

**An Analysis of the Presentation of the Image of King Henry VIII of England and
His Prominent Advisors**

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Abstract

If you were to ask virtually any person in the park to describe Henry VIII of England, the response you would get would probably include words such as “tyrant,” “glutton,” “ill-tempered,” “cruel,” and so on; this is how the public remembers this notorious king. Historically, he could perhaps be described this way in his later years but hardly in his prime. This paper examines the differences between what historians have concluded – specifically about Henry VIII and his close advisors Cardinal Thomas Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell – cinematic and television adaptations, and published summations of events and people, which seem to dictate the public’s knowledge of history. How is each one of these important men depicted in shows like BBC’s *The Tudors*, and books throughout history like John Richard Green’s 19th century *Short History of the English People*? What role do popular documentaries like *Inside the Court of Henry VIII* directed by Peter Chinn, PBS’s *Secrets of Henry VIII’s Palace: Hampton Court*, and PBS’s *Tales From the Royal Bedchamber* play in this discussion? This paper addresses these issues.

Introduction

A great mind, a generous lord, a talented artist, a vicious gossip, a doting lover, and an athletic Adonis – these are all epithets for Henry VIII. Coincidentally, these are the elements of this Renaissance ruler that commonly get excluded from the presentation of his person to the public. Generally, the public gets information about the past through cinema, television, popular novels, and now the internet. Sadly, squeezing all the information about such a crucial time and fascinating ruler is impossible to do in the hour and a half spent in a theatre or a 50-minute episode. What is deemed important then? In fact, it seems that it does not generally matter what historians qualify as most important, the real question is what the public wants. In terms of Henry VIII of England, it is the scandal, executions, marriages, and grotesqueness of his later years that makes him a good basis for a TV figure. An image of a selfish madman dominates rather than a vibrant mind cognizant of the repercussions his actions have and highly effected by the precedent set forth by his father and the counsel of his advisors and peers. The presentation of these advisors similarly is molded into a character fit for television at the expense of historical accuracy.

My first exposure to the reign of Henry VIII was in the “diary” of Elizabeth I, part of the *Royal Diaries*. Although there was minimal interaction with her father, the mention of her mother’s beheading and references to the chaos in the kingdom had me hooked on the story of the Tudor family. This example speaks to the fact that while children’s stories and public leisure novels aren’t 100 percent historically

accurate, they do serve the purpose of getting people interested in history. It certainly did for me. What kept me so interested in Henry specifically since then, was the curious effect he seemed to have on people in general. While in schools we are taught that he was a great Renaissance man, that is soon forgotten when the mention of his six marriages surfaces. It is at this point that one has to remember that genius though he was, he as king of England, never was completely independent. Whether he listened to his advisors and their counsel was variable but the fact that he was indeed continuously counseled remains.

This paper seeks to determine how historical figures such as King Henry VIII of England and his advisors Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, Sir Thomas More, and Thomas Cromwell – the men who shaped Reformation England – are represented in media in comparison to their actual lives and accomplishments. Because so many people's sole interaction with this history today is through historical fiction shows like *The Tudors*, they are important to analyze for their valuable teaching role. Other works like the afore-mentioned children's series *The Royal Diaries*, and films like early twentieth-century *Anne Boleyn*, and more recent *The Other Boleyn Girl* are often viewed before a scholarly biography or text or even a documentary. The result is a public that has a generally skewed knowledge about real events portrayed in a quasi-correct way.

Background

The history of Henry VIII is a well-covered topic in scholarship on a wide range of topics. As such a large personality and enlightened mind, his place in the

Renaissance and the English Reformation makes him a key figure to understand before understanding these two secular and religious movements. Henry was a devout man, a musical composer, an amateur poet, a self-proclaimed scientist, an academic scholar, and a highly charismatic man. He composed the famous song “Greensleeves,” created his own remedies for diseases and plagues such as the then-called sweating sickness, was a highly skilled diplomat, wrote several texts on religion including his famous pamphlet denouncing Martin Luther’s heresies. Despite all of these accomplishments, he is still mostly known for his cruelty and rashness in his later years.

Through common knowledge of his notorious string of marriages and the fact that the acquirement of a divorce from the first wife plunged England into a schism from the Church of Rome tells historians that not only was the king powerful, but resourceful. When Catholic marriage precedent set forth by the Vatican, and the efforts of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey failed him, Henry VIII had Thomas Cromwell and Thomas Cranmer turn to legal and scholarly channels.

Historiography

In Ethan H. Shagan’s *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*, very little is mentioned of his personality. Much of his text spends time analyzing the people’s attitude and behavior in accordance to loyalty and the law. This text is useful for this paper because it helps discern how the relationship between Henry and the laypeople of England would dictate the nature of, and motivation for, the upcoming decrees from the king and his counsel: “It was the peculiar genius of Henry VIII and

his advisors that, despite the pleas of the evangelicals and the pressures of Romanists, they sought throughout the 1530's to *politicise* their Reformation, keeping any questions of its legitimacy focused on loyalty rather than theology."¹ In this way, Henry's agenda was obviously more concerned with political gain than creating legislation that would promote what he considered "true religion." His advisors throughout the years had different methods in accomplishing these goals.

The first highly significant advisor to the king was Cardinal Thomas Wolsey. He was born March 1473 and died on November 29th, 1530 on his way to see the king after his November 4th arrest. He was the son of a butcher in Ipswich, England who had been elevated to his end status by the king. He had studied at the University of Oxford and became ordained as a priest in 1498. He was appointed as chaplain to Sir Richard Nanfan, who then recommended his service to Henry VII. After Nanfan's death in 1507, Wolsey became exclusively the royal chaplain, becoming dean of Lincoln just before the king died in 1509. Due to his successes in service to his father, Henry VIII soon gave him greater responsibility. ²

During this period of young Henry VIII's rule, he was very interested in delegating related tasks. "Appointed royal almoner in November 1509, Wolsey easily persuaded the pleasure-loving young monarch to surrender more and more of the unwelcome cares of state."³ Diarmaid MacCulloch describes his duties in a

¹ Ethan H. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 51.

² *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Thomas, Cardinal Wolsey | English Cardinal and Statesman", accessed November 25, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Cardinal-Wolsey>.

³ *Ibid.*

more cynical way, calling him “[a] specimen of a low-born minister saving the king the bother of ruling, except on occasions when Henry would suddenly want to.”⁴ Although this partnership was skewed in Wolsey’s favor in terms of power, the two men maintained a close relationship, particularly after Henry’s fruitful campaigns against the French in 1513. In fact, he recommended Pope Leo X “made him bishop of Lincoln (February 1514), archbishop of York (September 1514), and cardinal (1515).”⁵ Additionally, Wolsey would go on to become Lord Chancellor of England (December 1515), and three years later, papal legate.

This rise paved the way for a great many enemies at court.⁶ In terms of his relationship with Henry, Wolsey enjoyed the trust and love of the king. In a post-war England, after the War of Roses, the advancement of a commoner before those of nobility was added insult to injury among the court. Since Henry’s father had overthrown the Plantagenet king, there had been unrest among the aristocracy in the English court. The nobles who had fought against the Tudor dynasty were still alive and present; the memory of the hurt and embarrassment remained. Therefore, the fact that commoners were being elevated to their positions or higher created an awkward, resentful atmosphere among parliament and advisors. Reasons resulting from a combination of mistrust of these former enemies and a need of some sort of

⁴ Diarmaid MacCulloch, "Thomas Cromwell Review - New Biography of the Hero of Wolf Hall," September 3, 2014, Accessed November 25, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/sep/03/thomas-cromwell-untold-story-tracy-borman-review>.

⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica, "Thomas, Cardinal Wolsey."

⁶ *Inside the Court of Henry VIII*. directed by Samuel West (PBS, 2015), Film.

control over his subjects, Henry preferred to “make men.” If he was able to bring poor men to a life of luxury, he could use that as leverage when the time presented itself, to force the actions he desired.⁷

In the case of Thomas Cromwell this proves to be true as well. In 1485, he was born to a family of brewers in Putney, London, clearly not nobility. His father had been well acquainted with the court system: “His name appears at least 48 times on the manor court rolls for various misdemeanours, including watering down beer and assaulting his neighbours.”⁸ Carrying on this scoundrel-esque legacy, young Thomas was incarcerated as well; although perhaps due to an argument with his father who might have had him put in jail. Having had enough of living with his family, Cromwell left to fend for himself at age 15, ending up in France where he “may have joined England’s enemies in the French army or acted as a French soldier’s servant and pike carrier.”⁹ After the French defeat by the Spanish in the battle of Garigliano, Cromwell travels in Italy, becoming the “most Italian Englishman in England, after years of bumming around Italy and acquiring, mysteriously, a quite exceptional education.”¹⁰

⁷West, *Inside the Court of Henry VIII*.

⁸ Diarmaid MacCulloch, “Who Was the Real Thomas Cromwell?” BBC News, 2015, Accessed November 25, 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/timelines/zttjdjxs>.

⁹ MacCulloch, “Who was the real Thomas Cromwell.”

¹⁰ Diarmaid MacCulloch, “Thomas Cromwell Review - New Biography of the Hero of Wolf Hall.” September 3, 2014. Accessed November 25, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/sep/03/thomas-cromwell-untold-story-tracy-borman-review>.

In a review of fellow historian Tracy Borman's book *Thomas Cromwell: The Untold Story of Henry VIII's Most Faithful Servant*, MacCulloch provides a short list of the highlights of Cromwell's time in power:

As Cromwell's biographer, you can't help ticking off a predictable set of achievements (nor avoid deciding which are admirable and which are despicable): humiliating Catherine of Aragon; shaping the English protestant reformation; destroying monasteries, Anne Boleyn and sundry gentlefolk and nobility; taming Wales and initiating unsuccessful efforts to tame Ireland; and innumerable bits of bureaucracy including the introduction of registers of baptisms, marriages and burials, for which last achievement, historians of all creeds and none must bless Holbein's Man in Black.¹¹

MacCulloch points out that aside from his major actions in the way of dealing with Henry VIII's divorce from Katherine and the resulting break from Rome and Protestant movement, his successes range from bureaucratic to artistic. He made innovations in record keeping and was one of famous portraitist Hans Holbein's patrons.

The impending fall Cromwell suffered finally occurred in 1540. He was charged with treason and corruption after an embarrassing trial during the process of Henry's annulment from Anne of Cleves. Henry had to attest to his inadequacies in the bedroom and was humiliated because of it.¹² In terms of what he did do politically for Henry VIII, he approached the king's matters in a significantly different way than Wolsey, however effective.

Correspondence From the Court

¹¹ Diarmaid MacCulloch, "Thomas Cromwell."

¹² MacCulloch, "Who Was the Real Thomas Cromwell."

The first useful topic to discuss is that of the relationship between Henry and Cardinal Wolsey; this would be the enabling factor that kept him at court and at such a prestigious position for so long despite the growing distaste for him at court. For evidence that speaks to this relationship, I turn to the letters passed between the two. The first example is dated between 1518 and 1521 by the text.¹³ In this letter, most notably, Henry VIII is concerned for the health of the Cardinal: "Mine own good cardinal, I recommend me unto you with all my heart, and thank you for the great pain and labour that you do daily take in my own business and matters, desiring you (that when you have well established them) to take some pastime and comfort, to the intent you may the longer endure to serve us..." The letter continues with his "opinion" on the matter at hand (details of which are unknown at this time to the reader due to lack of context) which is really just his expression of confidence in Wolsey and his "trusty councilors'" ability and not an opinion at all.¹⁴ Therefore, from this letter two things are evident: the trust between Wolsey and Henry is strong and that the king is content to leave his administration to his servant's judgment.

Moving forward in time, the frustration of Henry's inability to produce a male heir is becoming more evident in the letters. With this growing frustration, however, he seems to be putting more trust and hope on Wolsey. This is visible in how he signs the letters: the wording changes from "your loving master" to "your loving

¹³ M. St. Clare Byrne, *The Letters of King Henry VIII: A Selection, with a Few Other Documents*, Reprint Edition ed. London: Cassell, 1968, 28.

¹⁴ Ibid.

sovereign lord and friend.”¹⁵ It seems enforcing the power structure is less pressing than ensuring the friendship between the two men, perhaps to push for results. His letters remain somewhat benevolent at this point although the impatience is clear: “...with convenient diligence, to the intent our affairs there may have some stay.”¹⁶ The letter ends with a plea for him to return to court as soon as possible under the veil of his presence being missed. Supposedly, this is so the king might better urge productive action from the Cardinal. This seemed to have worked because by the time of the letter to Pope Clement VII on February 11th, 1528, Wolsey was fully with the King in his divorce of Katherine.

In the aforementioned letter, Henry states Wolsey would not “for any earthly affection to his prince, or desire of reward, transgress the truth or swerve from the right path, nor would he have consented in any way to have reported to his Holiness otherwise than his conviction, which was of the insufficiency of the marriage.”¹⁷ These words clearly are not true but they tell us how the relationship is going: Wolsey has gone against his conscience as a man of the cloth and sided with the king in order to keep his position and perhaps his life. The Catholic Church at this time and continues today, to teach that divorce is wrong; an annulment can only be given under very specific circumstances – none of which applied to the king’s “Great Matter.” Since Queen Katherine had borne the king a daughter, and the previous

¹⁵ Byrne, *The Letters of King Henry VIII*, 49.

¹⁶ Ibid., 48.

¹⁷ Ibid., 63.

Pope had granted a dispensation so the couple could be married in the first place, the case really had no grounds. Wolsey had waged everything he had on the success of this case, most notably, his already shaky integrity; as I will explain later, *The Tudors* capitalizes on this moment.

Things tense up for the Cardinal as the king requires to hear from him “every second day”¹⁸, no doubt to keep him diligent and focused – if not stressed and determined. This energy continues throughout his next letters; the king assures him “there shall remain in me no spark of displeasure”¹⁹ and keeps in the pretense that he is under the impression that if anything has gone wrong or has been incorrect, it is through the fault of Wolsey’s servants and colleagues rather than Wolsey himself. He again signs the letter “your loving Sovereign Lord and friend.”²⁰

The last letter that mentioned Wolsey or was written on his behalf was that of Henry VIII to Lord Dacre in 1530. By this time, the Cardinal was relieved from a number of his titles but the king asks that Dacre “not only show [him]self from time to time, of toward and benevolent mind, using, entreating and accepting [Wolsey] as to his dignity doth appertain...”²¹ This last letter tells us much in the way of the reasoning behind Wolsey’s punishment. Clearly the king still has feelings of friendship and sympathy toward the man even though he felt it was necessary to remove him from court. This suggests that it was not wholly his own decision to do

¹⁸ Byrne, *The Letters of King Henry VIII*, 72.

¹⁹ Ibid., 78.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Byrne, *The Letters of King Henry VIII*, 111.

so: persons like Anne Boleyn, her father Lord Rochford, and his friends at court may have influenced him. Shortly after this letter was written, the Cardinal was arrested for treason and died en route to London.

Thomas Cromwell's relationship with the King was far less close than that of Wolsey's. This is exemplified in the sheer lack of writing between these two men. Whereas Wolsey and Henry VIII corresponded with both business matters and personal matters, little correspondence to Cromwell exists. The significant correspondence we do have concerning the king's business is between Cromwell and Sir Thomas Wyatt – advisor to the king and successful court poet. The two men are partly responsible for finding the new queen following the death of Jane Seymour after giving birth to the king's son, Edward. Remarkably business-like, the letters do little to speak to the relationship between Cromwell and Henry.

Cromwell's administration was well-organized and were excellent record keepers. The fact that history has not preserved multitudes of documents from this period is probably due to a "cleaning out" before or during his arrest. What is evident during the administration of Cromwell, however, is that Henry put far less trust in others. Rather than investing faith in another as he had done previously, he handled some matters of foreign diplomacy himself.²² This alternatively led to less of a friendship between himself and his advisors, and more of a servant-master hierarchy.

²² Byrne, *The Letters of King Henry VIII*, 200.

In the last letter between Cromwell and the King, the tone has undoubtedly changed. The new Earl of Essex, despite this recent rise, is imprisoned for treason and corruption. He pleads: “Most gracious prince, I cry for mercy, mercy, mercy!”²³ Although the king goes through with the execution, it seems he is remorseful, if not regretful. He misses “the most faithful servant [he] ever had.”²⁴

Early Dipictions

In *A Short History of the English People*, by John Richard Green and published in 1893 by Harper and Brothers in Franklin Square, New York – a four volume set giving summation of the events, movements, and figures of historical note – Wolsey and Cromwell are depicted with more or less the same information, but the connotation is much different. Whereas more contemporary sources include information about Wolsey’s social status and origins, such as how his father was a butcher, Green says more obscurely that Wolsey was “the son of a wealthy man in Ipswich, whose ability had raised him into notice at the close of the preceding reign...”²⁵ Setting aside issues of meaning across the centuries, a “wealthy man” is still a commoner; this is still at the heart of the mistrust and dislike of Wolsey at Henry’s court.

²³ MacCulloch, “Who was the real Thomas Cromwell.”

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ John Richard Green. *A Short History of the English People*. Vol. II. New York: Harper and Brothers, Franklin Square, 1893. 633.

Additionally, Green's text places Henry and Wolsey on the same playing field: "...the reconquest of Lombardy was facilitated by Henry and Wolsey, in the hope that while the war lasted England would be free from all fear of attack..."²⁶ This pair of names in similar phrases appears several times. Purposefully wording the actions of these two men in just this way equalizes them. In fact, the text seems to credit Wolsey for the major diplomatic accomplishments and endeavors during his occupation of his position at court: "...the administration of Wolsey, amid all its ceaseless diplomacy, for seven years kept England out of war."²⁷ The sentence before goes so far as to say Henry was not able to accomplish this at all. Now, perhaps without meaning to, Green had placed Wolsey's skill above that of the King. This had been a problem even during the lifetimes of these men and was one of the causes leading to the arrest of Wolsey, during the process of which, he died. The prestige and wealth acquired by the papal legate is described as follows:

"The revenues of two sees whose tenants were foreigners fell into his hands...he was in receipt of pensions from France and Spain, while his official emoluments were enormous. His pomp was almost royal. A train of prelates and nobles followed him wherever he moved; his household was composed of five hundred persons of noble birth, and its chief posts were held by knights and barons of the realm. He spent his vast wealth with princely ostentation. Two of his houses, Hampton Court and York House, the later Whitehall, were splendid enough to serve at his fall as royal palaces."²⁸

As stated above, Wolsey's houses were deemed grand enough to suit the king's needs for court. Originally Wolsey's house, Hampton Palace was gifted to the king. A

²⁶ Green, *A Short History of the English People*, 633.

²⁷ Green, *A Short History of the English People*, 633.

²⁸ Ibid., 635.

servant of the court gifted the palace that would later become the center of the court, to Henry.

It can be asserted that fall of Cardinal Wolsey was directly caused by the stagnant nature of the divorce under his care. This 19th century recounting of events goes further to say that Wolsey was more cunning than Henry VIII by implying that had Henry listened to him and approached the matter of the divorce as he had suggested, Wolsey would have been able to procure the desired results, and quickly.²⁹

When compared to the interpretation provided alongside the letters of the previous section, it is clear to see that this feeling has changed between the two. The complimentary text, first published in 1936, attempts to restore credit to Henry VIII as king rather than the laboring servants, namely Wolsey and Cromwell. This is reinforced by the title of the work, *The Letters of King Henry VIII: a Selection, with a Few Other Documents*, suggesting that Henry's are the main, important ones. It is curious then that much of the business is conducted in letters from others and to others, but this coincides with the assertion that Henry found time was better spent on other things rather than devoted to matters of the state. This was true for at least the early periods of his rule.

Documentary Depictions

²⁹ Green, *A Short History of the English People*, 648-649.

Several informative documentaries have been created and are readily available to the public. The first of these is really a testament to what the public already thinks they know about the infamous Henry VIII. Directed by Samuel West, *Inside the Court of Henry VIII* sets up the context of Henry's reign well. However, when the subject matter moves to the relationships with the two advisors discussed in this paper, the information is somewhat limited to what the viewers will find interesting.

When discussing Wolsey, this film emphasizes the fact that he was low born, *neuvo riche*, financially savvy, and was able to constantly out-smart his peers.³⁰ It also points out that Wolsey was very competent in doing the "king's will" sufficiently while advancing his own interests – something that also appears in the drama adaptation. Another recurring theme between the documentary versions and other secondary sources is that Henry did not like to be administrator. West's work clearly shows that he delegated most of the work to Wolsey and this was a contributing factor to his later downfall. *Inside the Court of Henry VIII* attributes Anne Boleyn to the Cardinal's fall: "Anne caused Wolsey's downfall single-handedly." However, I think it is fair to say that this is not correct; the close relationship between the monarch and his servant faltered most likely due to a combination of the lack of results, impatience, and comments from Anne Boleyn.

In another documentary, *Secrets of Henry VIII's Palace: Hampton Court*, moments echoed from early descriptions from *A Short History of the English People*

³⁰ West, *Inside the Court of Henry VIII*.

appear. The film suggests that Wolsey was pressured to gift Hampton Palace to Henry due to the fact that its wealth was beginning to rival that of the monarch. He had originally built it to “match his prestige;” Wolsey had become an important diplomat and landowner. This newly built palace was to reflect this status; however, it became a threat to the king’s prestige and therefore had to be gifted to the crown.³¹

Together, the two documentaries mentioned out of the wide variety available to the public paint a pretty true but sadly incomplete picture. The films are credited by appearances and interviews with leading Tudor historians such as Tracy Borman, Suzannah Lipscomb, Lucy Worsley, Diarmid MacCulloch, and Laura Purcell, but still the content is tailored to what would sell the most DVDs and keep the kids awake during class.

Henry’s Court as a Drama

Given what is now known through the study of original correspondences and texts, early interpretations, and contemporary commentary, what is left to analyze are the portrayals of Henry, Wolsey, and Cromwell in modern drama – specifically BBC’s *The Tudors*. This show has been praised and criticized in turn for several things: the elements of scandal and gossip have been called true to the spirit of Henry VIII’s court, while things like costume, technology, and of course much of the details of the events have been changed to create more intrigue and appeal to a

³¹ *Secrets of Henry VIII’s Palace: Hampton Court*, Directed by Peter Chinn, (United States: PBS, 2013) Film.

modern audience.³² What I want to focus on is the parts of the show that are for the most part, an accurate portrayal and what reconciles it to the world of historians (although there of course is remaining backlash).

Dr. Tracy Borman, head of interpretation for Historic Royal Places, executive for Heritage Education Trust, and noted historian, states in an article by Andrew Hough, "Yes, the scriptwriters may have taken liberties with the facts, but they have also succeeded in re-creating the drama and atmosphere of Henry VIII's court, with its intrigues, scandals and betrayals."³³ The show aired hardly a single episode in which there is not at least one sex scene, and a scene of death or bloodshed.

On the opposite of the argument is Dr. David Starkey who claims, "the BBC had 'squandered' public money on a historical drama which...had been deliberately 'dubbed down' to appeal to an American audience."³⁴ This would include the severely more risqué costume, and other changes to incite better ratings. While both Borman and Starkey have merit, it is clearly necessary to enter into watching the show with the knowledge that it is not one hundred percent accurate.

Despite Starkey's remarks, there are elements of the show that are very true to the historic record. One significant place to find these parallels is in the dialogue.

³² Andrew Hough, "BBC Period Show, The Tudors, Is 'Historically Inaccurate', Leading Historian Says," The Telegraph Online, August 10, 2009, Accessed November 25, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/6005582/BBC-period-show-The-Tudors-is-historically-inaccurate-leading-historian-says.html>.

³³ Andrew Hough, "BBC Period Show, The Tudors, Is 'Historically Inaccurate', Leading Historian Says."

³⁴ Ibid.

While much wording has changed to better ensure public understanding, many quotes remain accurate renditions of what we know the figures to have said.

Also an excellent portrayal is that of Henry's character in the first season, specifically in the first episode. It starts off with the murder of the king's uncle by Frenchmen. Henry then listens to his advisors in council and reaches the decision to declare war on France. The statement he makes directly after this decision is most telling: "Now! I can go play." The show capitalizes on the idea that Henry really had no interest beyond the attractiveness of battle to a young man.³⁵ In fact, later when Wolsey's character draws up a pan-European peace treaty, Henry's character comes off as slightly irritated until Wolsey assures him this will give his reign reverence.

Elements that perhaps aren't as grounded in historical records are friendships between characters on the show: the bond between Wolsey and Thomas More is one of these. Although not a strict focus of this paper, this relationship serves to indicate there was more complexity than just the dynamic between the king and his Chancellor – there was personal gain, self-preservation, and genuine care for the monarch. Through my research, I have found little evidence of a true friendship between Thomas More and Thomas Wolsey. The relationship seems to be more of a sparring of equals in the show. Wolsey bows to the will of the king and finds any way he can to placate him and benefit himself. During the first season of *The Tudors*, he finds it prudent to simultaneously fight for Henry's divorce and attempt to have his name put into the pool of considered names for papal candidates

³⁵ *The Tudors*, "In Cold Blood," directed by Charles McDougall and Steve Shill, aired October 5, 2007, Showtime, accessed November 25, 2015, www.netflix.com.

once the sickly pope of the time has died.³⁶ Additionally, in contrast to More, Wolsey seems to make Henry's decisions for him and guide him to that; More tries to guide Henry to making the right decision.

In the second episode of season one, there is considerable dialogue between More and Wolsey; directly after Henry decides to war with France, More asks Wolsey what they should do. Wolsey replies, "I think we should do what the king wants us to do." More asks, "What if the king doesn't know what's in his best interests?" To which Wolsey says, "Then you should help him decide." More looks unsettled after this statement.³⁷ This conversation, though probably not held between these two gentlemen, is a surprisingly accurate depiction of the advising styles of the two men: Wolsey leads Henry to the decision, More expects him to use his celebrated Renaissance mind to come up with a moral, humanist solution himself.

The interactions between Wolsey and Cromwell also have little place in my experience with primary sources. However, this interaction again serves to juxtapose the two different personalities and methods of dealing with the king. It also makes Cromwell appear more sinister as he puts on a front for the court to hide his true ambitions. In an episode leading up to the divorce of Henry and Katherine, Cromwell is shown at a Protestant meeting. Clearly the audience is meant to see that while outwardly true to the Catholic religion (under pain of being named a heretic)

³⁶ *The Tudors*, "Simply Henry," directed by Charles McDougall, aired April 8, 2007, Showtime, Accessed November 25, 2015, <http://www.netflix.com>.

³⁷ *The Tudors*, "Simply Henry."

he uses his experience among Protestants to inform his actions dealing with the king's "Great Matter."

Cromwell's affiliation with the Lutheran reformers is presented as the inspiration for his strategy getting around the Papal laws surrounding Henry VIII's marriage to Katherine. The protestant reformers discredit the Pope and therefore see no need for his judgment on the matter. Essentially, it is not and never has been a theological one, but a legal one according to Cromwell. It is this idea that sparks the surveying of the colleges across Europe for their verdict on the matter, rather than relying on Rome's decision. The series suggests that in the end, Cromwell and his colleague Thomas Cranmer are responsible for the idea to create the Church of England.

Conclusion

Dr. Tracy Borman is quoted to say *The Tudors* "undoubtedly stimulated interest in British history."³⁸ Overall, from the perspective of a historian, I say if historical fiction novels, movies, or even television dramas are able to spark an desire to read more, to see artifacts, to surround themselves with history, the work was successful. In a perfect world, all portrayals of historic figures would be as accurate as possible, settings would speak to the true atmosphere of the time, and dialogue would be precise to draw attention to the stark changes between the centuries. However, as long as that requires effort from the audience to study

³⁸ Hough, "BBC Period Show."

outside sources, the ratings will remain low and the resources will remain elusive. Thus, accuracy gets tossed aside for intrigue.

A glimmer of hope continues to flicker; as I have noted through example, shows like the Tudors have merit in describing perhaps not precision, but some accuracy. While specific friendships, conversations, and appearances are not to be internalized, the legacy of the characters has been honored. Wolsey's relationship with the king was such that he executed affairs of the state somewhat unchecked compared to the administration of Cromwell. Whereas Henry was detached and simple to placate early on, he took much more initiative, especially in foreign affairs when Cromwell was Chancellor. This is echoed in *The Tudors* and motioned to in the documentaries. It seems that later in his life, as his trust in the servants he had delegated to carry out the duties of the court waned, taking time away from personal enjoyment was more attractive than continuing to lose close friends and allies. Viewers of contemporary cinematography are left with this impression. Although it was not my intention as I began my research argue this, I believe from a public history standpoint, the popular renditions of Henry and his court are somewhat successful.

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