

The Fall of Anne Boleyn:
A Historiographical Study

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Good Christian people, I have not come here to preach a sermon; I have come here to die...for according to the law and by the law I am judged to die...but I pray God save the king and send him long to reign over you, for a gentler nor a more merciful prince was there never, and to me he was ever a good, a gentle, and sovereign lord.¹

Five hundred years after her death, Anne Boleyn continues to be one of the most captivating figures in history. Her life has been the subject of Shakespearean plays, films and popular novels. She has been characterized in a myriad of ways, as a whore, a woman of virtue, a religious reformer, and a great patron of education. She has also been the focus of scholarly study, as historians over the years have examined and scrutinized her rise and her dramatic fall. However, the question remains. Why did England's King Henry VIII, who risked his reputation and kingdom in order to marry her, have his beloved wife and queen charged with acts of treason and adultery, which swiftly led to her execution in May of 1536? Looking at the evidence that has survived, historians have developed their own unique theories as to what could have possibly been the reasons behind her fall. Spanning over a period of one hundred and twenty-eight years, from the late nineteenth century into the twentieth, this paper aims to explore the various theories on the fall of Anne Boleyn; whether it be political survival, the love of another woman, the need for an heir, a ruthless world, the fear of deformed children, a misogynistic society, a political coup, a promiscuous Queen, or careless comments that angered a King, with particular focus being given to those historians of the last thirty years.

¹ Eric Ives, *Anne Boleyn* (New York: Blackwell, 1986), 410.

Anne Boleyn, the second wife of King Henry of England, was born into the English aristocracy between the years 1501-1507 in Norfolk, England. Her father, Thomas Boleyn, served as the Lord Privy Seal to Henry VIII. Her mother, Elizabeth Howard Boleyn, was daughter of the second Duke of Norfolk and descended from King Edward I. Educated abroad, Anne served in the court of Queen Margaret of Austria as well as Queen Claude of France. Talented, smart and sophisticated, she returned to England in 1521, where she caught the eye of a married King Henry VIII. Having fallen for Anne, the King sought an annulment from his wife of twenty-four years, Queen Catherine of Aragon, which the Pope adamantly refused. Henry then shut his wife away, broke from Rome, and established himself as Head of the Church of England, secretly marrying Anne in 1533. Three years later, Anne along with her brother George, and four other courtiers, was executed, found guilty on charges of adultery and treason against King Henry VIII.²

Contemporary Thought

The reactions upon Anne's death amongst her contemporaries were mixed. John Hussey, one of Anne's former supporters wrote, "...that which hath been done and committed by Anne the Queen...which is so abominable and detestable that I am ashamed that any good woman should give ear thereto."³ Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury who was very close to Anne, suggested to Henry that if Anne was guilty, the righteous "...must hate her above all other..."⁴ Yet, there were those that thought Anne may have been innocent. Anne's

² *Dictionary of World Biography*, Volume 3, 1998.

³ Greg Walker, "Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn," *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 1 (March 2002): 5, accessed on Jstor online database in May 2012.

⁴ Walker, "Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn," 6.

longtime foe, the Imperial Ambassador, Eustace Chapuys, while pleased with the death of the “...putain...” stated, “...there are some who murmur at the mode of procedure against her and the others...”⁵ Thomas Wyatt, the poet, claimed, “These bloody days have broken my heart...,”⁶ and John Foxe, in his 1563 *Book of Martyrs*, claimed that Elizabeth’s long reign was God’s way of demonstrating that Anne was innocent.⁷ Clearly there was disagreement as to Anne’s guilt at the time of her execution, even if those commenting were not aware of the reasons behind her fall.

Early Scholarship

As the centuries passed, historians would begin to write about the events surrounding Anne Boleyn. Two historians of the nineteenth century who examined the evidence to explain Anne’s fall were Paul Friedmann and Agnes Strickland.

Paul Friedmann, the renowned nineteenth century British scholar, lamented the challenges of a historian. “The task of sifting the English evidence, of examining how much in each dispatch is true, and how much is simply boasting and misrepresentation, is extremely laborious and tiresome.”⁸ In Friedmann’s 1884 two volume work, *Anne Boleyn: A Chapter of English History, 1527-1536*, the author sets out to “provide a sketch” of the nine years that King Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn were together.⁹ Basing much of his argument on the dispatches by

⁵ Greg Walker, “Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn,” 7.

⁶ Karen Lindsey, *Divorced, Beheaded, Survived: A Feminist Reinterpretation of the Wives of Henry VIII* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995), 129.

⁷ Retha M. Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn: Family Politics at the Court of Henry VIII* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1989), 1.

⁸ Paul Friedmann, *Anne Boleyn: A Chapter of English History, 1527-1536*, vol. 1 (London: MacMillan, 1884), viii.

⁹ Friedmann, *Anne Boleyn*, v.

Eustace Chapuys,¹⁰ Friedmann argued that it was Henry's Chief Minister, Thomas Cromwell, who decided to act against Anne.¹¹ Feeling uncertain with his own political future, Cromwell devised a situation that would seem so threatening to the King, that it would appear only his chief minister could 'save' him. Knowing that Henry was tired of Anne and wished to marry Jane Seymour,¹² Cromwell took advantage of the situation. Friedmann concluded that it was difficult to know what really occurred during that period of Henry's reign, and that the history of Anne Boleyn had yet to be written.¹³

Researching Anne Boleyn's life at the same time was Friedmann's contemporary, Victorian historian Agnes Strickland. Writing in the style termed 'picturesque history,'¹⁴ Strickland declared, "There is no name in the annals of female royalty over which the enchantments of poetry and romance have cast such bewildering spells as that of Anne Boleyn."¹⁵ So begins the *Lives of the Queens of England, from the Norman Conquest*, Agnes Strickland's 1882 eight volume work. Beautifully written, erring on the side of propriety, the author painted Anne as a sympathetic figure, while condemning Henry as a "despot."¹⁶ Asserting that Anne "never incurred the crimes for which she was brought to the block,"¹⁷ Strickland argued that the King's "passion" for Jane Seymour prompted him to take advantage of "invidious gossips' tales" about Anne, in order to put his new obsession on the throne. One

¹⁰ Friedmann, *Anne Boleyn*, x.

¹¹ Paul Friedmann, *Anne Boleyn: A Chapter of English History, 1527-1536*, vol. 2 (London: MacMillan, 1884), 241.

¹² Friedmann, *Anne Boleyn*, 239-241.

¹³ Friedmann, *Anne Boleyn*, 312.

¹⁴ "Victorian Women Historians," last modified August 31, 2008, accessed June 4, 2012,

<http://www.npg.org.uk/whatson/display/2008/victorian-women-historians.php>

¹⁵ Agnes Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England, from the Norman Conquest*, vol. 2 (London: George Bell & Sons, 1882), 562.

¹⁶ Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England*, 664.

¹⁷ Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England*, 562.

of these tales was a conversation between Anne Boleyn and Mark Smeaton, the court musician, which has been a topic of debate amongst historians. Rather than feeling rejected by Anne as one of her paramours, Strickland argued that Smeaton's sullen behavior was on account of the frightening talk he was hearing at court, a fellow courtier's arrest, and the action that was being taken against her, all unbeknownst to Anne. Misunderstanding Smeaton, Anne's response suggested an intimate exchange, which quickly spread throughout the court. The author also questioned Anne's statements in the Tower to her jailer, Sir William Kingston, which implicated her in the wishful thinking for the King's death. Although used as evidence by Cromwell and later historians, Strickland wondered why Anne, given her experience at Court and fully aware her words were being reported, would utter such things. Perhaps, Strickland asserted, these reports were fictitious tales made up by those against her.¹⁸ Strickland concluded that the King's quick marriage with Jane Seymour after Anne's death explains the real motives behind Anne Boleyn's fall, and that upon his death, Henry conveyed shame in the slaying of Anne Boleyn.¹⁹

Early 20th century

Turning towards the twentieth century, there has been an abundance of diverse arguments explaining the fall of Anne Boleyn. According to A. F. Pollard, an English historian considered to be the foremost Tudor academic at the dawn of the twentieth century, the

¹⁸ Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England*, 664-672.

¹⁹ Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England*, 708.

reason behind Anne's ruin was in Henry's desire to have a male heir.²⁰ In Pollard's *Henry VIII*, first published in 1905, the author asserted that Henry wanted to divorce Catherine and marry Anne, not for sexual fervor as the popular myth depicts, but because Anne was pregnant. Henry wanted the child that Anne was carrying to be legitimate, and he was fervently longing for a son to succeed him.²¹ Anne gave birth to Princess Elizabeth. Two years later, Anne miscarried, which Pollard argued was the lethal blow to the Queen.²² This was an era that did not wish to have a female ruler, and it was feared that a female monarch might bring England to "...anarchy and civil war."²³ On the same day of Anne's miscarriage, Pollard asserts, there were rumors stated by Eustace Chapuys that the King wished to remarry, having been "...seduced by witchcraft..." when he married Anne, and that God would not permit them to have a son. A few months later, Anne was arrested for "high treason," and by the nineteenth of May she was executed.²⁴ This was a time, according to Pollard, when the 'will' of the state was considered to be all important,²⁵ and there was little concern for "individual liberties" or "guilt or innocence."²⁶ Pollard stated that in the manner in which Henry treated his wife Catherine, it "...pales before the hideous tragedy of the ruin of Anne Boleyn."²⁷

Seventy years later, historians would continue to be discussing the plight of Anne Boleyn. According to Hester Chapman, an English historical biographer, the world in which Anne Boleyn lived was like that of a "...snake-pit, of which nearly all the occupants were

²⁰ A.F. Pollard, *Henry VIII*, (London: Longmans, 1905), 148.

²¹ Pollard, *Henry VIII*, 148-150.

²² Pollard, *Henry VIII*, 274.

²³ Pollard, *Henry VIII*, 144-145.

²⁴ Pollard, *Henry VIII*, 274-275.

²⁵ Pollard, *Henry VIII*, 347.

²⁶ Pollard, *Henry VIII*, 348.

²⁷ Pollard, *Henry VIII*, 274.

venomous..."²⁸ In her 1974 book, *The Challenge of Anne Boleyn*, Chapman describes a sinister milieu without regard for the truth or kindness, and in which Anne herself was one of the major players.²⁹ According to Chapman, Thomas Cromwell, concerned with the succession since Henry had no legitimate male heir by Anne, devised a plan to bring about "...Anne's destruction."³⁰ Chapman asserts that Cromwell, knowing that if Anne was charged with "high treason," there would be no escape. Chapman explains that during this time, those unfortunate enough to be charged with high treason were not allowed to have someone represent them, not allowed to interrogate any "witnesses", nor allowed to see the proof of the alleged crime. The jurors themselves were not allowed to inquire about the validity of the supposed facts, or they themselves could be imprisoned. A guilty verdict was absolute. Through "bribery and threats," as well as information freely given from her many enemies,³¹ Cromwell obtained the required evidence that he needed to make a damning case against Anne. Chapman asserts that Mark Smeaton, the court musician, only declared guilt because he was promised he would later be set free if he admitted to "carnal knowledge" with Anne. When Henry was told of the matter and shown the evidence, Chapman asserts that Henry was aghast, but believed the charges.³² Chapman concluded in her epilogue that, while Anne was innocent, there should be no "question of blame."³³ The King, Chapman claims, was bound by law to endorse her "death-warrant."³⁴ Furthermore, Cromwell was only looking after the

²⁸ Hester Chapman, *The Challenge of Anne Boleyn* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1974), 16.

²⁹ Chapman, *The Challenge of Anne Boleyn*, 16.

³⁰ Chapman, *The Challenge of Anne Boleyn*, 194-197.

³¹ Chapman, *The Challenge of Anne Boleyn*, 196-197.

³² Chapman, *The Challenge of Anne Boleyn*, 196-197.

³³ Chapman, *The Challenge of Anne Boleyn*, 229.

³⁴ Chapman, *The Challenge of Anne Boleyn*, 229.

welfare of England, in the hope that the nation might have an heir to follow Henry,³⁵ and those that corroborated “...acted as patriots, putting the State first...”³⁶ “In these conditions,” Chapman closes, “of capricious hatred and undeviating ruthlessness, Anne Boleyn lived, triumphed – and perished.”³⁷

Modern Scholarship

Perhaps there has been no author who has received such criticism for her argument regarding the fall of Anne Boleyn than that of American historian, Retha M. Warnicke. While most historians share common themes or focus on the key players, Retha M. Warnicke, a Professor of History at Arizona State University, asserts in her 1989 book, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn: Family Politics at the Court of Henry VIII*, that the primary reason for the fall of Anne Boleyn was that Anne gave birth to a deformed fetus in January of 1536.³⁸ Warnicke examines Anne’s life “...within a framework of sixteenth-century values and impulses...”³⁹

Warnicke explains in her book just how prevalent the belief in witchcraft was during the sixteenth century in Europe. It was believed, the author asserts, that people could use witchcraft to make one fall in love, cause harm, and other desired outcomes. Looking at the English statutes and church documents of the time, Warnicke points out actual trial records to illustrate that people truly believed that evil spirits indeed exist. According to Warnicke, most Europeans during this time believed in demons and witches, and that “...witches gave birth to

³⁵ Chapman, *The Challenge of Anne Boleyn*, 229.

³⁶ Chapman, *The Challenge of Anne Boleyn*, 229.

³⁷ Chapman, *The Challenge of Anne Boleyn*, 16.

³⁸ Retha M. Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn: Family Politics at the Court of Henry VIII* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1989), 191.

³⁹ Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 3.

deformed children...and committed incest.”⁴⁰ Warnicke asserts that the prevailing thought amongst the clergy at this time was that deformed babies were the result of “gross sexual conduct” committed by its parents.⁴¹ Warnicke cites the reports of Nicholas Sander to substantiate her argument that the fetus was deformed. Sander, a Catholic priest and critic who later wrote a scathing attack on Anne Boleyn and described her with witch-like features,⁴² stated that the fifteen week old fetus which Anne miscarried was a “shapeless mass.”⁴³ Warnicke mentions as well that the details of Anne’s miscarriage were released, which was highly unusual in Henry’s court, suggesting that something was unusual with the fetus.⁴⁴ Warnicke cited that even Henry VIII felt that the miscarriage was “...an evil omen”⁴⁵ and that Anne had “bewitched him.”⁴⁶ It was within this background that Henry was able to have Anne charged with “...engaging in illicit sexual acts with five men...”⁴⁷ Warnicke concludes that it was the “...fearful perception...” of birth defects during the sixteenth century that contributed to Anne’s death,⁴⁸ and that by examining the “social and cultural values”⁴⁹ of Anne’s time, “...the modern conception of her as a femme fatale must be discarded.”⁵⁰

Six years later, Karen Lindsey would provide a scholarly study based on feminist theory. In her 1995 work, *Divorced, Beheaded, Survived: A Feminist Reinterpretation of the Wives of Henry VIII*, Lindsey, an American writer and advocate on women’s issues, offers a feminist

⁴⁰ Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 192.

⁴¹ Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 4.

⁴² Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 3.

⁴³ Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 246.

⁴⁴ Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 191.

⁴⁵ Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 4.

⁴⁶ Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 192.

⁴⁷ Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 4.

⁴⁸ Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 4.

⁴⁹ Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 5.

⁵⁰ Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 5.

perspective on the women who were married to King Henry VIII. Lindsey describes a world in which women were treated as a commodity, their worth determined by their sexual purity and how many sons they could produce.⁵¹ Their chance of economic mobility, or decline, was based on their marriage prospects.⁵² According to Lindsey, Anne Boleyn was not the seductress she has been portrayed as, but a maiden who sought to “repel” the sexual advances of the King.⁵³ Realizing that she could not get away from the King, she used his sexual fervor towards her to her own advantage.⁵⁴

According to Lindsey, once married, Anne Boleyn could only secure her position as Queen if she gave birth to a son. With each miscarriage, Anne lost the hold she had on Henry.⁵⁵ With the miscarriage of a son in January of 1535, Lindsey asserts, Henry’s feelings of passion for Anne turned to hatred, and he wanted her dead.⁵⁶ Thomas Cromwell, knowing his master well, devised a plan for the removal of Anne, all without Henry’s knowledge, in order that the King could hold on to his illusions that he was a “righteous” man.⁵⁷ Thus, Cromwell schemed to create a hideous image of Anne, a malevolent figure with a sexual appetite “...of insatiable and unnatural lust.”⁵⁸ Gathering Anne’s enemies, Lindsey argues, Cromwell waited for an opportunity, seized it, then arrested his prey.⁵⁹ In the end, Lindsey concludes, that “Even in

⁵¹ Karen Lindsey, *Divorced, Beheaded, Survived: A Feminist Reinterpretation of the Wives of Henry VIII* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995), xxiv.

⁵² Lindsey, *Divorced, Beheaded, Survived*, xxv

⁵³ Lindsey, *Divorced, Beheaded, Survived*, xx.

⁵⁴ Lindsey, *Divorced, Beheaded, Survived*, 48.

⁵⁵ Lindsey, *Divorced, Beheaded, Survived*, 106-107.

⁵⁶ Lindsey, *Divorced, Beheaded, Survived*, 121.

⁵⁷ Lindsey, *Divorced, Beheaded, Survived*, 121.

⁵⁸ Lindsey, *Divorced, Beheaded, Survived*, 121.

⁵⁹ Lindsey, *Divorced, Beheaded, Survived*, 122.

defeat, she was never truly Henry's,"⁶⁰ and that she "...defined for herself who she was and what her life meant."⁶¹

One of the most prominent researchers covering the Tudor period in the late twentieth century is Eric Ives. Ives is considered to be the eminent historian on Anne Boleyn. He is a professor emeritus of Modern History at the University of Birmingham, and has been honored by Queen Elizabeth II for his contributions to the field of British history. In Ives 1986 book, *Anne Boleyn*, as well as his 2004 follow up, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn: The Most Happy*, Ives gives a detailed biography of Anne's life, from her disputed birth in 1501 to her death on the scaffold. Ives asserts that "...the reason for the deaths of Anne, Brereton and the others was not sexual excess but politics. Their fate is explained by what happened not in the bedroom, but in the corridors of power."⁶² Thus Ives looks upon Anne's fall through a political framework. The author states that Thomas Cromwell, not wanting to meet the same end as that of his predecessor, Thomas Wolsey, "...determined to destroy Anne first."⁶³ Drawing upon trial records and Eustace Chapuys's letters, Ives asserts that Cromwell led a coup against Anne Boleyn.⁶⁴

The author argues that there were two areas of disagreement between Queen Anne and Cromwell that led to their rift. The first had to do with the dissolution of the monasteries, and legislation that was being pushed through to "...confiscate the wealth of the smaller

⁶⁰ Lindsey, *Divorced, Beheaded, Survived*, 48.

⁶¹ Lindsey, *Divorced, Beheaded, Survived*, xxix.

⁶² Eric Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn: The Most Happy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), xiv.

⁶³ Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, xv.

⁶⁴ Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, xvi.

monasteries.”⁶⁵ Ives points out that Anne was interested in church reform, but was concerned about the money being given to charities and learning institutions, rather than the resources going to the military, as Cromwell desired. In what appeared to be delivered with Anne’s endorsement, Anne’s almoner, John Skip, delivered a scathing sermon to the Court, comparing Cromwell to a cunning adviser from the Old Testament.⁶⁶ According to Ives, this was “...Anne’s call to courtiers and counselors alike to change the advice they were giving the king and to reject the lure of personal gain.”⁶⁷

Another clash between Anne and Cromwell, according to Ives, was in securing an alliance between England and Charles V. Cromwell wanted to see an Anglo-Imperial alliance. Henry was insisting that Charles V recognize Anne as the King’s lawful wife, and allow Henry to “...settle his own affairs himself...”⁶⁸ After a heated argument between Henry and the Imperial Ambassador Eustace Chapuys, it appeared that Henry was not backing down.⁶⁹ Because of Cromwell’s dealings with Chapuys, Ives asserts that, “By the middle of April...Anne Boleyn had become a major threat to Thomas Cromwell,”⁷⁰ and that Cromwell determined that “...she must go.”⁷¹ Therefore, Cromwell began to set in motion a scheme for her elimination.⁷²

Although Anne Boleyn met her death on the scaffold, Eric Ives had great respect for Henry VIII’s second wife, Queen Anne. Ives wrapped up his argument, proclaiming, “...Indeed,

⁶⁵ Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 308.

⁶⁶ Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 307-309.

⁶⁷ Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 309.

⁶⁸ Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 314.

⁶⁹ Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 315.

⁷⁰ Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 315.

⁷¹ Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 316.

⁷² Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 317.

Anne deserves to be a feminist icon, a woman in a society which was, above all else, male-dominated, who broke through the glass ceiling by sheer character and initiative.”⁷³

In contrast to Eric Ives, Tudor historian G.W. Bernard challenged the notions that Anne Boleyn was a victim of political intrigue. In his 2010 book, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions*, Bernard asked, “...is it so certain that Anne was innocent?”⁷⁴

Bernard, a British professor of Early Modern History at the University of Southampton, explained in his book that he was always fascinated with Anne’s role in Henry VIII’s ‘break with Rome,’ and what led to her own demise shortly thereafter.⁷⁵ Rather than accepting the image of Anne Boleyn portrayed in history texts, Bernard asserted “...as a professional historian I wanted to test what I had been told.”⁷⁶ Citing the limited amount of extant artifacts from the period, Bernard felt much had to be surmised.⁷⁷

Bernard believed that the crucial point that led to Anne’s fall was the argument between Lady Worcester and her brother, Sir Anthony Brown, in which Lady Worcester “...brought Anne’s conduct into the open.”⁷⁸ Bernard felt that Lady Worcester, being one of her attending ladies, knew a great deal as to the Queen’s activities.⁷⁹ Once out, the information led “...to accusations of conduct that no king could accept.”⁸⁰ Bernard cites the poem, *Histoire*

⁷³ Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, xv.

⁷⁴ G.W. Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 151.

⁷⁵ Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions*, viii.

⁷⁶ Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions*, viii.

⁷⁷ Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions*, ix.

⁷⁸ Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions*, 190.

⁷⁹ Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions*, 190.

⁸⁰ G.W. Bernard, “The fall of Anne Boleyn,” in *Power and Politics in Tudor England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 91.

de Anne Boleyn jadis Royne d'Angleterre,⁸¹ written by Lancelot de Carles, as a credible source in forming his theory.⁸²

Bernard also discussed the extent to which Anne Boleyn was criticized.⁸³ He questioned how much of this condemnation was based on "...a true reflection of her character and behavior?"⁸⁴ Bernard listed numerous examples of the clergy who referred to Anne as a "...whore and harlot,"⁸⁵ even mentioning the Duke of Norfolk, Henry's closest confidant, as referring to her as "...a great whore."⁸⁶ Bernard acknowledged that much of their opinions may have been based on gossip, but Bernard reminded the reader that "...gossip is not necessarily false."⁸⁷

After Anne was arrested, she was sent to the Tower, where she liberally spoke of her concerns to her jailer, Sir William Kingston. Bernard asserted that her words were "damning."⁸⁸ Bernard stated that the confession of Anne's court musician, Mark Smeaton, that he had slept with the Queen three times,⁸⁹ convinced Henry that Anne was guilty.⁹⁰ Bernard referred back to de Lancelot's poem, which clearly stressed Smeaton confessed without the use of torture.⁹¹ Bernard questioned why Smeaton would confess and maintain that confession up on the scaffold?⁹²

⁸¹ Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 60.

⁸² Bernard, "The fall of Anne Boleyn," 88-89.

⁸³ Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions*, 184.

⁸⁴ Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions*, 184.

⁸⁵ Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions*, 184.

⁸⁶ Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions*, 185.

⁸⁷ Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions*, 184.

⁸⁸ Bernard, "The fall of Anne Boleyn," 91

⁸⁹ Bernard, "The fall of Anne Boleyn," 92.

⁹⁰ Bernard, "The fall of Anne Boleyn," 91.

⁹¹ Bernard, "The fall of Anne Boleyn," 92.

⁹² Bernard, "The fall of Anne Boleyn," 92.

After looking at all the evidence, Bernard concluded that, in his opinion, Anne had without a doubt engaged in adultery with Henry Norris and Mark Smeaton, which led to her lethal fall.⁹³

In Greg Walker's 2002 analysis, *Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn*, Walker compares the study of Tudor politics to that of 'trench warfare,' with the story of Anne Boleyn's fall in particular being battled over by historians.⁹⁴ Rejecting the theories of earlier scholars, Walker proposes that the fall of Anne Boleyn was due to careless comments that Anne made over the course of two days.⁹⁵ Walker states that "Anne fell...not as a result of what she did, but of what she said during the May Day weekend of 1536..."⁹⁶ According to Walker, once the Queen's behavior was put into question,⁹⁷ the "...investigation gathered a momentum of its own in an atmosphere of frenzied accusation and interrogation, driven by Henry's furious search for the truth..."⁹⁸ Walker compares Anne's inquest to that of a "witch hunt,"⁹⁹ arguing that Anne and those accused with her were swiftly arrested and executed within a course of three weeks.¹⁰⁰

Similar to Bernard, Walker cites the poem, *Histoire de Anne Boleyn jadis royne d'Angleterre*, written by Lancelot de Carles in 1535 and later published in 1545, as a credible contemporary source in explaining the initial event that led to Anne's fall.¹⁰¹ The poem tells

⁹³ Bernard, "The fall of Anne Boleyn," 96.

⁹⁴ Greg Walker, "Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn," 1.

⁹⁵ Greg Walker, "Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn," 1.

⁹⁶ Greg Walker, "Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn," 1.

⁹⁷ Greg Walker, "Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn," 2.

⁹⁸ Greg Walker, "Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn," 3.

⁹⁹ Greg Walker, "Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn," 16.

¹⁰⁰ Greg Walker, "Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn," 5.

¹⁰¹ Greg Walker, "Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn," 16.

how one of Anne's ladies, Lady Worcester, was accused of sexual impropriety by her brother, Sir Anthony Browne. The lady replies, "...if sexual immorality was the charge, she was not the worst offender by any means, Browne should look to the queen herself..."¹⁰² Lady Worcester would then name three men who were later charged, Mark Smeaton, Henry Norris and Lord Rochford, as having questionable relationships with the Queen.¹⁰³ Burdened with this disclosure, Browne would then disclose this information to high officials, which prompted the investigation of Anne.¹⁰⁴

While in the Tower, Anne revealed to her jailer, Sir William Kingston, two conversations she had previously had with her courtiers, Mark Smeaton and Henry Norris, that proved damning to her. While over the May day weekend, Smeaton, acting sullen, was asked what was wrong by the Queen. Smeaton responded peculiarly and inappropriately for his station, which may have inferred to some that there was a relationship between the two. The Queen in turn put him in his place. Walker suggests that his confession of adultery with the Queen may have been his opportunity to get back at the Queen. Either way, Smeaton's confession increased the urgency of the query, and according to Walker, suggested that the rumors were true. Another conversation that Anne mentions to Kingston, and that appears to have been overheard was between Anne and Henry Norris.¹⁰⁵ Upon Norris's comments upon the subject of delaying his marriage to the Queen's cousin, Anne suggested Norris had feelings for her, stating "...You look for dead men's shoes, for if ought to come to the king but good, you would look to have me."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Greg Walker, "Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn," 17.

¹⁰³ Greg Walker, "Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn," 17.

¹⁰⁴ Greg Walker, "Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn," 18.

¹⁰⁵ Greg Walker, "Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn," 19-23.

¹⁰⁶ Greg Walker, "Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn," 21.

Walker states that it was considered treasonous to ever mention the death of the King.¹⁰⁷

Walker concludes that it “...was unguarded speech and the gossip that it encouraged that condemned Anne, rather than actual adultery...”¹⁰⁸

The study of the Tudor period, and Anne Boleyn in particular, is a dynamic field, generating hundreds of books on the genre. Much has been written on Henry’s second wife, and the publication of new works doesn’t seem to be slowing down, as the publication of Alison Weir’s 2010 work, *The Lady in the Tower: The Fall of Anne Boleyn*, attests. We may never know what the true cause behind Anne Boleyn’s fall, but as G.W. Bernard reminded us, “...we are left to weigh a range of possible explanations that make the best sense of the inadequate sources that we do have.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Greg Walker, “Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn,” 22.

¹⁰⁸ Greg Walker, “Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn,” 26.

¹⁰⁹ Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions*, 185.

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