

All About Dynamics: Katherine Howard's Hidden Story

Often considered Henry VIII's "wanton wife," Katherine Howard's story has been twisted and appropriated throughout the centuries to fit the propaganda of the court or the perceived love story between her and Thomas Culpepper. No older than nineteen at the time of her beheading, Howard supposedly professed "I die a queen, but would rather die the wife of Culpepper." However, through an in depth analysis of primary sources and new scholarship, her story is far more complicated than previously considered. Transcripts from court documents, witnesses throughout her life, and her own words paint less of a romantic tragedy and more of the tragic end of a young woman, alone and abandoned by her family, a victim of sexual abuse, taken advantage of time and time again without the resources to defend herself. Looking both through a feminist and mental health lens, this paper intends to set the record straight on the often ignored tragedy of the young queen Katherine Howard.

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“Divorced, beheaded, died. Divorced, beheaded, survived.” The familiar nursery rhyme tells of the fates of the wives of the notorious British monarch, Henry VIII. Reigning from 1509-1547, Henry VIII is most notable for having had six wives, each with their own dismal end. Throughout history, their stories have been taken and passed through mainstream Western culture, whether through children’s songs, television series, or even a musical. Of all six wives, Anne Boleyn, his second wife and first beheading, has remained infamous for her role in the creation of the Church of England. However, the same cannot be said for Katherine Howard, the fifth wife and second beheaded. The youngest of all of his wives, historians have come to the rough understanding that she was seventeen at the time of her marriage, barely nineteen at the time of her death. Despite her youth, or quite possibly because of it, historians have traditionally depicted her with the same scorn as those who influenced her demise. Over the centuries, Katherine Howard has been perceived as a sex-obsessed, flighty, and ignorant teenager, too caught up in the glitz and glamour of the palace and too self-obsessed to understand the consequences of her actions. Until recently, the story of her torrid love affairs were treated as concrete fact, along with her inherently wanton nature. With the introduction of deeper analysis however, new information and new interpretations bring to light a different story. While her historical narrative has continually slandered her as a "vixen" or "harlot," an in-depth analysis of primary sources¹ and modern scholarship reveals Katherine Howard to have been not a conniving enchantress, but rather an innocent and traumatized child, unprepared for the danger of the British court.

Due to her lack of privilege growing up, there is little evidence in primary sources of Katherine Howard’s early life and even less of her own writing, which has led to various theories

¹ Many different primary sources were analyzed. Primarily court documents and letters from the Court of King Henry VIII

and speculation. Here, the purpose is looking as closely as possible at primary sources and coming to the most accurate conclusions. Born somewhere between 1518 and 1524, there is no known definite year of her birth.² Scholars do agree, however, that she was born one of the youngest of ten children to a semi-noble family, the Howards. Having never appeased Henry VIII enough to win his favor, the Howards lived in relative poverty. From primary sources, her father, the Lord Edmund Howard, appears to have been a weak and ill-stricken man abused by his wife, Katherine's stepmother.³ Katherine's mother died when she was young and, as an adolescent, she was sent to live with her great aunt, the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk, as was a common method of providing girls with education.⁴ While she was there, at a young age, she entered into a relationship with her music tutor, Henry Manno. Again, as her year of birth is hard to discern, there is no concrete age for her, though, it has been generally assumed she was around thirteen years old when their relationship began, Henry significantly older.⁵ Due to her young age, modern historians have classified their relationship as sexual grooming, historians Christopher Day and Neil Johnston directly saying she was "sexually abused by one of her tutors, Henry Manno."⁶ Upon learning he had no intention of marrying her, Katherine ended their relationship. Later, Katherine began another relationship, this time with the secretary of the Dowager Duchess, Francis Dereham. Unlike her relationship with Manno, Katherine and

² Kizewski, Holly K, "Jewel of Womanhood: A Feminist Reinterpretation of Queen Katherine Howard" (2014): 7.

³ "Lord Edmund Howard to Lady Lisle," 1535, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 8*, Entry Number 797, 287-305, ed. James Gairdner (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1885), British History Online.

⁴ Kizewski, 8.

⁵ Simkin, John, "Francis Dereham," *Spartacus Educational*, accessed December 10, 2021, https://spartacus-educational.com/Francis_Dereham.htm.

⁶ Christopher Day and Neil Johnston, "A Tormented Tudor Queen's Treasonous 'Love Letter': The National Archives, January 21, 2021, in The National Archives, podcast, MP3 audio, <https://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/catherine-howard-thomas-culpeper/>.

Deherem consummated their affair, as is stated in numerous court documents.⁷ Their relationship ended when the Duke of Norfolk, Katherine's uncle, presented her in 1540 with the court position of a lady in waiting to the Queen, at the time Anne of Cleves. Henry's marriage to Anne of Cleves was notably unhappy and, due to lack of consummation, was annulled in July of the same year. As for who the new queen would be, Henry and Katherine were married July 28th in a private ceremony. While Henry lauded his new queen as the "jewel of womanhood" and often called her "a rose without a thorn," he would soon come to learn of her past.⁸ When asked by her brother John Lassells as to why she would not ask for a position at court, Mary Lassells, a woman who had grown up alongside Katherine at the residence of the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk, explained. She stated Katherine was: "light, both in living and conditions" and told her brother of her past relationships.⁹ Lassells then told what he had heard to the Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, who gave the King the information in a note during a religious ceremony. Both Deherem and Manno were taken in for questioning under ulterior charges and, during interrogation, Deherem supplied a new name: Thomas Culpepper. A member of Henry's royal household, and groom in the privy chamber, Thomas Culpepper has been described by historians as "lecherous." In 1539, he was accused of the sexual assault of a park-keeper's wife, and the later murder of a villager who tried to confront him.¹⁰ When interrogated, Culpepper admitted desiring a relationship with the queen, claiming she desired one as well. Katherine never affirmed Culpepper's claims, though she did later admit to her previous relationships with

⁷ There are many instances, but the first prolific mention is: "The Council to [Paget, ambassador to France]" 1541, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 16*, Entry Number 1334, ed. James Gairdner (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1885), British History Online.

⁸ Kizewski, 1.

⁹ Simkin.

¹⁰ Kizewski, 19.

Deherem and MannoX when confronted by Cranmer. A trial whose primary evidence included two private meetings between the pair, what members of the court considered “longing glances,” and a single letter, Katherine, her lady Jane Rochford, Deherem, and Culpepper were all charged with treason and executed.

While historians have been quick to judge Katherine’s character for her past relationships, David Starkey going so far as to claim she seduced MannoX in his 2003 book, *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII*.¹¹ In spite of this, primary sources and new analysis uncover extenuating circumstances that paint Katherine as less of the vixen and more of a victim. As previously stated, Katherine’s relationship with Henry MannoX began when she was roughly the age of thirteen and he was between twenty and thirty years old. With the significant age gap coupled with how young she was and the balance of power (while Katherine was a noblewoman, she lived in relative poverty), many have likened MannoX to using a tool of abuse known as grooming. Key signs of grooming are classified as: “manipulative behaviors that the abuser uses to gain access to a potential victim, coercing them to agree to the abuse.”¹² Through that lens, MannoX’s behaviors begin to line up. Upon later investigation, Katherine stated: “at the flattering and fair persuasions of MannoX being but a young girl I suffered him at sundry times...which neither became me with honesty to permit nor him to require.”¹³ While both Katherine and he denied ever having intercourse, a letter from the Privy Council notes MannoX, “...knew a privy mark on her body...” and confessed “...that he used to feel the secret parts of her body.”¹⁴ A

¹¹ Kizewski, 45.

¹² “Grooming: Know the Warning Signs.” *RAINN. Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network*, accessed December 12, 2021, <https://www.rainn.org/news/grooming-know-warning-signs>.

¹³ Simkin.

¹⁴ “The Council to [Paget, ambassador to France]” 1541, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 16*, Entry Number 1334, ed. James Gairdner (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1885), British History Online.

combination of his knowledge and her pressured consent, their relationship fits the label of grooming. His own words further establish this claim. When he was confronted by Mary Lassells, he responded: “Hold thy peace, woman! I know her well enough. My designs are of a dishonest kind, and from the liberties the young lady has allowed me, I doubt not of being able to effect my purpose. She hath said to me that I shall have her maidenhead, though it be painful to her...”¹⁵ While the term “dishonest” highlights its own form of deceit in the modern day, at the time, “honesty” paralleled the word “chastity,” further elaborating on his sexual intentions.¹⁶ The term “maidenhead” similarly describes her virginity. While Katherine went on to end the relationship soon after Lassells told her of what he had said, MannoX still remained in the household and, with few knowing of the relationship and fewer understanding the psychological significance, Katherine had no resources or even the knowledge of the damage of what he had done. Similar parallels were present in her next relationship.

Shortly after ending her relationship with Henry MannoX, Katherine began another with the secretary of her great aunt, Francis Deherem. When exactly their relationship started and how long it lasted are both unknown by historians. Estimates for Katherine’s age range from fourteen to sixteen with Deherem around the age of twenty five. As for how long their relationship lasted, the range is widely estimated at three months to three years.¹⁷ Most information surrounding Katherine and Deherem’s relationship is derived from interrogations and court documents. Court documents place significant emphasis on Deherem due to the fact that, unlike MannoX, Deherem and Katherine undoubtedly consummated their affair. In a letter to King Charles V, diplomat

¹⁵ Simkin.

¹⁶ Kizewski, 14.

¹⁷ Court documents describe a three year period for their relationship, however scholar estimates range from a few months to a few years. Simkin. "Marillac to Francis I," 1541, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 16*, Entry Number 1426, ed. James Gairdner (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1885), British History Online.

Eustace Chapuys writes: “news was confirmed yesterday by the lord Privy Seal, that this queen had confessed to having had to do, before she was married with Mr. Durem...that during at least three years that their amours lasted they had slept together...without a word of marriage.”¹⁸ In a time when women were confined to sexual purity and chastity based values, the knowledge that Katherine had had previous sexual encounters was enough to sentence both her and Deherem to death. The only thing that could have saved them would have been a pre-contract of marriage, annulling Katherine’s marriage to Henry. Deherem tried to establish this, as, through another letter to Charles V, Chapuys describes: “Durem confessed his early intimacy with the Queen, but justified it as an engagement.”¹⁹ Katherine, on the other hand, denied such claims. As to why, historians can only speculate. Though confessing Deherem and she would often call each other “husband” and “wife” and there was speculation within the household that they would marry, she refused every time he would propose.²⁰ In her official letter of confession, she stated: “He hath lain with me, sometimes in his doublet and hose, and two or three times naked, but not so naked that he had nothing upon him, for he had always at the least his doublet, and as I do think his hose also; but I mean naked, when his hose was put down.”²¹ When interrogated by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, she also claimed she had not properly consented and he had raped her with “importunate force.”²² Cranmer doubted her claims, though, as the information preserved relied primarily on witness testimony, there is no way to concretely know. Erring on the side of caution, and the age gap between the two paired with Katherine’s earlier sexual abuse that went

¹⁸ "Chapuys to Charles V," 1541, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 16*, Entry Number 1359, ed. James Gairdner (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1885), British History Online.

¹⁹ "Chapuys to Charles V," 1541, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 16*, Entry Number 1401, ed. James Gairdner (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1885), British History Online.

²⁰ Simkin.

²¹ Simkin.

²² Simkin.

unnoticed, it is indeed possible. Later, perhaps in an attempt to divert blame, in a letter to Ambassador Charles de Marillac to King Francis I of France, Marillac highlights: “Durant, to show his innocence since the marriage, said that Colpepre had succeeded him in the queen’s affections.”²³ The “Colpepre” Deherem refers to was none other than Thomas Culpepper, in many biographies Katherine’s “lover.” While that claim has been argued and disputed, the addition of Culpepper provided the one written piece of evidence: Katherine Howard’s letter.

The letter from Katherine Howard to Thomas Culpepper was, undoubtedly, some of the strongest evidence in both of their sentences. While historians have previously viewed it the same way the jurors had, as a declaration of her undying love for a man who was not her husband, new scholarship has re-examined its meaning. Historians for the British National Archives, Neil Johnston and Christopher Day analyzed the letter and came to vastly different conclusions. Day states: “It can be seen as a love letter if it’s taken out of context, but when it’s put into context, I think it’s not a love letter at all actually.”²⁴ As for the context, he argues: “I think she’s trying to appease him. He is likely very ambitious, he’s learnt of Catherine’s sexual past, and he is trying to exploit this and it’s likely he’s trying to blackmail her. And she is responding in the way she could by using the position she has to her own advantage by trying to possibly keep him quiet. It’s hard to know what she’s doing. It’s hard to know if they had a full sexual relationship or not. It’s certainly recounted that they did, but she’s certainly responding to pressure.”²⁵ Day and Johnston were not the first to notice the possibility of Katherine being blackmailed. Historian Holly K. Kizewski noted undertones of blackmail in a letter from an old

²³ "Marillac to Francis I," 1541, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 16*, Entry Number 1366, ed. James Gairdner (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1885), British History Online. It is also important to note the lack of spelling standards at the time. Deherem, Katherine, Culpepper, and MannoX all have variations on their names in primary sources.

²⁴ Day and Johnston

²⁵ Day and Johnston.

acquaintance of Katherine, Joan Bulmer. In her letter, Bulmer asks for a position at court, remarking of the “perfect honesty” she had always seen of Katherine and how, from others, she heard it remained.²⁶ As honesty and chastity were seen as interchangeable at the time, Kizewski suggests Bulmer was alluding to Katherine’s chastity (or lack of chastity) and previous indiscretions. As no one in Katherine’s family, nor Katherine herself had disclosed her past to Henry and his court, the chance of it getting uncovered presented a significant danger. Similar behavior is noted of Francis Deherem, who sent Katherine a letter asking for a position and was then appointed as a gentleman usher. For someone whose close proximity could create danger, her choice seems odd and foolhardy. Court documents note that, while Katherine and Deherem adamantly denied having seen each other while he was at court (Deherem under torture), Deherem recieved priviligis while under Katherine’s command. Upon questioning, Robert Davenport stated “many despised him [Deherem] because the queen favored him.”²⁷ On the official trial transcripts of Deherem and Culpepper, evidence cited she “had him in notable favour above others,” regarding Deherem and “gave him divers gifts and sums of money”²⁸ Katherine’s response to Culpepper in the letter follows similar undertones. Day asserting the “...language might suggest that Katherine’s life is dependent upon a secret that Culpepper is keeping for her, and which she urgently wishes to speak with him about, as suggested by the tone of the letter: ‘for I never longed so muche for [a] thyng as I do to se[e] you and to speke wyth you, the wyche I trust shalbe shortely now.’ Perhaps Culpepper had knowledge of the queen’s

²⁶ Kizewski, 14.

²⁷ "About Katharine Howard," 1541, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 16*, Entry Number 1339, ed. James Gairdner (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1885), British History Online.

²⁸ "Trial of Thos. Culpepper and Fras. Dereham, for Treason," 1541, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 16*, Entry Number 1395, ed. James Gairdner (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1885), British History Online.

sexual past and was holding the information to ransom, in return for particular privileges.”²⁹

They conclude: “this doesn’t appear to have been an affair in the normal sense...she might have been forced into ‘buying’ their silence to hide her previous sexual relationships...”³⁰ While their analysis uncovers a greater understanding, if it was even a love letter, it would have been both dangerous and out of character for Katherine to have professed her love in a way that could so easily be used against her. For reference, Katherine instructed Culpepper: “to beware that when so ever he went to confession he should never shrive him of any such things as should pass betwixt her and him;”³¹ fearing Henry, being the head of the church, would be told. For a woman without faith in her clergy and their dedication to God, the idea she would produce something so incriminating if it truly were an affair seems contradictory. Other primary sources detailing both her writing and her actions reveal the significant contrast.

Despite what she was later portrayed as, primary sources describe her as the ideal Englishwoman for the sixteenth century. At the time, the most important qualities of a woman were seen as chastity, obedience, and silence above all else, all mirroring Katherine’s recorded behavior. Up until her allegations, there had been no mention of Katherine displeasing Henry. This is striking, considering if she brought on Henry’s anger, it likely would have been recorded as it was with his other wives, both before and after her.³² The three main sources on her behavior and time in court, Chapuys, Thomas Cranmer, and Marillac all regarded her highly, a very challenging feat. Originally sent during the tenure of Queen Catherine of Aragon, and

²⁹ Day and Johnston.

³⁰ Day and Johnston.

³¹ "About Katharine Howard," 1541, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 16*, Entry Number 1339, ed. James Gairdner (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1885), British History Online.

³² This is mentioned broadly by Kizewski, 3. Specifics regarding Jane Seymour can be found: "to the Cardinal du Bellay," 1536, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 11*, Entry Number 860, ed. James Gairdner (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1885), British History Online.

“never a man to mince words,”³³ Chapuys was fiercely dedicated to Catherine of Aragon, even after her divorce. However, even when Katherine came into conflict with Mary, Aragon’s daughter, he made little mention of it and did not speak ill of her. After her beheading, he continued to refer to her as the “Queen,” a contrast, seeing as he was prolific for calling Anne Boleyn (who was beheaded on similar charges) a “concubine” and the “Great Whore.”³⁴ Marillac has similar respect for her. According to Kizewski, his letters described the only “...area in women’s behavior in which Katherine most obviously and outwardly failed was that of “shamefastness,” but her failure in this area suited her well.”³⁵ He described her as, “rather graceful than beautiful” and praised her for her vivacity and life that set her apart from the other women of the court.³⁶ Even at her trial, he did not condemn her, instead passing judgment at the cavalier manner of the Duke of Norfolk laughing as he interrogated Deherem and Culpepper.³⁷ Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, while the one to interrogate her and, as a Protestant bishop, staunchly against her Catholic faith, treated her kindly. When she began to repeatedly act out in a frenzied manner during interrogations, Cranmer was the one to order that all objects she could possibly hurt herself with were to be removed.³⁸ For a political enemy, this action suggests sympathy or kindness. As for the people of England, Chapuys noted her coronation received a “splendid reception.”³⁹ For a queen who replaced her beloved predecessor, her warm welcome was out of the ordinary. Though Anne of Cleves was not as greatly loved as Catherine of

³³ Kizewski, 87.

³⁴ "Chapuys to Antoine Perrenot," 1536, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 10*, Entry Number 901, ed. James Gairdner (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1885), British History Online.

³⁵ Kizewski, 84

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Kizewski, 91.

³⁸ Kizewski, 89.

³⁹ Kizewski, 90.

Aragon, Anne Boleyn had notably received a hostile and cold greeting.⁴⁰ After her beheading, there is minimal to no animosity towards her. In fact, at the idea of Henry taking on another wife, Chapuys writes: “few, if any, ladies now at Court would aspire to such an honour.”⁴¹ Though, to Henry, Katherine’s betrayal was seen as one condemning him and reminding him of his age, it appears that his own cruel nature was accentuated in her death, the blame turning to him instead. As for her queenly acts, while Katherine has often been considered “greedy” and “material obsessed” (most notably Alison Weir in her 1995 book, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*), there is little record of lavish spending in her records.⁴² In fact, one of her largest expenses as queen came out of generosity. Upon learning of the imprisonment of the elderly Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury, Katherine went to Henry to ask for a pardon. When she was denied, Katherine instead ordered her own dressmakers to produce warm clothing for Pole, paying for it out of her own expenses.⁴³ Despite her pleas for freedom being ignored, her kind act of sending a prisoner warm clothes, the greatest action she could do with her limitations, indicates kindness and compassion for those less fortunate. In court documents, the most often mentions of her are through her intercessions on the behalf of prisoners like Pole. This occurrence is notably present in the case of Sir Thomas Wyatt. Kizewski describes how, when discussing the release of Sir Thomas Wyatt and Sir John Wallop, Katherine’s role is mentioned twice and their release came “at the great suit of the Queen.”⁴⁴ At the end of the month, the list of grants includes Wyatt, Wallop, and John Mason (Wyatt’s secretary) on behalf of the queen. On a larger scale, throughout her short time in power, Kizewski emphasizes her generous nature through “several

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Kizewski, 91.

⁴² Kizewski, 39.

⁴³ Kizewski, 87.

⁴⁴ Kizewski, 13.

grants made during her brief reign grant lands and homes to her servants.”⁴⁵ With Katherine’s character so well-established and so well thought of by contemporaries, the lack of care and representation in her trial underscores Henry’s own cruelty rather than her own misdeeds.

Katherine’s trial (or lack thereof) and condemnation were similarly plagued with misogyny and protection for Henry’s ego as he crafted a case for her execution. Even before Katherine, Henry was known both for infidelity of his own and a vicious temper. When Katherine and he were married, he was forty nine to her fifteen to seventeen and suffering from chronic pain and gout. While he doted on Katherine and lavished her in gifts, upon hearing of her past, his plans for retribution grew harsh. In a letter to Francis I, Marillac describes: “...this King had changed his love for the Queen into hatred, and taken such grief at being deceived that of late it was thought he had gone mad, for he called a sword to slay her he had loved so much.”⁴⁶ Later on in the letter, he continues: “Sometimes he says irreverently that that wicked woman had never such delight in her incontinency as she should have torture in her death.”⁴⁷ In a position of ultimate power, Henry’s violent feelings towards her and her trial coupled with the court’s fearful need to please him, Katherine’s sentence was furthered by extra legislation. Her conviction was brought on by the Act of Succession of 1534 and passing the Royal Assent of 1541, declaring, “...that any lightness of the queen at the time may be revealed to the King or his Council, and that an unchaste woman marrying the King shall be guilty of high treason.”⁴⁸ In passing this law, Henry made it possible to sentence Katherine without a trial and deprive her of the chance to defend herself. During the time leading up to her coronation, Katherine was

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ "Marillac to Francis I," 1541, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 16*, Entry Number 1426, ed. James Gairdner (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1885), British History Online.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ "Parliament," 1542, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 17*, Entry Number 28, ed. James Gairdner (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1885), British History Online.

inconsolable, having told everything to Cranmer with the promise that the king would show her mercy (a promise he never honored).⁴⁹ Imprisoned in the Tower of London, Katherine fell into constant fits of hysteria severe enough to lead Cranmer to order the removal of dangerous objects for fear she would kill herself.⁵⁰ On the night before her execution, she oddly requested to have a block brought to her chamber so she might practice how to lay her head.⁵¹ Her request was honored and, the next day, February 13, 1542, she was beheaded. Despite the myth, her last words recorded by eyewitnesses were not that of wishing to be the wife of Culpepper, but rather confessing her sins, claiming she deserved a hundred deaths for what she had done, and considered her punishment just under the judgment of both the king and God. Approximations of her age reveal her to have been around nineteen at the time of her death. Alone and helpless, while Katherine's reign and fall were well regarded by those of her time, false information and misogyny perpetuated a barrage of myth.

Until recently, much scholarship surrounding Katherine Howard suffered under one or more of two misdeeds: faulty accounts and general sexism. With its earliest manuscript dated approximately 1556, the anonymously published *Chronicle of King Henry VIII of England. Being A Contemporary Record of Some of the Principle Events of the Reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI*, also known as the *Spanish Chronicle* was considered by early historians to be a reliable account.⁵² However, most modern historians have discredited the book entirely due to the amount of errors. In the *Spanish Chronicle*, Katherine is presented as vindictive and vain, something not present in primary sources.⁵³ As for more glaring errors, the chronicle claims she

⁴⁹ Simkin.

⁵⁰ "Cranmer to Henry VIII," 1541, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 16*, Entry Number 1325, ed. James Gairdner (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1885), British History Online.

⁵¹ Simkin.

⁵² Kizewski, 23.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

was the fourth wife of Henry VIII and a maid of Prince Edward.⁵⁴ According to the text, she and Henry were married the same day they met and, while Deherem and Manno are not mentioned, the affair with Culpepper is romanticized.⁵⁵ Through the *Spanish Chronicle*, the myth is created of her final words being not a cowed apology but a profession of love for Culpepper.⁵⁶ While the Chronicle's claim of her final words has no backing in any primary sources or any other sources, the idea of its credibility has led many subsequent biographies to include facts from the Chronicle in their retellings. In addition, many biographers place special emphasis on Katherine's sexuality. David Starkey equated her with a prostitute, calling her a "good time girl."⁵⁷ In his 1961 book, *Catherine Howard: A Tudor Tragedy*, Lacey Baldwin Smith, blamed Katherine for Culpepper's death, ignoring both his own part in their supposed affair and ignoring his past criminal activity, which he brings up later.⁵⁸ Female historians have also, notably, crafted their narrative through vindictive stereotypes. In Carolly Erickson's 1980 biography, *Great Harry*, Erickson attacks both her sexuality and her physical appearance, stating "Katherine more than likely seduced," Culpepper, saying she, "was clearly the aggressor, not the victim..." but refusing to provide evidence to her claim.⁵⁹ Even feminist interpretations can come into conflict. In *Divorced, Beheaded, Survived: A Feminist Reinterpretation of the Wives of Henry VIII*, while Karen Lindsey states the reason Katherine's "...image remains so tarnished says more about our failure to accept female sexuality than about Kathryn Howard's morality,"⁶⁰ she explicitly focuses on her sexuality rather than her individuality. Lindsey frames Katherine's

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Kizewski, 45.

⁵⁸ Kizewski, 38.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Kizewski, 43.

relationships being based purely around her sexual desire. For her relationship with Manno, she goes so far as to claim Katherine considered the balance of power in her favor, exercising her superiority over him despite the fact she was around thirteen years old.⁶¹ Time and time again, biographies from historians of all genders paint Katherine Howard as a sex-obsessed teenager on the basis of false information and patriarchal standards.

While many are quick to point a finger at her youth being a reason for a flighty nature, fewer view Katherine's youth and naïveté as that of a child, sent into the tumultuous world of the court of Henry VIII. Primary sources and new scholarship uncover new interpretations that reveal Katherine as most likely innocent of her supposed affair with Thomas Culpepper, sexually abused throughout her life, and the ideal sixteenth century woman with a vivacious nature. Her story, and the genuine truth behind centuries of bias, sexism, and myth, is too large to cover in a single paper. However, modern scholars and historians are beginning to put in the work. With more stories and adaptations continuing to be produced, Katherine Howard's story is reaching a greater audience. Even outside traditional scholarship, teens (especially teenage girls) are both relating and sympathizing with her life. New psychological developments have produced a better understanding of her mental state and the way her mental health influenced her choices and created support for people who experienced the same type of abuse. For a woman who may not have made it to the age of twenty, a queen whose reign barely lasted two years, and a memory which lasted through time as a single word in a rhyme, Katherine Howard's true legacy, though it may appear small, is timeless.

⁶¹ Ibid.

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