



QUEENSHIP AND POWER

HISTORY, FICTION, AND *THE TUDORS*

*Sex, Politics, Power, and Artistic License
in the Showtime Television Series*

Edited by

William B. Robison



Queenship and Power

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History, Fiction, and *The Tudors*

Sex, Politics, Power, and Artistic License
in the Showtime Television Series

palgrave
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Queenship and Power

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CONTENTS

1	Introduction <i>William B. Robison</i>	1
2	Henry VIII in <i>The Tudors</i> : Romantic Renaissance Warrior or Soap Opera Playboy? <i>William B. Robison</i>	27
3	Catherine of Aragon in <i>The Tudors</i> : Dark Hair, Devotion, and Dignity in Despair <i>William B. Robison</i>	59
4	<i>The Tudors</i> , Natalie Dormer, and Our “Default” Anne Boleyn <i>Susan Bordo</i>	77
5	The Last Four Queens of Henry VIII in <i>The Tudors</i> <i>Retha M. Wanicke</i>	97
6	The Significance of the King’s Children in <i>The Tudors</i> <i>Carole Levin and Estelle Paranque</i>	115

7	The King's Sister(s), Mistresses, Bastard(s), and "Uncle" in <i>The Tudors</i>	127
	<i>Kristen P. Walton</i>	
8	The King's In-Laws in <i>The Tudors</i>	139
	<i>Anne Throckmorton</i>	
9	The King's Friends in <i>The Tudors</i>	153
	<i>Victor L. Stater</i>	
10	Postmodern and Conservative: The King's Ministers in <i>The Tudors</i>	167
	<i>Robin Hermann</i>	
11	A Cardboard Crown: Kingship in <i>The Tudors</i>	179
	<i>Glenn Richardson</i>	
12	<i>The Tudors</i> and the Tudor Court: Know Your Symptom	195
	<i>Thomas Betteridge</i>	
13	"The Dyer's Hands Are Always Stained": Religion and the Clergy in <i>The Tudors</i>	209
	<i>Caroline Armbruster</i>	
14	Fact, Fiction, and Fantasy: Conspiracy and Rebellion in <i>The Tudors</i>	223
	<i>Keith Altazin</i>	
15	Crime, Punishment, and Violence in <i>The Tudors</i>	235
	<i>Krista J. Kesselring</i>	
16	Humanism and Humanitarianism in <i>The Tudors</i>	249
	<i>Samantha Perez</i>	

17	All That Glitters is (Fool's) Gold: Depictions of Court Entertainment in <i>The Tudors</i>	265
	<i>Carlie Pendleton</i>	
18	Holbein and the Artistic Mise-en-Scène of <i>The Tudors</i>	281
	<i>Tatiana C. String</i>	
19	Fashionable Fiction: The Significance of Costumes in <i>The Tudors</i>	293
	<i>Maria Hayward</i>	
20	Putting Women in Their Place: Gender, Sex, and Rape in <i>The Tudors</i>	307
	<i>Megan L. Hickerson</i>	
21	Incomplete Prescription: Maladies and Medicine in <i>The Tudors</i>	329
	<i>Elizabeth Lane Furdell</i>	
	Index	343

ADDITIONAL PRAISE FOR *HISTORY, FICTION,* *AND THE TUDORS*

“History, Fiction, and The Tudors: Sex, Politics, Power, and Artistic License in the Showtime Television Series is an insightful, remarkably balanced, and highly readable contribution to the scholarly conversation about how history is repurposed and repackaged for popular entertainment, specifically television.”

– Carolyn Colbert, Visiting Assistant Professor of English, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and contributor to *Henry VIII and History*

*“As a guide to the historical errors and distortions of the popular television series *The Tudors*, this book is unequalled in the breadth and depth of its coverage. Twenty expert contributors in twenty chapters examine in detail both what *The Tudors* got right and the many places where the real history was distorted or ignored. C. L. R. James, the great Caribbean historian, wrote, ‘There is no drama like the drama of history.’ It is a dictum that the contributors appreciate and the makers of *The Tudors* are shown to have clearly neglected.”*

– Ronald H. Fritze, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and Professor of History, Athens State University, and editor of *Historical Dictionary of Tudor England*

*“With a Henrician appetite for accuracy, these twenty essays examine all aspects of *The Tudors*: the persons who ruled; the places they romped; and their political, theological, and intellectual beliefs. Ideal for classroom use, these scholarly, accessible analyses of writing history and making fiction*

offer a clear, careful, and wide-ranging blend of fact and theory to guide students, scholars, theater and television professionals, and series fans to a more informed view of the Tudors.”

– Catherine Loomis, Professor of English and Women’s Studies, University of New Orleans, President of the Queen Elizabeth I Society, and author of *The Death of Elizabeth I: Remembering and Reconstructing the Virgin Queen*

“For better or worse, Showtime’s *The Tudors* will define the way a generation of global television viewers visualizes and thinks about Henry VIII and his court. But what should we think about *The Tudors*? In this admirably wide-ranging volume William Robison and an international team of scholars of Tudor history carefully evaluate the series’ strengths and weaknesses, its insights and moments of apparent madness. This is a comprehensive guide to *The Tudors* as both history lesson and popular cultural phenomenon.”

– Greg Walker, Regius Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature, University of Edinburgh, and author of *The Private Life of Henry VIII: A British Film Guide*

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Introduction

William B. Robison

“You think you know a story, but you only know how it ends. To get to the heart of the story, you have to go back to the beginning.” Thus does a voiceover by Jonathan Rhys Meyers as Henry VIII introduce each of the thirty-eight episodes of Showtime’s *The Tudors*. His statement is one with which historians can only agree. Regrettably, its apparent promise of concern for historical accuracy is one on which four seasons and thirty-five hours of the hugely popular cable television series largely fail to deliver. More revealing of what is to come is that the first episode starts not in 1509, the real beginning of Henry’s reign, but c. 1518 with the well-staged but fictitious assassination of Henry’s nonexistent uncle, followed in rapid succession by the king being “inconsolable,” angrily calling for war with France, and gleefully having sex with Bessie Blount, all within a few minutes both on-screen and in the storyline. From there the anachronisms, time compression, distortions, and outright inventions multiply, mingling with occasional moments of historicity and culminating with Henry agreeing with Thomas More and Thomas Wolsey’s proposal to create something that sounds like the League of Nations.¹

W.B. Robison (✉)

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This initial episode reveals a fundamental identity crisis that pervades the entire series. Is it supposed to be a serious historical drama, a clever deconstruction of traditional history, an artsy exercise in sociopolitical criticism, a period soap opera, or the world's longest piece of soft-core pornography? Is its target audience well-read history buffs, the hip intelligentsia, the demographic drawn to "chick flicks," or fans who like some semblance of a plot with their gratuitous sex and violence? That one can perhaps answer "all of the above" to both questions does not really clarify matters. Creator and writer Michael Hirst's response to criticism of the series has been similarly ambivalent. On one hand, he has said that his goal was entertainment rather than historical accuracy, which is fair enough—he is in the entertainment business. On the other hand, it is clear that he wants to be taken seriously in commenting about history even if not for recounting it literally. For example, he has said that his goal was to challenge the traditional views of Henry and the English Reformation. Further, he admits that there was too much emphasis on sex in the first two seasons, but that did not prevent his creating a bevy of fictitious sexual encounters in the third and fourth. Beyond that, he has made the all-too-frequent mistake of assuming that he can "improve" an already exciting story.²

Nevertheless, *The Tudors* is a genuine cultural phenomenon, one that historians of early modern England can hardly afford to ignore. It is by far the longest filmic event ever to deal with the Tudor dynasty. Filmed in Ireland for the Showtime premium cable television channel in the USA, it also appeared on BBC2 in the UK, CBC Television in Canada, and TV3 in Ireland, is now in syndication on other networks, is being distributed by Sony Pictures Television International, has been released through various digital outlets, and is available all over the world on DVD and Blu-ray, both as individual seasons and in a boxed set. It has won forty-one television awards and been nominated for sixty-five more, many of its stars have become international celebrities, it has its own rather sophisticated website, where one can buy a variety of series-related merchandise, and it has spawned fan sites, fan clubs, and fan fiction, as well as keeping Tudor blogs abuzz with commentary. Although the show has drawn fire from some television critics, others have had a largely positive reaction, while viewers have made it one of the highest rated programs in Showtime's history.³

The popular appeal of *The Tudors* poses both a dilemma and an opportunity to historians. Many have reacted with amusement, dismay, hostility, and/or cynical resignation to its extremely casual relationship with

historicity. But despite its many inaccuracies, the plot lines are often dramatic and engaging, the actors are generally good, the production values are high, and the series does certain things well, for example, its depiction of court pageantry and sport. All this makes the story seem plausible, gives it an “authentic” look, and renders it as likely to mold popular opinion about Henry and his era in the twenty-first century as Alexander Korda’s *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933) did in the twentieth century. Historians cannot afford simply to disdain and dismiss the show; rather, they have a responsibility to engage constructively the inaccuracies in *The Tudors* (and other films) unless history is to concede the field to fiction.⁴

However, historians can also take advantage of the popularity of *The Tudors*. In terms of scholarship, it provides abundant material for students of the emerging field of “Tudorism,” which Marcus Bull and Tatiana String describe as “the post-Tudor mobilization of any and all representations, images, associations, artefacts, spaces, and cultural scripts that either have or are supposed to have their roots in the Tudor era.” *The Tudors* already has been the subject of scholarly articles and presentations at professional conferences, in many of which contributors to this volume have participated. Moreover, historical films like *The Tudors* can serve a practical purpose, for discussing them in the classroom and the public forum—as well as scholarly publications—can encourage interest in real history, stimulate critical thinking, and reinforce memory. With proper guidance, students and others can be remarkably adept at comparing films with works of history and ferreting out errors. The extraordinary popularity of *The Tudors* makes it particularly useful in this regard. Therefore, rather than merely bemoaning its manifold flaws, it behooves historians to expose its errors while exploiting its Tudorist appeal.⁵

English filmmaker Michael Hirst is no stranger to the Tudor period or to controversy about his history-based projects, having written the screenplays for Shekhar Kapur’s feature films *Elizabeth* (1998) and *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007). Most of the directors for *The Tudors*—Jon Amiel, Ciaran Donnelly, Brian Kirk, Alison Maclean, Colm McCarthy, Charles McDougall, Jeremy Podeswa, Steve Shill, Dearbhla Walsh—have worked in both film and television, and some have collaborated with Hirst and/or worked on other historically themed shows, as have cinematographer Ousama Rawi, editors Lisa Grootenboer and Wendy Hallam Martin, score composer Trevor Morris, and costume designer Joan Bergin.⁶

The star of *The Tudors*, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, is an odd choice to play Henry VIII, to whom he bears absolutely no physical resemblance

and whose colossal ambition, conflicting impulses, gargantuan appetites, and outsized emotions he often struggles to convey. On-screen more than anyone except the king is Henry Cavill as Charles Brandon and, after him, Anthony Brophy as imperial ambassador Eustace Chapuys, both decidedly ahistorical but nonetheless engaging. Several characters who were major players in the political and religious struggles of the 1530s and 1540s and who thus should appear in all four seasons arrive late or depart without explanation: Henry Czerny, a lightweight amalgamation of the 2nd and 3rd Dukes of Norfolk, the latter of whom should have a major role throughout Henry's reign but vanishes at the end of Season One; Hans Matheson, who portrays Archbishop Thomas Cranmer with insufficient gravitas in Season Two and then is gone; Simon Ward, a rather one-dimensional Catholic fanatic as Stephen Gardiner, who does not show up until Season Three; and Alan Van Sprang, a remarkably unpleasant Francis Bryan who mysteriously appears at the beginning of Season Three and disappears at the end.

Seasons One and Two are distinctly better than Three and Four, in part because Maria Doyle Kennedy and Natalie Dormer's strong performances as Henry's longest-lasting and most interesting wives, Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn. Neither Anita Briem or Annabelle Wallis, Jane Seymour in Seasons Two and Three, respectively, measures up; Joss Stone is able but miscast as the supposedly ugly Anne of Cleves; Tamzin Merchant's adolescent appearance and behavior as Catherine Howard make her frequent nude scenes seem like child pornography; and Joely Richardson, though very good, has a fairly limited role as Catherine Parr. The first two seasons also feature stronger supporting actors, notably Sam Neill as the most fully realized on-screen Wolsey ever; Jeremy Northam, who emerges from the shadow of Paul Scofield (*A Man for All Seasons*) as Thomas More; Nick Dunning, splendidly slimy as Thomas Boleyn; and James Frain as a more complex Thomas Cromwell than the paper villain usually seen on film. The major characters in Seasons Three and Four are less compelling, for example, Max Brown and Andrew McNair as Edward and Thomas Seymour, respectively; Emma Hamilton as Anne Stanhope; Rod Hallett as Richard Rich; Frank McCusker as Risley (Thomas Wriothesley); Torrance Coombs as Thomas Culpeper; and David O'Hara as the Earl of Surrey. A notable exception is Sarah Bolger, who plays Princess Mary with considerable subtlety as she evolves from a sad, neglected teenaged girl into the bitter young woman who later burned nearly 300 heretics.

Season One's main attraction is the breakup of Henry's first marriage to Catherine of Aragon and perpetually hot pursuit of Anne Boleyn, whose family urge her to replace her sister Mary in the king's bed but who refuses to yield, even if in a dream sequence she urges him, "Seduce me." Other story lines include Wolsey's efforts to obtain a divorce for the king and the papal crown for himself; a failed plot by the Duke of Buckingham (Steve Waddington) to seize the throne; the birth of the royal bastard Henry Fitzroy (Zak Jenciragic) to Elizabeth Blount (Ruta Gedmintas), his ennoblement as Duke of Richmond, and eventual death; alternating plans for war against and alliances with Francis I of France (Emmanuel Leconte) and Emperor Charles V (Sebastian Armesto), including marriage proposals for Princess Mary and much pageantry; completely invented marriages by Henry's sister Margaret (Gabrielle Anwar) to the king of Portugal and then Brandon; Henry's pamphlet war with Martin Luther; More's estrangement from the king and nascent persecution of Lutherans; Cromwell's premature arrival; royal temper tantrums; and lots of sex; all culminating with Wolsey's fictitious suicide.

Marital politics continue to dominate Season Two, with Henry getting his divorce and marrying Anne, who gives him a daughter Elizabeth but no son, encourages his affair with Madge Shelton (Laura Jane Laughlin) to forestall other rivals but is gradually supplanted by Jane Seymour anyway, and is arrested and convicted on charges of adultery trumped up by Cromwell. Also, Henry breaks with a Roman Catholic Church anachronistically led by Pope Paul III (Peter O'Toole); Cranmer rises to prominence as Anne encourages religious reform; the Boleyns secretly try to poison Bishop John Fisher (Bosco Hogan), whose cook Richard Rouse (Gary Murphy) is boiled alive for the offense; More and Fisher are executed for refusing to take the Oath of Allegiance to Henry; Catherine is exiled from court, separated from Princess Mary, and stoically declines and expires; Mary is declared illegitimate and forced to serve her younger sister, later declared a bastard herself; Anne dies after a dramatic speech from the scaffold; and Henry gluttonously devours a swan, which is clearly a symbol for his deceased second bride.

It is the triangle of Henry, Catherine, and Anne that gives the first two seasons dramatic tension, and once both women die, the series loses energy. Season Three (eight episodes instead of the usual ten) introduces a new Jane Seymour, who reconciles Henry with his daughters, unsuccessfully appeals for mercy to the rebels in the Pilgrimage of Grace, and dies after giving birth to Prince Edward, which leads to a bizarre episode

in which the king goes into seclusion (and apparently mad) with only his fool Will Somers (David Bradley) for company. Meanwhile, Brandon savagely suppresses the Pilgrimage of Grace (a role that in reality belonged to Norfolk), and Henry has a fling with the fictitious Lady Ursula Misseldon (Charlotte Salt), who also sleeps with Bryan when he is not having sex with Anne Stanhope or on the continent trying to assassinate Reginald Pole (Mark Hildreth). Cromwell, with the assistance of artist Hans Holbein (Peter Gaynor), engineers the king's marriage to Anne of Cleves, the failure of which leads Cromwell to the scaffold and Henry to the bed of the nymphet Catherine Howard. Princess Mary has a brief flirtation with Philip of Bavaria (Collin O'Donoghue), but his Protestantism and rapid departure put a sad end to that.

Season Four witnesses Henry's marriage to the incredibly silly Catherine Howard, whose past affair with Francis Dereham (Allen Leech) and current one with Thomas Culpeper lead to divorce and beheading for her, heartbreak for the presumably aging king (who does not look older), and an unexpected royal marriage for Catherine Parr, the wife of Lord Latimer (Michael Elwyn) and the unofficial fiancé (pending her husband's death) of Thomas Seymour. It also includes the king's highly improbable bedding of the recently rejected Anne of Cleves. The Seymours' feud over politics and social status with Surrey and over religion with Gardiner, who relentlessly pursues Protestants, including Anne Askew (Emma Stansfield) and the queen. Seeking to recover his youth on the battlefield, Henry successfully besieges Boulogne at an enormous cost in lives and money, and Brandon has an affair with the imaginary Brigitte Rousselot (Selma Brook). Gardiner's intrigues against Catherine and plot to put Mary on the throne get him imprisoned in the Tower, while Surrey's ambition for the crown leads to his execution. While Holbein paints Henry's famous portrait, the ghosts of the king's first three wives appear in succession and berate him for his poor treatment of them and their children. Henry sends his family away, and the series ends with him examining his new portrait and then turning to leave the room. His death is not shown.

Unfortunately, while *The Tudors* is visually appealing and features some good performances, no amount of beauty or good acting can rescue it from Hirst having drastically rewritten history without any real justification for doing so. One expects a certain amount of invented dialogue and "stage business" in even the most accurate of historical dramas, but such things as amalgamating Henry's two sisters into one, having Margaret marry and murder the King of Portugal (she did neither) and then wed

Brandon (whom her missing sister Mary married) mangles history to no apparent dramatic purpose. The plethora of similar inaccuracies throughout the series belies Hirst's claim that it was "85 % accurate." However, Hirst does enjoy some support among scholars. Ramona Wray seeks to explain the many historical inaccuracies in *The Tudors* not as anomaly or error but as indicative of "a process now recognized as a characteristic of quality television—a 'complex seeing.'" In other words, it is rife with clever inside jokes. Wray's observation might make sense with a film like *Shakespeare in Love*, which consistently engages in clever self-mockery, but it gives Hirst more credit than his record—with *Elizabeth*, *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*, and *The Tudors*—seems to deserve. However, Wray is not alone. Jerome de Groot also sees it as an extended example of postmodern playfulness.

Still, a major element of *The Tudors*' appeal is not so much intellectual subtlety but lots of good-looking men and women, brightly (if inaccurately) costumed and frequently naked, with the more or less constant prospect during moments of non-erotic activity that they will be naked again soon. As Ginia Bellafante observed in her *New York Times* review of Season Two, "If *The Tudors* fails to live up to the great long-form dramas cable television has produced, it is not simply because it refuses the visceral messiness of a *Rome* or a *Deadwood*... but more significantly because it radically reduces the era's thematic conflicts to simplistic struggles over personal and erotic power." Or as Tim Dowling noted in *The Guardian* in 2009, "Almost everyone in *The Tudors* is young, thin and beautiful. Not only is this a little unlikely, it can also make it hard to tell them apart."

All that said, the goal of this volume is not merely to do a "hatchet job" on *The Tudors* but to assess it as a work of art, as a representation of history, as a reflection of modern and perhaps postmodern concerns, and as a potential tool for teaching. While the contributors express strong criticism where we believe it justified, we also express appreciation for what the series does well. Moreover, we do not all agree in our assessments of the series, and we hope that our disagreements will be as interesting and useful to readers as our agreements.

Chapter 2: "Henry VIII in *The Tudors*: Romantic Renaissance Warrior or Soap Opera Playboy?" is twice as long as the others not as the result of editorial self-indulgence but because it also incorporates warfare and diplomacy. Henry's legacy and his place in historical memory—both real and imagined—occupy all contributors to this volume; Henry is the main character, whose depiction in Hirst's script and by Meyers on-screen sets

the tone for the entire series; and *The Tudors*' central problem is the way it portrays the king's personal life, England's domestic politics, Henrician foreign policy, and the international ramifications of the break with Rome and the English Reformation. The historical Henry remains controversial, and filmmakers genuinely concerned with historicity must address his complex personality and the myriad motives for his often unpredictable actions; his abundant talents, powerful intellect, and extensive learning, as well as his boisterous behavior; the real reasons for his ardent pursuit of both love and war; if, when, and why he changed from a young Renaissance humanist prince into a brutal tyrant; whether he made his own policy or followed the lead of ministers like Wolsey, Cromwell, and Cranmer; to what extent he abandoned traditional Catholic doctrine and embraced reform after the break with Rome; and other issues.

It might be difficult for a typical two-hour film to address adequately and accurately all these aspects of a reign lasting almost four decades, but it certainly should be possible for a thirty-five-hour television series to do so. Yet, if Hirst's script occasionally pays lip service to such a goal, it fails to pursue it in a sustained and nuanced manner and is frequently ahistorical. From start to finish, *The Tudors* is characterized by tensions between actual history and inexplicable fictional deviations, between the complex Henry and Meyers' one-dimensional character, between traditional filmic tropes and Hirst's self-conscious new paradigm, between the filmmakers' desire to be taken seriously and the temptation to pander to viewers with sex and sensationalism, between the capricious and cruel but charismatic king of reality and the merely capricious and cruel incarnation on-screen, between the romantic Renaissance warrior and the soap opera playboy.

If Chap. 2 criticizes the series for eschewing historical accuracy and departing from filmic tradition to depict Henry in ways that are troubling, Chap. 3: "Catherine of Aragon in *The Tudors*: Dark Hair, Devotion, and Dignity in Despair," credits it for breaking with the typical on-screen treatment of Catherine, who almost always suffers badly in comparison with Anne Boleyn. Though Catherine was the daughter of two powerful and successful regnant monarchs, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, was an intelligent, learned, politically skillful, and deeply religious woman, and was married to Henry longer than his other five wives put together, film and television often concentrate on her later years, make her appear old and shrewish, and downplay her intellect, learning, and religion. *The Tudors*—while not entirely free of these tendencies—gives Catherine far more time on-screen, covers a greater portion of her life than

any production except *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (1970), and treats her religious devotion more seriously than any save *Anne of the Thousand Days* (1969). True, it ignores her early years in England as Prince Arthur's wife and widow, the happy phase of her marriage to Henry (foreshortened in the series by Anne's early arrival), her intellectual parity with the king, and her accomplishments as queen, notably as regent during Henry's absence in France in 1513, and at times it makes her too much a victim. It also, like every other filmic depiction except *Six Wives*, makes her brunette rather than blonde. However, Hirst offers a more fully developed Catherine who is not just a bit player in the story, and Maria Doyle Kennedy gives her depth, displays a genuine range of emotions, and invests her with real dignity. Therefore, despite its problems, *The Tudors* offers at least a partial corrective to popular views of Catherine.

Similarly, Susan Bordo argues in Chap. 4: "*The Tudors*, Natalie Dormer, and Our 'Default' Anne," that Dormer's Anne is superior to the default version derived from Eustace Chapuys and Catholic polemicist Nicholas Sander, described by Paul Friedmann in *Anne Boleyn* (1884) as "incredibly vain, ambitious, unscrupulous, coarse, fierce, and relentless," and still found in modern scholarship like David Starkey's *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII* (2004) and fiction such as Philippa Gregory's *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2001) and Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* (2009) and *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012). The real Anne, though fond of a good time, encountered evangelical thought at the French court, became an avid student of scripture, assisted importation of English Bibles, gave Henry copies of Simon Fish's *Supplication of the Beggars* and William Tyndale's *Obedience of the Christian Man*, sought to convert monasteries to educational purposes, and was the patron of such evangelicals as Thomas Cranmer, William Barlow, William Bill, Edward Foxe, Thomas Goodrich, Hugh Latimer, Matthew Parker, and Nicholas Shaxton, and reformist scholars at Cambridge. The filmic Anne appears on-screen more often than any other wife, usually in some variation of the default version, which gives scant attention to her intellect, learning, and zeal for reform. Emphasis on romance typically takes the story farther from documented history, for though Henry's love letters survive, their amorous activity on camera is the fruit of scriptwriters' imagination. Initially *The Tudors* offered little improvement, for Hirst scripted Anne as a one-dimensional sex object in Season One, where her sexuality overpowers other aspects of her character, especially after the signature "Seduce me" scene. However, Dormer, a student of history bothered by this mischaracterization, persuaded him to

pay more attention to Anne's faith and intellect in Season Two, where—though it comes amid a welter of factual errors and inventions—her character increasingly reflects the queen's real convictions.

If *The Tudors* offers clearer understanding of Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn even in the absence of accurate narrative, that is not the case with their successors, as Retha Warnicke demonstrates in Chap. 5: "The Last Four Queens of Henry VIII in *The Tudors*." They are less well represented in contemporary sources and modern scholarship, get less attention on film, and are less familiar to viewers, which can tempt filmmakers to treat them as a blank slate. Jane Seymour was likely quiet and religiously conservative but remains enigmatic, and on-screen she has been everything from a ruthless schemer to a virtual nun. In *The Tudors* she is a bit of both, for in Season Two Anita Briem's Jane is on the verge of becoming Henry's mistress, while in Season Three Annabelle Wallis' Jane is his devoutly Catholic wife. The conventional wisdom is that Anne of Cleves was ugly, though film makers often prefer to make her funny. In *The Tudors* she is neither, for its account of her marriage is persistently grim, and there never has been a more epic failure to cast a homely Anne than with Joss Stone. Though Hirst draws upon historical sources for her dialogue, he forfeits the credit by having her sleep with Henry after his remarriage. Warnicke aptly describes the youthful Tamzin Merchant's Catherine Howard as an early modern Lolita, though Vladimir Nabokov's adolescent heroine is less silly. Conversely, Joely Richardson is a compellingly mature Catherine Parr, and Hirst notes her intellect and Protestant activism, though he fabricates some details, for example, making Hugh Latimer her chaplain.

The series exhibits more sensitivity with Henry's progeny, as Carole Levin and Estelle Paranque show in Chap. 6: "The Significance of the King's Children in *The Tudors*." Mary was a tragic figure who has never been the primary subject of a serious film in English, though she figures briefly as a child in movies about Henry and Edward VI and as the bad old queen in those about Lady Jane Grey and Elizabeth. Thus, her status as a major character in *The Tudors* is a significant departure. Perhaps, because it never exploits her for sexual content (save for Francis Bryan's pointlessly vulgar joke about cunnilingus at her expense and an occasional wistful kiss), it deals with her psychological development with considerable subtlety, and Sarah Bolger does a fine job in the role of the adolescent and young adult princess—the gradual emergence of her determination to wipe out heresy is especially effective. Bláthnaid McKeown is also good

as the younger, oft-betrothed Mary. Elizabeth is the queen of Tudor film stars, but her childhood prior to Henry's death has received little attention on-screen. Kate Duggan and Claire Macaulay have only bit parts in *The Tudors* as the toddler and child Elizabeth, respectively, but Laoise Murray accurately portrays the adolescent princess as a budding intellectual, politically astute, and cautiously circumspect, though Hirst has her make prophetic remarks about her then improbable future reign. Edward, except for his well-known fictitious role in the many versions of *The Prince and the Pauper*, mostly appears on film as a sickly boy who is nearly kidnapped by his uncle Thomas Seymour and/or dies of tuberculosis. In fact, he was not only intelligent and devout but also, contrary to popular belief, vigorous and healthy—much like his father—until he became ill at sixteen. *The Tudors* shows little of this, employing Eoin Murtagh primarily for the cuteness factor, as it does with Zak Jenciragic as Henry Fitzroy, who appears long enough to be made Duke of Richmond and then dies tragically and much earlier than in reality. On the whole, *The Tudors* does better with Henry's daughters than his sons, though—to be fair—Mary and Elizabeth were around for much longer during the period the series covers.

In Chap. 7: “The King’s Sister(s), Mistresses, Bastard(s), and ‘Uncle’ in *The Tudors*,” Kristen Walton addresses some of Hirst’s oddest dramatic decisions. The first is opening the series with the fictitious assassination of Henry’s nonexistent uncle and ambassador (Sean Pertwee) in the ducal palace of Urbino by agents of Francis I of France. In reality, Henry’s only paternal uncle, Jasper Tudor, died in 1495, and any living brother of his mother—Elizabeth of York, daughter of Edward IV—would have been king himself. Even stranger is the amalgamation of Henry’s two sisters into one—Margaret—and the invented plotline in which she marries and murders the King of Portugal (Joseph Kelly) before wedding Brandon. The real Margaret’s marriages to James IV, the Earl of Angus, and Lord Methven had important consequences, as did her sister Mary’s to Louis XII of France and Brandon, but none of that is apparent in *The Tudors*. The portrayal of Elizabeth Blount is broadly correct, but the chronology of her relationship with Henry is scrambled. The king’s affair with Mary Boleyn (Perdita Weeks), which lasted four or five years, appears to be reduced to a few days or weeks in *The Tudors*, and there is no mention of her first husband William Carey or their children, sometimes alleged to be Henry’s, though he never acknowledged them as he did Henry Fitzroy. Finally, Henry’s affair with Madge Shelton may be a case of mistaken identity, as

his mistress appears to have been her sister Mary; however, *The Tudors* adds considerable embroidery to the erroneous tradition. Combined with Anne Boleyn's arrival seven or eight years early and the substantial compression of time associated with Henry's courtship of her and pursuit of a divorce, the result is a highly inaccurate picture of Henry's personal and family life in the 1520s and early 1530s.

Henry had as problematic a collection of in-laws as anyone has ever had. Many were important in their own right, but because *The Tudors* focuses so much on marital politics, their role is greater, and inaccuracies loom larger, as Anne Throckmorton reveals in Chap. 8: "The King's In-Laws in *The Tudors*." Hirst recycles an erroneous trope found in many films, whereby Thomas Boleyn and Norfolk try to put first Mary and then Anne Boleyn in the king's bed to cultivate royal favor. In reality, both were important courtiers from the start of Henry's reign, and Anne came to the king's attention, later and without their assistance or insistence, as one of Catherine of Aragon's ladies-in-waiting. *The Tudors* gives Boleyn his longest on-screen outing by far, but Hirst assigns Dunning too much to do in the role—though he correctly serves as a diplomat, he also informs on Buckingham, pays cook Richard Rouse (Gary Murphy) to poison Fisher, and indulges in other fictitious skullduggery before abandoning his children Anne and George (Padraic Delaney) to their fates. George follows his usual path to the scaffold, but Hirst invents a homosexual relationship between him and Mark Smeaton (David Alpay), the musician executed for alleged adultery with Anne. Henry Czerny's Norfolk is miscast, unconvincing, and—as in other films—a combination of the 2nd and 3rd Dukes. He disappears after Season One, though the real 3rd Duke lived until 1554, joined Gardiner in advocating conservative religious policy, helped destroy Cromwell, promoted Henry's marriage to his niece Catherine Howard, and was imprisoned when his son, the Earl of Surrey, was charged with treason—all developments featured in *The Tudors* but minus Norfolk. His mother, the Dowager Duchess (Barbara Brennan), seems to be running a brothel, whence Catherine is fetched for Henry's carnal pleasure. Surrey suddenly appears at the beginning of Season Four, is introduced to Henry as though they were strangers, is much older than he should be, and is the implacable enemy of the Seymours, with whom he was quite friendly at the time. There is a huge amount of nonsense about the Seymours, the worst example being that Edward's wife Anne Stanhope, quite loyal in reality, sleeps with Bryan, Surrey, and her brother-in-law Thomas, who fathers her nonexistent son.

Henry surrounded himself with boon companions and had close relationships with his ministers, so “king’s friends” is a broad category that might even include Will Somers, who joins the king in seclusion and lunacy after Jane Seymour’s death on *The Tudors*. In Chap. 9: “The King’s Friends in *The Tudors*,” Victor Stater focuses on five of the most important: Charles Brandon, Francis Bryan, William Compton, Henry Norris, and Thomas Wyatt. Anthony Knivert, one of a raucous group of friends in Season One, is a fictional character based on Sir Thomas Knyvett, who died in 1512, before *The Tudors* begins. Early in his reign, Henry’s companions included not only Knyvett but also Brandon, Bryan, Compton, and Norris, and *The Tudors* at least gets their unruly behavior right, but not much else. Brandon’s life is fabricated from beginning to end, though particularly noteworthy are his marriage to the wrong sister of the king (Margaret instead of Mary), his role in suppressing the Pilgrimage of Grace (instead of Norfolk), his fictitious affairs, his conversations with Lord Darcy’s ghost, and his appearance, for Cavill looks no more like the Brandon than Meyers does Henry. Bryan does not show up until Season Three (c. 1536), and though he correctly has an eye patch and really may have been involved in a plan to assassinate Reginald Pole, almost everything else he does on-screen is the product of Hirst’s imagination. Before *The Tudors* allows Compton, correctly, to die during an outbreak of sweating sickness in 1528, it gives him an entirely gratuitous homosexual relationship with composer Thomas Tallis, who in reality did not arrive at court until the 1540s and was happily married (on the show he does redirect his amorous intentions to women after Compton’s death). Norris gets Henry’s permission to marry the king’s mistress Madge Shelton, which historically he considered but did not conclude; however, he was executed for his alleged sexual relationship with Anne Boleyn, as he is on the show. Wyatt frequently figures in Seasons One and Two, but his poetry is largely used to hint at his unproven amorous relationship with Anne Boleyn.

James Frain as Thomas Cromwell, Sam Neill as Thomas Wolsey, and Jeremy Northam as Thomas More give three of the best performances on *The Tudors*, though they do so in highly fictionalized roles. In Chap. 10: “Postmodern and Conservative: The King’s Ministers in *The Tudors*,” Robin Hermann argues that despite adopting a putatively postmodern approach to Henry’s reign, Hirst actually ends up presenting a conservative interpretation of history in which only great men like Henry VIII are agents of change (a view more resonant of Thomas Carlyle than Jacques Derrida). Neill’s Wolsey is intelligent, subtle, worldly, ambitious, yet

sincerely dedicated to peace, justice, and the welfare of his young royal protégé. Regrettably, Hirst has him interact with imaginary churchmen as well as the real Cardinal Campeggio and gives him a great many ridiculous things to say and do, culminating with cutting his own throat on camera. Northam, as More, not only compares favorably to Paul Scofield but is in one respect an improvement, revealing a fanatical hatred for heretics, even if he burns the wrong one—Simon Fish, who died of natural causes. But Hirst succumbs to presentism when Henry, Wolsey, and More discuss plans for a 1518 Treaty of London that Woodrow Wilson might have drafted. Frain's Cromwell is too thin and too early, serving as Henry's secretary while Wolsey is still in power (he entered royal service only in 1530 or 1531). However, he is a more complex Cromwell than in most on-screen depictions, demonstrating his Lutheran sympathies, reacting with horror to Rouse's execution by boiling, and mingling love for his family with his own Machiavellian cruelty. In *The Tudors*, as in *A Man for All Seasons* and to some extent real life, Richard Rich is a key villain in More's martyrdom and a fairly unpleasant character thereafter. Richard Pace (Matt Ryan) is the subject of an ahistorical intrigue wherein Wolsey accuses him of treason and sends him to the Tower, where he goes mad. Risley (Thomas Wriothesley) is not particularly well developed, but the series does get right the general trajectory of his career, wherein he went from being Cromwell's associate to becoming a persecutor of Protestants.

Though *The Tudors* does not address the issue of kingship per se, its main character is a king who frequently interacts with other kings and their emissaries, which is bound to give viewers certain notions of what being an early sixteenth-century king was like. However, as Glenn Richardson shows in Chap. 11: "A Cardboard Crown: Kingship in *The Tudors*," Hirst shows little understanding of early modern kingship. The "King of Portugal" (never identified by name) appears only long enough for the completely fictitious segment in which Henry's sister Margaret marries and murders him; therefore, he does not figure much in shaping viewers' perceptions, save perhaps to create the impression that kings had really dirty feet. However, Charles V and Francis I are more real and substantial characters, and as with Meyers' Henry VIII, casting creates some problems. Armesto's Charles is unintentionally reminiscent of Mandy Patinkin's overtly comedic turn as Íñigo Montoya in *The Princess Bride* (1987), while Leconte's Francis may embody more French stereotypes than any on-screen character since Pepe le Pew. The problem this poses for suspension of disbelief increases exponentially when either actor shares

the screen with Meyers. Glimpses of Henry, Charles, and Francis “being kings” in *The Tudors* are sporadic. The monarchs are rarely seen at war except for Henry’s 1544 foray into France, and the comparatively svelte Meyers is a far cry from the morbidly obese man the king had become by that time. There are more scenes featuring the pageantry of royal diplomatic meetings, notably the Field of the Cloth of Gold. Perhaps the best are those that show Henry “practicing” for war and proving his manliness by jousting. There are also numerous scenes in which he dispenses royal patronage. On the whole, however, *The Tudors* gives the impression that being king was a great deal of fun—especially with regard to sex—the sustained revelry being interrupted only occasionally by pain and fear and seldom by the tedium of work. What it does not adequately convey is the extent to which kings of this era were—and were expected to be—“Renaissance men” capable of doing virtually everything well. Viewers see little of Henry the humanist, the linguist, and the musician, and when he has a completely fictional encounter with Marguerite of Navarre—sister of Francis I, wife of Henri II of Navarre, and one of the great literary figures of the age—he does not engage her in intellectual discourse, which would have been the likely result of such a meeting; rather, he seduces her.

In recent years, Tudor historians (e.g., G.R. Elton, David Loades, David Starkey) have demonstrated that the court was as important a venue for politics as parliament or the royal council. In Chap. 12: “*The Tudors* and the Tudor Court: Know Your Symptom,” Thomas Betteridge offers a fascinating description of how *The Tudors* depicts the court, the role of court politics in Anne of Boleyn’s fall, and the way Thomas Wyatt presents the court in his poetry. Access to the king was crucial for obtaining royal favor or for advancing a particular agenda, and those who served in the king’s privy chamber were well placed to do both. The court was where the king displayed his majesty to its fullest, where much royal policy was conceived, and where the dangerous but irresistible game of courtly love never stopped. Court factionalism lay behind many of the political ups and downs of the period, as Eric Ives has demonstrated in Anne’s case. Overall, *The Tudors* succeeds in demonstrating that every act and event at court, however great or small, had political significance and that a courtier’s greater proximity to the king—desirable in and of itself for any man (or woman) on the make—carried with it an increased risk of the unpredictable king’s displeasure and of treachery from one’s fellow courtiers. What it does not do is to give much indication of how the court actually functioned on a daily basis. Most scenes “at court” are set pieces