INTRODUCTION

Nowadayes, as the early moderns were fond of saying, there’s no doubt that scholarship has gotten emotional—and this mood shows little sign of passing, if recent work is any indication. In both the sciences and humanities, countless scholars are now participating in the “affective turn,” an interdisciplinary movement that traces the social, psychological, and material contours of emotional experience, a subject long taken for granted in many corners of the modern academy.¹

In literary and cultural scholarship of early modern England, the fruits of this research cluster are already apparent.² Though there has long been interest in certain discrete areas of Renaissance emotional thought—such as attitudes toward grief, or the discourse of melancholy³—about a decade ago there began to emerge a body of work, marshaled by Gail Kern Paster’s Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage (2004) and her mutually edited (with Mary Floyd-Wilson and Katherine Rowe) collection Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion (2004), that sounded a new charge for emotion as an object of explicit historical study in the period.⁴ Grounded in a rigorously historicist treatment of Galenic humoral physiology—which envisioned a materially porous boundary between the environment and self—this scholarship seeks to “discover the phenomenological character” of Renaissance affect, by imagining “the early modern embodiment of emotion in terms that challenge the post-Cartesian divisions between thought, soma, and world.”⁵ A boom of important scholarship followed in this mode, variously attending to the Galenic context of early modern emotion.⁶ Complementing the interest in humorals, other historicist work on early modern emotion has taken a variety of forms: Robert Cockcroft, Wendy Olmsted, Lynn Enterline, and R. S. White consider Renaissance affect through the lens of the contemporary rhetorical tradition; Susan C. Karant-Nunn, Joseph Campana, and Steven Mullaney explore the emotional consequences of the Reformation; and Daniel Juan Gil, Jennifer C. Vaught, and Cora Fox emphasize the relationship between literary works and the period’s changing emotional modes.⁷ Emotion, indeed, is pervasive in recent scholarship on the period: in 2015 alone, there emerged no fewer than nine new essay collections on emotion in the Renaissance.⁸
Following suit, *Emotion in the Tudor Court* is an attempt to imagine the emotional world of the sixteenth-century English court. It is also an attempt to imagine how the workings of emotion more generally might prove valuable to the study of literature, history, and culture. Textual forms, in their capacity to record the textures of emotion, provide the spark for my imaginings. But *Emotion in the Tudor Court* doesn’t seek to historicize early modern discourses of emotion (like so much of the valuable work described above), nor to explore Renaissance emotionality via the models of affect currently dominant in contemporary cultural studies. Instead, I mount in what follows three nested, escalating claims about the literary and historical study of emotion. A specific historical argument, about the role of emotion in the Tudor court, is developed in service of a broader, methodological argument about the manner of deploying emotion as a generalized analytical mode, itself serving a broader still disciplinary argument, about what aggregate model of emotion can best undergird this affective analysis for literary studies and cultural history. Taken together, these three arguments offer new direction for the study of emotion in the early modern period—with implications, I hope, for the study of emotion more broadly in the literary disciplines.

For the last several decades, historians of the early modern period have become increasingly devoted to a “socially derived understanding of Tudor politics.” This agenda, epitomized by Patrick Collinson’s now-famous cry for “an account of political processes which is also social,” has guided the efforts of many of the most prominent and influential scholars of sixteenth-century British history. Thanks to the efforts of David Starkey and many others, the great beneficiary of this trend has been the early modern court—which, as the amorphous, dynamic social core of interpersonal engagement between monarchs and their power-players, has been thought to unseat more public, formalized institutions like Parliament and the Privy Council as the “centre of political politics” in Tudor England. Though like-minded historians still fiercely debate just how such interaction should be assessed, there is nonetheless a growing consensus in current scholarship: in Tudor England, sociality was paramount to political power, and in Tudor England, the sociality of political power was most evident in the royal court.

In its historical mode, *Emotion in the Tudor Court* thus argues most basically that the operation of the Tudor courtly sphere, including its production of literary and cultural texts, is made fully comprehensible only by acknowledging the centrality of emotion to social and political
action. In the sixteenth-century court, I suggest more specifically, particular moments of political crisis generated sociotextual nodes that are best processed by tending to the dynamics of a particular governing emotion. In the chapters that follow, I examine the textual field surrounding such incidents—for example, the rise and fall of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, or the Earl of Essex’s ill-fated rebellion—via the discourse of an operative emotion like 

*disgust* or *dread*. Accordingly, I treat the Tudor court as what Ann Cvetkovich valuably terms an “archive of feeling,” viewing its “cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception.”

My historical claim finds contemporary support in the increasing sense among modern thinkers that many post-Enlightenment models of the rational political subject don’t give just due to the emotional components of politics. Perhaps most notably, Chantal Mouffe’s influential critique of the Habermasian tradition argues that a crucial “mistake of liberal rationalism is to ignore the affective dimension” of the political realm: the “prime task of democratic politics,” she advocates instead, “is not to eliminate passions nor to relegate them to the private sphere in order to render rational consensus possible, but to mobilise those passions towards the promotion of democratic designs.”

Such work in political theory is complemented by research in contemporary neuroscience: the oft-cited Antonio Damasio has spent decades arguing for the intimate anatomical coupling of reasoning and emotional processes, while Jonathan Haidt has similarly refined a thesis that moral and political judgments owe as much to intuitive, emotional responses as to reasoned deliberation.

Several mass-market books, such as Damasio’s *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (1994), *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (1999), and *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (2003), as well as Haidt’s *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (2012), have brought these theories to a nonspecialist audience, and there appears to be a growing interest in the emotional underpinnings of the “Political Brain,” which calls into question “intellectualist and deliberationist models” of political analysis. This suspicion of the Habermasian “rational cognitive subject” dovetails with a common inclination of many post-structuralists, and theorists working on affect have similarly foregrounded the connection between emotions and politics; for example, John Protevi’s recent analysis of “affective cognition in social contexts” gives rise to a perspective he provocatively calls “political physiology.” In fact, the affective turn has birthed a research cluster known as “public
feelings,” an interdisciplinary collective that attempts to correct “how the division between public and private spheres has problematically confined feelings and emotional life to the domain of the personal and private,” thus obscuring the important political stakes of emotionality.20

And though, as we will see, Emotion in the Tudor Court attempts to model a mode of affective analysis that is applicable to any domain of literary and cultural study, the political operation of the early modern court is an especially rich arena for emotional investigation. The “promise of affect theory,” in Donovan Schaefer’s formulation, is “the possibility of sliding together analytical tools used to pick apart both highly individuated and highly social contact zones”—and, as a context in which the stakes of emotional life were unforgivingly interpersonal, the court is one such contact zone in which it is paramount to consider individuated and social experience jointly.21 Produced by men and women who are, by definition, some degree proximate to the center of political power, courtly literature particularly encodes the affective negotiation between the private and public spheres, in a way that reflects how many modern theorists understand the operation of emotion more generally. Indeed, current research in the affective sciences insists that the subjective experience of emotion is socially situated: the “social functions of emotions” are apparent across “the individual, dyadic, group, and cultural levels of analysis,” and it has recently been argued that, as a primary component of “relationship reconfiguration” strategy, emotions are fundamentally “designed to function in a social context.”22 As early as Petrarch and Salutati, in fact, early modern thinkers acknowledged the proximity of the social and emotional domains: for many in the Renaissance, Richard Strier has shown, “sociality and affectivity are seen as defining the human, and as inextricably linked.”23 The court is the social heart of Renaissance politics, and emotion is its lifeblood. Tending to emotion, I suggest, can freshly situate the social operation of the courtier within the social operation of the court, and can freshly illuminate the literary, cultural, and historical texts that are generated by this interplay.

My suggestion that understanding emotion is paramount to understanding the Tudor court raises an immediate question: what critical method best facilitates this analysis? As we’ve seen above, recent work on Renaissance emotion has largely focused on how literature reflects and refracts early modern discourses of the emotional body, revealing how notions of the humors and passions dynamically shaped the relationship between early modern subjects and their natural world. But despite the certain value of this approach, there remains a sense in which its dominance has
Introduction

obscured the larger possibilities of emotionality as a framework for literary, cultural, and historical analysis.

My methodological argument, then, entails reconceptualizing how we might study Renaissance emotionality, by looking beyond the historical phenomenology that has dominated the field. I posit emotion not only as a source of inquiry—that is, not only as a set of historical discourses to be analyzed and inhabited—but rather as the mode of inquiry itself, by leveraging the inherent affectivity of textual, social, and biographical data to uncover new sites of meaning and new channels of inspection. My primary aim is not to historicize the features of emotionality in early modern experience, but rather to use features of emotionality to historicize early modern experience more broadly: I am concerned not so much with how early modern subjects understood a sentiment like disgust, but rather with how a wide engagement with models and discourses of disgust can inform our understanding of how they, and the texts they construct, participate in the Renaissance social world. A historicist reconstruction of the Tudor court, grounded largely in archival data, provides the raw material of my analysis; sensitivity to the varied contours of emotion, as understood by a variety of discourses, is how that analysis proceeds.

For reasons explained above, this project is a treatment of emotion in the literature and politics of the sixteenth-century English court. But its methodological approach is portable, and it is my hope that this form of affective analysis, and the more specific discourses of emotion I explore throughout, will be of value to other studies in both the Renaissance and beyond. “Affect,” Brian Massumi argues, “like thought or reflection, could be extended to any or every level” of analysis—and indeed, much like ideology, emotion is implicated in every feature of human engagement.24 As collective theoretical effort proceeds, it is my hope that we will continue to speak more regularly of performing an “affective” reading of text and culture. Rather than historicizing emotion as an end in itself, Emotion in the Tudor Court is committed to performing such broader analysis of the Tudor court and its productions.

I have claimed that emotion is crucial to understanding literary and political interaction in the Tudor court, and I have claimed that scholars of both the Renaissance and other fields might benefit from treating emotion not as an object, but as a method of analysis. But a final question remains: how should we develop our understanding of emotion?

In response, my disciplinary argument is that those of us working in the humanities can benefit from pursuing a model of emotion that is deeply
informed by the current, ongoing research programs of the social and natural sciences. On some level, this should be uncontroversial. Few, I think, would bristle at the notion that there’s something to be gained by cross-field interaction, which is already integrated into the conceptual architecture of much contemporary scholarship—and more specifically, as we’ll see below, cognitive studies of the early modern period (a lineage in which *Emotion in the Tudor Court* is generally enrolled) routinely anchor their analysis in scientific approaches. But the precise treatment of literary emotion has been thornier. In theory, inquiry into humoral subjectivity indeed “uses cognitive theory in a historicist context,” and it is true that treatments of emotion and affect in literary studies are sometimes peppered with references to the prominent work of scientists like Damasio, Joseph LeDoux, Paul Ekman, and Richard Dawkins. But in practice, it seems to me that the routinely effusive claims of interdisciplinarity often mask an engagement with other fields that remains underdeveloped. (The work of Lalita Pandit Hogan and Patrick Colm Hogan is a crucial exception.) As Constantina Papoulias and Felicity Callard sharply note, the limited scope of affect studies’ scientific borrowings necessarily risks reductive and distorted conclusions, while such interdisciplinary maneuvers may ultimately be little more than rhetorical gestures. In fact, Ruth Leys reveals, some literary and cultural studies of affect have stumbled into their own version of the vulgar New Historicist anecdote—in which a particular empirical study or concept, often decontextualized and misrepresented, is made to bear the burden of a theoretical argument surpassing its capacity to be responsibly supported.

A more thoroughly interdisciplinary approach, in the manner that I’m advocating, requires a more thorough effort to engage other fields in their own terms—acknowledging, of course, that our status as disciplinary tourists will inevitably shape our encounters there, and will help select the souvenirs we take home. As such, this book converses widely with a variety of other disciplines, since the promise of interdisciplinarity cannot be realized by casual glances at other fields. But more specifically, the project’s interdisciplinary approach is premised on the fact that contemporary scientific discourses of emotion—rooted, as they are, in our very specific historical, cultural, and epistemological moment—can reach back some 400 years into the past, to tell us something nontrivial about the early modern world. This conviction does not, it must be said, oblige us to lazily essentialize or universalize emotion, or to slip into naive anachronism: a compelling body of evidence, as we will see below, suggests that it is still possible to find currents of transhistorical and transcultural continuity in the culturally inflected experience of human emotion, and it
is possible to use these currents to seek new ground in the study of historically situated phenomena.

In some instances, scientific models of emotion lead me to conclusions that might otherwise be derived independently from humanistic methods, a feature that suggests the proximity between fields that are often seen as professionally and intellectually disparate. I would never claim that scientific approaches are the only way to generate every textual reading in this book—and indeed, part of my aim is to demonstrate how the sciences can offer corroborating evidence for the kind of work we’re already doing in the humanities. In this sense, Emotion in the Tudor Court partly resembles what has been termed “correlational criticism”—that which is “often the initial phase of a new theoretical approach to literary analysis.” But more often, I think we’ll find, such scientific models offer complementary knowledge that helps enrich and extend the discoveries of our own and related fields. To wield the sharpest possible critical tool, it seems sensible to integrate this perspective into our interrogation of early modern emotionality—and indeed, the editors of Reading the Early Modern Passions acknowledge that “empirical science and cultural studies ought to create more space for each other in their conceptual nesting grounds.” I very much agree, and in this sense my project aligns with the vital comparativist work of Patrick Colm Hogan—a program thoroughly grounded in contemporary scientific research—whose transparently titled What Literature Teaches Us about Emotion (2011) has recently argued that “literature provides a vast and largely unexplored body of data for emotion research” in the sciences. I concur that the science of emotion and literary/historical analysis should be better friends, and in its disciplinary argument, this book attempts to nurture such a relationship.

In advocating this method, my project broadly attempts to advance a new position in the larger, longer critical conversation about how literary scholars engage with the past. When a previous generation of thinkers—the so-called old historicists—glanced backward, they found a human subjectivity that looked suspiciously like their own; “what those scholars lacked,” Gail Kern Paster reflects, “was our theorized notion of the interior historicity of the subject.” New Historicism, of course, changed all of that. Seeking instead a history that is radically alien, New Historicist and cultural materialist scholars actively sought in their work “a stubborn, unassimilable otherness, a sense of distance and difference”; finding little in early modern subjects that recalled our contemporary sense of autonomous interiority, they convincingly urged us to “resist speciously imputing modern assumptions about ‘the self’ to a historically distant culture.” Reflecting “the post-1980 fashion for theorising the body and
affect, and the post-1990 fashion for inventing fresh paradigms for historicising subjectivity,” the recent turn to Galenic humoralism in early modern studies is, most fundamentally, an inheritor of this legacy.\textsuperscript{35} To be sure, humoralism is not merely a manifestation of New Historicism; the previous generation of historicists, it has been argued, “shared a suspicion of emotions as calculated constructions of power,” and recent scholars of emotion and affect are more rightly thought to focus on “physiocultural rather than sociocultural formations.”\textsuperscript{36} But the fact remains that, rooted as it is in New Historicism, the historical phenomenology of the scholarship described above has been fundamentally committed to honoring temporal distance: it emphasizes “historical differences in modes of emotional self-experience” by reconstructing “how emotions might have been experienced differently by early modern subjects.”\textsuperscript{37}

My project, however, takes a very different approach. In applying the insights of the modern sciences to historical phenomena, my aim is not to affirm the subjective continuity of past and present: I acknowledge absolutely that emotions have a history, that understandings of emotion change over time, and that cultural forces crucially shape how emotions are experienced. But I am equally uninterested in defamiliarizing the past beyond recognition. Instead, I attempt to employ intellectual frameworks anchored in modern understandings to account for the historically situated conditions of early modern culture, always with the knowledge that such understandings might help us make sense of, but distinctly do not determine, the experience of past subjects. In such, I am aligned with the more recent position of Paster herself—who, having “come to believe [that] basic human emotions are fundamentally trans-historical and trans-cultural,” now suggests employing “a heuristics of similarity, even perhaps of sameness” in the study of early modern emotional life.\textsuperscript{38} Modern theories of emotion offer a guide to thinking about historical affect, but it is not one contingent on absolute congruence between temporal moments. In the moment of New Historicism’s rising ascendancy, Jean E. Howard wisely observed that “a phenomenon in one period, which seems analogous to a phenomenon in another, may arise amid such different social conditions and play such a different role in a culture’s power relations and discursive systems that the two phenomena cannot be seen as continuous with one another.”\textsuperscript{39} A historicist practice like the one I’m advocating makes space to acknowledge the messy interplay of phenomenal analogy, a unique opportunity to examine both points of contact and points of divergence between our world and those worlds of the past—honoring, as Paster again puts it, “the productive spaces between sameness and difference.”\textsuperscript{40}
Finally, it is important to note that engaging the sciences in the manner I’m suggesting need not entail any epistemological commitments—there is intellectual benefit whether or not one assents to the objectivity of their methods and findings. Whatever one’s disposition, the sciences (to borrow a famous phrase) can be good to think with: such research on emotion, I find, helps me see new things about early modern literature and culture, and is for that reason worthy of attention.¹¹ Hedging on the truth value also alleviates the consequences attached to the mistakes and misunderstandings that inevitably creep into interdisciplinary translation. I am not a trained scientist, or a trained historian, and I will undoubtedly err in my attempts at disciplinary crossing. But by making a good faith effort to engage other fields in their own terms, and by seeking in them not answers, but new ways of questioning, even such missteps can be ultimately productive.

These three arguments guide my study of emotion in the Tudor court. They do, however, require some further justification, especially insofar as the project embraces the insights of the modern sciences: with good reason, literary and cultural studies tend to be skeptical about the transhistorical and transcultural investments of much scientific discourse. It is now long ago that critical theory dismissed ideas of human essentialism as “vacuous and untenable”—and in Renaissance studies more specifically, the emerging practitioners of the New Historicism were quickly associated with a shared conviction that “there is no transhistorical or universal human essence and that human subjectivity is constructed by cultural codes which position and limit all of us.”¹² It is thus an important question to ask: given what we know about the social construction of reality, how are the empirical findings of the sciences compatible with the analysis of historically and culturally contingent phenomena?

Vulgar determinism and essentialism are rightly rejected by modern scholars. But “in their laudable attempt to ward off one type of reductionism,” William E. Connolly suggests, “too many cultural theorists fall into another”—an alternate reductionism “that ignores how biology is mixed into thinking and culture and how other aspects of nature are folded into both.”¹³ An adequate theory of lived experience can’t neglect the interaction of biological and cultural phenomena; what’s needed, as Catherine Belsey has recently argued, is to account for how “the biology that constitutes human beings always interacts with the relatively autonomous culture their evolved brains make possible.”¹⁴ In this spirit, John Dupré advocates for a pluralism that “draws both on the empirical knowledge derivable from the (various) sciences, and on the wisdom and insight into
human nature that can be derived from more humanistic studies.” F. Elizabeth Hart, more specifically, imagines such a framework integrating both biological and cultural elements, a “third epistemological position nestled between the polar extremes of realism and relativism”:

a third position that effectively reshapes their relations from a binary structure to an epistemological continuum on which realist and relativist positions occupy opposite—but not all-encompassing—ends. This third position is actually a set of positions that together define the continuum connecting its two ends, positions that manifest varying degrees of combinatory possibilities of both realism and relativism but that do not have to fully commit to either.46

Despite skewing, quite naturally, toward one end or the other of Hart’s continuum, scholars working on the nature/culture divide have been increasingly vocal in advocating for such a flexible third position—whether it is called “soft essentialism,”47 weak constructionism (including “weak biological constructionism” and “weak social constructionism”),48 “constrained constructivism,”49 or “componential compatibilism.”50

“Far from being inconsistent with post-structuralist thought,” Ellen Spolsky importantly argues, the “assumptions that emerge from the study of evolved human brains in their successive contexts” can actually work to “extend and enrich it”—and indeed, the work of her colleagues in cognitive and evolutionary literary studies have led the way in this regard.51 For though scholars in the humanities (and social sciences) once seemed “so afraid of being labeled essentialist, reductionist, or biological,” the game is starting to change: as Paul Cefalu and Bryan Reynolds recently observed, a growing number of “literary critics are now participating in the cognitive revolution, partly because some of the seeming bogeys like universalism, essentialism, and eliminative materialism have been shorn of their odious sociobiological implications.”52 Though this trend is evident throughout the discipline—and here Patrick Colm Hogan was also a vanguard—it has a particular concentration in early modern studies, where scholars like Amy Cook, Mary Thomas Crane, Arthur Kinney, and Evelyn Tribble have made groundbreaking contributions to our understanding of literary cognition.53

And most crucially of all, this third epistemological position is gaining particular ground in the study of emotionality, as scholars from across disciplinary lines increasingly argue that emotions are neither “strictly biological or chemical occurrences” nor “wholly created by language and society”: though having a clear “neurological basis,” they are still crucially
“shaped, repressed, expressed differently from place to place and era to era.” In 2012 William A. Mason and John P. Capitanio observed that, although “opinions continue to differ among emotion theorists about the relative contributions of biology and experience to the expression of emotions, a consensus seems to be building that both factors must be included in an integrated theory of emotional expression.” This is a sound way to account for the wealth of emerging data, which suggest both “undeniable variability and irrefutable evidence of consistencies in emotional responses across situations, individuals, and cultures.” The philosopher John Protevi, for example, offers one intriguing model for thinking through this “interface of somatic and social”:

We can accommodate universal patterns of basic emotions, which although not genetically determined, do reliably develop from our shared genetic makeup, given minimally shared developmental contexts, such as some form of providing nutrition and care. I think we can satisfy the social constructivists, however, by noting that the thresholds and triggers of these basic emotional patterns develop during the singular contacts of unique somatic endowments and complex socialization practices, as do the patterns, thresholds, and triggers of higher emotions. These socialization practices instill “emotion scripts” that indicate culturally specific forms of acceptable performance of emotions.

In a different discipline, the spirit of this formulation is echoed by Jonathan H. Turner and Jan E. Stets, both sociologists of emotion:

People occupy positions in social structures and play roles guided by cultural scripts. They are able to do so because of their cognitive capacities to perceive and appraise the situation (its structure and culture), themselves (as objects), others, and their own physiological responses. Emotions are ultimately aroused by the activation of body systems. This arousal generally comes from cognitive appraisals of self in relation to others, social structure, and culture. Once activated, emotions will be constrained by cognitive processes and culture.

These formulations, of course, are just two of many advanced by scholars of emotion, but are representative of the growing transdisciplinary commitment to collapse the traditional nature/culture binary. It is to this end that Simon Clarke promotes “an interdisciplinary perspective in the study
of emotions which has elements of sociology, social constructionism, interactionism, and psychoanalysis and addresses issues such as social action, agency, gender, and the embodiment of the emotions”—but, most crucially, doesn’t “wholly [discount] elements of biology or the social.”

There is little doubt in my mind that emotions are the dual products of biological and social construction. This categorical hybridity, I argue, is what fundamentally underwrites the emotional power of literature itself, which transcends time and place to affect us. Literary emotion, it seems to me, so often evokes the sense of meeting a familiar stranger: the rage of Achilles, the envy of Iago, and the indifference of Bartleby resist full assimilation into our contemporary modes of emotional knowing, yet still demand to be acknowledged as kin to something in ourselves. As such, models from the sciences guide, but do not command, my search for literary and historical feeling. In developing this approach over the years, I have encountered (exceptionally smart) scholars of historical emotion that soundly reject the premise on which my work is founded. And indeed, a reader committed absolutely to the position that modern understandings have nothing to tell us about the emotions of the past is not likely to be satisfied by the book that follows. But scholarly disagreement is the sign of a healthy field. I can only say that I am convinced that the particular form of interdisciplinarity outlined above does generate valuable insights into this most interdisciplinary of phenomena. The method that I’m advocating is certainly not the only way to approach the study of early modern emotions—but it is one, I hope will become apparent as the chapters unfold, that does offer many virtues.

In four chapters, Emotion in the Tudor Court tries to account for the operation of some prominent courtly emotions in sixteenth-century England. Beginning with the early reign of King Henry VIII, chapter 1 considers the literary portrayal of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, the much-hated alter rex who gripped English politics for nearly two decades. I argue that contemporary slanders and satires of Wolsey, insistent in their images of illness, appetite, and intrusion, are animated by a core notion of disgust, a primal response through which the cardinal is cast as a physical and social blight contaminating both King Henry and the commonweal. Despite Wolsey’s profound role in shaping his early reign, King Henry ultimately fulfills the trajectory of disgust anticipated by the poets, diagnosing the now-abject cardinal as a foreign pathogen and purging him from the symbolic body of the court. Chapter 2 explores the life and art of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, a young man who, from atop the pinnacle of the Henrician court hierarchy, produced some of the period’s greatest literary
achievements—but whose short, volatile life never fulfilled the promise of its aristocratic upbringing. I argue that Surrey’s courtly experience is best understood through the dynamics of *envy*, an emotion that not only colored his celebrated friendship with King Henry’s illegitimate son (Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond), but also ultimately underwrote the terms of his destruction, just weeks before King Henry’s own demise.

The book’s second half is devoted to the court of Henry’s most famous daughter. Turning to the earlier reign of Queen Elizabeth I, chapter 3 considers the techniques through which Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester (famed Elizabethan courtier par excellence) and his nephew Sir Philip Sidney (the equally famed shepherd knight), managed courtly *rejection*, by converting the sting of political failure into a source of affective solidarity. In the 1570s, I argue, the discontented Leicester party utilized a series of pageants and entertainments, ostensibly designed for royal flattery, to tacitly imagine a liberating community of outlaw courtiers. By finding emotional strength in mutual opposition, their strategy reveals the social and psychic advantages of performing one’s incompatibility with official crown policy, even under the guise of endorsing it. The project concludes by considering what is perhaps the most memorable event of the Tudor dynasty’s final years: the infamous, stillborn rising of Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, and his followers in February 1601. Chapter 4 argues that the political experience of Elizabeth’s final decade, in which anxiety over the aging queen, the unsettled succession, and unrest at home and abroad transformed the court into a factional battleground, was marked by an atmosphere of *dread*—a flexible term, in early modern usage, that could attach to both a terrified subject and the object that terrifies it, and that reflects the affective ambivalence between Elizabeth’s courtiers and their own dread sovereign. In literary and cultural texts associated with Essex, members of his circle attempt to find political mastery in the affective mode of dread, a mode the crown desperately wished to keep as its own prerogative. The struggle for the Elizabethan court in the 1590s was a struggle to control the definition of dread, and was one in which Essex and many of his followers would finally pay a dreadful price.

The emotions I consider—*disgust*, *envy*, *rejection*, and *dread*—proved elemental to the affective atmosphere of the early modern court, and interrogating them in turn will help to situate moments of literary and historical interest within it. It is important to note, however, that while this book’s early modern content is considered via the emotion I found to be most illuminating, the pairings are not indivisible; considering Wolsey, for example, through the lens of dread, or Essex through the lens of envy, would undoubtedly yield different and useful results. Indeed, though the
models of emotion here are necessarily bound to individual chapters, they are all ultimately scalable: I can imagine each forming the basis of its own full-length study of the Tudor court, as there undoubtedly would be value in exploring their operation more broadly in the period. My aim, however, is to consider a variety of approaches to emotion in the period, as a foundation for more focused studies in the future.

My presentation, most obviously and importantly, is chronological, as I proceed through major moments of courtly interest in the sixteenth century. Other organizing factors also contribute to the overall design. The book’s movement from *disgust* (according to scholars, the most bodily of emotions) to *dread* (one considerably more metaphysical) is, in general, a progression of increasing abstraction. And there is something of a birds-eye thematic narrative, as the era’s political rise of middle-class bureaucrats and newly made men provoked disgust and envy among many onlookers at Henry VIII’s court—the same types of men who would find themselves rejected by the too-shrewd-to-be-tractable Elizabeth, whose management of the realm in her final years ultimately left many courtiers in a perilous state of dread. But I wouldn’t want to push on this too hard: such a broad accounting is necessarily a casual one, and its explanatory value is accordingly so. Given the complexity of affective experience, macro-narratives of emotional change (transformation, development, rupture, etc.) are particularly vulnerable to oversimplification and exaggeration, and it is crucial not to extrapolate too widely from one’s analytical frame. My aim is not to offer a rigid taxonomy of the court’s emotional modes, or to expose, in the manner famously envisioned by Raymond Williams, a sweeping structure of feeling that undergirds sixteenth-century England—tasks, I think, that risk obscuring the complexities of affective experience.

Two more notes on the project’s limitations. The first concerns the valence of the emotions I investigate: there is no doubt that this book overwhelmingly dwells on the negative, a feature that aligns it with the preexisting bias of current scholarship on early modern emotion. As noted above, a focus on grief and melancholy dominated the field prior to the “affective turn,” and Richard Strier rightly observes that even more recent work on emotion usually “presents the period in dark and dour terms.” This book offers no remedy—partly because the court, as a social arena dominated by the mechanics of competition and rivalry, was structurally primed to generate and amplify negative interpersonal feelings. But this does not mean, of course, that courtly life was uniformly dour: it was also filled with love, with camaraderie, with enthusiasm, with pride, and such positive sentiments certainly deserve more attention than
they’ve garnered to date. Space prevents me from including a transitory chapter that considers the reigns of Edward VI and Mary I as a period of hope—in which soldiers on both sides of the post-Reformation battlefield were marshaled by optimism for England’s religious future—though I hope to publish it shortly as a separate study. I am also coediting (with Cora Fox and Cassie Miura) an essay collection on positive affect in the early modern world, designed to help give a more complete accounting of emotional life in the Renaissance.

There is also a gender imbalance in the project’s subject matter. Though Queen Elizabeth figures prominently in the book’s second half, its focus ultimately settles on several of the prominent men whose courtly experience provides a nexus of literary and political interest. This is partly because of the inescapable realities of Tudor social organization—in which men, of course, had vastly unequal access to the center of political power—and partly because of the realities of the extant historical and literary record. But, again, this does not at all mean that the emotional life of courtly women was any less complicated than that of their male counterparts. While I have elsewhere explored some of the emotional dynamics of women’s manuscript circulation in the Henrician period, it is clear that this is an area that demands further study.

These shortcomings, I hope, will be partly softened by what the book does offer. Most fundamentally, Emotion in the Tudor Court is interested in uniting archives of literary, historical, social, and biographical data to tell a few discrete stories about the affective world of the early modern courtly sphere. In what follows, I’ll try to demonstrate the value in telling them this particular way.