

**THE UNBLEMISHED CONCUBINE:
REPRESENTATIONS OF ANNE BOLEYN
IN THE ENGLISH WRITTEN WORD, 2000-2012**

Submitted by

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A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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9 January 2015

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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Signed: Laura Saxton

Date: 9 January 2015

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to offer my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Prof. Shurlee Swain, Prof. Peter Sherlock and Dr Matthew Ryan for their invaluable guidance, expertise, advice and enthusiasm throughout my research. My family and, in particular, my parents have been unwavering in their encouragement and support, and I thank them for this. The postgraduate community of ACU Melbourne have offered a constant source of camaraderie, and I would particularly like to thank my 'postgrad posse': Amy Cumper, Sian Dunn, Christin Quirk, Helen Anderson, Sarah Dowling, Jo Bird and, especially, Ros Almond. Finally, I wish to thank my husband, Geoffrey Bramley, for his love, patience and laughter.

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ABSTRACT

Anne Boleyn, the second wife of Henry VIII, has been the subject of fictional and non-fictional historical narratives since her execution in 1536. Although already a contentious figure for her role in Henry VIII's annulment of his first marriage and England's ensuing break from the Roman Catholic Church, the nature of her death ensured that she would become a focus of examination, intrigue and scrutiny. This fascination is, in part, fuelled by limited primary source materials, particularly from Boleyn's perspective; there is an accepted, familiar narrative of her life that is defined by landmark events, however we cannot know precisely how she experienced these events. The reasons for her death are unclear because conclusive evidence confirming either her guilt or her innocence is yet to be uncovered. This combination of fascination and ambiguity means that Anne Boleyn is an apt case study for a consideration of the tensions between history and fiction that appear in all historical narratives. In recent decades, postmodern historiography has highlighted the literary qualities of histories, and scholars such as Hayden White have drawn attention to the narrativisation, emplotment and characterisation that occur in both fictional and non-fictional histories. The role of the historian as author—rather than as objective observer—has been integral to such scholarship. This study examines ten twenty-first-century historical narratives, encompassing a range of historical writing, including academic histories, popular biographies, historiographic metafiction and historical fiction. In spite of variations in style, audience, genre and veracity, each of the focus texts constructs both a characterisation of Boleyn and a narrative of her life. A close textual analysis of these narratives reveals that there are representational techniques and practices that are shared by the authors, regardless of their claims to authenticity and accuracy. Thus, the thesis rejects the apparent disjuncture between fictional and non-fictional histories on the basis of their capacity to relate truth, and argues that these texts should each be considered examples of historical writing.

The limits of representation are a central concern of the thesis, and it argues that interpretations of the textualised past and the social norms surrounding a text's production

inexorably impact the nature of a representation. It draws on current historiographical and literary theories to critique the representational practices at work in these narratives, demonstrating that generic tropes, conventions and archetypes significantly impact the manner in which the past is depicted. The gendered construction of Boleyn speaks to this propensity; representations of the ephemeral, intangible and unknowable aspects of this past are consistent with twenty-first-century conceptions of femininity, women's agency and gender. The tendency to regard women in light of their gender is not unique to representations of Boleyn, yet such issues are particularly pertinent to the way in which her history has been written, because of her rise to prominence as a royal mistress and execution on charges of adultery. Biographical narratives are regularly foreshadowed by her execution, and much of her life is considered in light of her death; the overwhelming representation suggests that, regardless of whether she was guilty of adultery and incest, her presumed failure to adhere to the expectations of the gendered roles of mistress, mother, wife and queen, meant that she was, to an extent, culpable for her own death. Hence, while this study is concerned with the processes by which we make sense of, and narrate the past, it specifically analyses the representational practices employed when writing about sex, power and violence in histories of women.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

In order to demarcate Anne Boleyn, the person who once lived, as distinct from textual representations of her in non-fiction and fiction texts, I will refer to the historical person as ‘Boleyn’ or ‘Anne Boleyn’ and textual characterisations as ‘Anne’. The purpose of this strategy is for conceptual clarity: this is not to suggest that my own representation is more accurate or less textualised than those which I analyse, only that Anne Boleyn did once exist. This is an approach that I use only when writing about Boleyn, and I have prioritised clarity when writing about other figures in the Tudor court. As such, when writing about members of the Boleyn family I often use given names, particularly in discussions of Mary, George and Jane Boleyn, while I refer to Thomas Cromwell and Thomas More by their surnames to avoid confusions.

Additionally, “Katherine”, “Katharine”, and “Catherine” are accepted English spellings for both Katherine of Aragon and Katherine Howard—Henry VIII’s first and sixth wife respectively. “Katherine” and “Catherine” are used across the texts that are analysed in this thesis. I will refer to both historical women as “Katherine”; however, I will faithfully reproduce the author’s chosen spelling in my textual analysis, both in quoted material and when discussing the author’s depiction of the textual representation of that individual. The spelling and punctuation in this thesis conform to standard Australian/British practice, but I have preserved the original American spelling and grammar of quotations.

I have chosen to use Modern Language Association Citation Guide as it has been appropriate for the textual analysis which comprises a significant portion of the analysis. However, I deviate from the style guide when citing the compiled archival document published in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII* and *Calendar of State Papers, Spain*. In-text citations pertaining to these documents are cited using the abbreviated *LP* or *Cal. S.P. Spain* respectively, followed by the volume number and document number. Additionally, I deviate from the style guide by using single quotation marks to indicate terminology or the ironic use of particular phrasing.

INTRODUCTION: ANNE BOLEYN IN THE ENGLISH WRITTEN WORD, 2000-2012

Anne Boleyn, the second wife of Henry VIII, is amongst England's best-remembered queen consorts. As the woman for whom England's ties with the Roman Catholic Church were severed and whose life was cut short by an executioner's sword, her history is both personally and politically fascinating. Her role in the English Reformation and relationships with Henry VIII and Elizabeth I—two of England's most recognisable monarchs—mean that she remains popular as a subject of biographies, academic research and fictional texts. Yet much of what is known about Boleyn is clouded by rhetoric, rumour and propaganda. Few sources predate her relationship with Henry; thus the political and religious biases of her contemporaries often skew descriptions of her actions, temperament and appearance. Although authors regularly acknowledge the difficulties inherent in writing about such a contentious figure, written accounts of Boleyn's life continue to reflect her ability to polarise observers. A number of misconceptions and myths have been inherited from the sixteenth century, with primary sources varying from hagiographic to defamatory in nature; understandings of Boleyn have, in turn, been shaped by the cultural conditions of those later generations who have returned to her history.

There is an accepted, familiar narrative of Boleyn's life that is defined by landmark events: educated abroad, she returned to England; became Henry's mistress and, later, his wife; gave birth to their daughter Elizabeth and was eventually arrested and executed on charges of treason and adultery. This chronology, recognisable in the multitude of texts that have taken Boleyn as their subject, belies the complexities of her past and character, and provides no insight into her own experiences. The politicised nature of the historical sources from this period means that it is difficult to determine precisely the extent of Boleyn's role in the events of the day, or the motivations that informed her actions. Because historical narratives regularly invoke aspects of the past that are ultimately unknowable—for instance, an historical figure's emotions—authorial interpretation and speculation are crucial to the shape of any given representation. The time in which a text is written is, therefore, as integral to its narrative as the past that it attempts to

capture. Representations of Boleyn have thus been shaped by authorial considerations; for instance, intended audience, generic conventions or cultural contexts that are contemporary to the text, can influence the ways in which gender, politics and religion are addressed. Writing from necessarily subjective ideological and cultural perspectives, authors use their research, which is often extensive, to present their own interpretations of the past and attribute meanings to its events. Thus, like any text, their representations can never be neutral, but are always constructed.

The history of Anne Boleyn offers an apt case study for a consideration of the tensions between history and fiction that appear in all historical narratives, including novels, biographies and scholarly works. As Katherine Cooper and Emma Short have argued, “the layers of representation attached to a real woman such as Anne Boleyn mean that even the most painstaking of historical studies has elements of fiction” (8). She has been a perennial subject in both fictional and non-fictional narratives, with the ambiguity that defines her persona further contributing to her appeal as a subject of investigation. For historians, the uncertainty surrounding many of the details of her life means that there remains significant scope for investigation and debate. Historical fiction, however, relies on the “gaps” between known events that have been recorded by history, and the past as it once existed (de Groot, *Consuming* 217). Although there are events that are known to have occurred, these ‘facts’ cannot encapsulate the full detail of the lived past; for example, we know that Boleyn was executed on 19 May 1536, but we can only speculate as to why she was executed, or how she and others may have experienced this event. Historical novelists fictionalise these ‘unknowns’, providing possible explanations for how a particular past *may* have occurred. With its many gaps, Boleyn’s history offers an opportunity to explore a recognisable character that provides significant scope for the imagination, while insubstantial evidence allows authors to invent details to suit individual portrayals of her character. As Jerome de Groot has noted, however, the freedom allowed by their fictional format has not prevented authors from regularly engaging with the formulaic narratives, contexts and characters associated with Boleyn’s history (de Groot, *Novel* 71).

Historians and novelists often share an interest in the same episodes and individuals, as is the case with Anne Boleyn. A clear distinction has long been drawn between the two forms of writing, particularly with regard to their relationship to the concept of truth; a history's merit is considered in light of its veracity (White, *Tropics* 83), whilst fictional texts are defined by their explicit use of imagination (Doležel 790). In turn, there are different ethical frameworks for fictional and non-fictional modes of representation, because "fiction is not accompanied by any equivalent truth claim, and bears no responsibility for the relationship between the fictional world and *specific* elements in the real world" (Farner 21). History and literature are both, however, fundamentally concerned with telling stories. Historians investigate people who once lived, while novelists write about characters that are often, but not always, wholly imaginary; yet both deal primarily with human actions and affect, here defined as emotions, motivations and the reasoning that informs action (Cronon 1370). The ability to engage with the past in written narratives is not exclusive to historians. Writers of historical fiction can also construct informed representations of past events and people. Although it is problematic to regard fictional histories as accurate accounts of the past—the aim of producing an engaging story will often take precedence over the recording of 'facts' and interpretation of sources—this does not discount the potential for fictional texts to offer valuable historical narratives.

History is a representational practice. As Alun Munslow has argued, history is the means by which the past is understood; it "is not the [past] itself" nor can the past "be transported as it actually was onto the page" ("Introduction" 7). This is not to deny that the past informs historical narratives, or that historical narratives hold value in investigating this past; rather, this approach highlights the essential role of historians in defining the way the past is constructed. In turn, it holds historians to account by questioning the basis of historical knowledge. Postmodern historiography emphasises the historian's task of researching a chaotic past, conveying her or his interpretations of that past in narrative form, and creating, rather than discovering, meaning. For postmodernists, a celebration of difference in historical representation has come to replace the

notion of a universal consensus (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 7). Postmodern historiography thus embraces the chaos of the past, accepting that a truthful metanarrative is not possible and that the past as it is understood in the present is a construct of both language and culture (Elias, “Metahistorical” 160). By accepting imperfection in our ability to represent the past in its entirety, it is possible to embrace multiple and often contradictory narratives from various perspectives, which can contribute to wider understandings of the pasts they seek to capture. The possibility of metanarrative becomes increasingly problematic when recognising the experiences of the “ex-centric”—those outside the white, middle class, heterosexual, male centre—who were traditionally excluded from or marginalised within the academy (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 12).

This thesis offers a textual analysis of ten twenty-first-century fictional and non-fictional historical writings that take Anne Boleyn as subject. It critiques the language and rhetorical strategies with which authors shape their own portrayals of Boleyn, and the textualisation of evidence that supports their individual positions. The texts analysed encompass a range of genres, some of which are explicitly fictional; these are examples of “realistic fiction”, which are set “within a time-and-place specific context” and imagine the actions of people, many of whom were real (White, “Introduction” 148). The aim of this thesis is not to discuss the role of historical fiction in contributing to popular understandings of the past; nor does it seek to identify inaccuracies or errors in the narratives that I critique. Rather, this thesis will demonstrate that *all* forms of historical writing contain elements of fiction. I analyse the specific representations of an individual who once lived and question the ways in which twenty-first-century authors actively and/or unintentionally construct those representations. Questioning delineations between fiction and non-fiction in historical representation, I will offer the alternative classification of ‘historical narratives’ in order to refer to any text that aims to represent a particular past, and which offers an account of its events, regardless of its categorisation as academic history, biography, or historical novel. The thesis contends that any author engaging with the historical record creates representations of the individuals, places,

periods and events they depict, irrespective of intended accuracy, purpose, style or audience. This process of representation is particularly apparent in the gendered characterisation of Boleyn. I argue that each text engages with unknowable aspects of her past, and that the interpretations of her character that they offer are significantly shaped by the cultural contexts and textual conventions of the era in which that text is produced.

I argue that ‘accuracy’ and ‘authenticity’ are distinctive, yet complementary, concepts for assessing the relationship between a text and the past that it seeks to narrate. A representation is accurate when it adheres to the available evidence pertaining to the past that it seeks to describe, while authenticity refers to the *impression* of accuracy. Thus the belief that a representation is authentic can be subjective and is shaped by intertextuality and culture. Constructions of Boleyn are an ideal example of the tension between accuracy and authenticity because there are numerous misconceptions and assumptions about her that are not verifiable, but which are commonly held to be true. By extending the conversation beyond questions of veracity, these categories of analysis provide a framework for understanding, not only whether a given representation is accurate, but also how and why particular representations can be read as in/accurate in specific contexts.

Characterisations of Boleyn reflect the social norms of the time in which they are written. For this reason I have limited the focus of my research to texts published during the twenty-first century. I have chosen this period because it has witnessed a renewed popular interest in Tudor England. Along with a number of plays, films and television productions, written explorations of the period have been both numerous and popular, with a number of these texts deemed ‘bestsellers’. Further, a feminist analysis of twenty-first-century histories of Boleyn—an ideal subject for an analysis of gender roles and representations—also provides an insight into contemporary constructions of gender, extending the significance of this thesis beyond understandings of historiography. The three episodes of Boleyn’s life that are analysed reveal the

dominant tropes of representation that are used in writing about this woman, but also speak to the ways sex, power, and violence are gendered in the twenty-first century.

I have limited my focus to a selection of historical narratives written during this period, with the aim of examining each representation comprehensively. The texts that form the primary resources for this textual analysis include academic histories, popular biographies, and historical novels. These texts have been selected for their variety in style, perspective, genre, and approach, irrespective of historical accuracy or authenticity. The academic histories analysed are G. W. Bernard's *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions* (2010) and Eric Ives' *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn: 'The Most Happy'* (2005). The popular biographies analysed are Joanna Denny's *Anne Boleyn: A New Life of England's Tragic Queen* (2005), David Starkey's *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII* (2003), and Alison Weir's *The Lady in the Tower: The Fall of Anne Boleyn* (2009). Finally, the historical novels analysed are Suzannah Dunn's *The Queen of Subtleties* (2004), Philippa Gregory's *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2002), Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* (2009) and *Bring up the Bodies* (2012), Emily Purdy's *The Tudor Wife* (2010), and Weir's *The Lady Elizabeth* (2009). I consider each of these texts to be examples of historical narrative and argue that each writer constructs a representation of the past, regardless of the ascribed fictional status of their narrative. Generic conventions are, however, of interest to the construction of specific characterisations; as such, I have not completely collapsed generic categories, and refer to the texts as fiction or non-fiction where appropriate.

In this thesis, a close reading of the above texts was conducted by creating a comprehensive index of themes, characters and personality traits. This approach has allowed me to comprehensively analyse the representations that occur across a text, rather than considering isolated examples. Having collated an index for each text, I identified the dominant themes, issues and representations, not only within each text individually, but across the selection of historical narratives. As such, I was able to identify the representational patterns and techniques at work, and to conduct a detailed comparison across my chosen examples. These aforementioned authors' representations of Boleyn are the analytical focus of my research, and

thus it is these historical narratives that form the primary source materials of this thesis. However, where these authors refer to sixteenth-century documents, I frequently look to the particular documents that are cited or referred to in the text. Like the authors I analyse, I use these sources in edited and translated form and assess the ways in which these documents have been interpreted and utilised in these twenty-first-century narratives. I have accessed these documents in their digitised form via *British History Online*, which is based at the University of London's Institute of Historical Research. Where authors refer to primary sources, I examine and interrogate the use of this evidence, thus conducting a historical analysis of their claims. In looking at these original sources, I aim to demonstrate the multiple layers of textualisation that occur when extant written documents, or copies and translations of those documents, are the only avenue by which authors can access the past. This methodology does not constitute my own recourse to empiricist history because I do not aim to offer my own interpretation of Boleyn based on these sources; instead I examine the evidence base of a selection of the claims and depictions that I analyse.

Anne Boleyn has long been a subject of historical representation in multiple forms of cultural production, and recent years have seen a number of scholars interrogate and examine these representations, particularly with regard to women's historical novels.¹ Susan Bordo's *The Creation of Anne Boleyn: A New Look at England's Most Notorious Queen* (2013) was the first book dedicated to the analysis of representations of Boleyn. Bordo looks to Boleyn's textual presence in the cultural realm, analysing a range of cultural productions, including such varied sources as the nineteenth-century biographies of Agnes Strickland, Jane Austen's account of England's

¹ For example, de Groot analyses both Gregory's *The Other Boleyn Girl* and Dunn's *The Queen of Subtleties*, and questions how these novelists have represented Boleyn's past (*Consuming* 217-32); Burstein argues that literary characterisations of Boleyn are formulaic and that her repeated presence as a romantic heroine speaks to the failure of novelists to represent her history in a manner that adheres to the conventions of the romantic historical fiction ("Afterlife" 1-26); Barlow analyses twenty-first-century historical fiction about the Tudor era and considers the influence of post-feminism on the representations of women; Hickerson compares the representations of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn in historical novels written by Jean Plaidy and Philippa Gregory; Crane analyses representations of Boleyn in historical fiction.

monarchy and the 2007 television series *The Tudors*. She critiques the portrayals of Boleyn's personality, intellect, emotions, affect and actions in these texts and questions the historical basis of the representations that she observes in modern representations. She also considers contemporary representations and the ways 'evidence' has influenced modern characterisations of Boleyn—for instance, she discusses the correspondence of Eustace Chapuys who was a Spanish ambassador resident in Henry VIII's court (1-19). Her analysis consists of a dual narrative. First, she offers her own narrative interpretation of Boleyn's past, which is "not meant to be straight 'history'", but it is chronological and designed to "provide enough historical detail to create a coherent backstory" to inform the cultural analysis that is her primary focus (xvii). Her own interpretation of Boleyn's past regularly acts as a comparison to the characterisations she critiques. This cultural analysis is the second aspect of this narrative. It offers a number of insights into the ways in which Boleyn has been characterised, such as depictions of her physicality, particularly her skin tone and hair colour, and how these depictions have reflected changing beauty standards (25-30).

Bordo positions her own work outside of the postmodern discourse that informs my own analysis. As such, her interpretation of Boleyn's history interjects into her cultural analysis: "I'm not such a postmodernist", she writes, "that I'm content to write a history of competing narratives. I'm fascinated by their twists and turns, but even more fascinated by the real Anne" (xiv). Bordo also subscribes to the view of postmodern historiography as nihilistic, in which any depiction of the past can be considered to be legitimate, no matter how inaccurate, because the ultimate truth cannot be known—a position that I reject. As such, she criticises Natalie Portman, the actor who portrayed Boleyn in the cinematic adaptation of *The Other Boleyn Girl*, for being "postmodern in her approach to history" and holding that multiple versions of the same past are possible (222). She acknowledges that "storytelling" is "unavoidable" for historians, biographers and writers of fiction, each of whom "string facts together along some sort of narrative thread that, inevitably, has a point of view" (4). I hold that postmodern historiography provides an

opportunity to explore varied perspectives on the past, and opens multiple possibilities for representation; Bordo criticises such a view because it purportedly excuses inaccurate or bad history. As such, she criticises Portman and her colleagues for invoking postmodernism, quoting novelist Margaret George's critique of the cast of *The Other Boleyn Girl*: "They are all a bunch of ignoramuses ... as for hiding behind such a dumb and dismissive statement as 'all you got from historians was competing views, anyway,' I wonder if they carry that philosophy over into their medical treatments?" (as cited in Bordo, *Creation* 223). She thus acknowledges the influence of postmodernism on conceptions of historiography, whilst adhering to the modernist dichotomy between history and fiction. In turn, she does not critique academic texts that reflect her own interpretation of Boleyn, most notably Ives' canonical *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, and therefore affords these texts a privileged position amongst historical narratives.

Bordo's thesis is largely a redemptive project, and she states that her "annoyance with popular stereotypes was one reason why [she] started this book" (xvii). The similarities between her work and this thesis are patent, but there are also significant differences: Bordo examines the ways in which Anne Boleyn has been characterised in historical writing, yet she also identifies inaccurate representations and labels these as unjust. She considers the cultural contexts in which representations have been produced, yet maintains that it is possible to know and objectively describe the real Anne Boleyn—a feat that this thesis argues is not possible, and it is here that part of my original contribution lies. My own aim is to emphasise the provisional nature of all representations of Anne Boleyn, regardless of their status as fiction or non-fiction texts; my intention is not to critique previous scholars and novelists for producing 'bad' history, but instead to interrogate, from a feminist perspective, the cultural and literary contexts that shape particular characterisations. This concern with context means that my focus is also more refined than that of Bordo, who offers a survey of the various incarnations of Boleyn that have been dominant since her death. Instead, my own work offers a comprehensive analysis of historical narratives about Anne Boleyn for the twenty-first century.

The originality of this project lies in its combined postmodern and feminist perspective. It offers a comprehensive examination of twenty-first-century representations of Anne Boleyn in the English written word, demonstrating the particular ways in which her history has been characterised in a range of historical genres. I use both literary and historiographical theories in my analysis; as such, this thesis is interdisciplinary, and is unique in its literary interpretation of fictional and non-fictional historical writing. Since the 1970s, scholars have considered the role of narrative in historical writing, arguing that this method of conveying what can be known about the past is not neutral, but actively shapes the representations therein. This thesis is the first study to consider how the processes of representation identified by postmodern historiographers have shaped the histories of a specific individual. Previous research has considered characterisations of Boleyn in history *or* fiction; however I consider these genres of historical writing in equal terms because they are all constructed representations of the past. Moreover, I introduce the categories of ‘authenticity’ and ‘accuracy’ as distinct but interrelated classifications of a text’s relationship to the past that it seeks to represent.

The following sections outline the theoretical framework that has underpinned this research. I outline the postmodern historiographic theories of Hayden White, which hold that the narrative structure of non-fiction histories means that, despite assertions of truth and objectivity, histories share much in common with fiction. I then explain the ways in which postmodern historiography has influenced conceptualisations of historical fiction, particularly with regard to Linda Hutcheon’s genre of postmodern historical fiction, historiographic metafiction. This thesis demonstrates the ways in which the past is constructed in both fictional and non-fictional histories. A consideration of gender is necessary to this analysis of representations of Boleyn hence the next section of the theoretical framework outlines women’s, gender, and feminist history. The textual analysis that comprises the methodology of this thesis means that a consideration of the representation of women in literature is equally important as that which has

occurred in historical discourse. As such, I then analyse techniques of representation, such as archetypes and stereotypes, as well as genre, particularly biography and historical fiction.

History, Narrative and Fiction

The historian's ability to relate the ultimate truth about the past has been a central question of historiographical debates in recent decades, with scholars suggesting that "such foundational concepts as 'truth', 'fact' and 'objectivity' have been exposed as at worst meaningless, and at best in need of radical redefinition" (Southgate 29). Critics of empiricist principles, who suggest that accurate historical narratives are made possible with rigorous research and impartial documentation, have argued that the research process is, in itself, a subjective exercise because a researcher can find answers only to those questions she or he asks; historians do not discover facts but instead construct them (White, *Tropics* 43). Historians create facts from the remnants of the past, not by fabrication, but rather by endowing these fragments with meaning that, in turn, informs their interpretations. The past as it once existed is inaccessible, and we can only access fragments of that past through textual representations (Munslow, *Deconstructing* 57). "Evidence" and "primary sources" are not neutral: as Munslow explains, "evidence does not refer to a recoverable and accurately knowable past reality but represents chains of interpretation" (62). This position has been somewhat controversial within the academy, and it should not be surmised that the ideal of objective and accurate history has been disregarded in this thesis; the division between empirical and postmodern conceptualisations of history is not absolute. Rather than dismissing the writing of history as an invalid pursuit, incapable of recreating the past, as some critics would suggest,² postmodern historiography encourages those who write history to be conscious of their own role in constructing depictions of the past, and to accept and celebrate "the inevitable failures of historical representation/presentation rather than striving to overcome them" (Jenkins 3).

² Southgate summarises these critical responses to postmodern historiography (ix, 3-26).

The narrative mode of history has been at the forefront of historiographical discourse in recent decades for its implication that history is primarily a literary endeavour. The assertion that these narratives tell factually accurate stories has been cited as the determining factor distinguishing history from literature, in spite of the commonly shared use of narrative. Rejecting Enlightenment delineations between history and literature based on the notion of empirical truth, twentieth- and twenty-first-century theorists questioned the narrative structure of historical texts and their subsequent resemblance to literary texts, instigating what Geoffrey Roberts referred to as the “central debate in the philosophy of history since the 1960s” (1-2). Non-fictional historical narratives most commonly consist of a linear story with “a beginning, a middle, and an end” in which causal relationships link past events (Rosenstone 1). The chaotic reality of the past is thus edited, ordered and textualised using the aesthetic conventions of written narrative. The authorial voice of these narratives is disguised using third-person narration that suggests omniscience (Hutcheon *Poetics* 10), thereby preserving “the notion that history already exists and somehow ‘tells itself’” (Rosenstone 5).

Hayden White stands amongst the key scholars who contributed to the postmodern historiographical debate for his critique of the demand for objectivity that once defined the discipline (White, *Tropics* 47). He has suggested that a concern with individuals, events and places that were at one time observable and can thus be considered as having been ‘real’ should not render history as the antithesis of fiction: “the study of the real versus the study of the merely imaginable” (121, 24). This is because the two disciplines share significant commonalities in their production of stories, particularly with regard to the capacity of historians to dictate both the style and form of their narratives—a process White refers to as “emplotment” (83). The historical record, as it exists outside of the influence of historians, consists only of congeries of vaguely related pieces of information and it is the historian’s role to create order and meaning amongst this chaos (125). Emplotment denotes the process by which historians select fragments that they consider to be of importance, before arranging and describing those items in a manner

that adequately reflects their own interpretation of events. This exercise is one that can be considered subjective and contextual, with imperatives “that are generally extra historical, ideological, aesthetic, or mythical” being fundamental to how an historian believes a particular episode can be emplotted (85). Such considerations influence both the direction of research and the interpretation of any evidence that is uncovered; historians seek to find answers to those questions that they find intriguing and that are compatible with the narrative they wish to produce (85).

White’s primary concern is the way in which the convention of writing history as narrative shapes the textualised past as it has been represented and remembered. Histories, he writes, are primarily “verbal functions the contents of which are as much *invented as found*” (*Tropics* 82, emphasis in original). Regardless of whether their subject is real or imaginary, writers take those events they consider to be of importance and use language to link them to create a coherent narrative, giving meaning to otherwise arbitrary instances. Like novelists, historians must describe their subject using tropological strategies and thus they engage in the act of representation, rather than mere documentation (125). Hence, the historian’s role, as White perceives it, is not to ensure that her or his narrative is devoid of any fictional elements (123), but instead to formulate “stories out of *mere* chronicles” (83, emphasis in original). The past provides “story elements” and the author’s task is to implement the techniques associated with the writing of fiction—including “suppression or subordination of certain [events] and the highlighting of others ... characterization, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view [and] alternative descriptive strategies”—to transform these disparate instances into a cohesive story about the past (84). This does not imply fictionalisation or falsification. The same chronology can, however, be represented in a multitude of ways, each with its own meaning, as historians employ individual plot structures to document their findings and privilege certain aspects of the past above others (92).

In formulating such stories using figurative language, authors regularly engage in the act of characterisation. Aspects of an individual's persona—including her or his affective interactions, motivations, personality and intellect—are described by historians, despite the intangible nature of such characteristics. Such a process transforms historical persons into “the kind of intending, feeling, and thinking subjects with whom the reader can identify and empathize, in the way one does with characters in fictional stories” (“Emplotment” 380). Similarly, the specific rendering of subjects can influence the style or tone of the narrative in a way that can resemble literary genres, such as romance or tragedy. Episodes of the past are not “*inherently* tragic, comic or romantic”, but are instead constructed as such when authors consider their subject “from a particular point of view” (White, *Tropics* 84-5, emphasis added). Limits are necessarily imposed on the possible interpretations by the sources that are available to the historian. The process of interpretation is, however, one of negotiation; the evidence that is available must guide the historian, but it can be read in a variety of ways by different researchers or in different contexts. Hence, it is the author of the narrative and the conventions of the discourse within which she or he operates, and not only the episodes described, which determine the style and form of any given representation.

The historiographical implications of postmodernism have garnered an array of responses from historians; some embrace it, others repudiate it entirely, and many regard it with a critical eye whilst acknowledging its contributions. As such, it cannot be stated unequivocally that postmodernism has changed the methodologies and conceptualisation of history as a discipline. It is, however, certain that these theoretical perspectives have acted to legitimise the critique of previously accepted historiographical practices and perspectives (Himmelfarb 28), “rendering problematic that which was once taken for granted by historiography—and literature” (Hutcheon, *Poetics* xii). This perspective is not only of interest when looking to theoretical implications, but also for considering texts in which historians refuse “to hide their interpretive and narrating acts behind the third-person voice of objectivity” and acknowledge the role of

imagination in their constructions of the past (91). It is this discursive atmosphere that has encouraged renewed interest in historical fiction, which has often been dismissed by scholars as a vulgar marriage of history and literature incapable of addressing the requirements of either discipline (Rehberger 59).

By taking the past as the framework of their stories, historical novelists have been criticised for their perceived inability to fulfil either the creative demands of literature or the empirical demands of history; its fictional elements render the form incapable of conveying the truth about the past, while the fictionalisation of a received story lacks the innovation and creativity expected of literature (White, *Tropics* 123). Thus, despite a sustained readership and demonstrated marketability, historical novels have received limited scholarly attention—particularly from historians—with the identification of error and anachronism favoured over serious critical analysis (Keen 174). Adherence to accepted metanarratives and historical accuracy—but not necessarily *authenticity*—have subsequently been the standard by which historical fiction has been critiqued. By questioning the extent to which historical texts can achieve truth, postmodern historiography has problematised the dismissal of historical fictions and, to borrow White’s phrase, the anathematisation of the historical novel by historians (White, “Introduction” 150); the genre’s critical exclusion, based solely on its use of imagination and its subsequent inaccuracies, can no longer be accepted without question. As Sarah Pinto writes, the repudiation of historical novels on the basis of their (stated) fictionality “offers little insight” into the processes and effects of representation in historical novels (Pinto, “Historical” 192).

White’s role in highlighting the literary qualities and rhetorical strategies of historical narratives has been influential for scholars, many of whom have reconsidered the historical novel in light of his analysis (de Groot, *Novel* 111), looking to the role of language in representing the past, and the subsequent relationship between histories and the pasts that they describe (Hutcheon, *Poetics* xii). As Pinto observes, “narrative devices cannot be found lurking at the margins of archival material or primary evidence” (“Contemporary” 47); these devices are not

neutral, but are shaped by authors and the societies in which they write. As such, history and fiction are both “human constructs”, consisting of textualised narratives with an “illusory” relationship with the past (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 5, 8). The process of textualisation that occurs when the past is represented is twofold: first in the creation of a text and, second, in the use of text-based sources, which are themselves interpretations of events, as evidence. Emplotment inexorably textualises the past, in that authors select, order and edit ‘facts’ to construct textual representation, yet the primary avenue by which the historian accesses the past is via texts: “its documents, its evidence, even its eye-witness accounts” (16). A consideration of textuality can thus encourage an awareness of the ways in which primary sources, themselves representations, mediate our impression of the past.

The ensuing “skepticism ... about the possibilities for true historical knowledge” is central to a number of critiques that have examined historical fiction in recent years (Elias, *Sublime* xvii). Adhering to the view that history is a linguistic construct incapable of describing the past as it once was, authors such as Linda Hutcheon, Amy Elias, and Diane Elam have interrogated the ways in which historical fictions represent the past. They propose that history and fiction can each be recognised as means by which to discuss and comprehend the past (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 89). Whilst Hutcheon, Elias and Elam differ in their specific analyses, they share the position that a historical narrative that is entirely devoid of fictional elements is not possible because authors must construct their representations of the past. These theorists also hold that the postmodern historical novel constitutes a specific genre of historical writing, the defining feature of which is an interrogation of historiographical knowledge. Such novels do not necessarily adhere to specific generic and aesthetic conventions, but they share an engagement with contemporary postmodern historiography. A questioning of the authority of historical knowledge, and a self-reflexivity regarding the ways in which historical writing is constructed, is common to all postmodern historical novels regardless of perceived literary quality (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 5). These novels

consider the reconstruction of the past as it once existed to be an impossible task and preference the notion of provisional representation over that of objective historical knowledge (92).

In spite of the protestations of Bordo, the position that ultimate historical knowledge is unattainable should not suggest a nihilistic attitude towards history. History is not “made obsolete” by postmodernism (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 16), nor is it “coming to an end” (Elias “Metahistorical” 159); rather, postmodernism has encouraged a questioning of what constitutes historical knowledge and the processes by which we seek and construct that knowledge (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 16; Elias, “Metahistorical” 160). The critique of truth allows for a “pluralist” approach to history which advocates for the possibility that narratives that offer contradictory and conflicting interpretations can be “equally meaningful representations of past reality” (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 96). Postmodernists do not question whether the past existed, but instead seek to understand the processes by which we seek historical knowledge (Elias, “Metahistorical” 160): “*how* can we know that past today—and what can we know of it?” (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 92, emphasis in original). Indeed, the inaccessibility of the past only acts to render historical knowledge more desirable, and Elam argues that the desire to know the past, in spite of the belief that there can be no ultimate understanding of that past, is a tension that lies at the heart of both postmodernist history and historical fiction (10).

Postmodern historical novels, although rejecting the notion of objective historical truth, “return to history with a vengeance” (Elias, *Sublime* 159-60). They crave historical truth, whilst simultaneously acknowledging and accepting the impossibility of gaining it (xviii). Elias argues:

what we live in is the present; what we remember is the past; what is beyond that is History, and for all the efforts of scholars and researchers and novelists, History is untouchable, ultimately unknowable, and excruciatingly tantalizing as well as terrifying, for there resides Truth (53).

Authentic historical truth is “the place of ecstasy” which “is always receding, always out of reach”, simultaneously encouraging an intense desire for truth and a need to come to terms with

those representations that we are capable of producing (19). Postmodern historical novels, with their explicit fictionalisation, offer an apt vehicle whereby we can pursue this desired, but unachievable, 'truth'. Hence the concept of truth remains meaningful in postmodern discourse; the emphasis, however, is placed on its subjectivity, multiplicity and unobtainability.

Archival research is integral to historical research and practice, and yet historical truth cannot be discovered in the archives; a text's truth is reliant on its author's perspective and influences, and, in turn, the various ways in which it is read independently of authorial intention (Jacobs xvii). In a postmodern framework, the project of writing about the past is defined as a dialogue between the past and the present, with representations continually evolving in accordance with the cultural conditions of the time of production (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 19). For Naomi Jacobs, "accurate representation" does not refer to past reality, but instead to "what the writer genuinely believed happened" because "facts are dead until transformed by imagination" with empirical evidence capable of providing only a "rigid outline of a historical persona" (xv, xvii). This perspective, however, need not imply that postmodern narratives lack the historical veracity of their modern counterparts. The belief that the past has been adequately and accurately represented encourages us to forget the past itself, choosing instead to remember only that construction: "realism makes us believe that we can be done with the past because we have accurately represented it" (Elam 15). In turn, anachronism can be effective in reminding the reader that this representation is not wholly accurate. The presence of anachronism in historical novels need not tarnish their accuracy, but can instead be seen as a challenge to realist representation; self-reflexive anachronisms are not merely "slips or errors", but may signify—consciously or otherwise—that the narrative, like all historical narratives, is not of the time it represents but instead created and influenced by other periods (Elam 14).

Elam and Elias claim that this interrogation of realism is particularly pertinent when looking to the genre of historical romance. In fictionalising the past using the aesthetics of romance, novelists have (often unconsciously) addressed the tension between the intense desire

to know the past and the inability to do so that is key to postmodern historiography (Elias, “Metahistorical” 164). The conventions of historical romance, with its occasional use of myth and magic, are unlike realist forms of representation and, as such, the genre offers a way of looking at the past which is at odds with an empiricist view of history (164). Realist narratives, it is argued, impose order on the past that they describe to produce a cohesive history (Elam 14). In contrast, postmodernists are sceptical about “any social or historical narrative that purports to make sense of a chaotic world of seemingly endless and contradictory lifestyles, cultures, and political viewpoints” (Elias, *Sublime* xvii). The heightened excess typical of the romantic genre, however, embraces chaos and can be read as implicit critique of realism, leading Elam and Elias to consider historical romance as a postmodern genre (Elias, *Sublime* 53; Elam 12). The specific techniques permitted in non-realist texts, such as “metafictionality, achronology, use of popular culture genres, and carnivalization” (Elias, *Sublime* 46), mean that historical representation in these texts is unlike that which is common to non-fictional histories. This mode does not necessarily strive for historical accuracy, and can question how to represent the past and whether it is possible to adequately do so (Elam 15).

Hutcheon considers novels that explicitly and self-consciously address their own role in constructing representations of the past. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), she introduced the category of ‘historiographic metafiction’—a term employed throughout this thesis.

Historiographic metafiction is novels that engage with the scepticism of postmodern historiography toward the authority of historical narratives and empiricist epistemologies (106). These novels take historical events, places and individuals as their subject, yet are “intensely self-reflexive” about the processes by which histories are constructed, and the degree to which, as authors, they are complicit in this construction (5). Historiographic metafiction questions issues of authorship, subjectivity and identity whilst adopting the conventions of the historical novel, and thereby render “the very possibility of historical” truth problematic (106). These texts work within the genre of historical fiction and adopt its conventions, but also subvert these

conventions by signalling to their reader that these representations are provisional and ironic (5). These texts convey an acknowledgment that both history and literature shape present understandings of the pasts that are the focus of their narratives, commenting on the “mixing of the historical and the fictive” that occurs in all historical narratives (89). The textualisation of the past is regularly acknowledged in these novels and writers invent scenes in which the past is recorded; the textualised nature of historical evidence is thereby highlighted (93).

A number of theorists analysing the postmodern historical novel have broadened their focus beyond those novels written from a postmodern perspective and have turned a postmodern eye to classic forms of historical fiction. For many, Walter Scott—often considered the founder of the historical novel in its modern format—has been the focus of this attention. In recent years, critics have suggested that his romantic historical novels display anxiety about his amalgamation of history and literature (Maciulewicz 387). Scott, they argue, perceived history in empirical terms and, as such, was diametrically opposed to fiction and romance (Elam 58). Unlike the work of women writers that was presumed to be concerned with romance and escapism, Scott’s writing was grounded in historical fact and was thus associated with the (male) realm of history (Cooper and Short 3). His work nevertheless combined history and romance, and his interpretations of the past have thus been interrogated through the lens of postmodernism (Elam 51). Elias describes Scott “as an ancestor to postmodern historical novelists” for the ways in which his romanticism can be seen to problematise his own empirical assumptions (*Sublime* 12). Scott is seen to have distinguished between history and tradition: history is that which is recorded officially by those in power, whilst tradition refers to the ways in which people remember their own collective past (Elam 58). Thus traditions are inauthentic variants of history, sullied by the inadequacies of memory (58). As irrational versions of the past, traditions, then, resemble historical romances in which the past is malleable and distorted according to the perspective and intentions of the author.

This understanding becomes problematic, however, with Scott's acknowledgment that written historical documents are equally capable of embellishment, error and omission (Elam 58). Furthermore, verifiable written accounts of the past are not always available to the historian and it is often necessary to employ tradition as a historical source (58). As a writer, Scott can thus be seen to be attempting to preserve the past whilst recognising the impossibility of doing so accurately (Elias, *Sublime* 15); "inevitably contaminated by tradition", Elam argues, "the past must somehow always be romantic" (58). In *Waverley*, Scott formulates a romantic narrative using tradition in which the boundaries distinguishing fact and fiction become blurred (Elam 60). Elam posits that this is because a reliance on tradition to remember the past entails that "romance is not merely the opposite of historical fact but a structural flaw at work within and against the discourse of historical fact" (59). For Elam and Elias, Scott's understanding of romance and tradition points to the "historian's need to anesthetize the past or render it more accessible" and the "inevitability of reconstructing that past as romance" (Elias, *Sublime* 14).

Scott's imaginative exploration of the culture of the Scottish Highlanders has thus become a point of interest for postmodern scholars. Scott, they argue, believed that in the absence of verifiable forms of evidence, empiricist historians would be unable to record the history of the Scottish Highlanders adequately and it would thus be lost (Elam 64); an empiricist perspective could thereby term the history of the Scottish Highlanders "unhistorical" because it cannot be adequately recorded using empiricist models (61), yet Scott was unwilling "to forget about Highland tribal culture" (Elam 67). The formulation of a narrative about these people and their customs necessitated a reliance on folklore and tradition—rather than 'evidence'—that would support Scott's apparent empiricist conception of history (58). As such, Scott's representations are anachronistic and cannot be considered empirically accurate (69-70). Such inaccuracies do not, however, undermine the significance of a text from a postmodern perspective; just as anachronism is a necessary aspect of romantic narratives, so too is it an "imperfect memorial" necessary when discussing the past (67). Scott acknowledges that the past

as it once existed cannot be transported to the page, and Elam argues that this is his “postmodern gesture” (14). For Elias, the reason Scott can be considered the “ancestor” to twentieth- and twenty-first-century historical fiction is because of the “entanglement of romance and history” that characterises his work (Elias, *Sublime* 15). Furthermore, the historical sublime—the simultaneous craving for knowledge about the past and concession that this goal is unobtainable—is evident in his work (Elias, “Metahistorical” 169).

Whilst Scott’s novels problematise the assumptions of modernist historiography, they cannot be labelled as explicitly postmodern because he specifically categorises the history of the Scottish Highlanders—rather than the past itself—as unknowable; this culture is “expired, vanished, and overridden by the forces of a new, modern paradigm” (Elam 15). This particular aspect of the past is unknowable, yet for Scott this is not true of progressive societies who provide documented evidence of their past (12): “Scott privileged the historical side over the romance side of the equation”, writes Elias, “finally showing that the mythicized Highland cultures were doomed in the face of an epistemic shift to rationalist modernity” (“Metahistorical” 164). For postmodernists, however, it is the romantic aspects of the representation that are intriguing because modernist modes of history fail to adequately capture the chaotic violence of this past (164).

Constructing Gender and Constructing Narrative

The 1970s saw a significant shift in historiography as women historians such as Joan Kelly-Gadol, Joan W. Scott and Natalie Zemon Davis drew attention to the exclusion of women from scholarly historical narratives. As Davis outlined in “‘Women’s History’ in Transition: The European Case”, women had not been entirely absent from histories; however such histories were typically biographies of notable religious or royal individuals and were often written by women, such as the Strickland sisters, who were mostly excluded from academia (83). Such studies were limited in scope, in that they only examined the lives of select individuals, and did

not address the ways in which institutions such as marriage and the family were not static, but were rather shaped by various political, economic and cultural events (84). Recognising the limitations of such representations, feminist historians were influential in a shift in focus within history; the shift saw women established as legitimate subjects of historical enquiry, offering “a new forum for feminist investigations of the past” (Bennett 251). Women’s history, feminist history and gender history each emerged during the 1970s and 1980s, and shared a concern with reconceptualising the notion of historical significance so that it encompassed the personal and subjective experiences of women (Scott 1055). These were, however, distinct fields of historical writing and research with separate purposes: women’s history is defined as historical research that takes women as its subject; feminist history is political in its aims and is concerned with the historical and contemporary oppression of women (Bennett 253); and gender history rejects biological determinism and instead considers historical constructs of femininity and masculinity, and the ways in which these constructs impacted social relations between the sexes (Scott 1056).³

The place of women within historical discourse thus became an important site of contestation, and the challenges that women’s history posed to historical practice and epistemologies contributed to the reconceptualisation of the discipline in the 1970s (Kelly-Gadol 809). These historians not only considered subjects and social issues that had previously been neglected by scholars, but also challenged the theory and practice that underpinned the discipline. They argued that a subject of enquiry could be viewed in different ways depending on the vantage point of the historian, and that a consideration of women’s experiences could produce a contradictory understanding of an established era or society. As Kelly-Gadol proposes, having previously viewed society from a masculine perspective, “suddenly we see these ages with a new double vision—and each eye sees a different picture” (811). The critique of women’s historical

³ Morgan discusses the ways in which women’s history, gender history and feminist history as distinct entities have “co-existed alongside each other in mutually productive ways” and have each aimed to expose “the gendered politics of historical knowledge” (382). Like Morgan, this thesis will henceforth use the term ‘feminist history’ when discussing the contributions and evaluations of each category of historical practice.

marginalisation was not merely a project which aimed to insert women into the canon; it analysed the manner in which gender—and identity and subjectivity, more broadly—is constructed by historians and in the primary source materials that they may cite as evidence. As Scott posits, the historical study of women is not advantageous only because it “add[s] new subject matter”, but because it holds the potential to “fundamentally transform disciplinary paradigms” (1054).

Writing in the 1980s, Joan Scott and Judith Bennett each argued that feminist history, although institutionalised and of high quality, remained marginal. Bennett wrote that although “the days of struggle against *overt* institutional hostility” towards feminist history “were gone”, the field nevertheless suffered from marginalisation (253, emphasis in original). For Scott, the limited rate of publication of textbooks, syllabi, and monographs about feminist history indicated that its broader methodological significance had not yet been recognised, and she perceived the introduction of gender as a category of analysis as essential in “the quest of feminist scholarship for academic legitimacy” (1055). The act of representing and retelling the past has often been gendered, with empiricist methodologies associated with the male sphere of politics, while social issues and imaginative modes of writing were readily demarcated as feminine. The field was, as Scott and Bennett each argued, demarcated from the broader discipline, and was considered as ‘light history’, of specialist interest only to women students and researchers (Bennett 252). Although women were, until the twentieth century, largely excluded from the academy, they nonetheless enjoyed “a lively, productive, and growing interest” in the production of history (Smith 6). Bonnie Smith argues that while many women engaged in amateur history, the quality of their work was not amateurish; yet, this tradition influenced a belief that ‘feminine’ history was “superficial, literary [and] trivial” (6).⁴ In contrast, feminist historians and literary scholars have

⁴ A recent example of this dismissal of women’s historical writing is evident in David Starkey’s 2009 argument that the memory of Henry VIII had been consumed by that of his wives, and that “it’s what you expect from feminised history, the fact that so many of the writers who write about this are women and so much of their audience is a female audience. Unhappy marriages are big box office...If you are to do a proper history of Europe before the last five minutes, it is a history of white males because they were the power players, and to pretend anything else is to falsify” (cited in Wallace, “Difficulties” 207).

emphasised that such criticism does not reflect the quality of the work, but the ways in which women's experiences were unlike those of men because their gender meant they had a different relationship with institutions, such as family and state (Kelly-Gadol 813, 816).

The critique of the discipline from a feminist perspective coincided with the theoretical challenges that were occurring in other areas of historiography, such as White's theories of narrative. The emphasis that a number of feminist historians place on multiple interpretations and vantage points is consistent with the postmodern emphasis on subjectivity, its critique of the purported singularity of historical truth and the "refocusing on the marginal and marginalized" (Hutcheon, "Feminism" 25-26). This does not suggest a shared politics, yet postmodern historiography and feminist history are both discourses that are capable of challenging essentialist and empiricist epistemologies (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 106; Banner 581). Both discourses critique metanarratives, because one account of a past cannot encompass a multitude of experiences (Hutcheon, "Feminism" 26). Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) was formative for third-wave feminism because of her understanding of identity as fluid, provisional, and socially constructed⁵—a view that is shared by postmodern historiography. A subject of inquiry does not possess a "unified or coherent" identity, and those totalising systems whereby historians attempt to capture the identities of past individuals, societies and events cannot adequately capture that contradiction and provisionality (Hutcheon, "Feminism" 12). Both feminist and postmodernist readings thus interrogate the power of representation. Where feminist history critiques patriarchal structures that saw women largely excluded from historical narratives, postmodernists question the structures by which we convert the chaos of the past into historical facts, asking who created these structures (57).

The term 'representation' itself connotes provisionality and signals a distance between the subject and its textualised form; in referring to a representation, we acknowledge "the gap

⁵ Butler opens her text with a criticism of previous feminisms that have "assumed that there is some existing identity, understood through the category of women" (3).

between how we see things and how, potentially, they might be” (Beer 77). The prerogative to construct representations carries the potential to misrepresent subjects, thus misrepresentation has been a continued site of feminist debate (Butler 4). Feminist historians, along with feminists working in other areas such as literary, sociological and cultural studies, critique representations of women and highlight the power implicit to governing depictions of both real and imaginary women (Cranny-Francis et al. 139-40); as Gillian Beer writes, “representations soon become representatives” and there is inherent power in the ability to shape the ways in which subjects are depicted (78). Where the subject of representation is a past individual, she can no longer influence the ways in which her image and reputation is shaped in later generations; thus, the project of gaining an accurate picture is further problematised.

By considering both fictional and non-fictional histories as texts and examples of historical narrative with the capacity to construct subjective representations of past individuals, we can interrogate previously held demarcations between the two ‘genres’ as well as claims to authoritative representation. A critique of the generic conventions, textual cues and literary devices employed by authors of historical narratives offers an additional lens through which to consider the ways the past is constructed. Texts reflect the cultural context in which they were written, regardless of whether their subject is historical or contemporary, and cannot be isolated from the literary, artistic or social context of production (Cranny-Francis et al. 90).

Characterisations of women in both fictional and non-fictional texts are influenced by the gender norms of the period in which that text was written, thereby providing one window through which we can identify and critique gender norms that are contemporaneous to the text (Beer 78).

Gender has come to be recognised as being neither natural nor inherent, but as “socially constructed and socially imposed”—as is the power dynamic and relationships between men and women (Kelly-Gadol 809, 814). As such, the tendency to depict women in terms that are consistent with archetypes and stereotypes of conventional femininity is one important site of feminist discussion and disruption when considering the textual construction of gender (13). In

Fables of Identity, Northrop Frye posits that archetypes and stereotypes are “patterns of imagery” which, although instantly recognisable, are not grounded in reality; their meaning is instead derived from the repetition and building of a “total structure of significance” from random fragments of information (*Fables* 15). For Frye, archetypal criticism is essential because it allows us to consider the images and patterns that appear across multiple texts, and which gain meaning not from one isolated text but from the various modes of artistic and cultural production in which they are invoked (12). Stereotypes refer to the assumption of particular traits (‘women are verbose’) while archetypes are based on particular character types (‘the gossip’), but both modes of characterisation reduce the complexities of human character to limited paradigms and reinforce existing power structures (Cranny-Francis et al. 143). Although stereotypes and archetypes are recognisable and are independent of one another, archetypal characterisations typically rely on stereotypes: the archetype of the wicked stepmother, for example, is reliant on stereotypes about women being nurturing, because it is the failure of the stepmother to adhere to this expectation that renders her wicked. Archetypes influence our reading of any given text; they are made familiar through their repetition and this familiarity means that we recognise the way in which an archetypal character functions, and/or can predict the way they will function, within a text.

While archetypal characterisations can be interpreted in ‘real’ people—Christy Williams argues that the archetype of the ‘wicked stepmother’ is so dominant that real stepmothers report that they feel compelled to defend themselves in light of its characterisation (255)—stereotypes tend to reflect dominant, and often politicised, assumptions about individuals. As such, stereotypes can “preclude the possibilities of subjectivity” because the individuality, contradiction and fluidity of an individual’s persona are replaced by a mere caricature (Aguiar 8). It is because of these implications for subjectivity that stereotypes have been criticised by feminist scholars. Archetypes and stereotypes are often gendered and invoke conventional conceptions of femininity and masculinity (Cranny-Francis et al. 103). The stereotype of women as emotional,

irrational, sensitive and deferential, sits in direct opposition to the stereotype of men as detached, rational and authoritative (104-5). Where both men and women perform similar attributes, there is a difference in terminology depending on which gender is being described: men are prudent, patient, and wise, while women are nurturing, empathetic, and insightful (79).

It is important to challenge gendered stereotypes, and the archetypes that are informed by them, in order to challenge the ways in which women's history has been regarded. Stereotypes about women's abilities and feminine characteristics have underpinned the association between femininity and the private/domestic sphere, while masculinity is frequently associated with the public, political sphere. The gendering of men as intellectual and political meant that their histories were regarded in light of this assumption, while women have regularly been defined by their sexual behaviours or child-bearing capacity, thus their histories have regularly been confined to the private sphere (Smith 5-6). Sue Morgan argues that the disjuncture between private and public spheres, and the subsequent separation between women's history and political history, has been an influential trope of western historiography which saw women's experiences confined to the peripheries of historical study until the late twentieth century (Morgan 383). The change in focus from women's history to gender history acknowledged this dynamic; because the term 'gender' implies both men and women, its use acknowledges "that the world of women" is "part of the world of men", and that the sole focus on women "perpetuates the fiction of the one sphere" (Scott 1056). This designation of separate gendered spheres is, like the act of representation, an expression of power: women's power is limited to and confined within private spaces and is defined by their interpersonal skills (Cranny-Francis, *Feminist 2*). This marginalisation in the historical canon mirrors the marginalisation of women in literary texts and criticism (Hourihan 158); in turn, gendered tropes of representation are at play in both fictional and non-fictional histories.

Intertextual tropes and cues, whether gendered or otherwise, are crucial to the structure of a text and its adherence to, or subversion of a genre (Frow, *Genre* 114). Genre is powerful in

that it guides the ways in which a text is read and the meaning that it conveys (Frow, “Worlds” 129). When historical events are the subject of representation, genre is of interest because the recognised plot structures and tropes of a genre can influence the way in which the subject is represented; as White asserts, the historical narrative mediates between the subject and the “pregeneric plot structures conventionally used in our culture to endow unfamiliar events and situations with meanings” (*Tropics* 88).⁶ Non-fictional histories also emplot the events which they narrate in accordance with style or genre conventions; as White argues, the historical narrative simultaneously points “*toward* the events described in the narrative and *toward* the story type or mythos which the historian has chosen to serve as the icon of the structure of the events” (White, *Tropics* 88, emphasis in original). Historical writing can take the form of a range of different genres beyond the categorisation of texts as fictional or non-fictional. Each of the texts examined in this thesis are examples of historical narratives that represent, rather than capture, the pasts that they describe. Each also employs genre conventions that “announce” to their reader their explicitly fictional mode of representation, or, conversely, “claim a high reality status” (Frow, “Worlds” 134). Genre is thus an important concept within historiography not only because it calls upon modes of narrative such as tragedy or romance, but also because history itself is a genre of writing; as John Frow posits, genres of history “trace the movements and the causal interactions between event and structure, transforming document into narrative and narrative into meanings” (144).

There are generic demarcations amongst non-fictional histories. The genre of biography is often considered to lack the scholarly integrity of other forms of non-fictional history; the focus on one individual is seen to limit the potential for commenting on the broader political and social milieu of the past, while the tradition of biographies written by (women) historians situated outside of the academy has seen the form labelled as amateur history for its purported lack of

⁶ Frye argues that tragedy, romance, comedy, and irony or satire, constitute narrative categories that underpin more narrowly defined genres (*Anatomy* 162). These “pregeneric” categories are apparent in otherwise unrelated texts—for example, Frye cites the work of Geoffrey Chaucer and Jane Austen as comedies, despite their significant differences in genre (162).

professional rigour (Banner 580). The subgenre of ‘women worthies’, although typically authored by men, further undermined the positioning of biography as a reputable genre because its purpose was not historical research or innovation, but moral instruction; individual women were chosen as subjects of research because they were seen to exhibit particular qualities and behaviours that readers of the form would be instructed to either emulate or avoid (Burstein, “Worthies” 592).⁷ As such, this form enforced narrow stereotypes about ideal femininity. A tradition that sought to examine the lives of women did, however, extend beyond the limitations of ‘women worthies’, although the focus on exceptional women was also consistent in other forms of biography. The royal biography was—and, to some degree, remains—a staple of historical writing about women; as such it has come to be seen as a ‘feminised’ genre, because these texts have predominantly, although not exclusively, been written by women and have tended to take queens and princesses as subjects (Burstein, “Royal” 495). Miriam Burstein has argued that Agnes Strickland’s significant contribution to the field in the nineteenth century, particularly with her *Lives of the Queens of England*, has meant that she has become representative of the Victorian author of royal biography (“Strickland” 220). Strickland’s gender is an important aspect in this generalisation, despite approximately half of the nineteenth-century biographies that took women as their subject being written by men (220). Yet Strickland’s commercial success and her engagement with various modes of writing, including fiction and poetry, meant that her work was increasingly critiqued as sentimental, in spite of her extensive archival research and original contribution to knowledge (220-21). Hence, the gendering of biographies contributed to the denigration of women’s histories and women historians.

The biography is not unique as a genre of historical narrative in which women have been prolific. As Diana Wallace contends, historical fiction as a genre has a long-established tradition “of making a space for women” as “readers, writers and subjects” (*Difficulties* 207). Women

⁷ For a discussion of the history and conventions of ‘women worthies’ as a subgenre of biography, see Burstein, (“Worthies” 593-96).

writers—including Georgette Heyer, Jean Plaidy, A. S. Byatt, Margaret Atwood, Jeanette Winterson, Hilary Mantel and Philippa Gregory—have been among the genre’s significant exponents. Recent scholarship influenced by feminist history and historiography has considered the role of historical fiction in re-imagining the lives of those women excluded from traditional metanarratives. Women’s marginalisation from traditional and canonical history meant that they—along with others outside the dominant white, heterosexual, middle class, male discourse—who shared this marginalisation, have been uniquely placed to recognise the limitations of that history; it did not reflect their own experiences, so it could not offer a complete picture of their past (Wallace, *Historical* 2-3). The exclusion of women from the academy saw them seek different media in which to explore the past, and historical fiction offered one such avenue whereby women could engage with historiography and history, and present alternative narratives that encompassed their own experiences (2-3). The capacity of the form to engage with the personal, as well as the political and the public, meant that historical novels could capture a perspective that was otherwise absent from canonical histories. While historiographic metafiction may draw attention to the methods of writing history, writers of historical fiction in its more traditional incarnations have consistently imagined what life may have been like for women absent from historical records.

Numerous historical novelists, argues Wallace, have sought to write the “lives of the conquered, the victimised and the marginalised, those left out of traditional histories written by the (male) victors” (*Historical* ix). Empirical records often neglected the experiences of women, and historical novelists have used the subsequent gaps in knowledge to explore imaginatively those experiences (2), offering a “counter-narrative to the male-authored histories that precede them” (Cooper and Short 3). Unlike the historian, novelists are therefore unhindered by limited evidence about their chosen subject, and can construct narratives about the past that focus on the lives of women. One of the typical features of genres, such as historical fiction, that have been classified as feminine is that they explore the point of view of women (Mabry 195). For

example, a narrative that takes the form of a diary is a common trope in a number of genres that have been associated with women; a diary indicates a private form of expression that documents the experiences of a character who “expresses her identity in her own voice” (198). This should not suggest, however, that women writers produce representations of women that are more accurate because of a shared sex; women are equally exposed to the cultural paradigms that shape the ways that we perceive gender (Beer 79), and women writers are not necessarily feminist writers (Cranny-Francis, *Feminist* 1). Although these novels can be problematic for their representation of women, they are nonetheless capable of imaginatively exploring women’s experiences, making the novel a medium “within which women can be made central” (Wallace, *Historical* ix). Hence, the act of writing (and rewriting) history—whether it is classified as fiction or non-fiction—can be considered to be a significant feminist feat with authors contributing female perspectives to “an ostensibly masculine discourse” (Spongberg 8).

The historical novel does not only offer an avenue by which women who were once excluded from historical narratives can be remembered; the genre also has the capacity to reconsider the ways in which histories of notable women construct the gender of their subjects. Writers of non-fictional historical narratives have also engaged in this project of critiquing prior representations, but the fictional mode again offers greater freedom from the primary source materials. As discussed, contemporary accounts of the past, which are considered to be evidence about the past, are themselves textualised representations of the events and individuals that they describe (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 16). The biases and perspectives of primary sources is an issue with which historians have always contended, yet the work of gender theorists has consolidated the need to consider not only possible political or religious predispositions and prejudices, but also the ways in which observers may have interpreted women’s behaviours in light of their own understandings of gender, and their subjects’ adherence to or deviance from accepted modes of feminine behaviour. As Beer argues, “unless we believe in fixed entities—man and woman—we need to be alert to the processes of gender formation and gender change” (81). Historians are

able to critique limited assumptions of gendered behaviour, but where there is a dearth of material it is often necessary to rely upon biased primary sources regardless of their problematic nature; novelists, on the other hand, can imaginatively construct a character from a range of perspectives. Historical novels can thus act as an “interjection into previous portrayals” of women—such as Anne Boleyn, for instance—who have been continued subjects of historical study (Cooper and Short 3).

Recently identified as “one of the most important” genres for women writers and readers for its capacity to present counter-narratives of established events, historical fiction has nonetheless been neglected in scholarly and literary circles (Wallace, *Historical* 3). First published in Russian in 1937 and translated into English in 1962, Georg Lukács’ *The Historical Novel* is the exception here; the text is considered to be a seminal one in scholarship that addresses the genre. His influence on scholarship in the area is patent, and Walter Scott continues to be cited as the founder of the historical novel in its modern incarnation, in part, because of Lukács’ identification of him as such (Wallace, “Difficulties” 206, 210). Lukács writes from a Marxist perspective; he views history in light of social revolution and upheaval, recognising the capacity of the historical novel to bring to the fore the experiences of those excluded from history with a particular focus on class struggles. Anne Stevens has argued that Lukács’ focus of analysis is not historical fiction, but “a specific type of class-conscious historical novel (6); the Highland clans of Scott’s novels are, for example, “of historical necessity” because they are “always the exploited, the cheated, the deceived” and their “heroic” qualities highlight the immorality and corruption of the “humanly far inferior ... ruling classes” (Lukács 62). The political dimension of this position means that Lukács contends that social realism as a mode of representation is integral to the historical novelist’s ability to critique capitalism and injustice: “honest writers” who are “keenly observant of the real facts of social development” were capable of drawing attention to the false notion of peaceful social development (31).

Yet, in his celebration of social realism and objectivity, Lukács' dismissal of the feminine tradition that preceded Scott is explicit. His opening remarks elucidate this position immediately; he cites Scott's *Waverley*, published in 1814 as an important milestone in the inception of the genre. He concedes that "of course, novels with historical themes are to be found in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries", but states that these "so-called historical novels ... are historical only as regards their purely external choice of theme and costume" (15). He criticises the identification of these texts as Scott's influences because, in his assessment, they lack veracity and literary merit: "it was the fashion to quote a long list of second- and third-rate writers ([Ann] Radcliffe, etc.) who were supposed to be important literary forerunners of his" (29). Thus Lukács' identification of Scott as the creator of a new form, and his definition of historical fiction as a realist mode of representation, dismisses the long tradition of women's writing that had preceded him. Anne Stevens has argued that the contention that Scott invented the genre "is simply not true" (2),⁸ and Wallace explains that Lukács' definition of the historical novel excludes women's writing that appeared after Scott from the canon; because he defines history in terms of societal transformation and the process of 'making history', novels that deal with the daily milieu of an imagined past are rejected as trivial and unhistorical (*Historical* 12). Such a perspective further contributes to the marginalisation of women's experiences, and situates the masculine perspective as universal (12).

An association between femininity and imagination has meant that women's writings about the past were often assumed to lack accuracy and vigour and were thereby relegated to the peripheries of historical writing (Beer 79). The eighteenth-century novel, then a relatively new mode of writing, was considered to lack literary merit because of the absence of an established canon as well as its ease of access and consumption (Eagleton 254). The production and consumption of novels was, unlike theatre, a domestic enterprise that could be conducted in the

⁸ For a detailed discussion of the tradition of historical fiction that predated Scott's 1814 publication of *Waverley*, see Stevens (76-122).

privacy of the home (254-55). Again, the categorisation of the novel as domestic reflects the demarcation of public/masculine and personal/feminine spheres. The novel as a form was regularly considered to be—and was dismissed as—feminine; this was partly because women wrote novels, but also because the form, even when authored by men, was conducive to purportedly feminine subjects, such as domesticity and interpersonal relationships (255). This view has been extended to the historical novel specifically, and Wallace argues that the association between history, as defined by Lukács, and the public sphere is integral to the marginalisation of women's historical novels (*Historical 2*). Women were, she posits, excluded from the events and processes that constituted 'history', such as war and politics, and it is thus unsurprising that women's writing did not engage with these issues on the same scale as their male counterparts (*Historical 2-3*).

Unlike Scott's work that narrated events considered essential to nationhood and empire, women's historical novels centred on the "traditionally feminine concerns" of romance, fantasy and family (Cooper and Short 2). The work of scholars such as Wallace has demonstrated the positive implications of the gendering of historical fiction, particularly with regard to its capacity to offer counter-narratives of the past. The demarcation of the genre as a feminine form has also seen it dismissed for its perceived frivolity and for its failure to produce narratives that adhere to the standards of serious historical research. The formulaic nature of historical fiction and its close counterpart, historical romance, has contributed to its critical neglect (Wallace, "Difficulties" 210). This is, in part, because of the disjuncture between the manner in which scholarly history depicts the past, and the tropes that shape fictional historical narratives; the historical romance, for example, is recognisable for its evocation of the fantasy realm and its focus on a 'marriage plot' or romantic pairing (Lee 52). The term 'romance' has come to denote a love story, although, as Wallace argues, its original usage referred to narratives that adopted a historical setting (*Historical 3*), even when that setting contained fantastical elements. This dual meaning of the

term, she continues, has contributed to the association between historical fiction, particularly that written by women, and romance genres (3).

Historical romances that are believed to represent a past society and its customs accurately are often considered to be distinct from their historically inaccurate counterparts; for example, Jennifer Kloester contends that Heyer has been derided for her early associations with Mills & Boon, before arguing that her “ability to distil the facts of [her chosen] period so effortlessly into prose” contributes to the perception that her novels present the Regency era ‘as it was’ (2, 4-5). The association with purportedly trivial issues and romance, and the assumption that these are almost exclusively feminine interests, means that the genre has been associated with female readership and authorship (Heilmann and Llewellyn, “Introduction” 5). Yet, as Wallace demonstrates, historical romance allowed women to explore and negotiate “normally taboo subjects” including “active female sexuality ... contraception, abortion, childbirth and homosexuality” (*Historical* 6). Thus, the conflation of romance with escapism and frivolity is problematic.

My research draws on scholarship that addresses the necessary textuality of historical writing, and, as such, I argue for the value of reading both non-fiction and fiction texts for their representations of Boleyn. Genres are defined by the shared attributes or conventions of multiple texts, as well as by the ways in which these texts differ from other genres. This is evident in the way that historical fiction, particularly romantic fiction, is positioned in opposition to scholarly history and biography (Curti 31). “The sentimentalized, romanticized history” that is found in historical novels is, as Anna Gething writes, regularly understood to be unlike the objective facts of scholarly history by which it is possible to access truth (191). I employ the same methodology for these texts in order to show the similarities in tropes and rhetoric that are used across generic categories, and which contribute to the construction of the past. This thesis is concerned with two important sites of contestation: the classification of historical narratives as fictional or non-fictional representations of the past, and the representation of gender in historical narratives. As

White's work demonstrates, the narrative structure of purportedly non-fictional histories demonstrates that the past is reconfigured in order to meet the narrative demands of the form. Similarly, a critique of gender in historical narratives requires textual analysis that considers the conventions and techniques that are at play and which are not unique to individual texts. I use postmodern and feminist historiography, as well as literary theory, to interrogate these characterisations of Boleyn. This is because these discourses are concerned with methods and limits of representation, in spite of their significant differences in politics and approaches.

Thesis Outline

This thesis is divided into two sections. The first, "Filling in the Gaps", considers the ways in which historical practice has been addressed by the nine authors whose texts I analyse. The first chapter, "It is a Good Story. But is it True?: Historiography, History and Fiction", compares the ways in which these authors position their writing in relation to historical accuracy and debates concerned with historiography, both within the texts themselves and in the promotional material surrounding their release. It analyses the literary devices that are employed to signal the text's accuracy or, conversely, provisionality. Eustace Chapuys, the Spanish ambassador to England during the period of Henry VIII's separation from Katherine of Aragon and marriage to Anne Boleyn, is a common focal point of such historiographical discussions. Hence, the second chapter, "The Spanish Ambassador: Eustace Chapuys and the Problem of Evidence", looks to the ways in which he and his writings have been represented. His significance as a source for this period means that the treatment of his correspondence as historical evidence, and his dual role as historical actor and commentator, offers an insight into an author's methodology and conception of historiography. As a source of evidence, Chapuys is dismissed or, in contrast, relied upon depending on the author's perspective on wider issues, such as the English Reformation or Henry VIII's kingship; thus an examination of the ways in which he is characterised provides insight as to the perspectives from which authors of historical narratives write.

The second section, “The Unblemished Concubine”, offers a comparative study of representations of Anne Boleyn in historical writing. Each of its chapters look to a specific episode from her past. These events—her time as Henry’s mistress, her queenship and execution—are significant moments from the accepted, verifiable narrative of her life; yet, the circumstances of these events remain opaque, as does Boleyn’s role within them. The third chapter, “‘She Radiated Sex’: Anne Boleyn as Maiden and Mistress”, argues that interpretations of Boleyn’s purported sexual behaviours are integral to the textual constructions of her character, despite these behaviours being largely unknown. The ensuing constructions reflect paradigms of both female sexuality and genre conventions of texts, rather than the actuality of the past. The fourth chapter, “‘I am Jezebel’: Anne Boleyn as Queen”, argues that depictions of Boleyn during the period of her marriage are consistent with archetypal depictions of deviant femininity, including ‘the shrew’, ‘the wicked stepmother’ and ‘the bitch’. It posits that Boleyn’s position as a woman who strives for and, to a degree, holds power is central to the use of archetypes. Boleyn’s ascribed transgression is directly linked to her eventual execution, and authors suggest that her own actions created an environment in which Henry VIII and her enemies were able to act against her. She is thus represented as the agent of her own downfall, and authors emphasise (or invent) manipulative, cruel and deceptive behaviours that are, in turn, represented as self-destructive. The final chapter, “‘She Was Dead Meat’: The Execution of Anne Boleyn”, offers a medievalist reading of representations of Anne Boleyn’s execution. It argues that representations of this event foreground the violence and pageantry of Tudor England, encouraging a macabre curiosity about execution whilst delineating between the medieval and modern worlds. Decapitation is thus ‘othered’, and Henry is subsequently depicted as a tyrant, rather than as a husband who kills his wife.

PART ONE

FILLING IN THE GAPS

CHAPTER ONE

“IT IS A GOOD STORY. BUT IS IT TRUE?” HISTORIOGRAPHY, HISTORY AND FICTION

In 2013, the BBC aired *The Last Days of Anne Boleyn*, a documentary that examined the events of 1536 that culminated in Boleyn’s execution. The documentary largely adhered to established genre conventions, with third-person narration interspersed with dramatic re-enactments and commentary from experts in the field.⁹ However, it was not only historians who featured as experts or ‘talking heads’, but also writers of popular biographies and historical fiction. Amongst those who appeared on the program were George Bernard, Philippa Gregory, Hilary Mantel, Alison Weir and David Starkey. This use of historians, biographers and novelists is evidence of what Jerome de Groot identifies as the intersection of celebrity and historian, and the growing commercialisation of history (*Consuming* 15). The “personality of the presenter” has become an important commodity in the production of television documentaries, particularly with the success of Starkey and Simon Schama’s respective forays into the genre (154).¹⁰ The complex intersection of personality and authority is also apparent in historical writing; the work of historians is increasingly considered alongside that of historical novelists, and “readability” and literary merit is of foremost importance to a text’s critical reception (44). Where historians are expected to produce engaging non-fictional narratives, the success of a historical novel is associated with its capacity to offer an authentic version of the events it narrates. The assumption that historical novelists conduct extensive research was evidenced by the inclusion of Gregory and Mantel in the BBC’s documentary; their novels may be fictional, but these authors are nonetheless recognised for their expertise in their subject.

⁹ De Groot outlines the genre conventions of twenty-first-century historical documentary (*Consuming* 147).

¹⁰ For a discussion of the success of Starkey’s *Monarchy* and Schama’s *A History of Britain*, and the influence of their success on the genre more broadly, see de Groot, *Consuming* 159.

The Last Days of Anne Boleyn also speaks to the problems associated with ascertaining the ‘truth’ of Boleyn’s past. The program did not present a single and unified account of the events that led to her death, rather its experts offered their individual interpretations. The juxtaposition of these conflicting readings of the past emphasised that surviving evidence is limited and that the details of Boleyn’s downfall, like much of her life, are unknown. Although not a unique challenge, the iconography surrounding Boleyn renders the task of writing her history a particularly daunting one. Her role in the English Reformation—as the woman for whom Henry VIII broke with Rome, as the mother of Elizabeth I, and a religious reformer in her own right—coupled with the dramatic nature of her public life saw her become a highly politicised persona. Representations of Boleyn, produced both during her lifetime and in the centuries that have followed, reflect this politicisation. The texts examined in this thesis build upon existing representations of Boleyn whilst also constructing new ones. However, the authors display a degree of anxiety regarding the legitimacy of their own representations and their use of evidence that informs modern understandings of their subject, aware that evidence is both limited in volume and characterised by political and religious upheaval. It is this discourse surrounding issues of authenticity, accuracy and objectivity that is the focus of this chapter.

This chapter will analyse the ways in which questions of authenticity, accuracy and objectivity are addressed within the focus texts and in the commentary surrounding their publication. It will look to discussions of historical practice and authority present in the historical narratives and the devices used by authors to legitimise their historical interpretations, with a particular focus on the historical novels. Those writing scholarly and popular biographies address the issue directly, lamenting the lack of surviving records and explaining their own use of evidence. Novelists, however, express this anxiety with the use of narrative devices that signal knowledge of research practices and methodologies. The narrative itself may incorporate these concerns with the discovery or production of fictional evidence—usually a letter, memoir, or diary—or the characterisation of historical figures or historians who are searching for evidence

regarding Boleyn. Novelists also include appendices, such as an Author's Note or Bibliography, in which they address research practices and engage in discourses concerning history and fiction. Using appendices, public discourse and the narratives themselves, the writers explain their representational choices and methodologies; as such, they demonstrate that their work, even when explicitly fictional, is historically authentic, if not strictly accurate. In doing so, they uphold the perceived dichotomy between history and fiction and the belief that those writing history have a responsibility—to their readers and to the past which they narrate—to offer accurate representations of their subject matter. Mantel is the exception to this approach. *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies* also include an Author's Note, in which Mantel indicates the sources that she consulted in writing the novels; however, rather than asserting the accuracy of her portrayal here and throughout the narrative, she often signals that her representation is provisional. She embraces her own role in constructing one of many possible fictional perspectives that builds on those representations that precede her own, and it is for this reason that she can be considered a writer of historiographic metafiction.

The examples of historical narrative that are analysed in this thesis all construct representations of Anne Boleyn. However, it is important to acknowledge the distinct debates, influences and discourses that surrounded their publication. Included below are brief summaries of each of the texts, listed according to their date of publication. This is so as to provide, first, an explanation of their intended purpose and narrative and, secondly, to address issues specific to each text regarding the way in which their authors have discussed or approached their own engagement with the past.

Philippa Gregory, *The Other Boleyn Girl*: Gregory has been writing historical fiction since 1987. *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2001) is the first novel in her “Tudor Court” series and has been the basis of cinematic and television adaptations. Although *The Women of the Cousins' War* (2011) is her first non-fictional history, she has argued that she was “an established historian” when she wrote *The Other Boleyn Girl* (Gregory, Baldwin and Jones, *Women* 337). It is for this claim that

Gregory has become a focus of criticism—as is demonstrated, for instance, by Susan Bordo’s objection to her “self-deceptive and self-promoting chutzpah” (*Creation* 226). *The Other Boleyn Girl* takes as its protagonist Mary, not Anne, Boleyn. The novel offers a characterisation of Mary that is at odds with dominant representations that have dismissed her as unimportant, or sexualised her because she was a royal mistress.¹¹ The novel is successful in its attempt to bring to the fore an individual who has otherwise been neglected by historians and, to a degree, it challenges the gendered assumptions that have underpinned previous accounts of Mary Boleyn. However, the novel invokes neo-conservative post-feminist ideals, because its heroine is celebrated for eschewing ambition in favour of marriage, motherhood and domesticity, while Anne is punished for her immoral pursuit of power.

David Starkey, *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII*: A noted Tudor historian, Starkey was already a popular public figure prior to writing *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII* (2003) because of his television documentaries that explored England’s monarchy and, in particular, the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I: as Lucy Wooding observes, “father and daughter ... have a great deal to do with making Dr David Starkey so well known” (*Henry* 281). Starkey’s academic background grounds his work in historical research, yet the colourful tone and accessibility of his writing locates it within the category of popular history—a classification that is further evidenced by the release of his books coinciding with a documentary series of the same name. Starkey argues in his introduction to *Six Wives* that the text reconsiders long-held stereotypes about Henry’s queens, but states that “as far as ... Anne Boleyn, is concerned, there was neither the need nor the opportunity for such fundamental reconsideration of character” (xxi). This perspective, he explains, is informed by previous scholarly research, but also the negative tone of contemporary sources: “it has been Anne’s fate to be vilified rather than idealised” and “enemies tend to be rather more honest than friends” (xxi).

¹¹ In “The Infamous Whore Forgotten: Remembering Mary Boleyn in History and Fiction”, published in 2013, I compare Gregory’s depiction of Mary Boleyn in *The Other Boleyn Girl* to subsequent popular biographies and demonstrates that Gregory’s depiction of Mary offers a plausible counter-narrative of Boleyn’s sexual history (Saxton 92-110).

Suzannah Dunn, *The Queen of Subtleties*: Published in 2004, *The Queen of Subtleties* is Dunn's first novel to fictionalise elite Tudor women. The novel consists of a dual narrative in which Anne's autobiography, recounted in a letter to her daughter Elizabeth, is contrasted with popular opinions of her rise and fall. Anne's narrative acts as an imagined historical source, providing an account of Boleyn's life from her own perspective. It also makes *The Queen of Subtleties* the only text in this thesis to take Boleyn as a first-person narrator. The consequences of Anne's readiness to sacrifice others to her own ambition are highlighted by Lucy Cornwallis, who works in the royal kitchens and whose voice constitutes the secondary narrative of the novel. In contrast to Anne's narrative, which is written in retrospect, the alternating chapters by Lucy are written in present-tense and cover the period from 1535-36. Lucy offers an interesting perspective; as a member of the working classes, she is seen to articulate the fear and disgust of the general populace as they witness the upheaval instigated by Henry's annulment of his marriage to Katherine of Aragon. However, her role within the royal kitchens and, in particular, her friendship with the ill-fated Mark Smeaton ensures that her impression of the unfolding events is informed by her proximity to them. As such, her narrative regularly counters Anne's self-perception, drawing connections between Anne's actions as she describes them and their broader ramifications.

Joanna Denny, *Anne Boleyn: A New Life of England's Tragic Queen*: The tone of Denny's 2004 biography is established in its opening paragraph: "No English queen has made more impact on the history of the nation than Anne Boleyn, and few have been so persistently maligned" (1). Asserting that Boleyn has continually been "subjected to accusations and vilification" (1), Denny explicitly positions her history as a response to defamatory accounts. As such, her narrative is an attempted vindication of Boleyn, which depicts her as a woman who "saw for herself that it was possible to be an independent thinker, set free from the pattern of sinful Eve or patient Griselda" (46). She attributes this attitude to "the influence of evangelism", which Denny argues "enabled women of character to take a different path" from their

predecessors (46). The religiosity referred to here is an important focus of Denny's argument, leading Miriam Burstein to describe the text as "Protestant flavoured" ("Afterlife" 7). In this sympathetic appraisal of the reformed religious perspectives and, in turn, those individuals who adopted a reformist stance, Denny characterises Boleyn as a martyr of the Anglican faith.

Eric Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn: 'The Most Happy'* Ives has long been acknowledged as the preeminent authority on Boleyn. Authors who engage with her history consistently reference his work, and he is the author of the biographical entry on Boleyn in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. His biography, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn: 'The Most Happy'* is a revised edition of his 1986 biography, simply entitled *Anne Boleyn*.¹² The revised text adheres to a number of theories outlined in the original, most notably that political factions held significant power in Henry's court and were responsible for Boleyn's rise and, later, her downfall. Likewise, Ives' depiction of Boleyn's character is consistent with his earlier interpretations: she was, he contends, "a figure to be more admired than liked" and was "that Tudor rarity, the self-made woman" (*Life* 196). In his preface he notes the growth in the field of Tudor history, asking "so why yet another book about Anne Boleyn?" (xiii). While he cites a growing awareness of Boleyn's importance to British history, it is also significant that he addresses the work of other prominent historians, including Starkey and Bernard, who wrote biographies in the years following the publication of his original work. For Ives, the work of these historians acts to justify his revision because their scholarship encouraged him to refine, if not significantly amend, his own work, and thereby reinforce his own position as the authority in Boleyn scholarship.

Alison Weir, *The Lady Elizabeth*: Weir has written histories and biographies for a popular audience since the late 1980s, taking the British monarchy as her subject. Her 2006 novel *Innocent Traitor*, which featured Lady Jane Grey as the protagonist, marked her first foray into

¹² The text was not published as a second edition of *Anne Boleyn*, however the distinct similarities between the two texts have been widely noted and, in his review of *The Most Happy*, Peter Gwyn noted that "this second life is essentially the same book; much of it is word for word the same, and even where on a first view there appears to be change, with for instance new chapter headings, this turns out to be often merely a rearrangement of the original text with some superficial rewriting" (1081).

historical fiction. Weir has argued that her experience as an author of non-fiction narratives means that her novels are grounded in historical research, but she also dramatises events that she does not believe occurred. Her novel, *The Lady Elizabeth* (2008) begins in 1536 as the two-year-old Elizabeth is informed of her mother's execution, and concludes in 1558 when she becomes Queen of England. Anne Boleyn is an essential, if absent, element of its narrative; it is her absence, not her presence that is of interest. The question of how Boleyn's dubious legacy impacted her daughter is a central theme of the novel and Elizabeth is perpetually uncertain as to how she should remember her mother. As a young woman Elizabeth is also confined to the Tower under suspicion of treason and, facing a similar fate, she not only empathises with her mother's plight, but also craves further knowledge; she believes that "the truth of her mother's fate" would "in some way ... give her courage" (388).

Weir, *The Lady in the Tower: The Fall of Anne Boleyn*. Weir describes her non-fiction works, including her 2009 text, *The Lady in the Tower: The Fall of Anne Boleyn*, as popular history, and argues that this label denotes her "accessible and entertaining" style of prose rather than the validity of her interpretations (Weir, "Author"). She argues that her own analysis is "based largely on original sources", the "conclusions" that she reaches "are her own" and that any resemblance to prior scholarship is "pure coincidence" (Weir, *Tower 2*). Although she "pay[s] tribute" to Ives' work, she writes that she "left reading all the modern biographies" until the text was "in its penultimate draft" (2). The text focuses on Boleyn's arrest and execution and the circumstances that created an environment in which this could have occurred (1). As such, Boleyn's actions prior to her downfall are a prominent focus of the text; for example, Weir considers Boleyn's interactions with her husband and her stepdaughter, and draws connections between these relationships and Boleyn's execution. She suggests that Anne was innocent of the crimes for which she was condemned but argues that her own behaviour made her a focus of animosity, creating a climate in which the accusations were possible. "In a word", Weir argues,

“Anne was probably framed”, but asserts that it was her own actions that made her a viable target (190).

G. W. Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions*: As a professor of early modern history at the University of Southampton, Bernard engages directly with academic debates surrounding the history of Anne Boleyn, and the reign of Henry VIII more broadly. *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions* (2010) draws together the research that Bernard has published in academic journals, presenting his refutation of interpretations that assert both her innocence and her religiosity.¹³ The brief biography that Bernard offers focuses on these areas of contestation and, in particular, his thesis that she was guilty of her alleged crimes. Amongst the authors whose work is examined in this thesis, he is the only one to argue that she was guilty. In addressing this central question, he examines those aspects of Boleyn’s story that define the way in which she is characterised in historical writing: her assumed rejection of Henry’s sexual advances, her role as an advocate for religious reform, and the extent of her political influence (*Fatal* 193). He acknowledges this deviation from previously held positions, writing that “the Anne Boleyn presented in this book is not the Anne Boleyn found in most accounts of her life” (193). Not only are other academic positions referenced here, but also the existence of numerous literary incarnations of his subject. His stated purpose is, however, “quite simply ... to recover the historical Anne Boleyn” (193).

Emily Purdy, *The Tudor Wife*: Purdy’s *The Tudor Wife* was published in 2010 and takes as protagonist Lady Jane Rochford, the wife of George Boleyn.¹⁴ Purdy has not published non-fictional histories and her website positions—and thus markets—her work in relation to other lucrative twenty-first-century examples of historical fiction: her novels ostensibly combine “the sumptuous historical detail of Philippa Gregory’s novels with the lust and authenticity of the

¹³ For example, see Bernard, “Fall” 584-610; “Rejoinder” 665-74; “Religion” 1-20.

¹⁴ This novel was published in the United States under the title *The Boleyn Wife* where the novel is attributed to Brandy Purdy. Throughout this thesis, I refer to the English edition, *The Tudor Wife*, which is published under the author’s pen name, Emily Purdy.

hugely successful TV series *The Tudors*". Like Gregory's *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Purdy's novel takes a maligned and marginalised member of the Boleyn family as protagonist and explores the historical events from her imagined perspective. However, like Gregory, Purdy is concerned primarily with Anne. Jane accused her husband of incest with his sister Anne, the crime for which they were both condemned, and was executed herself in 1542 for facilitating and concealing Katherine Howard's adultery. Jane's antipathy for Anne and her misguided love for George dominate this narrative, and eventually lead her to testify against them in court: Anne's greatest shortcoming is that she is the embodiment of all that Jane wishes to be and, most importantly, was loved by George.

Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*: Mantel's *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*, the first two instalments of a planned trilogy that fictionalises Thomas Cromwell's political career, have been successful both commercially and critically.¹⁵ An established author of historical and contemporary fiction, Mantel received the 2009 and 2012 Man Booker prizes for *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies* respectively—a feat that Diana Wallace has described as “an important turning point in the respectability” of historical fiction as a genre (“Difficulties” 206).¹⁶ *Wolf Hall* (2009) charts the period of Henry and Anne's relationship, from the first rumours that Henry desires a divorce, to Thomas More's execution. *Bring up the Bodies* (2012) continues this story to the point of Anne's own execution. Boleyn is at the centre of the key political issues of the day and her presence drives these narratives, although she is a somewhat distant figure. Cromwell develops a professional, but intermittently antagonistic, relationship with Anne who, as in previous renditions, is intelligent, controlling, ambitious and quick-tempered: “There is one quick way to please that lady”, Cromwell observes, “and that is to crown her queen” (*Wolf* 166). The association between Cromwell and Boleyn is not a personal one and, although Anne is

¹⁵ Because these novels are two instalments of the one series, they are considered as one ‘text’ in this thesis.

¹⁶ Although Mantel's critical success has, as Wallace argues, focused renewed critical attention on historical fiction as a form, the awarding of the prestigious Man Booker to a writer of historical fiction was not unprecedented. Writing in 1997, Nünning states that ten works of historiographic metafiction had been awarded the prize since 1969 (217).

outspoken regarding affairs of state, her private thoughts and desires are rarely exposed. Mantel's work is the only example of historiographic metafiction in this thesis. Her novels are notable for the ways in which they first "install and then blur the line between history and fiction" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 113). She fictionalises known events and individuals, and while the novels have been commended for their historical accuracy, the authorial voice regularly reminds the reader that this world is illusory.

Accuracy and Authenticity

Anne Boleyn has been a subject of "plays, opera, fiction, popular biography, film and, most recently, television" since Shakespeare fictionalised her history in the seventeenth century (Ives, *Life* xiii). The number of cultural productions dedicated to her has only grown in the early-twenty-first century. Representations of the past outside of the realm of academia became increasingly common in the 1990s, and 'history' has come to be recognised not only as a scholarly discipline, but as a "brand or discourse" that "pervades popular culture" in various media (de Groot, "Empathy" 391-92). Despite authors' own perspectives on postmodern historiography their work must engage with the central issues that are raised by this theoretical perspective: subjectivity, fictionalisation, authority and truth. In the previous section, the brief introduction to the authors and texts that are analysed in the chapters of this thesis discussed the genre conventions and the background of the authors; although this is a conventional and necessary starting point, such a summary outline cannot account for the ways in which problems of truth and truthfulness are addressed. The following section discusses the ways in which these problems manifest in both fiction and non-fiction accounts of Anne Boleyn, and propounds my mode of addressing the distinctions between 'truth' and 'fiction', accuracy and authenticity.

In her speech for the British Library's podcast series *Henry VIII: Man and Monarch*, Mantel suggested that historical fictions are a site of ironic interplay between author and reader who are continually "nudging each other and saying this is a fiction you know, and this is one

representation. It is one of many possible representations”. Here, Mantel embraces her own role in constructing representations of the past and thereby gestures toward postmodern historiographical discourse. Such discourse, which interrogates the necessary fictionalisation of the past in historical narratives, has encouraged an emerging self-reflexivity about the mutability of the past in historical writing. Of course, not all historical novelists hold a postmodern perspective; in the postmodern era, however, the subjectivity of experience is invariably recognised, and thus “it is no longer possible” to emulate Walter Scott’s style, for instance, in which “extensive research” is seen to underpin an “omniscient, authoritative view” (Margaronis 139). Twenty-first-century histories are therefore necessarily situated at an intersection of postmodern discourse and a competitive marketplace, and authors see a need to justify their own interpretations of the periods that they narrate. As Beverley Southgate has noted, the relationship between history and fiction has long been considered problematic, as has the question of whether the two can be disentangled; this site of contestation has been heightened by the proliferation of popular incarnations of history in the form of documentaries, historical novels and television dramas (172-73). Thus, Mantel not only speaks as a writer of historiographic metafiction—as defined earlier, a historical fiction that engages with, or invokes ideas consistent with, postmodern historiography—but also as a writer of historical fiction in an increasingly crowded marketplace.

Writers of non-fictional histories have acknowledged the popular and literary appeal of the Tudor period and, in particular, the life of Anne Boleyn: Starkey describes Henry’s marital career as “one of the world’s great stories”, containing “a world of literature within itself” because it is “both a great love story and a supreme political thriller” (Starkey xv), while Weir argues that Anne has “become a figure of romantic mythology and a part of our national folklore” (*Tower* 335). Whilst recognising the appeal of Boleyn’s history for a non-academic audience, historians distinguish between literary incarnations and the truth of the past. For example, Starkey reminds his readers that, in spite of the ascribed literary nature of the events and

individuals that he narrates, this narrative “is true” (Starkey xv). Where the records are insufficient to determine the truth, historians, like Bernard, covet the freedom of imagination enjoyed by historical novelists: “we can do no more than speculate ... once more that must be left to the imagination of historical novelists” (*Fatal* 10). Demarcations that are made between truth and fiction mean that the veracity of representations—and misrepresentations—of the past in historical writing becomes a site of debate, in both the narratives themselves and the surrounding discourse.

Appraisals of an historian’s work tend to focus on methodology or bias. In contrast, discussions of historical fiction regularly consider the notions of accuracy and authenticity. Historical accuracy is seen to be a marker of literary merit (Stocker 309)—itself a subjective assessment—while texts that are classified as ‘pop’ are often interrogated for inaccuracies more closely than those that are considered to be ‘literary’ (Bordo, “Fictionalised”). An emphasis on accuracy, as Anne Stevens explains, has been a feature of criticism of historical novels since the nineteenth century; this contestation has contributed to the establishment of “a set of rules” which dictate “the amount of [historical] detail appropriate to a novel” (149). “Too little information about the setting” can contribute to a perception that a text lacks the required detail to be considered *historical* fiction—that is, fiction that explores the past—and instead appropriates the past as the mere backdrop for a contemporary narrative (149). The “rules” that are outlined by Stevens thus relate to accuracy, stipulating, for example, that a novelist should avoid didacticism as well as inaccuracies and anachronisms (149). The importance that has been placed on accuracy has been explained in terms of authenticity; in order to be a convincing account of the past, historical details such as clothing, setting or language must be accurate (Stocker 308-9).

In this discourse, the terms ‘accuracy’ and ‘authenticity’ are regularly used interchangeably and typically refer to a text’s ascribed adherence to established historical facts and narratives. Yet I would argue that there is a distinction between historical accuracy and historical authenticity. A text, although accurate in its representation of what is known to have occurred in the past that it

represents, can be considered inauthentic if it does not reflect the (individual) reader's understanding of that past. Writing about historical film, Natalie Zemon Davis defines "authenticity" as the qualities that make a fictional representation of the past "seem real and worthy of belief" ("Resemblance" 270). Such appraisals are subjective and are shaped by the prior representations of the past that have been encountered by an individual reader. Such perceptions can be informed by historical research; however historical novelists necessarily engage with aspects of the past that are both unknown and unknowable, and their assertions cannot always be supported by research. Authenticity is an abstract concept, defined as "the spirit of an era rather than its actuality" (Stocker 310). These novels can, nonetheless, be criticised as inauthentic, as is evidenced by criticism of Dunn's *The Queen of Subtleties* and Gregory's *The Other Boleyn Girl*.

The colloquial tone of Dunn's language has been identified as dissonant because the early modern setting of the novel is disrupted by the inclusion of modern speech. As de Groot has noted, "Dunn's characters swear at each other, speak in slang that is recognisable to the contemporary reader, and refer to each other as 'Charlie', 'Tom' or 'Billy'" (*Consuming* 221). Dunn has defended this stylistic choice in an interview featured on the Harper Collins website. When asked why she chose not to use sixteenth-century English vernacular, she responded:

Can I ask you how you know what the vernacular of 16th century England was?! My line on this is that we have no idea how people spoke in those days. We know how they wrote, but that's always very different ... Rather than go for some idea of how we feel people might have spoken, some cod-olde-English, I decided to write it in 'normal English'. (Dunn, "Interview")

Dunn's use of modern English thus represents a "fundamental 'what-if' fictional postulation" (de Groot, *Consuming* 221): our inability to know exactly how people spoke means that this aspect of her text cannot be marked as entirely inaccurate. Dunn does, however, acknowledge that her novel may be read as inauthentic and "admit[s]" to knowing that "some people would hate it,

that it would ‘ring untrue’ to them” (“Interview”). A sense of in/authenticity can be informed by genre or reading habits, for example, rather than historical knowledge. Expectations are thus informed, Dunn argues, by a sense of “what a historical novel should be” rather than knowledge of the past itself. This intertextual element also means that interpretations of authenticity are subjective. One reader may interpret a text as capturing a sense of authenticity while others may not feel that a text captures *their* understanding of the past. This is reflected in Dunn’s own preference for language that provides “a clear window on the characters and their lives” arguing that attempts to replicate sixteenth-century English vernacular can be jarring: “for me, as a reader, any ‘thee’ and ‘thou’, or even any ‘did not’ rather than ‘didn’t’, gets in the way” (“Interview”).

Gregory has, like Dunn, been criticised for the inaccuracy of her novel. A particular focus of this criticism has been her depiction of Boleyn as having committed incest. Bordo, for example, condemns Gregory’s unlikable Anne and the historical inaccuracies that inform this portrayal (*Creation* 224), titling the chapter dedicated to the novel “Chapuys’ Revenge”—a reference to the Spanish ambassador whose enmity for Boleyn is explicit in his correspondence (219). While she criticises the “viciousness” of Gregory’s portrayal, it is the novel’s historical inaccuracies to which she primarily objects, compiling “*The Other Boleyn Girl* Fact-Checker”, a list of inaccuracies that occur in the book and in its filmic adaptation (224-5). Bordo’s identification of the incestuous relationship between Anne and George—a desperate Anne has sex with her brother in the hope of conceiving a son that she can pretend was fathered by Henry—as a “concocted fiction” (224), makes apparent the distinction between accuracy and authenticity. For Bordo, Gregory’s narrative is inaccurate because its fictional elements extend beyond merely addressing unknowns by fictionalising emotions, private thoughts or, like Dunn, the spoken language of the age: Gregory is not only “imaginatively inventive” but “defends her narrative choices as history too” (226). Bordo’s reaction is, however, arguably as unsubstantiated as Gregory’s. Incest was one of the charges levelled at Boleyn: she and her brother were both found

guilty and executed. By no means does this constitute evidence that Anne and George Boleyn were guilty of this crime; however Gregory cannot be held responsible for concocting this allegation. Bordo dismisses Gregory's assertions that her representation is grounded in evidence: "the historical record' here seems to be that she was found guilty by Henry's rigged court" (226). In spite of her disdainful tone, Bordo thus concedes that there is a historical basis for Gregory's plot choices; but Bordo's overall objection to the depiction of Anne "coercing her brother to have sex with her" is informed by her own interpretation of the allegations (220). While insufficient evidence means that historians continue to debate Boleyn's guilt, Bordo's belief in Boleyn's innocence renders Gregory's representation as inauthentic.

Marketing Methodologies

The research process is integral to a perception of authenticity. As such, novelists are regularly seen to defend their research and display a "politicized desire to lay bare the workings of the past" (de Groot, "Ethics" 14). Gregory, for example, asserts that she undertook extensive reading and visited locations that would be "key in the novel or that were key to the character" ("Pfaff" 58), and her official website passionately declares her "love for history and commitment to historical accuracy". This is not only symptomatic of a desire to be regarded as an author of 'literary' historical fiction—as contrasted with 'bodice-rippers' or 'airport fiction'—but the reiteration of scholarly research practice is also regularly framed in moral terms: historical inaccuracies are seen as a disservice not only to readers, but also to the subjects of representation.

The notion that the historical novelist's role is to fill in the gaps between known facts, not to fictionalise the accepted historical record, is a pervasive one. Despite the explicitly fictional status of their texts, historical novelists are regularly considered to have a moral responsibility not to deceive their readers and not to misrepresent deceased individuals. It is regularly defined as an "active duty to history" and to the past itself, as well as a "political and moral duty" to those readers who acquire knowledge about the past from these novels and who should not be deliberately deceived (de Groot, "Ethics" 14-15). As de Groot has noted, novelists "happily point

out that they are lying to the reader” because their narratives adhere to the conventions of fiction; yet authors nonetheless “seek not to misrepresent” the events and individuals they fictionalise (“Ethics” 13-14).

The moral responsibility of fictional narratives has been addressed by authors of fictional and non-fictional narratives about Anne Boleyn. Bernard states that those who write fiction may be “perfectly free to use their imaginations to fill in the enormous gaps in our knowledge”, but they should be aware that the representations they produce have the potential to determine the ways their readers view the past (ix). He writes that fictional representations are “powerful and make a deep impact” and it is this quality that means novelists “risk embedding images that are at best fanciful and at worst downright false” (ix). For Weir, the balance of fact and fiction in her novels is delicate, but important. In a podcast for National Public Radio—tellingly entitled “Writing the Well-Researched Bodice Ripper”—Weir argued, “where the facts exist, a historical novelist should use them”. She asserts that the “heady sense of freedom” when imaginatively “get[ting] into the head of your characters” is something that historians cannot experience, yet she maintains that she will only “make things up” when she “can legitimately do so. When the facts are there, I have kept to them” (Weir, “Q&A” 90). Indeed, Weir has even clarified that the “supernatural scenes” included in *The Lady Elizabeth* are fiction (487), demonstrating the lengths to which she will go to avoid deceiving her readers and to ensure that her forays into fiction do not undermine her reputation as an historian. She explains that she places such high importance on historical accuracy because the historical novel is an important avenue through which historical knowledge is accessed and that many readers care passionately that “what they’re reading is close to the truth” (“Q&A” 90). Indeed, the biography section of her website explains that her own introduction to history was made via fiction (Weir, “Author”). She describes her experience of being “so enthralled” by a historical novel about Katherine of Aragon as a teenager that she “dashed off to read real history books to find out the truth” (Weir, “Author”)—a recollection that relies on a dichotomy between entertainment/fiction and ‘real’ history/truth.

It is because of the didactic component of historical fiction that Gregory has been widely criticised for describing herself as a “trained historian”, and for asserting that her novels describe “the full context of the dramatic political, religious and social changes of the time” in which they are set (“History”). While she is not unique in emphasising the research that she conducts, she has been accused of deceiving her readers by describing herself as an historian. Gregory’s use of the term historian does not denote formal qualifications, and her doctorate is in literature (Bordo, *Creation* 226). She has referred to her “way of understanding the world” (Gregory, “Born” 242) as an inclination to think ‘historically’: she believes that her “tendency to look at the story behind the story is such that I’d always be a historical writer” (“Pfaff” 58). In her article “Born a Writer: Forged as a Historian”, she discusses the historian’s role in abstract terms; she considers that their task is to “keep [the past] alive in people’s memories”, to “explain how a recent conflict came about” and “to see the world as a product of its past” (239). Her definition of the historian’s role, although vague, is an apt description of her own role as a writer of historical fiction. Gregory has, however, become a focus of discussions concerning the ethics of writing historical fiction by describing herself as an historian. It is this description that angers Bordo, for example: “it’s Gregory’s insistence on her meticulous adherence to history that most aggravates the scholars” (*Creation* 229). Gregory’s own rhetoric regarding historical writing and practice echoes that of Weir, as she declares that a “convincing lie is a wicked thing because it replaces the truth. If a lie is told with conviction and accepted as the sound coin of fact then no-one will question it” (“Born” 241). Bordo has expressed her “surprise” at this sentiment and writes, “it’s very puzzling that Gregory does not see that her work is guilty of that” (*Creation* 229). It is not, however, Gregory’s adoption of the status of historian at which Bordo takes umbrage—she asserts, “I wouldn’t be hammering away at Gregory if it were only her arrogance at issue” (*Creation* 228)—but rather at the potential for readers, particularly young readers, to believe an inaccurate and inauthentic portrayal of Boleyn (*Creation* 228). Gregory, Bordo posits, “justifies highly inventive, provocative choices by invoking history”, and when novelists and filmmakers

do this, “we’ve lost whatever compass we have left (and it's gotten pretty fragile) for sorting out fiction from fact” (“Fictionalised”).

Authors of non-fictional historical narratives have also engaged with this discourse, differentiating their own work from that of their fictional counterparts. For example, Bernard directly criticises the role of historical fiction in shaping popular understandings of Boleyn and her milieu, and asserts that there exists a clear dichotomy between fictional and non-fictional representations of the past. Accessing available sources is, however, a challenge and Bernard, like others before him, at times enters the realm of speculation in his written representations of his subject. Bernard, as a historian, indicates to the reader that he is vigilant against failing to demarcate between speculation and demonstrable fact in his narrative: where evidence is “tantalisingly inconclusive or frustratingly absent”, his approach is to “ask questions at every turn, always show where ... information comes from ... and to share with you my reasoning, and indeed my speculation, albeit I hope informed speculation” (ix). Likewise, when considering a particular primary source, Starkey acknowledges that “it is a good story” before questioning “but it is true?” (276); he thus acknowledges that contemporary reports can be engaging as narratives, but that this quality does not necessarily make them accurate. As such, he draws a distinction between a ‘good story’ and historical research. Bernard and Starkey thus foreground their own positions as credible commentators. The explicit acknowledgement of fallibility that signals instances of speculation does not detract from this insinuation of authority, but instead sets his work apart from historical fictions that do not signal deviations from the truth.

Public discourse and promotional material provide avenues through which authors have attested to the accuracy or authenticity of their narratives. Novelists have also addressed their own research methods through appendices, such as an Author’s Note, Epilogue or Bibliography. The inclusion of such a device is common, and Purdy is the only novelist included in this thesis who does not do so. Listing works consulted during the writing of the novel provides a degree of credibility to the text, demonstrating that the novelist has conducted significant research.

Acknowledgements of historians whose work informed the novel's narrative are common and, while such an acknowledgement implies practices of academic honesty, it can also act to present the novelist as well-informed. Through the use of this device, novelists typically assert their own authority as an historical commentator by explaining the varied means by which they gathered the information to support their position—or, conversely, highlighting the aspects of the narrative that were entirely imagined. Such clarifications are typically concerned with controversial narrative choices and are described in detail in an Author's Note or Epilogue.

In her Author's Note to *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Gregory cites historian Retha Warnicke's book *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, stating that she is "indebted" to Warnicke because her text "has been a most helpful source for this story" (531). Warnicke's "original and provocative thesis", she writes, informed her own narrative in which George Boleyn and his companions engage in homosexual acts, and Anne Boleyn miscarries a deformed foetus (531). In referencing Warnicke, Gregory justifies these contentious inclusions by evoking the authority of a known historian, and asserts that the events are not wholly fictional but are supported by evidence. Like Gregory, Weir uses historical research to legitimise her narrative choices; however, she refers to her own position as a historian and, as such, describes primary research that she has conducted, rather than citing the work of others. Like Bernard, she draws a clear distinction between history and fiction yet, as a writer of both genres, she describes her care in distinguishing between her complementary but vastly different roles as historian and novelist; her work as a historian lends credibility to her novels, yet she dramatises events that she does not believe occurred in the past. In her "Author's Note" in *The Lady Elizabeth*, she defends her choice to portray Elizabeth as having fallen pregnant to Thomas Seymour and suffering a miscarriage by identifying contemporary "rumours" and "gossip" which constitute the "original sources on which I based this part of the novel" (485-86). Weir also draws the reader's attention to those aspects of her narrative that are merely speculative, and differentiates between her choices as a novelist and what she believes occurred (485).

Weir demonstrates a belief that the historical novel is a site that allows a speculative exploration of the past in a manner not permitted in non-fiction, whilst indicating where such fictionalisation occurs and, in so doing, perpetuating the separation between ‘history’ and ‘fiction’. For Mantel, however, the past is mutable, and the disjuncture between the past and history replaces that between fact and fiction. Her “Author’s Note” in both *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies* are not unlike those that appear in Gregory and Weir’s novels. She acknowledges the historians whose work informed her own, writing that she is “indebted to the work of Eric Ives, David Loades, Alison Weir, G. W. Bernard, Retha Warnicke and many other historians of the Boleyns and their downfall” (*Bodies* 410). Moreover, she addresses primary sources that are written by individuals who are featured as characters in the novel, such as George Cavendish’s *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*: “it is not always accurate, but it is a very touching, immediate and readable account of Wolsey’s career and Thomas Cromwell’s part in it” (*Wolf* 651). These references to primary and secondary sources do not “lend a feeling of verifiability”, a tendency that Hutcheon associates with conventional historical fiction, but instead play “upon the truth and lies of the historical record” (*Poetics* 114): Cavendish’s text is of interest *because* it is a personal, subjective account. As well as adhering to these conventions of acknowledgement, she also addresses postmodern historiography in her “Author’s Note” to *Bring up the Bodies*. “A mercurial woman, elusive in her lifetime”, she writes, “Anne is still changing centuries after her death, carrying the projections of those who read and write about her” (409). She joins other authors in addressing the problematic nature of evidence pertaining to Boleyn, characterising “the sources” as “dubious, tainted and after-the-fact” (409). Yet rather than referencing a particular historian’s interpretation to justify the accuracy of her own plot, as Gregory does, or explaining the reasons why she chose to dramatise episodes in a particular way, like Weir, Mantel declares that *Bring up the Bodies* is merely one of many possible representations of this past. She “is not claiming authority” for her version of events (409), but instead, by exploring how the fall of Anne Boleyn

“might have looked from Thomas Cromwell’s point of view” (409), she demonstrates that her representation is both provisional and subjective, particularly to one character’s perspective.

Mantel’s awareness of historical practice and engagement with postmodern historiography is not confined to appendices. The mutability of the past in historical narratives is a recurring theme in both *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*. Mantel’s narratives contain extensive imagined detail, encouraging a perception of authenticity, with her reader bearing witness to the innermost thoughts, backgrounds, fears and hopes of her characters. A number of novelists resist deviating from the historical record, fictionalising only established and verifiable events; in the Harper Collins interview, Dunn explained that the easiest aspect of writing *The Queen of Subtleties* was that she “already had the plot”; she wrote “a list of ‘events’ (in Anne’s life) at my side” and simply “worked down that list”. The limitation of this approach is that Dunn fictionalises only ‘events’ that have already been transformed into ‘facts’ by historians;¹⁷ she therefore writes only of those events that have been deemed to be important historically, rather than imagining unrecorded events that could have been personally significant to her fictionalised Anne, which may have allowed for a different characterisation.

In contrast, Mantel explores aspects of the past that are lost and cannot be known, particularly her protagonist’s life prior to his employment by Cardinal Wolsey; as she stated in her British Library podcast, this is the point at which “the name of Thomas Cromwell begins to appear on the historical record”. Mantel does not fictionalise established and known events, preferring, as she told her audience at the British Library, to “build her edifice of speculation on some foundation”. Despite the novels’ foundation in historical research, it is also clear that this Cromwell is a construction. The third-person narration is closely associated with the character of Cromwell, in that he is the sole focus of the narrative and the reader is privy to his private thoughts, and his only. Third-person pronouns are used throughout and Mantel’s narrator is

¹⁷ White explains the process by which historians construct historical events, arguing, “for modern historical studies, a historical event is any occurrence that lends itself to investigation by the techniques and procedures currently in force among the guild of professional historians” (*Practical* 43).

identified as “he” or “he, Cromwell”. Despite Cromwell taking the place as the narrator, a first-person narration, typical of such a perspective, is not utilised here (Farner 211-12); Mantel instead employs a first-person narrative *style*, but from a third-person perspective. The narrative thus deviates from the conventional use of third-person narrative, in which “the narrator of a third-person narrative is not identical with any of the characters involved in the action” (Farner 211), because the narrator-figure, although written in the third-person, is an active character. The reader is thus reminded that, although it may *appear* that Cromwell is speaking to us, it is Mantel who is writing this story.

In light of this perspective, the text not only explores the metanarrative of Tudor history, but also devises events that are personally significant for Mantel’s Cromwell; for instance, we learn of the angel costume made from peacock feathers that his daughter, Grace, wears one Christmas (Mantel, *Wolf* 174). Unlike Dunn’s Anne, who conveys established facts that are significant to Henry’s VIII’s reign, Mantel’s Cromwell relays wholly fictional exchanges and events that are personally significant to this character. These details are fabricated, but add to the richness of Cromwell’s narrative, rendering him an authentic and fully formed character. This additional ‘detail’ acknowledges that there are innumerable aspects of this past that are lost and, if they are included in a historical narrative, must be fictionalised. Paradoxically, this greater expansion of the narrative through entirely imagined events and affects, rather than solely reiterating accepted ‘facts’, means that the text can be read as *authentic*. Historical novels are not only required to narrate an aspect of the past, but must also “convince, persuade and entrap the reader into that willing suspension of disbelief that would never be the project of the historian” (Duncker 64), and it is in this regard that the additional detail provided by Mantel contributes to novels’ sense of authenticity. Mantel’s characterisation of Cromwell is the fictional lens through which she views Henry VIII’s court; in constructing a personal history for Cromwell prior to his rise to prominence and exploring his experiences beyond the metanarrative of Tudor history, she provides context for this imagined perspective.

Although some of the events of the novel have no basis in fact and are entirely fictional, she regularly reminds her reader that this world is merely an illusion, and thereby “install[s] and then blur[s] the line between history and fiction” (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 113). For example, her protagonist Cromwell reflects on the intangible nature of identity. He accuses Thomas More of arrogance and hypocrisy rebuking him for asserting his own righteousness in the name of Catholicism and its legacy:

‘You call history to your aid, but what is history to you?’, Cromwell exclaims, ‘It is a mirror that flatters Thomas More. But I have another mirror, I hold it up and it shows a vain and dangerous man, and when I turn it about it shows a killer, for you will drag down with you God knows how many, who will only have the suffering and not your martyr’s gratification’ (*Wolf* 566).

In referring to a figurative historical mirror, Mantel alerts her reader to the mutability of history and the subjective quality of history, highlighting the importance of individual perspectives in narrating the past. She simultaneously dismantles the self-perception of More the character, and the dominant characterisation of him with which her readers may be familiar: More has, argues Duncker, “enjoyed a reputation for saintly integrity, as a man of principle who stood up to the king’s bullying” (61). Mantel disrupts the image of More as “the brilliant scholar, devout Christian, loyal subject and chancellor who chooses God over country ... the epitome of noble righteousness” and signals that this is merely one of innumerable interpretations of his character (Kavanagh 13). Mantel does not preference her own portrayal, but instead merely reminds her reader that identity is mutable, and no representations can be definitive.

It is on account of this self-reflexive quality that both *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies* can be considered historiographic metafiction. Linda Hutcheon’s category, as discussed in the introduction, refers to those novels that query the authority of historical narratives and empiricist epistemologies (*Poetics* 106); in these novels, which use the conventions of the historical novel, issues of authorship, subjectivity and identity are questioned, and “the very possibility of

historical knowledge” is problematised (106). Many authors of both fiction and non-fiction describe the challenge of accessing the truth of the past; yet nonetheless hold that an objective account is possible. Such a view is evident in Denny’s introduction in which she asserts: “the past is a reality that exists far beyond our reach. We try to stretch out and touch the lives of these astonishing men and women, seeking to understand their characters and motivation” (1). She gestures here towards a postmodern understanding of the past as ephemeral, but her acknowledgement of inaccessibility only encourages Denny to declare, “it is time for a fresh look at the facts” (3). In contrast, Mantel’s text asserts that no examination of ‘the facts’ could offer a wholly accurate image.

Cromwell is again seen to reflect on the fluidity of persona in *Bring up the Bodies*, as he contemplates the weathered monuments to the dead: “we think time cannot touch the dead, but it touches their monuments, leaving them snub-nosed and stub-fingered from the accidents and attrition of time” (10). This imagery acts as a metaphor for the potentially distorted ways in which the memory of these historical persons is later invoked. As the past becomes increasingly distant, the personas of the dead gradually become distinct from the individuals who once lived and these monuments require intervention from the living so as to preserve their memory. Their descendants remind themselves to “mend” their “forefathers”, but they neglect this task, preferring to protect and inflate the accomplishments of their ancestors: heirlooms that attest to “their achievements and bearings, are kept always paint-fresh” while “in talk” they “embellish their deed[s]” (10). Transgressions are, in turn, forgotten and, “if their fathers and grandfathers picked the wrong side” during the Wars of the Roses between the rival royal houses of Lancaster and York, “they keep quiet about it” (10). Cromwell’s commentary on the ability of England’s nobility to re-forge identities and, in so doing, rewrite history, emphasises the disjunction between Mantel’s narrative and the past that once existed.

The dénouement of *Wolf Hall* sees Cromwell reflect on the death of the recently executed Thomas More, recalling his childhood fear of the deceased: “He knows different now. It’s the

living that turn and chase the dead. The long bones and skulls are tumbled from their shrouds, and words like stones thrust into their rattling mouths: we edit their writings, we rewrite their lives” (649). This passage sees Cromwell reflect on the identities of his dead contemporaries but it also foregrounds Mantel’s own role in placing words into the mouths of the dead—her characters. She does not preference her own portrayal, but instead reminds her readers that identity, like the past more generally, is mutable and that no persona can be definitive. Here she exhibits the “internalized challenges to historiography” and, in particular, the desire to challenge the paradox of “fictive/historical representation” that defines historiographic metafiction (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 106). This does not indicate a nihilistic attitude, in which the past lost and research pointless, as is evidenced by the concluding paragraphs of *Wolf Hall* that see Cromwell recall a scholar’s recent reinterpretation of British history that asserts King Arthur “never existed” (650). He acknowledges the possibility that this contention could reflect the actuality of England’s past, before recollecting his son’s response to the omission: “but Gregory says, no, he is wrong. Because if he is right, what will happen to Avalon? What will happen to the sword in the stone?” (650). Demonstrating the importance of stories about the past, Mantel problematises the notion of a factual history and instead preferences “the multiplicity and dispersion of truth(s)” (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 108). The Arthurian legend is positioned as myth, but through Cromwell’s recognition that it is a formative aspect of English identity, and therefore the identity of Mantel’s characters, she shows that the *force* of its truth, although repositioned, remains undiminished.

Mantel is unique amongst the novelists examined in this thesis as an author of historiographic metafiction. Gregory, Weir, Purdy and Dunn do, however, demonstrate an awareness of the problematic notions of historical authorship and representation. In Weir’s *The Lady Elizabeth* and Dunn’s *The Queen of Subtleties* this is manifest in the character of Elizabeth who, while aware of her mother’s reputation, is incognisant of Anne’s true character. In these texts, Elizabeth hopes to learn of the ‘real’ Anne Boleyn, and thus acts as a cipher for the historical

sublime that is outlined by Amy Elias. “We return”, writes Elias, “to the past again and again, seeking perhaps not closure but creative openness, dialogue with the voices we hear there; we return seeking the creative living utterance that we need for self-formation” (“Metahistorical” 169). In *The Queen of Subtleties*, Anne writes with intimacy, expecting that her daughter will be her only reader. This offers a fictionalised insight into how this characterisation of Anne experienced those events that define her life, whilst recognising that this retelling differs vastly from that with which her daughter—and Dunn’s readers—are familiar. Anne emphasises the importance of the letter, writing that “as long as Marg manages to smuggle this away from here, you will know” the truth (Dunn, *Queen* 311). *The Lady Elizabeth*, in contrast, begins on the day of Anne’s execution meaning that she is already consigned to the past and is thus unreachable. Encouraged by her governess Kat who believes Anne to have been innocent, Elizabeth secretly cherishes the memory of her mother despite the often-repeated sentiment that Anne does not deserve such reverence. She endeavours to reconcile the memory of her mother as “the ideal queen, beautiful, poised and kind” and whom she loved with “reverence and awe” (Weir, *Elizabeth* 9), with her horror at “how she came to her terrible end, and the gruesome details of that end” (46).

Weir and Dunn each take the character of Elizabeth as a vehicle for expressing a desire to discover further evidence of Boleyn: Dunn’s memoir acts as an imagined historical source, providing an account of Boleyn’s life from her own perspective, while Weir’s Elizabeth mirrors the reader’s desire to know Boleyn, substituting this void by finding solace in her mother’s belongings and cherishing them for the memories they carry. She finds Hever Castle, the Boleyn family home, to be especially evocative for its “reminders of her mother”: “Her memory was there in every room, every garden walk, every shady arbour. Many of the Boleyn family’s possessions had been removed ... Yet, even with the castle stripped of Anne’s belongings it was easy to imagine her at Hever” (Weir, *Elizabeth* 78). For these characterisations of Elizabeth, Boleyn is made opaque by the polemic that consumes her character after her execution. In questioning how Elizabeth may have remembered her mother, both Dunn and Weir highlight

that the task of identifying the 'real' Boleyn is similarly problematic for those writing historical narratives.

In taking as her narrator a woman who is remembered as an enemy of Boleyn, Purdy's *The Tudor Wife* exemplifies some of the difficulties associated with accurately documenting the past. Purdy's novel adheres to the formula for lucrative historical fiction outlined by Debbie Taylor: namely, to select a historical era with "exotic costumes, castle settings, royalty as central characters" and a "misunderstood or overlooked female character whose story is either pivotal to events (Mary Queen of Scots) or intimately caught up in them (Anne Boleyn's sister)" who will act as both protagonist and narrator (as cited in Duncker 60-1). Purdy acknowledges that Rochford's historical significance lies in her proximity to Boleyn and Katherine Howard and her part in their respective executions; this is demonstrated by Jane's declaration in the opening chapter that "centuries from now, if anyone remembers me, it will be because of Anne Boleyn" (11). Indeed, it is Anne's history that is the novel's central focus, as Jane is consumed by hatred and jealousy towards the sister-in-law whom her husband adores. Jane is, however, an unreliable narrator because her jealousy and mental instability undermine her ability to assess situations objectively. As Jane is led to the scaffold to face her own execution, she is haunted by the ghosts of George and Anne, to whom she speaks, encouraging witnesses to comment that she appears to be "quite mad" (414-17). Moreover, she is excluded from many of the events and interactions that drive the plot, particularly with regard to Anne's rise and fall; she is not a confidante to either Anne or George, nor is she directly involved in many of the events that define the narrative arc of the novel. Yet her narration relies on her recounting events and encounters that she witnessed. As the focus of *The Tudor Wife* is the relationships Anne shares with her husband, Henry, and her brother, George, Purdy manufactures instances in which Jane is able to observe encounters whilst she is hidden from sight: for instance, when Henry carries Anne to her bedchamber, Jane does "not hesitate" to run before them, "skirts hitched up high above [her] knees", before "leap[ing] inside a cupboard with latticed doors [that she] could peep through and have a direct

view of the bed” (215). This approach, which is repeated throughout the novel, highlights the question of historical authority; Jane is witness to events, and as such the novel features her testimony, but the novel’s reliance on Jane remaining hidden is unrealistic and often absurd, thus rendering the narrative inauthentic.

Conclusion

Writers of non-fictional historical narratives use the techniques associated with scholarly research throughout their texts. Bernard, Denny, Ives, Starkey and Weir all cite their sources using footnotes and provide extensive bibliographies. In these cases, devices, such as an Author’s Note to indicate a familiarity with the primary or secondary evidence, would be redundant because these sources are directly cited throughout the narratives. However, Denny is the only non-fiction author who does not open with a Preface or Acknowledgments to introduce the text and briefly outline methodology. These conventions situate the text within the field of Tudor scholarship. For example, Ives acknowledges those “librarians, curators ... scholars and friends” who assisted his research, along with those who granted him access to “manuscripts and other materials” (*Life* xvii), whilst Starkey expresses gratitude towards those who edited his manuscript and translated primary source documents from their original German or Spanish (xxvii).

With their respective acknowledgements, these authors each demonstrate their own authority and credibility. In thanking those who assisted them with translations or gaining access to contemporary manuscripts, they each highlight the primary research that they conducted. They also engage in an established academic discourse, demonstrating an awareness of the contributions of other scholars working in the area. These sections are, however, situated outside the narrative. First-person pronouns are implemented, and the ‘I’ of the Preface differs from the third-person omniscience that dominates the main narrative. The sense that this section conveys the author’s voice, as compared to the voice of the narrative, is evident here—a sense that is further emphasised by Weir and Starkey who both sign their prefaces with their location and date, situating their writing and themselves in a particular moment (Weir, *Tower* 3; Starkey xxvii).

The subjectivity that is embraced in these preliminary textual conventions is soon replaced with the objective tone that defines much scholarly historical writing.

In spite of their explicitly fictional status, the historical novels analysed in this thesis also directly engage with historical practice. The use of imagination in historical novels is a fundamental tenet of the form; they do not purport to present objective, verifiable history. As White explains, “unless a historical story is represented as a literal representation of real events, we cannot criticise it as being either true or untrue to the facts of the matter” (“Emplotment” 377). However, the novelists discussed in this thesis have adapted the tools of non-fiction writers—including first-person explanations of their methodology, approach and research—for the medium of the historical novel. Employing generic conventions of non-fiction writing gives a sense of historical legitimacy to the fictional narratives.

The postmodern perspective employed in this thesis holds that the historical narratives analysed are ultimately constructions, regardless of their claims to truth or fictionality. The textual devices and discussions of accuracy and authenticity that are identified in this chapter constitute the first step in the author’s process of representation. Although these devices contribute to a construction of Boleyn’s life and death, they are not meaningless. In these varied approaches to historical representation, we can read the process of negotiation between the past and the text that is necessary to any historical narrative. Using appendices, public discourse and the narratives themselves, authors explain their representational choices and methodologies in order to demonstrate that their work is historically authentic, if not strictly accurate. White discusses the truthfulness of “figurative representation[s] of real events” by stating that historical novels should be held to the same “principles governing our assessment of the truth of fictions” (“Emplotment” 377). It is here that *authenticity*, the intangible and wholly subjective *sense* that a given representation is accurate, regardless of its verifiable accuracy, is important for how a text is consumed. Authors of historical narratives demonstrate a desire to establish their own authority

as a historical commentator and, in so doing, engage in discourse concerned with the boundaries of history and fiction.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SPANISH AMBASSADOR: EUSTACE CHAPUYS AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIDENCE

Authority for a historical commentator is, in part, gleaned from the effective and appropriate use of evidence, particularly primary source materials. The ways in which writers use evidence is central to assessments of their work as either accurate or authentic: they must acknowledge the limitations of the sources whilst using the available materials effectively. There are accepted practices for evaluating the reliability of a primary sources; as Beverley Southgate notes, conventional practices hold that evidence should be “derived from witnesses who can be trusted and who themselves depend upon properly empirical procedures” (7). Evidence produced by reliable witnesses is not always available to historians, however. The problem of accessing appropriate evidence presents itself when discussing the history of Anne Boleyn, who became the focus of contemporary commentary only after she had become infamous as Henry VIII’s mistress. There are few surviving materials that are not underpinned by political or religious biases, and almost nothing that is written by Boleyn herself. The dispatches of Eustace Chapuys, the Imperial ambassador in England from 1529 (Davies, “Chapuys”), have been a continued focus of historiographical debates. In considering the value that these dispatches hold as evidence, authors typically question his ability to have personally witnessed the events that he describes first-hand, as well as the impact of his particular perspective on his dispatches. The absence of alternative sources means that authors necessarily privilege his accounts because he was Boleyn’s contemporary. Moreover, his writings are both extensive and colourful, with regards to the events and interactions that he describes and his chosen language.

The need to consult and, in many instances, rely on Chapuys’ accounts means that his writings offer an apt case study for an analysis of the treatment of evidence in historical narratives about Anne Boleyn. Authors use his writings to support their ideas, but they also demonstrate their familiarity with scholarly practice by drawing attention to the limitations of his

testimony. In order to outline the ways in which authors engage with the problem of evidence in historical narratives about Boleyn, this chapter will look to representations of Chapuys and his correspondence. Characterisations of him vary from authoritative commentator, to engaged and skilful politician, to defamatory gossip, and authors have interrogated the means by which he gathered information and his understanding of the culture and language of England. Such characterisations are not always consistent within the one text, and Chapuys is often cited as evidence only where his position confirms the author's contention. In turn, the way in which an author regards Chapuys' evidence can be indicative of their perspectives on broader issues, such as the Reformation in England. An analysis of this treatment of evidence demonstrates what Linda Hutcheon describes as the inexorable textualisation of the past, irrespective of a history's status as fiction or non-fiction. However, the treatment of evidence that occurs in historical fiction is unlike that in non-fiction. As Maria Margaronis asks, "for the purposes of fiction, what counts as evidence?" (138). Appendices that appear at the end of the fiction texts do not mention Chapuys and there is no indication in any of the focus texts that his testimony was influential in shaping the respective narratives. He is, however, included as a character; in these novels, he is a prominent figure in Henry's court, but novelists also gesture toward his role as an important source of evidence for historians by fictionalising Chapuys' role as a diplomat, his antipathy toward Anne and his processes of gathering information.

Chapuys' letters are numerous because his vocation demanded regular correspondence with Charles V—the Holy Roman Emperor and also the nephew of Katherine of Aragon—to inform him of the happenings of the English court. As his period as ambassador coincided with Boleyn's prominence, Chapuys' dispatches are not only valuable for their volume, but also for their specific content. He was instructed to seek out information pertaining to Henry and Katherine's divorce and he later became somewhat of an advocate for both the erstwhile queen and her daughter, Mary. The volume of his correspondence coupled with a keen interest, initially, in the divorce proceedings and, later, in Henry and Boleyn's marriage and its implications, makes

Chapuys a prominent and necessary source. His political allegiances, however, also render him a problematic one. Paula de Pando names Chapuys as the first proponent of a Spanish discourse that positioned Boleyn as a “usurper, an offender against both church and state, who had to be punished for her transgression” (186). This discourse, she argues, was so pervasive that it “acquired a military taint” that led to the 1588 Spanish Armada during the reign of Boleyn’s daughter, Elizabeth (186). She suggests that Catholic writers vilified Boleyn as a means of criticising the English break with Rome, and posits that Chapuys was “responsible for the image of Anne Boleyn as the destroyer of the sacrament of marriage” and was the cause of “Henry’s callousness towards Catherine and her daughter” (186).

Discussions of Chapuys’ politics, religion and skill as an ambassador are integral to the legitimacy and accuracy authors ascribe to his commentary, particularly with regard to his appraisals of individuals. The view that Chapuys vehemently disliked Boleyn, and the changes to England’s political and religious landscape that she purportedly instigated is shared by each of the authors discussed in this thesis. For some, his perspective significantly undermines his position as a reliable historical commentator, while others acknowledge his biases and continue to consider his words when forming their own interpretations because of the inherent subjectivity of all commentary—and, at times, the absence of any alternative source of evidence. It must, however, be noted that when citing Chapuys, each author refers to his correspondence as it appears in translated volumes. Historians view such a text via the lens of the translator and editor’s interpretations, not only with regard to the actual process of translation itself, but also the process by which particular documents are deemed worthy of inclusion in a volume (Schmid 10). As Douglas Howland writes, translation does not merely involve “a simple transfer of words or texts from one language to another”; it is a “complex act of communication” in which “idiomatic uses of language, variations of ‘register’ that alert one to markers of class and gender, and structures of thought that begin to give cultures their distinctive outlooks” must be decoded and rewritten in a manner that is intelligible in a different cultural context (45-46). These aspects of

translation are particularly pertinent for those examining Chapuys' despatches, as the most recent translations date from the nineteenth century and are thus influenced by a socio-cultural moment far removed from that familiar to both twenty-first-century writers and their sixteenth-century subjects.

That Chapuys has been the focus of few dedicated studies as a subject in his own right is also of interest when considering the influence of his observations of this period. Garrett Mattingly remains the authority on the ambassador. His 1922 Bowdoin Prize winning essay, "Eustache Chapuys: A Footnote to English History", his 1935 doctoral dissertation *Eustache Chapuys and Spanish Diplomacy in England (1488-1536): A Study in the Development of Resident Embassies*, and 1955 book *Renaissance Diplomacy* each examined Chapuys' time in England in detail. *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry, written by C. S. L. Davies, relies substantially on Mattingly's work. Mattingly introduces Chapuys by suggesting "the characters and fortunes of certain individuals" of the sixteenth century are integral to the ways in which the period has been recorded and remembered ("Footnote" 1). Chapuys, he argues, deserves prominence amongst these personalities for his concurrent roles as "a diplomat and statesman, the observer of events of the greatest importance and himself no mean actor in them", but has not been the focus of dedicated study as a subject in his own right (1).

Authors regularly address Chapuys as a historical source, rather than as an individual. He was, however, a prominent political actor and, as Mattingly suggests, this role cannot be divorced from his contribution to modern understandings of this era. A number of the texts examined in this thesis address the dichotomy between Chapuys as historical actor and source, approaching this dual role in varied ways: some address his professional and personal positions on key contemporary matters when introducing his writings as evidence, while others feature him as one of many individuals who actively engaged with, rather than merely observed, those events unfolding around him. The contrasting approaches of these authors can be an indicator of their

chosen genre of historical narrative, yet each author who directly addresses Chapuys engages with historiographical debates, questioning his ability to act as an objective observer.

A Catholic Ambassador in Henrician England

The manner in which Chapuys represented Anne Boleyn cannot be isolated from his Catholicism and, in turn, the ways in which modern authors represent his own political and theological biases. Henry VIII's attempts to annul his marriage to Katherine of Aragon led to England's schism from the Roman Catholic Church. This consequence of Henry's resolution to marry Boleyn, combined with Boleyn's reported reformist stance, made her a prominent focus of anti-Protestant and conservative sentiment. Denny argues that much of the negative imagery defining Boleyn is based on the "reports of those who were her enemies", the "greatest" of whom was Chapuys (2). She asserts that this hostility arose from "his mission" to "preserve Catherine of Aragon as queen and England as a Catholic nation" (2). Denny interrogates accepted narratives, presenting Boleyn as "the innocent victim in a campaign of malicious disinformation" and would, as such, be expected to critique Chapuys' political motivations for vilifying her (1). Discussions of Chapuys' politics and religion, however, are also evident amongst those authors who do not share Denny's redemptive project. Unlike Denny, they do not repudiate his writings, but they do question his legitimacy as a source and consider the implications for the ways in which these views may have coloured his interpretations of events.

In questioning the degree to which Boleyn may have influenced Henry's ideas of religion and reform, Bernard suggests "modern historians" can look to "the words of Chapuys" that described her as "the cause and principal nurse of the heresies in England, by which he meant the denunciation of papal authorities" (*Fatal* 54). On 22 March 1531, Chapuys wrote to Charles V about the case of an unnamed preacher accused of heresy whose freedom Henry secured (*LP*, v.148). He informed the Emperor that "the general opinion is that he has been delivered by desire of the lady and her father, who are more Lutheran than Luther himself" (*LP*, v.148). The assertion that the Boleyns were dedicated Lutherans and, as a prominent influence on Henry at

that time, their advice was informed by that religiosity is questioned by Bernard and Weir. Both authors cite this document when discussing the nature of Anne's theological perspectives and critique the extent to which Chapuys' theological views and political allegiances may have influenced his interpretation.

Both Weir and Bernard share the view that "Anne came to be anti-papal" (Bernard, *Fatal* 54-55), rejecting the notion suggested by Chapuys that she was a Lutheran convert. They do, however, differ in their analysis of her theological stance. Weir cites the above letter when describing Boleyn as "a passionate and sincere evangelical" who was "sympathetic to radical and even Lutheran ideas" (*Tower* 17). Anne, however, was not a convert as Chapuys had argued, but a reformer and "was to die a devout Catholic"—although Weir does posit that Henry would not have allowed Anne to convert to Protestantism and it is for this reason that she did not do so (17-18). Bernard, however, questions whether Anne's position was informed by pragmatism rather than faith, because England's break from Rome allowed her long-awaited marriage to take place (*Fatal* 54-55). Chapuys' assertion that the Boleyns were Lutherans, he argues, does not confirm their religious views, but instead speaks to the ambassador's own perspective which equated anti-papal sentiment with Lutheranism: "Chapuys gives the impression that Anne and her father were committed Lutherans" and in doing so he "too quickly and too polemically elided rejection of papal authority with Lutheran beliefs" (Bernard, *Fatal* 57).

Both Weir and Bernard cite Chapuys and share the belief that Anne's theological perspective was not as radical as he would have had Charles V believe. Weir considers Boleyn's final days in which she observed traditional Catholic practices to counter Chapuys' claim, while Bernard suggests Chapuys' own virulent position that inaccurately equated ideals of reform with Lutheranism undermines his account of Anne's religious influence and perspective. Denny also cites this letter and Chapuys' claim that the Boleyns were Lutherans; however, she attributes a greater degree of accuracy to this claim than either Weir or Bernard. While she foregrounds the importance of considering Chapuys' theological beliefs when examining his assessments of

Anne's character—and often rejecting his appraisals on the basis of his polemic—Denny accepts this particular assertion, quoting him in order to support her own contention that the Boleyns were ardent evangelicals (172).

As is the case with many aspects of her life, Boleyn's own thoughts on religion are confined to the past. Her presumed sympathetic stance on Church reform cannot confirm either her personal thoughts on religion, or a strict adherence to a particular doctrine;¹⁸ this was a tumultuous period in which theology and politics were inextricably entwined and denominational divides were fluctuating. As such, the contradictory interpretations of the accuracy of Chapuys' letter posed by Weir, Bernard and Denny can each be considered credible. Yet it is significant that their appraisals are consistent with their respective evaluations of Boleyn's religious views. Bernard argues that the imagery of Boleyn as a Protestant martyr is apocryphal. He suggests it is inherited from the writings of William Latymer and John Foxe who produced hagiographical accounts of her life during the early years of Elizabeth's reign with the intention of encouraging the young queen to "embark on further religious reform" (*Fatal* 92-94). Weir does not dispute that Boleyn was known amongst her contemporaries for her favourable perspectives on religious reform, and names "Catholic right-wingers" amongst those who were "anti-Boleyn" (*Tower* 31). She also positions characterisations of Boleyn's religion within a political context in which her name became a symbol of anti-Catholicism: redeemed as the mother of Elizabeth in a newly Protestant England she became—as Bernard also suggests—a figure of Protestant martyrdom; however, she remained "particularly notorious in Catholic countries" where she signifies sin and she has been represented as a demon (*Tower* 314).

Denny's work provides a hagiographical account of Boleyn, and her assessment of Chapuys' accuracy appears to be informed by her own theological views. Where Bernard rejects Chapuys' assessment because it equates anti-papacy with Lutheranism, Denny accepts this claim

¹⁸ Wooding subscribes to Ives' contention that Boleyn's "evangelical tendencies" acted as a catalyst in the way in which Henry ended his marriage to Katherine (*Rethinking* 53)

because it supports her own contention that “Anne Boleyn was the catalyst for the Reformation, the initiator of the Protestant religion in England” (132). Her narrative also indicates a sympathetic appraisal of the reformed religious perspectives. Henry, she writes, could perceive the benefits of asserting “political supremacy over the Church”, yet “his entrenched superstition deprived him of the liberty that accompanied [Boleyn’s] resolute evangelical faith” (72). Here she describes Anne’s faith, as she perceives it, in favourable terms, while her description of the English Reformation is not only equally commendatory, but also indicates her own theological perspectives: Denny suggests that “the rediscovery of the written word of God, put into the language of the people, was a liberation from the superstition and corruption of the established Church”, before listing Bible verses which contradict predominant Catholic practices and perspectives of the time (172-73).

Chapuy’s antipathy toward Boleyn is not only framed in terms of religion. His Catholicism informs his opposition to her marriage because of the entanglement of religion and politics that defines the era. The familial alliance between Katherine of Aragon and Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, is also central and Chapuy is depicted as a staunch defender of Katherine and Mary’s interests. He had been “sent by his master to champion [their] cause” and in this task he did not waver, having held their “best interests at heart” (Weir, *Elizabeth* 19). His primary role is to undertake diplomatic relations with Henry and to report back to Charles; however, the defence of Katherine’s reputation and dignity is also essential to his position because it is in the best interests of the Emperor. This is demonstrated in Gregory’s *The Other Boleyn Girl*, when Mary Boleyn considers the possible international ramifications of Henry’s decision to name a ship for her: “for all that we had ridden, singing out of tune together, we were not a lover and his lass. If my name was on this ship, if I launched it next week, then I was a declared rival to the Queen of England. I was an enemy to the Spanish ambassador, to the whole nation of Spain” (85). This scene takes place, however, prior to Chapuy’s arrival in England, and

Mary's reference to an unnamed Spanish ambassador indicates that this role, whomever its occupant, demanded opposition to any mistress who became a 'rival' to the queen.

This should not suggest, however, that Chapuys' antipathy for Anne is dispassionate. The language that Chapuys, the fictional character, is represented as using when discussing Anne demonstrates his hatred. Emily Purdy only features Chapuys briefly in *The Tudor Wife* and does not explore his character in any depth—he is merely called “the Spanish Ambassador” (9). However, he does feature in the opening passage of the novel in which Jane Boleyn admires Chapuys because he is the only man to see the truth beyond Anne's façade: “Anne Boleyn was not beautiful, but, while women took gleeful note of this, men seldom noticed; the Spanish Ambassador who dubbed her ‘The Goggle-Eyed Whore’ being a notable exception” (Purdy 9). The insult ‘The Goggle-Eyed Whore’ is repeated throughout the novel without reference to Chapuys, particularly when Jane is describing public opinion; when Anne, after having been arrested, is transferred to the Tower of London, Jane describes how “the people of London thronged both banks of the Thames, spitting down onto the barge and jeering ‘The Goggle-Eyed Whore’ on her way” (260). Suzannah Dunn similarly refers to the derogatory language used by Chapuys in *The Queen of Subtleties*. Dunn's Anne complains about “that lizard Chapuys” who “never once acknowledged” her as queen and who never spoke her name: “if he had to mention me to Henry, I was ‘the lady’; to everyone else, I was ‘the whore’” (105). It is not, however, to this language that Anne objects, but rather the response of her husband, who found the ambassador to be “a very charming man” whose insults were a marker of his loyalty, “an excellent quality in an ambassador with as difficult a job as his” (105). Anne is less offended by Chapuys' insults, than she is by Henry's ambivalence about his wife being named a whore.

It is stated that Chapuys overstepped his ambassadorial role, however he is commended for his loyalty toward Henry's first queen and her daughter, Mary. In *The Queen of Subtleties*, as Catherine “los[es] hope” of Henry returning to her, she appears in public only “on Chapuys' arm”, demonstrating his dedication to her cause despite her waning fortunes (Dunn 112).

Similarly, in one of his fleeting appearances in Weir's *The Lady Elizabeth*, Chapuys convinces the Lady Mary to sign a document that appeases her father by acknowledging him to be the Supreme Head of the Church of England under Christ", and her mother's marriage to have been "incestuous and unlawful", rendering herself "a bastard" (Weir 19). Mary anguishes over this act, which she regrets throughout her life, however she recalls Chapuys' influence upon her decision: the ambassador "assured Mary that he had her best interests at heart" having been "sent by his master to champion the cause of the late Queen Katherine and her daughter", and "so Mary had signed" (19). Although Chapuys' advice does not differ from that of Cromwell who also encourages Mary to acquiesce to Henry's request (18), Chapuys is depicted as working for Mary's interests, rather than Henry's, and is able to persuade her that this submission to her father's authority is the correct course of action. While this example demonstrates Chapuys' concern for Mary's immediate situation, authors also depicted him as actively attempting to re-establish her claim to the throne; in *Wolf Hall*, Cromwell suspects that Chapuys has suggested to Mary that she marry the exiled Reginald Pole, thus inserting "the half-Spanish Tudor back into the old Plantagenet line" (Mantel 557). The ambassador, Cromwell muses, "stays up till dawn studying the tables of descent of the English aristocracy: strengthen her claim, put her beyond reproach" (557). Thus, where Mary and Katherine are established as victims of Anne and Henry's cruelty,¹⁹ Chapuys is seen as one of their few steadfast allies. These authors do not only interrogate the actions of Chapuys or Anne, but view these actions in terms of the motivations of the characters: Chapuys intentions are admirable because he is working to defend Mary, while the selfish Anne works only for her own ambition.

¹⁹ Boleyn's actions toward Mary will be analysed in Chapter Four.

“The Power of Rumour”

The manner in which Chapuys obtained information is a common focus of discussions of his veracity, with authors questioning the degree to which he based his interpretations upon the opinions of others. His dispatches consistently indicate that he gained information from unnamed sources. The term ‘gossip’ is commonly used to discredit the ambassador, although this should not suggest uniformity in the manner in which it is implemented. The use of such language typically involves adopting a derisive tone. In Mantel’s prose, for example, the character of Cromwell remarks that Chapuys is “never stuck for something to put in dispatches”, because “if news is scant he sends the gossip”—“there is the gossip he picks up, from dubious sources, and the gossip [Cromwell] feeds him on purpose” (*Wolf* 358). In these instances, the ambassador is depicted as incognisant, despite a self-perception to the contrary, and is thus ridiculed as ignorant and self-deluded. Denny, for instance, writes that despite “claiming to know all the inside information at court”, he merely “repeated gossip and rumours from his paid informers” (2). For Weir, however, the term gossip is used as an admission that Chapuys was fallible, despite otherwise being “a shrewd observer” and “eyewitness of many of the events he describes” (*Tower* 29-31). Chapuys’ tendency to “sometimes repeat gossip or rumour as fact” (29-31), or report information that was “fourth-hand” (26), is merely an occasional failing and should not discredit his testimony (29-31). This is, Weir contends, because he was a constant presence in Henry’s court and can thus be understood to have observed much of what he describes.

By abstaining from the use of terms such as ‘gossip’ or ‘rumour’, Ives and Starkey offer contrasting views of Chapuys’ modes of gathering information, whilst still asserting that he relied on information from other parties—which was an important aspect of his role. Starkey believes the ambassador to have been “careful about his sources”, whom he typically named, and who “include leading councillors and courtiers, as well as intimate hangers-on about the great, such as doctors and priests” (360). These individuals were, Starkey argues, “all in a position to see and hear the incidents they reported, and frequently they corroborate each other” (360). Starkey

shares the view presented by Mantel, Denny and Weir that Chapuys did not personally observe all that he describes; however, he does not label this information as gossip or rumour, thereby offering a rather different perspective. For Weir, Chapuys is valuable as a commentator because he held a position in the court that allowed him to become a spectator to events as they unfolded. That he occasionally reported intelligence that can be considered gossip somewhat detracts from his credibility as a source, yet not to the degree that his testimony should be disregarded entirely. In contrast, Starkey's perception of Chapuys' letters as a historical source is influenced not by the ambassador's use of information, or gossip, gathered from others, but instead by his careful choice of well-placed informants.

Ives also considers Chapuys' choice of informant—or his “network of spies”, to borrow Gregory's phrase (389)—yet he arrives at a different conclusion from Starkey. It is the proximity of Chapuys' informants to court that is significant for Starkey. In contrast, the capacity of these individuals to potentially witness events is of secondary importance to Ives, who instead questions the ways in which their political and religious affiliations may have influenced their interpretation of events. Ives' view results in a rather more sceptical consideration of Chapuys' choice of ally, with Ives contending that “his reporting on the court tends to derive from individuals who share a single point of view and, what is more, pass news on with the gloss which that view gave” (*Life* 55-56). Among the challenges that Chapuys faced on his arrival in England was the “time” that it took to “discover sensitively placed individuals who would supply information, or servants who could go out freely enough to be able to verify reports” (55). Despite his foreign allegiance, Chapuys' condemnation of many of Henry's actions was shared by a number of Englishmen and women. As such, Ives contends that “he became the focus for all those who disliked what was going on” and was granted the luxury of access to “a ready-made set of contacts as anxious to give him news as he was to collect it” (55). Here, Chapuys is depicted neither as a scandalmonger nor as a bemused foreigner, incapable of delineating between truth and lies, each of which imply incompetency. In seeking informants with whom he shared a

political, religious or moral stance, Chapuys, Ives argues, seemingly confirmed his own interpretations, rather than seeking to discover accurate or truthful accounts of events.

Each of these authors positions Chapuys as reliant on information gained through interactions with others to formulate detailed accounts of Henry's court. In *Renaissance Diplomacy*, Mattingly asserts that becoming ingratiated in court circles was an established practice amongst ambassadors prior to Chapuys' arrival in England, and the act of simply listening was considered a foremost diplomatic skill (231-33). Yet it is the specific language used by writers to describe information that was gathered using this technique that is noteworthy for its ability to shape readers' perceptions of Chapuys' credibility. Intelligence gathered in this manner can be characterised as political rhetoric, conversation, or diplomatic relations, yet the term 'gossip', in contrast, indicates erroneous information, gathered from unreliable sources and subsequently signifies that ensuing commentary may not be historically accurate.

In *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*, Mantel fictionalises Thomas Cromwell's relationship with Chapuys. It is thus Cromwell's imagined perspective that shapes the representation of the ambassador. In *Wolf Hall*, Mantel's Cromwell is seen to manipulate the incognisant ambassador by passing on erroneous information and confirming rumours he knows to be false. In the sequel, *Bring up the Bodies*, it becomes clear that the relationship between the two men has altered, with Anne accusing Cromwell of being "too friendly with the Emperor's man" (Mantel 38). The ambassador's incompetence—and, by extension, inaccuracy—is a point of ridicule amongst Cromwell's circle in the first book: for instance, Cromwell is not only unperturbed, but is amused when he learns of the rumour, propagated by Chapuys, that he "keep[s] two women in [his] household dressed as boys", jovially responding that this is "better, I suppose, than two boys dressed up as women. Now that would be opprobrious" (*Wolf* 388). It is clear that Chapuys is both unthreatening and misinformed. As *Bring up the Bodies* opens, however, Cromwell comments that the retainers of his neighbour Chapuys, "loll about drinking" at his expense, suggesting that the ambassador and his men have ingratiated themselves within Cromwell's own circle (50).

In depicting the changing relationship between the two men in this manner, Mantel effectively demonstrates that Chapuys—both as a character and as a historical commentator—does not remain a static entity. As Imperial ambassador, his allegiance and politics do not change: he is staunchly opposed to Henry's second marriage and England's subsequent break from Rome, and continues to act as a loyal advocate on behalf of Katherine and Mary. Although bias continues to dominate Chapuys' despatches, Mantel illustrates that his position in Henry's court, and his diplomatic skill, evolve during his time in England. In featuring him as a character that, along with the novel's other characters, develops and changes throughout the narrative, Mantel demonstrates that neither Chapuys' role as historical subject nor as historical source remained constant during the sixteen years he spent in England.

Mantel's Chapuys increased proficiency in his ambassadorial role is, perhaps, best demonstrated by the ambassador's evolving mastery of the English language. When the reader is introduced to the new ambassador, Cromwell remarks that, although Chapuys' first language is French, which allows him to converse with numerous courtiers, "he will never take the trouble to learn English, for how will that help with his next posting?" (*Wolf* 192). Mantel's Cromwell thus comments on both Chapuys' ignorance of the English language and his position as a diplomat; he is "like any other diplomat" and does not hold any affinity with England, but merely considers it to be the location of his current posting (192). Once Chapuys has established himself in London, Cromwell again criticises his disinclination to learn English and directly links this to his skill as a reliable ambassador: "as Chapuys doesn't speak English he gets his news in French from Thomas Cromwell, in Italian from the merchant Antonio Bonvisi, and in God knows what—Latin?—from Stokesley, the Bishop of London" (358). He is heavily reliant on dialogue with others—particularly those who share his ideological and political views—to gain information because he is unable to observe any interactions that occur in English. In *Bring up the Bodies*, Cromwell "speaks in French to Chapuys, as it is the ambassador's first language" (50), however as the novel progresses it becomes clear that Chapuys is slowly learning English. Cromwell's

household welcomes him in Latin and French, and Cromwell notes that the ambassador “speaks some Spanish but English hardly at all” (119); but he observes that Chapuys “is beginning to understand more than he speaks” (119), indicating that his ability to quietly observe interactions without relying on translators is increasing, and that this is not a skill he is keen to make known.

Chapuys’ comprehension of the English language, and the degree to which this may have altered over time, is a theme common to discussions of his competency as both ambassador and historical source. This is in spite of Mattingly’s contention that Latin was unique as a language shared by diplomats and that “negotiations through interpreters” was a common practice (*Renaissance* 225). Ives and Weir each consider how his English comprehension and literacy may have posed a challenge on his arrival, yet they identify different difficulties. In *The Lady in the Tower*, Weir writes that Chapuys’ “command of the language had improved immeasurably over the seven years he had been resident”, thus attributing a degree of accuracy to his evidence (29-30). As her narrative covers only a few months, she positions Chapuys’ linguistic skills within this limited period and signals the likelihood that his competence may have increased by this time. She makes it clear, however, that his knowledge was not comprehensive and “he still may not have fully understood English idioms, which might account for the occasional vagaries in his dispatches” (29-30). Ives also acknowledges Chapuys’ poor understanding of English and posits that this would have presented a difficulty and, like Mantel and Weir, suggests that the significant duration of Chapuys’ time in England allowed him to effectively address the impediment this posed. For Ives, however, the problem Chapuys faced was not an inability to observe encounters for himself, but was instead how “a stranger speaking no English [was] to find informants” (*Life* 55). The answer, he suggests, is that Chapuys’ “continuous residence” from 1529 until 1545 “enabled [him] to overcome many of the obstacles in the way of an ambassador seeking news”, and it was this continued presence that allowed him to become “persona grata with the elite” to whom he spoke French (55).

In contrast, Dunn does not present the ambassador's inability to understand English as a hindrance to be overcome, as it is clear that he is suitably prepared for his task upon his arrival. In *The Queen of Subtleties*, Dunn's Anne describes him as "a talented newcomer" when recounting his arrival at court (105). She does not directly comment on Chapuys' English, but instead makes note of his "hand-picked, English-fluent staff" (105), suggesting that Dunn's Anne does not perceive an ambassador who does not speak English to be odd. However, Denny, who aims to dispel negative assumptions of her subject, explicitly rejects Chapuys as a legitimate historical source. This appraisal is, in part, informed by the ambassador's ignorance of English: she argues that "he claimed to know all the inside information at court" yet "his English was so poor that he could not understand what was being said around him" (2). Unlike Mantel's fictional portrayal in which Chapuys' skill continually evolves, Weir's representation of his skill level during the specific period in question and Ives' suggestion that this posed an initial setback that he was able to overcome, Denny considers—and rejects—Chapuys' correspondence as an unchanging entity and does not consider how his knowledge and skill may have grown during his residency.

Discussions of Chapuys' ignorance are not limited to England's language, but extend to its people, culture and customs. "Chapuys did not like England or the English", Weir posits, listing this distaste amongst the difficulties faced by the ambassador because, despite this aversion, "he was obliged to exercise his talents in that kingdom during one of the most tumultuous periods in its history" (*Tower* 30-32). Conversely, both Ives and Mantel describes "Chapuys' ready acceptance by English society" (Ives, *Life* 55): in *Wolf Hall*, he ingratiates himself in court circles, amongst whom he is a regular dinner guest (Mantel 191-93), while Ives suggests that he "dabbled a good deal more in English politics than the Emperor either knew or would have sanctioned" (*Life* 55). Mantel also represents Chapuys as being aware of public opinion regarding Henry's campaign to divorce Katherine. In spite of this understanding of the populace's perspective on the issue, Cromwell feels that his unfamiliarity with the English people leads him to misread and misrepresent their intentions. Chapuys writes to the Emperor that "the

people of England are so disaffected by their king that, given encouragement by a few Spanish troops, they will rise in revolt”; however, he is, Cromwell believes, “of course, deeply misled” (*Wolf* 358). Chapuys accurately determines that the English people do not condone Henry’s treatment of Katherine and continue to consider her the rightful queen, yet he assumes that this will translate to support for a Spanish invasion. It is this notion that Cromwell rejects: “instinct tells him” that the English people “will knit together against foreign interference” (358).

Conclusion

Chapuys’ writings feature prominently amongst the sources used by the authors studied in this thesis, and these documents regularly underpin representations of those aspects of Boleyn’s life with which they are concerned. For this reason, it is necessary to consider the characterisation as Chapuys as a political actor, as well as an observer. As is the case with Boleyn, these twenty-first-century representations differ significantly from one another, and regularly align with the author’s wider contention; characterisations vary from a scandalmonger who encouraged violence and unrest, to an intelligent and talented ambassador supporting a cause in which he passionately believed. For some, he is merely one of many characters of the court, while others have considered his writings in terms of their historical significance and thus reflect upon his dual roles as political persona and historical commentator. The manner of his characterisation is consistent with the degree to which his writings can be considered evidence. His correspondence remains, however, an invaluable, if problematic, primary source for the reign of Henry VIII and the life of Anne Boleyn; as Ives has stated, if “denied these reports, much early Tudor history becomes seriously, on occasion impossibly, opaque” (*Life* 56).

Given the historical significance attributed to his writings, it is unsurprising that discussions of the ambassador regularly appear in historical narratives about this period. A number of the focus texts address Chapuys, his credibility and his influence upon perceptions of the period. The means by which Chapuys gathered his information, the degree to which his Imperial allegiance may have influenced his interpretation of events and individuals, his mastery

of the English language, and his rapport with Henry are amongst the issues which the authors address. Those who do not question his historical influence do, however, feature him as a minor character, indirectly demonstrating the significance of his presence; although he and his writings are mentioned only briefly, he is unique amongst the ambassadors of the period as an integral figure in the Anne Boleyn metanarrative.

As with the use of textual devices such as bibliographies, discussions of Chapuys offer writers a strategy for staking their authority as historical commentators. He is the most complex and informative source pertaining to this period, and writers' discussions of him in these texts shows that they are aware of this significance. Knowledge of his writings demonstrates familiarity with practices of scholarly research and an engagement with historiography, particularly through a questioning of Chapuys' credibility and fallibility. This evaluation of source material is an expectation of academic historical narratives. For writers of historical fiction, however, featuring characterisations of known historical commentators acts to legitimise the accuracy of their own narratives by demonstrating an awareness of the issues raised by biographers and historians. Conversely, the treatment of Chapuys as a problematic source signals, intentionally or otherwise, that an author's interpretation is provisional. The acknowledgement that our most important commentator was biased and potentially relied on gossip for his dispatches emphasises that we, as writers of historical narrative, can only produce tenuous representations of already textualised accounts of the past.

The chapters in Part One of this thesis analyse the ways in which historians, biographers and historical novelists engage with historiography. These texts are different in many ways and yet their authors each incorporate ideas about their process of writing history into their narratives. Chapter One demonstrated that novelists adapt the techniques associated with scholarly historical research, most notably the acknowledgment of sources and the assertion of integrity, to suit the medium of historical fiction. One such technique was explored in detail in Chapter Two, which establishes that the figure of Chapuys provides novelists with one avenue by

which they can directly engage with historiography. Where Author's Notes and promotional interviews allow historical novelists to comment on their research and representational choices directly, they are able to weave such commentary into their novels by fictionalising a key source of primary evidence in Chapuys.

It is unsurprising that historians assert that their work is well-researched and grounded in historical detail. Historical novelists are not held to the same standards, and yet these authors clearly and explicitly discuss methodology and their use of primary and secondary sources; in order for historical fiction to be 'believable' it must be historically authentic. My intention in this section is not to hold these authors accountable to their claims of accuracy or authenticity, and the purpose of this thesis is not to merely highlight the inconsistencies or errors that inevitably occur when writing about the past. Rather, I hope to show the particular ways in which all authors who write history, regardless of their medium, create meaning.

My analysis of historiographical discourse in relation to these texts reveals the importance that historians and historical novelists place on accuracy and authenticity in their narratives. Intertextuality is evident here and many of these authors make reference to one another's work. Such references appear in formal citations and appendices, but acknowledgment of other narratives is often implied: for instance, in a novelist's awareness that readers may be familiar with Chapuys, or an historian's recognition that historical novelists have invented an explanation for a series of events where none exists. As such, historical narratives about Anne Boleyn do not exist in isolation, rather they are in dialogue with one another.

PART TWO

THE UNBLEMISHED CONCUBINE

CHAPTER THREE

“SHE RADIATED SEX”: ANNE BOLEYN AS MAIDEN AND MISTRESS

Sex and sexuality were, until the twentieth century, mostly confined to the margins of historical study because they were perceived to belong to the domestic sphere and, accordingly, held limited importance within canonical histories (Cervone 20). In spite of this tendency, a fascination with royal mistresses, particularly Anne Boleyn, persisted; this is evidenced by Christopher Haigh’s remonstrance, “for a demoralizing while it has seemed that...the sex life of Anne Boleyn was the only live issue in sixteenth century studies” (Haigh 449). Boleyn’s sexual behaviours are integral to the ways in which she is represented in historical narratives; she is remembered as the mistress who refused to compromise her virginity, and the queen executed for adultery and incest. The nature of the charges against Boleyn, coupled with the sexualisation of propaganda denouncing her, has meant that her sexual behaviours have been a dominant and recurring theme in written accounts of her life. Authors have questioned the nature, timing and motivation of her behaviour, particularly with regard to speculation about her chastity. The perceived deviancy of her sexual behaviours is a central theme in twenty-first-century characterisations, with such issues as the consummation of her relationship with Henry VIII and the nature of her relationships with other men being pivotal to her characterisation. Her choices—or lack thereof—with regard to sex, and the reasons that informed them, connote multiple aspects of her character: moral integrity, honesty, ambition, deviousness and intelligence. However, such appraisals rely on, first, assumptions about sexual behaviours that cannot be verified by available evidence and, second, Boleyn’s interiority, which is unknowable.

The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography offers a concise account, written by Eric Ives, of the beginnings of Boleyn’s relationship with Henry VIII: the besotted Henry pursued Anne, who “continued to refuse his advances”; he then proposed marriage, having realised that this would allow him to “possess Anne”, and the proposition of which “changed Anne's response entirely

and, accepting Henry's own conviction that he was in law free to marry, she agreed in the summer of 1527 to be his wife". Although interpretations and representations of these episodes vary, each of the texts examined in this thesis address this brief summation of Boleyn's time as Henry's mistress. Limited archival evidence means that the representations of her as mistress are regularly based on the author's own conception of Boleyn's affect and character; where authors cannot determine beyond doubt her actions or motivations, they must instead speculate as to how Boleyn *may* have acted and the possible motivations for her behaviour.

There are different generic conventions at work in academic, popular and fictional histories, which influence the manner in which authors have described and positioned these inexplicable aspects of the past. Historical novels, particularly those that take women as subjects, have often been associated with women readers and writers and, in turn, have been deemed to be feminine and escapist (Wallace, *Historical* 2-3)). Irrespective of generic categories depictions of Boleyn as mistress are gendered; it is for this reason that representations of this period of her life are particularly pertinent for a feminist reading of historical narratives, not only women's historical novels.

Boleyn is a notable figure in English history because of her royal status. Her behaviours as a mistress are considered to be the primary means by which she gained this status. Hence, the period prior to her marriage is formative, both in terms of later events and the construction of her persona. This chapter argues that perceptions of Boleyn's sexual behaviours are integral to representations of her character in twenty-first-century historical writings, despite insufficient evidence to confirm her sexual behaviours or their circumstances. I argue that Boleyn's actions prior to her marriage are regularly viewed through the prism of her sexual behaviours as they are understood by twenty-first-century authors, although the reality of these behaviours cannot be verified. Affect—that is emotions, motivations, and the reasoning that informs action—is fundamental to these characterisations; authors consider the degree to which love and ambition may have informed her interactions with men, in spite of the impossibility of learning the truth of

this affect. Throughout this chapter I demonstrate that the language used to narrate the period during which she was Henry VIII's mistress reflects paradigms of female sexuality and genre conventions of texts, rather than the actuality of the past.

The Other Woman

Anne Boleyn's position as "the other woman" in the first divorce in Western European history" means that she is regularly defined in sexualised terms as a royal mistress and, later, as an adulteress (Cervone 291). Yet the canonical account of this period, as evidenced by Ives' aforementioned entry in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, holds that Henry and Anne abstained from sex for "six or seven frustrating years" until a trip to Calais shortly before their marriage in January 1533. The role of a royal mistress is regularly defined by the ascribed sexual appeal and availability of the woman who has assumed the role. However, the contradiction of a chaste royal mistress means that Boleyn is simultaneously represented in terms of both her sexuality and virginity: she is sexualised as a mistress but is also a wife-in-waiting. As Joanna Denny argues, Boleyn's acquiescence in becoming Henry's mistress should not necessarily indicate consummation, but can instead be read as a period of "reserve and awareness of proprieties" in keeping with the expectation that she would be queen (98). Such a reading is further evident in the speculation concerned with her sexual experiences prior to 1532, as authors question the degree to which she fulfilled the expectations of either paramour or future queen. Boleyn's virginity is significant to her characterisation; the consummation of the relationship marks the beginning of her transition from mistress, to wife and queen, when her role became a dynastic one; and her sexual behaviours are then framed in terms of potential motherhood, and she is no longer an object of desire.²⁰ A questioning of her appeal is often implicit in discussions

²⁰ Whilst still a mistress, Gregory's Anne raises her concern that Henry's Great Matter will not be resolved in the foreseeable future and the impact that this may bear on her childbearing potential: "How am I to keep my looks? How am I to stay fertile? He might well be lusty till he is sixty, but what about me?" (*Other* 254)

regarding her chastity, with the intimation being that Boleyn and Henry must have been sexually active in some capacity in order for her to sustain his interest for such a significant period.

“Her particular attraction”, it has been proposed, must have lain in “a sexual secret” or “a special trick” (Mantel, “Royal” 6). Available evidence cannot confirm the extent of Boleyn’s sexual experience when she and Henry arrived in Calais in 1532, whether the couple abstained from sex and, if so, who instigated this approach. Competing interpretations thus reflect not only long-standing assumptions about Boleyn, but also gendered conceptualisations of sexuality in which female chastity—particularly in an early modern context—is associated with morality (Bullough and Bullough 83). Denny is unique for her contention that Boleyn not only “remained a virgin”, but did not engage in any sexual behaviours “until late 1532” when the “evidence shows that she finally surrendered to Henry” (184). The capitulation that Denny here describes is familiar—as will be demonstrated throughout this chapter—however the motives for Anne’s initial resistance are unusual. She writes from an explicitly Anglican perspective and associates religiosity with morality, arguing that Boleyn’s “firm religious beliefs had kept her from the King’s bed (and anyone else’s)” (170). The view that Boleyn remained chaste for moral reasons is not typical of those who have written about Boleyn, with the majority of writers suggesting that she had engaged in sexual behaviours prior to 1532, either with Henry or other men. Like Denny, the ways in which these authors interpret Boleyn’s alleged behaviour and how they position her actions in a moral framework are consistent with their wider representations of her character; as Ives notes, “the sympathetic can see Anne’s resistance as standing out for costly principle, the cynical gloss it as a calculated gamble, while the realistic can point to the discouraging prospects of a dumped royal mistress” (*Life* 89).

In contrast to Denny’s defence of Boleyn’s purity, the predominant interpretation holds that, despite withholding penetrative sex from Henry, she engaged in other sexual behaviours. Authors argue that her “chastity” may have been “merely technical” and that the couple engaged in “ways of giving and receiving sexual pleasure” that did not involve “actual penetration” (Weir,

Tower 12). The significant political and religious changes that Henry instigated in order to facilitate his marriage to Anne, and the years that elapsed before this marriage eventuated, have encouraged a persistent questioning of the possible qualities that she possessed that kept him enthralled. Such discussions regularly consider the intangible quality of her sexual appeal and, in turn, the acts that the couple may have engaged in prior to their marriage. Gregory and Purdy have imagined scenes in which Anne performs oral sex, for example, in order to ensure that she remains the sole focus of Henry's desire, thereby framing his attraction to her in terms of his lust and her desirability. Encounters between the couple are not described in terms of mutual attraction; rather, they are seen to be concessions made by Anne if she is to become queen, ones that she "can't see how to avoid" if she is to "hold" his interest (Gregory, *Other* 254).

Anne describes her actions as "a sin" (254), while her sister Mary offers instruction in oral sex, describing her own encounters with Henry while she was his "whore":

I looked her straight in the eye. 'I was his whore,' I said. 'And our brother has his stewardships and our father is a wealthy man because of it ... I would lie on him and kiss him down from his mouth to his parts and then lick his parts like a cat lapping at milk. Then I would take him in my mouth and suck on it.'

Anne's face was a picture of curiosity and revulsion. 'And did he like that?'

'Yes,' I said, brutally frank. 'He adored it; it gave him as great pleasure as anything else. And you can look as if you cannot bear the thought of it, you can set yourself up as high as you like; but if you have to hold him with whore's tricks then you had better learn some new whore's tricks and do them well.' (255)

In these scenes, Purdy and Gregory each use language that conveys a clear sense of violation: Gregory's Anne describes how Henry "strip[s] off his hose" and "pushes it into [her] hand", prompting her to complain to Mary that she "hate[s] him for it" because "it feels like an insult to me, to use me like this" (*Other* 254), while in *The Tudor Wife*, Purdy's voyeuristic protagonist Jane watches as Henry "peeled [Anne's] gown down from her shoulders until her breasts were fully

exposed ... his cruel little mouth closing round each rosy pebble of flesh and leaving it glistening with drool”, observing that “she tried to pull away but he held her fast” (91). It is not necessarily implied that there is a lack of consent in these interactions, however the power dynamics are explicit. As Gregory’s Mary tells Anne, she *must* engage in these behaviours if she is to maintain his interest; yet her disgust is clear. Anne is revolted by the idea of ‘whore’s tricks’—as is evident in her discussion with Mary—but also by their practice. When Henry ‘pushes’ himself onto her in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, and she tries in vain to ‘pull away’ from him in *The Tudor Wife*, it is evident that he is the dominant partner and that, although she may consent to these behaviours, she does not willingly choose them.

It is, however, Anne’s choice to pursue Henry—or, more accurately, to pursue the power and privilege that marriage to him would afford her. Denny positions the eventual consummation of Henry and Anne’s relationship as a “surrender ... to the man who had stalked her for so many years, commandeering her life” (85). Gregory and Purdy echo Denny’s appraisal of Anne’s emotional or physical struggle against Henry’s perseverance; yet, the tone of their respective narratives is markedly different to Denny because neither author positions Boleyn as a victim. Rather, she is seen to actively encourage Henry’s sexual attention because she “played every trick she could summon” in an attempt to “keep him at arm’s length” and, simultaneously, to sustain his desire (Gregory, *Other* 222). As such, Gregory and Purdy frame her encouragement of Henry as an agential choice, reflecting post-feminist perspectives regarding empowerment and victimhood.

“D’You Think She Will be Happier than You?”

Gregory’s *The Other Boleyn Girl* and Purdy’s *The Tudor Wife* can be classified as post-feminist texts or, more specifically, contain specific elements of the genre of ‘chick lit’, although the historical setting locates the novels outside the genre. This is because the representations that they offer are consistent with post-feminist conceptualisations of sex, gender and femininity, and adhere to some of the tropes and conventions of chick lit. Post-feminism denotes a cultural trend

that is predicated on the belief that the feminist movement was successful in achieving equality for Western women, and therefore late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century women have been freed from the constraints placed on them not only by patriarchal society, but purportedly also by the second-wave of feminism. Thus, the personal is no longer political, and women who adhere to neo-conservative notions of femininity if they so choose are equally ‘empowered’ as those who do not.

Angela McRobbie has argued that post-feminism is not merely an acknowledgement of the success of second-wave feminists, but that the perspective actively undermines their gains (11). She explains that the belief that further feminist activism is unnecessary, because gender equality has been achieved, constitutes a backlash against feminism (11-12).²¹ Post-feminism uses elements of feminist rhetoric, namely via the concept of autonomy, whilst espousing traditional gender norms and adhering to the structures of a patriarchal society. Although it created avenues for women to undertake professional careers, feminism is consequently framed as having denied them the opportunity to also pursue “old-fashioned femininity” (12). The idealised ‘choice’ and individualism associated with post-feminism conflates the notion of agency—the capacity of an individual to take action—with that of empowerment, without necessarily considering the social and cultural forces that encourage individuals to make particular choices. Such choices are often located in a commercial space, and “hedonism, fantasy, personal gratification, and entertainment” are recast as feminist forms of autonomous decision making (McRobbie 27). Where feminisms critique power dynamics, post-feminism celebrates the capacity of Western women to indulge in “seemingly autonomous pleasures and rituals of enjoyable femininity from the goods made

²¹ There are various spellings of post-feminist, and it is because of the disjuncture between the feminist movement and post-feminist culture that I adopt the hyphenated variation.

available by consumer culture” (3).²² It is this co-option of feminist rhetoric to legitimise consumerism and heteronormativity, and endorse motherhood that has led McRobbie to argue that post-feminism is an individualistic discourse that invokes the idea of feminism to perpetuate anti-feminist sentiment (1).

The genre of chick lit demonstrates the ways in which post-feminist discourse and cultural context has influenced fiction. *The Other Boleyn Girl* and *The Tudor Wife* are not examples of chick lit; however, they are post-feminist and exhibit some of the generic traits and politics of chick lit. *Bridget Jones's Diary*, which was published in 1996, is regularly identified as the seminal chick lit novel (Ferriss and Young 4). A modern retelling of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, it incorporates aspects of the romance tradition from which it stems, as well as the sexual and cultural norms of the era of its publication (4-5); Bridget desires marriage, yet her search for a husband is fuelled by the steady consumption of cigarettes and alcohol, and takes place against a backdrop of economic autonomy and sexual freedom (McRobbie 12). Pre-marital sexual encounters are a staple of the genre, which regularly incorporates co-habitation and casual sex into its narrative; there is an emphasis on the pursuit of sexual satisfaction and desire, which is distinct from, if not irreconcilable with, marriage and commitment (Harzewski, “Manners” 17). Although sex with numerous men is regularly depicted in chick lit, it is not necessarily depicted in positive terms; as Stephanie Harzewski has argued, the genre regularly interrogates the gains of the ‘sexual revolution’, arguing that sexual gratification does not guarantee either “fireworks” or “intimacy” (“Manners” 17). In chick lit, sex regularly occurs outside the confines of marriage or committed relationships, however these novels continue to reflect the neo-conservative understandings of sex and gender identified by McRobbie, albeit framed in terms of gratification,

²² McRobbie argues that post-feminism perpetuates a dichotomy between “the West and the rest” (1). Here Western women are “encouraged to conceive of themselves as grateful subjects of modern states and cultures which permit” them sexual freedoms and access to education and employment “unlike repressive or fundamentalist regimes” (27). Such discourse discourages feminist activist in the West, on the basis that equality has been achieved, while re-instating a “hierarchy of civilisation and modernity” that positions non-Western women as victims (27).

rather than purely morality: women are not criticised because they have sex with multiple partners, but the sex they have outside of monogamous relationships is often unsatisfying—until, of course, they have sex with ‘The One’.

The depiction of sex in chick lit is ostensibly representative of the varied experiences of women. Harzewski describes the genre of chick lit as “a new incarnation of the courtship novel” that reflects post-1990s sexual politics and customs (*Chick* 3). Yet the perspectives explored within the genre are nonetheless limited; the genre’s heroines are overwhelmingly white, heterosexual, urban, middle class, professional women who are younger than forty (Ferris and Young 4). The privileged characters in these novels often exhibit nostalgia for the femininity and domesticity that was supposedly critiqued by feminist discourse (Whelehan 161); thus the historical setting of these particular texts is conducive to the politics of post-feminism, although it positions these texts outside the genre of chick lit. As such, Gregory and Purdy’s novels are consistent with this generic characterisation, even if they cannot be classified as chick lit; the focus on the experiences of the elite of Tudor society neglects the possible experiences of those who were not born into the privilege and wealth of the aristocracy, thus projecting a narrow view of sixteenth-century England.

The privilege of this world does not, however, mean that it is necessarily romanticised. The aristocratic status of the respective protagonists means the advancement of their family is described as a “family business” in which the women are perceived to be mere “goods for sale” (Gregory, *Other* 310). Accordingly, these novels actively question and interrogate Henry’s court and kingship and argue that it was a destructive atmosphere. Jenna Barlow posits that the heroines of Gregory and Purdy’s novels are “extraordinary women who do not belong to the era in which they find themselves ... they are twentieth-century feminists whose observations of their historical contexts reveal the limitations and restrictions imposed by essentially misogynistic societal structures” (110). Feminist criticism is certainly apparent in *The Other Boleyn Girl* and *The Tudor Wife*, however their historical setting is integral to contextualising these novels within the

broader discourse of post-feminism. Yvonne Tasker and Diana Negra have argued that “the ‘pastness’ of feminism” underpins post-feminism (1). The idea that feminism *was* necessary means that it is possible for post-feminist authors to critique the patriarchal structures of Tudor England without advocating for the continued relevance of such a critique. Dynastic and strategic marriage is condemned as dangerous and damaging, particularly, although not exclusively, for women. Marriage, gender norms and the notion of defining oneself in terms of romantic love are not critiqued, however. Indeed, the characterisations of the novels’ respective heroines reinforce such conceptions of romance and gender in their adherence to some of the tropes of chick lit.

Harzewski identifies the use of first-person narration, which is uncommon in Harlequin romances, as a trope of the chick lit genre (*Chick* 34). The technique, she argues, reflects the confessional nature of the genre in which readers are privy to the personal growth of the heroine with the focus on her interiority reflecting this approach (34). This approach also reflects the individualised discourse of post-feminism. Both Purdy and Gregory use first-person narration, using the ‘I’ personal pronoun as it is described by Harzewski. Because the heroine’s development and experiences are central to the genre, Gregory and Purdy’s characterisations of Anne Boleyn are not only described via the fictional perspectives of their narrators, but are also defined in contrast to Mary and Jane respectively. Both Gregory and Purdy establish a dichotomy between their protagonists and Anne. In *The Tudor Wife*, this is manifest in Anne’s desirability and Jane’s lack of sexual appeal or likability; in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Mary Boleyn is simple, good and associates (even extramarital) sex with affection, while Anne is intelligent but immoral, because she uses sex as a political tactic. Purdy’s Jane and Gregory’s Mary also share a heteronormative desire for marriage and love—although only Mary achieves this goal—while both characterisations of Anne reject romantic notions in favour of personal ambition. It is useful to consider these representations of Mary Boleyn and Jane Boleyn briefly in order to analyse Gregory’s and Purdy’s post-feminist depictions of Anne.

Mary, not Anne, is the protagonist of Gregory's novel and it is her progression that forms its narrative. Her position as the sister of Anne Boleyn is, nonetheless, the reason for her being a subject of enquiry, as is evidenced by the novel's title *The Other Boleyn Girl*; Mary's story relies on the presence of Anne whose death acts as the dénouement of the novel. As members of the most powerful of England's noble families, both women inherit what is labelled as the Howard ambition and resolution: "if a plan goes awry we make another, if one weapon breaks in our hands we find a second ... it is always onwards and upwards for the Howards" (45). Despite this similarity, Gregory establishes a dichotomy between the two Boleyn sisters in the opening passages in which Anne is "a dark mirror" of the blonde Mary (7). The dichotomy between light and dark denotes the physicality of the women, but also points to their morality. Mary is the more naïve and less intelligent sister; Thomas Boleyn, their father, describes Anne as having "a head on her shoulders" and an "awareness of her own value" and dismisses Mary for approaching her time as Henry's mistress like "like a girl of fourteen in love for the first time" (45).²³ As Mary matures she begins to tire of life at court and it becomes clear that her former ambition was mostly informed by a juvenile determination to surpass her elder sister, while Anne is ambitious in the political sense and desires power. Although Anne is the more intelligent sister, as Thomas Boleyn states, Mary is the more prudent, because she prefers "the ordinary" to greatness (de Groot, *Consuming* 529).

Similarly, Anne's introduction in *The Tudor Wife* sees her directly compared to Jane who immediately feels inferior to her future sister-in-law. Anne welcomes Jane to Hever Castle, where she is "too grandly gowned" for the country setting and expresses a desire that they should become friends, to which Jane "could not speak" but "could only nod and stare back at her like a simpleton" (16-17). Jane's inability to match Anne and George's sophistication and accomplishment, defined by their lack of common interests, only adds to the confrontational nature of the encounter: Anne and George "live for music" and "have melodies in [their] blood"

²³ Mary is Henry's mistress for a number of years prior to his involvement with Anne.

while Jane enjoys music but “confess[es]” that she is “inept...as a performer”; Anne enquires whether Jane can dance or sing and Jane’s response is to blush at the memory of her French dancing master and Italian singing master who had both withdrawn their services because she “was as graceful as a cow” and “had a voice like a crow”; and when Anne compliments her on her gown and enquires as to whether it is her own design, Jane must admit that “other than selecting the material [she] had done nothing but stand still for the dressmaker” (17-18). This first meeting accordingly establishes a dichotomy between the graceful, accomplished, and intelligent Anne, and the talentless and inept Jane. This dichotomy is the basis of the relationship between the two women being one of animosity and antagonism: Jane, who is insulted by Anne’s “flaunting” of her “accomplishments” and clear insinuation “that as a candidate for her brother’s hand she deemed [Jane] most unworthy!”, immediately feels “the distinct urge to strike” Anne (19). The comparisons that Gregory and Purdy each make between Anne and their respective protagonists act to establish her as an antagonist whilst relying on stereotypes about competitive femininity.

Like *The Other Boleyn Girl*, *The Tudor Wife* is concerned primarily with the ways in which Anne impacted upon a relatively unknown historical figure—in this case, Jane Boleyn. The novel concludes not with Anne’s death as in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, but with the death of Katherine Howard, Henry’s fifth wife who was also executed for adultery, and Jane herself for facilitating Katherine’s meetings with her lover. Jane also blames Anne for her own complicity in Katherine’s adultery, arguing “had it not been for Anne, surely I would have had a daughter of my own to love, and would not have had to pretend that that wanton little harlot Kat was mine and, out of love for her, go along with her folly” (412). The novel is divided into three parts, and each part takes as titles the name of Henry’s queen—or, in Anne’s case mistress—during the period that it fictionalises. The second part, “Jane Seymour and Anna of Cleves: 1536-1540”, offers only a tokenistic exploration of its titular queens, and is instead focused on the aftermath of Anne’s death. The characterisation of Katherine Howard is more detailed, although this

characterisation often relies on comparisons to Anne. For instance, in describing Henry's attraction to Katherine, Jane observes that "not since Anne Boleyn had Henry been so smitten" (341), while her execution acts as a warning to Katherine: "even with her cousin Anne Boleyn's fate illuminating the treacheries of the royal court like a lighthouse does a dark harbor, Kat refused to heed the warnings or be guided by those who knew better" (362). Hence, even after her death, Anne is a continual presence in this narrative.

In *The Tudor Wife*, romance is seen as a destructive and dangerous force, but its pursuit is one of the primary motivations for many of the novel's characters. As Harzewski argues, the traditional romance narrative in which the heroine seeks a happy ending in the form of "Mr. Right" is replicated in chick lit, yet, unlike in romances, the heroine's expectations are regularly thwarted: "frequently Mr. Right turns out to be Mr. Wrong or Mr. Maybe" (*Chick* 28). This trope is evident in Purdy's novel, in which Jane, motivated by love, seeks marriage to George Boleyn; however, their marriage is purely dynastic and does not lead to happiness for either party. The retrospective nature of the narrative, beginning as it does on the night before Jane's execution in 1542, establishes this bitter dynamic from the outset of the novel. While imprisoned in the Tower, Jane imagines that George's ghost is present and confesses her love to him, to which the ghost replies, "forsooth, Madame, you have a strange way of showing it! You accused me of incest and sent me to the block! If that is how you treat those you love, I shudder to think what mischief you would work against an enemy!" (4). Hence, when the marriage negotiations begin the reader is already cognisant of the disastrous impact that it will have on both Jane and George. Jane's father expresses his concern about George's capacity to make her happy and suggests that she has confused infatuation with love: "Ah, Janey ... your eyes are dazzled by a pretty face, and your heart bewitched by longing, masquerading as love!" (39) Although he believes that George will bring her "nothing but grief", she counters that he will "change" after they are married and that she will "make him love" her (40-41).

However, the prediction made by Jane's father is accurate, and the marriage between Jane and George is an unhappy one. Jane's false hope that her husband would come to love her is a site of tension between the couple that is only exacerbated by her increasing jealousy over his closeness with his sister, Anne. George labels their union as a "bitter parody of a marriage", and responds to one of Jane's outbursts about his relationship with his sister by chastising her: "You yearn for what I can never give ... you claim to love me, though you find fault with nearly all of me and heap scorn and jealousy upon everyone and everything that pleases me. You harp and badger, weep and shriek, jeer and cling, until it is all I can do not to strike you" (68-69). It is Jane's inability to recognise that theirs was a union borne of ambition, dynastic strategy, and familial loyalty, not of love, that causes the marriage to be unhappy: as George states, "I have been a pawn to my father's ambition, and you see what it has wrought me—and you with me" (68). Here lies a key difference between the historical novels and the chick lit genre—dynasty is rarely a concern of texts set in the past few decades—and yet the rhetoric surrounding the protagonist's quest for romance, and to tame Mr. Wrong, reflects the genre's dominant themes.

Jane and George are not alone in their predicament: George is concerned for Anne's wellbeing, believing that she is "unlikely to find happiness" in Henry's bed: George "lost [his] battle" to find "happiness" but vows to "do everything [he] can to help Anne win hers" (68). Happiness in marriage is depicted as an unlikely occurrence throughout *The Tudor Wife*. The dynastic purpose of marriage means that the institution is not conducive to happiness. Purdy does not explore marital relationships that are personally fulfilling for their participants in any detail. In contrast, Gregory writes a more conventional romance narrative in the relationship between Mary and her second husband, William Stafford. The "desires and motivations" of Mary are the "focus" of the narrative (Mabry 195), thus Anne's political struggles are essential to the narrative because she impacts Mary. She is initially resistant to William's advances, refusing his proposal because she is "a Howard and a Boleyn and you are a nobody" (318). As they develop a friendship and he becomes an integral site of support against the backdrop of her family's

scheming, she falls in love with him. Mary and William openly admit their mutual attraction, yet they do not act on their desire prior to their marriage because any ill conduct on Mary's part may jeopardise the possibility of Anne's promised marriage to Henry eventuating; the importance of Anne's rise in status is thus framed as a determinant of Mary's happiness. She readily admits to her brother that she feels "a little lust" for William and, in response, George encourages her to wait until Anne is queen before she acts on her desire: "Anne has to be immaculate between now and her wedding day ... we are all of us on show. If you have a little lust for the man, then sit on it, my sister, for until Anne is married we have to be as chaste as angels" (331). Mary's desires must be quelled in order for Anne to appear pure: her sister's (destructive) ambition overrules Mary's (productive) desires.

In *The Other Boleyn Girl*, there is a distinction between sex and marriage motivated by genuine affection and that motivated by ambition for power and status. As in *The Tudor Wife*, dynastic sex and marriage are both destructive. Anne and Percy are evidence of such destructiveness: they both experience dynastically beneficial marriages that are defined by hatred and abuse, after their own betrothal—and the consummation of that betrothal—is dismissed. *The Other Boleyn Girl*, however, also offers a contrasting view in which marriage that is informed by love provides safety and emotional fulfilment. William, for example, desires Mary and proposes marriage, in part, because this would allow the couple to have sex; following their mutual admission of desire, he passionately declares: "Mary, we must marry ... or you must take full responsibility for me going insane" (335). Although the relationship is unconsummated until their secret marriage, it is nonetheless represented as a sexual one: William describes himself as resembling "a cunt-struck page ... shaking with desire", to which Mary responds, "oh God, me too" (335). Gregory frames social norms that demand chastity outside of marriage as restrictive, but does not label either Mary or William as immoral because of their sexual desire. Indeed, the negative response to Mary's revelation that she is pregnant and has secretly married William indicates the immorality of the court; although the couple have contravened social norms

governing marriage and sex, we are encouraged to view these norms as distorted because dynastic concerns are considered to be more important than love.

Mary's ambitions are focused on domesticity, love and happiness, not wealth and status. Although her first appraisal of William mirrors the later opinion of her family, he convinces her that happiness is of greater value than status. After they have stood together during a crossing to France, William asks her if these were not "the happiest six hours of [her] life", prompting her to recount her successes: "I had been the beloved of a king, I had been reclaimed by a loving husband, and I had been the more successful sister for many years", before conceding that "yes ... those were the happiest six hours of my life" (336). Mary's labelling of her former prominence as the king's mistress as success is flawed because status and wealth did not make her happy. It is thus happiness that informs her decision to risk her current status and her relationship with her family to pursue a life with William, and this choice is directly contrasted with Anne's decision to pursue power. Mary's marriage renders her a "nobody" yet, as William argues "there's a great comfort" in diminished social status, before challenging Mary: "your sister is set to be queen. D'you think she will be happier than you?" (318). Anne's marriage is thereby defined in terms of status and it is her rise to the rank of queen that is addressed, rather than any possibility of a fulfilling relationship with her husband. Mary's marriage is for happiness and love, in spite, or perhaps because of, its lack of status; it is true, pure, authentic desires that led to a happy marriage.

Miriam Burstein has argued that Anne Boleyn's history is not conducive to the romance genre. The nature of her death means that a happy ending in the conventional sense is not possible. She thus proposes that romances that engage with her past must offer variations on the conventional romance narrative: the "counterromance" (18) and the "antiromance" (4). These two variations of the romance genre address the conventional desires and concerns of the historical romance, yet explain how such desires cannot be adequately met within the milieu of the Tudor royal court. The atmosphere and demands of court required sex and marriage to be

politicised: “the ‘love’ in these narratives is usually questionable; the courtship game is just that” and “the sex can be unpleasant” (“Afterlife” 4). I argue that *The Other Boleyn Girl* and *The Tudor Wife* each conform to one of these models. Antiromances, such as *The Tudor Wife*, refer to novels concerned with characters in pursuit of objectives typical of the romance novel—including sex, courtship and marriage—but whose efforts are violently thwarted (Burstein, “Afterlife” 4). In such novels, the sex, love and courtship that are integral to the romance narrative “undergo a bloody transmogrification”; marriage and sex are politicised and are thus inauthentic, but the characters do not recognise this inauthenticity and it is this misreading that leads to tragedy (4). As Jane ponders: “does love ever truly make anyone happy? Look back; there is not one happy story in the lot! There is passion, yes, and pomp and pageantry, but every story ends with blood and tears” (411).

The Other Boleyn Girl is, however, a counterromance, because it features a romantic relationship that operates as a contrast to that which occurs between Anne and Henry. This secondary relationship—namely, that which exists between Mary and William—acts to show that “true love and an *authentically* organic relationship” can only be achieved by shunning both the political presence and artificial and sexualised rituals of attraction that are presented as being a ubiquitous aspect of courtly life (Burstein, “Afterlife” 18, emphasis in original). At court “every action becomes both political theatre and political commodity” (11), thus a genuine relationship in the romantic tradition is only possible outside of this arena (18).

The women in these novels are equally, or more, responsible for their unfulfilling marriages as their husbands: Mary Boleyn’s first marriage to William Carey is unhappy because she cuckolds him when she becomes the king’s mistress (Gregory, *Other* 237), while Jenna Barlow has argued that Jane Boleyn “is by no means a blameless victim of her husband’s maltreatment” because she is “vindictive, resentful, and occasionally abusive herself” (247). This characterisation reflects post-feminist criticisms of ‘victim feminism’, which emphasise the power that women do hold (Showden 169-70). In turn, Anne possesses agency and is held accountable for her actions;

she is not considered a victim of the patriarchy in which she lived. Women's agency, as it is depicted in Purdy and Gregory's portrayals of Boleyn as royal mistress, is shaped by sexual behaviours: "women are not straight-forwardly objectified but are portrayed as active, desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests to do so" (Gill, "Media" 151). A self-proclaimed feminist author, Gregory has argued that her books are "pro-women" and that they act as "advocates for women's power" ("Naughtie"). In her commentary on the novel and its representation of Boleyn, she has stated that she likes Anne: "she's an ambitious woman" and she becomes a "sexual conspirator" because she, like all women of the era, was "blocked from any sort of real power" ("Naughtie"). Despite this acknowledgment that Boleyn's freedoms and opportunities were limited because of her gender, Gregory's novel does not frame limitation in terms of repression. Instead, she emphasises that Boleyn possessed a degree of power but specifically defines this power as purely sexual.

In Gregory's novel, and in *The Tudor Wife*, Anne's sexual behaviours are a necessary means of sustaining Henry's interest for an extended period of time and are an undesirable and often degrading ploy to encourage, but never satisfy, Henry's desires. That these scenes depict Henry coercing or persuading Anne to engage in acts that she does not find pleasurable does not make her a victim in these novels because she is actively seeking a relationship with the king. However, she is complicit in her own objectification by using sexual behaviours as a tool to achieve power and status. As Mantel has argued, it is for this prescribed role of "opportunist and sexual predator" that Boleyn "finds herself recruited to the cause of feminism" (Mantel, "Boleyn" 6); Boleyn's sexual agency, and manipulation of her sexuality for power, ostensibly position her as a post-feminist icon.

Gregory has argued that representations of women by historians can be characterised by "Eve the temptress" or "Mary the Virgin" or "as so exceptional as to be a pseudo-man", and has criticised this view for defining women by their sexual behaviours (Gregory, "Introduction" 23).

Ironically, this archetypal view of femininity nevertheless dominates her novel. In *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Boleyn's agency is dependent on Henry finding her sexually attractive, despite her being both clever and politically astute. Although he is still "mad to touch" her, "he's been waiting three years" and Anne worries that she is not capable of sustaining their abstinence for "another three years" (Gregory, *Other* 254); this reveals her fear that Henry's attraction is primarily a sexual one. As such, Gregory's characterisation is defined by the sexual archetypes that she has criticised in other forms of women's history. Similarly, in Purdy's *The Tudor Wife*, Jane envies Anne's ability to make "men fall at her feet, sing her praises, and worship her" (9). Jane begrudges this allure and it is this resentment that, combined with her jealousy toward the closeness that her husband George shares with his sister, encourages her to perceive Anne as a direct threat to her marriage and happiness (17-18). Anne's success in court is seen to be purely a result of her ability to attract men, demonstrated by Jane's remonstrance of "would that I could be like Anne; perhaps then you would love me!" (69). Her jealousy is framed in sexualised terms; Jane observes the siblings' intimacy which resembles that which she craves from George: she watches her "husband lying on his sister's bed, holding her as he had never held me", and watches them kiss, observing that "he had never kissed me so tenderly or lingeringly" (238).

Rosalind Gill has argued that post-feminist media and literary culture promulgates a dichotomy between feminine and masculine sexualities in which women are seen to be arbiters of sexual interactions ("Media" 151). Women are "responsible" for constructing their own personas as "desirable heterosexual subjects" who facilitate male pleasure and self-esteem, whilst guarding against the risks of pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and challenges to their own reputation (Gill, "Media" 151). Purdy and Gregory each depict Anne protesting that should her virginal status be compromised by an illegitimate pregnancy or her sullied reputation, so too would her opportunity to become queen: she "can't give [her]self to him" because "if anyone thinks that [she is] his whore then [she] will never supplant Katherine" (Gregory, *Other* 325). In their respective characterisations of Anne, she does not desire Henry but is instead motivated by

personal ambition and thus acquires the dual role of mistress and politician. Sex is thereby framed in terms of strategy, rather than pleasure, and Anne is required to protect the couple against potential risks in their campaign to secure Henry's divorce.

Henry's masculinity acts as a counterpoint to Anne's controlled sexuality, supporting Gill's framework that sees men in post-feminist culture "hailed as hedonists just wanting 'a shag'" ("Media" 151). Simultaneously, there is a danger inherent to Anne's encouragement (and regulation) of Henry's desire, and she is depicted as being responsible for any potential ramifications; she does not critique Henry's inconstancy or disloyalty, but rather fears her own inability to remain desirable. Constructed, as a "predatory, sexually emancipated, possibly mentally unbalanced, single woman" (McRobbie 35), Anne herself is dangerous because of her encouragement of Henry's hedonistic desires and her potential failure to control and regulate *his* sexual behaviours. Despite the rejection of conservative notions of sex and morality evident in these texts, they nevertheless adhere to strictly defined gender roles, which preference male desire and in which women are required to regulate sex (because men are ostensibly incapable of doing so). Hence *The Other Boleyn Girl* and *The Tudor Wife* are examples of post-feminist "co-existence of neo-conservative" conceptualisations of sex and gender and "processes of liberalisation in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations" (McRobbie 255-56). Anne is ultimately punished for her ambition and sexuality, Jane's sadness over marrying Mr Wrong leads her to accuse her husband and sister-in-law of incest, whereas 'chaste' Mary is rewarded for choosing domesticity and authentic love.

Flirting with Power

Purdy and Gregory are not unique in their respective depictions of pre-marital sexual interactions between Henry and Boleyn. A number of other authors have characterised this phase of the relationship in terms of the persistence of Henry and the resistance of Anne; as Henry describes the depth of his passion, Anne refuses his advances because she will only submit once

they are married and she is his queen. Like Mantel's Cromwell, readers are encouraged to contemplate "the image of the king's fingers creeping over a resistant, quick-breathing and virginal bosom" (*Wolf* 190). The texts each depict Henry as continuing "to press her for the ultimate favour" (Purdy 90), in spite of her explicit protestation that she "wouldn't be his mistress" (Dunn, *Queen* 19), and was "only to yield when marriage was within her sights" (Weir, *Tower* 11). While he may have possessed "her heart and her love", she insisted that "he would have to wait" until "they were married" before she gave him "her body" (Starkey 283). Anne asserts her virginal status in these texts, protesting that "she would never forgive herself if she gave away her maidenhead before marriage" (Gregory, *Other* 222), yet for a number of these writers, her reluctance is not informed by her sense of morality but was instead a "tactical weapon" and a product of her personal ambition (Weir, *Tower* 12).

In these narratives, Boleyn's rejection of Henry's sexual advances is regularly accompanied by a protestation based on the wider political goal of securing their marriage. Her virginity is essential to the task of securing her marriage because it is "the promise of the eventual consummation of the relationship" that acts as "her source of power" (Dolan, "Gender" 138). The focus texts discuss the act of consummation as a transaction in which Boleyn offers sex only in exchange for the title of queen: Anne rejects Henry's pleas that she is "queen of [his] heart already" in *The Tudor Wife*, because the "bargain ... that we agreed upon" was that she "shall share [his] bed and give [him] sons" only once she is "Queen of England" (91). Likewise, Ives claims that her acquiescence in Calais should not be read as "an admission that she had lowered her price" but as evidence of her conviction that the marriage would soon take place (*Life* 167). Thus, the promise of her sexuality is framed as her political leverage. Described as the person who caused Henry's "gratification" to be "delayed ... for the first time in [his] life", Boleyn's ascribed use of this purportedly feminine device to gain political influence is seen as an unprecedented threat to Henry's ultimate authority: as Mantel's Cromwell ponders, "how can she refuse? Nobody knows" (*Wolf* 80).

Merry Wiesner-Hanks has argued that early modern Protestantism perceived unmarried women as a danger, as they represented a contradiction of the “divinely imposed order” with the denial of their “natural sex drive”, eschewal of marriage and, in turn, the patriarchal order “which made women subject to man” (Wiesner-Hanks 33). Depictions of Boleyn’s prominent role in the divorce proceedings and, particularly, in the downfall of Henry’s “right-hand man” Cardinal Wolsey, is consistent with this context (Ives, *Life* 115). It is his failure to secure an annulment for Henry’s first marriage that is seen to be integral to Wolsey’s political and personal downfall. Boleyn is perceived to have been responsible for convincing Henry that Wolsey was “lukewarm on the divorce” and thus secured his arrest and humiliation (113). While Henry held the power to punish the cardinal for his perceived disloyalty, narratives regularly place Anne at the centre of his downfall. Ives describes Anne as “an equal party, indeed, an instigator” in the plot (*Life* 114); in *The Other Boleyn Girl* Mary explains that the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk collaborated against Wolsey, but asserts that the “plot ... bore Anne’s hallmark” (274), and Starkey poses the question, “could Henry have two friends: one his minister and the other his mistress?” (291). These narratives present Boleyn as harbouring hostility towards Wolsey who, being aware of this, “feared the ensuing marriage of Anne Boleyn and Henry VIII, and was reluctant to do anything to bring it about” (290). Boleyn, they posit, “wanted rid of Wolsey” (Dunn, *Queen* 24), and having “decided that [he] was trying to frustrate, not assist, the divorce”, took her opportunity to act against him (Ives, *Life* 114).

Henry is described as having been initially reluctant to doubt the cardinal, and it is only Anne’s insistence that Wolsey had failed to carry out the king’s desires that alters Henry’s perspective. Ives argues that “ironically, the one person whom Anne found difficult to motivate against the cardinal was Henry”, but that the strength of Anne’s position allowed her to gain support from the nobility, many of whom were disillusioned with the extent of the cardinal’s influence and, having witnessed the extent of Henry’s passion for her, predicted that she “was going to win” (Ives, *Life* 115). In these narratives, Boleyn’s insistence exceeds Henry’s reluctance,

as George Cavendish's musings in *Wolf Hall* demonstrate: "How can the king be in two minds? How can my lord cardinal be dismissed if he doesn't want to dismiss him? How can the king give way to my lord's enemies? Isn't the king master, over all the enemies ... Or is it her? It must be" (Mantel 63). Anne's capacity to seemingly overpower the king and the cardinal demonstrates how far reaching her influence has become.

Wolsey is consistently represented as having underestimated Boleyn, dismissing her as a mere royal mistress—a dismissal that is contrasted with Anne's sustained hatred of Wolsey, believing that "we have been enemies from the moment" she arrived at court (Gregory, *Other* 273). Her threats made toward him are quickly and mockingly dismissed as simply the attempts of "some sallow chit ... to menace my lord cardinal" (Mantel, *Wolf* 79), but these detractors "could not know how she would rise and rise" (79). Characterisations of Boleyn regularly attribute her success against Wolsey, in part, to this general ignorance of her strength, evidenced by Anne's assertions that "he didn't even understand what power I have" (Gregory, *Other* 273), and that, "me being a woman, he didn't see me coming" (Dunn, *Queen* 24).

Although Boleyn's power is positioned as a challenge to the patriarchy, as is demonstrated by her successful triumph over Wolsey, she gains agency by exploiting the patriarchal structures that view women wholly in relation to men; in this society, as it is here depicted, sexual appeal and/or maternal potential determines women's ascribed value. Boleyn's failure to provide Henry with a son and heir means that, despite any sexual successes, she does not gain power as a mother. Anne therefore succeeds only as a seductress, and not as a wife. As Frances Dolan argues, her power over Henry is believed to have evaporated once they consummated their relationship (*Marriage* 138); it is the promise of sex, not the fulfilment of this promise, that is integral to her ascendancy.

Mantel explores this notion in *Bring up the Bodies*, when Anne dismisses the potential threat that Jane Seymour poses to her queenship, articulating that Jane's only weapon is her virginity: "what use is a maidenhead, the morning after? Before the event she is the queen of his

heart and after it she is just a drab who couldn't keep her skirts down" (118). Here, Anne speaks from experience. When Anne relinquishes her own leverage over Henry, she makes the transition from mistress to wife—seemingly escaping the fate of discarded mistress that she predicts for Jane—but once this transition is complete, the promise of sexual gratification no longer holds power. As Henry begins to doubt his second marriage in *Wolf Hall*, it is only during Anne's pregnancy that his fears appear to "vanish" (98); yet, as the prospect of a son and heir to the Tudor throne decreases, so too does Anne's ability to influence her husband. Cromwell contemplates this changed power dynamic and Anne's receding influence in *Bring up the Bodies*, believing that "while I am in Henry's favour, I doubt the queen can do me any harm" (38). As such, Cromwell dismisses her "little rages" as inconsequential (38). Although Henry had been fascinated by the volatility that demarcated Anne from "those soft, kind blondes who drift through men's lives and leave not a mark behind", he now looks "harassed" by her presence (38). The growing distance between the couple and the subsequent decline in Anne's influence acts as a contrast to her dominant role in the downfall of Wolsey that Mantel depicts in *Wolf Hall*; Anne's position is no longer determined by her proximity to the king, but by her ability to produce a male heir.

This trope is predicated on the notion that Henry's attraction to Boleyn as a mistress was predominantly sexual. For Starkey and Denny, however, Boleyn's attraction as a mistress differs in that it is not limited to her sexuality—or the promise of her sexuality—but also encompasses her wit, companionship, intelligence and strength. Henry is described by Starkey as a "love-sick schoolboy" (283); he asserts that the couple experienced "the pangs that only lovers—separated by distance, or necessity, or a false parade of virtue—know" and that Henry "fantasised about embracing her" and "kiss[ing] her pretty duckies" (340)—infantilising both Anne and Henry. Starkey also considers Henry's decision to visit Anne at Hever and asserts that he was motivated, not only by a desire to "canoodle", but also because he "needed to consult with her on ... the Great Matter" (341). By characterising the couple as a political partnership, and the success of

“the Divorce” as a collaborative project that they “debated” and “discussed” on an “almost daily” basis (285-86), Starkey counters the perception that sex acts were necessary for sustaining Henry’s interest for an extended period of time; instead, these encounters and desires represent merely one aspect of the relationship.

Similarly, Denny draws on more recent understandings of romance and relationships, and refers to Boleyn’s acceptance of the title of mistress as constituting the “first real relationship of [Henry’s life]” (99). It was “her ability to discuss literature and theology on equal terms with the King”, writes Denny, that encourages Henry to refer to “Anne as his friend” (99). It was her position as an “intellectual equal”—rather than her sexual allure—that was the source of her growing influence over matters of state (99). Like Denny who merges Anne’s roles as “friend” and “mistress”, Starkey does not limit Anne to a mistress, because she was unlike other women who assumed the role. He describes Anne’s resistance to becoming Henry’s “‘official’ mistress” and names her sister Mary as one of two women to have “occupied this position” (274). Starkey draws a comparison between Anne, the politician, confidant and friend, and Mary, the mistress defined by sexuality, introducing her as a woman who was “very attractive to men” and who “found them irresistible too—or, at least, her resistance never seems to have lasted long” (258). He directly contrasts Anne’s character with that of her sister, arguing that Anne and their brother George “were different” because they were “intelligent, ambitious” and “talent[ed]” (258), and comparing Mary’s “easy acquiescence” to Anne’s resistance (274). Hence he establishes a dichotomy between Mary, the conventional royal mistress, and Anne, the woman who “made [Henry], for the first and last time in his life, fall properly in love” (279). In doing so, Starkey explains how she sustained Henry’s infatuation without becoming “lovers in the fully physical sense” until their 1532 trip to Calais (461). The characterisations written by Denny and Starkey thus resist the formulaic paradigms in which a woman is defined only by her sexual behaviours and experiences.

Henry's Abstinence

Although there is significant variation in the manner of representation, the majority of authors contend that Boleyn withheld sex from Henry until shortly before their marriage in 1533. In contrast, George Bernard argues that the relationship was consummated early in the courtship and that it is “likely” that it was then Henry, not Anne, who insisted on abstinence (*Fatal* 30): “Anne had yielded” early in their relationship (30). Having “consolidated” the relationship in this manner, Henry became determined that they should be married and that it was subsequently necessary to become chaste so as to avoid the dual risks of gossip and an illegitimate pregnancy (30-31). For Bernard, “any notion that it was Anne who held Henry’s advances back for six years is nonsense” (31). He bases this contention on a reinterpretation of one of Henry’s letters to Boleyn, in which Henry wrote:

Your letter, and the demonstrations of your affection are so cordial that they bind me to honor, love and serve you. I desire also, if at any time I have offended you, that you will give men the same absolution that you ask, assuring you that henceforth my heart shall be devoted to you only. I wish my body also could be. God can do it if he pleases, to whom I pray once a day that it may be, and hope at length to be heard.
(*LP* iv. 3325)

Rejecting the predominant reading of Henry’s hope that his body could join his heart in total devotion as a plea to “soften Anne’s heart” (*Fatal* 29), he instead argues that it is “more plausible” to read Henry’s appeal as a prayer for the annulment of his marriage to Catherine (31). While Bernard’s reading of this passage as an appeal to God to allow his marriage to proceed—rather than as an appeal to Anne to consent to a sexual relationship—is certainly plausible, Henry’s words do not constitute evidence that the relationship had already been consummated.

Bernard’s interpretation hinges on the phrasing of a draft Papal dispensation that indicates that Henry may have previously had sexual intercourse with his proposed bride (31).

Having asserted the likelihood that Henry and Anne had “slept together for a time” he poses the rhetorical question:

Why else should Henry in the draft dispensation he sent the pope in autumn 1527 have asked for permission to marry someone with whom he had already had intercourse? It was manifestly Henry, once he set off on his campaign for a divorce, not Anne, who then deliberately refrained from full sexual relations (31).

In advancing this argument, Bernard denies Anne the (limited) power and agency associated with the decision. The dominant representation of Boleyn as an assertive figure in control of her own sexuality sees her become a historical actor in her own right rather than a passive subject of desire: as Starkey writes, “the girl from Hever, the cocotte of the Court of Queen Claude of France, had metamorphosed into ‘one of the makers of history’. It was an astonishing transformation” (286). Her agency, however, is predicated on her virginity—or Henry’s belief in her virginity—and her personal and political influence is dependent on her capacity to ensure that his attraction to her remains unabated, but never satiated (Dolan, “Gender” 138). By attributing the decision to abstain to Henry rather than Anne, Bernard eliminates her agency, and instead offers an interpretation of events that is consistent with his contention that Boleyn lacked the political knowledge and skill that is elsewhere attributed to her. He describes her as trusting and naïve, stating that this naiveté was “hardly surprising” considering she had “little experience of politics, diplomacy and canon law” (*Fatal* 46). He also rejects the thesis that she was influential in turning Henry against Wolsey on the basis that it is only “later sources, written with the benefit of hindsight” that “give Anne a more prominent role” (49). In his review of *Fatal Attractions*, which is tellingly titled “Anne Boleyn on Trial Again”, Ives observes that “Bernard appears to fear that if Anne is allowed any influence, it will undermine” his contention that Henry VIII “was the architect of the Reformation” (770); further, he criticises Bernard’s apparent methodology of “tak[ing] evidence which he accepts appears to be in Anne’s favour, and construct[ing] alternative interpretations one after another” (775). The contention that Boleyn, as an unmarried woman,

accepted the role of royal mistress without perceiving the possible consequences, and that it was Henry alone who recognised that the arrangement could be detrimental to their cause, undermines any notion that Anne was intelligent and politically astute, or that she held any power within the relationship.

Weir counters Bernard's interpretation, arguing that the wording of the Papal bull indicates a desire to cover "every contingency" should Anne become his mistress and "does not necessarily imply that he had already slept with her" (Weir, *Tower* 11). This contention reflects the widely accepted view that the couple had sex once their long-anticipated marriage appeared certain to become a reality; Henry was, she argues, "looking to the future" with the intention of "making Anne his mistress in anticipation of their marriage" (11). Weir, in turn, cites Henry's surviving "love letters" as evidence that "the more traditional assumption", in which "it was she who kept him at arm's length for all that time", "is likely to be correct" (11). In spite of her criticisms of Bernard's reading of this evidence, Weir also formulates her appraisal of Boleyn's sexuality on limited evidence and thus turns to speculation. In her non-fictional narrative, *The Lady in the Tower*, she argues that Henry's prudish nature meant that his realisation that Boleyn had previous sexual experience instigated a growing disillusionment, writing that Henry was "clearly shocked to discover that Anne had already had some experience before he slept with her, and this disenchantment had probably been festering ever since" (12). In the footnote accompanying this claim, Weir does not provide a specific citation, but instead writes that "the evidence for Henry's growing disillusionment with Anne Boleyn" can be found in *The Calendar of Letters, Despatches and State Papers relating to Negotiations between England and Spain*, known as the *Spanish Calendar*; the writings of George Wyatt; and William Roper's *The Life of Sir Thomas More* (360). This claim is unsupported by specific examples of the disillusionment, or discussion of Anne's prior sexual experience that contributed to Henry's unhappiness.

It is also important to note the historiographical implications of using these particular sources as evidence in this context. The *Spanish Calendar* and Roper's text are widely

acknowledged to propagate negative representations of Boleyn, thus they are problematic as evidence for the dynamics of her relationship with Henry. In contrast, Wyatt wrote a generation after Boleyn's lifetime and, although he offers a portrait that is flattering for the most part, his account cannot be considered to be contemporaneous. Weir also fictionalises the manner in which Boleyn's character was understood in the years after her death in her novel, *The Lady Elizabeth*, when those who encounter the young protagonist are mindful of her mother's reputation and she, in turn, is sexualised: Thomas Seymour's "loins quiver" with "the prospect of bed sport" with Elizabeth should he succeed in making her his bride, and while her youth is appealing, his excitement is largely informed by her being the daughter of "that provocative flirt, Anne Boleyn" (Weir 164). The evidence that is used by Weir, and her characterisation of Seymour's thoughts on Elizabeth, thus reflect Boleyn's posthumous reputation, which is difficult to separate from her execution on charges of adultery.

"Harry Percy's Lady"

Although Bernard is unique in his contention that Henry and Boleyn had sex early in their relationship, he is not alone in his assertion that she was not a virgin when the couple departed for France in 1532. Despite arguing that Henry and Boleyn refrained from sex, a number of writers contend that she had previously been intimate with other men, including Thomas Wyatt and Henry Percy, prior to the king: for example, in *The Tudor Wife*, it is "common knowledge that she had carnally known both the poet Wyatt and Harry Percy" (Purdy 135). Boleyn's success in sustaining Henry's interest and, in turn, becoming his wife is predicated on her virginity. The possibility that her "much-vaunted" virtue was not "genuine" has encouraged authors to question her morality, not only in terms of her sexual conduct, but also as a form of deception that may have acted to alienate Henry and thus contributed to her own eventual downfall (Weir, *Tower* 12). No documentation exists to confirm that such a pre-marital encounter took place and this contention is necessarily based on speculation. Weir, for example, writes that "it would be surprising if Anne ... had remained chaste until her marriage at the age of about

thirty-two”, basing this supposition on the licentious reputations of Boleyn’s mother and siblings (12).

Much of this speculation focuses on the possibility of a relationship between Boleyn and Percy, echoing the narrative in George Cavendish’s *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*. Cavendish dramatises a confrontation between Henry Percy—then the heir to the earldom of Northumberland—and Cardinal Wolsey, during which Percy is chastised for his pursuit of Boleyn. “There grew such a secret love between” the young couple, Cavendish asserts, “that, at length, they were ensured together, intending to marry”, yet the king, who secretly harboured an attraction to Boleyn, grew jealous and instructed Wolsey to end the relationship between Percy and Boleyn (29). Cavendish describes how Wolsey told Percy that his position demanded a wife who “matched you according to your estate and honour”, to which Percy defended Boleyn’s ancestry, before admitting to a “precontract” sworn before witnesses (30-31). This precontract was soon dissolved and Anne, ignorant of the king’s attraction, vowed revenge on Wolsey for preventing her marriage (30-31).

Cavendish’s account bears a significant influence on the twenty-first-century historicisation of the relationship between Percy and Boleyn. The Cavendish text primarily informs the accepted narrative: the couple undertake a betrothal, their intentions become known, Wolsey chastises Percy who submits to the Cardinal’s authority, before Anne swears that she will have retribution. Ives describes the text as “the principal text for the Percy story, and the only one that gives any detail” (*Life* 121), while Bernard writes, “sources are meagre” for this episode and “much depends on the truth of what George Cavendish ... writing much later, tells us” (*Fatal* 13). As Bernard here indicates, writers have regularly questioned the accuracy of Cavendish’s portrayal, despite his narrative’s continued influence on the ways in which this episode is remembered.

That the text was written retrospectively is integral to such discussions. Cavendish wrote during the reign of Mary I, “the enemy of Anne and everything she stood for”, and Denny argues

that Cavendish's representation of Boleyn as "the instrument of Wolsey's destruction" must be read by historians in light of this political context (47). While Cavendish was "splendidly placed to collect first-hand information about Wolsey and the court" (Ives, *Life* 59), his account was "almost certainly coloured by hindsight" (Bernard, *Fatal* 14). Although Denny considers this problem in terms of the context of the book's production, others have looked to characterisations of Percy and Boleyn that appear to be informed largely by their later reputations, criticising the representations as "too convenient" (14). For example, in the text, Percy's father berates him, accusing him of being "an unthrift waster" (Cavendish 32); however, as Bernard notes, Percy "had yet to come into the inheritance which he was to squander" (*Fatal* 14). This suggests the likelihood that the dialogue reflects Percy's eventual "ruin"—described by Ives as "the final act in the romantic tragedy" (*Life* 65)—rather than the original exchange.

Both Ives and Bernard agree that the assertion of Boleyn's fervent animosity towards Wolsey is inconsistent with her later dealings with him (Ives, *Life* 65; Bernard, *Fatal* 14). Starkey, however, accepts Cavendish's account as plausible, and argues that Anne did feel an enmity toward Wolsey because of the altercation between him and Percy, but that it was "at first judiciously concealed" (277). Starkey has criticised evaluations of Cavendish's account that assert, as Ives and Bernard do, that his authority is diminished because it is written in retrospect; he accepts the text as accurate because, he argues, Cavendish was indeed a witness to many of the events that took place: "Cavendish's account has been dismissed by the fashionable band of 'revisionist' historians, who are blessed with the happy confidence that they understand the past better than those who were alive at the time" (295). Ives' concern is not, however, whether Cavendish was a witness to those events he narrates, but rather that he wrote at a later date, asserting "after thirty-five years he can have retained only an impression of what was said" (*Life* 65).

Also of interest is the style of Cavendish's prose. Cavendish, argues Ives, incorporated his "first-hand reports" into "consciously produced pieces of literature" (*Life* 59), creating dialogue

rather than describing events from a third-person perspective. Likewise, Mantel queries the effect of Cavendish's literary style and retrospect on the accuracy of his account. Her focus is his ability to recall dialogue and reproduce it accurately decades later, deliberately drawing attention to the debate of his accuracy. In *Wolf Hall*, Cavendish recounts the resolution to the matter of "Harry Percy's lady" (Mantel 74) for Cromwell who has heard the story only in the "cardinal's chilly and dismissive rendition" (77). Cavendish relates the story in the form of "a play", prompting Cromwell to enquire: "I like ... the way you remember the exact words. Did you write them down at the time? Or do you use some licence?" (78). The ideal of an "informative" historical text devoid of imaginative embellishment is, however, inherited from nineteenth-century historiography (Ives, *Life* 59), and Cavendish's use of dialogue as a narrative device reflects earlier perspectives in which history was "a subsection of rhetoric" (Otter 109). Hence it is anachronistic to regard his narrative as inaccurate because it does not conform to modern conventions of historical writing and because "he writes as an eyewitness" (Ives, *Life* 63).

Although Cavendish's text has been considered to be a problematic historical source, it certainly has not been dismissed entirely by those who have written about Boleyn's relationship with Henry Percy. Authors have directly addressed Cavendish and *The Life And Death Of Cardinal Wolsey* in their examination of this episode, as is demonstrated by discussions of his credibility, while others implicitly reference the text in their narration of the confrontation: Purdy's Jane Boleyn, for instance, learns "the whole story" of Wolsey's chastisement of Percy from "Robert, a distant cousin" who is, like Cavendish, "a gentleman" in Wolsey's household (40). Cavendish's account of events "cannot be ignored" (Ives, *Life* 66), and it informs the narratives of the texts analysed in this thesis. Every author features the encounter between Percy and Wolsey—or a variation of this encounter—and Boleyn's subsequent reaction.

Wolsey is described as having forbidden the marriage in each text and, although writers explore various possibilities for how this may have occurred, the scene is regularly presented in a formulaic manner with social status and the couple's defiance of authority being the predominant

themes. This metanarrative relates how Wolsey “brutally pointed out the difference in status between Percy ... and his prospective bride” (Starkey 275), criticising Anne as “a common little nobody” (Purdy 42), and asserting his “plans for Harry’s family which didn’t include a Boleyn” (Dunn, *Queen* 7). Percy’s father, the Earl of Northumberland, then “came down from the North” (Mantel, *Wolf* 78), and “administered another tongue-lashing to the boy” (Starkey 276); having been “reduced ... to tears” (Ives, *Life* 64), Percy was “browbeat[en] into submission” and married Mary Talbot as he was instructed (Starkey 275). Mantel fictionalises an encounter resembling that described by Cavendish, although her variation takes place between Wolsey and Thomas Boleyn, who is chastised and subtly threatened: “speak to your daughter, or I will” (*Wolf* 67). While this confrontation sees Boleyn replace Percy as the recipient of Wolsey’s rebuke, similar themes are addressed, including the low social standing of the Boleyn family as the Cardinal reminds Boleyn that his daughter is “below a Percy ... in the dynastic sense” (68).

In writing a biography of Wolsey, Cavendish’s focus remained the Cardinal’s role in events, and as such he does not describe the nature of the relationship between Percy and Boleyn in any great detail: he does not indicate whether it was consummated, either party’s motivations for pursuing the arrangement nor whether genuine affection existed between the couple. These facets of the relationship are, however, significant for the ways in which it and, in turn, Boleyn are characterised in twenty-first-century historical narratives. While it is Anne’s relationship with Henry VIII that is the central concern for most writers considering her romantic endeavours, her previous liaison with Percy is regularly used as a framing device for these wider issues. The question of Boleyn’s sexual experience is important here—as is suggested by Cardinal Wolsey’s intimations of what she and Percy “might do in a haystack on a warm night” (Mantel, *Wolf* 68). Representations of Boleyn’s motivations for becoming involved with Percy are equally important for her characterisation as her actions. Cavendish’s emphasis on the disparity between the Percy and Boleyn families means that the question of whether it was Percy himself to whom she was

attracted, or merely his title and wealth, is a significant aspect of representations of Boleyn and, subsequently, her motivations for encouraging the king's advances.

Importantly, the representations of Boleyn's later interactions with Henry are dependent on the manner in which accounts of the relationship between Boleyn and Percy construct affect. Yet where her relationship with the king is strategic, Percy offers promise of both status and love. Gregory's *The Other Boleyn Girl* and Dunn's *The Queen of Subtleties* offer fictionalised portrayals of Boleyn's emotions toward Percy: Gregory achieves this through Anne's relationship with Mary Boleyn, the novel's narrator and Anne's confidante, while much of Dunn's narrative consists of a letter written by Anne to Elizabeth, which conveys Anne's own account of her life. In both of these narratives, Anne does not disregard Percy's wealth and position yet this is not her primary motivation. Dunn's version of Boleyn describes how "I fell in love with Harry, Lord Percy" and also states that, significantly, "Harry was in love with me" (4); his position as "one of the wealthiest heirs in the country" is described as merely "another point in his favour" in addition to their genuine affection (Dunn, *Queen* 4). Similarly, in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, the Boleyn siblings discuss the hoped-for marriage when Mary asks whether it is "just his wealth" that her sister covets (97). Although Anne facetiously replies that "the title" is appealing, she continues, confessing her love for him: "'Please God,' she said. 'I want nothing more in my life but Henry Percy. With that I would be content'" (98). As such, despite Anne's ardency, neither Dunn nor Gregory's characterisation of Anne disregards the significance of his social standing entirely, nor do they "forget what's due to me and my family" (Gregory, *Other* 97). Megan Hickerson has argued that Gregory's portrayal of Anne's "brief experience of love" is "shallow" because her affection is "ever-secondary to personal ambition" (223). I contend, however, that Gregory, and, equally, Dunn, do not present a dichotomous view of Boleyn's desires; Anne, in her pursuit of Percy, is motivated by love *and* ambition.

Gregory and Dunn explore romantic motivations, as well as those of status, wealth and privilege, and feature ardent declarations of love. In *The Queen of Subtleties*, Anne writes that "all

that mattered to us was being together” and that she “lived in a permanent state of offering silent thanks to God for Harry’s existence” (Dunn 7). Similarly, in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Mary listens to Anne declare “I feel as if we are two youngsters, in love and with nothing to fear” and in turn observes that “it was as if the Howard spell of coldness had been broken, smashed like a mirror, and everything was real and bright” (97-98)—again emphasising that love is ‘authentic’ or ‘real’ where ambition is not. Purdy also explores the relationship between Anne and Percy and positions it as motivated by genuine affection. Unlike in the novels of Dunn and Gregory, Purdy’s protagonist Jane Boleyn is not able to offer an intimate account of the affair in spite of her proximity to events, as she is merely an observer and does not act as a confidante to Anne. It is, however, Jane’s antipathy towards Anne and her tendency to denigrate her character that suggests that the appraisal of their love is accurate. Jane describes how “love came in the form of Harry Percy, the Earl of Northumberland’s son and heir” on Anne’s return to England (Purdy 25). She characterises Percy as “gangling, ginger-haired, stuttering, shy, and constantly tripping over his own tongue and feet”; “only the most mercenary of maidens”, Jane tells us “would have been smitten with him” (25-26). Yet Anne’s love is indeed presented as genuine and not motivated by his status: “As much as I would like to paint Anne blacker”, Jane concedes, to describe Anne’s pursuit as driven by wealth and title “would be a lie” because “the love that shone in her eyes and the tender, indulgent smile that graced her lips whenever she looked at Harry Percy told their own tale” (26).

In *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*, Cavendish describes Percy’s passionate defence of his decision to choose a wife “whereas my fancy served me best” (31). The authors whose work is examined in this thesis do not, however, identify similar evidence to establish Boleyn’s affective response to the promise of marriage and, in turn, the impossibility of that promise. Those writing non-fictional histories speculate as to how Boleyn may have felt at this time: Bernard concludes that “there must have been something between Percy and Anne” and that “the breaking off of the relationship...cannot have been very joyful for Anne”, yet acknowledges that his conclusion

can only be speculative (*Fatal* 15). In producing texts that can be considered historical romances, Gregory, Dunn, and Purdy each invent instances in which their versions of Anne express emotion not found in the historical record. Such assurances of Anne's love reflect the conventions of the romance genre, with the "heteronormative desire of Anne to be married, the wild love affair and seduction" (de Groot, *Consuming* 73). The declarations of love that are found in these texts are an integral aspect of the romance genre; the form demands an explicit pronouncement of love (Fletcher 1), and because no such statement has been recorded by history, authors of historical romance must invent an instance in which this occurs. Rather than seeking a historical understanding of Tudor marriage and courtship, these novels invoke an ahistorical ideal of love and romance that is recognisable to their readership (Pinto, "Historical" 192).

In depicting Boleyn as motivated by her genuine love for Percy, these novels also critique the "politicized passion" associated with the court of Henry VIII (Burstein, "Afterlife" 5). The material and political concerns which governed Tudor marital practice means that "authentic" love in romance novels about this era "can only exist outside the sphere of Henry's court" (5). The historical record demands that the relationship with Percy is doomed and the novels position Percy and Boleyn as holding the power to prevent the destruction associated with Henry VIII's second marriage. The metanarrative holds that when Boleyn is not permitted to marry for love, she is pursued by and marries a man whom she does not love. She encourages his advances because of her ambition to be queen, yet once that ambition is realised his love turns to hatred and he eventually orders her execution.

Weir has described Boleyn as "a romantic heroine in the truest sense" (Weir, "Allure" 94); however, her "marriage destroys another marriage, sex is problematic at best", and her story ultimately conclude with "death and destruction" (de Groot 73). In celebrating Anne's affair with Percy as one based on authentic romance, and accordingly lamenting that it was disallowed, these writers suggest the possibility that Boleyn and Percy's marriage could have prevented this

destruction. In *The Tudor Wife*, Anne and Percy both go on to experience unhappy marriages with other people. Jane describes the relationship between Harry and his wife, Mary Talbot, as one marked by “hate as black and thick as treacle at first sight” (Purdy 51). Like Harry’s, Anne’s marriage would be “ill-fated”: however this is not her only destructive relationship with a man (51).

Like Jane, Anne is denied happiness in marriage and her ensuing relationships with men are devoid of love. Her first sexual encounter is an example of the demarcation between love, sex and marriage, and is incidentally observed by Jane in Purdy’s novel. Jane, fortunate at having worn a brown gown that allows her to hide behind a tree, acts as voyeur as Anne has sex with the poet Thomas Wyatt in the ground of her family’s estate (50). Jane comments on Anne’s demeanour during this encounter: she “lay passive, her arms draped loosely about his back”, “more resigned than anything else” and “only once did she cry out, when he lay full upon her and with his fleshly lance shattered the shield of her hymen” (50-51). When Wyatt leaves to return to his home and wife, “Anne sat for a long time, hugging her knees, upon that bed of leaves” before withdrawing a golden locket containing a likeness of Percy and crying out “I wanted it to be you!” (51). The description of Wyatt breaking Anne’s hymen explicitly signals that this is her first experience of sex, while the imagery of her weeping over the image of Percy demonstrates the way in which her experience is at odds with the romantic expectations placed on this act. Anne’s choice to engage in premarital sex is not criticised, nor is it framed in moral terms; instead, sex brings to the fore the emotional implications of being denied love. When Wyatt returns home to his wife, Anne “flung herself facedown into the leaves and wept until the sun set”; bearing witness to this scene, Jane also describes Harry’s nightly attempts to “drown his sorrows” before falling asleep “across the table in a drunken stupor” and crying Anne’s name (51).

The episode has also been explored by historians who have considered Boleyn’s affect with regard to Percy. In imaginatively exploring the possibility that theirs may have been a romantic pairing, as well as an advantageous one, Gregory, Dunn and Purdy, as novelists, pose

“very historical questions” (Pinto, “Historical” 193). Like historians, novelists can offer only speculative and provisional answers to such questions. Historians are not able to explore the affective dimensions of this relationship due to the limitations of source materials; in fact, the “historian might envy the historical novelist who can present Anne as unperturbed and liberated or as desperate and unhappy” because “no surviving sources” exist to confirm the accuracy of these representations (Bernard, *Fatal* 18). “Tradition has it that Anne returned Henry Percy’s love and that the pair shared a brief romance”, writes Denny, “however, there is no evidence to prove conclusively what Anne thought of her new suitor” (47); regardless, Ives, Starkey, and Bernard each position the relationship as having been motivated by genuine affection, with Starkey describing the pairing as a “love-match” (277).

Addressing the nature of aristocratic marriages, Ives argues that “among the Tudor elite, property considerations were accorded more importance than emotional satisfaction”; “personal feelings were not consulted” in marital negotiations and it was, instead, the disparity between the wealth and status of the Boleyns as compared with the Percys that prevented the marriage from taking place (*Life* 69-70). The respective family pedigrees of Percy, the heir to an earldom, and Boleyn, the daughter of a diplomat, have seen authors consider whether it was she who took these matters into consideration when encouraging his advances with an ambition to secure an advantageous marriage. Both Denny and Mantel contextualise Tudor marriage as “first and foremost a hard-headed business contract based on land rights and social standing, not love” (Denny 49), and describe the perceived value of Percy as a prospective husband for Anne in terms of material concerns. “There is no evidence”, writes Denny, “to show that Anne either promised to marry Percy or was ever deeply interested in him”, before asserting that he did represent the possibility of a “far greater marriage” than the union with James Butler, her Irish cousin, that had been negotiated by her parents (49). Similarly, Percy is described in *Wolf Hall* as preferable to “the Butler’s heir” in Ireland, as “the young woman is not enticed by the prospect of Kilkenny Castle and its frugal amenities, nor by the kind of social life that will be available to

her when, on special occasions, she hacks on the poor dirt roads to Dublin” (Mantel 67). The Cavendish of Mantel’s narrative, who is also employed by Wolsey, later reiterates this sentiment when he states that Anne did not respect Percy but only “liked his title” (78).

Both Denny and Mantel suggest that Anne was motivated by ambition rather than love, yet they represent this motive in vastly different ways. Mantel writes from the imagined perspective of Cromwell, and this appraisal of Boleyn’s motivations reflects the unfavourable perspective of Wolsey and his household. Anne is an important presence in this narrative, yet Mantel does not write from her imagined experience, hence her affect, particularly with regard to her feelings for Percy, is observed by others. In contrast, Boleyn is the subject of Denny’s biography, hence it is Boleyn’s perspective that it explored throughout the narrative of *Anne Boleyn: a New Life of England’s Tragic Queen*. Her assessment of Boleyn’s feelings toward Percy does not suggest that Boleyn manipulated Percy out of *greed*, as Mantel does in *Wolf Hall*, and rather cites ambition for a better life as Anne’s motivation for the match; Denny argues that Boleyn “stood out from other women of her time as literate, accomplished and intellectual” and “aspired to become something more than a mere chattel” (Denny 60). Denny does not provide evidence to support her contention that Boleyn did not have affection for Percy, but merely states that there is no evidence to the contrary. However, her wider representation of Boleyn’s character informs her speculation. Any expectation of “romance” in Tudor marriage, she writes, “was just foolishness” (49), and Boleyn’s eschewal of such behaviour reflects Denny’s opinion of her as pragmatic and intelligent. She argues that Anne’s choices must be considered “in the context of the age in which she lived” (60), hence her encouragement of Percy—who is described by Denny as having been obsessed with Anne (49)—is thus positioned not as cold ambition as in *Wolf Hall*, but as an appropriate and intelligent attempt to guarantee her own security and a degree of independence. Denny thus positions Anne’s romance with Percy as an assertion of ambition and agency.

“Not the Easy Armful”

Boleyn’s encouragement of Henry Percy and, later, Henry VIII is regularly positioned as an act of aspiration and social mobility. Such interpretations are also consistent with the ‘femme fatale’ archetype that has often been ascribed to Boleyn: she (dis)embodies “the stereotype of the beautiful woman who sets men against each other as they fight to own her” (Cranny-Francis, *Engendered* 136). Enticed by the wealth and privilege these men possess, Boleyn is seen to have seduced them in the hope of sharing that privilege—a goal which she temporarily achieves (136). She becomes a subject of masculine combat: it is Henry’s jealousy toward her involvement with other men that is seen as a catalyst in his active pursuit of her (Cavendish 29), while the obstacles that Henry faced in his attempts to marry Anne are seen as threat to his authority as king. That she appears to have been pursued by a number of privileged men is, however, merely one element in this archetypal paradigm, with her physical appearance also necessary to her characterisation. Boleyn is not merely presented as having been beautiful, but descriptions of her physicality reflect a particular type of beauty that is consistent with the imagery of the femme fatale.

In *Engendered Fictions*, Anne Cranny-Francis outlines what she has identified as “the standard formula for the romance”: a pretty, nice woman “meets a magnetically attractive man” who is “tempted away” by “a siren who attracts him with her flamboyant beauty”, and the novel concludes as “he realises that the siren is a scheming gold-digger and that he would be much happier with the nice woman, who is beautiful in a fragile, feminine way” (*Engendered* 152). This trope is recognisable in narratives of Boleyn’s history in which Henry VIII represents the lover seduced by Anne—the siren—at the expense of the nice woman, Katherine of Aragon (or, as in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Mary Boleyn). Although Katherine fails to win back his affections, he does discard Anne in favour of another fragile, feminine woman: Jane Seymour.

Boleyn’s famed dark eyes and hair are significant in this paradigm, as the “delicate, blonde beauty” of the conventional heroine is contrasted with Anne’s “dark-haired elegance” (Cranny-

Francis, *Engendered* 136). Purdy's narrator, Jane Boleyn presents Anne as the antithesis of "petite, blond, and partridge-plump ... English beauties", describing her as "tall, dark, and slender as a reed, with a cloak of glossy black hair reaching all the way down to her knees" (9-10).

Discussions of Boleyn as mistress regularly demarcate her from other women who assumed that role, particularly with regard to her sister Mary. Gregory, for example, invokes associations between feminine appearance and personality that position Boleyn in contrast to other women not only because of idealised concepts of feminine beauty, but also feminine behaviour. As Denny writes, "women were supposed to be delicate little creatures with peaches-and-cream complexions and fluttering blue eyes" and "blondes were said to be more cheerful in temperament and submissive to men" (Denny 18). Such assumptions do not simply reflect the different hair colourings of the women with whom Henry was intimate, but invoke conceptualisations of feminine physicality and eroticism. The idea that Boleyn was raven-haired, Susan Bordo argues, is a combined result of propaganda that aimed to "make Anne sound as witchlike as possible" and the preference of twentieth and twenty-first-century filmmakers and novelists to depict her as the prototypical seductress (Bordo, *Creation* 32). Her dark colouring, typical of the imagery of the femme fatale is, in part, because she is both transgressive and an enigma.

The dichotomous relationship between Gregory's Boleyn sisters is reflected in their physicality: Anne is "dark and French and fashionable and difficult" while Mary is "sweet and open and English and fair" (Gregory, *Other* 7). Anne's darkness signals not only her colouring, but also her refusal to adhere to the expectations of various ascribed roles. As royal mistress, Anne refuses sex and demands marriage—unlike her sister, who successfully performs the role of mistress even through her adulterous behaviours mark her as a deviant. As femme fatale, the truth of Anne's assurances of virginity and professed love are unknowable (Hanson and O'Rawe 3). In contrast, Mary, "the kind little blonde, who is said to have been passed all around the French court before coming home to this one" (Mantel, *Wolf* 74), is ridiculed as promiscuous but

admired for her “sweetness, charm [and] youthfulness”, traits regularly associated with blonde women (Warner 363). The implications of this stereotypical characterisation of the Boleyn sisters extends beyond temperament to the potential disruption they may incite: in *Wolf Hall*, Mary is considered to be an appropriate mistress because “she’s an easy armful” and will not “cause difficulties” (Mantel 75); by contrast, it is hoped that Anne (who is “not the easy armful, but the younger girl, the flat-chested one”) will “drop her coy negotiations and please the king”—it is her “bargaining” and desire to “be the new wife” that is disturbing the infatuated king’s “conscience” (85).

Boleyn’s dark eyes and hair—and their fabled seductive powers—are a focal point for writers questioning her allure. She is not necessarily described as “ravishing” (Ives, *Life* 40) or “beautiful” but, nevertheless, writers assert that “men found her very attractive” (Weir, *Elizabeth* 69-70). Bordo identifies an apparent difficulty on the part of twenty-first-century writers and readers “to imagine a woman for whom a king would split the earth in two who is anything less than ravishing” (*Creation* 25); the contention that she was not an “outstanding natural beauty” has led authors to question the source of apparent “power” (Ives, *Life* 44). Her eyes are not only admired in these texts for their beauty but are closely associated with her capacity to beguile men; power, not beauty, is central to these discussions. Boleyn is represented as having been cognisant of the impact of which her eyes were capable; as Ives argues, it “seems obvious” that Anne was aware of her attractiveness to men (*Life* 44) and the effect of her looks, and thus “deployed them with a practised skill” (Starkey 263), and it is her haunting, “inviting black eyes” that ensure her success in securing Henry’s attentions (Weir, *Elizabeth* 52). Her hair is described in similar terms; she is labelled a “raven-haired enchantress” (Purdy 9). As with descriptions of her eyes, it is not only the hue of her hair that is significant to her archetypical characterisations, but also that she is seen to transgress the expected behaviour of a woman in her position; she is described as having “flout[ed] convention by letting [it] flow gypsy-free, instead of confining it inside a coif after she became a wife” (Purdy 9-10).

These descriptions of Boleyn's defining physical attributes connote supposed character traits. It is argued that she fostered a sexualised demeanour with her transgression of accepted behaviours, and embraced the reactions that such behaviour encouraged (Mallan 29). Not only is her attractiveness to men highlighted, but she is also depicted as having had an intoxicating effect on them. The Anne of Purdy's novel "cast a spell like no other", causing "men to fall at her feet, sing her praises, and worship her; some even gave their lives for her" (9). Likewise, after Anne's death, Weir's Henry reflects on his inability to "forget those inviting black eyes" (*Elizabeth* 52). Jane and Henry, as they are characterised in Weir's novel, each believe themselves to be a victim of Anne's effect on men; Jane laments, "was there ever a Jane plainer than I?", and strangely blames Anne's captivating personality for her unhappy marriage (14), while in *The Lady Elizabeth* Henry's memories are framed in terms of bewitchment. That these characters feel antipathy toward Anne is significant in their respective appraisals of her as both seductive and dangerous. However, it is not only enemies who consider her in such terms; in Weir's novel, Henry considers how his beloved daughter Elizabeth resembles her mother with her "vanity and flirtatiousness, and her capacity to charm" (52). In Starkey's narrative, Anne not only captivates Henry, but also *captures* him: "he was hers and wholly hers—mind, soul and body" (Starkey 283). Such characterisation is consistent with the archetype of the femme fatale.

These images of Anne's desirability, as distinct from specific physical attributes, are intangible. Gregory and Ives, rather ambiguously, portray Boleyn as "the very essence of desire" (Gregory, *Other* 224), and as having "radiated sex" respectively (Ives, *Life* 44). Bernard eschews vague appraisals of Boleyn's appeal and instead considers men's response to her: we cannot know beyond doubt what Boleyn looked like, but "much more important[ly]", it can be confirmed "that Henry Percy ... had found her attractive—and so would Henry VIII" (*Fatal* 20). Thus, in spite of Bordo's assurances that "anyone who has even the slightest actual knowledge of Tudor history is aware that the Anne who could turn men to jelly at first sight is a myth", these narratives "reflect the limits of twentieth-century conceptions of attraction, fixated as they are on

the surface of the body” (25); thereby the Anne of these narratives becomes an “erotic object” (Mallan 29).

Mantel also highlights Boleyn’s dark eyes, and her physicality is seen to reflect aspects of her personality. As in other texts, her eyes act as a signifier of her enterprising nature in both *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*, but instead of considering her success as having been reliant on her seductive skill, they reflect her intelligence and ambition. Here, her “black eyes” are “slightly protuberant, shiny like the beads of an abacus” and are “always in motion, as she makes calculations of her own advantage” (Mantel, *Wolf* 166), “restless ... missing nothing” (196). As in other texts, she uses “her prominent dark eyes ... to good effect” in order to manipulate men:

She glances at a man’s face, then her regard flits away, as if unconcerned, indifferent ... then slowly, as if compelled, she turns her gaze back to him. Her eyes rest on his face. She examines the man. She examines him as if he is the only man in the world. She looks as if she is seeing him for the first time, and considering all sorts of uses for him, all sorts of possibilities which he has not thought of himself. To her victim the moment seems to last an age, during which shivers run up his spine. Though in fact the trick is quick, cheap, effective and repeatable, it seems to the poor fellow that he is now distinguished among all men. He smirks. He preens himself. He grows a little taller. He grows a little more foolish. (Mantel, *Bring* 36-37)

In this passage, Boleyn’s ability to entice men is highlighted, rendering the description of her consistent and unremarkable. In contrast to other representations, however, Cromwell reflects that this “trick” has “never worked on him” (37). He is not “indifferent to women, God knows, just indifferent to Anne Boleyn” (37). Cromwell’s perspective is critical to Mantel’s characterisation of Boleyn. As the novels’ protagonist, Cromwell is the lens through which the reader must view this world and its inhabitants. He does not consider Anne to be sexually attractive or desirable, and he disassociates her physicality from sex—an assessment that insinuates that women can be either politically astute or alluring. Anne’s eyes are expressive, and

become an avenue through which Cromwell interprets her mood; they “are sparkling, hostile” and indicate her sustained engagement with political affairs (236). He describes her as being unlike other women, because she is strategic: he notes the “careful deployment of her eyes. He wonders what it would take to make her panic” (*Bodies* 204). It is the links between her power and appearance that mark her difference. Although he is not attracted to Anne, Cromwell does describe her eyes as “beautiful”; this beauty is, however, predatory because her eyes are at their “best when they gleam with interest, as a cat’s do when she sees the whisk of some small creature’s tail” (*Bodies* 145).

While these texts argue that Boleyn was attractive to men, they do not necessarily suggest that she was beautiful; rather they posit that she had particular features that were aesthetically pleasing. As Ives posits, “looks only tolerable, but a splendid head of dark hair and fine eyes—this was the impression that Anne Boleyn made on her contemporaries” (*Life* 41). The authors also, however, consistently argue that she possessed the “elusive quality” of “style” (Bordo, *Creation* 34). Anne is not defined by beauty, and instead possesses elegance and “refinement that makes mere prettiness seem redundant” (Mantel, *Bring* 36). She is said to have been unlike the other women of Henry’s court, in part because of her “sophistication” (Ives, *Life* 45); she is not universally admired as the “the most beautiful woman in the world”, yet she is considered “the most stylish” and it is for this reason that “the king cannot take his eyes off” her (Gregory, *Other* 162). Such discussions consider Boleyn’s apparel as evidence of her “style and elegance” (Denny 21); she is described in *The Lady Elizabeth* as having been “always elegantly dressed, for she had a way with clothes” (Weir 69-70) and, in *The Queen of Subtleties*, Dunn’s Anne argues that “no one in England rivalled my dress sense” (23). Evidence for Anne’s style and sophistication largely consists of documented descriptions of her clothing: Ives writes that “we know that ... Anne was excited by fabric and colour” (*Life* 24) and that, “in dress sense and wardrobe”, she “had an acute awareness of the politics of ostentation” (218); in *Wolf Hall*, Cromwell’s female relatives enquire

after her clothing and whether she is “graceful”, to which he responds by describing her attire in a “cool, mercantile” fashion (Mantel 207).

By characterising Boleyn in this manner, authors do not simply present her as fashionable, but again invoke the trope of the *femme fatale*. She is regularly contrasted with other English women because of her time in the French court, which is presented as the source of her sophistication, and she is thereby othered in these narratives (Sully 47); she is described as “practically French” (Dunn, *Queen* 23) and subsequently depicted as foreign, in spite of her English birth and family. Gregory depicts her affiliation with France as a deliberate conceit on Anne’s part, which is cultivated because “every woman has to have something which singles her out, which catches the eye, which makes her the centre of attention. I am going to be French” (*Other* 6). Her affinity with France is elsewhere depicted as genuine; however, regardless of assertions of authenticity or artifice, her French-ness distinguishes her from other women. Elegance is key to this characterisation and it is argued that “Anne Boleyn had style, and continental style at that” (Ives, *Life* 45); she had “thrived in [the French] atmosphere of stylish cultivation” (Starkey 261), and “no doubt absorbed much of French ways during her stay” (Bernard, *Fatal* 21). On her return to England, it is argued, she chose to “dress in the French fashion” (Ives, *Life* 176), most commonly signified by adopting the French style of hood (Mantel, *Wolf* 207).

Boleyn’s foreign influence is seen to contribute to the sexualisation of her persona, as is demonstrated by Bernard’s assurance that “Anne’s experiences” in France “added to her attractions” and, in turn, “help to explain the depth of Henry’s infatuation” (Bernard, *Fatal* 21). Yet she is not distinguishable from her peers only because of her time in France, but also because she is aware of the effects of her own appearance and the meaning that it conveys. It is claimed that hers was not a natural beauty, but was deliberately constructed using artifice; she is thereby labelled as a woman who “could make much from little” (Weir, *Elizabeth* 69-70). Ives argues that Boleyn possessed “more than a love of mere finery, rather a recognition that in order to play the

part one must dress the part” (*Life* 218), a sentiment that is echoed by Dunn, whose Anne believed herself to be “queen material” because she “dressed the part” (23). These representations of her artifice and inauthenticity act as a contrast to dominant depictions of Katherine of Aragon, who was royal by birth and is thus considered deserving of the rank of queen: in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Katherine, “a Princess of Spain and a Queen of England”, is regal, dignified and initially unfazed by Anne, assured that her husband’s mistresses cannot threaten her own rightful position as queen (Gregory, *Other* 31, 170).

Boleyn is seen to subvert established societal hierarchies (Sully 47); she is represented as “too eye-catchingly dressed, and her head held too high” (Dunn, *Queen* 101), and as having “tried too hard and asserted too much” (Starkey 258). Her appearance is described in terms of performance and aspirational behaviour, and she is represented as having viewed it, and its effect on privileged men, as an avenue for social mobility. Hence, “whether or not she was beautiful”, it is argued that Anne was nevertheless “stunning” (Denny 248), and this is invariably portrayed as an act of manipulation. In *The Tudor Wife*, as Jane describes an Anne Boleyn who “excelled ... at deception” with regards to her appearance, “cleverly concealing her flaws by the most ingenious means, and in doing so she set the fashions” (Purdy 9-10). Here, Purdy adheres to a familiar narrative in which Boleyn was not ‘naturally’ beautiful, and equally represents her stylish persona as neither effortless nor a product of her continental upbringing, but as dependent on self-reflexive artifice.

The depictions of Boleyn’s appearance that are featured in the focus texts of this thesis are, however, necessarily speculative because only fragmentary evidence survives. Many of the authors thus address the largely unanswerable question, “what did Anne Boleyn look like?” (Bernard, *Fatal* 19), with portraits being the focus of such discussions. Writers consider the appraisals of her contemporaries, yet maintain that “it would be good also to have some pictorial evidence” before considering the authenticity of those portraits that have survived (Ives, *Life* 41). In so doing, they “disturb a hornet’s nest, such are the confusions and uncertainties” surrounding

her appearance (Bernard, *Fatal* 20). Historians offer descriptions of each of the known portraits, before considering whether these can be considered to be accurate visual representations. The lone visual representation that they agree to be both authentic and contemporary is “a single specimen of the portrait medal struck in 1534”; yet, “given the condition of the medal, it is impossible” to determine Boleyn’s appearance beyond “the shape of the face” (Ives, *Life* 42).

Authors of fictional narratives also address the issue of visual sources, although the question of authenticity is less problematic in these narratives. This is evident in *The Lady Elizabeth* as the eponymous heroine searches for clues about her mother because, having “only the dimmest memory”, she “had often wondered what she looked like” (Weir 72). Elizabeth’s governess secretly gives her a portrait of Anne, telling her “it’s a good likeness”, which she then cherishes, noting that she is herself “nearly all Anne Boleyn” (72). That Elizabeth had not seen a portrait of her mother since Boleyn’s execution and must furtively guard her new acquisition reflects the historiographical challenges associated with authenticating images of Boleyn, whilst echoing the twenty-first-century desire to know what she looked like. This narrative is, however, explicitly fictional, and Weir is able to invent a portrait that is from Anne’s lifetime and which can be verified as an accurate depiction by a contemporary observer.

Limited visual representations of Boleyn are not the sole difficulty associated with determining the truth of her appearance. Written reports also represent a problematic form of evidence. Descriptions of her, as is the case with so many other aspects of her person, are both contradictory and heavily influenced by the political and ideological perspectives of her observers. This is perhaps best demonstrated by the contradictory accounts evident in the respective writings of Nicolas Sander and George Wyatt, both of whom produced biographical accounts of Boleyn during the reign of her daughter, Elizabeth I. Sander, an exiled Catholic priest, wrote in *The Rise and Growth of the Anglican Schism*, that Boleyn has a “sallow complexion, as if troubled with jaundice”, a “projecting tooth under the upper lip” and “on her right hand, six fingers” (Sander 25), while George Wyatt described the “rare and admirable beauty of the fresh

and young Lady Anne Boleigne” (Wyatt 182). As Bernard argues, neither “of these descriptions is in the end especially credible” (*Fatal* 20). The inclination of authors to describe Boleyn’s appearance in a manner that mirrors their assessment of her morality and character is not particular to sixteenth-century polemic, but is evident in twenty-first-century writings, such as *The Lady Elizabeth*. Throughout the novel, Weir’s characters offer incompatible appraisals of her appearance that reflect their personal opinions of her. This is particularly evident in the characters of Elizabeth and Mary; in Elizabeth’s eyes, Anne was “her beautiful, slender mother, with the raven hair, the vibrant inviting eyes and the witty smile”, an assessment that Mary rejects because “she had not thought the whore beautiful, with her coarse black hair and sallow skin, but she could not say that to Elizabeth” (11, 19). As such, in keeping with archetypal constructions as the femme fatale, Boleyn’s appearance is invariably correlated with constructions of her affect.

Conclusion

Depictions of Anne Boleyn as royal mistress are of interest because this period of her life is constructed as a distinct and significant episode, in terms of both narratives of her life and English history more broadly. It is therefore necessary to interrogate these portrayals, because historical writers understand her actions as Henry’s mistress to foreshadow her eventual execution. The power that she gains during her earlier relationship with Henry is conditional on maintaining her virginity—or his belief in her virginity—thus, once she becomes his wife and must engage in sex, her power diminishes (Dolan, *Marriage* 138). As a mistress, she is vibrant and exciting, but once she becomes a wife she is familiar and her vitality dissipates; although “she retains her dark glitter” it is “now rubbed a little, flaking in places” (Mantel, *Bodies* 36). Her failure to produce a male heir is also significant in the demise of her relationship with Henry; he was “desperate for her” and “desperate for a child”, and once she has satisfied one desire, and is unable to satisfy the other, she becomes dispensable (Gregory, *Other* 193). Fictional Annes admit this dynamic, cognisant of the danger of her actions: “by tempting him I play with fire, and one cannot play with fire without risking burns” (Purdy 137). While fiction written in the present

tense often depicts characters reflecting on potential danger, those writing in the past tense explain the demise of the marriage with direct reference to her actions as mistress. Boleyn's alleged experience with other men are regularly cited as a source of Henry's growing disenchantment (Weir, *Tower* 12).

For some writers, however, Boleyn's role as Henry's mistress is represented in a manner that corresponds with their wider contention, as is evidenced by the respective arguments of Denny and Bernard. These authors offer diametrically opposed views of Boleyn's character and historical importance; Bernard argues for the possibility that she was guilty of the crimes for which she was executed, whilst Denny aims to restore her reputation as a key figure in the English Reformation. Denny celebrates Boleyn's maiden status as an expression of her willingness to sacrifice her chance of "ever being able to enjoy a normal family life" in order to become queen and "restore the true religion" (Denny 170). Here, unlike in predominant representations, Boleyn is described as having remained chaste for moral reasons, and while she does not reject ambition, her commitment to religious reform motivates her strategic approach. These motives are later echoed in Denny's contention that Boleyn died not as an adulterous queen, but as a Protestant martyr. Bernard, however, rejects predominant characterisations of Boleyn as intelligent and politically engaged. His portrayal of her as mistress subsequently denies her the presumed agency associated with the act of rejecting Henry's sexual advances. It is also significant that Bernard asserts—somewhat controversially—that Boleyn was guilty of the adultery for which she was executed. The implications of this interpretation are twofold: first, his contention that she welcomed Henry's advances and was unaware of the potential risks of this act establishes a version of her character in which she was reckless and incapable of perceiving the dangers associated with deviant sexuality, thereby increasing the likelihood that, as queen, she would take similar risks. Second, Bernard questions Boleyn's moral integrity as he justifies his later thesis by arguing that she had engaged in sexual behaviours prior to marriage, hence it is likely that she could have been guilty of adultery.

This chapter has identified various Annes: the political schemer, coquette, Protestant reformer, femme fatale, and passive mistress. Diverse viewpoints construct these characterisations and employ different tropes and techniques in keeping with the author's contemporary context and their motivations. In spite of these variations, these representations share a reliance on supposition about Boleyn's sexual behaviours and gender norms. The reality of her sexual experiences prior to marriage is inexplicable, yet sex—or the absence of sex—is at the centre of these representations. In questioning her virginal status, the depth of her sexual experiences, the affect that informed her involvement with Henry and Percy, and the power that she was able to exert as a result of this involvement, each of the authors addressed in this thesis associate Boleyn's character traits with physicality, in terms of both sexual behaviours and physical appearance. The subsequent characterisations are highly gendered, as is evident in the tropes that are employed; the femme fatale, for example, is an archetype that is distinctly feminine. Additionally, the sexual behaviours of Henry VIII and Henry Percy are not interrogated in the same manner, nor are these behaviours used to signify broader characterisations; these men are not marked as moral, ambitious or politically astute based on their sexual experience as it is interpreted by twenty-first-century authors. This tendency to associate femininity with sexuality, Cranny-Francis argues, is a result of a dichotomy in which women are regularly associated with the body, while men are described in terms of the mind (*Body* 22). Boleyn is unique amongst the wives of Henry VIII for the weight of scholarship and speculation that has been dedicated to her life prior to becoming Queen of England. This is, in part, because the various characterisations that appear in these texts are not neutral, but correspond with the genre conventions of a text, its plot or ideological framework: Anne as mistress is seen to be essential to our understanding of Queen Anne and condemned Anne. The ways in which authors have represented her behaviour and persona as mistress are integral to wider textual portrayals of her character. She is described as manipulative, ambitious, and deceitful or, conversely, principled and virtuous, and these assessments of her character can be

seen to correspond with perceptions of her sexual behaviours and persona prior to her marriage.

Hence, her character as mistress is not only constructed in these texts, but these constructions act as a harbinger of her queenship and, in particular, her execution.

CHAPTER FOUR

“I AM JEZEBEL”: ANNE BOLEYN AS QUEEN

In 1533, Anne Boleyn became Queen consort of England. The title of queen consort denotes a marital relationship; as such, the role was primarily dynastic, not governmental (Earenfight, *Queenship* 6). The position afforded a degree of political influence, most often by acting as confidante or unofficial advisor to the king (14). Where the king was incapacitated or absent a queen consort could temporarily rule in her husband's stead—as Katherine of Aragon did in 1513 whilst Henry VIII was at war in France (251). However, for most early modern queens consort it was their “proximity to the king” that offered an, albeit limited, avenue to power (252). Thus, queens consort, with their capacity to influence state affairs informally, were situated both “inside and outside” official avenues of power (252). Boleyn is often considered to be exceptional because of the degree to which she was able to alter England's political landscape. As Diarmaid MacCulloch demonstrates, she is distinct from Henry's other wives because her time as queen was often referred to as her “reign” during her lifetime (287). This terminology is important because it speaks to the perception that Boleyn was not only a wife, but a *politician*. Such terminology does not, however, negate the gendering of Boleyn as queen; she is necessarily a woman—a woman whose power is contingent on her relationship to a powerful man, thus lacking authenticity—and despite her power she is always discussed in gendered terms. Ives, for instance, describes her as England's “most influential and important queen consort” but classifies her influence as “manipulation”, not advice or guidance, before explicitly linking her capacity as a politician to sex: “no one knows what Anne said to Henry in bed” (*Life* xv).

Her power is necessarily tied to her marriage; however the gendering of Boleyn goes beyond her dual role as wife and queen, and extends to her characterisation. While she is discussed in the focus narratives in historical terms, her representation is also of interest because it carries broader implications for the ways in which women in positions of power are represented in the twenty-first century. Ives declares that “Anne deserves to be a feminist icon”

because she “broke through the glass ceiling” of her “male-dominated” society “by sheer character and initiative” (xv). Ives’ reading of Boleyn as empowered is not the dominant representation which emerges from the analysed texts; instead she is regularly classified as a ‘bitch’ or ‘shrew’, and her behaviours are considered to be transgressive and deviant. I argue that her contemptuous characterisation cannot be separated from her final punishment for her transgressions, because the violence with which Henry ended this marriage means that Boleyn’s time as queen consort is regularly examined in light of her eventual destruction. Her marriage thus represents a transitional period in which her *desired* body, discussed in Chapter Three, becomes a *disposable* body, explored in Chapter Five, and it is her own misconception that she is capable of controlling Henry that defines this transition. Boleyn is successful as a mistress, in that she replaces her rival as Henry’s wife, but she is depicted as a failed queen. This failure culminates in her death. Narratives thereby present Boleyn as the agent of her own downfall by highlighting or—in the case of the novelists—inventing manipulative, cruel or deceptive behaviours that are, in turn, represented as self-destructive; her relationship with Henry once protected her from detractors and, because her behaviour sees the couple become increasingly estranged, during her time as queen consort she is said to have created an environment in which her enemies were able to act against her.

This chapter will argue that representations of Anne Boleyn as queen are framed in distinctly feminine terms and regularly rely on gendered archetypes. In analysing her reign, I will take Boleyn’s interactions with Mary Tudor—the daughter of Henry and his first wife Katherine of Aragon—as a case study because this relationship encapsulates both the political and familial aspects of the queen consort’s role; this was a diplomatic crisis in which Boleyn was unequivocally implicated. Boleyn’s elevation saw a significant change in Mary’s status; the annulment of her parents’ marriage meant that she was declared illegitimate and was, as such, no longer a princess nor heir to the English throne. The drastic change to her circumstances, coupled with her avowed Catholic faith, meant that Mary soon became a sympathetic figure to

those who opposed her father's marriage to Boleyn and the religious changes that it signalled. Mary's opposition to her father's marriage undermined perceptions of its legitimacy and posed a threat to both the stability of the realm and Henry's authority as king. Moreover, Henry's second marriage impacted foreign, as well as domestic, politics, primarily because Mary and Katherine held familial ties with Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain. Boleyn replaced Katherine as queen consort and therefore the disinherited Mary—as it was assumed during Boleyn's lifetime—who would never become queen regnant.²⁴

This period of upheaval was, however, a family crisis, as well as a political one. While Boleyn is critiqued as a queen, she is also criticised as a wife and stepmother. In spite of the serious repercussions of Mary's intransigence, Henry's ostensibly cruel treatment of his daughter is regularly attributed to Boleyn, whose representation is consistent with the archetype of the 'wicked stepmother'. A number of limitations were placed on Mary's freedom, and she became largely estranged from Henry during this time. It is clear that Henry and his ministers acted against Mary, yet contemporary commentators and twenty-first-century authors each regularly attribute Henry's actions to Boleyn. The interiority of both Henry and Boleyn are contrasted here, although the motivations and emotions of both individuals are ultimately unknowable: Henry grudgingly punishes his daughter, whom he loves, and increasingly resents his wife, while Anne is motivated by hatred for her stepdaughter rather than political pragmatism. Miriam Burstein has argued that characterisations of Boleyn in historical fiction have adhered to a formulaic pattern in which she is "vengeful, near hysterical, frequently asexual, and power mad" ("Afterlife" 3), and both fictional and non-fictional representations of Boleyn's interactions with her stepdaughter are congruent with Burstein's summation; the degree to which she acted against Mary is unclear, yet she is regularly depicted as having been verbally and emotionally abusive. As such, Boleyn as queen, and her position in the political landscape of the time, are necessarily correlated with her defined feminine roles as wife and (step)mother.

²⁴ Mary reigned as Queen of England and Ireland from 1553-58, and for a discussion of her reign see Weikel, "Mary".

“The Po-Faced Bastard-Daughter”

Mary Tudor’s childhood and adolescence are regularly romanticised by authors, and act as a contrast to the obstacles that she would later face. Accordingly, the Tudors are depicted by authors as a family, not a monarchical institution. During her youth “Lady Mary, the erstwhile Princess” had been both “King Henry’s darling and sole heiress to the English Crown” (Purdy 164). She had enjoyed a privileged and loving family life, and Starkey and Dunn each describe occasions in which her positive relationship with each of her parents were made public: Lucy Cornwallis, the king’s confectioner in *The Queen of Subtleties*, recalls an audience with the five-year-old princess who was treated by her mother to “a preview of the promised highlights” from the season’s feasts, and Lucy observes that “mother and daughter” were “like a pair of girls” who “could have been sisters” (Dunn 182). Starkey, however, looks to Mary’s relationship with her father and writes that Henry “publicly doted” on her, citing an example in which he “showed off her splendid auburn hair” to the court, proud that his daughter shared one of his defining features (Starkey 285). In spite of his affection for his daughter, Henry’s need to secure the Tudor dynasty is said to have influenced the manner in which he viewed Mary; she was, as Gregory’s Henry twice articulates, dismissed as “only a girl” and subsequently unfit to be heir to the English throne (Gregory, *Other* 164, 284).

This opinion, coupled with Henry’s belief that Katherine would not bear a much-needed male heir, is fundamental to his desire to end his first marriage. Katherine’s own first marriage had been to Arthur, Henry’s elder brother who was Prince of Wales at the time. Arthur died suddenly in 1502, and Katherine remained in England where negotiations for her marriage to Henry began (Davis and Edwards).²⁵ Lucy Wooding describes Henry’s marriage to Katherine, which took place at Greenwich Palace on 11 June 1509, as his “first important decision as king” (*Henry* 49). Katherine’s marriage to her first husband’s brother was permitted because a 1503 papal bull granted dispensation for this second marriage “even if ... the previous one had been

²⁵ For a discussion of the fraught negotiations between Ferdinand of Aragon and Henry VII, see Davis and Edwards.

consummated” (Davis and Edwards); despite this contingency, it was the possibility that Katherine’s marriage to Arthur was consummated that was interrogated when Henry began to consider the prospect of annulment, prompted by the improbability of Katherine conceiving a male heir (Wooding, *Henry* 84-85). Katherine had, in Henry’s eyes, failed in her dynastic role.

The Wars of the Roses, in which rival claimants to the throne had caused civil wars and political instability throughout the fifteenth century, ended when Henry VII defeated Richard III in battle and married Elizabeth of York, and in so doing united the houses of York and Lancaster (Wooding, *Henry* 13-14). That this conflict was so recent meant that the Tudor dynasty stood on “shaky ground” (13). These wars preceded Henry’s reign only by a generation and we, as readers, are reminded that the security of the realm and the dynasty was dependent on a clear line of (male) succession: “the fear ... of the return of civil war” had seen Henry VII execute “the nephew of King Edward and wicked King Richard” as part of the marriage negotiations that secured Katherine as Arthur’s bride (Mantel, *Wolf* 97), while his son, Henry VIII, “had done his best ruthlessly to eradicate or neutralise anyone with pretensions to the throne” (Weir, *Tower* 16). In spite of these efforts, “there could be little doubt that, were he to die and leave no son to succeed him, the kingdom would soon descend into dynastic turmoil and even war” (Weir, *Tower* 15). It was this concern for a male heir that, it is argued, drove Henry to pursue an annulment. The theological basis of his case was Leviticus 20:21, which states that “if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing: he hath uncovered his brother’s nakedness; they shall be childless” (Wooding, *Henry* 131). Of course, Henry and Katherine were not childless; but, as Cromwell explains in *Wolf Hall*, this patriarchal society “understood” that, when discussing “the Scriptures”, “children” meant “sons” (24) and Henry and Katherine were indeed “sonless” (Dunn, *Queen* 22).

For Henry, Anne Boleyn is said to have represented the opportunity to obtain the male heir that he believed his wife could not give him. Anne reminds him of this purpose in *The Queen of Subtleties* when he expresses a desire to “just ... be together”: “We can’t just ‘be together’,

Henry! We don't have that luxury. You're a *king*. Your *duty* is to make sure that it's *your son* who's king *after* you ... And I'm your chance" (Dunn 64). As the woman who would replace Katherine as queen and who promised to provide Henry with a son, Boleyn is inseparable from Henry's desire to end his marriage to Katherine, and its impact on Henry's heir presumptive. When her parents' marriage was declared invalid, the former Princess Mary became Lady Mary, and the 1534 Act of Succession excluded her, favouring the claim of her infant half-sister Elizabeth should Henry have died without a son to succeed him (Starkey 521).

References to Mary's "happy childhood", which was "spent basking in the love of both her adored parents" (Weir, *Tower* 33), do not only highlight an idyllic family but also act as a direct contrast to the period during which her parents—and Anne Boleyn—were embroiled in divorce proceedings and "Mary's world had crashed in ruins around her" (Weir, *Elizabeth* 20). Dunn's narrator, Lucy, recalls her encounter with Catherine and Mary; she maintains that Catherine is queen because she "was crowned queen and she didn't stop being queen because she didn't die", and does not consider Anne to be worthy of the role (180). She considers it "strange that our queen is Anne Boleyn, angry-looking daughter of a jumped-up noble; not the princess of Christendom's most royal family" (183). Starkey, however, positions Boleyn's first public appearance with Henry as a prelude to later events. He writes that "we can only guess ... what the two women thought of each other" but suggests that Mary, who was "the star of the ball", "probably noticed nothing" while Anne "knew ... that she and Mary would be inveterate enemies in a struggle that would last for both their lives" (285). Starkey's suggestion that enmity would come to define the relationship between Mary and Anne is indicative of the ways in which Boleyn's role in the divorce is represented: Weir argues in *The Lady in the Tower* that "Anne's enmity towards [Mary] had been well known" (276), while Bernard dedicates a chapter, entitled "Anne against Catherine", to Boleyn's apparent mistreatment of the former queen and princess during her marriage (*Fatal* 79).

While authors agree that the antipathy between the two women was mutual, they are depicted in vastly different ways. Anne is seen as needlessly cruel, while Mary's hatred is represented conversely as an appropriate response to ill treatment. For the majority of the authors, Mary's ascribed victimhood is positioned in direct contrast to the actions of Henry and Anne: Mary "had more reason than most to loathe Anne Boleyn" because, having supported her mother "in her brave stand" against the divorce, "she had incurred the wrath of her father and the malice of Anne Boleyn" (Weir, *Tower* 33). The wrath to which Weir refers is apparent in a number of measures that were taken against Mary. She was denied "her royal style and her household" (Ives, *Life* 197), as well as the loss of "her rank, her prospects of a throne and marriage, and the love of her father the King" (Weir, *Elizabeth* 5). The enforced separation from "her own mother, the late sainted Queen Katherine" is depicted as one of the more significant measures taken against Mary (Weir, *Elizabeth* 5). Katherine—who was now titled the Dowager Princess of Wales in acknowledgment of her marriage to Arthur—was forced to live in a separate household, and mother and daughter were "forbidden to visit or write to each other" for fear that they would conspire against Henry (Denny 205). Denied even the "consolation of letters", this complete separation of mother and daughter is depicted as a tactic to "weaken [Catherine's] resolve" in resisting the annulment (Purdy 124). Mantel introduces Mary in the "Cast of Characters" which precedes *Bring up the Bodies* as being "under house arrest" (x), and it is argued consistently that she was "isolated and miserable" (Weir, *Tower* 35), living "alone with no company but servants and her confessor" and spending "hours on her knees praying God to turn her father's love back to her mother, his wife" (Gregory 284). "Not only had Henry separated himself from Catherine", writes Starkey, "he was also separating Catherine from Mary" and, indeed, "mother and daughter would never see each other again" (442); it is this act that Starkey describes as "the final cruelty" (442).

"That great whore, Anne Boleyn" is regularly identified as the reason why Mary lost "all that she held dear in life" (Weir, *Elizabeth* 5). Although not the sole source of Henry's marital

woes, Boleyn is represented as the catalyst that saw him begin proceedings to end the marriage. He is depicted as capricious and as having held the power to pursue his whims regardless of the impact on others: as Cromwell's sister-in-law observes, "Henry can declare the law if he likes and put off his wife as he likes and marry Lady Anne and he will say what is a sin and what not and who can be married. And the Princess Mary, God defend her, will be a bastard" (Mantel, *Wolf* 308). Henry's desire for Boleyn is identified as the reason why he sought to annul his marriage to Katherine, yet Boleyn is not a passive actor in the episode; while Henry and Anne were united in "the Divorce", it was Anne who, "like Lady Macbeth, frequently took the initiative" (Starkey 285-86). It is this perspective that is adopted with regard to Mary, and it is Boleyn herself who is regularly depicted as the architect of her stepdaughter's misery. It is argued that she "cruelly treated the Lady Mary" having actively encouraged Henry to take actions against his elder daughter (Weir, *Tower* 30).

Denny is the exception to the tendency to present Anne as vicious towards her stepdaughter, because she does not encourage an empathetic reading of Mary's experiences. Rather, she describes her as a "cosseted" princess who had "strange, piercing eyes", few teeth, and "a limited education" (204). Denny represents Mary as having been uneducated, which is a claim that is unverified by contemporary sources,²⁶ as well as unattractive, and thereby perpetuating a problematic association between a woman's character and physical appearance. Further, Denny represents Boleyn as a posthumous victim of propaganda during Mary's reign, who is first introduced in the text only as "Bloody Mary" (2)—a reference to the heresy laws she would go on to enforce as queen. This reference not only conjures the violence and cruelty that has been associated with Mary's reign, but also characterises Anne's opponent as an adult monarch, rather than a child. Although seventeen when Henry and Anne married in 1533, Mary is described as "the little girl" in both Mantel and Gregory's narratives: for example, the decision to "use the little girl against her mother" is labelled "harsh" in *Wolf Hall* (293), while in *The Other*

²⁶ For a brief outline of Mary's education, see Weikel, "Mary".

Boleyn Girl, Mary Boleyn observes that “Anne knew” that the “little girl . . . was sick with grief” (284). The focus on Mary’s unhappiness and youth means that readers are encouraged to view her plight with sympathy because she is positioned as having been oppressed (Warhol 45). Anne and Henry’s cruelty are foregrounded and their actions are, to an extent, depicted as cruel *because* Mary is a little girl.

As a character, Anne is more prominent than Mary in these novels; however, narrative focalisation on Mary’s plight, which imagines the situation from her perspective, means that she is more readily viewed as a victim. In *The Lady Elizabeth*, Weir uses omniscient third-person narration to explore Mary’s fictional viewpoint—and is the only author here analysed to do so. The sympathetic yet condescending appraisals of Mary’s circumstances in Mantel and Gregory’s novels is absent from *The Lady Elizabeth*, although Mary remains a victim of Anne and Henry’s cruelty. Mary reasons: if it were not for Anne, Henry would not have “wickedly broken with the Pope in Rome, her mother would not have died abandoned and alone, and she herself would never have been declared a bastard” (Weir 13). Weir’s narrative focuses on Mary’s suffering but does not deny her agency, as Mantel and Gregory’s characters invariably do with their suggestion that she is merely a little girl. By imagining how she may have viewed events, Weir foregrounds Mary’s own antipathy: Mary had “hated Anne Boleyn more than any other mortal on Earth” (13), yet “could not triumph in the death of her enemy” because, “even for someone of Mary’s age”, Anne’s death was too awful “to stomach” (20). Mary is therefore still represented as a casualty of the events that culminated from Boleyn and Henry’s marriage, yet she is a more active character, rather than an innocent and passive victim.

Ives and Denny offer a contradictory view of Boleyn’s influence with regard to Henry’s treatment of his eldest daughter. They each critique the dominant interpretation that she was responsible for Mary’s situation. Denny argues that Mary remained loyal to her mother and thus believed that Boleyn “was responsible for seducing her father and ruining their lives” (205). Mary was, however, ignorant of Henry’s consideration of “a split from Catherine long before” he had

desired Anne and, Denny further contends, it was his own decision—free from the influence of his new wife—to punish her loyalty to Catherine (205). Mary, she argues, “blamed [Anne] for every setback in her life” (205). Ives also suggests that Mary unfairly held Boleyn responsible for Henry’s actions: Henry “was determined to break his daughter’s will” yet Anne Boleyn “got the blame” (197-98). Where Denny focuses on Mary’s disinclination to blame her father, Ives also considers the political necessity that commentators focus their criticisms away from the king so as to avoid accusations of treason (197). He argues that opposition to Henry required a degree of deflection. Mary was considered by many to be Henry’s rightful heir, thus loyalty to her could be framed as loyalty to the king and his line (197). In turn, Mary’s recalcitrance, and the broader opposition that it encouraged, was “much easier” when Boleyn was its focus, and critiques of Henry were thereby framed as attacks on Anne as a mode of protection against allegations of treason (*Life* 197).²⁷

Both Ives and Denny invoke emotion in order to explain the reasons why Boleyn became a focus of opposition. Mary’s emotion is the focus of Denny’s discussion; she argues that Mary “deceived herself”, unwilling to accept that it was her father who was working against her (205). Ives also touches upon this theme, arguing that Mary later learnt “the truth” of her father’s actions, and that “the abasement which Henry exacted scarred her for life” (198). It is, however, Boleyn’s affect that underlines his argument. Where Denny argues that Boleyn became a focal point for Mary’s unhappiness, Ives suggests that accusations regarding Boleyn’s conduct were informed, not by unfounded accusations, but by her own inappropriate performances of emotion. He does not assert that Boleyn was responsible for Mary’s misfortune, yet Boleyn’s emotional responses towards her stepdaughter are consistently represented as cruel, callous and, significantly, influencing Henry’s actions.

²⁷ Mantel offers an opposing view of the ways that loyalty to Mary could be interpreted. When facilitating the Dissolution of the Monasteries, Cromwell instructs his agents to interrogate monks and nuns about “their loyalty, what they think of Katherine, what they think of the Lady Mary, and how they regard the Pope” because if “the mother houses of their orders are outside these shores” then it can be construed that they have “a higher loyalty...to some foreign power” (*Bodies* 124).

The question of Boleyn's culpability is depicted differently in each of the focus texts, but, the depiction of Boleyn as erratic, manipulative and driven by anger is—with the exception of Denny—consistent. She is represented as having manipulated her husband to ensure that he acted according to her will: she “bullied”, “wheedled”, “threatened” and “cried”, and Starkey argues that “her arrows pierced [Henry's] heart and hardened his judgement” (442). There is a striking similarity in the language employed by Starkey and Bernard; Starkey argues that Anne provided “the emotional drive and energy” which fuelled “the Great Matter” (516), while Bernard questions whether Chapuys' assurances prove that it was “Anne who supplied the emotional drive and energy behind the attacks on Catherine and Mary” (79). In *The Queen of Subtleties*, it is not Anne's actions, but her hatred, that is compelling. Speaking retrospectively, Anne's opinion of Mary is fuelled by resentment. She insults her stepdaughter regularly—for example, calling Mary “the po-faced bastard-daughter” (Dunn 254). She perceives Mary and Catherine as obstacles who blocked her own success and their tenacity continually incites her wrath: “I felt cheated of the life I could be having, if it weren't for the Spaniard and her daughter”, she declares, “thumping like a heartbeat in me was, *If not for them, if not for them*” (Dunn, *Queen* 221). These texts thus reinforce Boleyn's characterisation as vindictive and manipulative, and a knowing and active agent in her cruel treatment of her stepdaughter.

These representations rely on emotives—the attempt to express emotion—rather than emotion itself (Rosenwein 18). William Reddy suggests that the description of one's own emotional state is neither descriptive nor performative (99). Rather, what he labels as “first-person, present tense emotion claims” (for example, ‘I am angry’) express “a descriptive

appearance”, “a relational intent”, and “a self-exploring or self-altering effect” (100).²⁸ Reddy proposes that such attempts to translate ‘feelings’ into language be termed “emotives” (105). Rosenwein argues that emotives represent an immediate, experimental choice as to how an internal experience will be expressed; these expressions regularly require refinement (for example, ‘I am angry’ becomes ‘I am hurt’) and cannot convey the unsaid possibilities of expression (18). Thus emotives are not the emotions themselves, but are the attempted and provisional articulation of a ‘feeling’. However, the absence of evidence written by Boleyn means that writers can only consider the ways in which Boleyn’s emotives were interpreted by others; evidence in which she reflects on her own emotions and emotives remains elusive. The affects of Boleyn are ultimately unknowable, but are attributed to her *because of* the events that occurred.

Postmodern historiography has drawn attention to the problems of accessing the past by way of its texts (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 16), and these issues are further exacerbated when researching past emotion. Emotions must always be read and interpreted. For historians, interpretation of emotion is problematized by the distance of time and we “must rely on textual and material traces and representations of feelings and passions” (Trigg 7). As Stephanie Trigg outlines, there are two fundamental questions that historians must ask when investigating past emotion: how do we “reconstruct” past emotion and how did these emotions impact historical change? (7) The reasons why it is particularly difficult to accurately identify past emotions are twofold. First, as Rosenwein postulates, emotion is performed and read within groups that recognise and adhere to norms, conventions and vocabularies of emotional expression. She labels these groups “emotional communities” (25). Rosenwein differentiates between “unfocused” studies of

²⁸ The basis of this categorisation is that a statement about one’s emotions cannot be verified and can serve a purpose other than accurate description. For example, the statement ‘I am calm’ adopts a descriptive appearance but does not necessarily explain a feeling of calmness. ‘I am calm’ can serve a relational intent—for instance, a person could state they are calm in order to alleviate the concern of others—or can have a self-exploring or self-altering effect, such as in an attempt to alleviate anxiety through reassuring oneself of calmness. For a detailed discussion of these three elements of first-person, present tense emotion claims, see Reddy 101-2.

emotion that describe emotion in order to add colour to a narrative (1), and “focused” studies which contextualise emotives in relation to other expressions of emotion from that same community (26); an ‘unfocused study’ thus does not contribute to our understanding of conceptualisations of emotion in a past community, while a ‘focused study’ acknowledges that emotion is socially governed and seeks to understand how emotion operated in a specific time and place. The second challenge that is faced by researchers is that emotions are never unmediated. They are always interpreted, both by the individual and by observers; we read the “gestures, bodily changes, words, exclamations [and] tears” that constitute the “symptoms” of emotion (27). Thus textual accounts of emotion are interpreted twice; first by the writer who records the emotives they either experience or witness—and whose writing constitutes evidence—and then by the researcher (27). Thus there are two levels of textualisation: that which occurs in the ‘evidence’, and that which occurs in historical narratives which are informed by that evidence.

Rosenwein’s acknowledgement of the challenges of representing emotions is evident in George Bernard’s use of Chapuys’s evidence. Much of the evidence that underpins Bernard’s analysis of Mary’s situation is drawn from Chapuys’ letters. For example, Chapuys expressed his fear that “the moment this accursed Anne sets her foot firmly in the stirrup she will try to do the Queen all the harm she possibly can, and the Princess also” (*Cal. S.P. Spain*, iv part ii. 1058); this is a passage cited by Bernard who writes that Chapuys had predicted that “this cursed Anne ... would do all the harm she could to Catherine, but also to Mary” (Bernard, *Fatal* 79). Affect is integral to Chapuys’ portrayal of Boleyn and her influence on the king, and is, in turn, an important aspect of Bernard’s narrative. Henry “sometimes showed Mary affection” (Bernard, *Fatal* 83), and was thus not “ill-natured”, but had grown to be mean because of Anne’s “importunate insistence that Henry should do more against Mary” (80). Anne had grown “more haughty than ever”, was “incessantly crying after the king” that he should be harsher toward Catherine and Mary, and “clearly felt little sorrow” when Catherine died in 1536 (87). Chapuys

refused to meet with Anne himself, and therefore his information, gathered from associates and sympathisers, was “indirect” (83); Chapuys did not witness the events he describes, thus there is an additional layer of interpretation between Boleyn’s emotives and the way in which they might be read by Bernard’s reader—considering Rosenwein’s discussion of textualisation, ‘access’ to Anne is mediated through Chapuys’ associates, then Chapuys, then Bernard. Bernard questions the authority of Chapuys’ summation of events—demonstrated by his rhetorical question, “does this ring true?” following one accusation of Boleyn’s threatening behaviour (83)—yet Chapuys’ dispatches remain the evidence base of the chapter.

Bernard’s representation of Chapuys’ correspondence is a solid example of the mediation that occurs in representations of emotives—in this case, Boleyn’s. Bernard frames evidence in a manner that highlights Boleyn’s role in events and is consistent with his wider portrayal of her. On 10 October 1533, Chapuys wrote that Henry had informed Mary that her title of Princess had been revoked and that her allowance was “to be considerably reduced” (*LP*, vi. 1249). In considering why Henry would pursue such a course of action, Chapuys suggested that Anne could be the cause of Mary’s misfortune, writing, “I do not understand why the King is in such haste to treat the Princess in this way, if it were not for the importunity and malignity of the Lady” (*LP*, vi. 1249). He then, however, goes on to consider possible motivations for Henry’s behaviour that were unrelated to Boleyn, including the potential political leverage that an improvement to Mary’s circumstances could offer in his dealings with Katherine and the Emperor (*LP*, vi. 1249). Yet Bernard neglects those alternative explanations offered by Chapuys that do not mention Boleyn, stating only that on 10 October he reported that Henry had reduced the number of Princess Mary’s attendants and expenses: “only the importunity and ill will of the Lady could explain why Henry was so quick to treat Mary so meanly” (80). Thus Chapuys’ correspondence, itself a mediated account of Boleyn’s emotives, is further textualised by Bernard. These levels of mediation show the problematic yet necessarily constructed nature of the selection and representation of the affective nature of historical figures.

“She Takes It Personally. Women Do.”

In the twenty-first-century, women politicians continue to be judged according to limited and limiting stereotypes. Analyses of media representations have found that women politicians are subject to increased scrutiny about their physical appearance, marital and motherhood status, and domesticity (Garcia-Blanco and Wahl-Jorgensen 425). Such stereotypes are evident in depictions of Boleyn as queen. Her ascribed failure to adhere to idealised models of femininity is, I argue, central to the perception of her as a deviant woman and the archetypal representation of her as ‘shrew’, ‘bitch’ and ‘wicked stepmother’. Boleyn’s political influence is regularly equated with her control over Henry, as is demonstrated in their combined treatment of Mary. As such, she fails to observe the deferential behaviour of a queen consort. Gender is an essential facet of the manner in which Boleyn is perceived as a politician. The contention that she acted irrationally and was emotionally manipulative is a gendered reading, and is also consistent with early modern understandings of women’s power.

Catherine Lutz has argued that understandings of emotion are consistently gendered, with women being viewed as the “the more emotional gender” (154). Men, she posits, are regularly understood to be rational while women are seen to be less capable of controlling their emotionality and are thus constructed as “irrational, weak and dangerous” (154). The gendered assumptions identified by Lutz are evident in the representation of Boleyn as queen. Anne is regularly adjudged to be a poor politician because she is led by emotion, not reason; this is evidenced by Mantel’s fictional conversation between Cromwell and the Duke of Norfolk, Anne’s uncle, regarding Henry’s punishment of Thomas More:

‘It’s my niece, I suppose, who wants him brought to book. She takes it personally.

Women do.’

‘I think the king takes it personally.’

‘Which is weak,’ Norfolk says, ‘in my view. Why should he care how More judges him?’ (Mantel, *Wolf* 547)

This exchange demonstrates Norfolk's opinion of Anne and her influence: her encouragement carries the power to convince the king to arrest and execute his former confidante and friend, and her motive, which Norfolk labels as weak, is merely that she has been hurt by More's actions.²⁹ Further, Norfolk attributes a particular behaviour to Anne, not Henry, because he considers it to be weak—a feminine quality rather than a masculine one. Stereotypes about gender and emotion take on further significance, however, when the subject of representation is a queen consort. Not only is she seen to weaken Henry's ability to act rationally because she is manipulative, but her capacity to influence affairs of state is dependent on her relationship with him. Boleyn did not hold "authority", but was able to influence and shape political events through her relationship with her husband (Wiesner-Hanks 277).

Henry and Boleyn's marriage is subsequently framed as both a romantic and a political partnership, and Boleyn's role in governance is simultaneously dependent on and damaging to her marriage. Anne's apparent disinclination to behave in a docile and respectful manner toward her husband is integral to her characterisation in twenty-first-century texts. The extent to which she is depicted as an effective politician varies, yet she is consistently represented as an *affective* politician. This is, in part, because her influence is portrayed as emotional manipulation, rather than as insight or counsel; however, the associations between subversive behaviours and emotion in the early modern context is also of interest here. The gendered language used in descriptions of Boleyn frequently links her affect with her position of power. In her analysis of gender in early modern and medieval shrew-narratives, Holly A. Crocker argues that the labelling of a woman as a 'shrew' indicated transgressive behaviours and emotions (54). Crocker argues that in the medieval and early modern contexts, the term shrew could be applied to both men and women; it did not indicate a specific gender but instead denoted a subversion of social hierarchies, a lack of self-regulation, and vice (53). For women, these hierarchies were located in the home where

²⁹ More refuses to acknowledge Henry and Anne's marriage or to swear to the Act of Supremacy which "draws together all the powers and dignities assumed by the king", which is a "treasonable offence" (Mantel, *Wolf* 588-89).

deference to their husbands was expected; hence the “unruly wife” was one type of woman who was often labelled as a shrew (51-52).

Bryony Stocker posits that dialogue is essential to the perception that a historical novel is an authentic representation of the past. The language used must be understood by the reader and not be obsolete, yet must also invoke the imagined past (312). The term ‘shrew’ is of the early modern period and is recognisable as such because of its Shakespearean connotations, yet carries meaning in a modern context; as Anna Kamaralli has argued, ‘shrew’ is “rarely used today” yet the gendered overtone of the insult “remains unchanged” (1). Once gender-neutral, she suggests that Shakespeare’s use of the term to denote only women means “today the subject is assumed to be female” (3). Although the term itself may be considered to be archaic (3), the myriad terms, such as ‘bitch’, that continue to signify an outspoken or tempestuous woman in the twenty-first-century lexicon means that the characterisation of Boleyn as a shrew is recognisable. As Aguiar argues, “the traditional stereotype of this figure maintains its tenacious hold upon the imagination” (9). The familiarity of the ‘bitch’ archetype in the twenty-first century means that the discussions of Anne’s shrewish behaviour is instantly recognisable and the characterisation reflects gender norms that are contemporaneous to the reader, despite the use of identifiably early modern language.

In both *The Other Boleyn Girl* and *The Tudor Wife*, the term shrew is used by relatives to describe Anne and her behaviour. In *The Tudor Wife*, Anne’s behaviour, particularly where it relates to her failing marriage, is described in terms consistent with the shrew archetype: for instance, Jane notes how “Anne’s sweetness towards the King was souring fast. Her temper grew increasingly tart and shrill as she began to nag, berate, and rage at him until they quarreled more than they kissed. And odds were being laid that the end was near” (Purdy 138). Anne is also, however, directly labelled a shrew. When Katherine Howard becomes a focus of Henry’s admiration, the Duke of Norfolk compares her to Anne, Katherine’s deceased cousin, and suggests that she is more suited to the role of queen: “Katherine—thank Heaven!—is not the

willful, tart-tongued shrew Anne was. Katherine is pretty and pliant, as a woman should be. We can control her!” (Purdy 332). Anne’s brother similarly refers to her as a shrew in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, but the tone is decidedly more playful; when Anne censures her brother for failing to treat her according to her status as a future queen, he chides, “don’t be a shrew with me ... we all know you are the first lady of the kingdom, but be sweet to me” (Gregory 308). Although she warns him that he “must show [her] every respect”, she does not react against the insult, but instead smiles and kisses George (309). This exchange, delivered with “his face just inches from hers”, indicates the intimacy of George and Anne’s relationship (308).

While this exchange differs in tone to Norfolk’s derision of Anne’s character in *The Tudor Wife*, both men indicate that their respective positions in the Boleyn-Howard family mean that her behaviour toward them is inappropriate. For Gregory, the terms “shrew” and “sweet” are positioned in opposition to one another, with the latter used to indicate the relationship that George expects from his sister. While he acknowledges Anne’s superior social standing, he infantilises her by calling her his “little queen in waiting ... my little princess” (Gregory 308). As such, he diminishes her power and reasserts the superiority of his own position in the confines of the family. In contrast, Norfolk explicitly criticises Anne in *The Tudor Wife* for her failure to adhere to gendered codes of behaviour, and labels her a shrew because he, the patriarch of the family, was not able to control her.

Ives, Starkey and Mantel also invoke terms that have been associated with deviant women to describe Boleyn’s behaviour. Unlike Purdy and Gregory, however, they each critique the manner in which opposition to Boleyn was informed by, and presented in light of, her gender. Starkey’s focus is Chapuys, for whom “no word was too coarse” to describe Anne (359). He was, Starkey asserts, “savage” in his condemnation of Anne and regularly labelled her “*la putaine*” and “a vengeful harpy” (359, emphasis in original). Starkey thus criticises surviving examples of Chapuys’ language whilst using it as evidence of the ambassador’s hatred of Boleyn. Ives and Mantel do not cite actual examples of his language, but instead encapsulate the tone of

opposition. Ives criticises Anne's opponents; however it is Mary, not Chapuys, who is his focus. When arguing that Anne became a subject of condemnation, Ives describes the tone of the criticism by ironically employing gendered language, writing that it was easier for Mary to focus her anger on Anne rather than on her father: he was "not to blame" because "it was the harpy who had her claws in him" (*Life* 197). Mantel's Anne recognises and mocks the trend in public thought that Ives and Starkey describe, stating:

I am Jezebel...As I am a woman, I am the means by which sin enters the world. I am the devil's gateway, the cursed ingress. I am the means by which Satan attacks the man, whom he was not bold enough to attack, except through me. Well, that is their view of the situation" (*Wolf* 362).

Anne thus acknowledges that her power can only be read as dangerous and contemptible by those around her, because, as a woman, she is already censured. As such, Ives, Starkey and Mantel criticise the terms 'harpy' and 'Jezebel' and their gendered connotations, showing the extent to which readings of Boleyn are negatively framed by ingrained assumptions of gendered behaviours; she does not conform to the archetype of queen, and thus must be discussed in other prescriptive terms.

In spite of this critique of the insults levelled at Boleyn by her contemporaries, these authors nonetheless frame assessments of her character in distinctly feminine terms, with her gender essential to the manner in which others perceive her political influence. The texts tend to deem her role in state affairs as both disproportionate to her prescribed position as queen consort and inappropriate in terms of her conduct. She is, for instance, said to have "bewitched" the king with her "cunning charms" (Weir, *Elizabeth* 14); such appraisals reference an early modern belief in witchcraft and this 'bewitchment' overwhelmingly refers to emotional manipulation. Authors who do not feature Anne as a narrator also consider her manipulative reputation, however they do so from the imagined perspectives of characters who witnessed or experienced this behaviour. Weir's Mary, for example, considers Anne to have been a "great

dissembler” who had a talent for concealing her own feelings in order to achieve a desired outcome, and it is this skill that leads Mary to doubt whether Elizabeth’s “disarming candour” was “genuine or feigned”, given her resemblance to her mother (*Elizabeth* 128). Mary associates Anne’s capacity to conceal emotion with deception and responds with suspicion, but in *Bring up the Bodies*, Cromwell admires this same skill: he “rated Anne as a strategist” and “never believed” her to be “a passionate, spontaneous woman” (Mantel 204). In *The Lady Elizabeth*, Mary Tudor tells Elizabeth that Anne was “evil” because, among other reasons, she was “quite capable of playing the King false” (Weir 127), thereby associating her with the archetypal shrew who provides false counsel (Crocker 51). Mantel’s Cromwell, however, compares himself to Anne, observing that “everything she does is calculated, like everything he does” (*Bodies* 204); by stating that Anne, as a calculating politician, resembles himself, and is thus not a ‘passionate, spontaneous’ woman, Cromwell labels political skill with masculinity, and equates volatility with femininity.

The demarcation between feminine and masculine behaviours mirrors Cromwell’s earlier assessment of Anne as “the king’s quicksilver darling” who is “not good at hiding her feelings” and is always “slipping and sliding from anger to laughter” (Mantel, *Bodies* 37). Defined as his ‘darling’, Anne is infantilised and her relationship with Henry is framed in romantic, rather than political, terms. Where her role is associated with femininity, Cromwell questions the efficacy of her strategies; Cromwell labels her naïve because she believes that “speak[ing] sweetly to Henry” constitutes diplomacy and governance, neglects the international ramifications of her actions, and is seen to appropriate the male political sphere by hating “Henry to listen to anyone but herself” and her immediate family (Mantel, *Bodies* 21-22). From Cromwell’s perspective, Anne cannot meet the expectations placed on either gender. Cromwell’s perspective demonstrates the “hatred for the feminine and disdain for the masculine in the feminine” that Aguiar proposes is fundamental to patriarchy (33).

Along with references to Anne as a shrew, a harpy, a witch and other gendered insults, the term ‘bitch’ is also present in the historical novels, and is associated with feminine misconduct. Characters in *The Queen of Subtleties* and *The Tudor Wife* explicitly refer to women as bitches: Dunn’s Anne imagines that Jane, her sister-in-law, might refer to her as “*that Boleyn Bitch*” when speaking to others, (52, emphasis in original) and she uses the insult to describe other women (166); Purdy’s Jane comments that “a popular jest” questioned whether Anne’s famous pendant that carried her initial represented “*B for Boleyn or Bitch?*” (209). The archetype of the bitch has, argues Beverly Gross, adapted to dominant conceptualisations of women’s sexuality in the late twentieth and early twenty-first-century (151). Once associated with unrestrained sexuality, Gross posits that ‘the bitch’ has come to be associated with power or temperament: the millennial bitch is not necessarily promiscuous—indeed, she may be criticised for a disinclination to ‘put out’—but she is instead typically self-absorbed and aggressive (Gross 151). The term thus reflects altered gender norms, in which women may no longer be expected to remain chaste, but are still expected to conform to models of idealised femininity, associated with “love, loyalty, altruism, and self-sacrifice” (Aguiar 9). Thus the archetype takes on new meaning in relation to contemporary cultural context, but continues to signal the failure of women to adhere to established gender norms. Despite the term’s negative implications, flippant delivery undermines its power, as is evidenced by Anne’s dismissal of one of her minders whilst under arrest as a “silly bitch” (Dunn, *Queen* 300).

In contrast, where authors use the term to dehumanise women, its insidious nature becomes apparent. Referencing the etymology of the word ‘bitch’ (Aguiar 4), Mantel and Gregory both invoke the term in order to liken women to dogs, particularly when discussing sex: when considering Anne’s alleged infidelity, Mantel’s Henry argues that it is morally “grievous” for a “woman to sit astride a man” or for a man to “approach a woman as if she were a bitch” (*Bodies* 290), while in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Mary says that in spite of their “great name”, Boleyn and Howard women are “all bitches on heat” (305). There is a distinct contrast in tone in these

two examples; Gregory's Mary is self-effacing regarding her own sexuality and, in *Bring up the Bodies*, Henry grapples with the allegations made against the wife he would soon have executed. Yet Mary's growing disillusionment with the moral code of the Boleyn-Howard family, and their use of sex as a political tool, means that her jest can be read as a criticism and an acknowledgement of how people view her. The term, as it is used in these two examples, thus directly denotes women as female dogs, but also invokes its colloquial meaning, which Aguiar argues emerged during the early modern period (5): Anne, in particular, appropriates the male sphere, while both Boleyn sisters are seen to lack moral and sexual virtue and are labelled bitches because of their bad, lewd or ill-tempered behaviours.

The depictions of Anne's interactions with Princess Mary also reflect the archetypal characterisation of Anne as a 'bitch', since 'the bitch' is both powerful and intelligent and she lacks restraint and kindness (Aguiar 6). The familial relationship between the two women means that in her dealings with Mary, Boleyn is also, and perhaps more specifically, constructed to resemble the archetypal 'wicked stepmother'. The wicked stepmother is present in a number of fairy tales, of which 'Snow White' is perhaps the most notable, yet is not confined to this genre or form of storytelling; as Maria Tatar writes, fairy tales "circulate in multiple versions, reconfigured by each telling to form kaleidoscopic variations with distinctly different effects" (ix). The central conflict of the 'Snow White' fairy tale is that which occurs between the 'evil' queen who, having married the king, persecutes her youthful, innocent stepdaughter (Tatar 75). The tale is dominated by the dichotomy between these two women; the princess is "fair, young ... sweet, ignorant, passive", while the stepmother is "older, fiercer ... artful and active" (Gilbert and Gubar 291-92). As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, the wicked stepmother is contrasted and conflated with Snow White's deceased mother whose inclusion in the tale is merely perfunctory, but who nevertheless embodies the good, feminine woman (292). Like the bitch, the wicked stepmother's "vengeance" is "misdirected toward another woman instead of toward the

repressive forces she initially intended to challenge” (Aguiar 99). Throughout the story, Snow White and the Queen battle one another for the attentions of the King, who is both Snow White’s father and the Queen’s husband (Gilbert and Gubar 37). Such malevolent power is evident in Anne’s treatment of Mary, and Anne’s role as stepmother is directly correlated with her cruelty: “Anne welcomed her stepdaughter. ‘On your knees! I am Queen and before me you shall kneel!’” (Purdy 165).

The archetypal stepmother is particularly dangerous because her vengeance not only targets another woman, but also represents a transgression of her prescribed role as mother, albeit by proxy. As such, criticism of Boleyn’s performance as a mother is not confined to her dealings with Mary, but also touches on her own daughter, Elizabeth. The perception that Anne lacked maternal sentiment is critiqued by Mantel and Dunn, who contrast Anne’s feelings towards her daughter with the ways in which others, including her husband, expect her to react to a daughter. Dunn uses the medium of letter from mother to daughter to allow Anne to clarify that Elizabeth’s birth was not the disaster it is regularly depicted to be. She instructs her daughter not to “believe what people might tell you”; it might be “easy to assume” that Anne and Henry were “devastated” by the “birth of a girl”, but this is incorrect: “we were disappointed, yes, but only because if you’d been a boy, you’d have solved a lot of our problems. Your being a girl didn’t create any” (Dunn, *Queen* 210). As such, Anne indicates the political implications of Elizabeth’s gender, namely that Henry still lacked a male heir, before describing the joy that she and Henry experienced: Henry was “stupid over you, his pearl-nosed piece of perfection” while Anne was “smitten” (210). Anne explains how “everyone”, herself included, was “surprised” by her instantaneous maternal and loving response to Elizabeth (210).

Mantel similarly contrasts the political implications of the princess’ birth with Anne’s personal happiness, and also suggests that others were surprised by her maternal instinct. Elizabeth’s birth is not depicted in *Wolf Hall* because Cromwell is excluded from this scene in which “prayers are said that men never hear” (483), however he does witness Henry’s reaction to

news that Anne has borne a daughter: having publicly expressed his gratitude to God, in the privacy of his own rooms he tells Cromwell to “call her Elizabeth” and “cancel the jousts”, before the “inconsolable” king “drops into a chair” (485). In spite of his own disappointment, Henry nonetheless reflects on Elizabeth’s position: “poor scrap ... her own mother will wish her away” (485). Henry’s assumption that Anne will resent their daughter for her sex speaks only to the way in which he regards his wife; his low opinion of her is not reflected in her behaviour towards their daughter. Indeed, Anne’s love for Elizabeth in some way explains her continued cruelty toward Mary, in that she preferences her biological daughter over that of her daughter’s rival: in *Bring up the Bodies*, for instance, Cromwell explains that Anne wishes for Henry to become estranged from his elder daughter because “she wants the Princess Elizabeth to be the only daughter he knows” (21). Although the possibility that Anne is motivated by love for Elizabeth, rather than hatred for Mary, means that she is not shown to lack maternal sentiment, her behaviour is nonetheless consistent with the archetype of the wicked stepmother; as Christy Williams posits, patriarchal structures which prevented women from supporting themselves and their children see the wicked stepmother preference the prosperity and survival of her biological children over the needs of stepchildren who act as competition for her husband’s resources (260-61).

The wicked stepmother’s inability (or disinclination) to mirror ideal models of femininity associated with the ‘good woman’ means that she is associated with models of masculinity (Aguilar 59; Gilbert and Gubar 293-94); she is “a schemer” who is “witty, wily, and self-absorbed” (Gilbert and Gubar 293). Yet her ambition to gain agency, and the means by which she seeks it, is punished because this goal is a “monstrous” and “unnatural” one for a woman (296); in turn, the wicked stepmother is “almost always brutally destroyed” for her deviance (Aguilar 59). This combination of traits is particularly apparent in Dunn’s characterisation of Boleyn. This is because the first-person narration of *The Queen of Subtleties* allows an imagined insight into Anne’s deliberate manipulation of Henry as she, for example, convinces him to force Mary to join her

infant half-sister's household. Her description of Henry's response to Mary's continued opposition labels him as "naïve" for his belief that "anyone and everyone", including Mary, "would come around" to their relationship—although "he was learning" that this may not eventuate (Dunn 218). Henry is hurt by Mary's continued defiance and support of her mother and, although Anne acknowledges that Henry found his continued conflict with Mary to be emotionally taxing (218), her response is to "act quickly" to ensure that Henry is resolute in the face of his daughter's defiance (219). This action takes the form of instruction, as she insists that he act against Mary, telling him to deny Mary her own household:

I insisted he take her at her word. Send her to Hatfield, I said, to take second place to Elizabeth, and don't—*don't*, whatever you do—see her. Don't give in. Don't pander to these histrionics. I told him: she says she's made her choice; now let her feel the consequences. Let her see how she likes it. Then we'll see. (219, emphasis in original)

Anne's obduracy with regard to Mary shows the extent to which she is willing to wield power over her husband, and the lack of any emotion she feels for her stepdaughter—especially when her and her biological daughter's position appears under threat. When her adamant approach is unsuccessful, she appeals to Henry's pride, and his need to reassert his own power: "listen, I said: she can't be any daughter of yours until she accepts the life you have now ... unless she accepts your authority" (219). This "deft but belated switch into a language that he'd understand"—namely, a language that speaks to his pride—sees him "suddenly sit a bit taller" and, importantly, agree with her response to Mary (219).

While Dunn's Anne verbally appeals to Henry's authority as king, the first-person narration simultaneously undermines it. She reveals her methods and techniques, which are, in this instance, successful, for ensuring that he adopts the course of action that she believes is most advantageous (219). Henry concedes that she is correct—"Yes, yes," he allowed, in the end" (219)—significantly, however, he does not seek nor value her advice. She recognises that he does not wish to consult her—the exchange is instigated when Henry receives a defiant letter from

Mary that “he didn’t let [her] read for herself” (218)—yet shows a lack of deference by forcing him to listen to her opinions. His resistance continues as she speaks: “he said nothing. Dead-eyed. Flinching from me. As if it were my fault” (219). Her acknowledgment that Henry holds her responsible for their current predicament is telling of his reaction to her, and her transgressions in her role of both wife and mother. She first recognises and then ignores Henry’s displeasure and thereby fails to behave in accordance with the expected deference. Accordingly, in Dunn’s novel, Boleyn is not represented as solely responsible for Mary’s behaviours, but she is invariably responsible for Henry’s growing dissatisfaction with his marriage primarily because she does not respect the parameters of her role as queen consort.

“Send that Little Martyr to Tyburn”

An alleged conspiracy to have Mary and Katherine murdered, judicially or otherwise, is regularly cited as evidence that Boleyn was ruthless in her ambition. Her attainment of power necessitates a cruel disregard for others. It is for this reason that her self-interest is portrayed in a negative light, as is demonstrated by her dealings with Mary. It is not necessarily suggested that Boleyn attempted to murder Mary, or that she considered this to be a viable option, but it is argued that her contemporaries believed her to be capable of murder. Weir writes that “there is no evidence that Anne actively had tried to poison” Katherine and Mary yet qualifies this statement with the argument that “Mary had no cause to love her stepmother, and the animosity was entirely mutual” (*Tower* 37); Ives refers to the Spanish ambassador’s “wilder fantasies about poison and treason trials” (*Life* 183); and while Gregory does not suggest that Anne made an attempt on the Lady Mary’s life, she does suggest that she would be capable of doing so. Mary Boleyn is with Katherine of Aragon when she receives news that Lady Mary is ill, and her “first thought” is that the princess had been poisoned—“probably by my sister” (*Other* 283). When Katherine asks, “would Anne have her poisoned to frighten me into a nunnery?” Mary reflects that she “could not say for sure what Anne might do now” (283). Anne’s *potential* to inflict

damage, even when she does not act on that potential, adds to her characterisation as unpredictable and vengeful, but does not go so far as to condemn her outright.

Dunn's first-person narration, however, confirms suspicions, such as those raised by Weir and Gregory, with regard to Anne's intentions to kill Mary. Anne voices her desire to execute her stepdaughter; although such threats are not serious they are indicative of her tempestuous nature, demonstrated by her response to her uncle's reprimand, "what are *you* putting *Mary* through?' ... 'Not enough,' I said, immediately. 'Not nearly enough. I'd send that little martyr to Tyburn, if I could.'" (Dunn, *Queen* 254, emphasis in original). This scene reflects surviving documentation written by Mary's supporters who expressed fear for her safety: for example, Dr Ortiz, Katherine's physician, wrote in 1535 of the apparent likelihood that Katherine "and the Princess [would] be sentenced to martyrdom" (*LP* ix. 873). Ortiz lists the injustices that had already been enacted against Mary—including her aforementioned enforced isolation from her mother and Chapuys—before referring to declarations made by Boleyn: "She has often said of the Princess 'She is my death and I am hers; so I will take care that she shall not laugh at me after my death'" (*LP* ix. 873). There are distinct similarities—deliberate or otherwise—between Ortiz's correspondence and Dunn's fictional narrative; both employ references to Mary's becoming a martyr and Anne's threats to Mary's life.

Unlike Ortiz, however, Dunn's Anne uses the word 'martyr' ironically to mock Mary's perception of herself and her cause. The tone of Boleyn's threats as reported by Ortiz does not reflect the flippancy of Dunn's character, yet both accounts present her threat to Mary as serious. In *The Queen of Subtleties*, however, it is the first-person narration that argues that Anne *would* execute Mary if she were permitted by Henry to do so. Hence, Anne does not actually make an attempt on her stepdaughter's life, but the imagined insight into her motivations and intentions means that she is nonetheless represented as a murderous stepmother. The scene in which Anne tells Henry how to deal with his daughter is, again, of interest here: once Henry acquiesces to her planned course of action, Anne, as narrator, offers an insight into her honest and ruthless

appraisal of the discussion: “I’d concentrated on sounding as if I were reasoning my way through a problem, but actually I could have killed her. I’m practical, remember, and her death was beginning to seem the most practical solution.” (219) Anne’s ‘practicality’, here, is in keeping with her transgressive characterisation that positions her as a ‘bad woman’.

Mantel also invokes Ortiz’s correspondence when commenting on the relationship between Anne and her stepdaughter. In *Bring up the Bodies*, Anne proposes a respite in the hostilities between herself and Mary, outlining to Cromwell the concessions that she is willing to make on the condition that Mary accords her a degree of courtesy and acknowledges her as queen; for instance, Anne tells Cromwell “I do not expect her to call me ‘my lady mother’, but I expect her to call me Your Highness” (146). Although for Anne this is, as Cromwell reflects, “an unparalleled set of concessions” it is clear that she is not motivated by kindness (147)—and not only because the discussion occurs “after the dancing” celebrating the death of Mary’s mother. Anne’s offer is politic and, despite anticipating Mary’s repudiation of any suggestion of compromise, she hopes that the young woman will accept her terms: “I do not think she will take it, and then we will both be sorry, for we are condemned to fight till the breath goes out of our bodies” (147). Anne then continues, employing the threatening language of Ortiz’s letter: “She is my death, and I am hers. So tell her, I shall make sure she does not live to laugh at me after I am gone” (147).

Dunn and Mantel’s fictional representations allow them the freedom to depict Anne’s intentions through the characters they have created, but Ortiz’s letter is evidence that Mary’s Spanish allies believed that Boleyn was willing to have Mary and Katherine executed, and, as a contemporary commentator, Ortiz’s belief that Boleyn hoped to see the king’s daughter executed lends authenticity to their historical fictions. For those readers familiar with the period, it is possible that the quote from the aforementioned letter may be recognisable—either as a primary source or as a common trope in other texts. Accordingly, the invocation of such evidence in

fiction has the capacity to contribute to the authenticity of Mantel and Dunn's offer characterisations of Boleyn.

However, the accuracy of Ortiz's claim is ultimately unknown, and the truth of Mary's allies' theories cannot be confirmed. In contrast to Dunn and Mantel's fictional representations of Anne, historians interrogate the available primary source materials directly and formulate their own appraisals of whether the evidence found therein is accurate. Despite their unsubstantiated nature, the suspicions of Mary's allies are, nonetheless, cited as evidence of Boleyn's murderous intentions. Ives, for example, depicts Anne as having threatened to have her stepdaughter killed. He argues that Mary's recalcitrance was a public "denial of Anne's own identity and integrity" because, "if Katherine's marriage was valid", as Mary maintained, "then Anne was a whore" (198). Anne was thus, in Ives' narrative, driven not by "malevolence" but "self-defence" (198). Ives' explanation for Anne's animosity is convincing; however, he points to its excessiveness, and argues that Anne's reactions, although understandable, were often imprudent. As such, his formulaic characterisation conforms to that outlined by Miriam Burstein, in which the limited agency that is ascribed to Boleyn is undermined by "threatening excessiveness", which is "usually represented in term of her hysterical speech" (Burstein, "Afterlife" 5). Affirming that it is unlikely that Boleyn was responsible for the measures taken against Mary, Ives nevertheless concedes, "this is not to say that Anne was guiltless" (*Life* 198).

His appraisal is based on a letter that Chapuys wrote to the Emperor on 23 June 1534:

the King's concubine had said more than once, and with great assurance, that when the King has crossed the sea, and she remains *gouvernante*, as she will be, she will use her authority and put the said Princess to death, either by hunger or otherwise. On Rochford, her brother, telling her that this would anger the King, she said she did not care even if she were burned alive for it after. (*LP*, vii. 871)

Ives' account replicates this letter, as it appears in translation, almost exactly (*Life* 198). His introduction of the source is, however, uncritical of the potential for Chapuys to distort Boleyn's

character—who is, again, labelled the ‘concubine’. Ives writes that “Chapuys’ letters are full of [Anne] railing against Mary and of her lurid threats”, before suggesting that the ambassador’s fears of “poison and worse” were unrealistic (*Life* 198). He does, however, introduce the above letter as credible, if not verifiable, asserting, “there is an obvious ring of truth in [Chapuys’] story” (*Life* 198). Chapuys refers to his source only as “a person of good faith” (*LP*, vii. 871), thus his choice of informant does not inform Ives’ assessment of the letter’s veracity; instead, it appears to be the volatile tone of Anne’s language and her irrational behaviours that Ives considers convincing. Although he goes on to explain the seriousness of the threat that Mary posed to Anne’s legitimacy as queen, Ives concludes his discussion of the letter by describing “Anne’s language” as “violent and threatening”, mirroring his earlier statement that “Anne was ranting, not thinking” (198). Although the accuracy of Chapuys’ claims is inconclusive, Ives’ assessment suggests that the image of an impulsive and malicious Anne is, for him, an authentic one.

Ives’ use of this letter as evidence for the ascribed volatility of Boleyn’s language is ironic, given the tone of Chapuys’ writings in which she is consistently referred to as ‘the concubine’ or ‘the whore’. As the Imperial ambassador, however, Chapuys’ language is considered to be a marker of his loyalty to Katherine and Mary and is seen to be appropriate given his role. It would have been inappropriate for him to show Boleyn respect or to acknowledge her as queen: Boleyn could not be queen nor could Elizabeth be a princess, because these titles belonged to Katherine and Mary respectively. While Starkey acknowledges these reasons for Chapuys’ language, he also perpetuates its gendered connotations. Starkey argues that as Anne’s “attacks were stepped up”, the language with which the ambassador described Anne also escalated (516). Chapuys “understood” that Anne was actively working against Mary, and Starkey suggests that it was for this reason that he began referring to her as “the whore”, rather than as “the Lady”, while her infant daughter Elizabeth was “the bastard” (516). Although Starkey notes that there was a “shocking ferocity” in Chapuys’ language, he also states that this was matched by Anne’s response to Mary’s “intransigence,” and he explicitly genders her behaviour: “‘the female’, we are

told, 'is more deadly than the male'. So it proved" (516). As such, Starkey acknowledges the derogatory language with which Chapuys described Boleyn, yet *Chapuys'* language is said to demonstrate *Anne's* misconduct.

Chapuys' representations of Boleyn are of interest when considering foreign diplomatic relations in the context of Henry's reign; however the image of a volatile Anne has also been central to depictions of her marriage. Boleyn's capacity to influence the king, and the extent to which this capacity diminished over time, is explicitly linked to the security of her position. In *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Anne's siblings observe as she "plays" Henry, convincing him to ignore her enemies who disparage her character: first "she flies at him and then she nestles ... they both get to shout and cry and then end up quietly in each other's arms" (496). While they agree that the technique is effective, George observes, "it's a damned dangerous game to play with a king who has absolute power" (497-98). In *Bring up the Bodies*, Mantel also considers the effectiveness of these displays of emotion. Cromwell comments that "she has her spites, she has her little rages; she is volatile and Henry knows it" (38). Yet these unrestrained displays of emotion that once "fascinated the king" now mean that he appears "harassed" in her presence: "you can see his gaze growing distant when she begins one of her rants, and if he were not such a gentleman he would pull his hat down over his ear" (38). This observation speaks to the way that marriage has altered Anne and Henry's relationship, and confirms Cromwell's earlier prediction that "perhaps" Henry will "whip her" for "provok[ing his] temper" once "they're married" (*Wolf* 309). The change in Anne's status, from mistress to queen, and the expectations regarding the two roles are thus integral to the contention that her influence diminished with time; where her deviance as a mistress was a point of intrigue, it becomes a source of dissatisfaction and cause for punishment once she becomes a deviant wife.

Henry's expectations of his wife differ substantially from those of his mistress. These differences become apparent in *The Queen of Subtleties*, when Anne is "in trouble" for calling her uncle, the Duke of Norfolk—whom Henry considers "a respected elder nobleman"—"an

arrogant little prick” (Dunn 254). Henry rebukes her for failing to “*behave* like a queen” and rejects her assertion that she “wasn’t meek and mild when [he] married [her]”: “‘I *assumed*,’ he went on, ‘that you’d learn to be queenly. When you got what you wanted ... I *assumed* you’d calm down and grow up’” (255, emphasis in original). While she was his mistress, her advice and guidance had been valued, and Henry had “*lived* to hear what [she] had to say”, but during their marriage she has “nothing to say ... that isn’t carping-on about someone” (255, emphasis in original). This encounter demonstrates Anne’s failure to meet Henry’s expectations, but its conclusion suggests that her failures will result in her execution: as he turns his back on her and leaves, he ominously murmurs, “when will this ever end?” (256).

It is consistently argued that Henry’s increasingly hostile attitude toward his wife meant that she lost his support and became vulnerable to attacks from enemies without his protection. Her treatment of Mary acts as a specific example of her misconduct which, it is argued, influenced her reputation and standing at court. Unwilling to compromise, Anne “does not understand the need to placate people”, and has thus gained a number of enemies (Mantel, *Bodies* 22)—a depiction that is consistent with Dunn’s Anne who, when Henry tells her of the continuous complaints he hears about her, asks “why don’t you just tell them all to fuck off?” (Dunn, *Queen* 255). Following Anne’s miscarriage, Cromwell begins to strategise in anticipation of Henry discarding her, and he plans a gathering of her enemies at which the possibility of a coup d’état is raised. The list of names that he prepares (“Norfolk, Carew, Fitz. Francis Bryan. The Courtnays, the Montagues, and their ilk. And Suffolk”) share little in common but a hatred for the Boleyns, and the religious and political changes which the family represent (194). In planning the meeting, Cromwell imagines that mentioning Mary may act to ingratiate himself with his guests:

‘It does my heart good to see you, Lady Gertrude ... Any friend of the Lady Mary is welcome to dine.’

‘The Princess Mary,’ Gertrude Courtenay snaps.

‘As you will, my lady,’ he sighs. (195)

Anne’s failed pregnancy prompts Cromwell to act against her, believing that Henry will want to discard his wife because she has not fulfilled her dynastic role and given him a son. However, his ability to manipulate factional politics to his advantage is possible because of the number of people who were considered enemies of the Boleyn family and who aligned themselves with Mary. The development of an anti-Boleyn faction which believed that “England had another queen, another princess” is consistent across the historical narratives (Dunn, *Queen* 214). For example, Weir describes Lady Kingston, who was amongst the women tasked with observing Boleyn in the Tower as she awaited trial, as “a friend of the Lady Mary” in order to explain that Kingston “cannot have been sympathetic towards Anne” (Weir, *Tower* 139). Anne’s own inability to recognise the impact that her decisions and actions have on others is thus constructed as an inability to engage effectively in the factional politics that are said to have dominated Henry’s court, having “not care[d] who hated her, as long as the king was at her beck and call” (308).

Anne’s arrogance blinds her to the danger of relying on Henry’s goodwill, in spite of the warnings that she receives from others. It is asserted that her simultaneous manipulation of the king and reliance on his protection rendered her vulnerable to both his wrath and attacks from opposing factions. She is callous in her assumption of his unwavering support, and her attacks against Mary become a source of tension between the couple; Mary is, indeed, represented as “the most immediate ... external problem” in Henry and Anne’s marriage (Ives 197). Anne’s lack of empathy towards his daughter is integral to his growing dissatisfaction with her; during one disagreement over Mary in *The Queen of Subtleties*, Anne exclaims, “I *told* you; *don’t* let Mary muck you about” to which “his gaze slunk up to mine, eyes dense with distrust” (Dunn 220, emphasis in original). Henry’s distrust of Anne is echoed by Weir, who argues that her cruelty towards Mary contributed to Henry’s readiness “to believe anything of Anne”; he “probably” considered the accusations made against her to be “entirely credible” given that she had, amongst other transgressions, “repeatedly urged Henry to send ... Mary, his own daughter, to the scaffold”

(*Tower* 146). The implications of her alleged actions against Mary are not limited to depictions of her actions as queen, wife or stepmother, since any misconduct is often addressed in terms of wider narratives about guilt and innocence.

“Learning to Make Cheese and Skin a Chicken”

The influence of gender norms that are contemporary to a text, rather than the era which it depicts, becomes evident when considering the ways that feminist discourse is invoked in historical narratives. The 1969 film, *Anne of the Thousand Days*, is one example in which the characterisation of Boleyn reflects the politics of second-wave feminism. The film’s dénouement sees a condemned Anne choose to die rather than allow her daughter Elizabeth to be bastardised and disinherited, before passionately rejecting Henry’s perceived need for a male heir: “my Elizabeth shall be queen and my blood will have been well spent!”. Susan Bordo has described this exchange as “all invention, but of a potent and timely sort for 1969”, citing the power of Anne’s choice—like *Thelma and Louise* in the 1991 film—to “ride off the cliff, in full consciousness of what she is doing, to preserve her own integrity (and, in this case, the future of her daughter and England)” (*Creation* 189-90). Turning her attention to twenty-first-century representations, Bordo argues that Gregory’s *The Other Boleyn Girl* relies on “this good woman, bad woman thing...good Mary, bad Anne” (“Interview”); she writes that in Gregory’s text “sex is allowed but ambition isn’t” before questioning, “what kind of feminism is this?” (Bordo, *Creation* 221). Just as the representation of Boleyn’s death in *Anne of the Thousand Days* is informed by the feminist ideals of the 1960s, twenty-first-century texts, including *The Other Boleyn Girl* and *The Tudor Wife* in particular, can be seen to exhibit post-feminist ideals of femininity, empowerment, victimhood and agency.

Both the second-wave-Anne of the 1960s and the post-feminist-Anne of today have been depicted as ambitious, ruthless and clever—much like male politicians from the era, such as More and Cromwell. There are, however, distinct differences in the characterisation of power and influence, depending on the gender of the individual in question. Twenty-first-century media

representations of politicians have labelled women as aggressive while their male colleagues are seen as “merely playing the(ir) game” (Garcia-Blanco and Wahl-Jorgensen 425). This tendency is evident in the historical narratives discussed in this thesis, but particular feminist perspectives frame feminine aggression in different ways: second-wave reinterpretations held that Boleyn’s failure to conform to stereotypically feminine behaviour constituted a challenge to the patriarchal structures and celebrated her as an agent of political and religious change,³⁰ in the post-feminist era, however, she has come to be viewed as manipulative and as having used marriage and sex purely as a means to gain personal power. In post-feminist fiction, Boleyn is intelligent and vivacious but, like other generic flawed heroines, she is also “cold, manipulative, and immoral” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 496). For this incarnation of Anne, marriage to Henry offers not romantic fulfilment, but wealth, status and influence (Harzewski, *Chick* 33), and it is the “repressive, deceptive, and deadly” means by which she is seen to pursue her goals that sees her positioned as a ‘bad woman’ (Tasker and Negra 9). Boleyn’s manipulative behaviours are regularly seen to accentuate and encourage Henry’s cruelty, of which she eventually becomes a victim: she is not simply a victim of his cruelty, but is, in fact, its origin.

Analysing Boleyn’s characterisation as queen offers insight into broader representations of women and power. This section, however, narrows the focus to post-feminist texts. The neo-conservative values of post-feminism, which celebrate ‘feminine’ pursuits such as motherhood and marriage, critique Anne’s ‘choice’ to seek power at the expense of happiness. *The Other Boleyn Girl* and *The Tudor Wife* can be read as post-feminist texts because they are nostalgic and romanticise traditional gender roles, yet reference feminist ideals with their rhetoric about choice, autonomy and individualism (Whelehan 161). In turn, an analysis of Anne Boleyn as queen is of interest because of the depiction of culpability and responsibility in post-feminist writing. As Megan Hickerson has written in her analysis of Gregory’s Tudor Court series, *The Other Boleyn*

³⁰ For a discussion of romance heroines who possess conventionally male traits and the ways in which this has been used by authors to convey individuation and autonomy, see Radway (123-24).

Girl—along with, I would argue, *The Tudor Wife*—is “tangibly post-feminist” because Gregory constructs her narratives so as to focus on “female agency” not “female victimization”, even when the histories “end badly for the women featured in them” (Hickerson 225). In Gregory and Purdy’s novels, Anne is depicted as ambitious and as manipulating the purportedly feminine spheres of marriage, motherhood and family to achieve power and prestige.

In Purdy’s and Gregory’s narratives, Anne’s separation of Katherine of Aragon and Mary is depicted as excessively cruel. Anne’s disinclination to acknowledge the distress that Katherine experiences in response to the treatment of her daughter and failure to adapt her own behaviour in response to that distress is essential to her negative characterisation. In contrast, her sister Mary, the protagonist of *The Other Boleyn Girl*, and Jane Boleyn, *The Tudor Wife*’s narrator, are empathetic towards Katherine’s plight. Jane considers the separation of Mary and Katherine to be merciless, and the culmination of the abuse that Katherine suffers: Henry and Anne “would show her no mercy” and their “envoys would, hound, bully, and beseech her tirelessly, in a vain attempt to make her repudiate her marriage vows ... they even kept her apart from her beloved daughter, Princess Mary” (Purdy 124). Unlike Jane who largely observes events from a distance, Gregory’s Mary develops a personal relationship with Katherine and, when they learn that the princess is ill, she considers this to be an indication that Anne had grown too powerful: “the thought of the Queen of England desperately asking if my upstart sister would let her see her own child, and that child a Princess Royal, was too much, even for this topsy-turvy world” (283-84). Anne’s misuse of her power is apparent. Anne’s cruelty, however, is emphasised when Henry, acting on her insistence, denies Katherine permission to visit their daughter and she revels in the pain that she has inflicted: Anne returns Katherine’s accusatory glance with “a radiant confident smile, and the queen, seeing Anne’s unconcealed pleasure, knew who she should thank for the king’s cruelty” (284).

Moreover, Jane and Mary perceive motherhood as an opportunity to grant them emotional fulfilment, rather than a means by which they can secure status, as Anne does. George

Boleyn's disgust for Jane, his wife, means that he is unwilling to have sex with her and thus denies her not only his love, but also the opportunity to become a mother; one night he arrives home drunk and "grudgingly tolerat[es her] soothing hands and the kisses [she] shower[s] upon his brow" before they have sex, during which she exclaims, "give me a child, George ... if you cannot love me, give me a child who will!" (Purdy 98). In contrast, Mary's growing disillusionment with Henry and his court culminates with the birth of her son. Having been mistress to Henry VIII for a number of years, Mary bears him a son and a daughter and quickly comes to the realisation that Henry is uninterested in their children, but will happily use them as political pawns should the opportunity arise. Mary is devastated when her son is "taken" from her shortly after his birth (Gregory, *Other* 163)—a reminder that sons hold more strategic value than daughters. She reflects that "they had stolen away a part of me too", and begins to relish the notion of raising her children at Hever or Rochford, the Boleyn family estates. She acknowledges that, because of her grief over the removal of her son, her previous affection for Henry had thus been irrevocably tarnished: "I could not love this man ... he was the father of my children and yet he would have no interest in them until they were old enough for him to use as counters in the game of inheritance" (Gregory, *Other* 163).

Where Mary Boleyn criticises a society that values power and strategy above love and family, Anne is unrelenting in her pursuit of power and, for her, childbirth represents the opportunity to consolidate her power. Anne's determination is evidenced in *The Other Boleyn Girl* and *The Tudor Wife* in her continued persecution of her stepdaughter during the birth of Elizabeth. Anne had not only replaced Katherine as queen consort, but had seemingly quashed Mary's chance of ever ruling England as queen regnant. The contention that Anne saw her daughter's birth as an opportunity to reinforce her stepdaughter's drastic change in prospects again sees her corrupting traditional feminine roles, in this case motherhood, for political gains.

Anne's child "would disinherit" Mary and therefore forcing her to witness the moment of her own disinheritance is labelled as "cruel" (Gregory, *Other* 386). Gregory describes Mary's

discomfort with the intimacy of the scene, “her pale face screwed up in her habitual scowl of determination”; however she does not elaborate on Mary’s role in the birth in any further detail (386). Contrastingly, in *The Tudor Wife*, Purdy depicts Anne as harassing Mary throughout her labour. “Even through the hot red haze of pain”, she writes, “Anne was relentless in her torment of the Princess Mary” (Purdy 168). Purdy’s Anne continually taunts Mary: Anne orders Mary to “stand at the foot of the bed and watch ... she must not move or hide her eye”, crying that “I want you to see my son enter the world!” (168). This aggressive behaviour is a continuation of Anne’s actions toward Mary in the weeks preceding the birth. When Mary reminds her stepmother of the possibility that she is carrying a daughter, Anne responds with physical violence. She shrieks, “A son! I will have a son, I tell you!” and then “snatched up the object nearest her, a book bound in red leather with gold-capped corners and hurled it straight and hard at Mary ... goug[ing] her forehead and [drawing] blood” (166). Having shown Mary “no mercy”, Anne is explicitly represented as cruel, violent, unpredictable and malicious, and the younger woman, again, becomes a sympathetic figure (Purdy 167).

Jane describes the pregnant Anne as “insolent and regal...with one hand resting triumphantly upon her grossly swollen belly” as she berates her stepdaughter, reminding Mary of her diminished status:

Anne’s hand curled tightly around Mary’s wrist, forcing her palm closer, to feel the life quickening beneath the gold brocade. ‘When your mother bore you, Lady Mary,’ she sneered, pointedly reminding Mary that she was no longer entitled to be called Princess, ‘she made a mistake, but here inside me is the remedy.’ (165)

This sadism towards Mary, in the weeks before Elizabeth’s birth, means that Mary’s gratification at Anne’s failure to deliver a male heir does not invite critique. With her prime position, Mary is the first to know the baby’s gender and it is her unconcealed smile that signals to the other women that the king has a second daughter—and which sees Anne call her an “insolent bitch” (168). This insult is unfair, not only because it follows Anne’s sustained cruelty, but also because

it so closely echoes Jane's earlier assessment of her own behaviour: Anne *is* insolent in her labelling of Mary as "Catherine's failure" and presumption that her child is a boy (167), but Mary is wholly justified in her joy at Anne's failure, because Anne, in her combined failure as a stepmother, a mother, a wife and a queen, is constructed as deserving of her disgrace.

The heightened atmosphere of Elizabeth's birth, described as "a scene from hell" in *The Other Boleyn Girl* (Gregory 386) and "hellish" in *The Tudor Wife* (Purdy 167), reflect the broader characterisation of Anne as erratic, manipulative and driven by anger. Her determination to punish and berate Mary, even whilst "her naked body bucked and writhed upon the mattress as she screamed and moaned in unrelenting agony", demonstrates the fervour of Anne's hatred and, importantly, her fear for her own position (Purdy 167). Having given birth, she immediately questions the sex of the child and in both novels responds with disappointment when she learns the answer (Purdy 169; Gregory, *Other* 387). Ives explains that such a concern was genuine and reasonable, because without a son to cement her position, "Anne Boleyn remained a pretender" because "even Mary herself would have been hard put to resist the prior claims of a boy" (186); the birth of Elizabeth, however, maintained the uncertainty of Boleyn's standing.

Gregory and Purdy call attention to her vulnerability and the very real need to secure her position: Gregory's Mary Boleyn argues that Anne will not be "free of fear" until she has a son (*Other* 388), and when Purdy's Anne learns the sex of the baby, she exclaims "God help me! I have failed!" (169)—a cry which she repeats when her son is stillborn and Henry demands, "why didn't you die instead of my boy?" (237-38). Anne is right to fear for her safety but—as Mary's plight demonstrates that when Henry discards a queen he also rejects her daughter—Elizabeth is equally as exposed to danger as Anne because of her gender. Hence, Anne's concern for her own position, and not her daughter's, speaks to post-feminism's dichotomous view of motherhood, which views "full-time" mothers who "relinquish ... career for parenting" as "selfless", and by implication constructs dedicated career women with children as "selfish" (Parkins 67). The imperative to 'have it all' with regard to 'career' and 'motherhood' perpetuates a discourse that

endorses “the scaling down of ambition” in order to accommodate “the onset of motherhood” (McRobbie 80). Anne’s concern for herself only speaks to this view, demonstrating that motherhood has not changed her narcissistic outlook. Rather than also being concerned about the vulnerability of her infant daughter, Anne focuses on what this failure will mean for her ‘career’ as queen, questioning “what good is a girl to us?” (Gregory, *Other* 387), and “turn[ing] away from her newborn child” (Purdy 169).

Twenty-first-century western culture has increasingly associated the role of “housewife” with privilege because of the need for a dual-income that is experienced by many families (Genz 54; Parkins 66-67). A celebration of and nostalgia for the domestic sphere has, in turn, become a feature of much post-feminist cultural production (Genz 54). It is thus unsurprising that a number of historical novels, with their inherent nostalgia and privileged context, can be identified as post-feminist texts. Stéphanie Genz and Benjamin Brabon have argued that post-feminist discourse romanticises the domestic sphere as a “sanctuary” from the (masculine) professional, public sphere (Genz and Brabon 51). The process of “downshifting”, a “voluntary, long-term change in lifestyle” which preferences the nurturing of self and family over materialism and employment, is evident here (Parkins 66). Downshifting is a romantic and unobtainable ideal in which the “ordinary messiness of the everyday”—which, in the case of *The Other Boleyn Girl*, is the sexualised and politicised interactions of the court—are “expunged” by the simplicity of the home (66). It is this conception of domesticity that pervades *The Other Boleyn Girl*, and in Gregory’s narrative the home provides a literal sanctuary for her protagonist, Mary Boleyn.

Gregory depicts Henry and his court as inherently dangerous, and contrasts this world with Hever Castle. Their home is removed from the royal court, both in terms of culture and location, situated as it is in Kent. Mary’s first experience of Hever as an adult is when she is sent there in temporary exile, having angered Henry, and she maintains hope that her absence will win back his affection (41-42). On her arrival, she is saddened by the thought of having lost both Henry’s love and the privilege to which she had become accustomed: “I did not want to be the

daughter of a small castle in Kent ... I had gone far beyond Hever and I did not want to come back” (44). Her boredom compels her to explore the countryside, learning about the estate and the people it employs, and she soon experiences “a growing sense that if [she] were never to go to court again, then [she] could at least be a good and fair landlord” (47). This appreciation for the country and its separation from the court quickly becomes one of the novel’s central themes, employing a standard trope of the sanctuary of the countryside.

Hever and Rochford, the second of the Boleyn family’s houses, represent simplicity, safety and happiness for Mary; William poses the rhetorical question to her, “when are you happiest now ... in winter when you are at court? Or in summer when you are with the children at Hever?” (318). The positioning of the country as a site of contentment for Mary is articulated in the final passages of the novel when, following Anne’s execution, Mary tells her husband:

I want to live in the country with you. I want to bring up our children to love each other and fear God. I want to find some peace now, I have had enough of playing the great game at court. I have seen the price that has to be paid, and it is too high. I just want you. I just want to live at Rochford and love you. (529)

Mary’s desire for peace within the setting of a family home with her husband and children, and her willingness to leave the drama of the court, exemplifies her construction as a good woman. This statement demonstrates Mary’s linking of her heteronormative desires of marriage, motherhood and home, with safety, but also draws attention to the disjuncture between the life she craves with that which her sister desires. Anne’s ambition and desire for dynastic power is destructive, ultimately futile—as is indicated by Mary’s labelling of the ‘game’ that is Henry’s court—and is contrasted with Mary’s authentic love.

Anne’s execution is constructed as a risk that needs to be taken in order to play the ambitious ‘game’ at court, and as a direct consequence of her deviant femininity. As McRobbie argues, post-feminist perspectives demarcate between “those subjects who are judged responsive to the regime of personal responsibility, and those who fail miserably” (19). This discourse

differentiates from feminisms that, it is argued, overstate the victimisation that women face (Showden 169). The “choice” to become an archetypal bitch acknowledges the “social limitations of femininity” (Aguilar 98). The power and agency that is available to women is restricted by models of femininity and in disregarding these models of behaviour, the bitch can reclaim that power (98). In contrast, post-feminism reclaims traditional femininity and the perception that women are gentle and less violent than men (Showden 169-70). One consequence of such a perspective is that, where choice is framed as a form of empowerment and equality is defined as the capacity to make decisions, violent and abusive behaviours against women are often attributed to the victim’s poor choices, rather than to perpetrators or patriarchal structures. Purdy and Gregory’s characters are held to this standard of femininity, and are subsequently seen to be responsible for their own respective fates as punishment for deviating from acceptable forms of feminine behaviour.

The emphasis that is placed on Mary’s capacity to choose a life outside of Henry’s court means that Anne is, in part, responsible for her own downfall. William is seen to grant Mary the opportunity to “break the pattern” in which women are used as pawns for political manoeuvring (330). He tells her: “don’t be just another Boleyn girl for another day longer. Come and be Mrs Stafford, the one and only, most beloved Mrs Stafford, who owns her fields outright and is learning to make cheese and skin a chicken” (330). Mary’s marriage is thus consistent with the idealised ‘choice’ of post-feminism, in which a woman’s ability to make decisions about her own life is conflated with notions of equality and empowerment. Being Mrs Stafford, with her mastery of dairy and poultry, is positioned as a far preferable role than that of queen.

Such a perspective fails to account for the social norms and pressures that make particular choices possible for particular women. As Rosalind Gill demonstrates, post-feminist understandings of choice “avoids all the important and difficult questions about the relationship between the psychic and the social or cultural” (“Critical” 76); it does not interrogate or question the reasons why a person makes particular choices or the ways in which our desires are shaped by

external pressures, such as gender norms or limitations on autonomy. Barlow tells us that, by emphasising Mary's agency, "Gregory foregrounds some of the most significant issues associated with second-wave feminist politics, not least of which emphasises a woman's right to control her own body" (144). I would argue, however, that Mary is *only* able to control her own body through marriage and, while she freely chooses this marriage, this choice cannot be removed from Mary's powerless position. She craves autonomy and freedom from the oppressive (and, eventually, deadly) atmosphere of the court, and these goals are made possible only through this marriage.

When her first husband, William Carey, dies, although saddened, Mary reflects that "his death had set [her] free" and hopes that she might gain the opportunity to "buy a little manor farm on my family's lands in Kent or Essex", where she could have land to "could call [her] own and crops that [she] could watch grow" (Gregory, *Other* 237). Here, the country symbolises not only sanctuary, but also independence and autonomy: "I might at last become a woman in my own right instead of the mistress of one man, the wife of another, and the sister of a Boleyn" (237). Mary's capacity to realise this dream is, however, undermined by the patriarchal structures of her society. In order to purchase land for herself and live as a "modest widow ... on [her] own little farm", she must "escape another husband" and "get some money from somewhere" by "persuad[ing] some man, Howard, Boleyn, or king, to give [her] a pension" in order that she may "raise [her] children and feed [her]self" (237). Gregory, here, acknowledges that Mary's experiences and opportunities are defined by her gender, and that she will not be able to achieve true independence because she will always be dependent on the generosity of a man. By linking the country with notions of, albeit limited, independence, Mary's eventual achievement of this goal becomes an act of empowerment.

As Genz argues, post-feminist discourse problematises twentieth-century conceptualisations of the domestic sphere as oppressive: domesticity is romanticised as feminine, and women "deliberately" choose "to 'go home'" (Genz 50). This understanding of the domestic sphere is evident in *The Other Boleyn Girl* and its representation of Mary Boleyn's second marriage.

However, the novel is also representative of the limitations of such a perspective. Gregory grants her heroine a degree of agency and empowers her to seek independence from her family; however the novel does not challenge normative gender roles because marriage is the only avenue through which Mary is able to gain autonomy. Mary's choice is embraced because the suggestion of marrying a man of whom her family disapproves is seen to be empowering. Moreover, William's continued reference to Mary as 'Mrs Stafford' reiterates that marriage has provided Mary with a valuable distance between her new identity as Mrs Stafford and her destructive Boleyn relatives. William Stafford is the man who provides for her, but her love for him means that she does not question the social structures which force her to marry in order to distance herself from her family and the court. Mary's empowerment, then, is only achieved with her adherence to conventional models of heteronormativity, and thus the extent to which she is truly empowered is questionable;³¹ as De Groot argues, Gregory's women characters "are empowered only to seek true happiness in marriage and family" (*Consuming* 219).

Mary concedes that, unlike her sister, who "caught and held the king", she "could not" achieve this; however she also declares that she "didn't really want" to "rise and rise" as Anne does (338). Highlighting the respective choices of the sisters, Mary's pursuit of motherhood and marriage is celebrated and she is rewarded with her own safety and that of her husband and children (de Groot, *Consuming* 219), while Anne is portrayed as the architect of her own violent death, rather than a victim of Henry's cruelty (Hickerson 225). Gregory acknowledges the significant restrictions placed on the freedom of Tudor women, whose value was perceived in strictly dynastic terms: Mary tells William that her daughter "Catherine will never have a say in anything. She'll be just another Boleyn girl who will be sent where they want her" (330). She also states that her son, Henry, "has no say in anything", but this is because he is "a little boy" (330); as an adult he will possess autonomy where Catherine will never have this freedom. In spite of

³¹ In "The Infamous Whore Forgotten", I discuss in depth Gregory's depiction of Mary Boleyn's character in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, and the way in which this differs from accounts of Mary's life in recent biographies, particularly with regard to Mary's purported sexual behaviour (Saxton 92-110).

this acknowledgement, the novel positions Mary as capable of freeing herself of these restrictions and it is, indeed, her choice to adhere to the expectations placed upon her. In contrast, Gregory's caricature of Anne as a "calculating harridan" (de Groot, *Consuming* 219) is, to an extent, informed by her unwillingness to accept the restrictions that are forced on her because of her gender.

Similarly, in *The Tudor Wife*, it is Jane's own behaviour that is the cause of her destructive marriage: she chooses to pursue the marriage despite her father's warnings, and it is her shrill treatment of George that fuels his disgust toward her. Her failure to recognise her own misconduct, and her growing resentment toward Anne and George, culminates in her accusations of incest against them; this causes her to be labelled "The Red Widow" and to be associated with "lies, the jealousy of embittered wives, and treachery" (Purdy 341). Jane's misconduct and feminine failure culminates in scenes of near absurdity in response to her husband's execution: with hysterical grief, she cradles George's disembodied head before Master Kingston, the constable of the Tower, and his wife reprimands her: Jane recalls how she "laid George's head in [her] lap and held out [her] bloodstained hands to show the Kingstons" before exclaiming, "George's blood is on my hands!" (301). In response, Lady Kingston simply "nodded grimly" and agreed, "Yes, it is" (301). When she faces her own execution, Jane repeats George's final words to her: "he—in this case, she—who sows the whirlwind must expect to reap the storm" (295); as such, her culpability for the events that unfurled is reiterated.

Neither Purdy's depiction of a disastrous marriage, nor Gregory's depiction of a happy one critiques the limited choices available to their respective heroines or their respective characterisations of Anne Boleyn. Post-feminist conceptions of domesticity are a nostalgic pastiche; subsequently, they are "caught in a struggle between tradition and modernity, past and present" (Genz 50). This pastiche celebrates normative gender roles, heterosexuality and femininity. In *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Mary is beautiful, loyal, maternal and loving, and it is her adherence to these stereotypes of idealised femininity that allows her to escape Henry's court; she

is desirable, thus William wants to marry her, and she is happy to leave her former life when promised domestic bliss. Mary is the heroine of Gregory's novel, thus it is unsurprising that she is the focus of its concluding passages. This conclusion relies, however, on a juxtaposition between the Boleyn sisters, because Mary's retreat from the royal court is *only* celebrated because Anne's fate elucidates the purported dangers of pursuing ambition, politics and power. Where the loving, maternal Mary survives, Anne and, in *The Tudor Wife*, Jane are selfish, demanding and angry—characteristics that ultimately see them killed.

Conclusion

The connections that are drawn between Boleyn's death and her purported misconduct as queen are encapsulated in Weir's discussion of the ways in which Anne's death was received by those who were sympathetic towards Mary. Weir considers the possibility that Henry may have contemplated annulling his marriage to Anne prior to any treasonous accusations being made against her, and argues that this avenue would "provide a solution to the problem of the Lady Mary" (*Tower* 27). Again, the measures taken against Mary are not ascribed to Henry, and it is instead Anne's purportedly vindictive campaign that saw her stepdaughter "treated little better than a servant" (34). As she relates the moment of Anne's death, Weir reminds her readers that Boleyn "had been one of the most powerful women ever to occupy the consort's throne", before describing the public reaction to her death: Anne "had never been popular ... the common people had always disliked her" and "many were elated at the prospect of the Lady Mary—whom they still regarded as the King's lawful heiress—being restored to favour" (276). Public opinion had, argues Weir, mirrored the sentiment at court in which Boleyn's arrest was a direct result of disparate factions and individuals coming together to work against Anne in response to the treatment of Mary (31). Hence the ruthlessly ambitious Anne had been punished for her immoral treatment of the innocent, youthful Mary.

In Weir's account, as in others, the absence of any evidence that attests to how Boleyn perceived her own interactions with Mary means that her emotives—the outward and provisional

expression of emotion—are always mediated by others, and have continually been mediated since the sixteenth century. Her affect, which underpins this characterisation, is textualised on multiple levels. It is not her actions, but her unregulated temper and cruelty that are associated with her eventual execution, and it is for this association that archetypal characterisations of her can be considered to be problematic.

Since the 1960s, the textual misrepresentation of women has been an important site of feminist criticism that seeks to prioritise subjectivity and complexity of character (Aguilar 1). Aguiar has, however, identified a trend in feminist fiction to replace the archetypal ‘bad women’ with an archetypal ‘good woman’, and argues that such a tendency fails to produce the complex and contradictory representations of women that second-wave feminists envisaged (1-2). She argues that the archetypal bitch “empowered with anger, wit [and] ruthless survival instincts” has been relegated to the margins of feminist fiction (1). The dominant characterisation of Mary Tudor, Henry’s daughter by Katherine, in the focus texts provides an apt example of Aguiar’s contention that positive representations can be equally limiting as their negative counterparts; Mary’s ascribed victimhood means that she is a figure of admiration and compassion, yet these authors also deny her political or personal agency. Although condemnatory and a demonstration of bias, Denny’s characterisation of Mary as ‘Bloody Mary’ nevertheless acknowledges her historical significance as a queen regnant of England, rather than dismissing her as a ‘little girl’.

The characterisation of Anne as a bitch is thus not inherently problematic, because it is associated with her ambition and power. However, the nature of her death adds an additional dimension to the archetypal representation of her personality and behaviour. In “Anne Boleyn: Witch, Bitch, Temptress, Feminist”, Mantel argued that Boleyn continues to be a subject of historical enquiry, in part, because “her rise is glittering, her fall sordid”. Her death, as conventionally told, Mantel continues, was deserved for the wrongs that she had committed: “God pays her out. The dead take revenge on the living. The moral order is reasserted” (“Boleyn”). Boleyn’s relationship with her stepdaughter, as it is described in the focus texts,

contributes to the reputation of Anne as a bitch and, more specifically, as a wicked stepmother. The immorality that is ascribed to these archetypes means that, while she is not necessarily considered to be guilty of the crimes for which she died, she is not *guiltless*: she becomes the victim of a tyrant—as will be demonstrated in Chapter Five—yet she is complicit in creating that tyrant. Having “overturned the order” by replacing Katherine as queen and disinheriting Mary, Anne establishes a precedent in which “any wife”, including herself, can be put aside “for no reason” (Gregory, *Other* 215). As Cromwell reflects in *Bring up the Bodies*, “it is Anne Boleyn’s former success that allows” her detractors “to imagine” that Henry may wish to find a new wife (196). She is thus responsible for the conditions that allow Henry to replace her, but also for his desire to do so. Henry, it is argued, “knows she is barren” and subsequently “wants another wife” (Gregory, *Other* 520), and Anne’s immorality is linked to her inability to provide him with a prince; as such, Boleyn fails as wife and queen, and is deserving of dismissal.

It is in the connection between Boleyn’s immorality and her downfall that the implications of her construction as the wicked stepmother become clear. The ‘wicked stepmother’ construction is not neutral but is explicit and implicit in its moral judgements; the necessary familiarity of the archetype means that we recognise that Anne will indeed be punished, and authors directly draw links between her death and her cruelty toward Mary. The ‘wicked stepmother’ of Snow White—also an evil queen—is punished: she dies “dancing herself to death in red-hot iron shoes” at the wedding of her victorious stepdaughter (Gilbert and Gubar 41). As Jo Eldridge Carney writes, this punishment is “horrific but apt” because “a woman so actively consumed with seeking affirmation from others and with violently undoing her rival is forced to enact her own physical destruction as a public spectacle” (94). Aguiar outlines three moral lessons (for women readers) that emerge from the various incarnations of the trope: “stay away from powerful females, especially if they are older than adolescent age”; “aspire not to power or autonomy thyself”; and “be a good girl, and do what you are told” (59). Boleyn fails to adhere to these guidelines and is thus punished. Like Snow White’s “egotistically assertive, plotting” wicked

stepmother, Boleyn is represented as a “plotting Queen” who becomes “a former Queen” at the spectacular moment of her death, for which she is ultimately held responsible (Gilbert and Gubar 42). Boleyn’s scheming first creates enemies, but becomes a necessary tool to keep her safe from those same enemies; for example, when Mary Boleyn criticises Anne’s continued attempts to humiliate and degrade her stepdaughter, asking “surely you don’t have to be always plotting?”, Anne responds that her enemies do not ‘rest’, thus nor can she (Gregory, *Other* 389). The specific connotations of the word ‘plotting’ are integral here, because it suggests misconduct and deception. Such traits are inconsistent with the designated roles of the queen consort, whose political influence largely consisted of intercession and motherhood. It is the wicked stepmother’s transgressive behaviours, encapsulated in her failure to adhere to models of idealised femininity, that lead to her downfall.

Gender norms governed the behaviour demanded of a queen consort; “royal brides had to learn” the complex ways in which monarchical power intersected with constructs of masculinity and femininity (Earenfight, *Queenship* 14). As the king’s wife, a queen had a unique channel through which to influence the king and provide counsel, whilst also exhibiting wifely deference and humility. Any perceived failure to negotiate this balance between advisor and wife could make the queen consort a focus of criticism and ridicule. As the example of Anne Boleyn demonstrates, where the actions of the monarch were unpopular, queens could become “easy scapegoats” (252). The fear of women exceeding their designated role in a patriarchal society was a factor here,³² but it was also politically expedient to focus criticism of the monarch on his wife. This allowed criticism of particular actions and policies in a manner unlikely to be construed as

³² Theresa Kemp analyses the actions of Elizabeth Woodville, the grandmother of Henry VIII, during the reign of Richard III in response to her opponents who drew upon “the prevailing ideology requiring female obedience to male authority and prohibiting female speech” (171). Woodville, she argues, gained “a kind of agency” (173) by manipulating the “gendered restrictions imposed on her by meaningful acts of absence and silence” (172). Although Woodville’s position as a former queen was in dispute at this time, Kemp’s analysis demonstrates the ways in which such women were required to negotiate their political role and gendered norms and restrictions.

treason. Moreover, “‘influence’ leaves no paper trail” and can only be “inferred from consequences” (Ives, *Life* xv). Therefore, claims that a queen possessed undue influence could be made with limited evidence.

This chapter continued the theme of deviant femininity, but shifted the focus of the argument from sexuality to power. I have argued that Anne Boleyn is consistently represented as failing to adhere to the expectations of how a queen, and, by extension, a wife, should act. As Frances Dolan argues, representations of Boleyn consistently suggest that “a woman like Anne ... could not really be a wife, and certainly not a good one” (*Marriage* 136), and it is this specific, limited and constrictive idea of femininity that I have interrogated throughout this chapter. Two intangible themes are central to my analysis of the way in which Anne is represented as queen: namely, her affect and her femininity. Boleyn’s emotional responses, motivations and manipulative behaviours are integral to the representation of her time as queen; in turn, the affect that is here ascribed to Boleyn is depicted as a failure to adhere to appropriate models of femininity.

CHAPTER FIVE

“SHE WAS DEAD MEAT”: THE EXECUTION OF ANNE BOLEYN

On 19 May 1536 Anne Boleyn became the first Queen of England to be executed. The manner in which she has been represented can be attributed to this distinction. She was accused of treason and adultery, yet the validity of these charges and the potential for her innocence have been continually questioned since her death. Even Eustace Chapuys, the Spanish ambassador who vehemently abhorred Boleyn and all that she represented, questioned the verdict, postulating that she may, in this instance, be “the unblemished concubine” (as cited in Bernard, *Fatal* 169). The reasons for Boleyn’s execution are ultimately unknowable, encouraging countless commentators to question, first, her guilt and, second, the reasons that might have compelled Henry VIII to execute the woman he had once so ardently pursued. The impulse to provide explanations for Boleyn’s execution and its circumstances is the predominant focus of texts that engage with her history. As the king and her husband, Henry is pivotal to such discussions, and representations of him have been substantially coloured by the perceived cruelty of his actions towards his wife. Boleyn’s death, as it is remembered in historical narratives, marks a critical moment in Henry’s reign, and 1536 has been identified as the moment of his apparent descent into despotism. He is regularly characterised as a “Prince Charming” who ended his life as “a Bloated Monster” (Starkey xv), and Boleyn’s execution is framed as having been crucial to this transition. This moment is, however, also positioned as distinctly ‘of its time’, evoking the apparent barbarism of Henry’s reign and Tudor England. As such, Boleyn’s execution is ‘othered’ and is firmly consigned to the past—an action that obscures her position as a woman who was killed by her husband.

This chapter argues that representations of Anne Boleyn’s execution rely on the tropes of medievalism. The episode is of interest to historical writers not only for its unresolved questions about guilt and innocence—with regard to both Boleyn and Henry—but also because of the spectacle of a queen’s execution. I argue that these representations foreground the violence and

pageantry of Tudor England, encouraging a macabre curiosity about Boleyn's fate. The implications of a medievalist writing of this past are twofold. First, the past is romanticised in these texts despite, or perhaps because of, its brutality. The weaponry and method of execution are described in exhaustive detail and are, to an extent, lauded. As Foucault argued in *Discipline and Punish*, execution and torture as public spectacle had largely disappeared from Western judicial systems by the nineteenth century (Foucault 14). Yet historical narratives that depict such punishments offer one forum in which this spectacle is allowed to continue. Attendance at public executions is no longer possible, thus media becomes an avenue through which this "consumption of the celebrated criminal corpse" can continue (Penfold-Mounce 260). The reimagining of Boleyn's death in twenty-first-century historical narratives is one such avenue.

The second aspect of these texts in which medievalist tropes are apparent is in the depiction of Henry. Where Boleyn's death is consigned to a medieval past, Henry becomes a medieval king. Her execution is consistently framed as Henry's most significant act of cruelty; in some cases, depending on the perspective of the individual author, the execution is tantamount to murder. Henry's attempts to secure personal happiness are destructive, but are possible because of the power that he holds as an absolute monarch. As such, he is depicted as archetypal: as a king, he is a medieval tyrant; as a husband, he is a Bluebeard. An analysis of this episode that considers the tropes and archetypes of medievalism offers insight into the ways in which the past is narrated in fiction and non-fiction; yet the implications of such a representation extends beyond an interrogation of historical writing. Medievalist depictions 'other' the past and, to an extent, trivialise its violence—a tendency that is particularly problematic when the subject of representation is a woman who was killed by her husband.

The Shadow of Death

The execution of Anne Boleyn is the culmination of the majority of texts that take her as subject and—unlike much biographical writing—her death is often the main focus of texts that

describe her life. Titles such as Weir's *The Lady in the Tower: The Fall of Anne Boleyn*, Denny's *A New Life of England's Tragic Queen* and Ives' ironic *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn: 'The Most Happy'* specifically indicate that these texts are significantly occupied with Boleyn's death. The use of language such as 'fall', 'tragic', and 'death' clearly indicates that Boleyn's execution is addressed in detail, but also signals that potential readers may be aware of this fact or may be intrigued by the insinuation of tragedy. Bernard's *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions* and Mantel's *Bring up the Bodies* similarly intimate that death, if not specifically Boleyn's death, will be a central theme of their narratives. Anne's execution takes place in *Bring up the Bodies*, the second instalment of Mantel's trilogy, yet *Wolf Hall's* title suggests that Anne's rise—which is the focus of this novel—is tenuous; it refers to the Seymour family seat and the novel's final passage indicates that Anne will soon be replaced by Jane Seymour:

'Now here, before we go to Winchester, we have time to spare, and what I think is, Rafe, we shall visit the Seymours.'

He writes it down.

Early September. Five Days. Wolf Hall. (650)

While, in *Wolf Hall*, Jane is listed as a lady-in-waiting under the heading "At court" (xi), the increasingly powerful position of the Seymours is consolidated in the "Cast of Characters" that precedes *Bring up the Bodies*, in which the "Seymour family of Wolf Hall" are given their own subsection (xi).

Starkey's *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII* offers a biographical account of each of Henry's wives. While it does not specifically mention Boleyn in its title, the introduction alludes to Henry's killing of his wives:³³ the story of Henry's wives, Starkey writes, encompasses the "universals of love and honour and betrayal and death" (xv). Like Starkey, Denny does not reference Boleyn's execution in her introduction yet she does refer to her subject's violent death,

³³ Katherine Howard, who was Henry's fifth wife and Anne Boleyn's cousin, would also be executed on charges of adultery on 23 November 1541.

stating that Anne was “butchered” (1). She rhetorically questions whether Anne was an “innocent victim” in the “bloody game of court factions”, and argues that she exhibited “real moral courage ... as she faced death” (1, 3). Thus, without mentioning decapitation or execution specifically, Starkey and Denny establish that Boleyn’s death (and in Starkey’s case, the deaths of Henry’s other wives) is a central focus of their discussions.

Boleyn’s execution is also regularly referenced in the opening passages of the fictional texts; Dunn’s Anne writes to Elizabeth from the Tower as she awaits execution (1), while the prologue to *The Tudor Wife* sees Jane Boleyn—who faces execution herself—recall how her sister-in-law had “bared her slender, swanlike neck to the French executioner’s sword” seven years earlier (Purdy 2). Thus, these authors foreshadow the conclusion of their novels in the opening passages: Anne’s execution is the dénouement of *The Queen of Subtleties*, and it is the conclusion of Part One of *The Tudor Wife* while Jane’s execution is the novel’s conclusion. Anne’s death also opens *The Lady Elizabeth*, however it does not introduce a retrospective narrative in the style of Dunn and Purdy. The novel begins in July 1536 when Elizabeth learns of her mother’s execution two months earlier from her half-sister, Mary: “Sweetheart, there is no easy way to say this ... but your mother committed treason against the King our father, and she has suffered the punishment. She has been put to death” (16). This knowledge is formative for Elizabeth and shapes her experiences and perceptions throughout the novel, and while it is not the culmination of the narrative it is integral to the plot’s development.

The Other Boleyn Girl, by contrast, does not adhere to the particular convention in which Boleyn’s death overshadows a narrative; it begins in 1521 and uses present tense narration throughout. The novel does, however, open with the execution of Stafford, the Duke of Buckingham. Henry is thus introduced as a king who will punish those who pose a threat to his ultimate authority and although knowledge of Anne’s death does not necessarily overshadow the narrative, the constant threat of execution remains. The novel thereby begins and ends with executions: those of Stafford and Anne. Both are relatives of protagonist Mary Boleyn—she

reflects that the duke was “close enough kin for me to call him uncle” (1). As the teenaged Mary awaits the duke’s execution, she naively “wishes that] the king would hurry up and grant clemency so that we could all go to breakfast” (1). ‘Uncle’ Stafford’s execution for treason establishes Henry as an absolute monarch and, although Mary’s immediate reaction is that his execution took place because the king simply “forgot to speak in time” to stop it, she quickly realises that “he wanted my uncle to die before the court so that everybody might know that there was one king, and that was Henry” (2). The lesson that Mary gleans from this execution is that court life is dangerous, a view articulated by her mother who calls her “a fool” for believing that Stafford would be forgiven; she instructs Mary to “watch and learn ... there is no room for mistakes at court” (4). Stafford’s crimes are not important here, and are mentioned only briefly: he had “offended the king in a dozen ways”, namely by having “royal blood in his veins”, keeping “too large a retinue of armed men” and saying that the king would die without a male heir (1). Instead, it is Mary’s reaction to Henry’s ruthlessness that is emphasised and we, the reader, are also encouraged to ‘watch and learn’.

As the novel progresses, Gregory does not alert her reader to Anne’s fate. Following Anne’s arrest and the pronouncement of her sentence, Mary believes, as she did when Stafford died, that Henry will show leniency—“the king was planning a last-minute reprieve and he would extract every drop of drama from it” (526). Mary’s response to Henry’s actions against Anne mirrors her adolescent reaction to her uncle’s death; however the characterisation of Henry that is established from the outset means that her hope is clearly erroneous.

“Anne the Headless, Anne sans Tête”

Prior knowledge of Boleyn’s fate does not undermine the climactic impact of representations of her execution because of the macabre fascination that surrounds execution. This fascination is an important aspect of the appeal of Boleyn as a subject—as is evidenced by Mantel’s reference to “connoisseurs of Anne’s last days” in her Author’s Note to *Bring up the*

Bodies (410). Death and the corpse have been a focus of intrigue “across time, culture and place” (Penfold-Mounce 250), particularly with regard to the condemned criminal who suffers “a sudden traumatic and violent death” through execution (252). New forms of media in the twentieth century, such as television and the internet, only cultivated this interest. The “consumption” of the corpse, to borrow Ruth Penfold-Mounce’s phrase, “has become increasingly mediated both through factual and fictional accounts, making the shocking, macabre, and disgusting a celebrated and popular entertainment form” (262). History is one such site of fascination. Hayden White argues that historical narratives, although purporting to represent real (rather than wholly imagined) events, demarcate the past from the present, and thus render the past as ‘other’ (*Content* 88-89). He writes: “as distinct from the present, the past is alien, exotic, or strange” (89). The process of othering allows readers to indulge in the spectacle of the conflicts and violence of the past, because these have been resolved and their threat has been neutralised (89).

The perceived distance of the past is particularly apparent in representations of the medieval period, which has been “relegated ... to the role of an all-purpose Other of the (early) Modern” (Berns and Johnston 98). Petrarch, writing in the fourteenth century, labelled the period preceding his own lifetime as the “dark ages”—coining a term that would prove to be highly influential to the ways in which the era would be remembered (Dagenais and Greer 444).³⁴ Situated between antiquity and the early modern era—two periods that have been celebrated for their intellectual and creative endeavours—the medieval period was long considered bereft of cultural and intellectual flourishing. The middle ages represents the point of disjuncture between the pre-modern and modern worlds, and it is for this purportedly un-modern quality that its culture and people have been firmly consigned to the alien past in the modern imagination. In

³⁴ Dagenais and Greer discuss Petrarch’s influence on conceptualisations of the medieval period. They argue that in *Africa* (1338), Petrarch “establishes most of the language which will be key to European colonization of The Middle Ages: the idea that there is a middle time, a squalid time of shadows which follows Roman Antiquity and which will in turn be followed by a second coming of light, of radiance, a period Petrarch believes he will never live to see” (444-45).

contrast, the early modern period has been viewed in terms of a continuum leading to the present.³⁵ As such, the early modern period, which saw the emergence of political, social, and philosophical ideas that would shape modern western societies, is ostensibly not as strange to those later societies that it influenced. Historians have come to critique the notion of a primitive middle ages as problematic, calling into question the distinction between these periods.³⁶ Periodisation is imposed on the past, and the very notion of a middle ages is “an invention of those who came after” the era they derided (Pugh and Weisl 1). Stereotypes pertaining to religious fervour and unrestrained violence are, however, persistent. Medieval violence is seen as more extreme than that of later generations because it belongs to an era that existed prior to the rationality that is ascribed to the Enlightenment.

Tudor England can be located in the early modern period; the end of the Wars of the Roses is often identified as the transformative moment at which England was no longer medieval, while the Reformation was, perhaps, the definitive event of the reigns of Henry VIII and his children, Edward VI, Mary I and Elizabeth I (Matthews and McMullan 4). In spite of this periodisation, representations of Anne Boleyn’s execution regularly return to the tropes and archetypes of medievalism. The image of the medieval comes to represent “a horrific nightmare” that is symbolic of “pessimistic, primitive, violent, tribal, barbaric, and irrational actions” (Pugh and Weisl 141). Medievalist texts typically depict the past in terms of excessive and unregulated

³⁵ Jonathan Dollimore discusses his preference for the term ‘early modern’ because it avoids the “idealist implications” of ‘Renaissance’, stating that the former can be read as “the origin of modern man, ‘he’ who threw off the shackles of the dark ages, triumphantly affirming and discovering himself, and so beginning that long march forward to humanism, enlightenment, and progress” (*Dissidence* 23). This is certainly an apt critique of the term ‘Renaissance’, however I would argue that such connotations, although less pronounced, are also evident in the term ‘early modern’.

³⁶ Dagenais and Greer, for example, argue that perception of the medieval period as a “middle” ages, with its inherent notions of progress and civilisation, informed later colonial endeavours which held that Europeans had become “civilised”, thus non-European peoples could undergo a similar transformation (431-48). They argue the othering that of medieval Europeans both mirrors and contributes to the othering of the indigenous peoples in colonised nations, and that “‘The Middle Ages’ and ‘medieval’ have served the interests of empire over the past six hundred years (and continue to do so today)” (431).

violence. Medievalist representations of Boleyn's death are problematic, however, because in encouraging a macabre fascination with execution, they romanticise and thus other her violent death.

The labelling of particular acts and events committed after 1500 as 'medieval' locates such acts within this purportedly barbaric past. These representations signal abhorrence by indicating that decapitation, for example, is no longer acceptable behaviour.³⁷ Yet where the subject is sufficiently removed from contemporary society, such as in fantasy fiction or historical narratives, medievalist representations allow a space in which it is possible to indulge in this violence (Pugh and Weisl 142). Violence and torture is not, however, unique to the medieval period and, as Denny writes, "the Renaissance flowered among the racks, the stake, the fires and butchery of the Inquisition" (3). The middle ages have been a continuing source of creative and scholarly inspiration because its customs, ideals, and pageantry fascinate for their strangeness and, in turn, enable commentary and comparison between this period and that of a text's production (Pugh and Weisl 1). The periods share commonalities not only with regard to contemporary thought and practices, but also in the manner in which they are remembered in historical narratives. As such, medievalism offers an apt framework with which to analyse Boleyn's execution. Because she was decapitated—a method of execution often associated with the reign of Henry VIII as well as a "monstrously constructed 'Dark Age'" (Cervone 2)—a medievalist analysis of her death is fitting. Medievalism considers representations of the medieval period in the post-medieval world (Utz 103), critiquing "how and why" the past is constructed in particular ways, the limitations of textual reproductions, and their inability to capture an image that accurately reflects that past (Pugh and Weisl 4).

Boleyn's execution is, like the medieval period more broadly, constructed as horrific and violent. Umberto Eco's "Ten Little Middle Ages" outlines the ways in which the medieval period

³⁷ As Pugh and Weisl explain, the labelling of contemporary acts as 'medieval' speaks to "modernity's trotting out of old tropes to whitewash its own moral failings" (143).

is conceptualised by post-medieval writers (68-72) and features “The Middle Ages as a *barbaric* age” (69, emphasis in original). He argues that “these ages are Dark par excellence” (69), and it is this perspective that pervades representations of Boleyn’s death and its inherent violence. The “historic moment” of Boleyn’s death (Denny 314) is imagined by the focus authors, who foreground the inherent violence in the separation of her head from her body. In *The Lady in the Tower*, Weir describes the effect of decapitation on the body in significant detail; over a number of pages she outlines scientific studies that have found the time it takes for blood flow to reach the brain no longer, speculating that Boleyn may have “experienced a few dreadful moments of awareness of what was happening” to her (272). Although Weir is alone in employing scientific and medical language to describe this moment, others have shared a focus on the transformation of Boleyn’s corporeality. The head is “central to our being” and there is “a sense that all human functions derive from it” (5); decapitation derives its symbolic (as well as physical) power from this severing of the mind from the body. In describing the moment of Boleyn’s death, writers have invoked such imagery by seeing the head and body as newly separate entities; as Weir writes, “Anne’s head fell in the dust, with her body tumbling beside it” (*Tower* 276), while Dunn’s Anne imagines the moment at which “the two pieces of me are stuffed beneath the floor of St Peter’s Chapel” (310). In Mantel’s *Bring up the Bodies*, Thomas Cromwell reflects at Anne’s trial that “she is dead meat” and with this colloquialism pre-empts the instantaneous transformation of Boleyn’s physical presence from person to corpse (371). Having just witnessed Anne die, Cromwell observes that “the body exsanguinates” and Boleyn’s “presence becomes a puddle of gore” (397). In contrast, Emily Purdy’s Jane Rochford in *The Tudor Wife* expresses a horror that this change is *not* instantaneous as she observes the possibility that Anne’s head, although divorced from her body, remains momentarily sentient: “Anne’s lips and eyes were moving still, opening and closing” (307).

A macabre curiosity extends beyond decapitation itself, and authors have considered the precise method by which she was decapitated: she was killed using a sword, rather than an axe

and, as Weir argues, “decapitation by the sword was very rare in England” (*Tower* 238). Boleyn’s execution is not representative of sixteenth-century English practice and, indeed, deviates from the punishment suffered by her co-accused. The executioner who killed Boleyn was from Calais, which was then English territory, and was employed specifically for this task. This departure from tradition has seen the sword and the reasons for its use become a focus of curiosity and speculation. The axe and sword are both identifiably medieval, as compared to the early modern guillotine of the French Revolution and the hangman’s noose of the British Empire. The discussion and depiction of weaponry is a trope of medievalist texts, acting as “useful shorthand” to connote an imagined idea of the “medieval” (Toswell 69-70). The aberrance of Boleyn’s execution in the English context allows writers to discuss these weapons and their use in considerable detail, particularly in fiction narratives in which the characters have witnessed executions previously. The “great two-handed sword” becomes an object of fascination (Purdy 306), and, in *Bring up the Bodies*, the nameless executioner allows Cromwell to inspect it: “the weapon is heavy, needing a two-handed grip. It is almost four foot in length: two inches broad, round at the tip, a double edge” (393). As Cromwell admires the weapon, one of his servants “wants to handle the sword, but he, Cromwell, does not want to let go of it yet” (393). Purdy and Mantel use such characters to describe weaponry with which the reader may not be familiar, but because the characters themselves are unfamiliar with this method of execution this exposition is not cumbersome; that Cromwell and Jane Boleyn are intrigued by a weapon uncommon to English execution is not remarkable. The ‘otherness’ of this execution for the English characters means that their curiosity mirrors that of the twenty-first-century reader.

The detailed comparison of these weapons indulges the violent spectacle of their implementation. Central to this comparison is the contention that decapitation by sword offered “a much cleaner, kinder and more precise method of execution than death by axe” (Weir, *Tower* 238). The French method did not require a block on which the condemned must lay their head, and writers have used explanations of this procedural difference to depict the English method as

particularly brutal. Purdy and Denny each provide such a comparison; Purdy's Jane compares Anne's execution to that which, as a Tudor woman, she is accustomed, explaining that "there was no need for a block" (305), while Denny writes that "the swordsman from Calais performed his task without a block" (315). Neither version sanitises or diminishes the violence associated with either form of execution, yet both authors indicate that the French method was the more humane. Denny achieves this by suggesting that there was a degree of dignity in the stance that the condemned would assume: "the prisoner almost had to lie prostrate at the low block" while the "victim" of the French executioner would die "kneeling upright" (315). Purdy, however, provides a more colloquial description, as Jane states that Anne's death would be "unlike ... English executions" which were "so clumsy, so messy, with the big, cumbersome axe" (305).

The contention that death by sword was less brutal than the alternative is inherited from contemporary records. William Kingston, the constable of the Tower, wrote to Cromwell of an exchange that took place between himself and Boleyn in the days preceding her death: he "told hyr it shuld be now payne", to which she replied "I heard say the executor was very gud, and I have a lytle neck" (*LP* x, 910). In the same letter, Kingston wrote that he had "sene [many men and a]lso wemen executed" (*LP* x, 910). His familiarity with the brutality of corporal and capital punishment means that it is possible, although not demonstrable, that his reassurance was not disingenuous and was informed by his experience of witnessing and facilitating previous executions. Yet this perspective is alien to the twenty-first-century imagination, and accordingly the notion of a painless execution is interrogated and even mocked: in *The Queen of Subtleties*, Anne explains that as an "ex-queen" she will be killed by "a super-sharp sword, wielded by an expert executioner from Calais", before facetiously adding, "apparently I won't feel a thing" (309). When, in *The Lady Elizabeth*, Mary informs Elizabeth that her mother is dead, the contrast between the 'reality' of execution and Mary's report is accentuated. Motivated by kindness and concern for the "young child", Mary tells Elizabeth that her mother was killed "with a sword ... It was very quick, and she did not suffer", but privately reflects that "the details were too

horrific” to be related to Anne’s young daughter and that “Anne had more than paid the price for her sins” (Weir, *Elizabeth* 20).

Scepticism does not, however, preclude writers from foregrounding the expertise of the Calais executioner. There is a distinction between the language that is used to describe Boleyn’s death and that of George Boleyn, William Brereton, Francis Weston, Henry Norris and Mark Smeaton; the sword is described as having come “down like a flash of lightning” (Gregory, *Other* 527), and “end[ing] Anne’s life” with “a swift slash of silver steel” (Purdy 306), while the men were subjected to the “crude blows of the axe” (Denny 309), which fell “with a horrendous thud ... cutting through skin and bone, making such a sickening sound” (Purdy 296). The violence of decapitation is inescapable, however the contrast between the onomatopoeic thud of the axe and the efficiency of the sword renders the use of the axe particularly brutal. The brutality is further compounded by the efforts taken to ensure that Boleyn would not face the weapon itself, which was deliberately hidden from her view: the executioner informs Cromwell in *Bring up the Bodies*, “she never sees the sword. I have put it there, in the straw. I shall distract her. She will not see from where I come” (393). Boleyn is described as “continually glancing behind her” as she anticipated the blow (Ives, *Life* 358), yet it is asserted that she did not see the sword before she was blindfolded. Once she was prepared and in position, it is declared that she did not have “time to register what was happening” before “the executioner swung his sword and her head was off” (Starkey 583): “While her lips were still moving” in prayer, writes Ives, “it was suddenly over” (Ives, *Life* 359). Such assertions that her death was quick and that she never saw the sword at her execution suggest that Boleyn’s decapitation, although undeniably violent and necessarily traumatic, was more humane than it could possibly have otherwise been.

The anonymous Calais executioner, with his “reputation for removing heads with an exquisite and surgical touch” (Starkey 581), is compared not only to other methods of decapitation but also to other forms of sixteenth-century execution. The suggestion that decapitation was less torturous than alternate methods of execution is predicated on the notion

that “all pain” is reduced to a “single gesture, performed in a single moment” (Foucault 33). As a woman judged guilty of treason, there was a possibility that Boleyn could have been executed “by the agony of fire” (Starkey 581). Henry’s decision to forgo executing her by burning is regularly described as an act of compassion and has been cited as evidence that he was reluctant to force Boleyn to suffer needlessly: as Ives argues, “death in the French style ... was certainly intended as an act of grace towards her, to add to the kindness of death by beheading, instead of the accustomed fire of the female traitor” (*Life* 351). Both Ives and Mantel reference the execution warrant, which states that the king had been “moved by pity” to commute her sentence to beheading by sword (Ives, *Life* 351). Ives quotes the document directly, while Mantel fictionalises the scene in which Cromwell presents the warrant to Henry for his signature. While Dunn does not refer to the warrant itself, she does fictionalise Anne’s response to the arrangements for her death and those of her co-accused. They each, however, interrogate the sentiment that the document is believed to convey, and note the irony of a merciful form of decapitation: indeed, Mantel features Anne laughing at the prospect of being given the moniker “Anne the Headless, Anne sans Tête” (*Bodies* 392).

Henry’s intentions and motivations are often hidden in Mantel’s novels and, as narrator, Cromwell—like writers of historical narratives—can merely offer speculation as to the emotional state of the king, and he expresses scepticism regarding Henry’s reasons for insisting on a ‘humane’ death. As he signs the death warrant that condemns his wife, Henry considers the possibility that Anne’s first sexual encounters had taken place during her youth in France, prompting Cromwell to contemplate whether the French style of execution “is a mercy at all ... or if this form of death, dealt to the queen, simply meets Henry’s severe sense of the fitness of things” (*Bodies* 388). Ives does not question Henry’s intentions as Mantel does, and instead holds that the king believed this to be a compassionate act. However, he does consider Henry’s decision to decapitate rather than burn his wife to be a perverse interpretation of kindness.

Henry, he argues, “was at his most nauseous in making arrangements ... to bring over the executioner of Calais to kill Anne” (*Life* 351).

Dunn’s Anne similarly recognises the disjuncture between the rhetoric surrounding Henry’s compassion and the violent death that she and her co-accused face, sharing the scepticism of Mantel’s Cromwell. On learning that Henry is considering honouring George’s debts, Anne reflects “magnanimous Henry, all of a sudden” (Dunn, *Queen* 308). She does recognise that her position as “ex-queen” affords her a particular level of comfort that is denied to Mark Smeaton, who is not of noble birth and is thus kept “in irons” and granted “no privileges” (308-9). “It struck me”, she writes, “what a privileged lot we were, the rest of us, sitting out our last days by firesides, with pies and the kindly attentions of Mr Kingston” (309). In spite of this difference in accommodation, the method of execution again becomes a site of compassion because Mark is spared the “gallows” at “Tyburn” and dies,³⁸ along “with the rest of the boys”, on “the block at Tower Hill” (309). Whilst acknowledging that particular forms of execution can be more horrific than others, Dunn’s Anne rejects the notion of a painless execution and, when she learns that she will be killed with “a super-sharp sword, wielded by an expert”, repeats her sarcastic appraisal of Henry’s character: “Magnanimous Henry” (309). While Mantel’s Cromwell questions whether Henry perceives a death in the French manner to be fitting, rather than merciful, Ives and Dunn interrogate the “psychology”, rather than the intentions, of a man who exhibits “a loving concern about the way to kill” his wife (Ives, *Life* 351).

“A Tyrant Runs Mad”

Tyranny denotes an abuse of powers by a monarch or political figure, thus it is in Henry’s public role as king that he is criticised as tyrannical. This archetype is regularly associated with a constructed idea of ‘the medieval’, in which “tyrannical systems of government” are seen to stem

³⁸ Devereaux explains that Tyburn, located at the intersection of Oxford Street and Edgeware Road, had been the site of London’s public executions “for centuries” until 1783 when it was replaced by Newgate Prison (128).

from the violent, irrational and primitive behaviours that are associated with medieval society more broadly (Pugh and Weisl 141). Henry, as he is characterised in the focus texts, abuses the power that is at his disposal, thus Boleyn's death is symbolic of the "dangers posed by absolutist monarchs to individual liberties" (Burstein, "Royal" 499). As Hickerson writes, Anglophone popular culture featuring Henry typically represents him as having become a tyrant as a result of his disastrous marital career (224). Integral to this transformation is the characterisation of Boleyn, whose unrelenting determination to become queen is juxtaposed with Henry's romantic passion (Hickerson 232). His eventual realisation that he has been manipulated by his wife, which is only intensified by the violence and upheaval he enacted in order to marry her, is key to the perspective that Anne "taught him to be the monster" with whom twenty-first-century audiences are familiar (238).

Boleyn is not unique as a prominent individual who was executed by Henry VIII, as is evidenced by the execution, for example, of Thomas More, but her death is rendered extraordinary because Boleyn was not only his friend and advisor, but also his wife. Lucy Wooding opens her biography of Henry VIII by asserting that her subject is "easy to caricature as a monarch" yet "hard to understand as a man" (1). This difficulty, she argues, can be partly attributed to the labelling of Henry as "a tyrant": "his reputation was extraordinary while he was still alive, and became even more lurid after he was dead" (*Henry* 1). Bernard locates this image of the king within the popular realm: "if you are not a specialist historian", he writes, "then your impression of Henry VIII is almost certainly that of a large, powerful man, a bearded Lothario who ruthlessly and shamelessly exploited his position to bed any young girl who captured his fancy" (*Fatal* 130). He argues that this "sensual" caricature, although unsupported by "the surviving sources on which our knowledge of Henry must be based", makes for "compelling television" (130).

Denny's representation of Henry is consistent with the caricature outlined by Bernard, although her use of evidence is problematic; she argues that contemporaries labelled him "a

tyrant more cruel than Nero” without citing the source either in the text or in a footnote (318). Purdy also employs this quote, attributing it to “a young scholar” who Jane hears amongst the “grumbling and lamenting” of “the crowd” in response to Anne’s sentencing (283). Bernard elsewhere contextualises this quote, which comes from a priest named Davy who was embroiled in the Pilgrimage of Grace and argued that Henry was a “tyrant more cruell than Nero, for Nero destroyed but a part of Rome but this tyrant destroyeth his hole realm ... thys Ttgre persecute[s] holy Chyrche, and not only the chyrche goodys ... but also destroyth the mynysters of the same” (as cited in Bernard, “Tyranny” 113). As such, the labelling of Henry as tyrant in this primary source does not refer to his actions against Boleyn, as Denny’s quotation and Purdy’s characterisation would suggest, but to the Dissolution of the Monasteries. In both texts, the use of the quotation lends an air of authenticity to the respective depictions; yet it is entirely removed from its original context.

This is not an isolated occurrence, however, and Denny also cites John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* when asserting that Henry “was ‘of one mind in the morning and quite another after dinner’, his violent moods increasingly unpredictable” (271-72). Foxe’s portrait of the king is “among the most important representations of the king ever penned” (Freeman 87), as a Protestant martyrologist however, the biased perspective from which he wrote has long been recognised. Given her own distinctly Anglican perspective, it is unsurprising that Denny does not critique Foxe’s assessment—of which Bernard is critical. Denny and Bernard’s respective interpretations of Foxe’s description of Henry are consistent with their positions with regard to Boleyn’s execution. Bernard considers the possibility that she was guilty. He argues that, “following” Foxe’s lead, “most ... modern historians” consider Boleyn’s alleged crimes to be abhorrent and, particularly with regard to incest, presume that she was innocent on the basis of this disgust because incest lies outside of indelible norms (*Fatal* 3). In contrast, Foxe’s description of “a hard-hearted husband [who] had his wife beheaded” is consistent with Denny’s contention (Foxe, as cited in Freeman 89). Indeed, Denny’s own illustration of Henry is more colourful than

those of the contemporary commentators whom she cites: “the King in 1536, with his bloated red face, piggy little eyes and ulcerated leg, cut a very different figure from the suitor of ten years before” (271-72).

The contention that Henry became increasingly despotic during the course of his reign is common. His life is often considered “a tale of two halves”, in which the benevolent king became the “overweight, suspicious, ruthless tyrant” of the popular imagination (Lipscomb 13). Where this characterisation has been questioned, a consistent pattern of demanding and dangerous behaviour on Henry’s part has nonetheless been identified; for example, Bordo maintains that Henry’s character did not undergo a significant change as he aged, rather his “apparent equanimity, beneficence, and open-mindedness” was dependent on compliance with his demands since “opposition unleashed the ruthless bully who had, in a sense, been lying in wait behind the carefully crafted posture of the virtuous prince” (125). While commentators disagree as to whether any transformation occurred, those who hold that Henry was a medieval tyrant share the position that he exhibited notable cruelty in 1536, the year of Boleyn’s death. Henry is depicted as becoming increasingly ruthless prior to Boleyn’s execution and although his cruelty culminates in her death, she is not his first victim; her “cataclysmic overthrow” is not significant because it is an isolated occurrence, but because it is symbolic of the fragility of the “balance of power at the English court” (Weir, *Tower* 276). Her former romantic relationship with Henry, coupled with her royal status meant that, as a condemned woman, Boleyn was unique—until, of course, Katherine Howard suffered the same fate. Yet her fall from a position of favour is not unlike the experience of a number of prominent individuals who were executed during Henry’s reign. The “Great Matter” of Henry’s first divorce had been, as Starkey states, “settled by the axe and the knife” (523), even if Katherine of Aragon had not been the victim. Proximity to Henry, it is argued, held inherent danger: as George Boleyn comments in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, “when you spend your life in the shadow of the throne you’re always afraid of blades” (Gregory 434).

Henry's displeasure is identified as a precursor of death in each text. Elizabeth observes in *The Lady Elizabeth*, "when her father was angered, bad things happened" because his temper is volatile and unpredictable, whilst also holding "the power of life and death" (Weir 62-63). Writers have foregrounded his power as an absolute monarch, yet it is the combination of the powers afforded by this position and Henry's own volatility—described by Denny as a "pathological cold streak" (51)—that means he is represented as particularly dangerous; held in the Tower, Thomas Wyatt asks Cromwell, "what does Henry want?" to which Cromwell can only reply, "he changes his mind, day to day" (Mantel, *Bodies* 353). Prior to his destruction of Anne, Henry is seen to have condemned or persecuted multiple individuals who he had once loved and trusted. The respective deaths of Cardinal Wolsey, Thomas More and Katherine of Aragon are granted significant attention in historical narratives of Boleyn—More was executed, and Wolsey and Katherine both died while estranged from Henry. Both *Wolf Hall* and *The Queen of Subtleties* feature narration that explores the private thoughts of protagonists who are closely associated with each of these individuals: namely, Cromwell and Anne. In *Wolf Hall*, Mantel contrasts Cromwell's rise in Henry's favour with the destruction of both Wolsey and More. Cromwell views Wolsey as a mentor and father figure, and is influential in building a case against More and facilitating Henry's divorce from Katherine. In *The Queen of Subtleties*, as discussed in Chapter Four, Anne is instrumental in the arrest of both men as well as in the divorce. Like Cromwell in Mantel's novels, Dunn's Anne is both a witness to and an agent in the ruination of her predecessor. Her talent, she suggests, was to "flinch at nothing to rid [Henry] of that used-up wife" (Dunn 24). The narrators of these two texts are not only in close proximity to Wolsey, More and Katherine as they face death and disgrace, but are also complicit in their destruction. Henry's capacity to destroy those for whom he once deeply cared is established and he is depicted as dangerous and capricious.

Self-preservation at court is intrinsically linked to the ability to placate and pacify the king, particularly by facilitating his demands. In *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Mary characterises this

behaviour as childlike: “He’s like a child himself and when I had a child of my own, a real child, I found I had no patience with a man who wanted to be diverted like a child. When once I saw King Henry was as selfish as his own little son, I couldn’t really love him any more” (Gregory 339). This demanding nature, when combined with absolute monarchical power, only renders him more dangerous because once he grows tired or frustrated, he will not hesitate to punish the offending individual. In *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*, Cromwell is cognisant of the precariousness of his own position. He is secure in his own abilities, but aware that Henry may turn against him at any moment. Memories of Wolsey and those “courtiers who [did not] honourably retire” cause Mantel’s Cromwell to be mindful of his own vulnerability should Henry one day “turn” on him, aware that his only power would be “patience” and the “hope [that] the end is quick” (*Bodies* 266). Contrastingly, in *The Queen of Subtleties* Anne retrospectively comments on her own naïve responses to Henry’s threats of violence, as she believed herself to be secure in his affections and unlikely to face this wrath. Boleyn has come to personify the uncertainty of Henry’s volatile inconstancy for her role as a catalyst for change during both her rise and fall from favour, because executing his wife is seen to be his ultimate act of tyranny.

The turbulent process by which Henry first acquires and then discards wives is an integral theme of the first two instalments of Mantel’s trilogy: *Wolf Hall* charts the rise of Cromwell and the Boleyns at the expense of Cardinal Wolsey, Thomas More and, of course, Katherine of Aragon, while the newly-powerful Cromwell of *Bring up the Bodies* is concerned primarily with the respective fates of Henry’s first two queens. As a politician, Cromwell is expected to assist Henry in legal matters and England’s governance, and, in a dynastic age, this role encompasses the king’s marriage. Hence, his own safety could be jeopardised should Henry be displeased with his marriage.³⁹ Faced with Henry’s dissatisfaction with Boleyn, Cromwell imagines how the deceased

³⁹ Indeed, the historical Cromwell was executed in July 1540, having become vulnerable to factional politics and Henry’s distrust because of his role in arranging Henry VIII’s marriage to Anne of Cleves, which was quickly annulled. For a detailed discussion of the circumstances that contributed to Cromwell’s fall, see Wooding (*Henry* 238-43).

Cardinal may advise him: “To his inner ear, the cardinal speaks. He says, I saw you, Crumb, when you were scratching your balls in the dawn and wondering at the violence of the king’s whims. If he wants a new wife, fix him one. I didn’t and I am dead” (*Bodies* 66-67). Wolsey had been the most powerful man in England, second only to Henry; accordingly, his example serves as an emphatic warning to Cromwell. Here, Mantel reminds her reader that it could be fatal to impede Henry’s demands and that, although Cromwell’s position is relatively secure in *Bring up the Bodies*, this safety is subject to instantaneous change.

An inability to achieve political goals can be construed as treason: it is made clear in Mantel and Dunn’s respective narratives that failures will indeed be punished as such. Writing from the Tower, Dunn’s Boleyn reflects on the way in which she and George had mocked Henry’s temper following one outburst in which he threatened his courtiers, “there’s none of you so grand that your head won’t fly” (65). Henry’s sudden outburst is characterised as childlike for his “puffed-up petulance” and it is this tantrum-like behaviour that the Boleyn siblings ridicule (65). However, it is also this infantile willingness to punish those who do not accommodate his demands that renders him dangerous. In retrospect, Anne recognises that this anger posed a serious threat and that her laughter was naïve: “I didn’t know, then, of course, how many heads would fly and how many of them would be of people I liked and loved. Nor that mine would, in the end, be joining them” (65). For Mantel’s Cromwell, the loss of Wolsey is a constant reminder of Henry’s volatility and his own vulnerability, while Dunn’s Anne views executions as isolated incidents and it is not until she and those she cares for become targets of Henry’s anger that she is moved by his violence.

Those who are close to Henry are vulnerable to his whims, and minor incidents, often unknown to the perpetrator, are depicted as carrying the potential to spark his anger. For example, Purdy suggests that he was jealous of Anne’s male companions regardless of whether he genuinely believed the accusations of her adultery. Jane believes it was “easy for him to condemn George, Weston, Brereton, and Norris”, because years earlier “his heart ... began to harden”

against these men when he realised that her brother and friends “had Anne in a way that he never could” (Purdy 70-71). These representations of Henry’s court frame petty annoyances and obstructions to the king’s will as harbingers of death; it is Henry’s animosity that frames kinship with the queen as treasonous adultery. Henry is here characterised as lacking the composure to consider the accusations rationally, having been first guided by court factions who spoke against Boleyn, and then by his own anger that prevented him from questioning the validity of their claims.

Moreover, the fictionalised characters of those who would suffer execution at the hands of Henry explicitly label him a tyrant. In a discussion of Henry’s divine right to rule and the power that has been granted to him by God, Cromwell observes that the discussion is gratuitous, stating “where the word of a king is, there is power, and who may say to him, what doest thou?” which is quickly rebuked by Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, who asserts, “Henry is not a tyrant” (Mantel, *Bring* 32-33). It cannot, however, be assumed that Gardiner’s insistence on Henry’s consolidation of power is just, not tyrannical (33), and an honest evaluation of the king’s rule; although we are only offered Cromwell’s perspective on the relationship, as “Cromwell’s enemy” (xii), there is limited trust between the two men.

In contrast, Gregory includes a private discussion between Mary Boleyn and her husband William Stafford in which they explicitly criticise Henry’s actions and label him as a tyrant. As her husband, William fears for Mary’s safety should she attempt to beg mercy for her siblings: “He is my brother ... I cannot desert him.’ ‘You can go to your own death,’ William said. ‘Or you can survive this’” (519). Their demonstrated concern for one another’s safety means that Mary and William trust that the other party will not report their words back to Henry. In turn, they are openly critical of Henry himself. Mary enquires after men who were “taken up with the others” but were not arrested, wondering why they escaped to which William replies:

Who knows? No evidence against them, or special pleading, or some kind of favour.

Who ever knows when a tyrant runs mad? They are excused; but a little lad like Mark

who only ever knew one thing and that was to play the lute is racked until he cries for his mother, and tells them anything they ask him. (520)

Likewise, Purdy's Will Stafford in *The Tudor Wife* reassures Mary that she was correct in remaining silent and not speaking to Henry on her siblings' behalf (283). Following Anne's trial, he comforts her: "Darling...come, there is nothing you can do here. We must get you home if we can" (Purdy 283). In both novels, William believes that Mary's pleading for her siblings' lives would constitute a risk to her own, however such an act does not compare in seriousness to that of openly naming the king a tyrant. His willingness to do so in Mary's presence demonstrates their trust in one another because their relationship offers a safe space in which they can openly express their fear and condemnation of Henry's apparently indiscriminate justice.

"Out with the Old, In with the New"

As well as holding the potential to distort Henry's history, this tyrannical reputation also impacts representations of Boleyn. Commentators have consistently sought explanations for Boleyn's downfall, citing factional politics; the diminishing likelihood that she would bear a much-needed male heir; Henry's dissatisfaction with Boleyn's behaviour as a wife; and that she was guilty, or that Henry believed her to be guilty, of treason. The circumstances that led to Boleyn's death are complex, manifold, and ultimately unknowable, however Henry VIII's desire to marry Jane Seymour is consistently represented as a catalyst. Bernard outlines "the popular view" of the events of 1536, in which "Henry simply fell in love with another woman and decided to discard Anne" (*Fatal* 131). "Henry was now tired of Anne" having become "disappointed at what he saw as her (not his) failure to produce a male heir"; "determined to have Jane" he "destroyed Anne, falsely accusing her of multiple adulteries, and then took Jane as his wife" (131). Bernard describes this interpretation as "plausible", although he does not subscribe to it; instead he postulates that the swift marriage was an attempt to prevent Henry from being ridiculed as an impotent cuckold (131-32).

In spite of Bernard's reservations, many of the focus texts offer narratives that resemble the 'popular' interpretation he criticises. The causal relationship between Henry's marriage to Seymour and Boleyn's execution is a point of unresolved speculation; nevertheless, the two events are represented as inseparable from one another. Further, they are integral to a belief in Henry's cruelty. Seymour, it is argued, had become Henry's "wife-in-waiting" prior to Boleyn's arrest and she "did not have to wait long" to become his wife proper (Starkey 590). Writers foreground the limited time that elapsed between the two events, thereby drawing a connection between the end of one marriage and the beginning of another: Ives writes that the couple were "betrothed" the day after the execution and married on 30 May (*Life* 360); Purdy's Jane recalls that "ten days after Anne died, I watched the King marry Jane Seymour in the chapel at Whitehall" (311); Weir, Gregory and Denny argue that preparations for the wedding coincided with those for the execution (Denny 313; Gregory, *Other* 528; Weir, *Tower* 282). Although these writers do not necessarily argue that Boleyn was executed solely because her death allowed Henry to remarry, these two events are represented as belonging to one historical episode.

Writers suggest that public sentiment toward the king and his new queen became increasingly hostile, fuelled by the speed at which Henry's transition between wives took place and the view that Boleyn's death was necessary only because she would obstruct the new marriage. Observers "thought it strange" that it was "within one and the same month that saw Queen Anne flourishing, accused, condemned and executed", and another was "assumed into her place, both of bed and honour" (Weir, *Tower* 284). Denny, Bernard, and Weir refer to public scepticism about "the speed in which [the marriage] was conducted" (Denny 318). Denny argues that "the English people" were left "in little doubt that Henry's lust for Jane was the root cause" for Anne's death, but does not provide a specific citation for this claim (318). Bernard and Weir, however, cite the following passage from Chapuys in their discussions of public opinion:

Although everybody rejoices at the execution of the *putain*, there are some who murmur at the mode of procedure against her and the others, and people speak

variously of the King; and it will not pacify the world when it is known what has passed and is passing between him and Mrs. Jane Semel [sic]. Already it sounds ill in the ears of the people, that the King, having received such ignominy, has shown himself more glad than ever since the arrest of the *putain* (*LP* x. 908, emphasis in original).

Chapuys' antipathy toward Boleyn is explicit, with his references to her as 'the *putain*' and, elsewhere in the same letter, "the Concubine" (*LP* x. 908), thus Weir considers his questioning of Henry's motives and propriety to be unbiased. She explains that contemporaries soon began to consider Boleyn "a victim done away with on a flimsy pretext, particularly in the wake of Henry marrying Jane ten days after her beheading" (*Tower* 280). This shift in public opinion in which Anne, who had once been labelled a whore, came to be viewed as an innocent victim is conveyed in *The Queen of Subtleties*. Lucy dislikes Anne, because she considers her responsible for the destruction of, first, Queen Catherine and, finally, Lucy's beloved friend Mark Smeaton; as such, Lucy represents England's wider populace with her response to the news that the end of Anne's reign "won't be a divorce": "A *queen*" she exclaims, before reflecting that "a king can't kill his queen, can he? No one can kill a queen" (Dunn 270, emphasis in original). Lucy's perspective on Henry's second marriage is well-established at this point in the narrative, thus her shock at Henry's actions does not stem from any previously-held affection for Anne. Gregory depicts a similarly drastic shift in sentiment that is a response to perceived injustice, but instead focuses on "the Londoners' public outcry": "The mood of the City" was disbelief at the charges against Anne and subsequently, "even those women ... who had shouted 'Whore!' at Anne at Queen Katherine's trials now thought that the king had run mad again and was setting aside a legal wife on a pretext, for yet another unknown favourite" (*Other* 522).

In explaining this shift in public sympathies, authors juxtapose the violence of Boleyn's execution with the courtship and wedding that followed shortly thereafter. Jane and Henry, writes Gregory, enjoyed "music and feasting and dancing and masquing while the queen was in

the Tower and five good men held as well, four of them under the sentence of death” (*Other* 522), while Mantel’s Norris, one of Anne’s co-accused, comments, “I suppose the Seymours have the wedding feast ready”, as Cromwell interrogates him in *Bring up the Bodies* (327). These observations are written from the imagined perspectives of Mary Boleyn and Henry Norris respectively—Anne’s sister and her co-accused—thus it is not unexpected that their assessment of Henry’s behaviour would be critical. In writing a biographical account of Boleyn’s life, Denny might be expected to provide a more objective view, yet she is equally critical as the characters that experience personal devastation as a result of Henry’s actions. She describes Henry’s behaviours following his wife’s arrest as “callous antics”, arguing that “the King was openly celebrating, holding lavish banquets and going up and down the river in a barge with musicians singing and playing” and was, as such, inciting a “growing fury” in his people (Denny 281-82). Henry’s conduct in response to the news that “he was a widower” is crucial to the interpretation that his actions were cruel (Weir, *Tower* 281). It is argued that he did not react with sadness or regret, but instead “set off to meet Jane ... as soon as news of the execution reached him” (Ives, *Life* 360). Seymour’s reaction to Boleyn’s death is similarly questioned, although no evidence is cited to determine the actuality of her response. Speculation thus forms the basis of these enquiries: “we might wonder” writes Weir, “if either Jane or Henry allowed their thoughts to dwell” on the fate of her predecessor (*Tower* 285); Starkey argues that “we do not know how she reacted” to the news of Boleyn’s death (591); while Gregory’s Mary relates how “Jane Seymour had chosen her wedding clothes on the day they executed my sister” (*Other* 528). The tone of such speculation suggests callousness in Seymour’s behaviour by implying that some form of emotional response would be warranted but was not apparent in her actions.

Criticism of Henry does not only focus on his ascribed pitilessness and lack of grief, but also contributes to “a cynical view” of the reasons for which Boleyn was killed (Weir, *Tower* 284). By framing her execution as an effective way to end a marriage, rather than a judicial process in which a traitor was punished, these writers posit that Henry used Anne’s execution as a means by

which he could attain Jane. “Before Henry could have Jane”, writes Starkey, “Anne had to be disposed of” (575), before describing the episode as a divorce: “Henry’s first divorce took seven years; his second, less than as many weeks” (592). In her fictional narrative, Dunn’s Anne recognises that she is an impediment to her husband’s wish to remarry: “the thud of the sword to my bared neck” will occur “in time for my husband’s announcement of his forthcoming marriage” (2). Dunn, like Starkey, articulates that Anne’s presence impedes Henry’s happiness and, as such, she must be removed. As the Anne of the novel states: “As his current wife, I pose a problem. Not such a big one, though, that the thinnest of blades can’t solve it” (2). Both Purdy and Dunn depict Anne using the cliché “out with the old, in with the new” as an explanation for Henry’s actions (Purdy 304; Dunn 311). In both iterations the phrase is delivered with a flippancy that resembles the ease with which Henry is seen to dispose of his wife and the common perception that he was “a man who sees women as objects” (Ives, “Real” 29).

The tone of these discussions of Henry’s transition between wives sees authors adhere to the archetypal construction of him as a medieval tyrant, evident in multiple aspects of Boleyn’s execution. In *Bring up the Bodies*, Cromwell readily admits to Norris, “the dying man” (330), this is not an issue of justice but one of satisfying Henry’s demands; “the king must be rid of her” not because she has committed treason but because “he is out of love with her”, “loves another lady and he cannot come at her unless Anne is removed” (326), and Anne’s temperament means that execution would provide the only quick resolution: “Anne will not go quietly, she warned me of it once; she said, if Henry puts me aside, it will be war ... she must be pushed” (326). In the concluding passages of *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Mary considers the implications of Anne’s death for Henry’s kingship: “when Henry changed his mind he always changed it fast ... he had divorced one faultless wife and beheaded another. Now he knew his power” (Gregory 528).

The emphasis that is placed on the violence of Boleyn’s death only strengthens this stance, in which it is suggested that Henry’s “callous butchery” underpinned Jane’s rise (Denny 318). Jane had, the reader is reminded, gained much from the death of “the woman ... whose

body was now decomposing beneath the pavement of the Tower chapel” (Weir, *Tower* 285). Although Jane’s perspective is ultimately unknowable, Starkey argues that she was complicit in Anne’s death. Conversely, for Gregory, it is Henry and the culture of his court that is responsible: Mary “did not even blame” Jane for profiting from her sister’s death, knowing she and Anne would not have behaved differently in her position (528). In contrast, Starkey writes that Jane “showed no compunction in stepping to the throne over the headless corpse of her rival” (591). He eschews the term “execution”, which connotes a legal process in which a convicted criminal is punished for her or his crimes, and instead labels Boleyn’s death as “judicial murder” (591). This juxtaposes the stereotypical characterisations of Boleyn as “Lady Macbeth” (285) with that of the supposedly meek and submissive Seymour: “Anne might *talk* of killing Catherine” but “the gentle Jane went further and was an accessory-after-the-fact” in her predecessor’s death (591).

“How Did Henry’s Great Love Turn to Ruins?”

Henry’s marriage to Seymour is one possible explanation for Boleyn’s arrest and execution, yet it does not necessarily elucidate the reasons for “Henry’s willingness—seemingly eagerness, in fact—to sign the order for Anne’s *execution*” (Bordo 120, emphasis in original). Thus, the question of *why* he acted against his wife has consistently been underscored by a persistent theorising as to *how* he could bring about her death. This questioning necessarily labels Boleyn’s execution, and especially Henry’s role in it, as cruel. The archetype of the medieval tyrant is, again, invoked in an attempt to explain his ability to have his wife killed. The king’s emotional state, particularly his anger, is prominent; he is depicted as a “too ruthless a king” to forgive Boleyn’s misdemeanours (Bernard, *Fatal* 176); likewise, his “rage and suspicion ... had tipped him over the edge” (Ives, *Life* 350). At the time of Boleyn’s arrest and trial, argues Ives, a “prurient self-righteousness” had “anaesthetized all doubt” in Henry’s mind as to the guilt of his “wife and friends” (*Life* 350-51). He is thus characterised as rash and incapable of governing his own rage, however this leads to speculation as to whether he may have regretted his actions; Ives

cites the king's later admission that "a victim in the Tower had no defence against false evidence", arguing that Henry "had to face the fact" that he had "taken a step which he could not reverse" irrespective of whether the charges "were to seem more questionable in the cold light of reflection" (*Life* 350).

That Henry did not need to execute Boleyn in order to extricate himself from the marriage is emphasised by authors who consider alternative avenues by which he could put her aside. This perspective is evident, for instance, in Cromwell's clerk in *Bring up the Bodies* who enquires, "could the king's freedom be obtained, sir, with more economy of means? Less bloodshed?" (351). Mantel and Gregory's respective narratives feature characters who accept the need for Anne and Henry's marriage to be dissolved whilst also hoping that Anne might live. Neither of these encounters, however, suggests that it is likely that Anne will be permitted to live, and both accentuate that her fate is dependent on Henry's feelings toward her. Mantel's Cromwell asks Percy to declare that he had married Anne thereby rendering her marriage to Henry bigamous and invalid: Percy questions "how will it help her, to have her marriage annulled and her child bastardised?" to which Cromwell replies, "it might save her life" (359). However, Henry "wishes her dead" (353) and Cromwell acknowledges that he could only be successful in annulling the marriage "if Henry's temper cools" (359). In *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Mary asks her father about the possible fate of her siblings and, although she is aware of the possibility that they will die, he posits that they will instead face exile (Gregory 520-21). Still, Gregory's Thomas Boleyn warns his daughter against approaching the king and asking for his forgiveness on her siblings' behalf: "if your name isn't Seymour then you're not welcome in his sight. If your name is Boleyn then you're due for the axe. Keep out of the way, girl" (521).

These examples feature individuals who believe Anne's execution to be unnecessary in order for Henry's marriage to Seymour to proceed, yet it is Henry's anger alone that impedes the viability of these alternate punishments. As an absolute monarch, he possesses the power to "retire one wife, and she a daughter of Spain" and, in turn, "give a pension to Boleyn's daughter

and put her away in some country house ... he could annul it, as a folly" should he choose to do so (*Bodies* 219-20). He is thereby depicted as possessing both the power and, significantly, a moral obligation to prevent Anne's death. William Stafford, Mary's husband, verbalises this obligation in *The Other Boleyn Girl*:

He has everything he wants. An adultery charge against her so no-one can say that he fathered a [deformed foetus]. The marriage annulled as if it never was. Everyone who impugned his manhood is dead. Why should he kill her? It makes no sense. And he has promised her. She signed the annulment. He is honour-bound to send her to a nunnery. (526)

William dislikes Anne and regularly criticises her throughout the novel, believing her to be the engineer of her own downfall (518-19), and therefore his belief that she does not deserve to die emphasises that, in spite of her shortcomings, Anne's punishment is unjust. In both Gregory and Mantel's novels, Henry does not *resort* to execution having exhausted other avenues to end his marriage but instead *chooses* to punish Anne with death.

The perception that execution was an unjust punishment, evident in Mantel and Gregory's fictional narratives, does not necessarily reflect an early modern understanding of punishment. The present and the past are of equal importance in historical fictions; to resonate, historical fictions and the pasts that they represent must either reflect contemporary concerns or encourage a perception of shared humanity across vastly different societies and cultures (Heilmann and Llewellyn, "Hystorical" 138). Thus writers must evoke a conception of justice that is simultaneously contemporary to both the reader and the subjects of their text. Foucault maintains that the eighteenth century saw a shift in the nature of European penal practices in which the limitation of freedoms and rights replaced punishment of the body (8). Such a perspective holds that it is not unexpected in the context of Tudor England that Boleyn's body became the site of punishment for the adultery and treason of which she was condemned. Foucault argues that all punishment of/on the body conveyed meaning with regard to the social

rank of the criminal and the crime they had committed (12). Treason was a crime that was deemed to warrant capital punishment and it is unsurprising that, once convicted, Boleyn's sentence was consistent with these social norms.

Her death is depicted as particularly violent within the contemporary context; Cromwell describes the composed demeanour of Charles Brandon, the Duke of Suffolk, as remarkable because, although he is "a hard man" who "owes Anne no forgiveness" and "has seen battle", he has never seen "a bloodletting like this" (*Bring* 398). Yet corporal and capital punishments were both ritualised and regulated, and an important aspect of this process was to "brand the victim" physically and metaphorically with "infamy" (Foucault 33-34). Hence, to divorce Boleyn, or retire her to a convent, could have circumvented the recognised conventions associated with the punishment of treason. The possibility that twenty-first-century writers and readers may consider decapitation extreme and unjust reflects the conception of justice of their own society, in which "a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions" has replaced a system in which the criminal's body serves as a site of visible punishment (11).

In comparison, for the writers who consider Boleyn's execution within its historical context, it is the legitimacy of the verdict, rather than the sentence that is called into question. The trial is described as merely a "formality" that allowed Henry to dispose of Boleyn (Dunn, *Queen* 303). The contention that Boleyn and her co-accused were unfairly tried has been supported by the assertion that the Calais executioner had been summoned prior to the trial, pre-empting the verdict. Denny argues that the "swordsmen" had been summoned "many days before the trial" (309-10), while Weir cites primary documentation which demonstrates that the executioner was summoned approximately ten days prior to the execution, arguing that "people were aware" that this request occurred "well before the trial" (*Tower* 240). Both Weir and Denny directly attribute the perceived injustice of Boleyn's conviction to Henry personally. Weir writes that "the King had intended all along that Anne should be beheaded" and that this had not only determined the findings of the court, but had "inflicted an added refinement of cruelty in keeping

her in suspense for a whole day as to whether or not she would suffer the agony of burning” (240). Denny argues that she was “betrayed ... by a husband who cared nothing for her innocence” (309-10). In this way, both writers frame this as an act of cruelty.

The depiction of Boleyn as a discarded and replaceable wife means that characterisations of Henry are not only consistent with the medieval tyrant, but also with the archetype of Bluebeard. Charles Perrault, in his 1697 tale of Bluebeard, narrates the discovery of the titular character’s bloody chamber, in which the bodies of his murdered wives are held, by his current wife who faces a similar fate (Warner 241). Marina Warner explains that “Bluebeard the ogre husband” simultaneously embodies the “patriarch whose orders must be obeyed” and the Biblical “serpent who seduces by exciting curiosity and desire and so brings on death” (246). As such, Henry’s dual representation as tyrant and Bluebeard is not problematic because the common narrative of their relationship fits with both archetypal constructions: he seduces Anne with the prospect of becoming queen before punishing her using patriarchal force. As such, his destruction of Boleyn symbolises not only the violence of the absolute monarch, but is the “ultimate act of kingly *and* husbandly force” (Dolan, *Marriage* 133, emphasis added).

As with many fairy tales, the archetype of ‘Bluebeard’ is not confined to Perrault’s original story, but has come to be recognisable in different manifestations for its themes of “curiosity, forbidden chambers, punishment, wife murder” (Hermansson 3). The characterisation of Henry as Bluebeard is a common one and scholars who have investigated cultural reimaginings of the king have cited the influence of the archetype.⁴⁰ Starkey, for example, argues

⁴⁰ For example, *Henry VIII and History* includes three references to Henry as Bluebeard. Richards quotes Agnes Strickland’s description of Henry as “the royal Bluebeard of English history”, arguing that this description is consistent with Strickland’s depiction of his treatment of his first four wives (174); Richardson suggests that Maxwell Anderson’s play *Anne of the Thousand Days* is successful because it incorporates the familiar elements of the Bluebeard archetype by presenting a Henry who is cruel and selfish, yet builds upon this façade so as to create “a credible human being” (206); Ahnert considers Robert Bolt’s *A Man for all Seasons* in which, it is argued, Henry is depicted as a tyrant and not “merely the Bluebeard figure that had executed some wives” (221).

that this history is “darker and more disturbing than the legend of Bluebeard” (xv). Marriage to Henry is thereby accepted as having been “repressive, even deadly” (Dolan, *Marriage* 133). It is for this reason that Mary Boleyn, having witnessed her sister die, “did not envy Jane Seymour”: Jane “would be the new queen and her children, when she had them, would be the next princes and princesses” but Mary had “seen two queens married to King Henry and neither of them had much joy of it” (Gregory, *Other* 528); Henry is understood as dangerous. However, the implications of this representation extend beyond questions of Henry’s subjectivity and representation. The Bluebeard tale features both a murderous husband and a disobedient wife (Warner 243) and, as Warner demonstrates, various iterations of the fable suggest that death is a “fitting penalty for his wives’ previous wickedness in defying a husband’s commands” (246). Thus Henry’s construction as Bluebeard necessitates, as a corollary, that Anne is culpable in her own death; she deliberately disregards her powerful husband’s wishes, and thus the punishment for her transgressions is due to her provocation.

The foreshadowing of Boleyn’s execution means that representations of her life are shaped by the violence of her death. References to the danger of her situation are common, even while she remains in Henry’s favour. This danger does, however, commonly refer to her behaviours and she is consistently represented as self-destructive (Burstein, “Afterlife” 4). In *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Mary informs George of the turn in public opinion against Anne, addressing rumours that associate her with witchcraft and asserting that these rumours mirror Henry’s own words: “he says he is a man possessed ... that she has enchanted him and that he can’t think about another woman” (Gregory 305). The siblings acknowledge that in spite of Henry’s tone—“it’s love talk when he says it”—such insinuations are “dangerous” (305). Rather than criticising Henry for placing their sister in a precarious position, George rebukes Anne and implies that it is her own behaviour, rather than Henry’s indelicacy, that is dangerous: “she should do more good works and not be so damned ... sensual” (305).

Henry's love is conditional and dangerous, however it is Anne who is held responsible for his fickleness and the ease with which he discards women. Anne is only successful in securing marriage—as was discussed in Chapter Three—because she is sensual and unlike other women. As Henry grows increasingly antagonistic toward her and views her with increasing suspicion, he convinces himself that he was tricked into love, again absolving himself from any responsibility. The qualities that enthralled Henry are integral to both her success and her downfall because he views his former passion, which saw him 'enchanted' with Anne, in terms of witchcraft not romance. The distortion of 'romantic' sentiments about her bewitching nature that Gregory's George predicts is also explored by Purdy in *The Tudor Wife*. Henry, having grown to hate Anne, accuses her: "they call you the Witch Queen! Methinks they are right—you must have bewitched me! How else could my eyes have been dazzled for so long when there is nothing about you to desire or love?" (216-17) There is a focus on Anne's bewitchment of Henry and the dangerous game that *she* is playing, therefore when Henry does tire of Anne it her purported misconduct, not his, that is held to account.

These scenes speak to the association between culpability and violence that appears in narratives about Boleyn. Prior to the execution, however, Purdy establishes a precedent in which Henry punishes Anne with violence. Post-feminist discourses reject the notion of 'victim-feminism', and instead accentuate the agency of the individual. One serious consequence of this discourse is that women who experience intimate partner violence, particularly those who remain in abusive relationships, are considered responsible for the abuse that they suffer (Rodier and Meagher 183). Women, in the ostensibly equal society that post-feminist discourse perceives, are able to leave abusers and access legal avenues to prosecute their attackers (183); of course, such a perspective neglects to take into account a range of situations that preclude such a 'choice'. As Kristin Rodier and Michelle Meagher articulate, "the imperative to leave is predicated upon a belief that the victim of violence is an independent and free subject who can easily disentangle herself from her economic and interpersonal situations" (186).

Purdy's Anne cannot leave Henry when she experiences spousal abuse. Moreover, she is held responsible for this specific attack. Anne's desperation to provide Henry with a son—hence her need to have sex in order to become pregnant—impelled her to stage a provocative dance before the court with the aim of arousing her husband (Purdy 210-11). This was, as Purdy's narrator Jane Boleyn observes, “no dance we knew”—though perhaps reminiscent of striptease with which the twenty-first-century reader would be familiar—and it involved Anne's “lissom body like a serpent, mesmerizing us with every movement as, one by one, she shed her veils” (214). As she removes layers of clothing, she is left as “a black and gold Circe, wearing a gown that poured over her body like molten gold, its sleeveless bodice cut low in a deep V, the point of which almost touched her waist. Her skirt was slit thigh-high in front and back on both sides to reveal bare legs” (214-15). Henry interrupts her performance and throws “her roughly over his shoulder”, declaring “if you dare cavort like a whore in my court, then, by Heaven, I shall treat you like one!” (215). He subsequently carries Anne to his bedchamber and rapes her.

Henry deliberately causes her pain, in an encounter that undeniably constitutes sexual assault; her lack of consent is vocalised with her plea, “please, my lord, not like this!” (216). Jane—who, conveniently, has run quickly from the hall to the bedroom, “pleading a sudden stomach upset” (215)—comments, “never before had I seen such intense hatred upon a human face” (217). Henry's intent is thus emphasised, as is his silencing of Anne's protest: “he clapped a hand over her mouth to stifle her screams, and continued to thrust into her, stabbing hard and deep, ignoring the tears that poured over his fat pink fingers” (216-17). His intention to degrade her is clear and continues after the rape when, having ejaculated, he “grabbed her long hair and wiped his cock off with it” (217).

Despite his deliberate perpetration of violence against his wife, Henry's actions are excused because Anne ‘provoked’ him. The scene invokes the “widely-held” belief that women incite men to abuse them (Rodier and Meagher 188). Sex with Henry is Anne's aim and the actions that she has taken, in the presentation of her body and her public performance of

seduction, means that she ‘asks for it’. He calls her a “whore” repeatedly, but, again, these insults are a direct response to her behaviours: “just like a whore”, she wears “not a stitch ... underneath” her gown, and he condemns her “Harlot’s tricks” before “savagely ... pinching and twisting” her “gilded” nipples (215-6). Moreover, he links his brutality with her dance and “take[s]” Anne “like the bitch” that he believes her to be, asking “are you in heat, my bitch? ... That performance you gave tonight would certainly suggest you are! So I shall do what you want and mount you!” (216). The use of the term ‘bitch’ reinforces the already established characterisation of Boleyn as a bitch, with its literal connotations, discussed in Chapter Four.

As in the many representations of Boleyn’s execution, Henry’s actions are framed as a punishment, and therefore while the violence against Anne is explicit, the condemnation of this violence is not. This scene, which has no basis in historical fact, is the only time in which Henry sexually assaults Anne—Jane informs the reader that “it was just for one night” (211)—yet it establishes the precedent that, first, he is willing to punish her with violence and, second, that her own behaviour is partly responsible for provoking his violence.⁴¹

Although Purdy is the only author in this thesis who represents Henry as having raped Anne,⁴² other authors, in their consideration of the reasons for her execution, echo the suggestion that she was ostensibly responsible for his violence against her. Starkey, for instance, considers what attracted Henry to Jane Seymour, whom he describes as “a woman of no family, no beauty, no talent and perhaps not much reputation”, and considers that perhaps “Jane’s very ordinariness was the point” (585). Henry, he maintains, wanted “domestic peace and the quiet life”, was “weary of scenes and squabbles”, and “more disturbingly, wanted submission”: “only obedience, prompt, absolute and unconditional, would do ... and he could have none of this

⁴¹ Barlow identifies “at least four incidents of violent rape and numerous mentions of domestic violence (perpetrated by both sexes) in [Purdy’s] text” (251). The instance described here is the only case in which Anne is the victim, however this scene is consistent with other instances of abuse analysed by Barlow.

⁴² Bordo intimates that Henry rapes Anne in the film adaptation of *The Other Boleyn Girl*, the screenplay of which was not written by Philippa Gregory (*Creation* 225).

with Anne” (585). Although he gestures towards the tyrannical Henry, who had grown “impatient of contradiction and disagreement”, Starkey presents it as Anne’s failure to meet her husband’s demands that sees her replaced (585).

Weir also considers similar ascribed traits in her discussion of an unauthenticated letter, dated 6 May 1536, in which Anne asserts her innocence. She includes the full text of the letter (*Tower* 171-73), before arguing that, should the letter be genuine, Henry would have found its “injured, pious and reproofing tone” and the writer’s accusations of injustice to be offensive (174). In considering whether Boleyn wrote the letter, Weir argues that its content would be self-destructive because it would be “guaranteed to arouse his anger” but would not be inconsistent with Anne’s behaviour: “Anne had never been afraid to speak her mind, nor even to upbraid or ridicule Henry; she was his wife and had grown used to speaking openly to him” (174). Weir does not consider Boleyn guilty of the charges, but does suggest that her behaviour rendered her “vulnerable to accusations of impropriety” (170). She describes Anne’s concern for the comfort of her co-accused and grief over her brother’s forthcoming execution before suggesting “Anne’s conversations” while she awaited execution “reveal her to have been indiscreet” (170). Weir construes Anne’s reported grief at the prospect of her brother’s and friend’s deaths as a “suspicious interest in the men accused with her”, arguing that she had “not kept a proper regal distance between herself and her courtiers” (170).

In her analysis of historical novels, Megan Hickerson posits that Henry tends to be examined “through the prism” of his marital career (223). In her analysis of *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Hickerson argues that “under [Gregory’s] pen much of the evil agency attributed to him transfers to Anne” (234). Indeed, in Gregory’s novel, Anne’s vulnerability stems from the possibility that other women will successfully implement her techniques; when Henry takes a mistress during Anne’s pregnancy, for instance, she fears that the “slut” may “keep” him and Mary reflects that, ironically, Anne “had taken him from me when I was in childbirth” (380). The notion that Anne became the victim of her own methods is not isolated to Gregory’s novel, or even historical

fiction, as evidenced by Starkey's discussion of factional plotting against the Boleyns; it would only be possible, he contends, to counter the Reformation that Henry had instigated "over Anne's dead body" (588) and the Catholic faction had a proven strategy:

The obvious tactic was to turn her own weapons of bedchamber politics against her. She had shown that a mistress could become Queen. Why should not another woman repeat the trick? And why should this other woman not overthrow Anne and all she stood for, as completely as Anne had toppled Catherine? (588)

Hence, Anne's destruction is made possible only because she had previously destroyed Henry's first queen. Henry's depiction as a Bluebeard, while characterising him as a monster, also insinuates a degree of culpability on Boleyn's part. Denny asks "how did Henry's great love turn to ruins?" (271). Her celebration of Boleyn suggests that she was a victim of a tyrant, yet for other authors Boleyn was ostensibly responsible for the circumstances in which that tyrant was able to act against her.

Conclusion

Bernard is unique amongst the authors discussed in this thesis because he does not romanticise the execution of Anne Boleyn, nor does he depict Henry VIII as a tyrant. His belief in her guilt challenges the dominant imagery of the "the hapless victim of a king's tyranny" (Bordo, *Creation* xiii), and instead positions her as a criminal who was punished for her crimes. Where the other writers describe her death in significant detail thereby encouraging the reader to view her sympathetically, in *Fatal Attractions*, Bernard instead focuses on her alleged crimes: Boleyn and her co-accused "allegedly had sexual relations", she had declared that she "would marry one of them as soon as the king died" and that "she would never love the king in her heart" (3). These "acts" were "regarded as treason, the greatest crime of all" and within this context—both with regard to Bernard's interpretation and early modern England's judicial system—execution is portrayed as a fitting punishment (3). Bernard writes that "accordingly, first

the commoners Norris, Smeaton, Weston and Brereton, and then on Monday 15 May Anne and her brother, were convicted and executed” (3). The dispassionate manner in which he relates these events indicates that, for Bernard, the importance of Boleyn’s death lies not in the severity of her punishment, but the enormity of her alleged crimes and his belief in her guilt. The rejection of these accusations as implausible, he writes, is “too hasty a response”, before questioning whether there was “rather more substance to the charges” (2-3). This contention is the core argument of Bernard’s text; as such, when narrating her execution his focus remains on the degree to which her reported behaviour has been considered evidence of her innocence. Such an approach is patent in his discussion of Boleyn’s scaffold speech. He refers to primary accounts of her actions on the scaffold arguing that the evidence suggests that she was poised and accepting of her fate (173-74). He acknowledges that others have romanticised this scene by stating that “all this makes for a deeply moving picture”, yet he does not linger, concluding that “neither Anne’s words nor her demeanour offer any compelling evidence that might take this inquiry further” (174).

One of the fundamental aims of Bernard's research is to interrogate the dominant characterisations of the subjects about whom he writes. Popular media have been instrumental in shaping the ways in which both Anne Boleyn and Henry VIII have been remembered, he argues; for example, he rejects the image of “Bluff King Hal” who is defined by his “lustful pursuit of a dazzling succession of court ladies” (*Fatal* xvii). Indeed, the text does challenge the metanarrative of Boleyn’s history and it is in the depiction of her death that this becomes manifest. In his Epilogue, Bernard recognises that “the Anne Boleyn presented in this book is not the Anne Boleyn to be found in most accounts of her life”, suggesting that his interjection into previous representations is informed by his contention that Boleyn was most likely guilty (193). Bernard’s characterisation is thus at odds with others analysed in this thesis; he explicitly rejects the tyrant trope that has been used to explain Henry’s behaviour and, in turn, the depiction of Boleyn as “the innocent victim of a king who tired of her” (193). Although Bernard deviates from the

dominant representations, it is significant that he defines his alternate interpretation in direct opposition to the medievalist representation that occurs in other texts; although he dismisses the trope of Henry as tyrant, his own version of Henry relies on a familiarity with the motif. Bernard's narration does not rely on the tropes of medievalism, but it directly addresses them; in *Fatal Attractions*, a guilty Anne is executed as a punishment for crimes that she is likely to have committed, not because she is the victim of the unrestrained violence of a medieval tyrant.

This thesis does not aim to comment on the authenticity or accuracy of the portrayals that form its analytical base, but rather to examine how this past is constructed in twenty-first-century historical narratives. Hence the question of Boleyn's guilt is of interest here only insofar as it has influenced the ways in which she has been represented. Further, this thesis does not seek to analyse representations of Henry VIII, although his construction is a predominant focus of this chapter; the analysis of his characterisation in this chapter is integral to addressing the representations of Boleyn, because where an author contends that Boleyn did not commit incest or adultery, her execution is attributed directly to Henry, who is seen to have abrogated established judicial processes in order to extricate himself from the marriage. Boleyn, not Henry, is the focus of the texts analysed; his character is only of interest for the purpose of this study because he is Boleyn's husband and, to some, her executioner. This focus on Boleyn has the potential to impact the way in which he is represented and interpreted; although outside the scope of this thesis, an examination of Henry's characterisation in historical narratives in which he is the primary subject, may contradict his construction in texts about Boleyn. It is consistently Henry's decision to rid himself of his second wife that leads to her death in these narratives, and this contention tarnishes his character. As Foucault writes, where the "legal violence of the executioner" is seen to be a spectacle it is possible for the responsibility of the act to be attributed to those who have condemned, rather than committed, the crime (Foucault 9). Just as Anne's attendants in *Bring up the Bodies* "veiled themselves" so as to disassociate themselves from "this morning's work" (Mantel 395)—they do not want "their husbands or their suitors to look at

them and think of death” and to have “their future lives” defined by death (395)—it is not possible to disentangle the cultural memory of Henry from that of Anne Boleyn and her execution.

By othering and romanticising Boleyn’s execution as the act of a medieval tyrant and Bluebeard, these narratives fail to interrogate the role of a husband who decapitates his wife. Both Ives and Mantel have critiqued the dominant imagery of this period; Ives identifies popular representations that have “made capital of a story linking the most famous of English kings with sex, scandal and wife-killing” (*Life* xiii), while Mantel mocked the proposed marketing strategy of her publishing company in an interview with the *Telegraph*: “they thought, ‘Tudor novels—we know what to do with this. Decapitated women!’”. Such imagery pervades these texts, however, and makes light of the violence that was once enacted on a real woman. Decapitation is no longer a form of judicial punishment in the Western world; however, spousal homicide continues to be endemic. As Tania Modleski argued in the 1980s, popular fiction reflects broader gender politics. In her analysis of romance fiction, she demonstrates that “the mystery of masculine motives”, particularly when concerned with violence or cruelty that is enacted by the hero on the heroine, is “central to most women’s popular romances” (“Disappearing” 439). The archetypal “happy ending”, which is usually defined by the engagement or marriage of the heroine and hero, acts to “alleviate female anxieties about men” (*Loving* xvi). Boleyn’s history “spectacularly fails” to provide the requisite happy ending (Burstein, “Afterlife” 4). However, the Henry that appears in these narratives is not a man, but a tyrant. As such, this Henry and his behaviour do not pose a threat to the safety of twenty-first-century women, isolated as he is in the medieval(ist) past.

This chapter suggests that a reading of Boleyn’s death in light of medievalist analysis reveals that a number of tropes are common to texts which romanticise and other this past, including the detailed descriptions of medieval weaponry and the characterisation of Henry VIII as both a tyrant and as Bluebeard. Previous chapters have considered the history of Boleyn in light of the genre of historical romance. Burstein has argued that the continued presence of

Boleyn in historical romance—and I would add non-fictional histories which mirror romance tropes—can be attributed to the incongruity between her life, ending as it does with execution, and the resolution of the romantic narrative that is demanded by the genre (Burstein, “Afterlife” 2). The depiction of Henry VIII as medieval tyrant, however, means that the lack of a ‘happy ending’ does not necessarily clash with romance motifs. Henry and Boleyn are, along with other key Tudor figures, regularly defined by caricatures, stereotypes and fictional depictions that have largely engulfed their historical personas—a process in which the focus texts are complicit. These fiction and non-fiction narratives thereby indulge in and perpetuate the spectacle of execution, whilst offering a glib account of spousal homicide that is consistent with the stereotypes and caricatures of Tudor England.

CONCLUSION: “THERE ARE NO ENDINGS”

Anne Boleyn’s death is the moment at which she was consigned to the past. Already a subject of contradictory representation during her lifetime, as Eustace Chapuys’ letters demonstrate, through her death she became unknowable and unreachable. Yet historical narratives that take her as a subject extend beyond the moment of her execution. In these texts, Boleyn’s life and her death carry profound implications for those who survive her. Where she is not the sole subject—such as in David Starkey’s *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII*, Emily Purdy’s *The Tudor Wife* or Alison Weir’s *The Lady Elizabeth*—authors consider Henry’s subsequent marriages and the possible impact that Anne had on her successors. The life of Elizabeth, who was two years old at the time of her mother’s execution, is consistently depicted as being a continuation of the narrative arc of Boleyn’s life. When her mother died, Princess Elizabeth was disinherited and declared illegitimate, making her Lady Elizabeth. In 1558, however, she became Queen of England in her own right. Writers consider the incongruity between her prospects as a child, “now officially a bastard” (Denny 324), and the iconic status of Elizabeth I, “the greatest queen England ever had” (Gregory, *Other* 531). Just as these authors turn to Elizabeth to explain Boleyn’s continued significance in the metanarrative of English history, so too will this thesis consider the treatment of Elizabeth in the endings of these texts because the ways in which they explain or gesture toward the future employ two of the processes necessary to the narrativisation of this past: characterisation and emplotment.

Fictional histories—particularly those in which Boleyn’s execution is the dénouement—will often clarify in an Epilogue, as in *The Queen of Subtleties* (Dunn 313-14), or Author’s Note, as in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, that Elizabeth would become queen, yet this future is far from certain in the final pages of the novels. Such depictions discuss the child’s ruination, suggesting that she was “nobody, worth even less than the despised Princess Mary” (Gregory, *Other* 529). This theme of worthlessness is replicated in Purdy’s *The Tudor Wife*, as Jane reflects, “Elizabeth, Anne’s

greatest failure, the princess who should have been a prince, was bastardized and banished to Hadfield” (317). It is this fate that Anne, once she becomes aware that Henry intends to marry Jane Seymour, fears for her child; as she tells her brother George, “I cannot let her be declared a bastard!” (Purdy 251). In *The Queen of Subtleties*, Anne’s hope for Elizabeth is that she will be “pensioned off” and will live “a life in obscurity” (Dunn 311).

In contrast, Weir’s novel begins on the day of Anne’s death and concludes with Elizabeth becoming queen. As such *The Lady Elizabeth* opens with Mary undertaking the “dreadful errand” of conveying this news to her half-sister (5). Elizabeth is devastated by the death of her mother, but is also saddened to learn that she “cannot inherit the throne or rule England after” Henry, and “miserably” questions, “You mean I am not really a princess anymore?” (21). As its title suggests, *The Lady Elizabeth* considers the period between its protagonist’s time as princess and her accession as queen. When the adult Elizabeth learns that her half-sister is dead, making her queen, she considers the “troubles, terrors and obstacles” that had preceded this moment, including “her bastardy, her mother’s execution” and “her precarious childhood” (482-83). The tendency of fiction writers to depict Elizabeth’s prospects as dire reflects the likely concerns of her relatives—particularly Anne Boleyn.

One purpose of historical fiction is to offer histories that comprehend the past in terms of its emotions. As Sarah Pinto has argued, historical novels “represent their pasts with feelings” (“Historical” 193). In the focus novels of this thesis, Tudor England is imagined via the lens of emotion, with authors exploring the anger, fear, hope and happiness of their characters, some of whom are based on real people. This use of emotionality is evident, for example, in Anne’s apprehension about her daughter’s safety and position. The ways in which particular characters respond to Elizabeth’s altered circumstances are indicative of and informed by their already established characterisations, as is evident in Mantel, Gregory and Dunn’s novels.

In their novels, the respective narrators refer to Elizabeth in vastly contrasting ways and express different concerns for the child, although she faces the same challenges in each text. The

focus of the final pages of *Bring up the Bodies* is not Elizabeth's future, but Cromwell's. As Mantel reminds her readers in her Author's Note, Boleyn and her husband are not the protagonists of this novel (410), thus it is not their child whose future is considered. However, as Cromwell ponders "the debts of the dead woman", he reflects on the precariousness (and affluence) of Elizabeth's position: "the status of her daughter is uncertain, but for now the child is well provided with gold fringing for her bed, and with caps of white and purple satin with gilt trim" (404). Cromwell's cold efficiency pervades his listing of individuals awaiting payment—including "the French executioner" who is owed "twenty-three pounds"—and he considers Elizabeth, too, primarily in terms of her mother's debts, noting, "the queen's embroiderer is owed fifty-five pounds" for work that was done for the princess (404). Prior to Anne's execution, however, Elizabeth's vulnerability is made clear and this is crucial to convincing Anne that, although her own "cause is lost", she "may do something for [her] daughter Elizabeth" (344); Cromwell stresses to Anne that it is imperative that she is humble and penitent in the face of the accusations, because "the more patiently you bear with the process, the less bitterness will His Majesty feel when your name is raised hereafter" (344). In these examples, Cromwell works to achieve his own aims, which are to ensure Anne's co-operation and to settle the king's finances; he is ultimately unperturbed by the welfare of the princess.

In contrast, both Gregory and Dunn's narrators—Mary and Anne Boleyn, respectively—express deep concern for Elizabeth, her position and safety. In spite of their shared sentiment, both women respond to their concerns in vastly different ways. Awaiting execution, Dunn's Anne considers the "motherly wisdom" she "should" impart (such as, "if you want to keep your head, keep it down") but suspects her efforts to be pointless (311). In light of her guess that Elizabeth's "Tudor, Boleyn" heritage will see her "run the risk of losing [her head] anyway, one day", Anne chooses instead to instruct her daughter to "be [her] mother's daughter and hold [her head] high" (311). This, the final passage of the novel, encapsulates the pride and ambition that Anne exhibits throughout the narrative.

Gregory, conversely, closes her novel with Mary's escape from Henry's court with her husband William and their children. William agrees that Mary's "part" in court politics "is done", but tells her that this cannot be said of the next generation, who will one day "be sailing upriver again, back to court and power, sometime in their lives" (329). Mary's fears for her children and niece are justified, given that she has so recently witnessed her siblings' executions, yet they also stem from her rejection of power in favour of stability and domesticity. Throughout the novel, Mary becomes increasingly critical of her sister's choice to pursue power, viewing Anne as immoral and dangerous. For that reason, she "shook [her] head in protest" at William's suggestion that her children would return to court, reiterating her hope for a quiet life at Rochford (329). The naiveté of this hope is highlighted by William, who tells her: "'They're half Boleyn and half Tudor,' he said. 'My God, what a combination. And their cousin Elizabeth the same. Nobody can say what they will do'" (329).

Dunn and Gregory depict their respective narrators as fearing for Elizabeth—and in Mary's case, her own children as well—but their emotional responses differ. Mary hopes that her domestic sanctuary will also protect her children, while Dunn's Anne accepts that Elizabeth will risk a similar fate to her, but hopes that she will face it with pride and conviction. Weir's *The Lady Elizabeth* is the only novel analysed here that offers a detailed characterisation of Elizabeth, as Dunn and Gregory feature her only briefly because she is a child at the time of Boleyn's death. Rather than alluding to future success by invoking Elizabeth's character, they instead look to the characters of Anne and Henry, which have been established in the novels. In referencing her combined Boleyn-Tudor heritage, Dunn and Gregory explain that it is her resemblance to her parents that will give her strength whilst also placing her in danger. Thus, the characterisations of Anne and Henry that dominate these novels—rather than any possible prior knowledge of the English monarchy—explain their daughter's survival and success: we, as readers, know that she will be ruthless, intelligent, charming, stubborn and determined.

Characterisation of these historical figures is not, however, limited to fiction. In recounting Anne's final words, in which she described Henry as "a good, gentle, gracious and amiable prince", Starkey writes that "knowing Anne, one might suspect satire" (583). This sense of 'knowing' Boleyn's character pervades the conclusions of the texts discussed in this thesis, although the characterisations that appear therein are not necessarily similar. A notable contrast is evident, for example, in the works of Denny and Bernard. Denny argues that "Elizabeth was her mother's daughter in many ways", citing her dedication to Protestant reform, education, scholarship and the arts (327). Elizabeth was, she argues, "born to rule and prepared for this destiny" because of both her lineage and her education under "Protestant scholars", upon which her mother had insisted (325). Bernard, however, rejects the "traditional" view of "a formidable woman" who "sparked off the English Reformation" (193). Bernard's distinctive characterisation of Boleyn is clear: the Anne Boleyn of *Fatal Attractions* did not refuse to have sex with Henry until they were married, did not inspire the schism from the Roman Catholic Church and was not "the patroness of protestant reformers" (193). In light of his rejection of a number of widely held views about Anne, it is telling that Bernard does not mention Elizabeth in his Epilogue. He does not consider Elizabeth's experiences, but in his discussion of Anne's guilt instead looks to doubts that were cast over her paternity. The potential that she was not Henry's child is raised in other texts—most notably, *The Lady Elizabeth* in which Mary questions whether Elizabeth is Mark Smeaton's child (Weir 338). For Bernard, however, contemporary rumours that questioned whether Elizabeth was Henry's daughter, promulgated primarily by Chapuys (*Fatal* 181), are amongst the "fragmentary sources available to us" that suggest that the accusations of infidelity against Anne were not entirely unfounded (182).

For those non-fiction authors who consider Boleyn to have been innocent of the charges laid against her, Elizabeth's accession is constructed as Anne's vindication. In these instances, both characterisation and emplotment are evident. Anne, Weir argues, "would have gloried in and enjoyed Elizabeth's triumph" (*Tower* 328), while Ives questions: "Is it fanciful to feel that

after twenty years, the mother in the nearby grave in the chapel of St Peter was at last vindicated?" (*Life* 366). Here, both Ives and Weir base their speculation about how Anne might have responded to Elizabeth becoming queen on their already established characterisations. Just as Dunn's fictional Anne considers her daughter's future in light of her own ambition and pride, Weir imagines Anne's gratification should she have lived to witness this moment, while Ives positions Elizabeth's success as exoneration for her own failure to provide a male heir. However, Boleyn was beheaded twenty-two years before her daughter became queen and by establishing a connection between these events, Weir and Ives engage in the process of emplotment: the 'facts' of Anne's execution and Elizabeth's accession are connected as in a story.

It is not only Elizabeth's accession that is linked to Boleyn's death, but also her iconic status as England's Virgin Queen. The perception that marriage was inherently dangerous for women is described by Dolan as Boleyn's legacy to her daughter, who famously never married (*Marriage* 139). Denny, too, writes that, along with a talent for languages and music, Elizabeth "perhaps" inherited a suspicion of "love and marriage" from her mother (327). Having outlined Elizabeth's disdain for marriage and how contemporary reports expressed confusion about the reasons for her attitude, Denny rhetorically asks: "Did the young child remember more about her mother and her execution than anyone had assumed? ... Elizabeth had learned a hard lesson well" (327). In *The Tudor Wife* this lesson is delivered directly, and Anne, knowing that Henry wants to end their marriage, tells her daughter, "No man is worth crying over! Guard your heart, Elizabeth ... keep it under lock and key, and be wary of who you let near it, lest you be betrayed. Let no man be your master; be mistress of your own fate instead" (Purdy 248). This outlook is only consolidated as Elizabeth bears witness to her stepmothers' and half-sister's respective experiences of marriage: Jane Seymour and Catherine Parr each die after childbirth; Anne of Cleves' marriage is immediately annulled, Katherine Howard is executed, and the marriage of Mary I is disastrous, both personally and politically. Elizabeth's growing determination never to marry becomes one of the core themes of *The Lady Elizabeth*. Her ruminations on Katherine

Howard's execution demonstrate the way in which she associates death with marriage.

Contemplating "the horror of Queen Katherine's beheading and her mother's", and Jane Seymour's death in childbirth, she concludes that "if you let a man [have sex with] you, or—worse still—if he forced you, you might die, one way or another" (Weir, *Elizabeth* 92). She thus resolves that she will "never marry" (92).

These narratives employ varied modes of emplotment to represent Anne Boleyn, as is demonstrated by the different ways in which Elizabeth is described in each text. What is consistent is the presence of the historical sublime. Amy Elias argues that we are "hardwired to desire" the past, yet we are unable to reach an ultimate and encompassing understanding of it ("Metahistorical" 160). It is this desire for the past and acknowledgment of its unknowability that constitutes the historical sublime: "a longing for the past—not a longing for a past simpler time or a past simpler culture, but for *the past itself* as a situating, grounding foundation for knowledge and truth" (Elias, *Sublime* 22-23, emphasis in original).

The erasure of Boleyn and her memory from Henry's court is regularly addressed in the focus narratives, speaking to the unknowability of this past. In *The Queen of Subtleties*, Anne writes of her fear that her daughter will not know her mother and cites this as her motivation for writing the memoir: "Elizabeth, you'll be told lies about me, or perhaps even nothing at all. I don't know which is worse" (Dunn 1). The child, Weir suggests, "grew up reluctant to speak her [mother's] name" (*Tower* 328), and is advised "to forget you ever had a mother like that" (*Elizabeth* 127). Purdy's narrator Jane reflects that "it was as if Anne ... had never existed" as she watches as "Anne's initials, crest, and motto were scraped off the walls or painted over" and her "portraits were taken down off the walls to be either burned or consigned to dusty attics, as every trace of her must be removed" (316). "Henry", it is argued, "wanted no reminders" (316). Not only was Boleyn consigned to the past, so too were conspicuous markers of her former presence—except, of course, for Elizabeth. During the final decade of Henry's reign, Ives contends that there was "little said of Anne, and little left of her but her child, the young

Elizabeth” (*Life* 365). Elizabeth’s accession thus represents the point at which Boleyn was no longer a “non-person” (364). The efforts to remove Boleyn do not preclude the similarities between Elizabeth and Anne in temperament—because “just like her mother, Elizabeth would not be cowed or cower before Henry” (Purdy 360)—and appearance: “it angered the King to see Anne’s dark, defiant eyes staring back at him from out of their daughter’s face” (317). While the similarities between mother and daughter are noted, the extent to which Elizabeth remembered Anne is unclear and is a topic of speculation (Denny 327). For fictional representations of Elizabeth, memories of Anne are vague but desired, as in *The Lady Elizabeth* in which she responds to the memories of others by “avidly drinking in ... information about her mother”, and using their accounts to expand her own vague recollections (Weir, *Elizabeth* 70). Elizabeth’s presence in these narratives thus signals Henry’s failure to entirely erase memories of Anne, whilst also demonstrating that this memory is intangible and that Boleyn, *herself*, is gone.

Chapter One outlined my theory of historical authenticity. I argue that authenticity, whilst subjective and intertextual, is essential to the sense that a representation ‘rings true’ and is consistent with previously held ideas about the subject. Authentic representations, however, need not be *accurate*. Accuracy refers to historical veracity and the degree to which an historical narrative can be considered to be factual. Thus a text can be considered historically accurate if it reflects the known facts about a particular period, such as dates and names, but also the customs or milieu of a period and encompasses such details as clothing and transport. Authenticity, however, is intertextual, culturally conditioned and subjective; any given text can be read as authentic or inauthentic by different individuals because, as I have argued, the term denotes the extent to which a text is consistent with previously held views about an historical period, event or individual. Because authenticity is concerned with perceptions of the past, rather than the past itself, it can be applied to aspects and ideas that can neither be confirmed nor denied, such as speech patterns or personality.

My analysis in Part Two of this thesis demonstrates that the dominant representation that emerges from the texts that are the focus of this study does not—and cannot—offer a wholly accurate portrait of Anne Boleyn. This thesis is not a history of Boleyn. I do not presume to offer a definitive account of Anne Boleyn, nor do I wish to do so. Moreover, my purpose has not been to simply highlight the inaccuracies of historical narratives. Instead, I have emphasised that there are aspects of Boleyn’s narrative that have been integral to her characterisation that are ultimately unknowable, including her motives, ambitions and anxieties, but these aspects of her character are consistently represented in strikingly similar ways. Although not an *accurate* representation of Boleyn, the characterisation that I have identified is, perhaps, an *authentic* characterisation for the period of textual production that I have analysed. I demonstrate that the ‘Anne’ that is found within these narratives is dependent on and created by a range of textual conceits and I have accordingly interrogated the cultural norms that shape the perception that this Anne is, indeed, authentic.

It is near impossible to analyse Boleyn’s time as mistress or queen as it is represented in twenty-first-century historical narratives without continually returning to her death. This is because emplotment invariably determines the shape of the narratives: Anne is, first, a desired mistress who becomes a bad queen and is finally punished with death. When identifying aspects of Boleyn’s life that I wished to investigate, I initially selected these three aspects of her narrative because they broadly represent three moments which we ‘know’ occurred, even if we cannot know their details: Anne Boleyn was mistress to Henry VIII, became his queen in 1533 and was, in May 1536, executed on charges of adultery. As I undertook my research, however, it became apparent that these were not represented as isolated events. Instead, in translating the chaos of the past into narrative form, these events are invoked and explored as a way of answering the questions: how and why did Henry kill Anne? It is this very quality of narrativisation that means these texts can be classified as histories, rather than chronicles or annals (White, *Practical* 53). Instead of simply listing known events chronologically, a history attempts to make sense of those

events and explain the impact that they had on their context; as White articulates, in order to “qualify as ‘historical,’ the event, set, or series [of events] must also be validly describable as if they had the attributes of elements in a *plot* of a story” (*Practical* 53, emphasis in original).

The events of Boleyn’s life are ‘historical’ because of the ways in which they can be seen to intersect with and influence pivotal moments in English history, most notably the English Reformation and the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. As well as identifying the particular way in which emplotment works in the historical narratives addressed in this thesis, I have elucidated the ways in which this process of narrativisation can be problematic. My analysis revealed that, in looking to Boleyn’s behaviours as a royal mistress or queen in order to explain her eventual destruction, these writers suggest—implicitly or otherwise—that it was Boleyn herself who was responsible for the final, cataclysmic event that was her execution.

This thesis identifies the flaws in such a contention; the representation of Boleyn as deviant both before and during her marriage relies on assumptions about femininity, and the limitations that continue to be imposed on women’s bodies and voices. When Boleyn is not characterised as deviant, she is positioned in terms of feminine models of behaviour; for example, Anne is a good woman because she maintains her chastity in the face of Henry’s sexual coercion. These narratives question what behaviours constitute good or bad femininity, and frame Boleyn’s death in terms of her adherence to or deviation from these contemporary *and* historical gender norms. Stereotypical and gendered constructions of Boleyn are thus critiqued throughout this thesis, in part, because the framing of culpability and responsibility with regard to violence against women remains a critical site of feminist debate in the twenty-first century. More specifically, however, the rhetorical strategies that I identify and analyse distort the characterisations of Boleyn, representing her in terms of gendered tropes, archetypes and norms.

It is the contestation between the desire to know the past and the impossibility of achieving that knowledge that forms the primary focus of this thesis. Anne Boleyn’s character in twenty-first-

century historical narratives has been both constructed and gendered. The texts studied here have been classified in different ways, often in opposition to one another: non-fiction or fiction, high or low literature, biographical or academic history, bodice-ripper or historiographic metafiction. In his 2014 text *The Practical Past*, Hayden White argues that it is fundamental to scholarly practice that we constantly criticise “presuppositions and assumptions which ‘go without saying,’ so obvious are they taken to be foundational to the practice in question” (12). The existence of a dichotomy between history and literature as two distinct categories, he continues, is one assumption that demands interrogation (12).

The comparative textual analysis undertaken in this thesis demonstrates the limitations of understanding fictional and non-fictional histories to be diametrically opposed and unrelated modes of narrating the past. Ostensibly, non-fictional histories are equally as capable of fictionalising the past in order to meet the demands of genre or gender as their explicitly fictional counterparts; in turn, novels are able to engage with historiographical practice and issues of authenticity and accuracy. Historical narratives about Anne Boleyn—a figure who has been both derided and idealised since her death, and about whom only fragmentary evidence survives—are a site of speculation, contestation and romanticisation. A close reading of the ways in which Boleyn is characterised in these texts reveals the tropes, cultural contexts, generic conventions and gender norms that underpin this characterisation, and thus demonstrates the ways in which literary techniques influence historical representation. My reading of these narratives uncovers the ‘fictional’ elements of historical narratives, regardless of their claims to truthful representation. It can thus be concluded that the ‘Anne’ of twenty-first-century historical writing is equally shaped by literary techniques of representation as she is by the actuality of the past.

Scholars, such as White, have effectively demonstrated that histories are narratives that utilise similar modes of representation as literature. This thesis builds on White’s theoretical foundations by demonstrating the ways in which the history of one individual has been constructed across fictional and non-fictional histories in the early twenty-first century. It is the

first extended study to apply White's theories to one subject of historical writing. My critique challenges the philosophy of empiricist history, insofar as it argues that it is not possible to ultimately *know* the past. Historical narratives about Boleyn clearly demonstrate this unknowability. As the case study of Eustace Chapuys explored in Chapter Two shows, writers of fiction and non-fiction each acknowledge that primary sources are not neutral but are the only window to the past that we have, and thus cannot be ignored. The very process of selecting, reading and interpreting such sources adds new layers of textualisation and the past itself becomes increasingly distant. Such a process does not involve nefarious falsification, rather it is simply an unavoidable aspect of the process of historical representation. Eric Ives, for example, is an exemplary scholar, and it is his analysis of the available evidence that has led to a biographical account of Boleyn that has significantly enriched our understanding of Tudor England. Yet his text is, necessarily, a *representation* of her life and death.

It should not be surmised that historical research is a futile endeavour; we cannot know the past in its entirety, but this does not mean we cannot learn about aspects of the past. The assumption and speculation that pervade all historical narratives—and which are identified throughout this thesis with the case study of Boleyn—should not be a read in terms of their failure to produce a truthful representation of the subject. Accepting that histories can only be provisional and are always textualised—in the narratives themselves and the evidence that informs interpretations—allows for multiple representations of the same past that are not necessarily competing with one another, but which offer different perspectives.

As such, we can conclude that one of the benefits of self-reflexive historical practice is that it provides new opportunities for questioning the ways in which we construct gender in historical narratives. Self-reflexive historical practice, in which multiple viewpoints are celebrated and speculation is openly acknowledged, holds the potential to offer a similar space in which the experiences of 'the ex-centric' can be addressed. Boleyn is an apt example of historical representation, but by no means is she unique as a subject: she is not the only individual whose

history is contested, nor is she alone in having been romanticised, marginalised and gendered. As such, my proposal that self-reflexivity and competing narratives be celebrated in historical writing does not only carry implications for the ways that Boleyn's history is represented, but for historical representation more broadly.

Historiographic metafiction—the category introduced by Linda Hutcheon, and which White considers the “dominant genre of postmodernist writing” (*Practical* 7)—emerges as the ideal form through which to explore the mutable past. The self-reflexive quality of the genre, which continuously reminds the reader that the narrative is merely one of many possible representations, is evident in Mantel's *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*. Her novels are not perfect representations nor do they claim to be, and in many ways Mantel engages in the same gendered processes of representation as the other authors examined. Her representation of Boleyn is, however, governed by and mediated through the imagined perspective of her narrator, Thomas Cromwell; we are not encouraged to view the character as the ‘real’ Anne because we can only view her in light of Cromwell's opinions, biases and experiences.

The ‘metafiction’ of Hutcheon's genre refers to the ways in which these postmodern historical novels acknowledge that they are constructions; however, White argues that historical non-fiction is also metafictional, and that its metafiction relies on in its capacity to appropriate a literary format whilst insisting that the story that is being told is truthful:

Here is a congeries of facts organized for presentation as if they were (or had the form of) a literary and more specifically a fictional thing. The form of the story is just there to make the information (facts and arguments about the facts, their nature, relationships, etc.) more palatable. So read and enjoy but once you are done, kick away the fictional ladder on which you have climbed and contemplate the facts in themselves for what they tell you about a ‘form of life’ now dead and past. (*Practical* 19)

This narrative structure of non-fictional histories must be embraced, not denied. Self-reflexive scholarly history can, like historiographic metafiction, acknowledge its provisionality. Hence, the narrative techniques that we, as historians, employ are not merely tools to make the consumption of the facts 'more palatable', as White argues, but are essential to the ways in which we comprehend and negotiate the past.

Histories are not fictionalised, but they are constructed. Each author of non-fiction whose work has been analysed in this thesis uses rhetorical strategies to propel their argument and entertain their reader. Only Bernard indicates that although his narrative is biographical in format, it is also explicitly *his* interpretation of the charges against Boleyn. The acknowledgement of fragmentary evidence occurs across the non-fiction texts examined in this thesis, yet Bernard's narrative is explicit in its presentation of a scholarly argument. I disagree with the contention that he puts forward regarding the likelihood of Boleyn's guilt, and have argued that his use of evidence is, at times, problematic; however, he effectively demonstrates that his text constitutes a revisionist account of the charges against Boleyn, signalling where his narrative deviates from previous interpretations and where his interpretations are informed by speculation, not 'facts'. Although this approach often relies on positioning his work as the antithesis of fiction, Bernard does signal that his interpretation is not the only possible version that could be surmised from the extant evidence.

Bernard's acknowledgement that his role as an historian involves interpretation and speculation does not, however, discount the limitations that are apparent in *Fatal Attractions*. His narrative, like all of the texts here examined, relies on limited paradigms of gender which regularly conflate feminine virtue or intelligence with sexual or submissive behaviours. Diana Wallace has effectively demonstrated that historical novels are a space in which women's histories can be explored and previous portrayals can be challenged. This is a genre dominated by women writers and readers, but it is the fictional quality of historical novels that is integral to their revisionist potential. Where evidence is elusive, historical fiction allows writers to imagine

how women whose histories have elsewhere been neglected or lost may have experienced historical events. The example of Anne Boleyn demonstrates, however, that making women—or, in this case, a woman—the focus of historical narratives does not negate the problems of gendered representation. Boleyn has long been a legitimate subject of historical enquiry but has been marginalised, in spite of her prominence. This is because assumptions, which are rarely labelled as such, are made about her character and held to be true although they are unverifiable. This trend is equally dominant in historical fiction as it is in non-fictional history.

Although a revisionist history is made possible in historical fiction, it is not a requirement of the form, and the depictions of women found in historical novels can be shaped by problematic contemporary cultural contexts. It is not sufficient to revise prior representations of historical figures such as Boleyn because they rely on gendered norms and tropes without turning a critical eye inward, and considering the ways in which our own culture constructs gender. Post-feminism is not the only cultural paradigm impacting representations of women in the twenty-first-century; it is, however, significant because it uses the language of feminism, namely by way of the notion of empowerment, to promote regressive gender norms. While writers of post-feminist texts ostensibly focus on women's stories and experiences they predominantly define women in relation to men, either by relationship status or dichotomous views of femininity and masculinity. Post-feminism is integral to the representations of Boleyn that are to be found in Gregory's *The Other Boleyn Girl* and Emily Purdy's *The Tudor Wife*, but the thesis concludes that gender norms underpin the representations that are found in *all* of the focus narratives, which highlights the extent to which Boleyn's characterisation is necessarily tied to her constructed femininity, and her roles of mistress, wife, mother and queen—or, rather, the extent to which she fails to perform these adequately.

By no means are historical fictions alone in their capacity to reimagine the past in light of a questioning of 'how' and 'why' historical actors have been represented in particular ways. Ives demonstrates the value of such reconsideration in his discussion of previous assumptions that

were made regarding Boleyn's fashion: "older historians despised" Anne's "preoccupation with glamour" because they deemed this to be a sign of "feminine weakness", where she can now be "recognized" as a political figure who used her physical appearance and public image as a tool to exercise power (*Life* xiii). The cultural context of a text's production and tropes of representations are integral to historical narratives. While this thesis identifies the authentic 'Anne' for the early twenty-first-century, it has also questioned *why* this particular characterisation is read as such. In this study, I have demonstrated that crucial aspects of the depictions of historical figures are consistent with literary archetypes—such as the 'femme fatale', 'wicked stepmother' or 'Bluebeard'—and are shaped by ephemeral aspects of the past, including emotion. As such, my research reveals and critiques the specific rhetorical strategies evident in fictional and non-fictional histories of Anne Boleyn, and the ways in which these strategies are gendered. This analysis shows that the literary devices and techniques used by historians go beyond the use of narrative, and the presentation of 'the facts' in an engaging manner. By engaging with concepts of character and affect, writers of history risk reducing complex individuals to mere archetypes. Characterisation in this mode does nothing to enrich our understanding of the past and perpetuates damaging gender norms in the present.

This thesis argues that previously held distinctions between fictional and non-fictional history are tenuous because both forms rely heavily on rhetorical strategies; however, it also concludes that such distinctions must be reconsidered because both forms are not only capable of challenging the gendered assumptions of previous scholars, but have a responsibility to do so. My close textual analysis of twenty-first-century written narratives of Anne Boleyn demonstrates that a written account of her life and death that fully encapsulates the lived detail of her past is not possible; she was, however, a real woman. Hence, it is imperative that, in our continued attempts to represent her, writers acknowledge that Anne Boleyn was, like all individuals, complex and contradictory.

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