Reputation and appropriation at the Tudor court: Queen Kateryn Parr and Anne Stanhope, Duchess of Somerset

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Abstract: As daughters of the gentry who rose to positions of power at the Tudor court, Kateryn Parr as the last queen of Henry VIII (r.1509–1547), Anne Stanhope as wife of Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, and Lord Protector under Edward VI (r.1547–1553), both women were exceptional for their times. Bold, outspoken, advisors to their husbands, both stepped beyond the socially sanctified gender role of modest woman and self-effacing wife. Each was active in claiming the principal female role at the top of the Tudor hierarchy, and while Parr was seen by contemporaries as a constructive force, Stanhope’s reputation was the opposite. Just how precise, however, are these characterizations? The relationship between these two women, collaborative while Kateryn was queen, combative when Anne became the Protector’s lady, display mechanisms of appropriation and confrontation that spilled out into the public forum and affected the power dynamics of the Duke of Somerset’s Protectorate. Their interaction, the credibility of recent attempts at the rehabilitation of Stanhope’s reputation and an analysis of her place in the power politics of her husband’s regency are themes that this article explores.

Subjects: Visual Arts; British History; Early Modern History; Cultural Studies

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT
During the reign of the child-king Edward VI (r.1547–53), a vicious battle for power was fought not only among the men of Edward’s council but among two of the most important women at court, Edward’s stepmother, the queen-dowager Kateryn Parr, and her once ally but now bitter enemy Anne Stanhope, Duchess of Somerset, and wife of England’s Lord Protector. While the queen fought for a place in the young king’s regency, the duchess sought to replace the queen as first lady of the kingdom. Stanhope’s strategy involved the usurpation of precedence due to the queen, the seizure of her jewels and the appropriation of patronage over projects that had once been Kateryn’s. Stanhope was also an eager imitator of Parr’s earlier promotion of the English artistic Renaissance. As a woman, Stanhope’s aggressive behavior, avarice and political intrigue brought general condemnation not only from her husband’s enemies but also from his friends. Her negative reputation was seminal in the downfall of his Protectorate.
‘Reputation is an idle and most false imposition, oft got without merit and lost without deserving.” Thus Iago to Cassio in Act 2 Scene 3 of Shakespeare’s *Othello* on the fickle nature of a good reputation. But what about a bad one? Shakespeare had a comment about that as well and has Mark Antony remark that, “the evil that men do lives after them”. Historically and for women in particular, their good name was a mandatory passport to social acceptance. Wealth and beauty could achieve much but a bad reputation could ruin all. At the Tudor court this was demonstrably true. For 500 years since their chaotic careers which contributed to inflexion points in the history of Tudor England, the received reputations of Kateryn Parr (1512–1548), sixth wife of Henry VIII, and Anne Stanhope (c.1510–1587), wife of Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, and Lord Protector under Edward VI, have not been happy ones.

But how precise were these characterizations? Do current opinions differ markedly from contemporary Tudor ones? Each woman had approximately five years—Kateryn from 1543–48 and Anne from 1547-1551—to explore the limits of her agency at the Tudor court. Although her contemporaries were in general complementary to her during her lifetime, in the centuries after her death Parr came to be characterized as little more than a royal nurserymaid to her ailing husband, a pious, plain-faced prude who preached Protestantism and was kind to Henry’s children. Recent research has proven Parr’s postmortem reputation to be wildly inaccurate (James, 1999, passim, 2009, pp. 142–51, 2018). During her brief time on the throne Henry’s sixth queen created benchmarks of royal engagement through her activities in religion, literature, education, art and music. She set precedents in each of those fields, acted as Regent-General and inhabited the role of an activist queen, a choice that informed her stepdaughter Elizabeth’s approach to her own time on the throne (James, 1999, pp. 136–7, pp. 144–2, 2009, pp. 145, 290–1).

Stanhope has fared worse. Described as acquisitive, vindictive and arrogant beyond measure during her lifetime, Stanhope’s reputation has continued to be that of a malevolent mischief-maker who ruled her husband and successfully sought the death of her brother-in-law. Her claim to a place of power within the Protectorate has been generally subsumed by aspersions cast on her character, but in the last few years a spirited attempt at rehabilitating that character has been undertaken (Warnicke, 2012, pp. 77–104). Yet by reverse engineering her documented image, imperfect though it is, to present the gendered stereotype of a good wife is to do damage to the ways in which women achieved and held onto power. Whether ignored by historians, dismissed as a mere meddler or rehabilitated as a marital asset badly maligned by her husband’s enemies, like Parr’s role during the last years of Henry VIII’s reign, Stanhope’s actual agency within the Protectorate, filtered through the scrim of her character flaws, has been both distorted and underrated.

The relationship between these two women, collaborative while Kateryn was queen and combative when Anne became the Protector’s lady, was complicated. Yet it was to have a seminal effect on the politics that played out at court between 1543–1552. Parr’s activities and choices as queen influenced Stanhope’s own decisions during the Protectorate and in turn affected attitudes of both friends and enemies toward her husband’s rule. A brief moment in the relationship between these two women during the first year of the Protectorate has been documented numerous times in both primary sources and current histories (Chronicle, 1889, pp. 156–64; Hayward, 1993, pp. 197–8; James, 1999, pp. 307–9; Warnicke, 2012, pp. 77–81). But the arc of interaction between the two women and their families, one that stretched over decades, has had less attention. As this paper will show, a number of Kateryn Parr’s patterns of engagement with authority were later appropriated by Anne Stanhope, the queen’s former lady-in-waiting, during the period her husband acted as England’s Lord Protector. The relationship between these two
women, the impact of Stanhope’s reputation on the power dynamics of Somerset’s Protectorate, and the credibility of recent attempts at her rehabilitation are themes that this article explores.

1. Family matters
Born within two years of each other both Anne Stanhope and Kateryn Parr came from the gentry class. Born in 1512, Parr grew up in a closely-knit nuclear household run by her widowed mother. Born about 1510, Anne Stanhope’s childhood was spent in what is now termed a blended family. Her mother, Elizabeth Bourchier, had had two previous marriages that produced one surviving daughter when she married Anne’s father, Sir Edward Stanhope of Rampton in Nottinghamshire, a widower with two surviving sons. As adults, the younger of these, Sir Michael Stanhope, only two or three years older than Anne, became her closest ally. Although Anne was her parents’ only child, she was nonetheless a middle child in a family of half-siblings. Besides the three older ones, she also had a younger half-sister by her mother’s fourth marriage to Sir Richard Page. It was Page, who was to be the connecting link between the child Anne and her future at the Tudor court.

As early as the mid-1520’s there was a connection between Anne Stanhope’s family and the Parrs. Kateryn’s uncle, Sir William Parr of Horton, was a client of Cardinal Wolsey’s and through that patronage in 1525 he secured the position of chamberlain in the recently formed household of the king’s illegitimate son, Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond, at Sheriff Hutton in Yorkshire (James, 1999, pp. 40–51). The office of vice-chamberlain and Parr’s second in command was given to Anne’s stepfather Richard Page, who was knighted in 1529. It was probably during this period of interaction with the powers that be at court that Page secured a post for his teen-aged step-daughter as a maid-in-waiting in the queen’s household (Tytler, 1839, pp. 51–2). A portrait of Anne at the age of 16 (Figure 1), now at Syon House, may have been commissioned in recognition of her appointment. Another lady in Catherine of Aragon’s household at that same time was Maud Green, widow of Sir Thomas Parr and mother of Kateryn, who had served as the queen’s lady-in-waiting.

Figure 1. Anne Stanhope, by an unknown artist, circa 1526. Oil on panel, 48.26 by 40 cm. Syon House, Syon Park, Isleworth. Courtesy of the Northumberland Estates.
for a decade and was one of her most favored ladies (James, 1999, p. 13n.10; L&P (1875), 4:i, no. 1939). The 34-year-old Maud and the teen-aged Anne would certainly have known each other. Both became close friends of the queen’s young daughter, Mary, friendships that would have repercussions in the following decade.

While Anne pursued her court career in the queen's household, the queen’s goddaughter Kateryn Parr at age 16 was given in marriage to Edward Borough of Gainsborough in Lincolnshire, the eldest son and heir of Sir Thomas Borough. For the next seven years, her life would be lived first in Lincolnshire as Borough’s wife and after his death in 1533 in Yorkshire as the third wife of John Neville, 3rd Lord Latimer. In 1536 Latimer’s actions during the uprising known as the Pilgrimage of Grace irrevocably compromised his reputation in the eyes of the king, resulting in the more or less forced removal of the family from their center of power in the north. With her return to the south, Lady Latimer rejoined the circles at court. By this time her mother was dead as was the queen she had served but Mary’s memories of Maud Parr were warm ones and they provided an entrée for Lady Latimer to join Mary’s household, an establishment that by December 1542, as Imperial ambassador Chapuys noted in dispatches, the king was visiting with curious frequency (L&P (1900), 17, no. 1212; Loades, 1989, pp. 113, 117). Lord Latimer died in March 1543 and the following June, John Dudley, Lord Lisle, wrote that Kateryn, together with her sister Anne, were “in the court with the Ladies Mary and Elizabeth” (L&P (1902), 18:i, no. 740). Three weeks later Kateryn married Henry VIII and became queen of England.

2. Relations at court

From her days as Catherine of Aragon's maid-in-waiting, Anne Stanhope's career remained tied to the court and with the eclipse of Catherine and the ascent of Anne Boleyn, she transferred her royal duties from the household of Henry’s first queen to that of his second. As the politics shifted around the royal divorce and the establishment of the English Church, Stanhope became romantically involved with Sir Edward Seymour, the brother of another lady in the current queen’s household, Jane Seymour, and married him sometime before 9 March 1535 (L&P (1885), 8:i no. 481:13). Just over a year later, Henry VIII took Jane Seymour as his third wife and the fortunes of the Seymour family took a distinctly promising turn. Seven years later, when Henry VIII married his sixth wife, Kateryn Parr, on 12 July 1543, the Seymours as aunt and uncle of Henry’s heir were politically well-established. A letter written in 1537 assured one noble lady that “so my Lady Beauchamp [Anne Stanhope] be your friend” all would be well for her business at court (Lisle Letters, 1981, 4, no. 867). Now Earl and Countess of Hertford with supporting estates, the Seymours also had a new connection to the new queen. Kateryn was in love with Hertford’s younger brother, Sir Thomas Seymour. Unfortunately for the lovers, Henry’s desire to marry Lady Latimer had ended all thoughts in Seymour’s direction. Reluctantly Kateryn had acceded to pressure not only from the king but from her own family to become Henry’s wife and queen of England.

Interpreting the royal marriage as a sign from God, the new queen framed her elevated position in terms of a religious mission to ensure that the Reformation in England and her royal husband’s place at the head of the English church were both secure and that English congregations were well supplied with vernacular liturgical works to use in worship. In her support of the reformed religion the queen found fellow believers in the Hertfords. Evincing a similar zeal for Evangelical beliefs, Anne Stanhope, who had moved successively from queen’s household to queen’s household, became one of Kateryn’s ladies-in-waiting and immersed herself in the religious hothouse that was the queen’s chamber. Yet despite their shared religious convictions, Anne stood outside the circle of Kateryn’s intimates. It was circumstance not compatibility that compelled the two women to join forces during the religious machinations at the end of Henry’s reign. The queen’s closest companions at court during these years were her sister, Anne Herbert, her cousin Maud Parr, Lady Lane, and her cousin, Sir Robert Tyrwhit’s wife, Elizabeth. Between 1544–1547 mutual Evangelical
The circumstances of their relationship changed dramatically at Henry’s death with Edward Seymour’s elevation as Duke of Somerset and Lord Protector of England. No longer a lady serving in the queen’s household but now wife to the most powerful man in the kingdom after the child king, the new Duchess of Somerset appears to have considered herself First Lady in the kingdom. Although recent apologists have argued without supporting evidence that Anne Stanhope had no such thought and that this was simply malicious gossip, too many contemporary reports corroborating the duchess’s conduct exist to dismiss it out of hand. This assumption of prerogative, however, does not seem to have happened immediately and according to the letters exchanged between Parr and Sir Thomas Seymour directly after the king’s death, amicable relations still existed between the two women until the news of Kateryn’s clandestine marriage to the younger Seymour brother was revealed. Although as a political stratagem aimed at strengthening the power of the Seymour family the Somersets had initially supported the idea of such a marriage sometime in the future, as a fait accompli arriving only months after the king’s death it caused them to reconsider the political calculus (NA: SP10/1 f. 41).

Such a precipitate marriage, occurring without the knowledge of the king and unsanctified by the Privy Council, verged on treason and could have put the Lord Protector’s own position at risk. It endangered not only the newlyweds but their politically ambitious relatives. No wonder then that relations between the two couples soured quickly. Given the circumstances, it is not difficult to understand the anger the Somersets felt toward Seymour. The duke’s grasp on power as Lord Protector, unlicensed by Henry VIII’s will, was always fragile and Thomas Seymour’s ambition, fraternal envy and impetuosity played into the hands of Somerset’s enemies. Seymour’s attempts to control the boy king, his ambitions toward Princess Elizabeth, his control of the English navy as Lord High Admiral, and his intriguing with the Marquis of Northampton and the Earl of Rutland all gave him powerful tools to use against his brother. Northampton also noted that another bone of contention was Seymour’s guardianship of Lady Jane Grey whom the Somersets were trying to wrest from his control as a prologue to marrying her to their son, “but they would not prevail” (CSP: Domestic, 1547–53, no. 189). It is not unsurprising then that both the duke and duchess were later accused of wanting the disruptive and dangerous Seymour removed from court although whether the duchess encouraged her husband to have his brother executed, as gossip had it, is unproveable. Whether or not it was true, it was believed in certain quarters and the quotation attributed to her: “My lord, I tell you that if your brother does not die, he will be your death,” while possibly apocryphal, arguably in the face of Seymour’s plotting made prudent political sense (Chronicle, 1889, pp. 156–64).

The ensuing quarrels between Kateryn, her new husband and the Somersets have been exhaustively discussed elsewhere (James, 1999, pp. 303–313; Warnicke, 2012, pp. 90–92; Scard, 2016, pp. 118–25). But in summary they rested on four main points, status, jointure, jewels and precedence. From Thomas Seymour’s perspective, his support of his brother’s assumption of the role of Lord Protector had been meagerly rewarded. As the young king’s other uncle he considered that his political role should be of similar if not equal importance to that of the duke and that further lands and titles should be forthcoming. Even the post of governor to the king which Seymour sought had been given instead to Anne’s brother, Sir Michael Stanhope. Kateryn’s battle with the Lord Protector which included his wife focused initially on the appropriation of her jewels and much of her jointure. The issue of court precedence has also been extensively raised as a flash point between the two women (Chronicle, 1889, p. 156). Court gossip had the duchess refusing to hold the queen’s train, usurping her place at Matins and informing various courtiers that if “Master Seymour is unable to teach his wife better manners, I am she who will.” While Scard goes so far as to state that the queen’s animosity “was directed at Somerset, not Anne”, the Parr-Seymour letters prove otherwise (Scard, 2016, p. 120).
This enmity was described in the second edition (1570) of Acts and Monuments by John Foxe, who wrote about the “displeasure” that arose between the queen-dowager and the duchess (Foxe, 1838, 6, p. 283). Foxe was a close friend of both Katherine Willoughby, Duchess of Suffolk, in whose house he had lived for a time, and William Cecil, the Lord Protector’s one-time secretary, neither defenders of Anne Stanhope. These connections gave the author first-hand sources for the belief that precedence was at least one social signifier of the quarrel. While apologists for Anne Stanhope claim that there was no clash over precedence, Thomas Seymour contradicted that claim indicating that it was an immediate point of conflict between himself, the queen-dowager and the Somersets in his statement to Sir William Sharington in late 1548. “[I]t would be strange to some,” he told Sharington, “when his daughter came of age, taking [her] place above [the duchess] as a queen’s daughter” (CSP: Domestic, 1547–53, no. 184). This wishful vision deliberately singled out the duchess for public humiliation when in future the queen’s child—and his—could claim precedence over her.

3. Literary appropriation and Erasmus’s Paraphrases
With Kateryn Parr’s death on 5 September 1548, Anne Stanhope shed her main rival for the title of first lady in the kingdom. Catholic Mary and questionably legitimate, 15-year-old Elizabeth were in no position to support the role. With Parr’s absence from the cultural scene Stanhope proceeded to appropriate a number of the late queen’s most cherished projects—both literary and artistic—and put her own stamp on them. One of the signature efforts of Kateryn Parr’s time as queen was the preparation and publication of the English translation of Erasmus’s Paraphrases upon the New Testament (Devereux, 1969, pp. 348–367; James, 1999, pp. 227–33; Pollinitz, 2011, pp. 199–233). From 1545 until her death, Kateryn’s involvement in this project was more than simply as sponsor. Working with playwright and cleric Nicholas Udall, a member of her own household, Kateryn not only provided the funding for the translation but seems to have parcelled out the translating work as well.

Udall remarks in his dedication to the “Book of St. Luke” that it was work which “it pleas’d your highness to commit unto me to be translated … [and] was I glad your commandment did so justly concur with the determination of mine own mind and purpose”, although, he confessed, he was “by many degrees inferior in knowledge & faculty to all the others whom I hear that your highness hath appointed to the translating of the other parts” (Udall, 1545, f. ccvi; Mueller, 2011, pp. 89, 103; Devereux, 1969, p. 352). The queen encouraged her stepdaughter Princess Mary to contribute an English version of the “Book of St. John”, while she, herself, may have undertaken the translation of the “Book of St. Matthew” and “Acts of the Apostles” (James, 1999, pp. 228–31). Each book of this translation was dedicated to Parr with copious compliments, calling her “the Chief Patroness” who has undertaken “to sow abroad the Word of God, and to plant true religion in all parts of his realms and dominions” (Mueller, 2011, pp. 162–3). This was not idle flattery as all of the translators had been chosen by and were personally known to the queen.

Concurrent with Udall’s project was the queen’s sponsorship of John Merbecke’s Biblical Concordance, the first version of which had been confiscated and destroyed during his arrest and trial for heresy in July 1543. Those arrested with him, known to history as the Windsor Martyrs, were condemned to death on 26 July just two weeks after Kateryn Parr married Henry VIII. Through the intercession of Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, Merbecke was spared (Records, 1993, p. 88). By profession, Merbecke was a composer and the organist at St. George’s Chapel, Windsor, and Kateryn Parr, who was a patron of Thomas Tallis and profoundly interested in music, may have been originally drawn to Merbecke through his music (James, 2018). She was quickly attracted as well to his efforts at reconstructing his Concordance, which “has the distinction of being the first concordance to the whole English Bible” (Walker, 1894, p. 18). In Merbecke’s preface, he described how he had recreated the work and that his friend, Richard Turner, who was Archbishop Cranmer’s chaplain, “would so move it to the Queen’s grace … that he doubted not but that her grace would so prefer it to the King that his Majesty would command it to be published … Then so happened it, that before the queen’s grace could have true conceit to move the king’s
highness, God took him to his mercy, and anon I lost her grace also" (Kim, 2008, p. 50; Hunt, 1939, p. 34).

While Merbecke’s Concordance languished (it was finally published in 1550), the queen’s great project of the Paraphrases was published on 31 January 1548 and in July a government order required that every parish church acquire a copy of it together with the English Bible and make both available for congregational consumption. Just two months later, the patroness of the Paraphrases died. The wide-spread acceptance and distribution by the Lord Protector’s government of a work that the queen had been instrumental in producing seems to offer no reason why after her death the continuation of the project should not have fallen directly under Somerset’s sponsorship. But it did not. Instead, the Duchess of Somerset took over that honor, succeeding Parr as proprietor of a liturgical undertaking particularly close to the late queen’s heart. Whatever Nicholas Udall’s opinion of the duchess, he declined to work with her on the next stages of the project and Miles Coverdale succeeded him as general editor. According to Devereux: “The queen had died and the new patroness, the Duchess of Somerset, could not give as much help” (Devereux, 1969, p. 360).

Unlike Parr, Stanhope, who was not a member of the royal family, could not command compliance nor was she a hands-on patron who assigned translating tasks or undertook them herself. In fact, she appears to have had no fluency in Latin (Original letters, 1847, p. 702). The publisher, Edward Whitchurch, arranged the translation assignments. But the duchess did take credit for the continuation of the project. In 1549 a second volume of translated paraphrases on the New Testament was published, “which was almost entirely the work of John Old”, a client of Hugh Latimer and close friend of Whitchurch. Old dedicated his work to Anne Stanhope, who rewarded him with the vicarage of Cubbington in Warwickshire at Latimer’s urging (Townley, 1856, p. 253; Watkins, 1873, p. 203). Stanhope’s achievement then was to stamp her name on a project that she had appropriated from Parr but at several removes. It is unlikely that she knew John Old personally, nor had she requested that he be used as a translator. Her lack of Latin would have made it difficult for her to judge the quality of his work in any event. His reward was given through the aegis of Latimer’s persuasions and whether the duchess actually invested monetarily in the project as the queen had done is open to doubt.

In addition to the Paraphrases, like the queen, the duchess also interested herself in sponsoring a Concordance. This was not Merbecke’s work (which was published after Somerset lost the Protectorate) but a translation into English by Walter Lynne, a London printer, from a German version by Henry Bullinger, Leo Jude and Conrad Pellican. The book was dedicated by a printer who had probably never met her: “To the right noble and vertuouse Laidy, Lady Anne, douchesse of Somerset ... [whom he] wyshed abounidance of all grace and Godlynes wyth a longe and prosperous estate, to Goddis honour and your graces health and saluaicyon” (Bullinger, 2012). While there is no doubt of Anne Stanhope’s Evangelical commitment to the English Church, it is noticeable that she chose to put her mark on the same patronage projects—the Paraphrases and a Concordance—as the late queen. It would also seem that her commitment to both the translating and publishing processes was far less invested than her predecessor, and for the most part her patronage appears to have been titular in nature.

4. Artistic appropriation

In addition to literary appropriation, artistic appropriation is discernable in the relationship between Stanhope and Parr. Kateryn Parr’s high profile involvement in the English artistic Renaissance that flourished during her reign has been commented on at length (James, 1996, 2009, pp. 142–51, 2018). Five extant portraits with differing face patterns portray her during her lifetime and at least three documented others, once owned by Parr’s sister and her cousins, the Throckmortons and the Dacre family, may yet survive. These are in addition to the dozens of miniatures ordered by the queen in 60s job lots from an array of painters of which the Holsewyther-Horenbout miniature at Sudeley Castle is the only known example. This field of
pictorial investment was one that her sometime lady-in-waiting Anne Stanhope imitated during the queen’s lifetime and appropriated upon Edward Seymour’s assumption as Lord Protector. Stanhope’s portraits reflect a tendency to copy the models used for the queen, replicating Parr’s strategy of visual presentation as a mechanism for asserting status and place. What has perhaps not been considered enough in the discussion of 16th-century English art is the historical context of individual portraits. These are not just artifacts of material culture but active commentary on historical processes and events. As such, they deserve to be studied within the context of those events. In the age of the selfie it is easy to forget that the commissioning and creating of images in the Tudor period was a contractual procedure requiring negotiations with the painter and presentation decisions that included choices of setting, costume, jewelry and other symbolic items, all of which implied purpose and occasion. Such works were commissioned and displayed as statements of status, programmes of propaganda or icons of familial legacy. Royal portraits were exchanged internationally as part of the elaborate courtship rituals concerned with dynastic unions. Undertaking the commission of a portrait was more than an act of personal vanity, it was an exercise designed to produce a pictorial reminder of someone usually in the process of, or as a statement of, a life-altering event. It is from this viewpoint that a discussion of three pairs of portraits representing Kateryn Parr and Anne Stanhope has been undertaken.

As patron and subject, Kateryn Parr’s commitment to supporting English artists like John Bettes and John Hayes, as well as those from the continent like Giles Gering, Nicolo Bellini, Hans Holbein, Susanna Horenbout, Margaret Holsewyther and Lievne Teerlinc has been well established, as has the fact that the last three mentioned miniaturists were all members of her own chamber (James, 1999, p. 163, 2009, pp. 142–51, 253–4, 279–81, 290–2, 2018). Kateryn’s monopoly in 1545 on at least one court painter, possibly William Scrots, led an exasperated Thomas Hussey to write to the Earl of Surrey in November, that “yowre [pi]ktr[ur] be nothyng in redinesse for that hyse delegens ys ssciche wt [the Quene’s] grace” (L&P, XX, ii. no. 38; Sessions, 1992). For Parr this robust encouragement of portraiture certainly had an element of artistic engagement (“I have sent in haste to the painters for one of my little pictures which is very perfect by the judgement of as many as hath seen [it]”) (Bod: Rawlinson MS D.1070.4 (1547); NA: SP10/1 f. 41). But as queen, Parr employed her patronage primarily as a political tool to reinforce her royal position at court.

The queen’s interest also had the result of supplying a unique concentration of skilled painters in and around London and an increase in the production of royal imagery can be traced to paintings such as “The Family of Henry VIII” (RCIN 405,796), the genre paintings celebrating Henry’s military and diplomatic victories (RCIN 405,793, 405,794, 406,784, 405,800), the portrait of the Prince of Wales attributed to William Scrots, as well as the portraits of Kateryn’s stepdaughters Mary and Elizabeth, painted individually in oils for the first time (NPG 428; RCIN 404,444; RCIN 404,441). These works had a higher purpose than simply painted likenesses of important royals. The portraits of Henry’s daughters were reminders of their return to the official line of succession, and at a time when the king’s health was a matter of concern Edward’s portrait reinforced his position as primary royal heir ensuring the stability and continuity of the Tudor dynasty.

Parr’s earliest known image is as a child in a family grouping in stained glass that once hung in the Parr chapel of St. Ann Blackfriars (BL: Addit. 45,131 f. 109b (1517)). The earliest known portrait of Stanhope is as a teen-ager (Figure 1). Both early portraits would have been commissioned not by the subject, herself, but by her family. The portrait of Anne Stanhope at 16 and the first identifiable painting of Parr (Figure 2) were probably executed within three years of each other, when their subjects were the same age, and were commissioned to mark significant milestones in their lives. Anne’s portrait at 16, painted in 1526, presents her in a white linen coif wearing what appears to be a brown velvet coat with fur collar and deep décolletage that reveals the border of her shift. The work may have been commissioned on the occasion of her appointment as maid-in-waiting to Catherine of Aragon’s household. It shows a strong-featured young woman with wide-set brown eyes, reddish-brown hair, a fleshy nose, thin upper lip and a distinctively pointed chin, all features that carry over into her later portraits.
Kateryn’s earliest known painted portrait was almost certainly created three years later in celebration of her betrothal in 1529 at the age of 16 to Edward Borough of Gainsborough, Lincolnshire. Its purpose as a betrothal portrait is recognizable from the foregrounded gold and ruby ring conspicuous on the third finger of her right hand and from the oversized emphasis the painter has placed on its display. Half-length portraits at this date showing the subject’s hands are rare and their prominence in this painting is a statement of occasion. Parr may still have had the ring in her possession at her death when a list of her possessions included: “5 rings of gold with rubies whereof 2 are tabled, 2 rocks and 1 pointed” and “a broken ring of gold with a spark of a ruby” (BL: Addit. MS 46,348 fos 205a and 206b). This sort of portrait celebrating the dynastic union of two families was not uncommon during the 16th century. An 18th-century copy of a similar one of Katherine Knyvett, Lady Paget (1547–1622), now hangs at Plas Newydd (James, 2009, pp. 50–1). Kateryn and her mother Maud were particularly close and her daughter’s departure for life in the north with a new husband seems to have been the occasion for which the painting was commissioned, a memento of a cherished daughter Lady Parr had little hope of seeing again in the near future.

The way in which the gable headdress is worn in the painting with the front lappets turned up and pinned in place and the hair “concealed in silk sheaths, often striped, and crossed over under the gable point” represents a fashion dating after 1525 nearer the end of the decade (Cumming, 2010, p. 75). The costume is consistent with Parr’s love of crimson, gold and purple. During her first year as queen, Kateryn “chose to dress in crimson and cloth of gold” and crimson and purple were the most frequent colors of cloth she received from the silk house at Whitehall (Hayward, 2008, p. 186). The Venetian-style under-sleeves are a look she particularly favored and which appear in her portrait of 1544 (NPG 6804). At her death Parr owned 22 pairs (Hayward, 2008, pp. 186–7; James, 2018). The decorations on both corners of the gown’s square bodice evoke the Catherine wheel,
part of the symbolism of Kateryn’s patron saint whose image she incorporated into her badge as queen. The pearls that are shown may be a portion of the wealth of pearls (some 546) that were left to Katerlyn by her mother in her 1531 will (NA: PROB 11/24; Image Reference 149/110).

While there has been no known controversy over Anne’s youthful portrait now hanging in the Oak Passage of her former home of Syon House, a reattribution of Parr’s portrait in 2013 (now NPG L246) attempted to prove that the work was actually a painting of Catherine of Aragon. This re-identification was based on four main points: the dating of the work, its size, background decoration and the assumption that it looked like secure portraits of Catherine of Aragon (Bolland, 2016; NPG, London, undated). To take each of these point by point, there is no question that the painting pre-dates Kateryn’s time on the throne but there is no reason to suppose that a woman as committed to portraiture as Parr was from the first days of her royal marriage had not had a portrait of herself painted at an earlier date. Portraiture was part of her family legacy. Her parents had had themselves and their four children portrayed in stained glass as early as 1517 and her mother owned several Horenbout miniatures. Both of Kateryn’s siblings were drawn by Holbein before she became queen (RCIN 12,256; RCIN 12,231) and her first cousin Elizabeth Cheney, Lady Vaux, with whom Parr grew up, was both drawn and painted by Holbein (RCIN 12,247). It is not unreasonable then to suppose that Kateryn, too, may have posed for a portrait particularly in light of this portrait’s configuration as a betrothal statement. It should also be remembered that in 1529 Maud Parr was lady-in-waiting to Catherine of Aragon, owned miniatures of the king and queen which she bequeathed to Katerlyn in her will and would have had access to painters employed at court.

The collection to which L246 has historically belonged should also be taken into consideration. The portrait is part of the collection of the Archbishop of Canterbury and formerly hung in his London home at Lambeth Palace where its identification as Parr dates back centuries. This circumstance alone should put a question mark next to the 2013 reattribution. As early as 1789 the Reverend Treadway Nash commented that: “There is an original picture of [Katerlyn Parr] in the gallery at Lambeth over the chimney-piece.” (Nash, 1789, p. 9). The circumstances of Kateryn’s portrait hanging at Lambeth Palace are easily explained. In 1544–45 the queen was working closely with Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, in shaping the new vernacular liturgy for the English church. Cranmer became one of the queen’s closest associates. Such a relationship and the fact that Katerlyn was known to have presented her own portrait to friends and political allies would have made a gift of this early likeness as a remembrance of their friendship unsurprising. Finally, it is unlikely in the extreme that Cranmer, godfather of the English Reformation and the man who officially annulled the king’s first marriage, would have kept hanging over his chimney-piece a portrait of the last Catholic queen of England whose marriage he had delegitimized.

As for the painting’s measurements, 20½ inches by 16½ inches, such relatively small, irregular sizes were a common feature of English portraiture circa 1515–1530. Anne Stanhope’s 1526 portrait measures 19 inches by 15¾’s. The use of green glazes for background color was the customary choice among the Anglo-Flemish school of painters both in England and on the Continent during this period. The Archbishop of Canterbury, William Warham’s, portrait by Holbein dating to 1527 (NPG 2094) features a background of green glazes depicting a patterned fabric. Neither irregular size nor background color, wide-spread as they both were, establish identity. As for similarity of features between L246 and Henry’s first queen, such a judgment call is the least reliable identifier in portraiture due both to the subjectivity of the viewer and the abilities of the painter. Although there is an 18th-century copy of a panel portrait of Henry’s first queen (NPG 163), there are only two secure contemporary likenesses of Catherine of Aragon (NPG 4682; “Catherine of Aragon with a monkey”, Collection of the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry), plus at least one cropped contemporary duplicate of the second (NPG L244). All are in the Flemish style dating to about 1524–1526 and executed by one or other of the Horenbout siblings.
Catherine had contempt for English artists, remarking to the Spanish ambassador in 1505 that the resident artist at her mother's court in Spain, Michel Sittow, was a far better painter than any to be found at her husband's court in England (CSP: Spanish, 1, p. 370). As the two surviving miniatures of her were painted from life not by an English artist but by a Flemish one and seem to have met with Catherine's approval, it can be presumed that they were reliable likenesses. In these, the queen is shown with blue eyes and light brown hair and in both she is shown with the full, rather heavy face of a mature woman entering her 40's with slightly swollen eyelids, a reddened, distinctively bulbous nose and the stout figure of someone who has been continually pregnant for nearly a decade. Her stature, coloring and features are completely at odds with the youthful lines and trim figure of the girl shown in L246. When weighed together all indications suggest L246 is a betrothal portrait whose costume details date it a few years later than the miniatures of Catherine of Aragon.

A second pair of portraits painted some two decades later show Parr and Stanhope together in the same arena, the Tudor court. By marriage to Edward Seymour about 1535, shortly to become Viscount Beauchamp (1536) and then Earl of Hertford (1537), Anne had risen from plain Mistress Stanhope to the position of Countess of Hertford. A possible Holbein drawing of her still exists (RCIN 912,190) from about the time of her marriage as does one of her husband (RCIN 912,213). Although there are no known paintings derived from these drawings, evidence of Stanhope's personal engagement with Holbein during this period can be found in a 1536 commission from her to the painter for a copy of his portrait of her sister-in-law, Queen Jane Seymour. Displaying such a portrait in her own home would have been an announcement of Anne's royal connections and thus of her own superior status (Jackson, 1875, pp. 174, 176). With Jane's accession as queen, Stanhope's position at court became important and assured and her feelings seven years later upon the king's 1543 marriage to a Yorkshire widow with no powerful family connections who was arguably far beneath her on the court ladder of consequence may not have been particularly friendly. But as a creature of the court, she joined the new queen's household and two portraits painted circa 1544–46 whose similarity is striking suggest the close interaction between the two women during this period.

The original half-length portrait of Kateryn as queen survives in a late 16th-century copy and portrays her wearing a black velvet gown with an upstanding collar lined in silk or linen decorated with black embroidered gillyflowers and roses (Figure 3). The seam of her bodice is covered by a jeweled band of gold buttons set with rubies between pearls in groups of five. Her additional jewelry includes an upper habiliment of goldsmith's work with pearls set in rows of four, a “neck lace” of white pearls with an attached gold pendant set with rubies and a pendant pearl. She also wears a brooch or ouch set with a large table diamond and decorated with “antiques” in the form of Venus and Cupid (James, 2018).

A remarkably analogous portrait from the same period exists, identified here as the then Countess of Hertford (Figure 4). One source claims without reference that the dendrochronology of the work suggests a date after 1542 (Packwood, 2011). The subject wears a dress, almost identical to the queen’s, in black satin trimmed with velvet with upstanding collar lined in white fabric with black embroidery. Matching but awkwardly placed strips of the same lining on her sleeves are just visible at the bottom of the painting suggesting that the original work may have been cut down. Unlike Parr, a brief glimpse of the sitter’s embroidered shift appears above the vee of the neckline whose décolletage is not quite as deep as the queen’s. The seam of the bodice is also placed higher and lacks Parr’s jeweled breast band. The red and white colors of the cap and the gold pleated crepine in each portrait echo each other although the upper and lower habiliments of the sitter’s cap in Figure 4, also constructed of goldsmith’s work and pearls, are richer than the queen’s less ornate single habiliment.
The other jewelry worn in the portrait duplicates that of the queen. The nearly matching necklace of pink and white pearls may have come from the same jeweler’s workshop as Kateryn’s. And like the queen’s choice of a brooch featuring Venus and Cupid imagery, the opposing brooch is also in the classical mode referencing the Judgment of Paris and featuring a scene of the golden apple of beauty being awarded to Venus. The subject of the brooch is an obvious compliment to its wearer. Although not individually identified on a detailed jewelry list, the ornaments worn in this painting are similar to ones mentioned in Anne Stanhope’s will. To her daughter-in-law, she left “a fayer tablet to weare with antique work of one syde and a row of diamonds on the other syde”. That the brooch in the painting is a tablet, in other words a round locket that could open to disclose what was usually a miniature, can be seen from the tiny hinges visible at the rim. Anne also left to her daughter, Mary, “a lace with small pearle(s)”, a description which matches the “neck lace” that is shown in the portrait (NA: PROB11/70/369).

These sister images reflective of similar tastes in fashion and portraiture demonstrate a willingness by Stanhope to adopt the artistic model set by the queen. They symbolize the union of purpose particularly in the arena of religion shared by these two women in the mid-1540’s, wherein for both, God “hath long agoe called me to the knowledge and love of the Gospell”. But beneath the surface similarities, dictated not only by religious belief but by pragmatic political realities, lay two very different personalities. The Evangelical support group of royal household ladies under the leadership of the queen ended with Henry VIII’s death, Edward Seymour’s accession as Duke of Somerset and Lord Protector of England and Kateryn’s transformation from queen-consort to queen-dowager. The new Duchess of Somerset’s appropriation of the queen’s earlier use of portraiture as political propaganda stands out starkly in a third pair of full length images painted barely four years apart. These two works reinforce the proposed hypothesis that
Parr’s choice of visual imagery as a statement of power had an impact on her sometime lady-in-waiting who appropriated it for a similar purpose.

In 1538 while searching for a bride to replace the late Jane Seymour, who had died two years earlier, Henry VIII commissioned a group of portraits of likely matrimonial candidates and sent Hans Holbein off to Brussels to paint the Danish princess Christina, Duchess of Milan, the 16-year-old widow of Francesco II Sforza (NG 2475). As far as Holbein’s royal master was concerned, the portrait that resulted was spectacularly successful and although the marriage between England and Denmark never took place, the English king was much taken with Christina’s portrait and had several copies made to hang in his various palaces. Aware of her husband’s infatuation with this particular portrait and shortly after her marriage in the winter of 1543–44, Parr commissioned a similar one of her own (Figure 5). The queen’s long portrait (NPG 4451) discussed at some length in earlier publications, was a ground-breaking work, the first known full-length portrait of an Englishwoman to be commissioned (James, 1996, 2009, pp. 142–51, 2018).

Up until this time even the portraiture of English queens had been modest, either miniatures such as those of Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn or half-lengths like Holbein’s likenesses of Jane Seymour and Anne of Cleves. Full-length portraits seem to have been reserved to the king alone as Holbein’s signature work of Henry VIII suggests. Even Henry’s heir is shown at this time in three-quarter’s length. For the king’s new wife to take it upon herself to commission a work that showed her, in paint at least, presenting her public image on the same footing as her royal husband was a bold move. The painting is of an impressive size, measuring 71 by 37 inches, underscoring the audaciousness of the project. Not only does NPG 4451 present the queen in all
her splendor, wearing an emblem of royal regalia in her crown brooch, it also presents her on a “turkey carpet” which had until recently been reserved to paintings of the Virgin Mary. That this painting had a profound influence on Kateryn’s lady-in-waiting is suggested by a second work, known as “The Lady in Black” but almost certainly Anne Stanhope as Duchess of Somerset and first lady of the Protectorate of England (Figure 6).

The broad canvas of suspicion among her contemporaries regarding Anne Stanhope’s motives and ambitions during the Protectorate is confirmed in the visual presentation of this portrait. Like NPG 4451 it is a claim to authority, an announcement of purpose and intent. Apart from NPG 4451 this is the only known full-length portrait of an Englishwoman pre-dating the reign of Elizabeth I which in and of itself suggests the importance of its subject. Tentatively attributed to William James.
Scrots, an inscription concealed in the brushwork on the fluted column directly to the right of the sitter’s head dates the portrait to 1547 (Figure 7(a,b)), a date that makes Stanhope the most likely subject. Painted while the queen-dowager was still alive, it is an unblushing statement of perceived status, its appropriation of the presentational pattern of NPG 4451 suggesting the deep desire of the duchess to assume the place and agency of her former mistress. Stanhope no longer needed Holbein’s portrait of her royal sister-in-law to define her importance, she could now claim it on her own.

The dendrochronology of the four principal vertical boards on which the portrait is painted indicates that the work was done between 1545–55 which conforms to the above identification (Hearn, 1995, pp. 53–4). As with NPG 4451, a painting that presented the queen-consort on the same visual plane as her royal husband, “The Lady in Black” presents the Duchess of Somerset on
the same visual plane as the Lord Protector, signifying not only her own importance to the Somerset Protectorate but, as Caroline Armbruster has pointed out, one-half of a recognized political partnership (Armbruster, 2013, p. 12). The difference between this painting and its prototype is that the queen’s portrait would have hung in one of the royal residences meant to be seen by the entire court. Anne’s portrait would have found a less exulted setting in one of the Somersets’ own residences, but during the Protectorate those residences became courtly simulacra, theaters of political operation where high level meetings were convened and government business was conducted. The power brokers of the Protectorate summoned to these conclaves would have been well aware of the portrait’s purpose. “The Lady in Black”, then, is no less an announcement of rank and position than NPG 4451 and is a signifier of where the duchess perceived her place to be in the Protectorate’s power structure.
In the painting, the subject wears a gown of black satin trimmed with velvet with upstanding collar lined in white fabric and black embroidery over a black velvet forepart. Her slashed sleeves are filled with linen or silk fabric embroidered with black gillyflowers matching the lining of her collar, fabrics and colors that Figure 4 suggests the duchess favored. The subject’s black shod feet can just be seen at the hem of her gown. A new emerging fashion is presented in the collared shift pulled up around the neck, a fashion that would quickly give way to a small pleated ruff. “The Lady in Black” wears a black velvet cap with a single gold-work habiliment and, unlike the 1544–46 portrait, her jewelry here is modest, a tiny gold brooch in the shape of a flower and, tied by a black ribbon to her girdle, what appears to be a round tablet of carved jet set in gold.

Rather than the plain background of NPG 4451, the busy background of this work is filled with a hodgepodge of classical architectural elements, a terracotta tile floor, a fluted column rising from a pedestal with inset panel, square columns, stone walls, brick walls and a distant archway, an architectural mélange that suggests the vast building projects the Somersets had in hand at the time in London, Wiltshire and Middlesex. Such a programme, too, may have taken inspiration from the exceptional portrait of Anne’s husband, featuring architectural elements and painted the year before in 1546, and by 1547 no doubt hanging at Somerset House (James, 2000–2001, pp. 14-21). A version of the fluted column rising from its classic pedestal with inset panel in the earlier work reappears in the later one.

The provenance of this portrait, hung for centuries at Sutton Place, Surrey, is traceable through the Weston family and the marriage of Anne Pickering to Sir Francis Weston. Once again illustrating the links between Kateryn Parr and Anne Stanhope, Anne Pickering was the daughter of Sir Christopher Pickering of Killington in Westmorland and the descendent of a house that had been clients and servants of the Parr family for generations (James, 1993, pp. 104–5). Anne Pickering’s cousin, Thomas Pickering, was steward in the household of Kateryn Parr’s mother, Maud, and is mentioned in her will. Anne Pickering’s grandfather, Sir James Pickering, had fought beside Sir Thomas Parr on the Yorkist side during the Wars of the Roses, and the Pickerings held their manor of Killington from the Parrs for the annual rent of a pair of gilt spurs. When Kateryn Parr married Henry VIII, Anne Pickering was a witness at the wedding and, together with Anne Stanhope, became a lady in the queen’s chamber. Her first husband, Sir Francis Weston of Sutton Place, had been executed in 1536 as a reputed lover of Anne Boleyn. Lady Weston subsequently married Sir Henry Knyvett and thirdly John Vaughan. Vaughan, a member of the royal household, was well-connected being the nephew of Princess Elizabeth’s attendant Blanche Perry and a cousin of William Cecil, the Duke of Somerset’s secretary. His marriage to the very wealthy Anne Pickering in 1549 must have had the approval of the Lord Protector which may have put him in Somerset’s debt.

In October 1549 when Somerset was first arrested, the order was given for his lands and goods to be seized. Before agents of the Crown could confiscate them, the duchess and her brother Michael Stanhope carried off from Syon House and the palace of Sheen as many of the family valuables as they could and stashed them with servants and friends. One informant to the Privy Council kept a careful record of these attempts at “embezzlement”. “That morning,” the resultant report stated, “the duchess of Somerset carried openly four square caskets and [a]lighted with them at [Richard] Whalley’s house in Wimbledon” (CSP: Domestic, 1547–53, no. 423). Whalley was the chamberlain of the Somersets’ household. A long list follows of “bedding, carpets, hangings and other stuff”, including wagonloads of furniture, transported by the duchess, her brother and her servants to various households in Croydon, Beddington, Roehampton, Richmond, Kew and Isleworth. How valuable Stanhope considered her long portrait to be is unrecorded, but it may have been at this time that she entrusted it to the care of the Vaughans whose residence at Sutton Place was 20 miles southwest of Wimbledon. The erstwhile Lord Protector was executed just over two years later and the portrait was never reclaimed. It remained in the family of Anne Pickering’s son, Sir Henry Weston, until the beginning of the 20th century.
5. “The bubble reputation”
In addition to the mechanisms of appropriation and confrontation which formed within the relationship between Kateryn Parr and Anne Stanhope and spilled out into the public forum, Stanhope’s personal reputation, disparate as it was in the Parr-Seymour letters, was a significant factor in contemporary opinions held of the Duke of Somerset in his role as Lord Protector. It has been asserted that the reported negative aspects of Anne Stanhope’s reputation sprang initially from a single contemporary account by an anonymous Spaniard who wrote a manuscript chronicling the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI, a work distributed in manuscript form in the 16th century and ultimately published in 1889 (Chronicle, 1889, pp. 156–64; Warnicke, 2012, pp. 77–8; Armbruster, 2013, p. 51).

Other denigrating reports of her, according to Stanhope’s rehabilitators, grew from unfounded, malicious gossip retailed and repeated by her enemies at court, much of it inspired by the alleged ambition of the queen-dowager and the assumed arrogance of the Duchess of Suffolk (Warnicke, 2012, p. 97). According to this line of reasoning, successive male commentators either accepted these accounts without question or had personal agendas, such as preserving the prestige of Anne’s husband, which made casting aspersions on her reputation an easy way of protecting his. Such an overly generous interpretation by modern historians of hypothetical conspiracies ignores the numerous negative remarks made of the duchess during her lifetime from an entire range of people. And far from simply passing on unverified gossip, a number of contemporary commentators, including John Foxe, John Clapham, and William Camden, all had ties to Somerset’s sometime secretary William Cecil, who as the letter from Thomas Fisher, discussed below, suggests, nurtured his own dislike of the duchess.

The first surviving written condemnations of the Duchess of Somerset’s behavior date from the beginning of her husband’s Protectorate and are found in the letters exchanged between the queen-dowager and her new husband, Sir Thomas Seymour. Scurrilous stories and written screeds set against her followed, all focusing on the arrogance and avarice that the commentators claimed characterized her. According to a tract written during the Protectorate and entitled, “Agaynst Edwarde duke of Somerset falsely usurpinge the name of Protectour”, attributed to Thomas Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, the writer’s indictment of the duke leads off with a scathing evisceration of his wife: “that imperious and insolent woman his wif, whose ambytious wytt and mychevous perswasions ledd hym and dyrectyd hym even also in the weighty affaires and gouernement of the realme to the grete harme and dishonour of the same” (HMC 7th Report, 1879, p. 607). Southampton was Somerset’s bitter enemy but his denunciation of the duchess in an indictment of her husband, with its focus on her involvement “in the weighty affaires and gouernement of the realme”, seems a superfluous flourish if there were indeed no truth in the accusation.

According to both friends and enemies many of the Protector’s difficulties stemmed from “having a bad wife” and either he was a false usurper held under his wife’s thumb or, as a latter day Macbeth, he was a “Good Duke”, a benevolent man corrupted by his wife’s malign influence (CSP: Spanish, 9, 1547–9, p. 429). In either scenario his duchess played the villain. What appears to be evident, and the 1547 creation of “The Lady in Black” suggests, is that both the duke and duchess came to the Protectorate with a mutually supportive sense of entitlement, one that they proceeded to exercise with a recklessness that undercut the probity of the office. According to historian Lily B. Campbell, negative stories about Anne Stanhope were repeated “by countless others; many of whom undoubtedly followed unquestioningly the old gossip; but the gossip is too universal to be ignored” (Campbell, 1934, p. 13). This analysis was reiterated many decades later by Scott Lucas, who wrote: “The view that Anne Seymour’s faults contributed to Edward Seymour’s deposition was shared even by many of the Protector’s supporters”, which is of significance as the majority of these knew her personally (Lucas, 2009, p. 100 n. 65). And while many men struggled for power in the years between the death of Henry VIII and the accession of Mary I, the Duchess of Somerset is the only spouse whose actions were widely discussed and publicly condemned.
Two streams of documents reinforce the validity of many of the contemporary assessments of the duchess, desperate letters of apology begging her not to take punitive action against the writer and fawning compliments in the form of letters and book dedications begging for her patronage. The former implies authority and suggests a vindictive aspect to her nature and the latter a general awareness of her influence with her husband and her agency as a patron. Two letters serve as examples of the first group, one written about 1549 by Sir Thomas Smith, who had been the Duke of Somerset’s secretary at the beginning of the Protectorate (1547), served as clerk to the Privy Council (1547–8) and was acting as Principal Secretary in 1549. He was, thus, far from being one of the Duchess of Somerset’s household servants. Although Warnicke echoes J. G. Nichols in suggesting that Smith’s letter was actually meant for the duke, this argument is unsustainable as is the argument that it was written later than 1549. Smith addresses the duchess directly several times in the body of the letter and concludes with the hope that: “I shall finde your grace my good Ladie and Mistres” (Nichols, 1845, pp. 380–1; Warnicke, 2004, p. 855; Archaeologia, 1860, p. 127). After Somerset’s fall in October 1549, appeals to the authority of the duchess would have been irrelevant.

At the time the letter was written slanderous gossip was circulating about Smith which he worried the duchess would believe. This gossip addressed a variety of issues from financial malfeasance to character flaws. As a government official and not a household servant an interesting question arises as to why Smith felt the need to justify his behavior to the Duchess of Somerset and what such a need says about her involvement in the operations of government. Significantly, it was her good opinion as well as the duke’s that concerned him and it was to her rather than to her husband that Smith addressed himself. His fear of a retributive response is palpable in the letter.

[For] if I were gilty, I shulde amend, if I were ungilty, I
shulde answere, the which, with pardon obteigned, I most
gladly desire ... [or else] it might be taken ... that I shulde
neglect and not esteme your grace's opinion of me, I am
forced to write this my declaracion ... the which I will averre
and justifie furst to God, and next to your grace and all the
worlde, before those whisperers and tale-tellers, if it please
your grace to call me to their rebuke ... I desire no more of
your grace but to heare both parties, before your grace
enclyne to th'one ... for else, if I knewe I were condemned
in your grace's judgement, I wolde neither write nor speake,
but paciently suffer, and lament my fortune (BL: Harl. MS 6989
f. 141; Archaeologia, 1860, pp. 120–127).

The Somersets’ household steward, John Thynne (who had once served in Kateryn Parr’s household), had been sent by the duchess to upbraid Smith for “mych like thinges ... that your grace seamsid to me to speake as half persuaded that their saienges was true”. It was the most recent of
multiple times that at the behest of the duchess, “Mr. Thynne hath shewed me agayne [my faults]”. Smith “coulde not then hide my grieue and sorowe”. Ironically one of these slanders was a misuse of the manor of Yarlington in Somerset which had been part of Kateryn Parr’s jointure. Parr’s death as it turned out had been a boon to Smith. “If the quene had lived, it had bene wourth nothing unto me; her death made it wourth me xxx li a yere.”

Another of the personal slanders of which Smith stood accused was haughtiness and pride and “mych regarding myself, despising other[s]”. Smith goes on to say that “I doo remember about th’ende of the last parliament your grace shewed me certain of my faultes, the which, ye saide, men noted in me.” That Stanhope was aware of what “men noted” of Smith implies that she was privy to conversations and shared opinions within the inner circle of her husband’s Protectorate. Her self-appointed supervisory relationship with the anxious official had, he tells us, gone on over time and her assumption that she had the right to upbraid and correct him, together with his acceptance of that right, speaks to the ease with which the duchess had inserted herself into the affairs of the Protectorate for in addition to his other offices Smith was acting as the Lord Protector’s Master of Requests. According to John Stype:

The Lord Protector had set up an Office in his House of a

Master of Requests, for the better care-taking of poor Mens

Sutes, and for the more effectual speeding them without

the Delays and Charges of Law. In this Office was Dr. Smith

placed, and seems to have been the second Master of Requests
to the Protector, as Cecil was the first (Stype, 2003–2009, p. 40).

This was the seventh article in the charges brought against Somerset when he was impeached in 1549 that “ye had and held against the lawes, in your own house, a court of requests, and thereby did inforce divers of the kings subjectes to ansere for their free holds & goods, and determined the same to the subversion of the same laws” (Stowe, 1605, p. 1014).

Both the location of this important office of government, operating within Stanhope’s own residence, and the character of its master raise questions regarding the processing of petitions and the opportunities that the duchess had for imposing herself in their resolution. That Thomas Smith, who wrote Stanhope such an obsequious letter of apology in 1549, was in charge of the office suggests an acknowledgement of her authority as does Dorothy Wingfield’s 1547 petition over a land title (discussed below), an area of the law with which the Court of Requests was concerned. Some years later, the duchess even recommended her nephew for appointment as Master of Requests (Nichols, 1845, p. 380). Smith had written an earlier letter to William Cecil on 15 July 1548 requesting a post for one of his former pupils and advising Cecil that he thought it would be a good idea to ask for help from the Duchess of Somerset, another indication of Smith’s belief in Stanhope’s power over appointments (CSP: Domestic, 1547–53, no. 127). Smith’s letters present a vivid picture of the duchess as an integral part of her husband’s Protectorate, part of its communication network, active in the control of various streams of business and severe in the prosecution of perceived faults. He was only one of the men and women who came before her to accuse, complain, petition and plead and “to kneale upon your grace’s carpettes” (BL: Harl. MS 6989 f. 141 (1549b); Archaeologia, 1860, pp. 120–127).

At about the same time as Smith’s letter, Thomas Fisher, who also served as secretary to the Lord Protector, wrote to William Cecil, regarding the duchess: “There are other reasons for my not being over hasty to attend [on her] as you shall know at our meeting, and doubtless understand ...
As you hear my lord, my lady and others talk of me, answer as for one of your poor assured friends ... it is evident enough how I am regarded by my lord and my lady in their house ... In the meantime I creep into a corner and pray” (CSP: Domestic, 1547-53, no. 458). Once again a servant of the duke’s testifies to the role the duchess played in the treatment of government officials, in discussions regarding them and by implication in discussions of government itself. That Fisher expected Cecil to “doubtless understand” his fear and dislike of the duchess speaks to Cecil’s own opinion of her.

This intimidating habit employed by Stanhope of aggressively pointing out other’s faults or of sending a servant like John Thynne to do it for her seems to have been habitual with her and the way in which she ran her household. It was not a new thing. Some years earlier Katherine Basset, step-daughter of Henry VIII’s uncle Arthur Plantagenet, had turned down a position as maid-in-waiting in Anne Stanhope’s household. Katherine Basset was an ambitious young woman and in October 1539 begged for a place in the newly formed household of Anne of Cleves. But in February 1537, when she was offered a position in the highly placed household of Anne Stanhope, Katherine was resolute in declining. The reasons she gave her mother were that she was “loath to depart" from her current position as “she reckoneth it better to be [where she was] in case she being with my Lady Hertford should be taken but as her woman” and used as a servant (Lisle Letters, 1981, 4, no. 867). Given her ambition to shine at court, the gossip concerning this household and how it was run must have weighed heavily in Katherine’s decision. Disgruntled servants appear to have been a common factor there.

Not only was it the habit of Anne Stanhope to find fault in those of her own household, it was also the way in which she dealt with many at court, a habit that others found presumptuous. When the queen-dowager was given the wardship of the Princess Elizabeth after Henry VIII’s death, the Duchess of Somerset made it her business to monitor Kateryn’s guardianship and to investigate Elizabeth’s activities as her ward (Collection, 1740, p. 96; James, 1999, p. 317). Stanhope also took it upon herself to upbraid Elizabeth’s servants for allowing the princess too much liberty and then threatened to take Elizabeth away from Kateryn’s household altogether, an act of hubris that she had no authority to perform. That in matters as important as the physical disposition and security of an heir to the throne, Stanhope considered her authority held precedence over the queen’s gives credibility to the stories going around at the same time regarding the duchess’s assault on the queen-dowager’s right of ceremonial precedence.

A second letter to the duchess written on 27 January 1549 was yet another plea for forgiveness, this time from John Cheke on behalf of his wife Mary Hill, who was also a member of the Duchess of Somerset’s household (BL: Lansd. MS 2, no. 34 (1549a); Archaeologia, 1860, pp. 115–16). Cheke, a noted scholar and close friend of Thomas Smith’s, had influence at court as tutor to Edward VI. Yet his wife had in some way offended the duchess and she was making life miserable for Mary Cheke because of it. John Cheke wrote an emotional appeal, “desiring of pardon where forgivenes is plentiful, and knowing ye forgivenes of fautes past is amendment of time to come; and no vice in anie meane woman to bee soo great, but ye vertue of nobilitee is as large to mercie. Mi moost humble request therefor is, ye yo’ g. gentilnes overcome mi wife’s fautes ... [and] to extende yo’ gracious fauor so far above the requirers desert, towaerde mi wife and me both”. Mary Cheke’s grievous fault is not revealed by her husband’s letter, but Warnicke notes an earlier suggestion that the cause of the affront was Mary’s decision to “secretly [leave] Lady Somerset at Syon House to condole with [Sir Thomas] Seymour when he returned to Chelsea after [Kateryn Parr’s] death” (Warnicke, 2012, p. 93). If this is so, then the duchess’s reaction underscores just how strong her hostility was toward her brother-in-law and his late wife. In his pleas Cheke seems to have been successful in winning back the favor of the duchess but it is hard to miss the implication that Anne Stanhope was judgmental, easily offended and that any positive interaction with her brother-in-law had negative consequences with her. It is hard as well to miss the thread of fear that runs
through Fisher’s comments to William Cecil and through the letters of Cheke and his friend Thomas Smith.

The second stream of documents reinforcing the validity of Tudor contemporary assessments that Anne Stanhope had the power to influence the outcome of petitions or at least to move her husband to do so can be found in requests made to her, such as the December 1547 petition by Dorothy Fitzherbert, widow of John Wingfield (died c.1542), asking for Stanhope’s help in ensuring her continued possession of her late husband’s lands in Suffolk (CSP: Domestic, 1547–53, no. 69; Statutes, 1792, p. 2). Katherine Willoughby, Duchess of Suffolk, made several requests, the frequently repeated, ultimately answered 1549 pleas for government funding for the household of the late queen-dowager’s baby daughter—“I reminded my lady of her promise of some pension for maintaining the late queen’s child who, with a dozen others, lies at my chamber”—and the October 1550 petition on behalf of lands and offices claimed by one of her cousins for whose difficulties she “blames his grace’s lady” (CSP: Domestic, 1547–80, pp. 27, 30; CSP: Domestic, 1547–53, no. 332).

That all these petitions were successful was attributed, at least by the Duchess of Suffolk, to Anne Stanhope’s direct intervention as a surviving thank-you message from her, relayed through William Cecil and apologizing for her previous “coarseness”, demonstrates (CSP: Domestic, 1547–80, p. 31; Warnicke, 2012, p. 97). As Warnicke notes: “Many petitioners must have sought her assistance as the lord protector’s wife”, a tacit admission of the authority that such a position offered her (Warnicke, 2012, p. 92). Having the office of the Master of Requests under her own roof and the master, himself, under her thumb would certainly have helped facilitate any assistance the Duchess of Somerset cared to give to those who came before her to kneel upon her carpets and plead.

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Additionally a belief in the ability of the duchess to influence the careers of would-be authors and translators resulted in some seven book dedications. Following in the queen’s footsteps and during the years of the Protectorate after the queen’s death, the duchess became the principal female benefactor for those reform-minded authors seeking literary patronage through their volumes of religious creations and translations. Warnicke declares that: “More publications were dedicated to her than to any other woman in early Tudor England”, suggesting that Stanhope’s position and Evangelical convictions made her a primary patronage target (Warnicke, 2012, p. 98). How urgently she sought to encourage book dedications is debatable although, as tributes to her station, such offerings could not but be welcome. Given the visual insistence on rank and position suggested by her proposed portrait as “The Lady in Black”, painted in the first year of her husband’s Protectorate, and together with her appropriation of the late queen’s catalogue of cultural commitments, Stanhope appears to have worked energetically to put her stamp on arenas once held by Kateryn Parr, demanding acceptance as the leading lady in the kingdom, a position that brought a responsive flowering of flattery with it.

The works dedicated to the Duchess of Somerset were mostly a continuation of the flood of literature initiated by Archbishop Cranmer and Kateryn Parr that focused on providing vernacular publications for the English Church. Yet such dedications do highlight Stanhope’s achievement of a reputation for centrality in these same efforts. Some of the literary offerings were from members of Stanhope’s own household, but it is unclear whether she actually subsidized any of them or was simply targeted with dedications by their writers anticipating future favors. The respectful but repetitive use by these petitioners of such encomiums of address as “my gracious lady”, “most noble lady”, “right virtuous lady”, were not a celebration of her universal popularity nor were they unique to the duchess but were standard phraseology used by suitors offering gifts to the nobility in the hope of reward. On the other hand, the duchess did have her admirers. One author and habitué of the court, William Baldwin, who published A Treatise of Morall Physlesophie in January
1548, was a dedicated reformer and staunch supporter of the duchess. Baldwin “boldly continued to offer praise for both the late Protector and Seymour’s much-maligned wife ... long after many others had turned away in silence from these widely discredited figures” (Lucas, 2009, pp. 36–8).

6. Peculation at court
Together with the flattery connected to the duchess’s unique position came an expectation of probity which she seems regularly to have flouted. She was hardly alone. Records show that with the accession of Edward VI to the throne, the men tasked with running the kingdom took advantage of the fact that their king was a child and were generous in rewarding themselves with grants of royal lands and offices. In order to secure the support of the Privy Council’s inner circle for his appropriation of the role of Lord Protector, an appointment absent from Henry VIII’s will, Edward Seymour handed out lavish favors, including titles and the estates suitable to supporting these new honors—the dukedom of Somerset to himself, the earldom of Warwick to John Dudley, the marquessate of Northampton to William Parr, the earldom of Southampton to Thomas Wriothesley and by 1549 the barony of Paget of Beaudesert to William Paget (Loach, 1999, pp. 26–27). That the queen-dowager condemned this land grab was noted by her cousin, Sir Robert Tyrwhit, who quoted her as telling him: “Master Tyrwhit, you shall see the king when he cometh to his full age, he will call his lands again, as fast as they be now given from him” (Collection, 1740, p. 104).

Both Somersets had grandiose tastes and planned expansive new residences, one in London, Somerset House, another at the former Bridgettine convent of Syon House some 40 miles east near Brentford and a third at Bedwyn Brail, three miles from the duke’s birthplace at Wulfhall (Scard, 2016, p. 157). They also set up housekeeping in the royal palace of Sheen at Richmond. In London, churches, Episcopal palaces, one of the Inns of Chancery and the charnal house belonging to St. Paul’s Cathedral were all cannibalized to provide space and building materials for the couple’s palatial Somerset House on the Strand in which they had invested over £10,000 between 1548–51 (Knight, 2000–2001, pp. 6–8). But lands and titles were not all that were self-gifted from the royal holdings. Moveable valuables in abundance also found their way to the Somersets’ chambers and coffers.

The battle over Kateryn Parr’s royal jewels has been discussed elsewhere (James, 1999, pp. 305–306) but the new Duchess of Somerset did not hesitate to trawl among the jewelry boxes not only of the late queen but of other wives unfortunate enough to have husbands arrested and goods forfeited. When Thomas Seymour was arrested in January 1549, his late wife’s jewel chest was carried up to London and appropriated by the Lord Protector (James, 1999, pp. 435–42; BL: Addit. MS 46,348 (1549c)). At the same time, Seymour’s associate, Sir William Sharington, was also arrested and forfeited £300 worth of linens taken “to the duke of Somerset’s use”, while “five chambers hung with tapestry, furnished with down beds and woolen quilts, [and] silk canopies” were taken to the Somersets’ house. Also seized was £50 worth of plate belonging to Sharington’s sister and the clothing and jewels of his wife Grace, among them a diamond and a white ruby worth £100. All of these goods were handed over to the duchess, “including jewels of great value” left as security for a loan that Sharington had made to the Duchess of Suffolk. When Sharington was finally pardoned, Lady Sharington asked for her jewels back but was informed by the Duchess of Somerset, who refused to return them, that “they were of no value” (CSP: Domestic, 1547–53, no. 205).

In addition to helping themselves to the belongings forfeited by the misfortunes of others, petty and not so petty peculation among the material goods of the Crown was noted in official records on multiple occasions. In the fall of 1547 the Duke of Somerset had ordered a complete inventory of the material goods belonging to Henry VIII. So both he and his wife were well aware of what valuables existed and where they were located (BL: Harl. MS 1419). That August a list of costly fabrics was removed from the royal silk house at Whitehall by Somerset apparently for furnishing traveling vehicles for his wife, a wagon done up in crimson velvet, trimmed with “gold and silver
Venice", and a side saddle covered in black velvet. At the first of the year another itemized list of pilfered items taken by Anne and her brother, Sir Michael Stanhope, was recorded which expanded her wardrobe of “crepons [and] coifs” and included “sacrament cloths, coverpanes, pillows richly wrought with gold and silver, and other things taken trussed in a sheet from the silk house by the [Duchess] of Somerset and Sir Michael Stanhope [and] carried to her chamber”. In June the duchess made off with a load of “tinsel and baudkin”, valuable fabrics woven of silk and gold thread, which were also carried to her chamber and the following month, the Somersets’ servant, John Thynne, who now held the keys to the silk house, took another load of silks and satins away, claiming they were meant for the Earl of Ormond, “but were carried to Sheen and delivered ... [to] the [duke’s] chamber”. The fact that such excuses were made to cover this wholesale appropriation of luxury goods demonstrates that the Somersets were well aware that their actions were suspect.

This persistent peculation continued into the following year when on 9 February 1549, Stanhope and her brother made raids on the royal jewel house and “the study on the great garden side”, appropriating a list of items, including, “a wooden coffer, a desk, a looking glass, an alabaster hour glass and an ebony box”. Only ten days later, on 19 February, Sir Michael Stanhope’s servant carried “loads of stuff from the long gallery to his master’s chamber, thought to be from the silk house” (CSP: Domestic, 1547–53, no. 204). These actions point not only to the Duke of Somerset’s self-enrichment but also to the assumption by the Stanhope siblings that as the privileged wife of the Protector, Anne had open license to appropriate what she would from the royal stores. One of the various charges later brought against Somerset according to Edward VI’s journal was “enriching himself of my treasure” (Edward VI, 1884, p. 12). The duke’s wife and his brother-in-law were certainly part and parcel of that enrichment.

7. Politics, policy and power
There is a distinction between Anne Stanhope, the person, and Anne Stanhope, the power broker. To whitewash her reputation, smoothing out the sharp points of her personality, and maintain that she held little or no political importance is to take a greedy, proudful and powerful confidant and consort and erase her claim on history. Such an effort at rehabilitating her reputation is in fact a form of gender stereotyping which declares that women who exercised authority within a male-dominated power structure—Empress Matilda, Isabella of France, Margaret of Anjou—must of necessity be she-wolves and bad wives. Personally likeable or not, this is how powerful women were generally characterized and Stanhope was no exception. When historian M. L. Bush wrote his seminal essay on The Government Policy of Protector Somerset in 1975, Stanhope’s participation in the Protectorate played no part in the discussion. Yet over and over her contemporaries, both supporters and detractors of the Lord Protector, insisted on her influence in her husband’s decisions. Stanhope’s intrusion into the manner of Kateryn Parr’s guardianship of Princess Elizabeth suggests as well that she was not reluctant to threaten political interference even when it involved the royal family.

On 13 August 1549 Imperial ambassador Francois Van der Delft, who despised the Duke of Somerset, confided to Sir William Paget that Somerset had basically lied to him “on three separate points” and that he considered the Lord Protector “personally to blame for all the evil that had befallen this kingdom” (CSP: Spanish, 1547–49, 9, p. 429). Paget was acting as the king’s comptroller and had been a key supporter of Somerset’s creation of the office of Lord Protector. Faced with Van der Delft’s accusations, Paget’s response was to inform the irate ambassador that much of the fault lay at the door of the Protector’s duchess. “He has,” Paget explained, “a bad wife.” Both Paget’s remarks as the duke’s supporter and those in the pamphlet written by his detractor, “Agaynst Edwarde duke of Somerset falsely usurpinge the name of Protectour”, are evidence that one of the drivers of the attacks against the Protector was this perception of Anne’s disruptive influence. So successful was this line of attack with Van der Delft that Paget continued to use it for all manner of subjects particularly in the politics of religion. “To the very last, in the face of attempts to coerce the Lady Mary into compliance with the new legislation on religion, Van der
Delft was quite satisfied with Paget’s explanations to the effect that it was all the fault of the Protector’s wife” (CSP: Spanish, 9, p. xvi).

Some later commentators have seen this tactic as a ruse on Paget’s part to create a credible scapegoat as an excuse for the duke’s bad behavior yet have failed to query why it was that Paget—as well as Southampton, the Duchess of Suffolk and the queen-dowager—chose the duchess and not some other party as a more plausible fall guy. Such an arbitrary accusation by Paget, made multiple times, would hardly have been believed had contemporaries not generally agreed that far from being a “good wife”, that is a self-effacing helpmate, someone for instance like Jane Guildford, Countess of Warwick, wife of Somerset’s chief rival, the Lord Protector’s duchess was someone with possibly unfortunate political influence. According to Anne Stanhope’s most recent apologist, Anne “did not have great influence over public policy”, but as Caroline Armbruster has pointed out: “With regard to public policy … the couple worked together in more or less of a political partnership—first at court under Henry VIII and later as Duke and Duchess of Somerset” (Warnicke, 2012, p. 77; Armbruster, 2013, p. 12).

Anecdotal evidence supporting the general belief that Stanhope was both an advisor and a partner in the duke’s decision-making is reinforced by the comments of other contemporaries. So many letters and deposition blaming “my lady” for “my lord’s” deficiencies reiterate the common perception of the couple as two halves of a symbiotic political whole. In a letter to William Cecil, dated 8 October 1550 after Somerset had lost the Protectorate, Katherine Willoughby, Duchess of Suffolk, describes her fury at his arbitrary treatment of her cousin Richard Naunton. “I could blame my lady,” the Duchess of Suffolk wrote to Cecil, “for my lord’s fault, but I think he has been warned too late to fall again into that evil” (CSP: Domestic, 1547–53, no. 481). This inference by the Duchess of Suffolk, that Somerset had been warned, possibly overtly by the Privy Council or more broadly by the events of his recent arrest, not to “fall again into that evil” of allowing his wife to meddle in political affairs, affirms the perception of partnership.

There are differences, of course, between the mechanisms of governance within the Protectorate and the setting of policy. With the office of the Master of Requests operating out of her own home, Stanhope had ample opportunity to involve herself in its daily workings particularly as its master demonstrated an outright subservience to her wishes. The setting of policy is a more difficult area in which to trace her activity but some suggestion of it survives. Somerset’s foreign policy toward Scotland, for example, rested on a simple if ultimately failed attempt to marry the child king Edward VI to the child queen Mary of Scots and join the two kingdoms together under the banner of the English Church. In pursuit of this policy he launched an invasion of Scotland that ended in the Scots’ defeat on 10 September 1547 at the Battle of Pinkie Cleugh. Although there is nothing that documents Anne Stanhope’s involvement in her husband’s actions, the duke’s chief secretary, Thomas Chaloner, was knighted by Somerset on the field of battle. At the same time, the duchess presented Chaloner with a jewel recognizing his exemplary service (Lucas, 2009, p. 47). Having observed Kateryn Parr’s active involvement in marshaling Henry VIII’s military as Regent-General during the French invasion of 1544, such a gesture three years later would suggest at the least Stanhope’s approval of Somerset’s Scottish deployment.

In domestic policy, Stanhope was blamed for playing a role in the uprisings of 1549 under the belief that she had influenced her husband’s policy on enclosures (Scard, 2016, p. 153). It is impossible to tell at this distance whether this was merely perception or had any element of truth to it but the reaction to her by the peasant army Somerset gathered at Hampton Court in October 1549 (discussed below) would suggest that the belief of her influence at least among the populace was certainly real. In the matter of religion Stanhope’s views were well known. Her aggressive support for the Evangelical party during the last years of Henry VIII’s reign and her rumored support for its outspoken martyr Anne Askew, burnt at the stake on 16 July 1546 for heresy, came at great personal risk. The queen, herself, barely escaped with her life for her religious beliefs during this period.
Such risk-taking on Stanhope’s part reveals a personality not intimidated by society’s expectations of female behavior nor one to shy away from taking a public stand on her beliefs. Evidence suggests that Somerset’s wife, a former member of Kateryn Parr’s religiously fervid chamber, was before him in pushing a reformist policy toward Calvinism, a position recent Somerset biographer Margaret Scard believes “was greatly influenced by the queen” and Stanhope’s exposure to Parr’s beliefs (Scard, 2016, pp. 96–7). As early as 15 July 1549, John Calvin wrote from Geneva to the Somersets’ 11-year-old daughter, asking her to thank “the most illustrious princess, your mother” for a ring which Stanhope had sent to Calvin “as a token of her good-will”, remarking that “I understand that you have been made aware, from her conversation, of her friendly disposition towards me” (Original Letters, 1847, vol. 2, pp. 702–3).

Friendly interaction between the duchess and Calvin, which was on-going as early as 1548 when Calvin dedicated his Commentary on the Epistles to Timothy to the duke, represents a statement of Stanhope’s advanced religious position that appears to have taken her husband longer to reach. In his profile of Somerset, Bush argues that the duke did not turn toward Calvinism during the Protectorate but only afterward, suggesting that it was Stanhope, who, having absorbed the earlier lessons of the queen’s chamber, was influencing the direction of her husband’s beliefs (Scard, 2016, p. 96; Bush, 1975, pp. 109–110). With her close ties to arch-reformers Hugh Latimer and John Hooper, both of whom died at the stake under Queen Mary, Paget’s comments to Ambassador Van der Delft become more than plausible, that the duchess was active in attempts “to coerce the Lady Mary into compliance with the new legislation on religion” (CSP: Spanish, 9, p. xvi). To wean Mary from her devotion to Catholicism, the late Queen Kateryn had tried gentle persuasion; Stanhope was made of sterner stuff. Yet despite Paget’s comments, the relationship between Mary and the Duchess of Somerset has been characterized as a friendly one on the basis of a single letter.

Multiple letters requesting Anne’s favor and intervention, particularly during her husband’s Protectorate, suggest that those writing the letters believed she had influence with him. But this letter in particular, rarely placed in an historical context, was written on 24 April 1547 by Princess Mary and has been quoted extensively as an example of Anne’s cordial relationship with Mary and Mary’s belief that Anne had the power to intervene in one “old suit concerning Richard Wood” and another for “my poor George Brickhouse” (Tytler, 1839, pp. 51–2). Written just months after her father’s death when the jubilant Evangelicals under Somerset had taken over the government, Mary’s position was suddenly precarious. She had named her brother’s successor in her father’s 1544 will and while it was true that under pressure from the Emperor the new Protector allowed her to continue to hear mass privately, as an avowed Catholic her status was now in question. Nor given her friendliness to Calvinism was it at all certain that Stanhope approved of her husband’s latitude toward the princess any more than during the same period she approved of Kateryn Parr’s latitude toward Mary’s sister. Seated among the triumphant Evangelicals who controlled the new government, Stanhope was expressing her own statement of religious commitment through her actions.

The letter that Mary wrote to Stanhope, only nine months after Evangelical martyr Anne Askew was tortured and burned at the stake, was not a missive by a powerful princess acknowledging a lesser friend at court, it was a carefully worded evocation of former allegiances intended to cajole Catherine of Aragon’s erstwhile maid into acting on Mary’s behalf. The caressing terms—“My good Gossip”, “my good Nann”, “your loving friend during my life”—and references to Stanhope’s connection to the household of Mary’s mother had a careful political calculation behind them and were designed to sway Anne’s interest not only in Mary’s requests but in Mary, herself, though a sentimental remembrance of things past. The letter is more political stratagem than acknowledgement of friendship certainly in the context of the on-going religious duel between Mary’s Catholic household and the Evangelical council controlled by the Duke of Somerset. Significantly, too, when Mary took the throne, there was no further mention of “my good Nann”, and as queen she did not restore either Anne’s dowry or her jointure to her. It was left to Elizabeth a decade later to provide Anne with an income. As far as providing Stanhope with a place to live, it was not until...
the final months of Mary's reign in 1558, five years after she had come to the throne, that she offered the duchess a residence. Ironically, it was the manor of Hanworth which had once been the home of Kateryn Parr (Lysons, 1800, pp. 94–5).

Anne's own reign as the de facto first lady in the kingdom began its end of days on 8 October 1549, as plots among the Privy Council against Somerset's Protectorate boiled over. On that date the duke issued a proclamation to his supporters that “all those who were loyal to the King should repair to Hampton Court where his person resided” (CSP: Spanish 1547–9, 9, p. 457). The Duke and Duchess of Somerset left London and joined the 12-year-old Edward. The Protector had discovered that an array of powerful forces led by the Earl of Warwick, soon to become Duke of Northumberland, was coalescing against him. Somerset appealed “in all directions” for volunteers with the result “that over 4,000 peasants immediately assembled at court”. If he was expecting a military stand-off as he obviously was, it is curious that the Protector chose to bring his wife with him to the fray. The reaction to the presence of his duchess by the troops who had gathered at Somerset's request and who were there to defend him is telling. Her unpopularity was such that pressure appears to have been applied by his advisors to impel Somerset to send her away. At “about five in the afternoon [Somerset] sent his wife off to her house and she went out weeping, very badly handled in words by the courtiers and peasants, who put all this trouble down to her.” It should be remembered that these courtiers and peasants were the duke's own supporters and again they easily believed that the duke was being badly advised by his wife. That he felt compelled to remove her indicates just how great an impact her reputation was having on his ability to command.

Despite Somerset's efforts, the Protectorate fell and by 14 October the erstwhile Lord Protector was imprisoned in the Tower. Briefly arrested as well, the duchess was soon freed (Skidmore, 2007, 210). Not content to sit at home and wring her hands, she set to work to obtain her husband's release by relentless petitioning of the Earl of Warwick. According to the Imperial ambassador, Warwick was said to be showing Somerset “favour and has been won over by the Protector's wife, who is always in his house” (CSP: Spanish, IX, p. 489). By the following February the duke had been released and although stripped of his primacy he was allowed to attend Privy Council meetings once more. His position in light of the ambitions of the Earl of Warwick and his supporters was tenuous and his duchess devised a new scheme to restore his fortunes and bring him back into charity with Warwick. That she thought this was possible speaks to her self-confidence in her ability to mold opinion. Together with Jane Guildford, Countess of Warwick, Stanhope arranged a marriage in June 1550 between her 12-year-old daughter, Anne, and Warwick's heir, John, Lord Lisle. The absence of the bridegroom's father from the ceremony on plea of illness might have been taken by the skeptical as an ominous sign (CSP: Spain, X, p. 98). Stanhope's involvement in a similar plot less than a decade later, the clandestine marriage of her son to Lady Jane Grey's sister, Katherine, promptly led to the imprisonment of the young couple and reflects an inability on the part of the duchess to learn from her mistakes. In the event, the 1550 union between the Seymours and Dudleys did little to endear the Somersets to Warwick and the Duke of Somerset was arrested once again the following year.

That Anne Stanhope was involved in plots and plans to enhance and later shore up her husband's power is evident, but the strongest evidence of her participation in her husband's political affairs can be found in the November 1551 depositions of three men, William Crane, a Somerset servant, Sir Thomas Palmer and Henry FitzAlan, Earl of Arundel. The depositions of these three men lay out Anne's participation in the Somerset party's plot to foil the conspirators arrayed against the duke—John Dudley, now Duke of Northumberland, William Parr, Marquis of Northampton, and William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke—men whom Somerset and his advisors had been planning to seize and put under arrest. Crane testified that Somerset had “bade him tell the duchess he would no further meddle with the apprehension of any of the council, and he commanded her bid (her brother) meddle no more in talk with the earl of Arundel”. Arundel testified that: “They and the duchess were privy to the [proposed] apprehension”. Crane and
Palmer swore that: “Somerset told the duchess that Arundel would never confess his doings, if [they were] revealed” (CSP: Domestic, 1547–53, no. 567). These depositions leave little doubt that the Duchess of Somerset was a co-conspirator and that she was, as she had been from the beginning of her marriage, a partner and confidant of both her husband and his henchman, her brother, Sir Michael Stanhope. Her gift in 1547 to Sir Thomas Chaloner suggests her support for the invasion of Scotland; her gift in 1549 to John Calvin shows her lobbying to push the Church of England toward Calvinism. Crane, Palmer and Arundel’s testimony positions her in the center of her husband’s network of politics and policy.

A final piece of evidence suggesting Anne’s complicity in the power politics of her husband’s Protectorate is the fact that when the duke was arrested and thrown in the Tower for the second time on 11 October 1551, the duchess, together with her brother, was arrested as well (Loades, 1996, p. 184; Nichols, 1845, pp. 373–74). Somerset was executed on 22 January 1552 and Sir Michael Stanhope on 26 February. Announcing Somerset’s death, Imperial ambassador Jehan Scheyfve advised the Emperor on 12 February that: “It is believed that the Duchess, Somerset’s spouse, will soon go the same way” (CSP: Spain, 10, p. 453). To further rub salt in the wounds of the newly widowed duchess, Scheyfve also reported that her children “are to be declared bastards, because it seems [she] had been promised to a certain gentleman before the Duke married her.” It was the same charge that had been brought against Anne Boleyn.

Among all of the plots and plotters and accusations of high crimes that filled the years of Edward VI through to the accession of Mary, no wife had been incarcerated in the Tower with her husband. Anne Stanhope was the exception. Her perceived meddling in the affairs of state had earned her a place at his side. Anne remained in prison until the end of Edward VI’s reign, evidence of the deep and abiding animosity that the men who had overthrown the Protector bore her as well as their conviction that widowed though she was, she continued to be a political threat. In the eyes of those who knew Anne Stanhope—Kateryn Parr, William Paget, William Cecil, the Duchess of Suffolk, the Earl of Southampton, Lady Sharington, William Crane, Thomas Smith, John Cheke, Thomas Fisher—and of those who knew of her, Katherine Basset, Ambassador Van der Delft and the peasants at Hampton Court, the Duchess of Somerset’s reputation brought no luster to the office of her beleaguered husband’s Protectorate.

8. Conclusion

As daughters of the gentry who rose to positions of power at the Tudor court, Kateryn Parr as queen, Anne Stanhope as wife of the Lord Protector, both women were exceptional for their times. Bold, outspoken, advisors to their husbands, both stepped beyond the socially sanctioned role of modest woman and self-effacing wife and claimed the principal female role at the top of the Tudor hierarchy. Parr was seen by contemporaries as a constructive force while Stanhope’s reputation was the opposite. Each followed a different path as young women, Parr marrying at 16 and moving to the north; Stanhope creating a career in successive queens’ households and marrying later at 25. Their paths converged in the last four years of Henry VIII’s reign, collaborative while the king lived, combative after his death. In support of the Evangelical movement and the establishment of the English Church, it is not an exaggeration to say that both women risked their lives to further their beliefs. But the triumph of the Evangelicals with the accession of Edward VI and Edward Seymour’s control of the Protectorate led to quarrels, bitterness and acrimony. Given the survival of the Parr-Seymour letters there can be little doubt about the ensuing tension in the Parr-Stanhope relationship and the queen-dowager’s angry repudiation of her former lady-in-waiting.

On Stanhope’s side of the equation not just gossip but visual evidence underscores her assertive approach to her place in the Protectorate. Her proposed portrait as “The Lady in Black” was a checkmate to Parr’s own proclamation of authority, NPG 4451, a visual claim made by the wife of England’s Lord Protector to the primary female role at court. The queen’s signature on several documents as “Regent-general”, written immediately after Henry VIII’s death, shows the role that
she fully expected to assume in the new government of the young king, the role she had played in 1544 as royal regent (HMC: Salisbury (1883), I, 1306–1571, no. 220, p. 51). But Edward Seymour seized both the title and the power associated with the regency and his wife commandeered the ceremonial and patronage aspects associated with the position of queen-consort. Little wonder then that the queen-dowager was out of charity with both of the Somersets.

Given Stanhope’s place as the wife of the Lord Protector, the cultural appropriation of the queen's known commitments to the evolving world of English portraiture, to the expanding body of vernacular literature or to other suitable areas of patronage where a high-ranking woman might be expected to involve herself could hardly be considered usurpation. But where the queen as consort of a divinely-anointed king could interest herself in politics, serve as Regent-General of the kingdom, advise her husband and urge a realignment of the succession, all of which Kateryn Parr undertook, any similar actions by the Duchess of Somerset within the constraints of a Protectorate unauthorized by royal will, combined with the socially limiting agency of her gender, were looked upon as meddling.

The duchess was undoubtedly her husband’s advisor and evidence would suggest that she supported his policies toward Scotland and played an important role in the movement of the English Reformation toward Calvinism. She may also have interested herself in the proceedings of the office of the Master of Requests located in her own home. Furthermore, as part of the Protectorate’s inner circle during the conspiracies that raged over control of power between 1547–51, she became a major player forming a connecting link between her husband and her brother. The contemporary conviction that she was Somerset’s closest confidant whose own reputation exercised a negative influence over his was wide-spread enough to do damage to his Protectorate and, as Lily B. Campbell and Scott Lucas have both remarked, that conviction was not created from whole cloth.

At such a distance of centuries it is fruitless to argue whether someone living in the Tudor era was wicked or wise, naïve or acute, destructive or benign. On the basis of surviving evidence it is more constructive to measure how that person, in this case two women, fit into the context of gender expectations, of power politics and of lasting contributions to the arenas in which they operated. As Shakespeare so cogently observed about the quality of reputation, until recently Kateryn Parr’s good efforts were buried with her bones. Anne Stanhope’s suspect reputation lived on after her, opaque, reviled and tarred with accusations as a wicked woman, her central place in Tudor history erased by disputes over character flaws and expectations of gender.

Certainly both Kateryn Parr and Anne Stanhope made their mark on the age in which they lived and historical judgment has been hotly contested for both. Elizabeth I carried the banner of Parr’s tutelage into the seventeenth century. The memories of Stanhope were not as bright. Yet her place as a powerful force within her husband’s Protectorate must be acknowledged. Whatever her character flaws may have been, it is that power that Stanhope appropriated as successor to the vacant position of queen-consort, asserting herself as her husband’s councilor, and wrapping herself in the trappings of projects promoted by the previous queen, that gives her a place in Tudor history. For an age characterized by John Knox as one overwhelmed by a "Monstrous Regiment of Women", Stanhope’s role as a power player at the Tudor court has been overlooked or dismissed by modern historians and, warts and all, deserves acknowledgement and re-examination.

Acknowledgements
I would like to thank Professor Scott Lucas and Alison Weir for sharing their research with me and many thanks to Kitty Hadaway of Sotheby’s and Lisa Little at Alnwick Castle for their help.

Funding
The author received no direct funding for this research.

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Citation information
Cite this article as: Reputation and appropriation at the Tudor court: Queen Kateryn Parr and Anne Stanhope, Duchess of Somerset, Susan E. James, Cogent Arts & Humanities (2019), 6: 1664863.

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