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**Project Title: Anne Boleyn: Historical and
Contemporary Perceptions**
(Working Title)

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ABSTRACT

The focus of my MA is on the sixteenth century Queen consort, Anne Boleyn and how media has represented her through history across the platforms of film, television and print. Using historical documents of the time, the study will delve into her character as a celebrity, fashion icon, religious reformist and of course, a royal, comparing and relating these documents to how she has come to be depicted in modern times by the media.

There are many differing opinions, both historical and contemporary, of who Anne Boleyn was and what she was like, both in appearance and in character. Some say she had red hair, others dark, some even claim she had six fingers and other deformities, all depending on whose depiction you read. However, the purpose of the MA is not to determine if she did or didn't have any abnormalities; it is to explore the perception of Anne Boleyn as an icon, how we came to these representations, and ask the question: Would there be a place for Anne in contemporary society?

Anne Boleyn is the most famous of the English Queen's; her life and her death have fascinated us for over 500 years. There are many opposing arguments about her, especially regarding her death. Some historians, like G.W. Bernard, believe that Anne was guilty of the crimes she was accused of, David Starkey and Alison Weir use a wealth of references in their work but the undertone suggests elements of bias.

However Anne is seen through the eyes of people, the fact that she is still being seen, albeit through print, broadcast and stage, is what is so sublimely captivating. A woman who in my opinion, if history is to be believed, was ambitiously courageous and determined, who, in an age where women were traditionally oppressed, contributed significantly to the religious structure of sixteenth century England, which, centuries later still holds an influence. It is because of all these intriguing elements I am basing my MA on Anne Boleyn.

The framework will be focused mainly on Anne Boleyn and the perception given of her in the sixteenth century and if these accounts ring true to the representation of the Anne we have come to recognise. There were no surviving original portraits of Anne since Henry VIII had them destroyed after her execution. However, there is a coin depicting an image of a woman which is not especially clear that is said to be Anne Boleyn. The portrait most commonly known of Anne, hangs in the National Portrait Gallery. Comparing the painting to actresses who have portrayed Anne Boleyn there is no mistaking this is the image researchers base the likeness of Anne on. Although the main theme is on Anne Boleyn and how she has been perceived over time, exploration into modern representations of celebrities, politicians and royals will be covered and used as a comparison to Anne. The research may spark parallels and therefore will answer the question addressed above.

CONTEXTUAL and CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The main focus of the project is on Anne Boleyn and how she has been perceived through history and the media; therefore the sources I will centre on are original documents, biographies, other texts such as plays for the stage and broadcast productions. My project will have parallels with the primary sources, but in some instances may differ due to the content and who wrote them at the time. There will be obvious biases in the original accounts, those who were opposed to Anne Boleyn and those who were in support of her, so this needs to be considered when carrying out research. What will also be interesting to examine are accounts written by people when Anne was first in favour with the King, and comparing these to accounts written by the same people but after she had fallen from grace, Thomas Cromwell being one.

The project is by no means intended to be a biography of Anne Boleyn. However, the project will have strong parallels to biographies such that source material will come from the same source as the other writers. In this instance it is important I remain impartial such that I can objectively critique their work

and differentiate between speculation and fact. I also need to remain objective when looking at how the media have portrayed her, analysing the various depictions, and how close these are to historical accounts. Do the media prefer to cast her as aesthetically pleasing or like historical accounts suggest 'not a handsome woman'? Is she seen as ruthless as opposed to courageous, manipulative rather than ambitious, formidable or encouraging? Iconology and iconography will be explored when analysing the interpretation of Anne Boleyn portraits, identifying symbolic forms associated with her.

There are many films and television series that portray Anne Boleyn, the most recent being *The Tudors* (Show Time) which captures Anne Boleyn as a religious reformer, extremely ambitious and sensuously seductive. Parallels to my work and those of broadcast media will be evident as researchers usually take an in-depth study of the period/character in order for the perception to be as close to history as possible. Nevertheless, they will only go on what they decide to research. This can lead to bias, consciously or not as writer, producer or director will have his or her own agenda. *The Tudors*, is a prime example in regards to the iconography, the character of Henry VIII is especially exaggerated. Just as parallels will come apparent, differences will also emerge. Differences will become visible in the biography accounts, Alison Weir is sometimes seen as being unfavourable to Anne, and the same is said about Philippa Gregory, the author. I will also read material from *theanneboleynfiles.com* as they do literary reviews and reports on biographies and fiction linked to that time period. This will provide useful points of view as each report is written on a blog for others to compliment or challenge. What is also fascinating is the huge number of people who are passionate about this part of history and become rather irritated when they believe someone has written an untrue account of events.

At this stage it is undecided what the final product will be. One idea is a fictitious narrative based on Anne Boleyn linking in representations of women of that time. For example, being oppressed, dominated by men and not always educated. Usually it was only women born into nobility who were educated and even then it was not always the case. Alternatively, a more

factual piece based primarily on Anne Boleyn and comparing contemporary influential women to her. Whichever I decide, the biographies and primary research will take a major role in the product, either from differing opinions or drawing on the same conclusions.

Research will be structured around a number of areas consisting of the following:

- Original documents, historical and contemporary
- Biographies of Anne Boleyn
- Broadcast material: film, television series and documentaries
- Stage productions
- Auto/biographies of selected contemporary women
- Visual culture, film and also photography

Some original documents can now be accessed via the internet; sites such as The National Archives, englishhistory.net, British History Online and theanneboleynfiles.com, all provide an array of original letters, speeches, diary entries and manuscripts from the time. Accompanying the documents is usually a breakdown of the contents as well as discussions into its authenticity, which will prove to be very useful.

Researching historical documents will give me an insight into how Anne Boleyn was portrayed from the perspective of a participant or observer at the time. These will play a fundamental role in helping me understand what I'm looking for, although unfortunately, some documents, which claim to be originals, are believed to be forgeries. For example, on the website englishhistory.net, regarding the letter written by Anne Boleyn to Henry VIII on 6th May while she was in the Tower 'debate over its authenticity continues and no definitive answer is possible.' At the same time, there are various representations of Anne Boleyn written by people who had differing opinions of her. This is an issue I will explore throughout the project.

Online sources are useful, just as references in books can be, however, the Internet is simply an intelligence and not a mind so visiting the National Archives in Kew and the British Library, for example, and viewing original documentation will clarify any doubts of authenticity. Therefore, how I access these and decide which ones are relevant is something I need to look into. Contacting the National Archives will be a start and hopefully, if they are unable to help me, point me in the direction of someone who can. The British Library offer 'Help for Researchers' where information specialists from the British Library guide you to the most appropriate material for your research as well as suggesting other libraries, archives etc. that may be of interest. This service can be accessed while at the library or online. Nevertheless, some of the sources I use will be the same as those the biographers/historians have used.

Other potential sources include the following books:

- David Starkey: *Six Wives. The Queens of Henry VIII*
- Alison Weir: *The Lady in the Tower*
- Eric Ives: *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*
- G.W. Bernard: *Fatal Attractions*

This is by no means an exhaustive list; they are only the beginning of what will no doubt become an extensive list of reference material.

The books mentioned are biographies of Anne Boleyn, but very interestingly take different views of who she was, what she represented and even if she deserved the fate served to her, often being quite biased. It is fundamental I engage in the readings of these biographers, since the project is mainly focusing on the perception of her across history and through media. It will be fascinating to know the views of these writers as historians, like theorists and their ideas, question one another's validity of their sources. A good example of this is demonstrated in David Starkey's *Six Wives; The Queens of Henry VIII*

where he refers to Agnes Strickland and the reliability of her writing in her book *Lives of the Queens of England* (London, 1854):

'...there is almost as great a drawback to Strickland's work. For she was indiscriminating and credulous and, as a true daughter of the Romantic Era, loved a legend – the more sentimental and doom-laden the better. Such stuff seeps through her pages like a virus. Like a virus, it risks corrupting the whole. And, like a virus again, it has proved almost impossible to get rid of – with consequences that linger to the present.'

Nevertheless, it is not just historians who query sources, the everyday reader or book critique can also argue any point history biographers make. G.W. Bernard's, *Anne Boleyn, Fatal Attractions* has contrasting reviews, some although not agreeing with him, respect his views, while others say his theories have no evidence to back up his claims:

'Bernard gives the most controversial queen of history a tabloid treatment, which could be headlined as: "no evidence, but found guilty."' (annboleyn.com)

Historians can only go on representations of the time and decide which view they take as the most truthful and give their reasons for this. Likewise, scriptwriters, producers and directors do the same with the information that is presented to them, via researchers/historians. A representation is a likeness or similarity of something or someone and it depends on the writer or director's agenda of how they want their Anne Boleyn to be depicted. This is an area that I will analyse, just like the written accounts; I will also explore the ways Anne Boleyn has been cast and mediated on screen.

The constructionist view will be explored when analysing films from 1933 (*The Private Life of Henry VIII*) through to the present day (*The Tudors*, 2007+), noting any stark contrasts in character portrayal or any omissions in history. Theories such as postmodernism will emerge through deeper analysis into contemporary representations of her, as will elements of feminism when

considering Anne Boleyn living in a time when women were heavily oppressed. Narrative theory will be introduced as work begins on the final product, considering the structure, writing style and demographic.

The next stage of the project considers influential women of contemporary society, researching a selection of modern women and linking any comparisons to Anne Boleyn.

Modern women I am considering studying are:

- Margaret Thatcher/Kasturba Ghandi – the political link (albeit Anne in regards to religious faction)
- Madonna/Kate Moss/Coco Chanel/Bridget Bardot – celebrity/fashion icon link
- Princess Diana- the royal link

The same process of research will be conducted, exploring how these women have been portrayed and perceived through time over the media platforms. In addition, visual culture will be explored when looking at broadcast texts and how the use of cinematography, mise-en-scene and setting add to the representation of time, place and characters on screen as well as in still photography. The use of photography techniques to recreate the flat image of portraiture, for example, will be examined comparing how 16th century visual art was used to represent the subject of a painting to how visual art is used today to capture a depiction of a subject. Furthermore, issues of identity, individual and as a collective will be raised, considering stereotypes of women and how, through visual art, women have come to be seen by society. Photographers, such as Cindy Sherman will be interesting to examine, focusing on their representations of women. A review, on Sherman's exhibition, 'A Retrospective', written on ARTINFO's website, captures elements of identity in society that connect to areas in my project:

'What emerges through these images is a subtle analysis of individual identity, both the fantasies that it generates

and the forces that shape it. This immersion in the uncertain, conflictual zones where individual identity struggles with the collective imaginary, stereotypes and issues of symbolic power, can be either playful or—when it touches on horror and repulsion, on the decay and dismembering of the body—very dark.'

Elements of feminism will draw into this, as visual art illustrates oppression, constrictions and conformity enforced on women, as well as the male gaze approach of women as sexual objects to be desired.

PROJECT CONTENT

Content

It is unclear as yet to what the final product for submission will be. However, there are three possibilities I am considering.

Fiction

My first idea is to write a fictitious narrative based partly on the character of Anne Boleyn and partly on a fabricated character based in Hull. The idea stems from C J Sansom, a historian who also writes fiction, his books in this series include *Dissolution*, *Dark Fire*, *Sovereign*, *Revelation* and *Heartstone*. Sansom's protagonist is a lawyer during the reign of Henry VIII and his books are detailed with descriptions of the time, with strong representations of historical characters and places.

As with all writers, research into the era/person they are basing their story on needs to be extensive, especially if setting it in a historical period of time. The research I carry out during my study will support my writing of Anne Boleyn and the Tudor period. However, additional research into Hull during this era, which has not been previously mentioned, would need to be realised.

The theme of the story is yet unknown, the reformation is a possibility basing it around one, perhaps two years before Anne's execution (1534-1535).

Thomas Cromwell was in favour of the dissolution of the monasteries, reaping

the benefits of the gold and other rich paraphernalia the monasteries housed. However, although Anne was a reformist she did not wish to go as far as Cromwell nor turn her back on the poor and destitute, instead invest the money in educational institutions.

The narrative would follow a merchant in Hull who has been given the task to present the Queen of England (Anne Boleyn) a jewel/or something similar which was housed in a northern monastery, but on request from Anne has been ordered to be recovered and sent directly to her. No explanation is given, other than it is to remain as secret as possible. However, there is also another party who is very interested in the item and who will go to any extremities to claim it. The merchant has to tackle and overcome the antagonist as well as ensure the secrecy of the object, returning it to Anne safely.

Script

The second of my ideas is to write a script, possibly for screen rather than stage, based on the Anne Boleyn story. However, it would be set in modern times and rather it be a royal focus, the characters would be politicians. Henry VIII's role cast as the Prime Minister, Thomas Cromwell as the Chancellor of the Exchequer and closet advisor, Duke of Norfolk (Anne's uncle) Secretary of State for Justice and so on. The narrative would be the same, the difference being there would be no religious reform, just a loss in public confidence in the Prime Minister, with a contemporary backdrop.

Factual

Anne Boleyn in a modern society: Parallels to women of contemporary times. The third of my ideas is to write a book based on the research conducted on Anne Boleyn, highlighting how history and the media and the various representations, which have emerged over the centuries, have perceived her. The book, which is not so much a biography as an analysis into the different representations of Anne, will include numerous documents of the time, as well as the thoughts and opinions deciphered from historians and biographers of Anne Boleyn. It will then explore the different representations that have

emerged through the media of Anne Boleyn, highlighting any stark differences in her portrayal in primary sources and historians and through visual culture. The next section of the book will focus on the representation of a selected few influential contemporary women. It will compare original documents and biographers to the media's perception of these women, analysing visual perceptions alongside the written representations. Finally identifying any parallels between these women and Anne Boleyn.

Functional Requirements

The final product is to be an in-depth written piece based on the research carried out on Anne Boleyn. Other research will either include a study of Hull between 1534-1536 or exploration into a selection of influential modern women.

One of my main requirements would be support with the writing, ensuring I capture the style suitable for my audience as well as making sure I do not include any unnecessary information that may deviate from the purpose of the work.

Depending on the chosen product will obviously depend on the style of writing, as fiction is different to a more factual piece.

Print resources (visual and written), will be a combination of primary and secondary sources obtained online, from libraries and similar archives, as well as biographies and historians work.

Broadcast resources will consist of films and television series that portray Anne Boleyn through drama and documentary.

Access to archives will also be a requirement but something I need to take charge of.

GOALS

By producing this project I hope to improve my skills in the following areas:

- research and development – history, visual culture,

- creative/script/factual writing
- critical analysis over media platforms
- knowledge and understanding of Anne Boleyn and other influential women

On a professional level these will compliment my teaching across all levels. From an artistic perspective the knowledge and skills I develop above will hopefully allow me to become more confident if I chose to continue writing fiction/factual based texts.

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Other Boleyn Girl, The (2008). Directed by Justin Chadwick. BBC Films [video: DVD]

Private Life of Henry VIII, The. (1933) Directed by Alexander Korda. London Film Productions [video: DVD]

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Tudors, The: Series 1 (2007) Directed by various creator Michael Hirst. ShowTime [video:DVD]

Tudors, The: Series 2 (2008) Directed by various, creator Michael Hirst. ShowTime [video:DVD]

Anne Boleyn, second wife of Henry VIII of England and mother of Queen Elizabeth I. Alternative Title: Anne Bullen. Anne Boleyn, Boleyn also spelled Bullen, (born 1507?â€”died May 19, 1536, London, England), second wife of King Henry VIII of England and mother of Queen Elizabeth I. The events surrounding the annulment of Henryâ€™s marriage to his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, and his marriage to Anne led him to break with the Roman Catholic Church and brought about. Anne Boleyn used her position at court to present herself as a solution to Henry's succession issues. Because Pope Clement VII refused to annul Henryâ€™s marriage to Catherine of Aragon, Henry broke with Rome and established the Church of England. In life and in death, Anne Boleyn has always invited controversy. On the one hand, she was that 'godly lady and queen' under whom 'the religion of Christ most happily flourished'. But to her detractors, Anne was the very 'scandal of Christendom'. A prevailing view that commonly appears in both scholarly and popular texts is that Anne was either perceived in her time as a witch or was indeed a witch. It demonstrates that Anne was never regarded as such by her contemporaries or by those who were critical of her. © 2018 Australian and New Zealand Association for Medieval and Early Modern Studies. All rights reserved. Following a brief explanation of the doctrine and its historical significance, attention turns to