

Carleton University
Fall 2026

ENGL 4301A Studies in Renaissance Literature : Tudor Queens
HUMS 4902A Research Seminar: Renaissance to Enlightenment: Tudor Queens

Prerequisites: fourth year standing (ENGL 4301); fourth year standing in the Bachelor of Humanities program (HUMS 4902)

Professor Micheline White

Email: micheline.white@carleton.ca

I do not read or respond to email between Friday 4:30 PM and Monday 9:00 AM.
Office hours on zoom or phone: Tuesday 2:00-3:30. You can schedule an appointment with me on Youcanbookme.

Tudor Queens: Sex, Power, and Writing in the Lives of Katherine Parr, Mary Tudor, and Elizabeth I

***** This is a preliminary syllabus only—texts and assignments are subject to change. A complete version will be available closer to the start of the term. *****

I: Course Content

Renaissance queens have long fascinated the reading public, but their political power and literary writings have only recently become the objects of academic study. In this seminar, we will explore early modern attitudes towards the concepts of a “queen consort,” a “queen regent,” a “queen regnant” and a “dowager queen.” We will focus in particular on the queen regnant who was understood to be both *male and female*: she had a female “body natural,” but occupied a masculine “body politic.” Over the course of the semester we will engage in a detailed exploration of the three queens’ textual and visual productions including speeches, published prose works, diplomatic letters, poetry, translations, and portraits. Students will be introduced to early modern paleography and book history. We will also consider the depictions of these queens in recent films and TV programs.

Katherine Parr (1512-1548) was the final wife of Henry VIII. Although she is often depicted in popular culture as the woman who nursed Henry in his old age, she was actually a literary powerhouse and an influential religious activist between 1543 and 1548. We will examine her published literary texts, her narrow escape from being arrested and executed, and her scandalous marriage to Thomas Seymour after Henry’s death.

Mary Tudor (1516-1558) was the daughter of Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon. After acceding to the throne in 1553 as queen regnant, she restored England to Catholicism and became famous for overseeing the burning of three hundred Protestants. For centuries she has been vilified as “bloody Mary” and as an incompetent ruler, but current scholars are offering new accounts of her political skills and successes. She was the first queen to figure out how to be both male and female.

Elizabeth I (1533-1603) was Parr's step-daughter and Mary's half-sister, and she is one of the most famous British monarchs. As a queen regnant, Elizabeth obviously wielded extraordinary agency and yet her status as an unmarried woman was an on-going concern throughout her reign. Through an examination of her public speeches, private letters, portraits, proclamations, poems and prayers we will consider how she managed her image and how she contributed to important political, social, and literary developments. Recent movies will be addressed.

II: Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course, you will be able to:

- define and explain the key concepts and challenges pertaining to the various forms of queenship in the early modern period – queen consort, queen regnant, regent, and dowager queen.
- read, analyze, and discuss primary sources produced by early modern queens. These texts will include: letters, speeches, gifts, portraits, devotional works, poems, and proclamations
- explain and use basic feminist ideas and methodology in examining the activities of queens in the early modern period
- deliver an oral presentation on a primary text of your choice and write an abstract.
- develop a research topic, undertake secondary research, present your research project to the class, and produce a research paper using secondary sources.
- provide productive oral feedback to your peers and engage in respectful academic discussion

III: Assignments and Evaluations based on learning outcomes: (still subject to minor revision)

2 open-book in-class tests	30%
1 oral seminar presentation	15%
1 abstract of presentation	5%
1 final research paper	20%
1 final exam	15%
weekly participation	15%

Required Texts. Total cost varies: from \$ 14 minimum to \$130 maximum

Katherine Parr: Complete Works and Correspondence, ed. Janel Mueller. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. Available electronically via the library, or reserve, or through a book store of your choice. A limited number of students can access this book at one time on-line. Available through **Amazon for 76.40. You will need to bring primary sources to the tests so I recommend that you purchase this book.**

Elizabeth I: Collected Works, eds. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. Available at the book store for **40.00**, electronically via the library, or on reserve. A limited number of students can access this book at one time. You will need to bring primary sources to the tests so you **MUST BUY THIS BOOK.**