleves until she was on her way to marry him in December 1539, although the negotiations did include a proviso that he could receive a portrait of her, duly provided by Hans Holbein. Henry liked what he saw well enough to proceed — so, seemingly not a “Dim, Fat Girl” — but the situation deteriorated from the moment he first made her acquaintance. In a return to the courtly amours of his past, Henry and some of his nobles did not wait for Anne to make the lengthy journey to him in Greenwich, but rode to meet her en route and “invaded” her chamber disguised as Robin Hood and his merry men. The young, incredibly inexperienced Anne — who spoke almost no English — was rather more terrified than flattered, fearing she was about to be abducted. Henry left her chamber and returned in his own person for more courtly compliment and greetings, but the damage was done. “I do not like her,” he flatly declared. However, the diplomatic die was cast; he had to marry her.

Within a week of the marriage, Henry had forsaken any attempt to consummate the marriage, though he continued to appear in formal, public contexts with Anne as queen. If there is such a thing as karma, it was about to come for Henry in a big way. While Anne Boleyn (Anne #1) had been imperious and flirtatious, and rather free in her salacious gossip about Henry’s sexual prowess (or lack thereof) with her equally indiscreet ladies, it is unclear that Anne Boleyn did, in fact, commit adultery — an act of treason, of course, when one is married to the King. Henry’s sexual dissatisfaction with Anne #2 (Anne of Cleves) prompted a quick quest for a way out of the marriage (non-consummation being the obvious preferred course).

Anna of Cleves (Brittney Mack)

I mean, it’s the usual story, isn’t it: the savvy, educated young princess deemed repulsive by a wheezing, wrinkled, ulcer-riddled, man twenty-four years her senior.

RB: It also prompted the fall from favor and execution of Thomas Cromwell (who had instigated the whole Cleves marital alliance idea in the first place), and the opportunistic stepping in of the Howard faction, whose daughter Katherine had been placed in the queen’s household as it assembled, before Anne #2 had even arrived on English soil.

Henry placated Duke William of Cleves by conferring lands and grants on Anne roughly commensurate with her dowry, and assuring her a place at court (below his children and any future wives in precedence, of course). Meanwhile, his eye had alighted on the young and exuberant Katherine Howard, destined to be Katherine #2 (enter “The Sexy Teenager”). Though younger than Anne #2, Katherine #2 was far more sexually experienced. She had at least two affairs prior to her marriage to Henry in July 1540, a scant six months after his marriage to Anne of Cleves and mere weeks after Henry’s formal dissolution of his fourth marriage. In reality, Henry and Katherine Howard were well-matched in their casual attitudes to sex and marriage, but Henry VIII trafficked in no reality but his own.

Had Katherine's dalliances remained in the past, she may have lasted longer. However, Henry was aging and suffering from an increasingly vicious circle in which an ulcer in his leg prevented regular exercise which in turn caused him to gain weight, which in turn exacerbated the strain on his leg, which would further ulcerate, etc. etc. He was irritable and unpredictable and can't have been a very appealing love object for an attractive young woman who had many other options. By the following spring, Katherine had taken back up with a former love, Thomas Culpepper, who served in the King's privy chamber, and by that summer she had employed a second former lover, Francis Dereham, as her private secretary. She was indiscreet, not only about these appointments, but about arranging to meet these men late at night in her chambers, and wrote them damningly passionate — and explicit — love letters.

Katherine Howard (Samantha Pauly)

With Henry it isn't easy
His temper's short and his mates are sleazy
Except for this one courtier
He's a really nice guy, just so sincere

The royal life isn't what I planned
But Thomas is there to lend a helping hand
So sweet, makes sure that I'm okay
And we hang out loads when the King's away.

RB: The Howards were religious conservatives, seeking a return to the old Catholic ways. Therefore, when Thomas Cranmer, eager for Protestant reform, got wind of the details of Katherine's household and her conduct of it, he pounced on the opportunity to take them down. Henry was besotted with his vivacious young wife, and was not easily convinced of her infidelity. Once he was, though, his vengeance was swift, and wide-ranging. Culpepper was beheaded; Dereham hung, drawn and quartered. After a long imprisonment, Katherine herself was taken to the Tower Green and publicly beheaded in February 1542. As David Loades sums it up: "The Howard ascendancy at court had been destroyed. Servants and minor members of the family were rounded up in large numbers" (Loades 125). Even the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk and the Duke of Norfolk were in the crosshairs, though they were eventually pardoned after being threatened with loss of all of their property, and "perpetual imprisonment" (Loades 125).

Enter Catherine Parr — the only wife to outlast Henry, and the only one to debate religious politics with him without fatally rousing his ire, but "Bluestocking," as Starkey would have it, is putting it rather strongly. Parr — not Anne Boleyn — paved the way to the Protestant reforms seriously undertaken in the reign of Edward VI via not only her

cajoling of Henry, but also her warm, maternal relationships with his three children, and her own published prayers and religious meditations.

Catherine Parr (Anna Uzele)

There's so much more
Remember that I was a writer
I wrote books and psalms and meditations
Fought for female education,
So all my women could independently study scripture
I even got a woman to paint my picture
Why can't I tell that that story?
'Cos in history

RB: Henry began to put the moves on Catherine #3 when she was still married to her second husband, the ailing Lord Latimer, and when she had also begun to develop a relationship of her own with Thomas Seymour. However, the King claimed precedence over Seymour, just as he had over Henry Percy in the days of Anne Boleyn, and when Latimer died, Henry staked his claim. Catherine married him in July of 1543.

She survived one attempt on the part of the conservative faction to take out Cranmer (and implicate Catherine herself in overly zealous religious reform). For his part, Henry used the occasion to re-affirm his own sovereignty over not only political, but also religious matters. This incident, too, is in the play *Henry VIII*, though Shakespeare exports it from the reign of Catherine Parr into the reign of Anne Boleyn in that play. So if you saw that production and you recall, this is the incident in which Henry agreed to Cranmer's arrest on the part of the conservative proto-Catholic faction, but then warned Cranmer that it was coming, giving him his own ring to appeal to Henry directly for a judgment when the attack on him came. And Henry also then positioned himself (in the play) in an upper gallery like a *deus ex machina* to watch this whole thing unfold.

Henry died in late January 1547 still the head of the Catholic Church in England. It was left to Edward VI and his Protector, his uncle Edward Seymour, to move the country decisively in the direction of the Protestant faith. For her part, Catherine Parr got her love match to Thomas Seymour after all, in her fourth and final marriage. Like the other wife with whom Henry lived in relative ease, Jane Seymour, Catherine died giving birth to her first child at the age of 36, fathered by one of Jane's relatives.

The Tudor court was so tightly intertwined that picking a single thread always threatened to unravel the whole. The wonder is that it held out so long.

SBT: That's all for this season of ASIDES. Thanks for tuning in to explore these plays with us. Please share these episodes with your friends, family, students, teachers, and

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