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Anne of Cleves: Enigmatic Queen

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Anne of Cleves: Enigmatic Queen

An Honors College Project Thesis

Presented to

The Department of History and Global Studies

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for

Honors Scholar

by

Courtney Thate

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This Project Thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee,
has been accepted by the Honors College of Abilene Christian University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the distinction

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews non-fiction sources to determine the traditional and orthodox views and the revisionist views of Anne of Cleves, arguing that since the same general primary sources are used in every secondary source, the differences in interpretation are due to the social and cultural locations of the historians. Anne of Cleves developed from a footnote in Tudor history, to having value as one of King Henry VIII's wives, and has only recently been acknowledged as her own person. This paper examines the plethora of interpretations that are attributed to Anne of Cleves, as well as common factual mistakes that persist to this day, ut in the end Anne of Cleves remains an enigma.

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Introduction

“As a matter of fact Anne was at least as good looking as Jane Seymour, and Henry’s taste in the matter of feminine beauty was not of a very high order.”¹ This statement is characteristic of Anne of Cleves as she was seen in many works about the Tudor Dynasty. Remembered primarily for her short-lived marriage, interpretations have failed to examine Anne as a complete person in her own right; she was but a thread in the fabric of the Tudor Era. From sixteenth-century English-language chronicles to modern day analyses, writers’ portrayal of Anne is more a product of their own time than a realistic picture of Anne.

Described as “twenty-four, ignorant of the ways of the world [and] heading to an unknown country to become the fourth wife of a man twice her age,”² the basic facts of Anne’s life appear to be straightforward. She was raised in the German duchy of Cleves, was older than most royal brides, had an arranged marriage, became the fourth wife of King Henry VIII, was divorced from Henry after six short months, and lived the rest of her life as a semi-independent woman of means.

This paper examines the historiographic development of Anne of Cleves. Initially, ambassadors, courtiers, even Henry himself all expressed opinions about Anne’s appearance and actions. Three extant letters signed by Anne survive, but both were certainly edited if not written by advisors, so they do not reveal an accurate view of Anne.³ Anne remains on the fringes in scholarship devoted to the Tudors, and to the

¹ A.F. Pollard, *Henry VIII* (London, Longmass, Green, 1951), 308.

² Amy Licence, *The Six Wives & Many Mistresses of Henry VIII: The Women's Stories* (Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2014), 305.

³ The three letters can be found in the *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, Vol. 15, 1540, edited by J S Brewer (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office).

discussion of Henry's wives. She was viewed as one of many wives and did not possess any major qualities that made her unique. In the Tudor Era soap opera surrounding Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn, the short saga of Anne of Cleves does not hold a candle to their intrigue.

However, more recent scholarship recognizes the value of Anne as a person separate from Henry and more completely develops her story apart from the other wives. In this interpretation, Anne becomes a real person and is finally placed in her appropriate context. At the same time, contemporary popular culture threatens to keep Anne a cliché. Anne of Cleves is an enigma and has more depth than any single author gives credit.

Anne's Earliest Depictions: "The Queen"

"[Her] wit supplies the place of beauty"; "every creature rejoiced to behold her."⁴

These two contemporary observations provide glimpses of Anne of Cleves and suggest that she exhibited some appealing presence. However, her husband Henry VIII said multiple times "I like her not."⁵ Although Anne's voice is never fully heard in the record, the *Letters and Papers both Foreign and Domestic from the Reign of Henry VIII* and Edward Hall's *Chronicle* remain the two most complete and available English-language primary sources concerning Anne of Cleves.⁶ *Letters and Papers* contains Henry's official documents, including letters from Henry, advisors, courtiers, and foreign ambassadors, as well as documents such as treaties and official statements.⁷ Edward Hall, who lived during the reign of Henry VIII, wrote *Hall's Chronicle*, and his outsider perspective of the events of court, provide a stark contrast to the inside view offered by the *Letters and Papers*.

In most of Anne's depictions, the record characterizes her according with political boundaries. Thomas Cromwell, one of Henry's advisors, serves as one example offering conflicting testimonies about Anne for political reasons. Chronologically, Cromwell gave the first impression of the future queen when he mentioned Anne in March 1539 in a

⁴ "[Her] wit": *Letters and Papers, Volume 15*, 10; "Every creature": Edward Hall, *Chronicle*, 847.

⁵ "I like her not": *Letters and Papers, Volume 15*, 422.

⁶ While there are some German language primary sources in existence, only the English sources are examined for this study. *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, (edited by J S Brewer, London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1540).

⁷ Compared to the other five wives, there are fewer primary sources concerning Anne of Cleves. Four unique perspectives are seen within Volumes Fourteen and Fifteen of *Letters and Papers*. These belong to: Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII, Charles de Marillac (the French ambassador), and other English nobility. Unsurprisingly, Henry dominates the view and discussion. The two more minor primary sources are the two paintings of Anne that survive, the first by Hans Holbein and the second by Barthel Bruyn the Elder. They offer a possibility of how she looked and were both painted during her lifetime.

letter to Henry.⁸ During the search for Henry's fourth wife, Cromwell wrote, "Everyone praises the lady's [Anne of Cleves'] beauty, both of face and body. One said she excelled the Duchess as the golden sun did the silver moon."⁹ This praise thus set forth the idea that Anne was beautiful, even more beautiful than the Duchess of Milan, who was also under consideration as a possible fourth wife for Henry.¹⁰ Cromwell wanted to cement a Protestant alliance, and Anne's powerful Lutheran brother-in-law provided the key for such an alliance; therefore Cromwell promoted Anne heavily to Henry, going so far as to describe her as beautiful when it suited his purpose. However, Cromwell's praise of Anne flipped to criticism when the political situation reversed.

After only six months of marriage to Anne, Henry demanded a divorce and began scheming about Anne's supposed lack of virginity as a justification. Before the divorce proceedings began, Cromwell's political enemies accused him of treason and convinced Henry to imprison him in the Tower. Henry kept Cromwell alive long enough to provide evidence for the divorce proceedings, and with the dramatically different situation, Cromwell told Henry and the court exactly what they wanted to hear. In this rendition, Anne was no longer described as beautiful. Cromwell wrote a letter testifying that after meeting Anne for the first time, Henry said, "I would never have her [Anne]; but now it is too far gone, wherefore I am sorry. ... Then is there no remedy but to put my neck in the yoke?"¹¹

⁸ Ibid., Vol 14 Part 1, 213.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See Appendix II for Hans Holbein's portrait of the Duchess of Milan.

¹¹ *Letters and Papers, Volume 15*, 389.

When Cromwell related this conversation with Henry, the only support Cromwell offered to defend Anne was, “me thinketh she hath a queenly manner withal.”¹² Interestingly, even when Cromwell no longer called Anne beautiful, and even facing death, he still suggested that Anne had a semblance of positive characteristics. This implies that Cromwell judged Anne’s queenly manner as beyond doubt. Cromwell was very unlikely to propose a contrary view with respect to public opinion, so Anne’s queenly manner was most likely common knowledge. Additionally, Cromwell said what he thought Henry wanted to hear, to the point that Cromwell now questioned Anne’s virginity by repeating the idea that Henry doubted Anne’s virginity.

The Earl of Southampton continued this pattern of changing descriptions of Anne due to political considerations. Southampton was posted at Calais and met Anne when she traveled through Calais on her way to England in 1539. At first, Southampton praised Anne in ways that were similar to the other courtiers who saw her. In December, before Henry saw Anne, Southampton wrote a letter to Cromwell in which he described Anne by saying, “Her manner was like a princess.”¹³ While his positive words do not call Anne beautiful, they do echo Cromwell’s first assessment of Anne’s royal manner.

As with Cromwell, these generous assessments changed when the divorce proceedings began. Southampton recanted any past praise by qualifying his earlier words: “Upon first sight of her [Anne], considering it was no time to dispraise her whom so many had by reports and painting so much extolled, he did by his letters much praise her and was very sorry to perceive the King, upon sight of her, so to mislike her person.”¹⁴

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *Letters and Papers Vol 14 Part 2*, 248.

Once Henry decided to divorce Anne, Southampton's new testimony suggests that he supposedly disliked Anne from the beginning, but felt like he could not share his negative opinion. He transformed his words of the past to try to make it appear he was innocent of any conspiracy to push Anne on Henry. But words had not been the only means by which Henry formed his first impression of his bride.

Another person who was instrumental in creating a positive image of Anne was Hans Holbein the Younger. Holbein at times acted as a court painter for Henry and was sent to Cleves by Henry to paint a portrait of Anne and then return to England.¹⁵ This portrait of Anne was presented to Henry before he met her. While Henry's direct response to the portrait was not recorded, marriage negotiations continued after the portrait's arrival. Holbein's painting shows Anne looking directly at the viewer with a neutral expression on her face and a detailed dress. Anne looks moderately beautiful of face, but the elaborate dress dominates the image. It is difficult to determine the accuracy of the painting, but it is noteworthy that when Henry and Anne's relationship turned sour, Henry never blamed Holbein for misleading him; in fact, Cromwell was the only one to suffer Henry's wrath. Holbein was not punished and continued to receive commissions until his death. At the very least, Holbein's continued employment hints that the painting of Anne was partially accurate.

¹⁴ *Letters and Papers Vol 15*, 422.

¹⁵ See Appendix 1 for the portrait of Anne of Cleves and Appendix II for the portrait of the Duchess of Milan, the other potential future bride. Both portraits were done by Holbein and have been subject to much speculation by secondary sources, which will be covered as the speculation occurs.

A second portrait of Anne was painted by Barthel Bruyn the Elder during the 1540s following her divorce from Henry.¹⁶ This painting shows Anne in profile with a neutral expression similar to the one in Holbein's painting, and her dress is still elaborate and full of detail. There is no evidence for why this portrait was commissioned, but it is known that Henry did not commission it. It may be that Anne herself commissioned the painting and thus the artist painted a flattering portrait. But since the Holbein and Bruyn paintings both reveal a moderately attractive woman, it becomes less clear why Henry called Anne ugly and rejected her.¹⁷

Along with the artists Holbein and Bruyn, other observers removed from Henry's inner circle, particularly peripheral courtiers, left behind specific observations of both Henry and Anne. One of the influential people at English court was Charles de Marillac, the French ambassador. He sent reports back to France concerning Anne's official entrance to London. Marillac's report on Anne used nuanced language. In the account written to King Francis, he wrote, "She looks about 30 years of age, tall and thin, of medium beauty, and of very assured and resolute countenance. She brought 12 or 15 ladies of honor clothed like herself – a thing which looks strange to many."¹⁸ Marillac seemed to match Cromwell and Southampton's initial views that describe Anne's appearance as regal. Consequently, either Anne genuinely did project a regal appearance that was noteworthy, or her beauty could not be praised and her presence was the only slightly positive trait that each could report.

¹⁶ Barthel Bruyn the Elder, *Anne of Cleves*, 1540s. St. John's College Oxford. See Appendix III for a copy of the painting.

¹⁷ As a note of interest, the secondary sources used in this study rarely mentioned this second portrait.

¹⁸ *Letters and Papers, Vol 15*, 10.

A close examination of Marillac's statements further reveals subtle criticism of Anne's appearance. He claimed she looked about thirty years old, but in fact Anne was only twenty-four. Marillac detailed the cause of Anne's older look and further describes Anne as being of "medium beauty," which is a clever diplomatic maneuver that can be interpreted neither as a compliment nor as a slight. However, his description of Anne and her ladies' attire as strange might be read as an insult, particularly when placed in conversation with his second letter.

In this letter, Marillac conveyed his thoughts in a second report to the Duke of Montmorency using less diplomatic language than that to his king. Marillac announced that Anne was in London and "according to some who saw her close, is not so young as was expected, nor so beautiful as everyone affirmed."¹⁹ Marillac himself does not call Anne ugly, but insinuates that others found her a disappointment. His frankness continued when he wrote, "She is tall and very assured in carriage and countenance, showing that in her the turn and vivacity of wit supplies the place of beauty."²⁰ In other words Anne had a good bearing, which might make up for her lack of beauty. Again, Anne is not labeled ugly outright, but the reader is left with no doubt that looks were not her strength. The final sentence of Marillac's letter described the ladies-in-waiting who looked "inferior in beauty even to their mistress and dress so heavily and unbecomingly that they would almost be thought ugly even if they were beautiful."²¹ This description reveals a particularly low opinion that Marillac had of both Anne and her ladies. He

¹⁹ *Letters and Papers, Vol 15*, 10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

insulted both their appearance and fashion sense and insinuated that Anne was ugly by writing “inferior in beauty *even to their mistress*” (emphasis mine).

In these first impressions of Anne of Cleves, Marillac later offered an interpretation of Henry and Anne’s divorce from an outside perspective. On July 8, 1540, Marillac wrote Francis because he was told Henry asked Parliament to examine his marriage “for the sake of truth, repose of his successors, and the prevention of any future contest for the Crown among his heirs.”²² These reasons made Henry appear noble, valiant, and quite self-sacrificing. Henry was willing to suffer and put his wife aside for the good of his realm. Henry knew it was unconventional to divorce a foreign princess after six short months of marriage, but he had succeeded in putting away his first wife and beheading his second, so clearly Henry knew to manipulate the situation to appear as advantageous for him as possible.

Like Marillac, Edward Hall’s outside observations offer a unique insight to Anne and reveal a positive view of Anne that appeared less unaffected by the negative political events than do Cromwell and Southampton.²³ In his chronicle, first published in 1584, Hall portrayed the first meeting of Henry and Anne as a success. He described Anne’s response to meeting Henry as behaving both “gracious and loving... receive[ing] and welcome[ing] on her knees.”²⁴ Anne emerges in this telling as the perfect queen and companion for Henry. In stark contrast to the reports from Cromwell, Marillac, and Southampton, Hall gushes that when Anne entered London wearing the English fashion,

²² Ibid., 427.

²³ Edward Hall, *Chronicle: Containing the History of England, during the Reign of Henry the Fourth, and the Succeeding Monarchs, to the End of the Reign of Henry the Eight, in Which Are Particularly Described the Manners and Customs of Those Periods*, (London: J. Johnson, 1809).

²⁴ Ibid., 843.

it “so set forth her beauty and good visage, that every creature rejoice to behold her.”²⁵ It is challenging to speculate on what caused Hall’s thoughts as he made these statements. England had been without a queen for almost two years, so maybe the general population was just happy to have a queen and any old queen would do; or perhaps Anne was so far away from sight that her elaborate clothes hid her real appearance and the people were simply happy to have a reason to celebrate. In the end, Hall’s detailed, positive statement stands as an anomaly.

Hall’s surprisingly blunt description of the divorce did not elaborate on the causes of the divorce nor did he give detail to individuals; he simply explained that the events occurred, stating, “they were clearly divorced and separated, and by the Parliament enacted and concluded, that she should be taken no more as Queen, but called the Lady Anne of Cleves.”²⁶ In his account, the marriage appeared to end rather suddenly and for the rest of the chronicle, he never mentions Anne again. Hall’s short description of events, in sharp contrast to the divorce proceedings set forth in *Letters and Papers*.

The official documents contained in this compendium provide full testimony from Henry’s and Anne’s divorce hearing.²⁷ These documents reveal a narrative that created a chance for Henry to save face while Anne lost face. Although it appears that Henry did not want to be married to Anne because he never liked her and was never attracted to her, the narrative of the court documents suggest that his claims rested on four official causes: Anne’s pre-contract with the son of the Duke of Lorraine; the possibility that Anne was not a virgin; Henry’s unwillingness to enter the marriage; and the non-consummation of

²⁵ Ibid., 847.

²⁶ Ibid., 853.

²⁷ *Letters and Papers, Vol 15*.

the marriage. Henry's case rested on being able to prove all four of these, or at least ask enough questions to cast reasonable doubt as to the validity of the marriage.²⁸ Since the marriage was between a King and a Duchess, the marriage had to be valid beyond a doubt for inheritance purposes. All of the evidence given in testimony in *Letters and Papers* focused on one or another of these topics for the divorce hearing.

With respect to Anne's pre-contract with the son of the Duke of Lorraine, the first question presented to the court on 29 June 1540 was, "to declare the difference between *sponsalia presenti* and *de futuro*. Whether either of them being not first... be a lawful impediment whereby the second marriage may be declared naught with having appearance of consent lacked yet a perfectly and hearty consent, as by proof of witness may appear."²⁹ In short, Anne was engaged to the Duke of Lorraine prior to her marriage to Henry, so the validity of her marriage to Henry rested on whether the previous engagement was *sponsalia presenti* (marriage legal immediately, marriage of minors) or *sponsalia de futuro* (marriage that might or might not take place later on, an engagement of minors).³⁰ The former meant the marriage to Henry could be claimed invalid; the latter meant the marriage held. The proceedings spent a considerable amount of time and effort to determine the finer points of canonical law and what exactly happened between Anne and her betrothed. Since Anne of Cleves was raised as the second daughter of a German prince, her engagement was not legalized with the consistency and order that the English courts expected, which led to the challenge to determine what had happened between the

²⁸ Ibid., 387-424.

²⁹ Ibid., 387.

³⁰ Henry Ansgar Kelly, *The Matrimonial Trials of Henry VIII* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), 269.

courts of Cleves and Lorraine. Consequently, the inability to make a strict ruling on this betrothal saw the divorce court testimony turn to the other three points to justify the divorce.

Henry himself set the tone for all testimony when he gave his deposition about the marriage. In the declaration, Henry argued that “he liked her [Anne] so ill” and “I never for love to the woman consented to marry (sic).”³¹ Basically, Henry found Anne horrendous and did not want to spend his life with an ugly woman, thus Henry testified that he did not consummate the marriage. But Henry went further claiming that “if she brought maidenhead with her” her previous marriage nullified of his attempts at “true carnal copulation.”³² Henry’s insinuations questioned Anne’s purity, which suggested that the King of England was stuck with an immoral Queen. The record does not show that the court asked for or pursued any medical exam to prove or disprove Henry’s claims.

In contrast to Henry’s divorce from Catherine of Aragon where she used her opportunity to speak to fight the divorce, Anne was given no similar avenue and thus did not have an opportunity to answer Henry’s slanderous claims about her or to explain her side of the marriage. Instead, she was told of the finalization of the divorce after it happened. At this point, Anne sent a letter to Henry, but it was most likely written or heavily edited by both German and English advisors. In the letter, Anne accepted the divorce decision and asked Henry “to take her as one of his most humble servants,” stating that she was glad to hear “that the King will take her as his sister.”³³ Anne’s

³¹ Ibid., 395.

³² Ibid.

signature indicates that she defaulted to her previous title, and with that, the letter fully gave into all of Henry's demands while managing to flatter him at the same time. In the face of uncertainty, Anne submitted to Henry's wishes and he provided for her until his death.

The dearth of English-language primary sources means that only a vestige of Anne remains. Additionally, she left only three mediated letters, in which she appears calm and collected.³⁴ She acknowledged her fate with grace and dignity. Like her letter, Anne emerges from the primary documents as a mediated character but she has potential to be interpreted with more depth and care.

³³ *Letters and Papers, Vol 15*, 435.

³⁴ See footnote two for a full explanation of the three letters.

2D Anne: Henry's Fourth Wife

The majority of secondary sources about Anne of Cleves focus on her role in Henry's line of wives and examine her as one of many people around Henry rather than an autonomous person. Henry's decisions and actions determined Anne's emergence in the literature either as a simpleton or as a saint. According to these sources, she may have lived in ignorance or she may have quietly suffered.

The first major book devoted to Henry's wives was Agnes Strickland's 1850 *Lives of the Queens of England*.³⁵ Overall, Strickland characterized Anne as a saint, beginning when Strickland described Henry and Anne's first meeting: "Anne, who was certainly the person most to be pitied, was somewhat taken by surprise at the unexpected visit of the formidable spouse to whom she had been passively, but perhaps reluctantly, consigned by the will of her country."³⁶ In this interpretation, Anne appears self-sacrificing in her arranged marriage to Henry. Strickland further crafts this image when she exaggerates Henry saying "Henry was more than double her age, unwieldy and diseased in person, with a countenance stamped by all the traces of the sensual and cruel passions which deformed his mind."³⁷ Strickland presents limited analysis on Anne, but portrays Henry as villainous while presenting Anne as long-suffering. She characterizes Anne as happy after the divorce. Strickland's Anne is a bona-fide saint, unshaken by the trying ways of the world.

³⁵ Agnes Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England: From the Norman Conquest; with Anecdotes of their Courts, now first published from official records and other authentic documents, private as well as public. Vol. 4* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1850).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 244.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 250.

Strickland's views fit well with her own context. She was a female historian in the 1850s, thus her writing and views of Anne reflect this and are shaped by the values of the Victorian Era. Specifically, Strickland was highly focused on the way Anne upheld the Victorian morals and fit the Victorian standard for womanhood. Strickland also had a romanticized view of Anne and looked at the past in a way that reflected her present standards. Her view of Anne is not exactly accurate, but it does offer a good representation of how Anne was seen by the Victorians.

In *Tudor Women: Queens and Commoners*, Alison Plowden is also extremely sympathetic to Anne, to the point where she adds her own views to the accepted narrative to support her assertion that Anne was a saint.³⁸ She starts her favorable depiction of Anne by arguing “whether poor Anne was really so very unattractive may be open to some doubt.”³⁹ While the discussion about Anne's actual level of beauty is a debate in the literature, Plowden seems biased in favor of Anne. She continues to praise Anne when she says, “She was clearly anxious to please and adapted readily to English ways, more than fulfilling Nicholas Wootton's estimate of her ability to learn the language.”⁴⁰ At this point, Anne sounded like a woman who was ready to do everything in her power to please the people of her new home.

In addition, Plowden argues that Anne knew what was going on around her and purposely suffered through, a true trait of a saint. Plowden writes,

Her first few weeks in England must have been particularly trying, since she can scarcely have failed to realize that she was being despised, but she carried off a difficult and humiliating situation with great natural dignity and composure.

³⁸ Alison Plowden, *Tudor Women: Queens and Commoners* (New York: Atheneum, 1979).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

Given half a chance, there is no reason to suppose that this large, homely, serene and sensible girl would not have made the King a perfectly satisfactory wife.⁴¹

This characterization of Anne is positive to a level that seems unsupported by the primary documents. There is no proof of Anne's emotions or feelings, nor is there any record that she knew what was going on around her. There is some support of her queenly manner, which includes dignity and composure, but the primary sources are overall quiet about Anne. The description of Anne as a large, homely, serene and sensible girl is more or less baseless, and the discussion of her suitability as Henry's wife is anachronistic. Once Henry decided he did not want her, there was no going back. Henry's rejection meant Anne was unsuitable, and it was pointless to try to argue otherwise.

Plowden crafts Anne well throughout the divorce proceedings, suggesting that "Anne had often been dismissed as dull and spiritless for her meek acceptance of Henry's rejection, but her situation was totally different from that of Catherine of Aragon, and in any case the alternatives open to her were strictly limited."⁴² Even though Anne was a saint who would endure anything, she did not have a reason to fight the divorce. She knew what was coming and simply accepted it. Plowden argues this was the best course of action because "she would keep a measure of financial independence and social status in a country whose people and customs she clearly found congenial. Anne evidently considered that she was getting a fair bargain and, like a sensible woman, settled down to make the best of it."⁴³ Anne appeared to be a pragmatist who accepted her fate with some resignation. Plowden does not describe Anne's life after the divorce and ends with the

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 92.

⁴³ Ibid.

idea Anne simply settled down. This narrative about Anne of Cleves, especially considering this book is about Tudor women, not just the consorts of Henry, would have been much richer if Plowden had examined Anne's life after Henry, but even in a book focused on women, Anne was only valued when she was directly involved in the life of a man. Once her marriage ended, her life was no longer worth examining, or at least the lack of information about her in the book suggests as much.

Alison Weir crafts a tale for an audience that lands somewhere between scholars and lay people in her book *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*.⁴⁴ The book reads like historical fiction with many characters having feelings and emotions unsupported by primary sources. Most frustratingly, Weir does not use footnotes or cite her information. While she includes a bibliography, there is no indication of how she draws on that material. Weir uses the same primary sources to create a sympathetic portrayal of Anne.

Weir describes Anne as “a good-humored woman who jumped at the chance of independence.”⁴⁵ Similar to Strickland's Victorian Anne, Weir creates a set of characters with twentieth-century values. For example, she describes Anne as an independent woman after the divorce, even though this description is not a valid interpretation for the time period. Weir is creative, too, when she gives her characters emotions. For example, she characterizes Henry as “the royal wooer who hastened towards his destination, joyful anticipation in his heart.”⁴⁶ She suggests that Anne is “surprised, therefore, when the King was announced, and a party of men clad in coats of moiré was ushered into her

⁴⁴ Alison Weir, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (New York: Grove Press, 1991).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 377.

presence; in fact, she was trembling with nervousness.”⁴⁷ Both of these depictions are pure imagination with no supporting evidence.

In addition, Weir suggests a reason behind Hans Holbein’s portrait of Anne that no other historian has legitimized. Weir introduces her thoughts by saying, “nor is it beyond the bounds of reason to suppose that Cromwell had sent Hans Holbein off with instructions to make the lady look as attractive as possible in her portrait.”⁴⁸ This is pure speculation, and, some would argue, outside of the bounds of reason to conjecture that Cromwell deliberately meddled in Holbein’s commission. The bounds of reason should be supported by the historical record and primary documents, but Weir fails to do this and instead goes beyond the pale to suggest that “of course, Holbein’s miniature had been displayed at court, but Holbein was an artist who painted what his inner eye saw, and he had after all had his instructions from Cromwell.”⁴⁹ Weir takes her hypothesis and carries it through her story. What was once presented as speculation is now presented as historical fact.

Weir also quotes a bizarre rhyme from the Tudor Court: “Several people at court were already privately expressing doubts that Anne of Cleves was as attractive as she was depicted in that portrait, and in early December, a scurrilous little rhyme was secretly circulating: ‘If that be your picture, then shall we/ Soon see how you and your portrait agree!’”⁵⁰ Even though Weir is apparently quoting from a source, it is impossible to determine where she found this information. It is not mentioned again in any other book,

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 387.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 392.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

and Weir did not use footnotes to substantiate her claim. There are no other indications that people doubted Anne's beauty, and even those who saw her in person agreed the portrait was a true likeness. This rhyme would, furthermore, have changed how Anne was seen prior to meeting Henry because it shows doubt about her actual appearance. However, the rhyme's authenticity is questionable. It is noteworthy that Weir says it was Anne's physical appearance that most horrified Henry, but strangely Weir paints Queen Anne as a saint: "It says a great deal for Anne of Cleves that she managed to settle into her position with dignity. Many people liked her and admired her courage and common sense, and the common people were impressed with what they had seen and heard of her."⁵¹ In this characterization, Anne suffered silently. Further, Weir implies that Anne was a saint in so far as she did not have a desire to have sex and was not even aware of its existence. As to the divorce, the sainthood continues with Weir promoting Anne as "the wisest [of] Henry VIII's wives. She was certainly the luckiest."⁵² Weir's characterization of Anne as the luckiest wife is seen in future interpretations, particularly in the twenty-first century depictions. While Weir's book lacks in formal scholarship, Antonia Fraser's work clearly identifies her source material.⁵³

Fraser's account was well written and appears unbiased and even. Fraser's surprising change to the historiographic trends is her reference to Anne of Cleves as Anna, the German pronunciation. Fraser does not view Anne as tragic, but as incompetent, and her account, more than others, promotes a view of Anne as simpleton. Fraser acknowledges some intelligence, but she is more interested in Cromwell's

⁵¹ Ibid., 407.

⁵² Ibid., 429.

⁵³ Antonia Fraser, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1992).

downfall and Katherine Howard's rise than in Anne herself. Thus Anne emerges as a background character in the larger actions simultaneously occurring in the realm. Indeed, Fraser calls her "poor Anna of Cleves."⁵⁴ Anne was doomed to fail as Henry's wife from the very beginning because of her uncultured upbringing and ignorance about worldly courts. This characterization is very similar to other historians' assertions, and shows how Anne was almost set up to fail as Henry's wife from the very beginning.

Henry had never before married someone he did not know. So he experienced a massive let down when Henry and Anne met for the first time. This surprise, and incognito, first meeting did not go well either since "Lady Anna, who was in truth probably bewildered (she spoke no English at all at this point), gave the fatal impression of being bored."⁵⁵ The king had been expecting a lovely young bride, but he saw someone who, to put it crudely, "aroused in him no erotic excitement whatsoever."⁵⁶ This is a key contribution by Fraser to the discussion about Anne of Cleves. Other historians tried to point to one fatal flaw or issue that caused Henry to find her so distasteful, but Fraser suggests that the issue could have well been with Henry and not Anne. Even in Henry's complaints about Anne contain few specifics other than her general lack of impressive traits.

Fraser also comes closest to labeling Anne a simpleton when she discussed Anne's lack of knowledge about sex, which Fraser blames on Anne's mother. Fraser goes on to say that Anne's "ignorance protected her from undue personal mortification."⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid., 299.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 307.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

This makes Anne quite the simpleton because she did not know the ways of the world, nor did she have enough logic to determine what was supposed to happen between a husband and wife. In the end, Fraser argues that it was Anna's lack of understanding sex that helped Henry with getting a divorce.

Fraser focuses on Anne's response to the divorce more than on the divorce itself. It was here that Anne made the one most crucial decision of her life and it saved her from being presented solely as a simpleton. Fraser explains:

Whether by luck – out of sheer terror – or by instinct – having observed her husband's willfulness – Anna of Cleves had managed to return that answer most likely to gratify the King. And she presented him, furthermore, with a deeply pleasing image: that of a submissive woman, accepting his will, his decisions in all things, casting herself on his mercy.⁵⁸

Since no primary documents provide insight into Anne's thoughts, Fraser does better than to speculate. Instead, she offers two different explanations that encompass both logical possibilities. Fraser does not know whether Anne was lucky or whether she made a calculated decision, but still gives her credit for making the correct choice. Anne showed she was only loyal to Henry and for that she was rewarded.

Fraser differs from the previously discussed historians because she examines Anne's life as Henry's sister instead of his wife, but it is in her discussion of Anne after the end of the marriage that Fraser makes the most unique contribution of any historian: she discussed Anne's position and her lack of sexual activity. Commenting on Anne's position in England, Fraser describes her as “a rich widow (ever a favorable position for any woman untroubled by grief) she had a household, a large income and property, untrammelled by any need to bow before any male authority except that of the English

⁵⁸ Ibid., 326.

King.”⁵⁹ To modern ears, this sounds like great set-up, a level of independence and wealth unequalled in Tudor England. But, Fraser went further than the modern perception of Anne’s situation and said, “one might go further and argue that the Lady Anna of Cleves was, for the time being, one of the happiest women at the Tudor court.”⁶⁰ This is a significant claim for which Fraser offers no proof. Even though modern eyes see Anne as having everything necessary to be happy, there is no word from her about her emotions. In fact, not everyone at the Tudor court was supportive of Anne’s condition, and “the oddity of her ‘unmarried’ situation in England continued to tease the popular imagination.”⁶¹ Further, Fraser is also the only historian to recognize that Anne lived the rest of her life as a single, celibate woman, repudiating sex through her actions. This might have not been such a discussed topic in the Tudor Era, but it continues to be left out of the conversation by modern historians. It is hard to know whether the concern for Anne’s celibate life is anachronistic or not, but Fraser is the only historian who recognizes this issue.

Within three years of Fraser’s study, a new book about Henry’s wives was published.⁶² Karen Lindsey’s work provides a feminist reinterpretation of the wives of Henry VIII, including Anne of Cleves. The practical application of this feminist reinterpretation seems to be viewing all of the women in as positive a light as possible. Lindsey is very vocal about supporting the women and using the primary sources to see the best in each. Lindsey tends to view Anne as a saint who knew what was happening

⁵⁹ Ibid., 338.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 339.

⁶¹ Ibid., 359.

⁶² Karen Lindsey, *Divorced, Beheaded, Survived: A Feminist Reinterpretation of the Wives of Henry VIII* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub., 1995).

and chose to suffer by putting up with Henry and marrying him even though she might have found him a “fat, bedraggled and boisterous stranger.”⁶³

Lindsey does not argue with the established historical precedent in which Henry called Anne ugly, she simply reinterprets these events. Henry certainly called Anne ugly and believed she was ugly, but many others could have seen Anne as beautiful. Lindsey supports her argument by discussing the fates of three specific courtiers who gave favorable reviews of Anne’s beauty. All three courtiers continued to have good careers after giving opinions that ran contrary to Henry’s.⁶⁴ Lindsey argues this meant, at the least, that Henry understood how others could see Anne as beautiful even though he had a contrasting opinion. At the most, the continued success proved Henry knew that his courtiers gave him accurate advice.

Lindsey argues that Anne was neither stupid nor insensitive, but that she was intelligent enough to see that she needed to adhere to the new social norms and say just the right things. Lindsey views Anne as a saint for thinking of Henry before her own desires. Likely this interpretation is incorrect, because Anne likely had little nuanced ability in speaking English and was still using interpreters.

Ultimately, Lindsey ends her discussion of Anne of Cleves by discussing the intersection of her life with Henry’s, rather than evaluating Anne independently on her own merit. It was surprising that a feminist reinterpretation would not be more

⁶³ As an interesting side note, Lindsey is the only modern historian who accepts Henry labeling Anne a “Flanders Mare” (142). Gilbert Burnet, the Bishop of Salisbury, in his 1679 book about Henry VIII, first mentioned Anne as a Flanders Mare. Burnet did not quote any sources for the “Flanders Mare” comment and since he was not a contemporary of Henry VIII, his label has normally been taken as false. Most other historians dismissed Burnet’s account and did not take it seriously. The fact that Lindsey uses the comment as fact makes her less reliable as a historian and raises questions about the amount of research she put into the section about Anne of Cleves.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 145.

enthusiastic about Anne's wealth and freedom from any man, especially in an era where this was so unusual. Instead, Lindsey focuses on the possibility of Anne becoming Henry's sixth wife after Catherine Howard's death.⁶⁵ The book falls short of so much potential to flesh Anne out as a fully formed individual and defaulted to the normal accounts. Lindsey takes a new look at multiple topics, but still presents Anne as a saint for enduring marriage to the tyrannical Henry. Even as Lindsey's more complex portrait of Anne emerged, other historians continue to characterize her as a simpleton.

David Starkey confesses in his 2003 introduction, "my treatment of Anne of Cleves is traditional...my only twist of novelty in the chapter is to show that Anne, far from retreating thankfully into the status of a well-endowed divorcee, never gave up hope of remarrying Henry and viewed each of his succeeding marriages with despair and renewed chagrin."⁶⁶ If Anne had reacted differently, it is impossible to know how history would have changed. Instead, neither side was prepared or able to act in the way that was best for the other.

Starkey argues that later Anne figured out how to act the best for Henry, and that was to do what she could to help him get his divorce. Starkey examines a conversation Anne had with her ladies and asked, "Was Anne really as naïve as this exchange suggests? Or was she trying to keep up appearances? Was she even, perhaps, trying to protect Henry?"⁶⁷ These questions prove Starkey does examine the primary sources critically, but he comes to a different result than others. Starkey agrees with Lindsey in

⁶⁵ Ibid., 184.

⁶⁶ David Starkey, *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), xxiv.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 633.

saying that there was more to the conversation than first appeared. Both agree with the possibility that Anne had the conversation to prove her virginity and non-consummation with Henry. Starkey is not as convinced, but does acknowledge the possibility of more than just ignorance.

Starkey criticizes Anne due to her actions during and after the divorce process, claiming, “Anne herself probably understood little of the political storm which raged round her and of which she was the all-too-passive cause.”⁶⁸ As is a pattern with other scholarship, this criticism is baseless because Anne’s thoughts were not recorded. It is pure speculation to say just how much Anne knew what was going on around her. By presenting Anne as unaware of the critically important events around her, Starkey makes her seem like a simpleton. Starkey then discusses Anne’s position after the divorce was granted. He writes, “She had her slighted honor to avenge. She found her position of Henry’s ‘sister’, despite its comfort, both awkward and anomalous.”⁶⁹

The most recent and most thorough book about Henry’s wives, including Anne of Cleves is Amy Licence’s *The Six Wives & Many Mistresses of Henry VIII: The Women’s Stories*.⁷⁰ While Licence agrees with the long-held interpretation that Anne was unfamiliar with the primary duties of a wife, she suggests that Anne “may have been unaware of the act itself.”⁷¹ Licence compares Henry’s expectation of Anne to fall in love with him in disguise to the “plot of a French romance,” which highlights just how strange

⁶⁸ Ibid., 639.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 686.

⁷⁰ Amy Licence, *The Six Wives & Many Mistresses of Henry VIII: The Women’s Stories* (Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2014).

⁷¹ Ibid., 304.

Licence views Henry's and Anne's bizarre first meeting.⁷² She sums up her interpretation nicely by saying, "the disguise he [Henry] had adopted in the hopes of sparking a romance necessitated him retreating behind another to conceal his dislike."⁷³ This clever use of the work mask showed just how intricate life was at the Tudor court and how Anne was unprepared for everything.

Licence then turns to the question of Anne's feelings. For the first time in the historiographic topics about Anne, she says, "Anne's opinion of Henry is probably a misleading and anachronistic question to raise."⁷⁴ However, no one ever asked Anne for her opinion of Henry, so this question is impossible for present-day historians to answer. Licence takes a new view of Henry and Anne's sexual relationship, suggesting that Anne was no longer a simpleton who did not understand sex at all, nor was she a saint, rather she was a woman who was an individual person who was not solely determined by Henry.

Ultimately, historians have presented a two-dimensional view of Anne, either as a simpleton or a saint. The majority of these sources about Anne of Cleves focus on her role in Henry's line of wives and examine her as one of many people around Henry. Henry's decisions and actions determined Anne's emerging either as a simpleton or as a saint; she either lived in ignorance, or she quietly suffered. It was not until studies examined Anne for Anne that she emerges as an independent and more fully developed woman.

⁷² Ibid., 307.

⁷³ Ibid., 308.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 310.

Fourth Wife: Life After Henry

“In spite of the divorce, she [Anne] seems to have remained fond of Henry or, at any rate, she kept any feelings of hostility well hidden.”⁷⁵ Anne’s feelings remain a mystery, but modern scholarship devotes more time to piecing together the puzzle. Thus new topics in modern historiography of Anne of Cleves focus on her life after Henry. These new sources remain attentive to earlier parts of her life, but for the first time examine her life, experiences, and desires after the divorce. The three books that focus singularly on Anne can be divided according to the author’s opinion about Anne’s happiness or despair after the divorce.

Mary Saaler writes the first book about Anne of Cleves in 1995.⁷⁶ The book is unique because when the author was involved with an archeology site at Bletchingley Palace, she became interested in Anne. Saaler begins her book with a short description of previous depictions of Anne; she provides a mini-historiography. She finds that male historians tends to take a “totally censorious and chauvinistic view of Anne,” while “women historians have generally tended to take a more sympathetic view of Anne, paying more attention to her personality than her looks.”⁷⁷ Saaler also echoes the general view of Anne as compared to the other wives by saying, “her ability to survive a difficult and potentially dangerous situation shows that she was perhaps the wisest of Henry’s wives – she was certainly the luckiest.”⁷⁸ This argument holds some truth in that it is possible to argue that Anne was the wisest of Henry’s wives since she managed a

⁷⁵ Mary Saaler, *Anne of Cleves: Fourth Wife of Henry VIII* (London: Rubicon Press, 1995), 76.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

hazardous situation and kept her head. However, saying Anne was the luckiest is anachronistic since Saaler is applying a modern day understanding of 'lucky' to Anne's situation.

One of Saaler's specific areas of analysis is concentrated on the mediated voice of Anne through her letter to Henry. Saaler writes, "Her choice of the words 'sister', 'father' and 'brother' are significant; they show her relationship to Henry, in which he was depicted as her male protector and provider, taking on the roles of her father and brother, rather than husband and lover."⁷⁹ Anne moves Henry from the position as husband to the role of brother in which Henry remains her protector.

Saaler goes on to examine Anne's state after the divorce and concludes, "we know very little about Anne's reactions or emotions. In spite of the divorce, she seems to have remained fond of Henry or, at any rate, she kept any feelings of hostility well hidden."⁸⁰ She accepts the holes in the primary sources and does not try to fill in the gaps definitively, as did earlier authors. Her guesses of Anne's emotions are labeled as obvious speculation, even though they are based on source materials. Saaler remarks that Anne's "reactions suggest that she had an intelligent, practical attitude to life. Only she and Henry really knew the truth and, by complying with Henry's wishes, Anne gained independence, position and security."⁸¹ Saaler is the first historian to argue that Anne and Henry might have consummated their marriage, since other historians just accept it as established fact. If Anne knew they had consummated the marriage but still accepted the statement of non-consummation that implies she was willing to do whatever Henry

⁷⁹ Ibid., 73.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 76.

⁸¹ Ibid., 77.

wanted. Anne did gain independence and a separate position, but, in context, this was the only option compared to death or being sent home in disgrace. There is no evidence that Anne wanted her independence and position, it was entirely possible she acted the way she did to avoid being executed.

Saaler details Anne's life following the divorce with a unique and more in-depth look at Anne. Saaler reveals Anne's management style through an analysis of Anne's relationship with her steward; there was "a certain amount of friction between him and Anne about the management of the house and parks," which spoke to the fact both Anne and Carwarden had opinions and ideas about how her property should be run.⁸² Saaler concludes that Anne adapted well to her independent status. Before the divorce, Anne was not involved in managing land, but now she was and had opinions that she fought for.

Additionally, Saaler discovered evidence of rumors about Anne and her health. Apparently, Anne suffered from poor health from time to time, and "when she was forced to stay in bed for a while, rumours quickly spread that she had given birth – even on one occasion to a 'fairre boy', whose father was the King."⁸³ The continued interest in Anne, even after the divorce, showed her perceived importance at the Tudor Court. Nevertheless, the rumors were untrue and had the possibility of threatening Anne's position because they also highlighted Anne's independence. The public presumably thought Anne wanted to be with Henry even after the divorce and the rumor played into that belief.

⁸² Ibid., 88.

⁸³ Ibid., 92.

Ultimately, Saaler states, “Her major triumph was to survive in times when many lost their heads. She not only survived divorce, but survived on her own terms.”⁸⁴ Considering Henry’s wives had an execution rate of thirty-three percent and that many other ministers and members of the nobility were executed, Anne did well to avoid execution, but it is arguable whether or not Anne survived on her own terms because she just accepted the terms Henry dictated. But, Saaler recognizes that Anne’s position was unprecedented and problematic, yet Anne was “a determined, resilient, intelligent woman, who took a realistic view of her situation and made the best of it.”⁸⁵ Saaler creates, finally, a characterization of Anne of Cleves that is far more complex than the simpleton or saint characterization that dominates earlier depictions.

Retha Warnicke in her study, *The Marrying of Anne of Cleves: Royal Protocol in Early Modern England*, also closely examines the argument for Anne’s luck.⁸⁶ She notes, “authors have hinted and sometimes stated explicitly that Anne of Cleves was fortunate that Henry repudiated her. These ‘present-centered’ sentiments are the product of modern culture and social factors that fail to understand the major family and dynastic expectations and considerations of early modern society.”⁸⁷ Warnicke proposes that luck needs to be reconsidered because Anne still failed to live up to her family’s expectations of her, and she was seen as a cast-aside wife and outcast. Anne was intended to be Henry’s wife and queen, but after the divorce became simply his adopted ‘sister.’

Warnicke asserts that Anne’s “private anguish leaves, however, an emotional trail of

⁸⁴ Ibid., 116.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 117.

⁸⁶ Retha Warnicke, *The Marrying of Anne of Cleves: Royal Protocol in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁸⁷ Ibid., 244.

thwarted ambitions and hopes.”⁸⁸ She does not offer concrete evidence as to this personal despair, instead ending on the sad note of Anne’s deep unhappiness.

The most recent scholarly work about Anne is Elizabeth Norton’s *Anne of Cleves: Henry VIII’s Discarded Bride*, published in 2009.⁸⁹ The book presents a chronological view of Anne’s life. Norton, like Warnicke, believes that Anne was unhappy after the divorce. She claims, “Anne always believed herself to be the legitimate wife of the king and the true queen.”⁹⁰ This claim is not backed up with any primary sources and is pure speculation by the historian. Norton labeled Anne “first and foremost, a survivor.”⁹¹

Anne was undoubtedly a survivor because she managed to stay alive as queen, continued living as a divorcee, and outlived Henry and all his other wives. By this measure alone, Anne was a survivor, but there is a deeper story of resilience within her that allowed her to not only survive, but also thrive in her unique situation. Because of the lack of primary sources, Anne cannot be easily labeled even though past historians tried to imply that she was a simpleton or a saint. This does her a great discredit because neither of these represent a whole person. It is not until the most recent historical works about Anne that she finally emerges as a complicated woman and survivor.

Scholarship has improved significantly, but there are still gaps. Almost nothing has been written in English-language scholarship about Anne’s life in Germany before she was betrothed to Henry. Historians have basically accepted that her life did not begin until Henry decided he wanted to marry her. In order to have a fuller understanding of

⁸⁸ Ibid., 246.

⁸⁹ Elizabeth Norton, *Anne of Cleves: Henry VIII’s Discarded Bride* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2009).

⁹⁰ Ibid., 157.

⁹¹ Ibid.

who Anne was as a person, scholars must examine her first twenty-four years of life.

Once this time is understood, perhaps Anne can finally be her own person, as

independent from Henry as possible. Sadly, modern media is working against this hope.

Internet Anne: Twenty-First Century Depictions

“The story goes like this: Holbein painted a beautiful picture of Anne of Cleves, and his art made her seem beautiful in herself... The marriage was made, the princess came to England – and the fat, sick, ageing king rejected his bride as not good-looking enough for him.”⁹² Hans Holbein’s portrait of Anne of Cleves continues to fascinate the general public. This description of events from a 2001 article in *The Guardian* streamlines the story but reveals also hypocrisy. The author, Jonathan Jones, seems to be suggesting that Holbein misrepresented Anne, but Henry ends up as the villain because of his hypocrisy. The reality is Anne is once again lost even in her own story. Anne of Cleves remains an enigma to the modern popular audience. Popular culture today tends to either hold Anne up as a modern woman stuck in an earlier time or push Anne to a mere background role in an era filled with charismatic characters.

The majority of people who know Anne recognize her from the popular television show *The Tudors*, which aired on Showtime from 2007-2010.⁹³ Anne made her initial appearance in the second half of the third season after Queen Jane Seymour’s death.⁹⁴ The show had financial goals and was obviously meant to be entertainment, but the many historical inaccuracies shape a warped view of Anne.

⁹² Jonathan Jones, “Did Holbein Engineer a Royal Wedding?”, (*The Guardian*: 2011).

⁹³ *The Tudors*, television show, directed by Jeremy Podeswa and Dearbhla Walsh (2007-2010; United States: Showtime, 2010.), Streaming.

⁹⁴ The show appears well researched. For example, when Henry hears that Anne of Cleves is being considered as a spouse for him, he says, “I hear no great praise of either her personage or her beauty.” In reality, John Hutton, Henry’s ambassador to Mary of Hungary, made this statement in a letter when he was compiling a list of possible brides. The letter can be seen in the *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of Henry VIII* (see bibliography). Even though Henry never said this, the fact that the television show writers were aware of this line is a testament to the amount of research they must have done. However, other the inaccuracies are glaring. The writers seem willing to attribute quotes as a way to appeal to the audience.

The most glaring historical inaccuracy is the characterization of Anne following the annulment of her marriage to Henry VIII. Anne returns to court completely transformed from her previous mousy self. Now happy and confident, and positively radiant, Henry aggressively takes advantage of her. Indeed, *The Tudors* portray Henry visiting Anne during his fifth marriage to Catherine Howard. Over the course of this visit, Henry appears to regret his decision to Anne, complimenting her demeanor and her card-playing abilities, perhaps as a way to invite himself into her bed. This actions flies in the face of all established fact concerning both Anne and Henry. There was no indication Henry ever found Anne attractive before or after the divorce and no evidence that they ever had an affair, even briefly.

The Tudors' sub-plot of Henry's affair with Anne, which the viewer assumes was only a one-night stand since Anne is rarely mentioned again, relegates Anne to a position of victim rather than an agent of her own actions. *The Tudors* uses Anne as a tool to reveal Henry's consuming self-centeredness, to the point where he would throw everyone else's lives in turmoil for a chance at his own happiness. This factious account echoes early scholarly portrayals of Anne in which only Henry has value, and Anne did not matter.

Similarly, some popular Internet websites describe Anne as a dreary character, a woman on the fringes. Englishhistory.net includes a webpage devoted to Anne and discusses her at length but without sources. She comes across as a flat character. The website gets some facts correct but spends most of the analysis describing how the actions of others affected her. For example, the page claims that "four things pushed Henry towards an annulment – his dislike of Anne, foreign policy changes, his attraction

to Catherine Howard, and his courtiers' hatred of Cromwell."⁹⁵ This continues the characterization of Anne as a victim of Henry's actions who was unable to stand up for herself. Again, in this telling, Anne simply exists while others around her made the decisions and took action.

In contrast, other websites view Anne from a modern feminist perspective. Commonly, Anne of Cleves is seen as the luckiest wife as demonstrated by tudorhistory.org, a website run by Lara Eakins, an amateur historian.⁹⁶ Eakins appears to have some history training, stating, "I also have an odd interest in the wife that I think got the best lot in life of the bunch – Anne of Cleves. Think about it... she only had to stay married to Henry for six months, didn't have to be intimate with him (if you take my meaning), and got to keep her head and some castles to boot!"⁹⁷ Another amateur historian, Gillian, compares Anne of Cleves to the other wives concluding that "Certainly, her life after her marriage seems to have been a happy one, which cannot be said for Katherine Parr. I would, therefore, posit that Anne of Cleves was the most successful of all the wives of Henry VIII."⁹⁸ Both authors' views represent a prevalent scholarly proposal that Anne of Cleves was the best or luckiest wife. This discounts the fact that no one really knew how Henry and Anne's marriage would end at the time. Even after the quick divorce, the possibility always loomed that Henry could change his mind and dramatically shift in his treatment of Anne. Furthermore, the modern definition of

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Lara Eakins, "Anne of Cleves: God Send Me Well to Keep" (Tudor History: 2014).

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Gillian, "Anne of Cleves: Henry's Most Surprising Wife", (Harlots, Harpies and Harridans: 2012).

best wife or luckiest wife seems to be tied to the idea of happiness and riches. To modern eyes, Anne of Cleves appears both happy and rich. However, there is little evidence of Anne's feelings and there are records that her allowance was inadequate to meet her expenses. It is therefore a stretch to claim Anne of Cleves was the happiest or wealthiest and consequently the best or luckiest of Henry's wives.

The values of present day have prompted observers to ask anachronistic questions that lead to the creation of new, perhaps unsupportable views of Anne of Cleves. In these modern readings, Anne's voice is silenced in an environment that listens only to men. At the same time, modern, feminist interpretations describes Anne as lucky because she had some measure of independence following the divorce. It is difficult to reconcile these views with the source materials, which are silent on these issues except as the men saw fit to record. The speculation about Anne certainly helps to see her as more human but the truth suggests that her life is still a riddle.

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Appendix 1

Holbein the Younger, Hans. *Anne of Cleves*. 1539. The Louvre, Paris.



Appendix II

Holbein the Younger, *Christina of Denmark (Duchess of Milan)*. 1539. The National Portrait Gallery, London.



Appendix III

Bruyn the Elder, Bartholomaus. *Anne of Cleves*. 1540s. St. John's College, Oxford University, Oxford.

