Research Aim

To understand how the modern representations of Catherine of Aragon and Jane Seymour, two of Henry VIII's first queens, came to be. Characterizations of historical figures are always complicated by both their real lives and the hundreds of literary lives they have lived since their death. I was interested to see how the lives of these two woman came to be represented as they are today. Popular media is an extremely impactful way to share historical information. The way that these two Queens are represented in popular media shape how people view them, so it is important to understand where these representations come from.

Catherine of Aragon

Career

- Catherine of Aragon was the first wife of Henry VIII, Queen from 1509-1533. In 1533, Henry divorced her to marry Anne Boleyn.
- She was Spanish, the daughter of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabelle of Castille, both regnant monarchs.
- Before marrying Henry, she was briefly married to his brother Prince Arthur, but he died months into the marriage. This first marriage became the grounds on which Henry sued the Pope for a divorce.
- Catherine only had one daughter, Mary, survive to adulthood.[1]
- Catherine was a devout Catholic as well as a known Christian humanist who supported church reform.[2] She was known for her learning and often acted as an able diplomat.[3]

1. All information before this citation comes from C.S.L. Davies and John Edawrds, "Katherine [Catalina, Catherine, Katherine of Aragon]", *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* Oxford University Press, 23 September 2004, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-14647?rskey=R7pdOF&result=2 [Accessed 2 July 2020].
2. Retha M. Warnicke, *Elizabeth of York and Her Six Daughters-in-Law: Fashioning Tudor Queenship, 1485-1547* (Cham, 2017), p. 154.
3. Michelle L. Beer, "Between Kings and Emperors: Catherine of Aragon as Counsellor and Mediator" in Catherine Fletcher, et al. (eds.), *Queenship and Counsel in Early Modern Europe* (Cham, 2018), pp. 35-58, p. 38-40.

Tudor Views

The later Tudor period saw strong female rule under Mary and Elizabeth, leading to celebrations of women deemed to hold masculine virtues like strength and intelligence and natural female virtues like modesty and piety.

- Catherine is celebrated **as a good and virtuous Queen** in both Catholic and Protestant sources.[1] In *A Newe Enterlude Drawen Oute of the Holy Scripture of Godly Queene Hester* (1561) and Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* (1613) she undertakes the traditional queenly act of intercession, pleading to her husband for mercy on behalf of her people.[2] This emphasises her place as the people's Queen who speaks for their interests. It also stresses that Catherine is a proper queen, as she is seen enacting long-accepted traditions of queenship.
- Representations from this period stress **Catherine's strength**. Again, in *A Newe Enterlude* and *Henry VIII* Catherine is incredibly brave when confronted by her enemies. In both plays, she speaks for what she knows to be morally right, despite any ill-consequences it might bring her. The duality of **her strength and her womanly virtue** are a clear reflection of depictions of female rulers in this period.
- Catherine is shown to be **the model wife who stays loyal to her husband** despite his disloyalty. Catherine never blames Henry for the annulment. In both Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (1563) and Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* she blames Wolsey, Henry's advisor, but never shows any malice towards Henry himself, stressing Catherine's excellence as a wife.[3]

1. Alison Findlay, "Gendering the Stage" in Arthur F. Kinney (ed.), *A Companion to Renaissance Drama* (Oxford, 2004), pp.399-415, pp.399-400.
2. "A Newe Enterlude Drawen Oute of the Holy Scripture of Godly Queene Hester", 2nd ed, in Walter Wilson Greg (ed.), *A New Enterlude of Godly Queen Hester: Volumes 5-6* (Vaduz, 1963), pp. 3-46, p.37: William Shakespeare, *Henry VIII*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (Washington D.C., 1613), pp. 27-31: J.L. Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval* Queens (Oxford, 2004), pp.6-7.
3. John Foxe, Actes and Monuments, book three, (1563), accessed on The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online or TAMO (The Digital Humanities Institute, Sheffield, 2011). Available from: http//www.dhi.ac.uk/foxe [Accessed: 25.06.2020], pp.507-511.

Victorian Transformations

Queen Victoria was known for her middle-class ideals which stressed a woman's place as the head of the domestic sphere. A women's place was in the private, not the public sphere. Women were also seen as the moral compasses within their family.[1]

- **Catherine's learning is stressed** in the Victorian age, **but her political accomplishments are often downplayed or ignored**. Both Strickland's biography (1840) and Ollier's *Cassells Illustrated History of England* (1870) stress that Catherine was a Christian humanist who enjoys conversation with learned men.[2] However, while Strickland pays slightly more attention than Ollier to Catherine's political influence, both tend to ignore her diplomatic skills. This is in line with the Victorian ideals of domesticated queenship, which saw queens as rulers of the house, but not active political players.
- Both Strickland and Ollier give examples of **Catherine acting as Henry's conscience** while their marriage is still strong. This is inline with the Victorian idea of women as the moral compass of the family.[3]
- Catherine is still portrayed as a **Queen of high moral standing, who is to be praised for her piety, compassion, and obedience**. Strickland and Ollier stress that Catherine was a devout Catholic, though Strickland goes further, saying that Catherine was "self-denying."[4] Both say that she carried herself with dignity in her hearings against the king.

1. Georgianna Zeigler, "Re-Imagining a Renaissance Queen: Catherine of Aragon Among the Victorians" in Jo Eldridge Carney, et al. (eds.), *'High and Mighty Queens' of Early Modern England: Realities and Representations* (New York City, Houndsmill, Basingstoke, and Hapmshire, 2003), pp. 203-222, p.207.
2. Agnes Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England, from the Norman Conquest*, vol. IV-V(London, 1885), p. 519: Edmund Ollier, *Cassells Illustrated History Of England: New and Revised Edition*, vol. II (London, 1873), p. 162.
3. Strickland, *The Lives of the Queens of England*, pp. 510-511: Ollier, *Cassells Illustrated History*, p. 134.
4. Strickland, *The Lives of the Queens of England*, p. 617.

Queens of Today

Modern nostalgia for the nurturing mother has created a dichotomy. Woman can either be good mothers or strong independent women with no room for overlap.[1] Additionally liberal feminism encourages women in positions of power, meaning more focus on the Queen's political authority.[2]

- Catherine is represented in **two ways which reflect the dichotomy between the good mother and the strong woman.** *The Tudors* (2007-2010), *Henry VIII* (2003), *Anne of the Thousand Days* (1969), *and The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (1970) all stress Catherine's devotion to Mary. Additionally, they all emphasize that Catherine refuses to renounce her marriage because it would harm her daughter by making her a bastard.[3] Alternatively, in Mantel's *Wolf Hall* (2009) and *Bring up the Bodies* (2012), Catherine is praised for her political fortitude.[4] However, Catherine's strength does not make her a good mother as it causes her daughter Mary to suffer.[5] One can admire Catherine's strength, but not her motherly nature.
- Catherine is painted as a very **intelligent and politically well-versed Queen**. Mantel talks about Catherine's political achievements as her father's diplomat and as regent of England.[6] In all the productions mentioned she is **extremely strong willed** and does not doubt the righteousness of her cause. In Mantel and *The Tudors* she makes good use of her political connections on the continent to gather support for her cause.[7] The rehabilitation of Catherine's political career, though it still tends to take a back seat to her domestic attributes, is an important contribution of liberal feminism.
- Catherine is **depicted as a traditionalist** in Henry's court. She is portrayed as older than Anne and Henry in *Henry VIII, Anne of the Thousand Days, The Six Wives,* and *The Tudors,* making her seem like an outdated relic in Henry's vibrant, young court.[8] She is dressed primarily in black in *Henry VIII* and *Anne of the Thousand Days* making her seem dour and boring.[9] All the shows stress her devout Catholicism, and she is often seen at prayer or taking pilgrimages.
- **Catherine is depicted as the people's queen**. She is cheered by crowds of people in *Henry VIII* and *The Six Wives* on her way to trial, and both stress that if Catherine wanted, an army would form in her defense.[10]

1. Julia Frechette, "Gender and Femininity: Motherhood" in Mary Kosut (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Gender in Media* (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC, 2012), pp. 127-129, p.127.
2. Lorin Basden Arnold, "Feminist Theory: Liberal", in Mary Kosut (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Gender in Media* (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC, 2012), pp.96-98, p.96.
3. *The Tudors, season one and two,* dir. Michael Hirst (Showtime Networks, 2007-2008). Netflix: *Henry VIII, dir. Pete Travis (Granada Television, 2003).* Youtube: *Anne of the Thousand Days*, dir. Charles Jarrott (National Broadcasting Company, 1969). Amazon Prime Video: *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, dirs. Naomi Capon and John Glenister (British Broadcasting Corporation, 1970). Amazon Prime Video.
4. Hilary Mantel, *Bring Up the Bodies* (New York City, 2012)., p. 145.
5. Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall* (New York City, 2009), p. 235.
6. Ibid., pp. 24-25.
7. Mantel, *Wolf Hall*, p. 24: The *Tudors, season one and two,* dir. Hirst.
8. *Henry VIII, dir. Travis : Anne of the Thousand Days*, dir. Jarrott : *The Six Wives*, dirs. Capon and Glenister: *The Tudors, season one and two,* dir. Hirst.
9. *Henry VIII, dir. Travis : Anne of the Thousand Days*, dir. Jarrott.
10. *Henry VIII, dir. Travis: The Six Wives,* dirs. Capon and Glenister..

Where Did They Come From?

- The emphasis on **Catherine as an incredibly good and loving mother** was developed in the Victorian period and has been retained as a key to understanding Catherine ever since.
- **Catherine has been depicted as the people's favorite** of Henry VIII's queens since the Tudor era. Catherine's public intercession and royal birth have led her to consistently be portrayed as the model queen, something the people clearly recognize.
- **Catherine's political astuteness** can be traced back to the Tudor era, where many depictions of Catherine showed her as an active political player in Henry's court. While this was lost in the Victorian era and in many early films, recent depictions of Catherine have refocused on her political achievements.
- Again, **Catherine has been depicted as a strong woman who refuses to compromise her morals** from the Tudor era onward. Though her strength has been interpreted in many ways, it has always been a key component of her representation.

Jane Seymour

Career

- Jane Seymour was the third wife of Henry VIII reigning from 1536-1537.
- Jane was an English lady raised at Wolf Hall, and there was general agreement that she was quite intelligent
- It is unclear whether Jane was part of the new Protestant religion or a Catholic, but it is clear she supported Henry's reconciliation with his daughter Mary
- Jane gave birth to Henry's sole male heir, Edward VI, but, unfortunately, she died within a week of the birth.[1]

1. All information in this text-box comes from Barrett L. Beer, "Jane (née Jane Seymour)", *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* Oxford University Press, 23 September 2004, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-14647?rskey=R7pdOF&result=2 [Accessed 2 July 2020].

Tudor Views

The Protestant Reformation saw the formation of the Church of England. This greatly affected cultural production in the Tudor era. An author's religion changed how they wrote about historical figures on both sides of the religious divide.

- **The sources from this period which says the most about Jane are the letters of the imperial ambassador** at the court of Henry VIII, Eustace Chapuys. Chapuys, a supporter of the Catholic cause, writes that Jane was very interested in furthering Mary's cause, which suggests she might have been Catholic .[1] He praises Jane's piety and virtue to the Emperor. [2]
- **Jane is broadly ignored in Tudor popular culture**. Jane does not appear in *Henry VIII* (1613), nor does she have any works on her life, just two ballads about her death.[3] Jane is mentioned in Foxes *Actes and Monuments* only as the mother Edward VI and sister of Edward Seymour.[4] This silence in the period is most likely due to her unclear religious stance. As the mother of Edward VI, it could be assumed that she was a Protestant, but her contemporaries seemed to hint that she was Catholic. Jane was not Catholic enough to be written about by Catholic authors as a great figure, nor was she Protestant enough to be remembered by Protestant authors.

1. "19 May: Eustace Chapuys to the Emperor", in Pascual de Gayangos (ed.), *Calendar of Letters, Despatches, and State Papers Relating to the Negotiations Between England and Spain, Preserved in the Archives at Simancas, Vienna, Brussels, and Elsewhere*, vol. 5, pt. 2,(London, 1888), pp.122-131, p. 124.
2. "1 April: Eustace Chapuys to the Emperor", in Pascual de Gayangos (ed.), *Calendar of Letters*, vol. 5, pt. 2, (London, 1888), pp. 79-85.
3. Alastair Vannan, "The Death of Queen Jane: Ballad, History, and Propoganda", *Folk Music Journal*, 10:3 (2013), pp. 347-369.
4. John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments* (1563), accessed on *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* or *TAMO* (The Digital Humanities Institute, Sheffield, 2011). Available from: http//www.dhi.ac.uk/foxe [Accessed: 25.06.2020], p.946.

Victorian Transformations

Victorian society was governed by a set of strict morals which were considered especially important for women. The literature of this age is steeped in moral lessons about right and wrong behavior.

- **Early to mid 19th century views of Jane tend to be positive, praising her good morals**. In Thomson's novel, *Anne Boleyn: A Historical Romance, Vol. 3* (1842), Jane is pure and innocent. Thomson decries the men in her life for corrupting her.[1] This is consistent with Victorian views that women, not men, were the moral characters in society. Similarly, in Milman's *A Dramatic Poem: Anne Boleyn* (1826), Jane is a morally good character who pushes Henry to be merciful. Readers are informed Jane begged Henry for mercy for monks who refused to leave their monasteries.[2]
- **Mid to Late 19th century sources take a more critical view of Jane**, focusing on her **role as Henry's mistress,** and painting her as **politically ambitious**. Strict Victorian morals saw unchaste behavior as a great sin, so this switch makes some sense. Strickland in *Lives of the Queens of England* (1840) argues that Jane cannot be morally good because she willingly encouraged Henry's advances knowing he had a wife. She argues any of Jane's actions which could be considered morally good, like her support for Mary, were done only to differentiate herself from Anne Boleyn.[3] Boker's play *Anne Boleyn: A Tragedy* (1850) similarly paints Jane as someone who was extremely ambitious. Boker has Jane manipulating Henry to become Queen, with no moral scruples at all.[4]

1. A.T. Thomson, *Anne Boleyn: An Historical Romance*, vol. III (London, 1842)., pp. 279-280, p.100.
2. H.H. Milman, *Anne Boleyn: A Dramatic Poem* (London, 1826), p. 65.
3. Agnes Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England, from the Norman Conquest, a New Edition*, vol. IV and V (Philadelphia, 1850), pp. 223-224.
4. George H. Boker, *Anne Boleyn: A Tragedy* (Philadelphia, 1850)

Queens of Today

Third wave feminism began in the 1980s and focused on the sexual liberation of women by allowing them to seek their own pleasure without judgement.[1] Postfeminism has also affected modern representations, believing that the liberated woman is one who wants to be a sexual object for men, thus they present women in highly sexualized ways.[2]

- Modern depictions of Jane paint her as **innocent and morally pure** despite her affair with Henry. In both *Bring up the Bodies* by Mantel and *The Tudors* Jane is seen encouraging Henry in their affair, yet she is still characterized as an innocent.[3] The fact that, Jane is seen as a morally upstanding woman even after her affair is in line with postfeminist ideals that woman who are sexually available are not to be shamed but celebrated. Additionally, Jane always acquiesces to the will of the men in her life in *The Tudors, Henry VIII,* Mantel, and the *Six Wives of Henry VIII,* showing her obedience and goodliness as a wife.[4]
- Jane is depicted as **simple but virtuous and peace-loving**. Neither Mantel in *The Mirror and the Light* (2019) and *Bringing up the Bodies,* nor *The Tudors* depicts Jane as learned or of high intelligence.[5] She does not speak often in Mantel's works, and her family even comment on her simple mindedness.[6] She is similarly quiet and uncomfortable as queen in *The Six Wives* and *Henry VIII* which serves to highlight her simplicity.[7] However, when she does speak, it is often to push Henry towards peace, as she does in all the series when she begs for mercy for the Pilgrimage of Grace.
- Jane is depicted **as a successor of Catherine of Aragon**, fashioning herself in Catherine's image and bringing back Catherine's ladies to court. Mantel shows Jane's similarities to Catherine by having Jane adopt Catherine's gable hood instead of Anne Boleyn's French hood.[8] Also, in *The Tudors,* Jane is gifted one of Catherine's crosses on her wedding night.[9] Further all the shows mentioned feature Jane helping to reconcile Mary and Henry, and generally show Jane as a Catholic supporter.

1. Kim Golombisky, "Feminism", in Mary Kosut (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Gender in Media* (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC, 2012), pp.90-95, pp. 93-94: Brittany N. Griebling, "Feminist Theory: Third Wave", in Mary Kosut (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Gender in Media* (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC, 2012), pp.106-108, p.107.
2. Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of Sensibility", *European Journal of Cultural Studies,* 10:2 (2007), pp.147-166, pp.149-151.
3. Hilary Mantel, *Bring Up the Bodies* (New York City, 2012): *The Tudors,* season two, dir. Michael Hirst (Showtime Networks, 2007-2008). Netflix.
4. *The Tudors,* season three, dir. Hirst: *Henry VIII, dir. Pete Travis (Granada Television, 2003).* Youtube: Mantel, *Bring Up the Bodies: The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, dirs. Naomi Capon and John Glenister (British Broadcasting Corporation, 1970). Amazon Prime Video.
5. Mantel, *Bring Up the Bodies,* p.13: Hilary Mantel, *The Mirror and the Light* (New York City, 2020), p.42: *The Tudors*, season two, dir. Hirst.
6. Mantel, *Bring Up the Bodies*, p. 197.
7. *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, dirs. Capon and Glenister: *Henry VIII, dir. Travis.*
8. Mantel, *Bring Up the Bodies*, pp.306-307.
9. *The Tudors*, season three, dir. Hirst.

Where Did They Come From?

- The depiction of **Jane as the good and virtuous** Queen can be traced back to the Tudor period and the letters of Chapuys which praise Jane for these very graces. This view survived the attack on Jane's reputation in the Victorian era and persists today.
- Today **Jane is portrayed as quite simple**, most likely because of her silence in early Tudor sources. Her innocence may also come from the silence on Jane in the Tudor period. Because she seemingly abstained from playing politics in the Protestant and Catholic conflict of the time, she is portrayed as an innocent.
- Again, **Jane's Catholic sympathies** can be traced to the Tudor period and the letters of Chapuys. Jane's religion is mostly ignored in the Victorian period but is picked up again in her on-screen depictions.

Portrait of lady identified as Catherine of Aragon by Michael Sittow, circa 1468-1525 or 1526

Michael Sittow (c. 1468-1525 or 1526). c. 1503-1504. Portrait of a Lady, identified as Catherine of Aragon (1485-1536). painting. Place: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria. https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.st-andrews.ac.uk/asset/LESSING_ART_10310751774.

Portrait of Jane Seymour by Hans Holbein the younger, 1536/37

Hans Holbein the Younger (1497 or 1498-1543). 1536. Jane Seymour, third wife of King Henry VIII of England. painting. Place: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria. https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.st-andrews.ac.uk/asset/LESSING_ART_10310750712..

Henry VIII's Queens: A Study in Popular Representations and their Historic Roots

Project by Jillian Ducker
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19th century illustration of the trail of Catherine of Aragon in Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*.

Sartain, John, 1808-1897, printmaker., Harlow, George Henry, 1787-1819, artist.. 19th century]. Trial of Queen Katharine [from Shakespeare's King Henry VIII, act II, scene 4] [graphic] / painted by G.H. Harlow ; engraved by John Sartain.. Place: <A HREF=https://www.folger.edu/>Folger Shakespeare Library</A>. https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.st-andrews.ac.uk/asset/25245888.

Conclusion

In the near 500 years since these queens lived, they have been brought to life repeatedly, each queen gaining and losing parts of her character to fit the era which she was to occupy. The modern characterizations of both Queens are made up of different facets of their earlier characterizations tailored to the postmodern depictions of women in popular culture.

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