Shoulders To Cry On: Catherine of Aragon and Marguerite of Austria

Theresa Earenfight
(Seattle University)

Parallel Lives (pace Plutarch)

Catherine of Aragon (1485–1536) and Marguerite of Austria (1480–1530) were entwined in a complicated network of powerful family connections and political alliances that were central to the history of early modern Europe. Catherine, daughter of Isabel I of Castile (b. 1451, r. 1474–1504) and Fernando II of Aragon (b. 1452, r. 1479–1516), was queen of England as wife of King Henry VIII, whose divorce actions severed their marriage and resulted in the official religious break with Rome (Earenfight 2021). Marguerite, daughter of Mary of Burgundy (1457–82) and Maximilian of Habsburg (b. 1459, r. 1508–19), was Regent of the Netherlands, guardian of her nephew Charles (later Emperor Charles V), and an influential patron of art, literature, and music (Eichberger 2005).

Both women were influential in their own time, Catherine for what she did not do (bear a son and give in to her husband's demand for a divorce) and Marguerite for what she did do (serve as Regent of the Netherlands and patron of the arts). They both married while quite young, were widowed within months of their weddings, and had difficult pregnancies. Both experienced the early death of siblings. Both were politically active throughout their lives and during their second marriages, and both governed as regents for a husband or nephew. There are some differences—Marguerite was widowed twice and never had a child survive to adulthood, Catherine had to endure the infidelities of her husband, while Marguerite did not.

Their lives had a striking symmetry that began with their first meeting in 1497 at court in Spain until Marguerite's death in 1530. Catherine was twelve years old and Marguerite seventeen when they met in 1497 because their parents arranged a double marriage that joined their families. Marguerite married Catherine's brother, Juan (1478–97), and Marguerite's brother Philippe (1478–1506) married Catherine's sister, Juana (1479–1555). For over three decades, they played pivotal roles in some of the most consequential events in the sixteenth century—Catherine's divorce and the split of England and Rome, Margaret's regency of the vast Habsburg Empire. Their conjoined families literally ruled all across Europe.

For all they have in common, historians have focused on Catherine and Marguerite individually. In separate biographies they are mentioned in the same paragraph occasionally, when they had to mediate in a crisis, as in 1513 during a period of warfare, or in 1520 at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in France, or when Henry's divorce from Catherine threatened diplomatic relations with Margaret and their nephew, the Emperor Charles V. This essay is a nod to Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, which traced the lives and deeds of famous men whose lives followed a similar path, but in this essay, I'm not focusing on men waging war. When we put Catherine and Marguerite together and ponder the nuances of their relationship, we can see the personal impact of public political actions and the deaths of loved ones. What we don't get, however, is their voices in conversation.

We have roughly seventy extant letters for Catherine and hundreds more for Marguerite owing to her work as regent, but they did not, as far as we know now, exchange letters of a personal nature. And so, we rely on the reports of ambassadors and family members that may record emotional public displays of joy, love, and grief, but do so through social scripts, what women were expected to say and do. The official memoranda and letters reveal only some of the details

of conversations meant to be kept secret and conveyed not in a letter, but in a whisper, through interlocutors and confidantes.

It is possible, though, to glean meaningful insights into their relationship through gifts— a rosary and a musical score—that Marguerite gave to Catherine. These gifts contain encoded messages to Catherine, sent at moments of emotional stress, such as the death of a parent, spouse, sibling, or a child, or a fractured marriage and a divorce. These gifts are subtle and enduring tangible symbols of trust, respect, and unselfish love. Marguerite was hundreds of miles away, yet her gifts are an emotional embrace of Catherine at a moment of joy and when she needed shoulders to cry on while mourning.

1496–99: Two Girls at the Spanish Royal Court

Catherine, born on 16 December 1485 at Alcalá de Henares, was the fifth child of Isabel and Fernando. She was a complex cultural blend, named in honor of her grandmother, Catalina, the daughter of Constanza of Castile and John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster. She had four siblings—Juan, Isabel, Juana, and María. Marguerite was born in Brussels on 10 January 1480 into a powerful Burgundian family closely affiliated with the French Valois royal dynasty. She had only one brother, Philippe. They both were highly prized as objects in strategic dynastic marriages: Catherine was betrothed to the English prince, Arthur Tudor, and Marguerite to the future Charles VIII of France. Both had been educated to act with public power and authority from skilled women, Catherine from her mother, Isabel, and Marguerite from her aunt, Anne de Beaujeu (d. 1522), sister and regent to Charles VIII of France (Earenfight 2021, 26–52; Eichberger 2005).

Marguerite and Catherine were not educated specifically to rule, but their education was a strong preparation for both of them to govern a court and a realm. Isabel carefully selected and compensated her children's tutors, the brothers Antonio and Alessandro Geraldino. Alessandro accompanied Catherine to England in 1501, served as her confessor, and wrote *De eruditione nobelium puellarum* (*On the Education of Noble Girls*, 1501), at Isabel's request. At age eleven, Catherine owned a breviary. Her studies included philosophy, literature, religion, and music (she could play the clavichord and harp). In addition to her native Castilian, she was learning French well and German, and was proficient in Latin, prompting one of her tutors, Beatriz Galindo, to note that Catherine surpassed her mother in Latin learning (*CSP Spain*, 1, 203: 156, 294: 255). She studied late medieval ideas on virtue, justice, and proper queenly behavior and Christianized versions of Classical philosophy and natural science concerning medical understandings of the differences between the sexes. Fernando and Isabel were avid patrons of artists, and an itinerary of their travels can also be read as a tour of artworks-in-progress. Catherine watched her parents interact with their subjects and convoke the regional assemblies of nobles and townspeople. For fifteen years she travelled throughout the Spanish countryside, staying in royal towns and military camps, small towns and religious sites (*Itinerario de los Reyes Católicos*). With four siblings ahead of her in the succession, she was a distant witness to the momentous events of the wars against Granada, the onset of the Inquisition, the westward sea voyages of Columbus. She grew close to her mother as her siblings as, one by one, left home to marry.

Unlike Catherine, Marguerite did not really know her mother, Mary of Burgundy, who died when she was only two years old. That year, she was betrothed to the thirteen-year-old Charles, the dauphin of France, and lived at the French court where she was tutored by her guardian, Anne de Beaujeau, author of a handbook of advice for elite women, *Lessons for My Daughter* (Jansen 2004). The library there housed works in Latin, Castilian Spanish, and French, including works by Christine de Pizan. The betrothal was annulled in 1491 and in 1493, she returned to her father's

court at Mechelen. Her education there was much like Catherine's, morally infused humanism inspired by Erasmus, with a focus on languages, secular and devotional literature, music, and history. The library at court contained richly illuminated didactic, religious, and moral works and she cultivated a serious taste for visual art and music. (Ridder-Symoens 2021; Blockmans and Prevenier 1999, 213, 229).

Catherine and Marguerite met in Burgos on 18 March 1497 for the wedding of Marguerite and Juan, a marriage negotiated by Isabel and Fernando after Marguerite's marriage plans to Charles of France dissolved in 1491. Marguerite left the Netherlands in the late fall, but hostilities with France made the land voyages dangerous, so she traveled to Spain on the same boat that carried Juana to the Netherlands. A difficult sea voyage so frightened Marguerite that she wrote her own epitaph, "Here lies Margaret, the willing bride / Twice married – but a virgin when she died." She arrived safely, however, and was met with queenly splendor at Santander (Eichberger, "Margaret of Austria," 49–50). The two sisters-in-law got along well even though their personalities and temperaments were different. Marguerite was lively and open, with an easy-going demeanor, and a sense of humor, as her droll epitaph shows. When she arrived at court, Isabel issued instructions to avoid the "familiarity, common treatment and informal communication used by queens and princesses in Austria, Burgundy and France." Catherine, like her mother, was tended to display the culturally accepted emotional expressions and what was expected of her. She was taught to be more circumspect because "gravity [. . .] was the [common] usage in Spain" (Fernández de Córdova Miralles, 254–75, 307).[1]

Catherine and Marguerite must not have ruffled any feathers, for there is almost no mention of them in contemporary records except as subjects of marriage negotiations. We do have,

[1] 1. Juan de Flandes, "Portrait of an *Infanta*," ca. 1496, oil on wood, 31.5 x 21. 7cm. Madrid: Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, inv. # 1930.36; 2. Juan de Flandes, "Marriage at Cana," ca. 1497, oil on wood, 21 x 15.9 cm, 4 mm thick. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. # 1982.60.

however, portraits of them at roughly the same time, painted by the same artist, Juan de Flandes, a Flemish court painter to Queen Isabel from 1496 to 1519. Isabel and Fernando commissioned him to paint Catherine from life to mark the proxy betrothal of her to Arthur Tudor (1486–1502). This exquisite painting is perhaps the earliest depiction of her, painted when she was between eleven and thirteen years old (Ishikawa 46–48; Silva Maroto; Weiss 2014 and 2019). It is quite small (12 in. x 8 in.) and strikingly intimate. It is not a stock image, suggesting that she actually sat for the portrait. The rosebud she holds in her right hand tightly closed, barely revealing red petals, signifying that she is a mere bud of a girl, a virgin. The three leaves on the rosebud stem suggest the trinity and symbolize piety. The painter rendered Catherine with delicate pink lips, a perfect straight long nose, and perfectly clear skin—the sign of an unblemished soul. Her golden-red hair is neatly pulled off her face and coiled around silk grosgrain ribbons, a style typical of the Mediterranean. Her modest dress, with gathers at the sleeves and the neckline, reveals a hint of her breasts. She is fresh, youthful, a virgin brimming with fecundity and the promise of children. This portrait indirectly portrays her emotions. She is calm, unruffled by the presence of an artist looking directly at her. Her face is solemn and modestly direct; her blue-grey eyes are neither downcast nor evasive.

Juan de Flandes painted Marguerite and Juan as the bridal couple in the *Marriage at Cana*. This painting, part of a *retablo* painted for Isabel of Castile, shows the married couple seated to the left of the Virgin Mary, against the rear wall of an intimate loggia. Chiyo Ishikawa argues that the face of the groom is an idealized type, and so may not be a likeness of Juan, that the bride bears several features that identify her instead as Marguerite. Like her, she is blond. Her narrow face, prominent nose, and downturned eyebrows are notably not like the typical feminine ideal of Juan de Flandes. Her posture and poise match the description of her by King Fernando, her father-in-law, as "healthy, charming, and happy." The most striking detail, however, is the inclusion of jeweled daisies, called *margaritas* in Spanish, to embellish the clasps that hold her gold-colored dress and mantle at her shoulders and fashion the circlet on her head (Ishikawa, 12–15, 90–94).

Marguerite's happiness was short-lived. Six months after the wedding, Juan contracted a serious illness. She wanted to go on pilgrimage to pray for his recovery, but she could not because she was pregnant. Juan's health declined rapidly. She was with him when he died on 4 October, and shocked by his death, she had to be carried from the room. The kingdom mourned Juan's death for forty days with familiar funeral rituals. The members of the court wore sackcloth and austere black velvet gowns, sending a message of mourning to the people at court who understood that the color black in Christian cultures makes real the finality of death. But at court, there were no dramatic public lamentations, no tearing of hair or ripping their garments. Isabel and Fernando held their sadness close, a private personal gesture that Catherine took to heart later in her life. Sadness troubled the family. On 2 April 1498, Marguerite gave birth to a stillborn daughter and on 23 August 1498, Catherine's sister, Isabel, died, leaving a baby son, Miguel (Liss, 366–67; Silleras Férnandez, 204–205).

Rather than return immediately to the Netherlands, Marguerite stayed in Castile. During the next two years, she forged a close bond with the royal family as they traveled across Spain to Zaragoza, Alcalá de Henares, and Seville. It is evident that Catherine and Marguerite also studied together, because their tutor at court, the Italian scholar, Alessandro Geraldini, later sought their patronage, appealing to his role as their former teacher. Marguerite accepted his pleas for patronage and reminded Catherine to do the same (*L&P Henry VIII* 2, no. 4195; Ylä-Anttila, 64). Marguerite tutored Catherine in French to improve her fluency at the request of Elizabeth of York and Margaret Beaufort, Henry VII's mother who "wish that the Princess of Wales [Catherine] should

always speak French with the Princess Margaret [of Austria], who is now in Spain, in order to learn the language, and to be able to converse in it when she comes to England. This is necessary, because these ladies do not understand Latin, and much less, Spanish" (*CSP Spain I*, no. 202).

When Marguerite left Spain in September 1499, Isabel and Fernando gave her a parting gift, a bracelet with a pattern made of arrows, one part of the emblem of the arrows and yoke (*yugo y flechas*) of Isabel and Fernando. This gift cemented diplomatic and familial ties, but the bracelet was no mere bit of protocol. It signified both the diplomatic affection of Isabel and Fernando, and Marguerite responded with genuine emotion. She continued to wear Spanish-inspired fashion and often had daisies (*margaritas*) embroidered on her clothes to remind her of her family in Spain (Matthews, 150–51).

They lived the rest of their lives on opposite sides of the English Channel and met only once again in person, yet they never lost touch. The shared family business of governing would link Catherine and Marguerite over the next thirty years. Marguerite was a tireless advocate of amity between her family and the royal house of England, a self-professed *"bonne englese*,*"* owing to the influence of her step-grandmother, Margaret of York. She was (Ylä-Anttila 155). In 1500, they both became aunts when Juana gave birth to Charles (1550–58, Emperor Charles V 1519–56). Marguerite was his godmother and wore a Spanish headdress (*tocado*) and mantle (*manto*) as a way to emphasize her dignity as the widow of a Spanish prince. Family matters were not just personal; they had political, religious, and cultural significance. They shared a love of visual art, music, and literature, confronted shared family tensions, and navigated diplomatic crises. They loved and grieved husbands and children, parents and siblings. Their expressions of love and mourning broadcast their emotions, even when conveyed allegorically or metaphorically, and played a key role in articulating social and diplomatic relationships.

A Decade of Weddings, Baptisms, and Funerals: 1500–1509

Six months after Marguerite left Spain, Catherine's sister María left for Portugal to marry her sister's widower, Manuel of Portugal. There was one bright spot in that nearly empty nest when, in the fall of 1500, Catherine's long-awaited betrothal to Arthur Tudor was finalized. She spent her last year in Spain in Granada with her mother, getting ready for her departure. On 1 May, she began to make her way slowly from Granada to La Coruña. They sailed on 17 August, but thunderstorms and rough seas ("wiendes and jeopardies") made the voyage perilous (*CSP Spain*, 1, 304–305; *Receyt of Ladie Kateryne*, 4–5). She became ill, and a few days later turned back. Knowing that Marguerite had faced a similar frightening sea voyage may have helped Catherine overcome her fear while she recovered and the weather improved. They tried again, sailing from Laredo on 27 September. Calmer seas prevailed, and they landed at Plymouth on 2 October. Catherine married Arthur on 14 November with days of banquets, pageants, and theatrics (Earenfight 2021, 50–60).

As a young bride, Catherine had to deal with another fear. Arthur's health was fragile, and she was cautioned against vigorous sexual activity. Both her mother, who recalled Juan's young death, and Margaret Beaufort, Arthur's grandmother, who suffered a very difficult pregnancy at age 13, advised against sex too soon. Catherine was quite clear when, decades later, during the divorce proceedings, she said that they never consummated the marriage. By all accounts, they were content, perhaps even happy, and hoped for a long marriage and children (Earenfight 2021, 60–73).

On 4 December, a few weeks after Catherine's wedding, Marguerite married Philibert of Savoy (1480–1504). They were the same age, and for both it was a second marriage. They were a

good match and worked well together, both personally and politically. He was interested in hunting and sports and left the duchy in her hands during a time of conflict with France. She thrived at the day-to-day work of governance. She took the lead in plans for the visit of her brother Philippe in April 1503, where she discussed and approved his plan to continue good relations with France. Marguerite resided in the Mechelen palace, Hof van Savoyen (Court of Savoy), a cultural center to which she brought the best painters, sculptors, architects, poets, and musicians of the time (Mareel, 13–25).

Both soon were widows, however, Catherine in 1502 and Marguerite in 1504.

Catherine and Arthur spent a very cold rainy winter in a castle at Ludlow (Shropshire), fitted out for soldiers, not newlyweds. They both fell ill, but Arthur's frail health put him at greater risk (*L&P Henry VIII* 7, item, 128). By late March, his illness became serious, and he died on 2 April 1502. Catherine's grief was profound. She turned to her Spanish lady, María de Rojas, for comfort, who slept with and comforted Catherine after Arthur's death (*CSP Spain 4:1*, items 573, 577). The weather on the day of the funeral was atrocious, rainy and windy with dep-rutted muddy roads. Rumors of a pregnancy proved false, but she was too ill to attend the funeral ceremonies at Ludlow and Worcester Cathedral, which may explain why there were no criticisms of her absence. But there was an expectation that the widow should attend the funeral, so several ladies from her household represented her at the funeral (Earenfight 2021, 73–77).

During her painful and difficult transition from wife to widow she was comforted by a few remaining Spanish ladies and the English women: Margaret Beaufort; her Tudor sisters-in-law, Mary and Margaret; Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury; and her English attendants. Most of what we transpired during her period of mourning was not recorded and is lost to us. We know from Privy Purse accounts of her mother-in-law, Elizabeth of York, that she eased Catherine's grief with empathy and common sense. She settled past due bills accrued from the wedding, paid for the yards of black velvet to cover the litter that brought Catherine back to London, and ordered that five bucks be sent to her household in Durham House (Okerlund, 113, 194). She invited Catherine to visit her at the palace at Westminster and paid for the barge from Durham House to Westminster and for the messengers who went back and forth between the two households. Catherine's grief for Arthur was still raw when, on 11 February 1503, Elizabeth of York died in childbirth (Laynesmith, 211; Cunningham, 178–92).

Marguerite had nearly three years of a happy marriage until 10 September 1504 when Philibert died after a short illness. They had no children. She grieved deeply and publicly, described as so distraught that she tried to commit suicide by jumping out a window. She cut off all of her hair, a symbol of youthful vitality and vowed that she would not marry again, earning her the epithet, "Lady of Mourning" dressed widow's attire and with in a soft white veil with a widow's peak (Mareel, 90–91). One of her first acts of memorializing her husband was to begin construction of a monastic funerary complex in Brou where Philibert, his mother, and she, too, would be buried. In the sculptural love knots that embellish the Renaissance Gothic church of St. Nicolas of Tolentino, Marguerite first used a visual motif to signify her emotions. She entwined "cords of conjugal, filial, and sovereign love" often in her heraldic emblems, medallions, and manuscript illuminations (Gelfand, 414–17; Silleras Fernández, 228–29).

Later that year, both Catherine and Marguerite mourned again, this time for Isabel of Castile who died on 26 November. Catherine's grief was heartbreaking to those around her at court. Isabel's death was more than just a personal tragedy. It transformed the political landscape in Castile in ways that affected both Catherine and Marguerite as Juana was crowned queen regnant and Philippe her king-consort. Catherine took comfort with the Spanish women of her household

who stayed on during the vexing period of disarray in her household while she waited in political and marital limbo. Marguerite held close the memory of Isabel as she instructed Isabel's treasurer to purchase for her thirty-two works from Isabel's collection painted by Michel Sittow and Juan de Flandes, among then the work most emotionally meaningful, *The Marriage Feast at Cana,* with the double portrait of Marguerite and Juan. She ordered that this work, and nineteen others, be mounted in a silver-gilt frame adorned with her heraldic device, enameled daisies. It formed part of a portable diptych with another painting from the same *Retablo,* the *Temptation of Christ.* Marguerite kept this painting close to her, a sign of her religious devotion and patronage of the artist, but also it was an assertion of her similarity her mother-in-law, Isabel, and was a link to her brief life at the court where she and Catherine became friends. The painting remained in the Spanish Habsburg collections until at least the death of Felipe II in 1598 (Hand et al., 48-53, Eichberger 1998, 303–305).

Catherine remained as close as possible to Marguerite, with family concerns keeping them in touch across the distances. After 1503, Catherine was caught up in a struggle with her father and father-in-law, batted about as a possible bride for her brother-in-law, Henry. Her life was increasingly difficult as both Henry and Fernando fought over her future, and she endured years of pinching pennies. The one respite came in January 1506 when Juana and Phillipe literally blew ashore on their way to Spain and they spent several days reveling in each other's company at Windsor. Their short visit was marred by marital discord between Juana and Philippe, who stated publicly that he thought she was mad. Their public argument upset both Henry VII and Catherine (Earenfight 2021, 82–85; Silleras-Fernández, 260–61).

That brief moment of joy with her sister ended a few months later when, on 25 September, Philippe, Margaret's brother and Catherine's brother-in-law, died unexpectedly. Juana's passionate displays after Phillippe's death, were unsettling. Unlike her mother, a paragon of emotional reserve, Juana wailed long and loudly from castle ramparts and would not be parted from his corpse as the funeral cortege moved across Spain. People feared for her sanity, earning her the epithet, "la Loca," or the "crazy woman." Her unsteady mental state prompted Fernando to keep her close at hand in Castile, virtually imprisoned and excluded from governing as rightful sovereign queen (Silleras Fernández, 49–81, 211–97).

His death propelled both Catherine and Marguerite into wider roles in the public political sphere. Catherine's relationship with her father had gradually improved as she forcefully asserted herself in family matters with political consequence, most notably her concerns for the proposed marriage of Juana to Henry VII. In April 1507, Fernando appointed her as Spain's ambassador to England. Marguerite, as Regent of the Netherlands and guardian to her young nephew, Charles, worked with her father to govern a sprawling assortment of realms, an empire that covered much of Europe and newly settled lands in North America. Two years later, Catherine's years of penury and isolation changed dramatically when Henry VII died. After publicly grieving the king's death, his son, Henry announced that he would marry Catherine. They were hardly strangers, having known each other since her arrival and she was optimistic about her future (Earenfight 2021, 104–18).

How are we to understand this decade of emotional ups and downs? We often think about how culture and gender affect emotional expressions, but it is useful to ponder the different reactions of these three women. Catherine and Juana grew up in the same emotional community yet had very different reactions to death of a loved one. Can we attribute this simply to personality? Or was there some undocumented childhood experience shaped their emotional world? Was Catherine restrained because her marriage was so short, based more on affection than love? Was

her relationship less profound because they did not have sex? Or did she simply have a restrained temperament? Was Marguerite more emotionally attached to Philibert? Or did a second widowhood cut deeper? Did Juana grieve passionately because she and Phillipe had been together longer? Was her loss more acute because they had children? Was it because she was pregnant with their fourth child and knew that child would not know their father? Did they calibrate their expressions to suit the audience—family and friends, courtiers and personal attendants, nuns and priests, diplomats?

As we think this through, all we can say for certain is that both Catherine and Marguerite rejoiced and wept, on opposite sides of the English Channel. Marguerite could not be with her in person to weep and to celebrate, and mindful of the eyes and ears of courtiers who read her letters and overheard her conversations, she she did the next best thing. She sent gifts. These were not ordinary gifts, but ones that resonated with sly and subtle significance.

A Rosary as a Token of the Bond of Friendship, 1510–20

One gift she sent is an exquisitely carved boxwood decade rosary created in a workshop in Flanders and sent sometime between 1509 and 1526. Meant to be used daily, a decade rosary was a devotional object, intended to stir the imagination by stimulating both sight and touch in order to inspire silent and oral prayer. This is an extraordinary work of art. By 1500, the most advanced princely patrons competed openly with each other to acquire art, to have possessions produced by a prestigious artist. Exquisite artisanal craft created the illusion of sky and flesh instead of boxwood. It is a finely crafted, costly, useful, and enchanting *objet d'art* (Bordes, 43). It is intimate in size and delicately carved, not quite 23 inches long, is ten small faceted "ave" prayer beads (1.5" diameter) and a larger "paternoster" bead (2.1" diameter), with a carved crucifix on the end of the string of beads, attached to a carved ring that could slip over a finger or a belt. It is tactile, heavy and compact, soft and smooth, polished from frequent touching, and tiny enough to loop around a belt. The paternoster bead, known popularly as the "prayer apple" and carved in the shape of a nut, could be carried in the palm of one's hand (Scholten, 16–20, 56–71; Romanelli, 1–3, 107–22).

A rosary such as this, part of a late medieval fascination for incredibly small masterpieces, highlights the complex and profound intertwining of art and piety. Boxwood, prized for its consistent grain, was hard enough to hold its shape and was believed to have been one of the woods used to make Christ's cross. Using tiny tools, artisans carved with exquisite detail religious scenes within the beads. Each bead is carved in the shape of a walnut to symbolize three aspects of Christ: the outer sheath represents Christ's flesh, the shell is his cross, and the core symbolizes Christ's death (Suda and Boehm, 340–51).

To understand the emotional resonance of this rosary, we need to catch up with Catherine and Marguerite. Catherine's life during the decade from 1510 to 1520 was filled with pregnancies, miscarriages, stillbirths, and the death of an infant son. Only a daughter, Mary (1516–58, queen of England, 1554–58), survived to adulthood. Marguerite took a different path, one filled with governance of the Netherlands and care for her family, including her sister-in-law, Catherine.

After Philippe's death and Juana's emotional breakdown, Emperor Maximilian appointed Marguerite as guardian to her nephew and nieces whom they affectionately called "our children": Charles, Leonor (1498–1558), Isabel (1501–26), Mary (1505–58), Ferdinand (1503–64, Emperor 1556–64), and Catherine (1507–78). Marguerite served as regent of the Netherlands twice, 1507–15 and 1519–30. The first woman selected as regent, she was an intermediary between her father and her nephew's subjects in the Netherlands. She resisted her father's

attempts to persuade her to marry Henry VII of England, saying she was sure she could not bear children anymore (Ylä-Anttila 2019, 26–56, 117–23).

Her work as regent depended on counsel and labor, which she enforced through the rhetoric of familial love. As an older relative and former guardian, she had more power with Charles than with her father, who treated her cordially but occasionally acted in a threatening manner. She legitimized her power by claiming she had Charles's best interests in mind. She acted as de facto queen consort in a political sense, as her father and nephew were absent rulers who needed a representative with a dynastic presence that complemented them while also out-ranking all men (Earenfight 2005; (Ylä-Anttila, 115–17, 123–26). She had to balance an extremely delicate diplomatic situation fraught with competing political interests—local groups (nobles and states general) versus her father (the emperor), and the Netherlands versus England, France, Spain, and the Holy Roman Empire. She was pro-English and a strong advocate of a possible marriage between her nephew and Mary Tudor, Catherine's sister-in-law. It was primarily her disregard for the French that led her father and the States-General to declare Charles, fully fit to rule in his own right at the relatively young age of 14. (Ylä-Anttila, 132, 155–57).[2]

During her first regency, the Netherlands was at war against the Duke of Guelders, and although the army was unsuccessful, Margaret was praised for her diplomacy as leading negotiations that led to the League of Cambrai against Venice in 1508 and then the Holy League against France in 1513. To hasten Charles's emancipation, she agreed reluctantly to step down as regent. Her father assured her a year later "not to be melancholy, for I give you a word of a prince that your father will not let you down" (Ylä-Anttila, 155–57). She continued as the guardian and tutor of her nieces and participated in deliberations about their possible marriages. Her purview extended beyond her immediate family. Around 1512, or 1513 at the latest, a very young woman, Anne Boleyn, came to reside at Marguerite's court in Mechelen for year and a bit; in the autumn of 1514, she moved to the court of Queen Claude of France. She remained there for the next six or seven years, and when she returned to England in 1521, she was placed in Catherine's household (Ives, 14–17, 34–35). Marguerite resumed the regency in 1517, when Charles inherited the Crown of Aragon after the death of his maternal grandfather, Fernando, and ruled all of Spain. She mediated between Maximilian and Henry VIII, took part in the peace negotiations with France and Aragon, and was instrumental in securing Charles's victory in the imperial election of 1519.

Catherine's life was filled with pregnancies and motherhood. On 1 November, just five months after the wedding and one month before her twenty-fourth birthday, Catherine was pregnant. Her happiness was brief. On 30 January 1510, she gave birth to a stillborn daughter. She kept the news private until 25 May, "so secret that no-one knew it until now except the King my

---

[2] Decade rosary of Catherine of Aragon and Henry VIII, ca. 1509–26 (detail of paternoster bead, opened). The Devonshire Collections, Chatsworth. Reproduced by permission of the Chatsworth Settlement Trustees / Bridgeman Images.

lord, two Spanish women, a physician" and the Spanish ambassador (*CSP Spain Further Supp* 1, No. 7). She finally shared her emotions with her father in a letter on 27 May. She was fearful, telling him that she had "miscarried a dead daughter and because it was considered here an ill omen I did not write before to tell your Highness." She begged him not to reprimand her or be angry with her, and said the stillbirth had been the will of God. She put on a cheerful face and was thankful that God "has given her such a husband as the King of England" (*CSP Spain* 2, item 43). With Marguerite hundreds of miles away, she was comforted by María de Salinas and Inés Vanegas, two Spanish women at court, who helped her regain both her physical and emotional health.

She quickly became pregnant again. On 1 January 1511, she gave birth to a son they named Henry, and on 8 January, Catherine told Marguerite about the birth and christening (*Hall's Chronicle*, 516; *L&P Henry VIII*, I.i., 673). After a month of processions, celebrations, and a tournament at Westminster which Catherine attended, joy again turned to grief. On 22 February, their baby boy died. Henry was concerned for Catherine who, "like a natural woman" was devastated and "made much lamentation" (*Hall's Chronicle,* 519). She bounced back. In late spring or early summer of 1513, she was pregnant again. But Henry was away, waging war against the French, and Catherine was regent, governing the realm while managing a war with Scotland. She traveled north with the English army while fretting about Henry in France. She wrote to Marguerite, begging her to send a doctor to be at hand for her husband (*L & P Henry VIII 1,* 2138). Catherine savored the victory of the English over the Scots at the battle of Flodden on 9 September, but again, joy was soon sadness. On 6 October, the Venetian ambassador reported that "the Queen of England has given birth to a son," but the child died (*L&P Henry VIII 1,* no. 2287). Catherine held her emotions in check and kept trying.

In June 1514**,** Marguerite's ambassador wrote that "[t]he Queen is believed to be with child" (*L&P Henry VIII 1*, no. 3041), but repeated pregnancies and the emotional toll of miscarriages or stillbirths taxed her well-being. A quarrel between her father and her husband frayed her nerves. On 31 December 1514, Peter Martyr reported that she "has given birth to a premature child—through grief, as it is said, for the misunderstanding between her father and her husband. He [Henry] had reproached her with her father's ill faith" (*L&P Henry VIII 1*, no. 3581). Catherine kept both her hopes and fears to herself, but in autumn 1515, she clearly was pregnant. News of her father's death on 23 January 1516 was "kept secret, because of the most serene Queen's being on the eve of her delivery" (*L&P Henry VIII 2*, no. 1563). She was weary, fragile, tentative, hopeful, and fearful. After nearly a decade of heartbreak, Catherine finally could rejoice at a successful pregnancy when, on 18 February 1516, she gave birth to a daughter, Mary, who survived and outlived her mother. Catherine was pregnant one more time in the summer of 1518, at age 32, but on 10 November 1518, she gave birth to a stillborn child.

Adding to the physical and emotional pain of miscarriages and stillbirths, while she was pregnant, Henry was having an affair with a woman in Catherine's household. Gossip in the household about Henry's liaisons began as early as 1510, but one mistress, Elizabeth Blount, gave birth to his son in 1519. Catherine did what her mother did when Fernando had sexual affairs, she tucked her emotions inside and looked the other way. Without a male heir, she remained faithful to Henry and continued to have sex with him, but as far as we know, she never was pregnant again.

It was during this decade that Marguerite sent the rosary to Catherine and Henry. We do not know who the maker was or the exact date of creation, but we do know that it was made in the workshop of a Netherlandish carver Adam Dirckzs (and perhaps by his hands). The finger ring signified the identity of the owners, with the royal arms of England and the motto "Honi soit qvi

mal y pense" of the Knights of Garter ("Evil be to him who thinks evil") inscribed on the bead. It was sent to them both, and the provenance notes Henry as the owner, but that is more a curatorial formality than a mark of its use. It makes more sense that Marguerite had Catherine, not Henry, in mind as the recipient. First, the later owners, the bishop of Aachen and two French Catholic priest, one a Jesuit, point to Catherine as the intended recipient. There are clues in the imagery, too. There are two images in the halves of paternoster bead: The Mass of St. Gregory, which affirmed the sacrament of transubstantiation, and a Virgin of the Apocalypse, which illuminated both the prayers to the Virgin Mary and the more controversial theme of the Immaculate Conception (Ringbom 1969, 159–70). This tight linkage of images and the act of prayer would have created for Catherine, a wife and mother, an empathic devotional act to the Virgin Mary (Dillon 2003, 459). Given her deep allegiance to the Church of Rome, she would have given the rosary to a fellow Catholic who then took it to France to keep safe from Protestants (https://boxwood.ago.ca/object/decade-rosary-0). Finally, a rosary is closely associated with late-medieval Marian devotion among women and was a form of piety that spoke powerfully to women (Winston-Allen 1997, 13–26, 111–32; Hirsh 2016, 333–42). It would have been an important part of Catherine's prayers as Henry's affections cooled, and the divorce loomed. The rosary may have been part of her daily devotions, a key element of her piety as well as a memento of her family.

The rosary most likely was created between the wedding in 1509 and the beginning of their estrangement in the early 1520s. If it was sent in 1509, as a wedding gift, Catherine would have used this rosary both as joyful prayer for her marriage and hope for successful pregnancies, and to comfort her as she recovered from a miscarriage or stillbirth. If it was sent in 1516, as a gift to celebrate Mary's birth, the rosary would have been part of her rejoicing in the birth of a healthy child.

This rosary speaks eloquently of the close personal bond between Marguerite and Catherine as it conveys subtle but important messages of meaning and emotion. Catherine would be reminded of Marguerite as she began by securing the beads to her belt or her finger (Dillon 2003, 451–71). Then, she would touch the crucifix, with its image of the crucified Christ and the four evangelists on one side, and the four Latin Church Fathers on the other. She would secure the beads in the palm of her hand and recite the ave beads, one by one, each carved with Latin inscriptions of scriptural texts on large scrolls held by apostles and prophets. Then, she would touch the large paternoster bead with images depicting the incarnation, life, and passion of Christ and the redemption of mankind on the outside. When she opened the paternoster bead, she could see a very small carved image of her with Henry, dressed in contemporary Flemish fashion and seated together in a gallery above an altar, hearing Mass. This minute detail, almost invisible to the naked eye, is one of the few surviving portraits of the two of them together in the same visual frame. Marguerite's gift was a personal reminder to Catherine of the sanctity of her marriage, which would serve her well in the coming decade.

1520–30: Prelude to a Divorce

By 1520, Marguerite's second regency was proving vital to the coherence of the vast Habsburg composite domains. She used the rhetoric of motherly love, so much so that Charles referred to her as his real mother in the 1520s, when he was spending most of his time in Castile and needed a Flemish "mother" to enforce his authority in the Low Countries (Eichberger, "Margareta," 49–50). The summer of 1520, the significance of the web of family ties was powerfully on display in a dazzling political performance of comity and marital peace in France at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. This famous meeting of the English and French monarchs,

seventeen days of lavish ceremonies and tournaments, was designed by Cardinal Wolsey to craft an alliance between the two realms (Beer 2018, 60–69). It posed distinct diplomatic problems for Catherine, though, with roots in the testy relations between Maximilian and Henry. They disagreed on the best way to handle relations with France: Henry usually preferred peaceful means to balance power while Maximilian wavered between threats of war and overtures of peace.

Catherine viewed the French as a threat to the best interests of both her husband and her nephew. Rather than directly challenge Henry and Wolsey, she met with her council and she voiced her objections to an alliance with the French, which prompted the French ambassadors to report to Henry that she "had made such representations, and shown such reasons against the voyage, as one would not have supposed she would have dared do, or even imagine" (Currin 2005, 14–43). A queen's audacious act such as this could have gone badly, but Catherine's instincts were sound. Henry interpreted this not as a threat to him, but rather as an expression of a sentiment shared by many of the English nobles. Catherine gained influence at court, and Henry gained leverage in the meetings with the French. She worked with Marguerite to get their nephew Charles to meet with Henry before the Field of the Cloth of Gold. Catherine made an emotional pitch to Henry, saying that she hoped that "she might see Charles, which was her greatest desire in the world" (*L&P Henry VIII 3*, no. 689). This may read to our ears like a persuasive ploy couched in the language of emotional hyperbole, but it has a ring of truth (Attreed 2012, 3–27). After Maximillian's death in 1519 and the succession of his grandson and Catherine's nephew, Charles, Marguerite stepped in and concluded plans for the ceremonial meeting of the rulers at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520, an extravagant public display of power in a series of tournaments, banquets, and masques.

Before leaving for France, Catherine reached out to her nephew. Charles was one of the few family members still alive, but she had never met him. He replied to her, thanking her for organizing the meeting, saying that it would give him "the greatest satisfaction" to meet with her and Henry (*L&P Henry VIII 3*, no. 776). The meeting took place at Canterbury in May 1520, where Catherine's clothing signaled her loyalties. A gown of cloth of gold embroidered with the Tudor roses and a necklace made of five strings of pearls with a pendant with St. George wrought in diamonds showed off her Englishness. A luxurious Flemish headdress was a nod to her family ties to Marguerite and Charles (Hayward 2007, 227). When they met, she "embraced her nephew tenderly, not without tears" (*CSP Venice 3*, no. 50). Catherine and Henry then left England for meetings with Marguerite and King François I. On 12 July, Catherine and Marguerite met for dinner at Calais, the first time in fourteen years that they had seen each other. "Margaret [. . .] and the Queen embraced and kissed each other" and then spent the evening together in what must have been a lively conversation, filled with family news and the hope for a prosperous future for them (*CSP Venice 3*, no. 106).

We can see from our vantage point that the Field of the Cloth of Gold marks a turning point in Catherine's married life. One of Queen Claude's attendants, Anne Boleyn, then at the French court, was probably in attendance, although her name is not listed. Her father, Sir Thomas Boleyn, brought her back to England in 1521, she was placed in Catherine's household, and made her first recorded appearance at court at a masque on 1 March 1522 where, presumably, she caught the eye of the king (Ives 2004, 34–35). Catherine, growing up at her mother's side, avoided doing anything that would make Henry anxious about his masculinity and remained true to her motto, "Humble and Loyal." She sewed her husband's shirts, restrained her emotions, and kept her tongue in check. She knew that more was at stake than simply her husband's delicate masculinity or her own emotional pain. Catherine publicly remained calm and dignified while Henry plucked a succession

of young women from her court, directly in front of her, to satisfy his desires (Earenfight 2021, 125–66).

None of this was new. Henry's choice of women for his liaisons reveals sharply his very unsettling preference for selecting his next lover, and sometimes his next wife, from the women serving his current wife at court. Three women in Catherine's household were sexually involved clearly and openly with Henry—Elizabeth Blount, Mary Boleyn Carey, and her sister, Anne. Whatever emotional pain Catherine felt, she was the perfect picture of marital harmony. She devoted herself to her daughter, Mary, the center of her emotional world and, she believed, the anchor of her marriage and status as queen consort. That anchor, however, was in danger of slipping away as Henry's quest for a son to succeed him led him to question the legitimacy of their marriage, of their daughter, and of Catherine as queen. She relied on the women in her household and, as her marriage began to crumble, on Marguerite, who lent her a sympathetic ear and supported her with considerable political influence and power as Henry began to have second thoughts about the validity of their marriage.

By 1525, he had already made an ominous move that threatened their daughter Mary's standing in the line of succession when he granted his son with Elizbeth Blount, Henry Fitzroy, the title of Duke of Richmond and Somerset. Henry's romance with Anne Boleyn was warming up amid the wider context of increasingly tense relations with Charles V and François. Marguerite was well situated to act on behalf of Catherine. As regent of the Netherlands and a skillful and reliable diplomat, she balanced her relationships with the Tudors and the Habsburg families, and mediated with the French after Charles's victory at Pavia and the capture of François in 1525. In January 1528, Henry declared war against Charles, an act which infuriated Catherine who found herself caught in a bind between her husband, Marguerite, and Charles. Their disagreements over foreign relations were further complicated by Henry's anxiety over a male successor. Unable to imagine a Tudor dynasty without men, he questioned Mary's status as legitimate heir, and to keep her near him, he recalled her from Wales. When Mary returned to court, she naturally favored her mother as the marriage deteriorated, but taking sides was personally dangerous.

Marguerite's expertise and her reputation were tested as the divorce of Catherine and Henry soon dominated European politics. The proceedings were lengthy, prolonged by questions of who had the authority to decide the outcome—a royal court in England or a papal court in Rome. The merits of the case have less to do with subtle legal and theological reasoning, and everything to do with Henry's anxiety over a legitimate daughter taking precedence over an illegitimate son. His decision and Catherine's public resistance to a divorce rippled widely as part of the Protestant Reformation.

In 1527, when Marguerite first heard the news of Henry's wish to divorce Catherine, she sent a letter to Cardinal Wolsey to find out what was going on (Tremlett 273–74). She received letters from Catherine to ask for help as soon as the date of the trial, and secretly sent a notary from Brussels to help and worked with Iñigo de Mendoza, the Spanish ambassador. By 1529, Henry had made his intentions clear. He would divorce Catherine and marry Anne.

On 27 May 1529, Marguerite stepped in. She sent, in secret, a notary to instruct Catherine to appeal against the very first act of the legates in court and to send the appeal to be forwarded to Rome. The letter gives us clues as to how Catherine (the defenseless "poor Queen") and Marguerite sent messages through courtiers and proxies that convey the tense emotions.[3]

[3] A gentleman of Queen Katharine's household has also arrived with a message from her, to the effect that since the return to England of the person sent by King Henry to Spain for the purpose of obtaining the dispensation brief, the King, her husband, has recommenced judicial proceedings for the divorce more briskly than before. She wishes her

On 31 May, Catherine received the summons to appear before the legatine court at Blackfriars, she immediately reported it to Marguerite. Catherine wanted her lawyers sent back to her; they had come once before but had been so harassed that they left immediately (Earenfight 2021, 152–57). By 16 June, the paperwork for the divorce case was sent on to Rome. On 18 June, Catherine appeared in person at a court organized under the auspices of the papal legate, Lorenzo Campeggio, at Blackfriars in London. On 21 June, she spoke directly to the court. After she forcefully articulated her case against the divorce, she dramatically curtsied and left. The next day, she met privately with Wolsey and Campeggio, lamenting the emotional toll of the divorce and lack of legal counsel and true friends. A month later, Pope Clement VII agreed to try the case in Rome.

Marguerite was aware of what was going on in London, but was preoccupied with negotiations with the French queen, Louise of Savoy, to end a war between François I and Charles. The "Ladies Peace" of Cambrai, signed on 5 August 1529, a treaty that confirmed effective Habsburg hegemony in the Duchy of Milan and in the Kingdom of Naples, was an impressive diplomatic accomplishment. Wasting no time, she quickly shifted her attention to Catherine and worked with Eustache Chapuys, the imperial ambassador to the Tudor court. After the meeting in Cambrai, she tried to convince Louise of Savoy to support Catherine through her ambassadors in the French court. Marguerite felt deeply for her former sister-in-law and viewed King Henry VIII's divorce plans as willfully illegal. She believed that Catherine should speak for herself and her position against her husband and asked for sought theologians in Paris to be sent to England to defend Catherine. She wrote that Louise should be persuaded to talk with her son so that Francis would not support the King of England "*contre raison*" and would instead ask the opinion of the university, which she clearly believed would condemn Henry VIII's plans. Marguerite repeatedly brought up the subject in her letters and hoped that her niece Eleanor in Paris would help Catherine. Her attitude shows that she still firmly believed in the power and duty of queens to intervene by appealing to their spouse when they saw injustice. It was very likely Marguerite who appointed Juan Luis Vives as part of a delegation that travelled to England in 1528 to help the queen with the divorce proceedings (Yla-Anttila, 167–68).

Chapuys reported to Nicolas Perrenot, de Granvelle, a Burgundian lawyer and trusted adviser to Charles, in August 1529 that "my interlocutors promised to speak to Madame [Marguerite] about the matter. [. . .] It seemed to me better for me to be in England [. . .] since I was being sent there largely at Queen Catherine's request and to give her my assistance" (*CSP Spain Further Supplement*). A few weeks later, on 20 August, Catherine sent a message to Marguerite via her interlocutors, to be sure to use gracious words in their pleas to Henry (*CSP Spain Further Supplement*). For the next year, Catherine remained outwardly calm, waiting for a decision.

On 23 August 1530, Chapuys wrote to Marguerite, telling her that "[a]s soon as I received your letter of the 5th of this month I communicated it to the queen, who was greatly rejoiced, both by the good news from Germany and by the evidence of the solicitude you have always shown for

(Margaret) to send to England two qualified personages to counsel and help her to draw out the allegations and appeals that may be required. But as the Emperor's orders [are] that the case is not to be pleaded in England or decided by the judges appointed there, no lawyers have been chosen for that purpose, as the Queen wished. She (Margaret), however, intends sending to Malines (Mechlin) to obtain the opinion of experienced lawyers in that place; and if the personage appointed by the Emperor to replace Don Iñigo has not yet left Spain, his departure should be hastened, for the poor Queen is very perplexed, and there is no one in England who dares take up her defence against the King's will.— Brussels, the 27th. Marguerite (*CSP Spain 4-1*, no. 16).

her affairs. Your letter came in good time to mitigate the disappointment which she was feeling because all the steps taken at Rome in her behalf have been rendered nugatory by the pope's command" (*CSP Spain Further Supplement*). In September, Anne Boleyn forbade Catherine's courtiers to see her, and Henry would not allow his wife to see their daughter.

Sometime amid the personal, political, and religious tumult of the late 1520s, Marguerite sent a sumptuous presentation manuscript of music as a gift to Catherine and Henry. This manuscript, a "Book of 28 motets, 6 Latin secular pieces, and 1 canon," contains four-voice music largely by French composers was created by Petrus Alamire, a well-known singer, composer, and copyist of musical manuscripts in Marguerite's service in Brussels (British Library Royal 8 G VII). It depicts the banners of England and Castile flying from twin towers, embellished with the Tudor rose and pomegranate (fol. 2v), their emblems are combined together in the initial (fol. 3), and the letters "H" and "K" are written in flowers on these folios. It is inscribed with "Katherina" and "Henricus rex" in the text of the motet *Adiutorium nostrum* (fols. 4v-6r). It is a gift of beautiful music for a couple who had a well-known affection for music (Blockmans and Kellman 1999; Petti 2020, 15–33; Carley 2005, 119).

This is, however, no ordinary musical composition, and like the rosary, it was probably intended for Catherine. The first 26 stanzas (of 35) are conventional in theme and stem from familiar Christian scripture or liturgical texts (Thomas). But at stanza 27, the manuscript abruptly shifts and the next five stanzas repeat a refrain, *Dulces exuviae* ("Relics once dear"). These stanzas are derived from a classical epic poem that Marguerite, Catherine, and Henry knew well. This is Dido's lament at the end of Book IV (motets 27–31, fols 50v–56r) of *The Aeneid* (Thomas 2005, 360).[4]

Musicologist Jennifer Thomas closely analyzed the manuscript's unusual structure and content and notes that these lines are part of an unusual five-part repetition, the only text specifically repeated in this manuscript and an uncommon practice in general. The repetition emphasizes the tragedy of this moment in the poem, when Dido is abandoned by Aeneas. It was meant to evoke an emotion and to offer consolation to the listener. Emotions conveyed allegorically in music and plays have complex multiple layers that were easily read by a contemporary audience, but that require a modern historian to literally read between, around, over, and beside the lines (Broomhall 2019). In this piece, the pathos of the moment is captured five times in the music of four different composers. It is a powerful counterpoint of fortune and fate, heaven and earth, life and death, and shade and spirit.

The effect is heartbreaking. The repetition may have been interesting to Henry, but it was especially meaningful to Catherine. Her life with Henry was a litany of heartbreak and physical exhaustion, six pregnancies, and divorce. The last line of motet 34, the *Anima mea liquefacta* ("My soul failed"), Dido speaks of the wrenching pain of loss that would resonate poignantly.[5]

---

[4] Relics once dear, while fate and heaven allowed,/ Take this my spirit and loose me from these woes./ My life is lived; I have fulfilled the course by fortune given, and now my shade/ Passes majestic to the world below.

[5] My soul failed when he spoke; I sought him, but I could not find him;/ I called him, but he gave me no answer./ The watchmen that went about the city found me, they beat me, they wounded me;/ the keepers of the walls took my veils away from me./ Daughters of Jerusalem, tell my beloved that I languish with love.

Feminine voices and themes link Catherine to the Virgin Mary as sympathetic mothers who both suffered the loss of a son. Motet six, *Descendi in ortum meum*, contains Catherine's personal emblem, the pomegranate, in a sly allusion to fertility and pregnancy (Thomas 2005, 349).[6]

The linkage of a Classical text with Christian themes takes the listener through Dido's stages of grief, but not to a suicide on a fiery bier, rather to a return toward a path of greater understanding that hints at the Christian God. Finally, motet 35 ends with *Tribulatio et Angustia*, a meditation on sorrow.[7]

Embedded in those last nine stanzas of the ill-fated love of Dido and Aeneas was a deeply personal private message of comfort to Catherine from Marguerite.[8]

They both knew the story of the *The Aeneid*, so Marguerite knew that Catherine would have keenly understood the significance of textual motifs of rumors and doubts about the legitimacy of a marriage, a lost or unresponsive lover, and the loss of a child. The music resonated personally and deeply also with the twice-widowed Marguerite, who also understood the physical and emotional ordeal of a miscarriage. She shared the distress not only of the loss of a child, but the sense of failure that Catherine felt when it was clear she would not have another child (Thomas 2005, 337–64). This gift was not simply an official gift of state. Marguerite commissioned an exceptionally sensitive and intimate gift of sorrowful support to a dear friend. It was a metaphoric offering of shoulders to cry on.

Thomas argues convincingly that the emotionally profound message of love, loss, and personal anguish was meant for Catherine's ears and eyes, not his. Together, the boxwood rosary and the music manuscript are far more than just a devotional object and a sumptuous musical text. The music manuscript has much to say about the woes of Catherine's marriage to Henry, but shifting the focus to Catherine and Marguerite allows us to see how this manuscript and a handful of other objects expressed personal emotions, particularly grief (Earenfight 2021, 138–41). The manuscript also contains strong associations with the Virgin Mary, such as in the motet *Ave sanctissima Maria*, and this links back to the boxwood rosary, which contains a carving of the illumination of the Virgin. This suite of motets was a gift from a friend who knew well that Henry's eyes and body were wandering, and that her friend Catherine was struggling to keep both her composure and her husband. A letter simply would not do. Marguerite was an astute and wily woman who had served as regent of the Netherlands for two decades, and she sensed that was not safe to remark on the shaky state of the royal marriage, risky to take sides against the king, and dangerous to say what she felt. She may not have said so directly, or even through her ambassadors, but there was no love lost between Marguerite and Henry. When she died in 1530, Henry VIII shocked Eustace Chapuys, the imperial ambassador, by telling him that her death "was certainly no great loss for the world" (*CSP Spain 4:2*, no. 584). Marguerite was far more subtle about her feelings. She let the music speak for her.

Catherine's "Trouble and Sorrow": 1530–36

[6] I went down into my garden to see the fruit of the valleys,/ to see if the vine was in bloom and the pomegranate in bud./ Return, return, return, that we may look upon you.

[7] Trouble and anguish have taken hold of me,/ yet your commandments are my meditation./ Troubles and sorrow do I find, and I invoke the name of the Lord.

[8] Sheet music for motets, decorated written music with decorated initials and voice parts for a choir. Motets for unaccompanied mixed voices. British Library Royal 8 G VII. British Library Board /Robana / Art Resource, New York (AR 9119933).

There is not, as far as I know, any report of Catherine's reaction to Marguerite's death on 1 December 1530. She probably got the news shortly after that of the death of Cardinal Wolsey on 29 November. By the time of her death, the conflicting loyalties of the Burgundian-Netherlands had centralized around the Habsburg dynasty as the unifying force in the region (Blockmans and Prevenier, 233). Marguerite was succeeded in the government of Flanders by her niece, Mary, the widow of John, the last king of Hungary. Her tomb at Brou, decorated with vines and lacy ornaments and love knots, is a testament to a reign that Laura Gelfand describes as "marked by love [. . .] for her family" (436). Among her loved ones—husband, father, brother, nephew, nieces, the people over whom she ruled—I wish to add Catherine, her sister-in-law. Their relationship was not the subject of much public comment, and they met only once after 1499, but the rosary and the musical motets are personal communications from one close friend to another who shared a family history. Although their relationship had political dimensions, it was also personal. Theirs was not a public display of emotions but was intended for one set of eyes and ears. It was not part of political rhetoric. It was personal, subtle, and individual. Marguerite gave gifts freely and responded to the moment. These tokens of affection symbolize the human bond of friendship and family in a ritualized visual language that reveals the subtle emotional bond they shared.

It is then all the more tragically sad that Catherine spent six nearly joyless years of emotional isolation. Her marriage was over, and she had to move from castle to castle while Henry got on with his life with a new wife. She lost her lifelong friend, barely saw her daughter, and her friends at court, notably María de Salinas and ambassador Eustace Chapuys, put their reputations and their lives at risk just to see her. Catherine's health deteriorated quickly in the fall of 1535. On 30 December, María wrote to Henry's chancellor, Thomas Cromwell, and begged him to allow her to visit her friend. She held nothing back: "When I sent my servant to you he brought me word that you were in such importunate business that you could not despatch me or any other body. But now I must put you to pain, for I heard that my mistress is very sore sick again. I pray you remember me, for you promised to labor with the King to get me licence to go to her before God send for her, as there is no other likelihood" (*L&P Henry VIII* 9, item 1040) The request was denied.

María defied his orders. On 1 January 1536, she left her London home and arrived at Kimbolton around 6 PM. She did not have formal permission to enter, but the custodian allowed her to visit Catherine after María lied to him. She told him that she had fallen from her horse, could go no further, and needed to come inside to tend her injuries. She was joined by Eustace Chapuys, who arrived on 2 January and stayed until 5 January. María remained with Catherine and her physician and they were there at Catherine's death on 7 January. María and three other ladies did the women's work of mourning. They watched over Catherine's body until it was embalmed and taken to the chapel, where she remained for a week, from 16 to 22 January, in a coffin covered in a cloth of estate and adorned by fifty-six wax candles. (Earenfight, 182–83).

The lives of Catherine and Marguerite were entwined by the joys and sorrows of family and the conflicting demands of public life and governing. Their lives were enriched by the constancy of their unfeigned friendship, one marked by genuine love freely given. Their friendship over the course of over thirty years is memorialized in the gifts that Marguerite gave to Catherine to comfort her and remind her of the power of love that grew from their first meeting at the court of Isabel and Fernando in 1497.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Calendar of State Papers (CSP)

CSP Spain 1. Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 1, 1485-1509. Ed. G. A. Bergenroth. London, 1862. British History Online, https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol1 [accessed 5 June 2025].

CSP Spain 2. *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 2. 1509-1525*. Ed. G A Bergenroth (London, 1866), British History Online, https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol2 [accessed 7 June 2025].

CSP Spain 4:1. Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 4 Part 1, Henry VIII, 1529–1530. Ed. Pascual de Gayangos. London, 1879. *British History Online,* https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol4/no1 [accessed 14 September 2025].

CSP Spain 4:2. Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 4 Part 2, 1531-1533. Ed. Pascual de Gayangos. London, 1882. *British History Online,* https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol4/no2 [accessed 7 June 2025].

CSP Venice 3. Calendar of State Papers Relating To English Affairs in the Archives of Venice, Volume 3, 1520-1526. Ed. Rawdon Brown. London, 1869. *British History Online*, https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol3/pp85-89 [accessed 5 June 2025].

Hall, Edward. *Hall's Chronicle*. Ed. H. Ellis. New York: AMS Press, 1965.

Itinerario de los Reyes Católicos, 1474–1516. Ed. Antonio Rumeu de Armas. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas. Instituto Jerónimo Zurita, 1974.

Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII (L&P Henry VIII)

L&P Henry VIII, 1: Volume 1, 1509–1514. Ed. J. S. Brewer. London, 1920. *British History Online,* https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol1/pp369-377.

L&P Henry VIII, 2: Volume 2, 1515–1518,. Ed. J. S. Brewer. London, 1864. *British History Online,* https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol2 [accessed 7 June 2025].

L&P Henry VIII, 3: Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 3, 1519-1523. Ed. J. S. Brewer. London, 1867. *British History Online*, https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol3 [accessed 7 June 2025].

The Receyt of Ladie Kateryne. Ed. Gordon Kipling. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Modern Sources

Attreed, Lorraine. "Gender, patronage, and diplomacy in the early career of Margaret of Austria (1480–1530)." *Mediterranean Studies* 20 (2012): 3–27.

Beer, Michelle. *Queenship at the Renaissance Courts of Britain: Catherine of Aragon and Margaret Tudor, 1503–1533*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2018.

Blockmans, Wim and Herbert Kellman (eds).*The Treasury of Petrus Alamire: Music and Art in Flemish Court Manuscripts, 1500–1535.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Blockmans, Wim and Walter Prevenier. *The Promised Lands: The Low Countries under Burgundian Rule, 1369-1530*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.

Bordes, Philippe. "The Materiality of Art." In Peter N. Miller (ed.), *Cultural Histories of the Material World*, 39–44. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2013.

Broomhall, Susan. “Ruling Emotions: Affective and Emotional Strategies of Power and Authority Among Early Modern European Monarchies.” In Elena Woodacre, Lucinda H. S. Dean, Chris Jones, Russell E. Martin, and Zita E. Rohr (eds). *The Routledge History of Monarchy*. London and New York: Routledge, 2019. 668–84.

Carley, James P. *The Books of King Henry VIII and His Wives*. London: British Library, 2005.

Cunningham, Sean. *Prince Arthur: The Tudor King Who Never Was*. Stroud: Amberley, 2016.

Currin, John. “England’s International Relations 1485–1509: Continuities Amidst Change.” In Susan Doran and Glenn Richardson (eds), *Tudor England and Its Neighbours*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 14–43

Dillon, Anne. “Praying by Number: The Confraternity of the Rosary and the English Catholic Community, c. 1580–1700.” *History* 88:3 (2003): 451–71.

Earenfight, Theresa. “Absent Kings: Queens as Political Partners in the Medieval Crown of Aragon.” In Theresa Earenfight (ed.), *Queenship and Political Power in Medieval and Early Modern Spain*. Burlington (VT): Aldershot, 2005. 32-52.

---. *Catherine of Aragon: Infanta of Spain, Queen of England*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021.

---. “Raising Infanta Catalina de Aragón to be Catherine, Queen of England.” *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 46/1, enero-junio de 2016, pp. 417–443.

Eichberger, Dagmar. “Devotional Objects in Book Format: Diptychs in the Collection of Margaret of Austria and Her Family.” In Margaret M. Manion and Bernard J. Muir (eds), *The Art of the Book: Its Place in Medieval Worship*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1998. 291–323.

---. “Margareta of Austria, A Princess with Ambition and Political Insight.” In Eichberger (ed.), *Women of Distinction*. 49–55.

---. (ed). *Women of Distinction: Margaret of York, Margaret of Austria*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2005.

Fernández de Córdova Miralles, Álvaro. *La Corte de Isabel I. Ritos y ceremonias de una reina (1470-1504)*. Madrid: Dykinson, 2002.

Gelfand, Laura D. “What’s Love Got To Do with It? Unlacing the Love Knots in Margaret of Austria’s Royal Monastery at Brou.” In Walter S. Melon, Joanna Woodall, and Michael Zell (eds), *Ut pictura amor: The Reflexive Imagery of Love in Artistic Theory and Practice, 1500–1700.* Leiden: Brill, 2017. 413–38.

Hand, John Oliver and Greta Koppel with Till-Holger Borchert, Anu Mänd, Ariane van Suchtelen, and Matthias Weniger. *Michel Sittow: Estonian Painter at the Courts of Renaissance Europe.* Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2018.

Hayward, Maria. *Dress at the Court of King Henry VIII*. Leeds: Maney, 2007.

Hirsh, John C. “The Twenty-five Joys of Our Lady: An English Marian Rosary of the Fifteenth Century from the Bodleian Library MS Don. D. 85.” *Traditio* 71 (2016): 333–42.

Ishikawa, Chiyo. *The Retablo de Isabel la Católica by Juan de Flandes and Michel Sittow*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2004.

Ives, Eric. *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.

Jansen, Sharon L. *Anne of France: Lessons for My Daughter*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004.

Laynesmith, Joanna L. *The Last Medieval Queens: English Queenship, 1445–1503*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Liss, Peggy. *Isabel the Queen: Life and Times.* 2nd ed. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Mareel, Samuel (ed.). *Renaissance Children: Art and Education at the Habsburg Court (1480–1530)*. Tielt: Lannoo Publishers, 2021.

Matthews, Paul. "Apparel, Status, Fashion: Women's Clothing and Jewelry." In Dagmar Eichberger (ed), *Women of Distinction: Margaret of York/Margaret of Austria*. Leuven: Brepols, 2005. 146–53.

Okerlund, Arlene Naylor. *Elizabeth of York.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Petti, Erin. "Music Manuscripts at the Court of Henry VIII." MA thesis, Newcastle University, 2020.

Ridder-Symoens, Hilde de. "Balancing Knightly Ideals and Humanist Appropriateness: Upbringing and Education at the Burgundian-Habsburg Court." In Mareel (ed.), *Renaissance Children*, 27–39.

Ringbom, Sixten. "Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions: Notes on the Place of Art in Late Medieval Piety." *Gazette des beaux-arts* 73:6 (1969), 159–70.

Romanelli, Susan J. "South Netherlandish Boxwood Devotional Sculpture, 1475–1530." PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1992.

Scholten, Frits, ed. *Small Wonders: Late-Gothic Boxwood Micro-Carving from the Low Countries*. Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 2017.

Silleras-Fernández, Núria. *The Politics of Emotion: Love, Grief, and Madness in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*. Cornell University Press, 2024.

Silva Maroto, Pilar. *Juan de Flandes.* Marid: Caja Duero, 2006.

Suda, Alexandra and Barbara Drake Boehm. "Handpicked: Collecting Boxwood Carvings from the Sixteenth to the Twenty-First Centuries." In Scholten (ed.), *Small Wonders*, 340–51.

Thomas, Jennifer. "Patronage and Personal Narrative in a Music Manuscript: Marguerite of Austria, Katherine of Aragon, and London Royal 8 G.vii." In Thomasin LaMay (ed), *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women: Many-Headed Melodies*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005. 337–64.

Weiss, Jessica. "Juan de Flandes and His Financial Success in Castile," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 11:1 (Winter 2019) DOI: 10.5092/jhna.2019.11.1.2.

---."Isabel of Castile, Flemish Aesthetics, and Identity Construction in the Works of Juan de Flandes," PhD dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2014.

Winston-Allen, Anne. *Stories of the Rose: The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.

Ylä-Anttila, Tupu. "Habsburg Female Regents in the Early 16th Century." PhD dissertation, University of Helsinki, 2019.