

WITH LOVE, YOURS TRULY: THE LANGUAGE OF SEDUCTION IN HENRY VIII'S LETTERS TO ANNE BOLEYN IN *THE TUDORS SERIES*

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Abstract

This study examines the rhetorical strategies embedded in Henry VIII's letters to Anne Boleyn as portrayed in the television series *The Tudors*. Drawing on Ballif's seduction theory, which posits that persuasion intertwines rationality and emotional manipulation, the analysis identifies three key linguistic elements: affective, pompous, and ridiculous language. Using qualitative textual analysis paired with Spradley's ethnographic coding techniques, the study investigates how Henry's discourse oscillates between expressions of romantic devotion, performative grandiosity, and strategic dominance. The findings reveal that Henry's letters employ emotional appeals, hyperbolic flattery, and rhetorical flourishes to simultaneously assert authority and court Anne's favor. In contrast, Anne's responses reflect caution and tactical modesty, underscoring her navigation of gendered power dynamics. The results demonstrate that seductive language in these exchanges blurs the boundaries between sincerity and manipulation, aligning with Ballif's argument that rhetoric operates beyond binary distinctions of truth or falsehood. This study highlights the dual function of seduction as both an intimate gesture and a political instrument, offering fresh insights into the interplay of love, power, and persuasion in historical dramatizations.

Keywords: *Seductive Language, Rhetorical Strategies, Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn, The Tudors*

1. INTRODUCTION

Henry VIII's letter to Anne Boleyn is one of the most important documents. It contains an important legacy of King Henry VIII's personal relationship with Queen Anne Boleyn. The letter not only represented their romantic relationship, but it was also used as a tool to manipulate each other. The communication between Henry and Anne was filled with dramatization and emotional appeal (Weir, 2008). The language used not only shows love but also asserts power and control. This can

be seen directly from Henry's dramatized letter, as if he is ready to sacrifice everything just for love. The use of exaggerated language was common and deliberate in England in the early 16th century. It was done to establish and reinforce social rank.

The letter quoted in *The Tudors* series reads "*I was distressed that you would not accept the brooches.*" This is an example of Ballif's theory that seduction is not just an appeal, but a rhetorical tool that uses emotional manipulation to influence perception.

Ballif (2001) says that seduction is a rhetorical technique that uses doubt and manipulates language to mix truth with lies. In this letter, Henry plays on Anne's emotions by creating a sense of great disappointment so that Anne feels guilty for not accepting Henry's gift.

Seduction and Sophistry in rhetoric according to Ballif (2001), is used as a tool to challenge the truth and destabilize power relations. This rhetorical tactic is played through seduction as Ballif implies. This tactic is delivered through ambiguous and manipulative language. Through ambiguous language, obscuring the truth is the main purpose of the language of seduction. In Henry's letters to Anne, the language used is often ambiguous, unclear whether the seduction is sincere or just deliberate manipulation. This shows how rhetoric can be used to challenge standards and expectations in relationships.

The phenomenon underlined is about Henry's strategy in using the language of seduction in his letters to Anne to seduce and manipulate her. The letters contain three essential elements of the language of seduction namely: affective, pompous, and ridiculous. From this, the question arises:

1. How does Henry VIII seduce Anne Boleyn via letters in *The Tudors* Series?
2. How do affective, pompous, and ridiculous elements in Henry VIII's letters function as tools of seduction?

This is a critical issue because it shows how rhetoric and the language of seduction were used in a wider context than personal relationships. These letters not only reveal Henry's feelings and desires but also show how language can be used to lord over and control others, especially in situations of gender imbalance. The analysis of Henry VIII's letters opens a new view of how

language is used to master and control others through Ballif's theory.

Previous studies on *The Tudors* series explored various aspects of history and cultural representations. Kesselring (2016) discussed crime, punishment, and violence in the context of *The Tudors*, highlighting how power was used in the era. Mullin (2019) examined how the series reframed historical narratives in 21st century television. Wray (2010) analyzed the portrayal of characters such as Henry VIII, relating it to the politics of historiography and the aesthetics of actor Jonathan Rhys Meyers. Betteridge (2016) highlights the importance of acknowledging the cultural symptoms that appear in the Tudor court. Levin and Paraque (2016) focus on the significance of the king's children in the series, highlighting the political and social implications of royal heirs in these fictionalized historical narratives.

As such, these studies not only provide important context but also support an in-depth analysis of the seductive language in Henry VIII's letters to Anne Boleyn, helping to connect romantic representations in the series with historical power and cultural dynamics.

This study aims to analyze the seduction strategies used by Henry VIII in his letters to Anne Boleyn. The focus is on identifying and evaluating Henry's seduction strategies, as well as exploring the use of seduction language as a rhetorical tool full of manipulation and ambiguity, in accordance with the theory proposed by Ballif (2001). In addition, this study aims to identify the affective, pompous, and ridiculous elements of language in the letters, and analyze how these elements contribute to strengthening Henry's appeal and influence the power dynamics between him and Anne. This research will also examine how Henry's seduction

strategies were used to influence Anne Boleyn's feelings. Thus, this research will provide a deeper insight into how language and seduction strategies can be used not only as a tool for seduction in romantic relationships but also in political relationships in the 16th century (Ballif, 2001).

Furthermore, while previous studies have extensively examined The Tudors from historical, cultural, and media perspectives, there remains a gap in analyzing Henry VIII's rhetorical techniques in his letters. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse by applying a rhetorical and linguistic lens to Henry's communication with Anne, specifically exploring how his language functioned as both an expression of personal desire and an assertion of power. By integrating Ballif's (2001) theory of seduction as a manipulative and ambiguous rhetorical strategy, this research expands the understanding of how language was used as a political and personal weapon. Future studies could further explore similar rhetorical tactics in other historical figures, reinforcing the broader implications of persuasive language in shaping historical power dynamics.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Seduction is described as the opposite of production. While production aims to make everything visible, seduction draws attention away from the implicit order, creating a mysterious and ambiguous atmosphere (Ballif, 2001). A lighter version in writing: According to Freud's theory put forward by Garcia (1987), seduction refers to the view that hysterical patients experience long-term effects of childhood sexual assault, which of course have a significant impact on their future psychological well-being. Seduction, although often seen as a force

that thrives in obscurity and mystery while avoiding visibility and clarity, also has significant psychological impacts, as seen in Freud's theory. Freud's concept of seduction aligns with this idea because it involves the long-term and hidden effects of childhood sexual trauma that remain unconscious and later emerge as psychological disorders in adulthood. Both perspectives highlight how seduction operates in the realm of the unseen, either through the symbolization of the overt or the psychological influences that are embedded in the unconscious mind.

Israel and Schatzman (1993) reviewed Freud's theory of seduction in the realm of psychoanalysis and explained how seduction can evoke emotional responses by forming a dependency on vague truths. Zéhenne (2021) developed this idea by describing seduction as a creative option for production, where the process emphasizes emotional involvement and engagement rather than rigid clarity. This idea of "seduction for production" supports it as a rhetorical strategy, inviting deeper involvement and challenging traditional interpretations.

Seduction can be juxtaposed with images that are not always associated with negative aspects such as theology and eroticism. In communication theory, seduction can be a means to strengthen interpersonal and public communication relationships (Frunza, 2017). In addition to other functions, seduction also has a significant role as a persuasive tool that can effectively influence the actions of others. Seduction can process information in a persuasive way to influence human actions, allowing communicators to use various strategies in conveying messages (Severin and Tankard, 2001). In everyday life, communication science can be applied easily to understand and implement

seduction strategies in various contexts. Therefore, it is important to understand the role and techniques of using seduction in communicating privately and publicly to increase the effectiveness of communication.

Seduction in language refers to the way language is used to entice and captivate individuals beyond mere communication. Seduction plays a role in challenging ordinary words and expectations, creating pleasurable interactions or communications using words and symbols. According to Baudrillard's view in Ballif (2001), seduction involves interactions with language that are not tied to clarity or truth, but rather to attraction and attraction, producing dimensions where meaning is vague and ambiguous. The role of seduction in discourse is to create a non-dialectical space to stimulate conventional political and rational discussion. In this context, seduction does not only intend to reach agreement or shared understanding but also invites pleasurable engagement using language that can bring new interpretations and experiences. This can present a challenge to established norms and encourage us to rethink the way we interact with language and meaning (Ballif, 2001). The concept of the "Language of Seduction" in Freud's theory describes the complex dynamics of childhood sexual experiences, strategies for uncovering hidden memories, and the development of this narrative understanding within the discipline of psychoanalysis, which ultimately calls into question the validity of the theory of the language of seduction itself.

The letters written by Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn present an interesting story of seductive language style. According to Weir (2008), in his efforts to win Anne's heart, Henry skillfully combined

enthusiastic emotional expressions with rhetorical intelligence. This tactic was not only a form of expression of love but was also used intelligently to strengthen one's position or role and provoke Anne's desire. His letters were so captivating with touching emotional expressions, beautiful promises of a bright future, and great praise for Anne's beauty and grace. The strategic use of language was intended to express his desire but also manipulate Anne's emotions to be more attached to him.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach that focused on textual and visual analysis to examine the rhetorical strategies of the letters between Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn depicted in *The Tudors*. The aim of this research was to examine and understand the three elements used in the language of seduction: affected, pompous, and ridiculous, which were found in the letters of Henry and Anne Boleyn. This research used Michelle Ballif's theory relating to the rhetorical language of seduction. To complement the textual data analysis, specific episodes were collected by transcribing conversations and analyzing visual cues such as gestures and facial expressions. A systematic analysis of the relationship between language, power, and seduction in the correspondence between Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn in this research combined Ballif's theory of seduction with Spradley's ethnographic methods.

Data analysis was conducted using Spradley's (2016) ethnographic method. This stage included four main steps: domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, component analysis, and cultural theme analysis. The first stage focused on identifying the main elements in the character, followed by analyzing the placement and relationship between

these elements. The third step compared Henry's and Anne's rhetorical styles, and the last step combined the results to discover key themes, particularly how seduction functioned as a tool for influencing emotions and politics. The decision to analyze Henry VIII's letters was taken because of their historical significance, as explained by Weir (2008).

Weir argued that Henry's relationship with Anne was not just a personal matter but was also a principal factor in England's departure from the Roman Catholic Church. The letters showed how Henry used rhetorical strategies to strike a balance between love and manipulation to influence Anne's emotions in a calculating way while asserting his authority as ruler. Given this context, studying the dynamics of language, power, and seduction in their correspondence was an especially important endeavor. To ensure the veracity of the findings, data triangulation was used, i.e., textual data was compared with the visual elements of the series, and reference was made to historical and academic literature regarding Henry VIII's letters.

The research findings were presented using a descriptive qualitative approach. This involved detailed explanations and interpretations of the

collected textual and visual data, highlighting key quotes from Henry and Anne's letters and referencing specific scenes from *The Tudors*. The findings were thematically organized around the three elements of seduction—affected, pompous, and ridiculous—and supported by Ballif's theory. Tables and charts illustrate patterns in rhetorical strategies, while narrative descriptions captured the emotional and political nuances within the correspondence. This integrated descriptive and visual reporting ensured a comprehensive presentation of the research results.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study examines three elements of seductive language—affected, pompous, and ridiculous—as found in Henry VIII's letters to Anne Boleyn. These elements often appear in love letters and seduction strategies, as they can strengthen emotional bonds and influence the feelings experienced by the recipient. Ballif's theory of seduction suggests that by using such language, Henry challenges conservative logic and strengthens the emotional connection, thus strengthening the confrontation in the relationship.

Table 4.1 The Emotional Connection

	Affective	Pompous	Ridiculous
Henry → Anne	√	√	√
Anne → Henry	√	-	-

This study also found that the affective element is used more frequently by Henry. The affective is used by Henry to convince Anne that his love is sincere and strong despite their tricky situation. In addition, the affective is used to affect Anne psychologically by making her feel valued and deeply loved.

This language is used by Henry to influence others to follow his will through emotional appeals that move the heart.

Furthermore, the element of the ridiculous is the least found in Henry's letter to Anne. The element of ridiculousness was used by Henry

because, given his position as king, he had to maintain his image as a wise and dignified ruler, even in personal communication. In addition, the lack of ridiculous elements in the letters is because Anne Boleyn's intelligent, charming, and ambitious character means that an exaggerated and overly ridiculous style of communication would not suit Anne's personality and would be considered inappropriate. The use of ridiculous elements in the letter could also be seen as demeaning or making Henry seem unserious, which is contrary to his status as king.

On the other hand, Anne's letter to Henry does not display the elements of pompous and ridiculous. Anne Boleyn did not use these elements because she wanted to maintain her image as an intelligent, dignified, and humble woman. By choosing a simple, sincere, and strategic style of language, Anne tries to convey loyalty, hope, and commitment to her relationship while demonstrating mature emotional control. Anne and Henry's love story is not only personal, but also political.

4.1 Affective

The analysis reveals that both Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn use affective language in their letters, albeit with different intentions and tones. Affective communication, as described by Kuppens et al. (2013), involves the use of emotional expressions to convey subjective experiences and elicit emotional responses. This process is essential for building intimacy and trust in romantic relationships. Henry's letters are rich in dramatic emotional appeals that are strategically designed to influence Anne's emotions and deepen their bond. In contrast, Anne's letters reflect a cautious and humble approach, emphasizing her vulnerability and the power imbalance in their relationship.

In one instance, Anne writes, *"It causes me such pain and sorrow to return the gifts you have given me. Alas, they are too beautiful, and I am unworthy to receive them"* (07:05, episode 4). Here, Anne uses affective language to express her humility and regret, revealing her internal conflict. Her expression of pain is intended to elicit sympathy and understanding from Henry, while maintaining a tone of modesty consistent with her position as a commoner addressing a king. This careful navigation of emotions demonstrates Anne's attempt to balance respect for Henry with her own sense of self-worth.

Henry's response reflects a more manipulative use of affective language. For example, in *"I was distressed that you would not accept the brooches. They were made for you, not for anyone else"* (22:51, Episode 4), Henry communicates disappointment by emphasizing the exclusivity of his gift. By subtly pressuring Anne to reconsider her rejection, Henry uses emotional distress to provoke guilt and create a sense of obligation. His affective expression functions not only as a declaration of love, but also as a rhetorical tool to influence Anne's actions.

Henry's use of emotional hyperbole is particularly evident in his statement, *"Perhaps you don't understand. But I cannot sleep, I can hardly breathe, thinking of you"* (42:37, Episode 4). These exaggerated expressions dramatize his suffering to elicit Anne's sympathy and reinforce the depth of his feelings. Such hyperbolic language, as described by Ballif (2001), is a hallmark of seduction, where emotional intensity is used to obscure rationality and create an emotional connection that makes the target more susceptible to persuasion.

Anne, in her cautious response, writes: *"How your tokens and signs of*

affection frighten me. How can I be to you? What do you think I am?" (05:16, Episode 5). This response shows her fear and hesitation, which shows her insecurities and complex emotions. Here, Anne uses affective language to express vulnerability while maintaining boundaries. Her words show that being in a relationship with a powerful king is fraught with uncertainty, as emotions must be measured carefully to avoid misinterpretation.

"I have given you, my heart; now I wish to give you my body" (19:35, episode 5). Henry says in another correspondence, combining emotional intensity with romantic pressure. This statement illustrates how Henry uses affective language to elicit a reaction and reinforce his dominance. This romantic expression places emotional demands on Anne, subtly pressuring her to follow his wishes.

In his letters to Anne, Henry uses affective language as a strategy to manipulate her emotions, increase his influence, and strengthen his relationship with her. For Anne, using affective language is a way to address the power imbalance in their relationship while protecting her sense of agency. Although Kuppens et al. (2013) argue that affective communication fosters trust and intimacy, Ballif (2001) argues that affective communication can also destabilize traditional power structures and obscure truth and rationality. This dual function is evident in Henry and Anne's correspondence, where affective language demonstrates the complex relationships between love, authority, and manipulation.

4.2 Pompous

Henry VIII's letters to Anne Boleyn reveal a striking use of pompous language that underscores the king's attempts to assert his emotional depth

while simultaneously reinforcing his royal authority. When Henry said, *"Written by the hand of him who in heart, body and will is your loyal and most ensured servant."* (19:35, episode 5) Henry employs an exaggerated formality that not only expresses loyalty but also amplifies his self-importance. The grandiose nature of this statement may come across as excessively theatrical, suggesting that the king's devotion is more performative than genuine. Such pompous expressions can evoke skepticism today, as they risk being perceived as insincere or overly dramatic.

Another significant phrase is *"I almost believe that I would sacrifice my kingdom for an hour in your arms."* (42:37, episode 4) This statement exemplifies a hyperbolic expression of love that elevates Henry's feelings to an extraordinary level, implying that his devotion is so profound it warrants the abandonment of his kingdom. This kind of exaggeration serves to inflate the emotional stakes of the correspondence while simultaneously reinforcing his identity as a king capable of deep affection. The interplay of these elements shows how Henry's letters function both as personal declarations of love and as strategic rhetorical tools designed to manipulate Anne's emotions while asserting his authority. Henry creates a complex story that aims to attract Anne by using affective expressions, grand statements, and pompous language. Michelle Ballif describes seduction as a complex interaction between power and emotion, where language serves as a means of communication and manipulation (Ballif, 2001). According to Ballif, a man may make ironic or illogical comments when he is tempted by a woman because women are often associated with seduction. In addition,

Judith Butler's theory of performativity states that repeated performances create identities (Butler, 1990). Her identity as both lover and king is constructed by her repeated statements of loyalty and devotion in Henry's letters. This performance reinforces her sense of royal authority, demonstrating how language can shape perceptions of individual and collective identity.

Ultimately, looking at these pompous elements shows how Henry VIII's language was used for seduction, linking emotional appeals to power dynamics. Henry uses exaggerated language to tell a story that aims to both charm Anne and maintain his position as king. In Tudor romantic discourse, this dynamic demonstrates the complex relationship between language, identity, and authority. It shows how cultural expectations and rhetorical conventions shape expressions of historical love.

4.3 Ridiculous

The element of the ridiculous is evident in a letter from Henry to Anne Boleyn. The sentence, *"I wish myself, especially in the evening, in the arms of my sweetheart, whose pretty breasts I trust to kiss shortly"* (01.33, Episode 6), contains an element of absurdity and seems incongruous. The line is written with an excess of dramatic flair. The message also indicates that King Henry is primarily interested in Anne's physical attributes and is preoccupied with intimacy and her physical form. In the context of romantic seduction, this sounds silly and amusing.

This hyperbolic expression not only seems impractical but also adds an element of absurdity to romantic conversation. Such hyperbole might elicit laughter rather than admiration from a modern audience, highlighting the disparity between Tudor romantic conventions and modern expectations of

honesty. The interplay of these elements shows how Henry's letters function both as personal declarations of love and as strategic rhetorical tools designed to manipulate Anne's emotions while reinforcing his authority. By combining affective expressions, grand declarations, and ridiculous hyperbole, Henry creates a complex narrative designed to captivate Anne.

A Third Sophistic postmodern posthuman trans rhetorical tactic, or alternatively, to call woman and seduction, language as trace, is more subtle, ingenious, critical, and ironic than the subject (Ballif, 2001). According to Ballif's theory, one could say that women are interchangeably associated with seduction. When a man is seduced by a woman, he might utter more ironic and illogical remarks. Baudrillard offers a radical alternative: instead of liberating theories, he proposes fatal theories; instead of the banality of "love," he offers seduction; instead of the subject, he offers the object (Ballif, 2001). Such exaggerated language also falls under the rhetoric of pathos, in which emotion and devotion are expressed in extreme ways to create an intense emotional effect on the reader. This pathos rhetoric often carries a hyperbolic meaning, creating a dramatic atmosphere or meaning that may also seem insincere or excessive to modern readers.

5. CONCLUSION

The focus of this study is the affective, pompous, and humorous expressive elements found in the correspondence exchanged between Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. The results show that Henry skillfully used these rhetorical devices to express his affection, influence Anne's emotions, and assert his position as both lover and king. By using his affective language full

of emotional intensity and exaggeration, he attempted to get close to Anne and create an emotional bond. Henry's statement, for example, "*Perhaps you do not understand.*" To capture Anne's attention, he dramatizes his feelings. In contrast, Anne's correspondence is written in a more humble and guarded tone, indicating her vulnerability and the difficulty of relating to a powerful king. As expressed in "*It is painful and sad for me to return the gift you have given me,*" her humility shows her attempt to remain respectful while acknowledging her own emotional limitations. In contrast, Anne's correspondence is written in a more humble and guarded tone, indicating her vulnerability and the difficulty of relating to a powerful king. As expressed in "*It is painful and sad for me to return the gift you have given me,*" her humility shows her attempt to remain respectful while acknowledging her own emotional limitations.

In addition, Henry's letters use pompous language, combining grandiose expressions of love with his royal power. He elevates his emotions to extraordinary heights, reinforcing his role as a deeply in love king, with statements such as "*I almost believe I would sacrifice my kingdom for an hour in your arms.*" These statements may heighten the emotional stakes, but they can also be overly dramatic or disingenuous. However, his rhetoric is enhanced by the absurd elements found in his writing, such as, "*I wish myself, especially at night, in the arms of my sweetheart, whose fair breast I trust I shall soon kiss.*" Such hyperbolic statements, while intended to convey passion, blur the distinction between romantic intensity and comic exaggeration. Henry uses this mix of affective, pompous, and ridiculous elements to communicate in layers,

attempting to charm Anne while subtly asserting control.

This research reveals how affective, pompous, and ridiculous elements interact in the correspondence between Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn as depicted in *The Tudors*, showing how Henry skillfully manipulates rhetoric to express affection, influence Anne, and assert his dominance. However, there are limitations; this analysis relies solely on the characters featured in the series, potentially losing the nuances of the original due to limited data and dramatic interpretation. In addition, interpreting historical correspondence through fictional representations requires careful consideration of context, adaptation, and potential bias in the texts presented.

Future research could explore similar patterns in other historical correspondence or fictionalized depictions of royal romance, paying more attention to the impact of power dynamics on communication strategies as well as exploring gender differences in the rhetoric of seduction across different historical and cultural contexts. Studying the relationship between language, identity and authority through contemporary psychoanalytic and performative lenses will further enrich our understanding of seduction as an emotional and political tool.

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