Iconic 16th Century Queens

Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots as Portrayed in Contemporary Historical Fiction by Women

M.A. Essay

Anna Dögg Gyldadóttir
Kt.: 070690-2339

Supervisor: Ingibjörg Ágústsdóttir
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Abstract
Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots can be considered as the proto-feminist figures of the Tudor era. They affected politics and religion and made a permanent mark on history. Elizabeth was a successful sovereign and overcame considerable obstacles due to the fact that she was a female monarch, while Anne Boleyn, her mother, and Mary, her cousin, were less successful. Because they defied the norm, Anne and Mary paid the ultimate price; ending their lives on the block. Historians have not always treated these women fairly and they do not agree as to the extent of these women’s guilt in plots and murders that took place in their lives. Anne and Mary’s history has never been told from their point of view. The historical novel becomes a powerful tool where these women are given a voice and their history is presented from different viewpoints. Writers of the women’s historical novel can write about the lives of women and offer explanations for events that have not been fully explained by the historical record.

This essay begins by discussing the historical novel and demonstrating how the historical novel is a combination of fact and fiction and how it can become a medium that tells a story about people and events, as well as explaining how the women’s historical novel gives the women of history a voice they have never had. Further, by introducing Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots, the essay explores the main events in their lives, their influence on politics, religion and how they affected history.

The essay goes on to analyse various portrayals of Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots in modern literature with focus on their characteristics, relationships and how main events in their lives are portrayed. It discusses both novels that stick mainly to historical facts and novels that are more fiction than facts. Finally, this essay explains how these portrayals differ by analysing how historical facts and fiction are intertwined, concluding by comparing some different portrayals of the queens in question.
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1. Introduction

In England and Scotland during the 16th century, three women lived fascinating lives that were characterized by romance, power struggles and death. Anne Boleyn was born into a noble family and later became queen, a fact that made its mark on English society. Elizabeth, her daughter, was born a princess, then declared a bastard before she became one of England’s greatest monarchs. Mary Stuart, Elizabeth’s cousin, was born a princess and later became Queen of Scotland and then Elizabeth’s prisoner. The role of women during this era was mainly to procreate and they had no power nor a voice. However, for these three women this typical female role was not enough. Being a female monarch was not normal during this era, nevertheless Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots were the daughters of kings and became the monarchs of their countries. Anne Boleyn, however, married the King of England after he had divorced his first queen, Catherine of Aragon, and in order to get a divorce, King Henry VIII split the English church from Rome and became Supreme Head of the Church of England. These women greatly influenced history; they affected religion and politics, among other things. Therefore, they can be viewed as the proto-feminists of their time. Plots, murders, love and death were all a part of these women’s lives; however, historians do not agree as to the extent of their involvement in the plots and murders that took place around them.

Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots have inspired modern authors to write biographies and novels about them. For instance, Philippa Gregory, a historian and a writer, has written many novels about the Tudor family, such as the novels The Other Boleyn Girl (2001), which is about Anne Boleyn, The Virgin’s Lover (2004), which is about Elizabeth I, and The Other Queen (2008), which is about Mary Queen of Scots. Many other authors have written novels about these women. Sandra Byrd wrote a novel about Anne Boleyn, named To Die For (2011), and a novel about Elizabeth I, named Roses Have Thorns (2013). Carolly Erickson wrote The Memoirs of Mary Queen of Scots (2009), which is about Mary Stuart. These novels will be discussed in this essay. The selection of novels about Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots is substantial, that is there are many different portrayals and many different stories available.

The historical novel is a combination of historical facts and fiction. The woman’s historical novel is very popular today and that is because women in history have never had a voice. The Other Boleyn Girl, To Die For, The Virgin’s Lover, Roses Have Thorns, The
Other Queen and The Memoirs of Mary Queen of Scots focus on the female figure in history, giving Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots a voice and empowering them. The novels consist of different portrayals of people and events and differ greatly in historical accuracy: from a novel that sticks mainly to historical facts to a novel that is mostly fiction with some historical facts. In order to demonstrate this, this essay will examine the historical background of Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots, focusing on the main events in their lives that have been adapted many times into novels, as well as discuss the concept of the historical novel. The essay will go on to analyse the novels in question, emphasising how the three queens are portrayed, and then finishing by comparing the novels and various portrayals. The iconic queens of the 16th century, Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots were significant to history and made a distinguishable mark on the politics of their countries and are still influencing people today through their characterizations in historical novels.

2. Bringing the Past into the Present

Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots all lived fascinating lives. They all influenced history, their nation, the country they lived in, politics and religious conflicts. Even though all of them have been dead for over 400 years, authors are still writing biographies and novels about them. Various novels have been written about Anne, Elizabeth and Mary, from different perspectives and each woman has been portrayed in many different ways. A common type of literature where these queens appear is the historical novel. The historical novel combines two different subjects: history, which is what has actually happened throughout history and recorded in historical sources, and fiction, which is a story written as entertainment. With historical novels, it could be said that the reader is getting the best of both worlds. Jerome De Groot describes the historical novel as thus: “The historical novel is a form that has provided writers with ways of conceptualising and challenging experience of nationhood, history and selfhood. As a form the novel has allowed writers to investigate knowledge, nation and time” (“Consuming History” 262). Within the genre of the historical novel there is the sub-genre of women’s historical fiction. This genre of fiction has become popular and authors are still writing and publishing novels about Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots. The novels discussed in this essay are all written by women authors. In his book Consuming History, Jerome De Groot states that historical fiction has become incredibly successful over the past decades and that the historical novel
“has become an even bigger seller than it had previously been”. He also states that the historical novel “has a claim to being a mode that has fundamentally affected sensibility and imagination” and “is a form that has provided writers with ways of conceptualising and challenging experience of nationhood, history and selfhood” (262). The woman’s historical novel challenges the role of women during different historical periods and the novels discussed here all certainly do this in the context of the Tudor era. Gillian Polack discusses the main difference between historians and narrators in fiction and states that one answer is point-of-view, and describes it thus:

   Historians usually have a static narrator (themselves) who operates in the limited realm of what can be known and how the sources can be used to inform or expand or interpret this. Narrators in fiction are far more flexible. They can indicate the unreliability of our understanding of the past, or suggest special insights. They can offer alternate points of view. (27)

Certainly, authors of historical novels can fill in the blanks that exist in history. These authors can write about what possibly happened and link various events that have occurred in history to their imagined versions. The historical novel has become very popular and modern writers and historians are intrigued with the past and continue to research it.

Women in history have been a popular subject in historical novels. In a way the historical novel is necessary because the view of history is very male-centred. The voices of women in history have not been heard. Ingibjörg Ágústsdóttir explains how women have been invisible in written history and how this relates to 20th century historical fiction:

   The male-centric nature of written history is well established; in the past history was predominantly written by men and focused mainly on actions - military, political, diplomatic - undertaken by men. Since the early 20th century, women’s historical fiction - whether the literary or the popular type - has attempted to readdress this imbalance and in general to re-evaluate women’s relationship with history. (“The Story” 141)

Therefore, the historical novel is not just for entertainment but also a tool that writers can use to give the women in history a voice for the first time, in order to tell history from new points of view.

   Philippa Gregory is an historian and an author who has written many novels that take place during the Tudor era, including novels about Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots. Gregory’s novels explore the female historical figure and Gregory gives them a voice and chance to tell their story. Peter J. Beck states that “Gregory’s historical novels have
struck a chord with a popular (largely) female audience. Tales of love, seduction, rape, incest, and so on have become Gregory’s hallmark” (212). Beck goes on to explain that the reason for Gregory’s mostly female readership is the fact that they are “attracted by her overt use of a feminist perspective to fictionalise the histories of women during a period when women were normally written out of history, merely footnoted, or presented in a shallow manner” (221). Indeed, Anne Boleyn and Mary Queen of Scots, along with other characters of the novels such as Mary Boleyn and Bess of Hardwick have been overlooked in history. However, the exception is Elizabeth I, who she has gotten some space in history books because she was a successful monarch for 45 years. Similarly, Ágústsdóttir describes how Philippa Gregory’s historical novels function and how her novels can be seen as feminist: “her narratives, with their focus on the female figure, actively remove the power from traditional historical accounts and create alternative versions of history in which women are given influence and agency” (“The Story” 143). Anne Boleyn was a remarkable woman and historically important, because she had great influence on religion and politics. “She was a key player in the Reformation, arguably the first woman to demand to be considered equal to a man, the first female commoner to be made a peer by direct creation and to hold a title in her own right” (De Groot “The Historical Novel” 70). Therefore, Anne Boleyn can be seen as a proto-feminist figure of the Tudor era.

Diana Wallace states “that the historical novel has been one of the most important forms of women’s reading and writing during the twentieth century”. In order to understand why this is, Wallace continues: “as numerous feminist theorists have pointed out, women have been excluded from traditional historical narratives. This offers one particularly crucial reason why women writers have turned to the historical novel as a discourse within which women can be made central” (ix). Katherine Cooper and Emma Short further assert: “By placing the female historical figure at the centre of their narratives, and by exploring her sexuality and her agency, novels such as Gregory’s re-appraise and reassert the role of the woman in history” (3). The woman’s historical novel is feminist and empowering and this may be why this genre has become so popular. The reason why historical novels on the Tudor era are so popular and why it is necessary to give the women during that era a voice is because of how women were treated and because of what was expected of them. Wendy Dunn states that “the patriarchal society of the Tudors told women silence was a virtue” and that “women who did try to make their voices heard put themselves into the dangerous position of nonconformity. They risked physical punishment, if not their lives”. She goes on to argue that “with silence as a matter of life or death, it is not surprising the Tudor period left
women historically voiceless” (4-5). Since women have been forgotten in history while men have been appraised for their achievements, the woman’s historical novel is a tool that gives women a voice. Dunn explains this, citing Heilmann and Llewellyn’s claim that “historical fiction offers (women) and their female characters a means of reclamation, a narrative empowerment to write women back into the historical record” (7). This statement demonstrates how the women’s historical novel gives women of the past a voice and gives them a place in history.

Dunn states that “Anne Boleyn was a woman who rejected silence, and paid the ultimate price for doing so. By rejecting silence she gave to the period an authentic voice of a woman who was heard; a voice that now transcends time” (6). This statement demonstrates why Anne Boleyn has become a popular subject in historical novels and Philippa Gregory does indeed give Anne Boleyn a voice in The Other Boleyn Girl. Dunn goes on to state that Anne’s downfall had to do with her having a voice: “Determination to have her voice heard for the political and religious direction of England brought her to the time when Henry VIII chose to erase her from his life, persuaded that her lack of silence and self-effacement provided evidence of treason and lack of chastity” (7). De Groot states in The Historical Novel that Anne Boleyn has become more popular due to Gregory’s novel: “There has been a clear upsurge of interest in Boleyn in the early twenty-first century, due in part to the success of Gregory’s The Other Boleyn Girl but also because of the explosion of the women’s historical novel and its interest in writing strong female characters” (76). It is evident that the women’s historical novel has become popular because it presents powerful female characters.

The woman’s historical novel is very popular, not just because these women and many more in history lived fascinating lives, but also because modern women want to read about empowering women. Ágústsdóttir explains how modern women still have to fight for things more than men, for example a pay rise, and she connects this to Gregory’s historical novels: “the struggles of Gregory’s female characters against men’s power arguably constitute part of the reason her novels are so popular with today’s female readership, alongside Gregory’s feminist project of rewriting women into history” (“The Story” 144-145). It is possible that when Philippa Gregory noticed this lack of change, she wanted to write historical novels in the hope of presenting female heroines that were not just desirable because of their feminine vulnerability but because they had a voice. Wallace states that “the historical novel has been one of the most important genres for women writers and readers in the twentieth century” (3). She goes on to argue that “[t]he sheer number of historical novels published by women writers over the twentieth century is a testament to the importance of the
form” (Wallace 4). The historical novel is important for women because the female voice is not as evident in the historical records as the male voice. The rising popularity of historical novels written by women suggests that the readership wants to hear the voices of women in history.

In novels about Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots there is always rivalry; it is inevitable, and it is almost impossible to write a novel about one and never mention the other. It does not really matter which one of them is the heroine and which is the villain, because they will always be women that had influence on politics, religion and their countries. Like Wallace states: “In taking sides with either Elizabeth or Mary, women historians and novelists signal their allegiance to both a version of female identity and a view of women’s place within history” (19). Both women made their mark on history and by writing their story, writers are celebrating their influence on history. Ágústsdóttir states that Mary “has achieved legendary status in popular culture through her role as victim and Catholic martyr. Biographers do not agree as to the extent of her guilt in the Darnley murder1, and commentators differ in their expressions of sympathy for or judgement against Mary, but the importance of her reign to British and Scottish history remains undisputed” (“Feminine and National Icon” 2). Because historians cannot agree about certain aspects of Mary’s life, her history is unsettled and can be interpreted in different ways. That is because Mary’s history was not written from her point of view.

This situation is similar to that of Anne Boleyn; it has been difficult for historians to research her life and assess what exactly happened. Burstein explains that the reason for this is because “we know virtually nothing about Anne, much of what we do know is buried under political or theological polemic” (2). Furthermore, unlike Elizabeth and Mary, Anne’s date of birth is unknown but evidence from that era gives modern scholars the choice of either 1501 or 1507 as Anne’s birth year. The art historian Hugh Paget demonstrated that Anne wrote a letter in 1513, when she went to Brussels to become a maid of honour at court, a position that was for 12 or 13-year-old girls. This would make Anne’s birth year circa 1501. The fact that little is known about Anne gives historical novelists the chance to fill in many blanks with fiction and therefore novelists can portray Anne and her life in a variety of ways.

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1 Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley was Mary’s second husband. When he was assassinated some people accused Mary of complicity in the plot to murder him (Guy 310).
3. Anne Boleyn

Anne Boleyn was born in Norfolk and her background was the same as the majority of the Tudor upper class. Her father Thomas Boleyn was the Earl of Ormond and came from a wealthy family. Her mother Elizabeth was the daughter of the Earl of Surrey, one of the main noblemen in England (Ives 3-4). As mentioned previously, Anne’s date of birth is unknown but evidence from that era gives modern scholars the choice of either 1501 or 1507 as Anne’s birth year. Anne had two siblings, Mary and George, and their date of birth is also unknown; however, it is believed that Mary was the oldest, born in 1499 and George the youngest born in 1504 (Ives 14-17).

In the year 1513, Anne went to the Habsburg Court at Mechelen in Brabant, where she was to become maid of honour at Margaret of Austria’s court. There Anne would receive elite education and according to Ives “nowhere could a father find a better start for a future courtier” (19). At Margaret’s court Anne received a tutor and she was taught French. Anne also had to master various courtly skills, which included dancing and indoor pageants, which was “a composite art form, involving drama as well as music and dance, and organized on a single theme” (Ives 20). In 1514, Anne went to France and became an interpreter for Mary Tudor, who was married to the King of France. When the King died, his daughter Claude became Queen. Anne Boleyn waited on Claude, Queen of France, for seven years. She was well liked at court and showed great talent in singing, dancing and playing the lute (Ives 26-29). In 1521, Anne’s services at the French court came to an end because she was supposed to marry James Butler; however, the wedding never took place (Ives 34-36).

In March 1522, Anne first appeared at the English court after her stay in France. She was taking part in a pageant; the theme was the cruelty of unrequited love (Ives 37). While at the courts of Habsburg and France, Anne had received the best training in pageants and singing and dancing. Therefore, Anne was very lucky to be making her debut at the English court doing something she excelled at. Anne became maid of honour to Queen Katherine (Ives 63). King Henry VIII and Queen Katherine had one daughter, Mary. Henry VIII’s interest in his wife Katherine had been dwindling for years. She had not become pregnant for seven years and Henry VIII had lost hope for a male heir (Ives 83). At a joust in the year 1526, Henry VIII’s affections for Anne were first noticed by the public. On his clothes was a heart and written inside it the words: “Declare I dare not” (De Lisle 163). In August 1527, Henry VIII “applied to the pope for the dispensation to allow him to marry again” (Ives 84). Anne Boleyn and King Henry VIII decided to marry; be that as it may, Henry VIII was still
married to Katherine of Aragon. However, Henry VIII was determined to bring that marriage to an end (Ives 88). While Henry was trying to get his marriage to Katherine annulled, Anne became more and more unpopular. People were blaming her for Henry’s decision to get his marriage annulled (Ives 100). When Henry VIII became Supreme Head of the Church of England (De Lisle 179), he could grant himself annulment from the marriage to Katherine of Aragon.

On the 25th of January 1533, Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn got married and by then Anne was pregnant. Anne’s coronation took place at Westminster Abbey when she was six months pregnant (Ives 162, 178). On the 7th of September, Anne gave birth to a daughter and she was proclaimed as Henry’s first legitimate child. When only three days old the baby was christened Elizabeth. Three or four months after Elizabeth’s birth, Anne became pregnant again and in July she miscarried (Ives 184-185, 191). In 1536, Henry VIII had an accident when his horse fell on him, leaving Henry unconscious for two hours, and five days later Anne miscarried the second time. Henry was beginning to see his marriage to Anne as similar to his marriage with Katherine; childlessness was condemning the marriage (Ives 296, 298). Ives states that Henry’s affection for Anne was stolen by Jane Seymour2 while Anne was pregnant and that Jane Seymour was instructed to poison Henry’s mind against Anne, hoping that Jane could become more than a mistress to Henry (Ives 302-303).

In April and May, 1536, George Boleyn and four other men were arrested and accused of adultery with the queen (Ives 319). Anne’s marriage with King Henry VIII was declared null and void, leaving Elizabeth a bastard. That same day the men who were found guilty of adultery with the queen were executed. King Henry VIII decided to get an executioner from Calais to execute Anne, he was so skilled a swordsman that he “could cut the head off a prisoner who was kneeling upright” (Ives 351, 354). On the morning of the 19th of May, Anne Boleyn was executed, her last words were about Henry: “a more merciful nor more gentle prince was there never, and to me he was ever a good, a gentle and sovereign Lord” (De Lisle 208).

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2 Jane Seymour was King Henry’s third wife, they became betrothed the day after Anne was executed (Ives 360).
3.1 The Other Boleyn Girl

The novel *The Other Boleyn Girl* by Philippa Gregory, published in 2001, is about the sisters Anne and Mary Boleyn. The novel begins when Anne is in France and ends when she is executed; the time frame is 15 years. Mary Boleyn is the main character of the novel and the story is told from her point of view. However, there is rivalry between the sisters which can make her telling of events unreliable. Crane states that “Gregory’s choice to concentrate on her sister Mary means that Anne can be observed with all the freedom of a secondary character - though, again, with that vital prescience which is part of the satisfying fabric of historical fiction” (82). Mary Boleyn had been largely ignored by historians until the publication of *The Other Boleyn Girl* and although it is “not the first novel to fictionalise her past, the popularity of Gregory’s *The Other Boleyn Girl* has reignited interest in Mary Boleyn as a legitimate subject of historical inquiry” (Saxton 104). Saxton states that “limited source material means that an account of her life that reflects the reality of her past is not possible” (105). This lack of historical facts about Mary gives the historical novelist an opportunity to fill in the blanks with fiction, making the possibilities numerous. In *The Other Boleyn Girl*, the two sisters are portrayed as complete opposites; Mary is the sweet and kind one that cannot see a person executed while Anne is portrayed as vain, conniving, spiteful, cold-hearted, selfish and possibly responsible for murder. However, even though the sisters are portrayed in such a different way they can both be read as feminist figures.

In the novel Anne is portrayed as malevolent; for instance, early in the novel she makes this statement about Queen Katherine: “She’s an old woman. Dressed like an old woman in the ugliest clothes in Europe, from the stupidest nation in Europe” (Gregory 6). Then Anne says that she will be French because she thinks that will single her out and make her the centre of attention. Anne is vain and thinks that she is better than the Queen of England. Later when Mary says that there is still time for the King and Queen to have a male heir, Anne replies: “Time for her to die and him to remarry?” (Gregory 10). This statement of Anne’s is interesting because later in the novel Anne marries the king, so that Gregory might be hinting that Anne has her eye on the king from the beginning of the story. When King Henry VIII asks for Mary’s kerchief to wear under his breastplate, Anne becomes jealous. Anne says that Mary could never manage the king because: “the woman who manages him will be one who never stops for a moment remembering that she is there for strategy” (Gregory 36). Anne is obviously thinking about how a woman can manage the king and how she herself would do that.
Anne is vain and this is illustrated when Mary describes her sister: “Anne could always be comforted by the sight of her own beauty” (Gregory 226). Another example of Anne’s vanity is when she wants George to say that she is desirable and when he asks Anne if he should take her to the king, she answers with the question: “Wouldn’t you rather take me to your chamber?” (Gregory 326). Anne states that she wants everyone to desire her and she wants her brother to state so in front of Mary because she wants to be better than her sister. The Anne of The Other Boleyn Girl is even involved in murder. When Mary hears the news that Bishop Fisher has been poisoned, she thinks: “I remembered the darkness of her face as she swore that she hated Fisher as much as she had hated the cardinal. And now the cardinal was dead of shame, and Fisher’s dinner had been salted with poison” (Gregory 282). Her own sister even believes that Anne might be partly responsible for these incidents. Mary Boleyn becomes King Henry’s mistress and when Mary gives birth to a son, there is no doubt that the child is King Henry’s son and not her husband’s. Gregory uses this son, who is named Henry, to demonstrate how mean Anne is. When Anne is married to Henry, she decides to adopt Mary’s son and starts calling him her son in order to strengthen her relationship with the king, stealing Mary’s son and leaving Mary heartbroken. According to Ives, Mary Boleyn was King Henry VIII’s mistress before getting married, the duration of the affair is unknown, and it might have continued even after Mary was married (15-17). Therefore, Mary might have given birth to King Henry’s children.

After Anne’s plan to marry Henry Percy and become the Duchess of Northumberland fails, she completely loses her temper with her brother George and physically attacks him. Anne is really hot-tempered; she is very quick to anger. Anne physically attacks her siblings’ numerous times throughout the novel and the reasons for these are attacks are insignificant. One scene is when Mary tells Anne that she is married and pregnant; Anne slaps Mary so hard on the cheek that Mary can hear her neck snap. Anne even fights with her husband Henry, screams at him and calls him a fool, which is a dangerous thing to do, even though they end up hugging and kissing. Anne is playing the king like an instrument; she has control over him. Anne uses tantrums as tools of manipulation, as rebellion against male power and male dominance. Anne uses this method on the king, which is really brave because it is not in her best interest to try and control the king; it could be a matter of life and death. Anne has to be mean to get what she wants; Henry wants Anne badly and she manipulates him by withholding sex and when she snaps at him, he cannot stay angry at her for long. De Lisle describes Anne as “rather sallow-skinned, with a long narrow face and high-bridged nose, but she was graceful and striking with her dark hair and flashing black eyes” (161-162). Ives
states that Anne radiated sex and “what made her stand out was sophistication, elegance and independence” (45). This description of Anne as a beautiful, lusty sexual being indeed supports Gregory’s portrayal of how she manages to control Henry and manipulate him. However, after they are married, he begins to lose interest in her.

The moment that Anne has got some power and Queen Katherine is no longer living with the king, Anne becomes power driven and threatens her siblings. Anne says to them: “You are subjects. [...] I had my own aunt sent from court, I had the king’s brother-in-law sent from court. I had the queen herself sent from court. Is there anyone who has any doubt that I can send them into exile if I wish?” (Gregory 302). By making such statements, Anne thinks that she is much better than her siblings and that they are her subjects, and she does not show affection for her siblings. This is a clear demonstration of how Anne uses bitchy methods in order to maintain her power. How mean Anne is in The Other Boleyn Girl, is made apparent when she gives birth to Elizabeth. Anne says: “A girl. What good is a girl to us?” (Gregory 387). Again, Gregory is stating that Anne knows what she must do in order to maintain her power. She has to give Henry a male heir and she is afraid of what will happen if she does not give him a son. However, according to Ives, Anne showed a maternal side when it came to Elizabeth. Anne sent her daughter various things and she also visited Elizabeth alone or with Henry. Anne also wrote letters to Lady Bryan, the woman that was taking care of her daughter. However, as the mother of a princess, Anne did not have a say in her daughter’s upbringing as Henry made all the decisions (255-256).

In the story there are some scenes where Anne and George have a moment that is not normal for siblings; Gregory is hinting that George and Anne have sexual feelings for each other. They often meet late at night and lie in bed together and at one point, Jane, George’s wife, sees them. Mary even witnesses when Anne and George kiss and Mary states: “we all pretended that it was nothing more than a brotherly kiss” (Gregory 309). This kiss is obviously sexual and they all know it. Later in the novel George confesses his feelings for Anne to Mary: “She is a passionate whore, isn’t she? I’m her brother and I’d have her now” (Gregory 313). Gregory is stating that Anne is guilty of having an affair with her brother. This is where Gregory decides to weave together facts and lies as she herself states in her article “Born a Writer: Forged as a Historian”, where she discusses the process of writing a historical novel:

Is not the imposition of the order of a story on historical facts the making of a lie? Am I not picking out from the enormous range of facts of that year the very few that I can thread together to tell, even to prove, the story that I want to write? (242)
Gregory continues to weave together facts and lies in how she portrays Anne’s relationship with her brother, George.

During Anne’s third and final pregnancy, she says to her sister, Mary: “No-one knows what went into the making of this baby, Mary. No-one will ever know” and Anne says about her baby that “[h]e should be a great prince for England. For I went on a journey to the very gates of hell to get him” (Gregory 450). This suggests that the baby is not the king’s baby and possibly George’s baby. When Mary tells George that Anne is pregnant, George does not seem happy as he should be, but looks guilty. Mary tells the reader that “I knew with absolute certainty that his conscience was not clear, and I guessed that Anne had taken him as her companion on her journey to the gates of hell to conceive this child for England” (Gregory 453). When Anne gives birth to the baby, it is described thus: “In the midwife’s bloody hands was a baby horridly malformed, with a spine flayed open and a huge head, twice as large as the spindly little body” (Gregory 472). Anne gives birth to a monster that was conceived in incest. However, Ives states that “no one ever mentioned the deformed foetus, either when moves against Anne were beginning, or after her arrest or at her trial subsequently […] and no evidence whatsoever supports the alleged deformity” (297). Because of the rumour of a deformed foetus, some historians have speculated about a possible link between Anne’s fall and an accusation of witchcraft, but Ives states that “no accusation that she had dabbled in the black arts was ever levelled with Anne” (298). However, Gregory portrays George and Anne as guilty of incest. In the novel, George says to Anne, after she has miscarried: “And whatever we have done, it was done for love” and she replies: “Even when the outcome was monstrous?” (Gregory 482). Gregory portrays Anne Boleyn as guilty as sin, and there is little doubt that Anne and her brother George are having an affair. Ágústsdóttir describes how Philippa Gregory portrays Anne’s and George’s relationship, stating that:

Gregory details Anne Boleyn’s fall by using a mixture of factual details concerning the charges laid against her, as well as more controversial plot elements such as Anne’s miscarriage of a deformed child and an implied incestuous relationship between Anne and her brother George - events that are not proven by the historical record, yet are clearly persistent in popular myths about Anne Boleyn. (“The Story” 145-146)

As has been mentioned earlier, this is where history meets fiction; however, Gregory chooses to use myths about Anne Boleyn and she weaves those myths into her plot. By doing so, she suggests answers for the reader as to why Anne was executed.
Little is known about Anne’s relationship with her siblings, Mary and George. However, Ives states that “Mary Boleyn played much less of a part in Anne’s life than did their brother” (15). In The Other Boleyn Girl, Anne is closer to Mary, i.e. Mary knows more about Anne than George does. Mary dresses and undresses Anne and they sleep in the same bed. This connection between Anne and Mary is obvious when Anne has become queen and she meets her brother after some time apart. Anne does not tell George that she cannot go anywhere without an armed guard because the people hate her so much and she does not tell him that Bishop Fisher, Anne’s enemy, has nearly died of poisoning. Mary believes that Anne does not tell her brother these things because Anne does not want her brother to see who she has become. This scene demonstrates that Mary knows a lot more about Anne than her brother, which is credible since Mary is Anne’s lady in waiting and she is with her continuously (Gregory 301).

Susan Bordo criticises The Other Boleyn Girl and the historical inaccuracies depicted in the novel along with how Anne Boleyn is portrayed. She does not like Gregory’s portrayal of the sisters and states that “[h]er novel [...] allows Mary to be both sexual and saintlike, and despite having been ‘used’ sexually by Henry, she is rewarded with the best ending of anyone in the book (which just happens to be a life of domestic happiness)” (220-221). Bordo further questions Gregory’s comment that Mary’s story is about independence, victory and a triumph over Anne’s ambition and therefore feminist: “sex is allowed and ambition isn’t?” (221). Bordo also mentions writers that agree with her about Anne’s portrayal in The Other Boleyn Girl, for example, Robin Maxwell, who stated she was appalled along with Hilary Mantel and Michael Hirst (220-221). Basically, Bordo believes this portrayal of Anne Boleyn to be anti-feminist. Gregory portrays Mary as closer to Anne because Mary is the feminist heroine of the novel. Beck argues that Mary Boleyn is “a feminist heroine standing up to the demands of a masculinist society” and that “Gregory forced readers to decide who was the real heroine, Anne or the other Boleyn girl” and that the title is a good indication (217). Later in her discussion on The Other Boleyn Girl, Bordo states that putting the novel in the context of a “power feminist” celebration of female competitiveness and aggression may also explain why it seems, to Gregory and many of her most beloved readers, that her Anne is not a villainess, but rather [...] a bold, assertive, [an agent] who, in the final analysis, made her own bed. (244)

Bordo is stating that the portrayal of Anne as the mean and competitive woman is selling to the theory of the femme fatale.
However, the portrayal of Anne in *The Other Boleyn Girl* is multidimensional and complicated; ultimately, Anne can be read as a feminist heroine. Even though she is mean and clearly guilty of what she is accused of, she wants power, she gains power and in order to maintain this power she has to be mean and guard herself and what she has gained. Gregory’s portrayal of Anne Boleyn demonstrates that whether she was kind or mean, Anne could never have survived longer than she did. It all comes down to the fact that her fate completely depended on the whims of King Henry VIII. It is essential to bear in mind the historical background of the Tudor era. Anne wanted power and she got what she wanted: to become a queen, i.e. the most powerful woman in England. However, because she was a woman, she was powerless, nevertheless. The fact is that Anne has a few great scenes in the novel and these are the moments where women have power over men. The scene when Wolsey gets to feel the power Anne has, is poignant: “The girl he had scolded for unchastity and for aiming too high sat at the right hand of the king of England and looked at him with narrowed eyes as if she were not very impressed with what he had to say” (Gregory 225). This arguably shows a feminist version of Anne; Anne has the power here and not Wolsey. Anne threatens to destroy Wolsey and the fact that everything that Anne threatens Wolsey with comes true shows how powerful she is. She, as a woman, has power over him, a man. Gregory thus describes how much power Anne had even though she was a woman during the 16th century. These little victories of the female characters are very satisfying and even though they are small victories, they really do mean a great deal because Tudor women had never gained power like Anne Boleyn did. Ágústsdóttir states that because Anne succeeded in gaining power, she is a feminist figure:

the narrative does make clear just how much Anne has to sacrifice in order to gain power and influence. This, then reflects on the position of women in history as placed outside the sphere of power and underlines the fact that challenging this power structure quite simply required a superhuman effort; it meant resorting to underhand “bitchy” methods, and overall making terrible sacrifices. (“The Story” 148)

During the Tudor era women did not have any power and in order to gain power a woman had to have a strong character that went against the prevailing opinion and a particularly dominant opinion at that. Later in the novel, Anne says to Mary that she will make her own plans and unlike Mary, who obeys and does what she is told, Anne will live her life as she pleases (Gregory 77). This statement makes Anne a feminist because during the 16th century women did not control their future or even who they married. By stating that she herself will be in control is a good example of how strong willed and determined she is. Anne’s rise to
power and her death can be used in order to demonstrate why she can be seen as a feminist heroine. Ágústsdóttir states that even though Gregory's portrayal of Anne is unsympathetic, her death is significant: “Anne has reached too far and through her ambition posed too great a challenge to the patriarchal system of Tudor politics, and for this she pays the ultimate price” (“The Story” 150). Clearly, demanding change and respect equal to men is not accepted and Anne, with her ambition, has gotten as far as possible.

Saxton’s view of the feminist figure in The Other Boleyn Girl is similar to Susan Bordo’s:

Both Boleyn women acquire agency and are thereby seen to be responsible for their respective fates, yet they achieve this agency through vastly different means and pursue opposing goals. By highlighting the respective choices of the sisters, this post-feminist depiction celebrates Mary’s pursuit of motherhood and marriage and she is rewarded with her own safety and that of her family, while Anne is the architect of her own violent death. (99)

Throughout the novel there is rivalry and competition between the sisters leading to the question of which sister is the more feminist figure. Julie Crane states that Mary is the sister that succeeds, because she gains the happy life she aimed at:

Mary, the novel reminds us, is the means to the continuance of the Boleyn line, and she also achieves personal satisfaction in a happy marriage, whereas Anne - the Queen who could afford to wait - is finally defeated by time, time as history and time as it impinges on her changing female body. (Crane 82)

Therefore, Mary is the feminist focus of Gregory’s novel The Other Boleyn Girl. One difference between the sisters that emphasises who Gregory intends as the feminist figure of the novel is how they treat and think about their daughters. Anne sees her daughter as another Boleyn girl which makes her worthless while Mary wants her daughter away from court so that she can have a happy life. The sisters are portrayed as contrasting feminists; Mary is the feminist focus in the novel, because she achieves her happiness on her own terms and she does not want her daughter to be a part of a world that only sees women as pawns in the game for power. She wants things in the society to change. Anne on the other hand can be read as a feminist figure in the novel, she is strong-willed, she knows what she wants and she achieves her goals. However, she mostly cares about herself and she does not defy how girls are treated, she sees them as disposable. The different portrayals demonstrate the various aspects a feminist character can have. When discussing the sisters, Cooper and Short state that “Gregory in particular joins a growing tradition of female historians and writers who play
upon, add to, and knowingly embellish the life of Boleyn and her sister, and who thereby critique claims to authenticity and accuracy made by male historians and writers” (3). By presenting the sisters as strong characters, Gregory makes their story fascinating and like other female historians and writers, she re-evaluates the validity of history as told by men.

3.2 To Die For

The novel To Die For by Sandra Byrd, published in 2011, tells the story of Anne Boleyn from a young age, and until her execution; the time frame is 18 years. The story is told from Meg Wyatt’s point of view, who was Anne’s childhood friend and lady in waiting when Anne became queen. The novel focuses on female friendship; Meg is close to Anne and she witnesses everything that happens in Anne’s life. Anne is portrayed as a kind hearted and humorous woman that is devoted to her religion. Anne’s portrayal in To Die For is at least not the same as most of her fictional representations, as defined by Burstein, who says they “have varied little over the course of the last century [as] Anne is vengeful, near hysterical, frequently asexual, and power mad” (2). Anne is portrayed as so driven by her religion that she sincerely believes that in the eyes of God there is no question that Henry’s marriage to Katherine is null and void, and that it is only a matter of getting it annulled on paper. This is demonstrated when Anne reads from the Bible that “if a man shall take his brother’s wife, it is an unclean thing” and she goes on to explain that the Pope cannot overrule Holy Scriptures (Byrd 98). However, Byrd’s religious devotion might perhaps come through in her novel. In Author Q & A section of To Die For Byrd talks about religion and mentions her favourite Scripture.

Byrd uses Meg Wyatt to demonstrate that Anne is innocent of the charges made against her. As a lady in waiting to Anne Boleyn, Meg knows almost everything about Anne’s private life; she dresses her and changes the sheets on her bed. One scene demonstrates how much Meg knows about Anne. This is when Henry and Anne get secretly betrothed in Calais and Meg notices that Anne has had sex for the first time. Meg notices blood in Anne’s sheets and she wants the laundress to see the blood because she wants everyone to know that Anne was a maiden when she first slept with the king. Henry’s marriage to Katherine was declared null and void because Katherine was suspected of not having been a maiden when Henry married her. Meg is scared for Anne and she is not sure whether Anne will be safe by being married to Henry. In her article “Meg Wyatt: The Faithful Friend” Byrd discusses the character of Meg Wyatt. Byrd was researching Anne
Boleyn when she found the name Anne Wyatt and that she had attended Anne Boleyn until her death. They were very close because when Anne Boleyn was about to be executed, she gave Anne Wyatt a prayer book and whispered something in her ear. Anne Wyatt was close to Anne Boleyn in age and had a much older sister named Meg. Byrd decided to switch the names of the Wyatt sisters so there would not be two ‘Annes’ in her novel in order to avoid confusion. On her website, Byrd states that although much of Meg’s story in To Die For is fictionalized, “it is drawn from known facts.” She also states that the Boleyn family and the Wyatt family were neighbours and friends and Meg was Thomas Wyatt’s sister (Byrd). The fact that the families were neighbours and friends gave Byrd the opportunity to portray Anne and Meg as best friends from childhood, resulting in the strong bond they have. In this way Byrd sticks to what is known according to the historical records.

In To Die For, the rumours of Anne’s adultery begin when Madge Shelton asks Henry Norris if he wants Anne Boleyn. Anne becomes so shocked that she states that Henry VIII would have to be dead for Henry Norris to have her. The room becomes silent, everyone is shocked because speaking about the king’s death is treason. According to Ives this happened, Anne was the one that asked Henry Norris why he was postponing his proposed marriage, his response making her say: “You look for dead men’s shoes; for if ought came to the king but good you would look to have me” (335). However, in the story, Madge is the one that is asking the questions and because Madge’s family has ties with Katherine of Aragon, the narrator Meg Wyatt speculates if Madge is trying to trick Anne into saying something idiotic. Madge Shelton runs and tells the news that Anne and Henry had a lovers’ spat where they hoped for the king’s death, which leads to Anne being accused of adultery. This scene suggests that Anne Boleyn was set up and then accused of something she did not do.

Meg knows what occurs in Anne’s chambers, she knows the people around Anne and she is constantly waiting on Anne. The scene when Anne has been arrested and is accused of adultery demonstrates how much Meg knows about Anne and explains her innocence. Meg is relieved when she hears the dates and places of the alleged affairs because Anne is clearly innocent. Meg says: “Anne was in a completely different place than the accused spot of rendezvous. A simple review of the king’s books could confirm that. Or the men charged were elsewhere. Or she had been recovering from childbirth, surrounded at all hours by her ladies, and still bleeding” (Byrd 305). Since Meg knows all this the King and the Lords should also have known. This suggests that Anne is being set up; the evidence of her innocence does exist, but no one is bringing this evidence to show Anne’s innocence. Ives states that “the detailed particulars of Anne’s adultery were [...] fiction” because in twelve
cases Anne or the man accused were elsewhere than the meant adultery was supposed to have happened. Anne was supposed to have had sex with Henry Norris at Westminster on the 6th of October; however, she was at Greenwich recovering from childbirth (344). The nature of the relationship between Anne and Thomas Wyatt is unknown although his poems to her suggest he was in love with her while she did not love him (Ives 68-69). Susan Bordo states that “Wyatt […] as his grandson emphasizes, was never a real contender for Anne’s affection because he was already married”. He only wrote Anne poetry and charmed her with flattery and entertaining conversations (Bordo 142). This supports Byrd’s portrayal of Anne as innocent of adultery. Crane states that there is another side to Anne’s story that is shaped by women and that is certainly the portrayal of Anne in To Die For. Crane further states that women were closest to Anne and knew her best: “Women brought her up, women surrounded her until the very last moments of her life” (80). Therefore, it is perfectly credible that she would have confided in the women that were closest to her. It certainly makes the novel interesting that it is told from Meg Wyatt’s point of view. By using Meg, Byrd is applying the knowledge of someone close to Anne and therefore the portrayal of Anne becomes more credible. This fits with Crane’s statement that “the women by whom Anne was surrounded from birth, and whose own lives were affected by her rise and fall, have lent much of the texture, poignancy, and interest to her story” (80-81). Meg becomes the medium that tells Anne’s story and she is a person that has known Anne almost all her life, which makes the portrayal of Anne convincing.

Burstein states that novels that contain bona fide romance plots “insist that authentic romance can exist only outside the sphere of Henry’s court” (3-4). This statement can be applied to The Other Boleyn Girl and To Die For. In The Other Boleyn Girl, Anne ends up on the block and Mary Boleyn receives her happy ending in the country with her husband and children. In To Die For, Anne Boleyn also does not get a happy ending, as is well known. However, her maid of honour Meg Wyatt does. At the end of novel, after Anne’s execution, Meg thinks: “What I had once so easily dismissed, a simple life as a wife and a mother, had now become my greatest pleasure. I mourned Anne, who had not had the mighty love of a good man, but rather the uncertain affections of a mighty man” (Byrd 325). Meg Wyatt gets the happy ending and Anne, the unlucky one, suffers a tragic ending because Henry was not a good man and her life depended on the king’s inclinations. In both novels, the happy ending is outside Henry’s court and at a safe distance from there. When Henry has set his eyes on Jane Seymour, Anne says to Meg that perhaps the king has convinced Jane that his marriage to Anne is invalid, just like he once did when he convinced Anne his marriage to Katherine
was invalid. Anne feels sorry for Jane because she is being tricked by the King just like Anne once was. Burstein’s statement that “Anne’s life depends entirely on the king’s whims” (Burstein 5) is certainly relevant in To Die For because Anne is clearly innocent of the accusations made against her. Henry sets his heart on Jane Seymour and therefore he must get rid of Anne.

4. Elizabeth I

The year was 1533 and on the 7th of September Anne Boleyn gave birth to a baby girl in the palace of Greenwich. The baby was King Henry VIII’s daughter and she was christened Elizabeth. When Elizabeth was three months old, she received her private household with servants to take care of her. Before Elizabeth’s mother, Anne Boleyn, was executed, the marriage between Anne and Henry was nullified, leaving Elizabeth a bastard. At that time, Elizabeth was two years and eight months old (Neale 1, 4-6). In 1544, Elizabeth and Mary had been present at court and public ceremonies with their brother Edward as Henry’s dearest children. That year an act was passed by parliament which established the sisters in the succession to the throne. During that time Elizabeth began her education (Neale 9). By the age of ten Elizabeth had begun learning Italian and French along with Latin and later Elizabeth began learning Greek. When Elizabeth’s tutor died, Elizabeth requested Ascham, the man that had taught her previous teacher. Elizabeth was obviously strong willed because she got her way (Neale 12-13).

Elizabeth was thirteen years old when her father King Henry VIII died in January 1547. Henry’s son and Elizabeth’s brother, Edward, became king. Elizabeth and Edward shared the same religious and intellectual outlook and for Elizabeth the future looked bright. In 1553, Edward died and Mary became Queen. Queen Mary faced difficulty from the start; she was a devout Catholic while the nation’s religion had been Protestant for twenty years. Mary intended to make her country Catholic again (Neale 19, 27, 31). Queen Mary did not want her sister to be her successor and when Elizabeth pretended to practice Catholicism Mary did not believe her. In January 1554, a conspiracy to overthrow Mary as Queen was discovered and even though Elizabeth had been stuck in bed very sick, Queen Mary was sure of her involvement in this plot. However, Neale states that “it is difficult to believe that she was ignorant of the conspiracy” (37). In March, it was decided to send Elizabeth to the Tower. There was not sufficient evidence to execute Elizabeth, nor was it possible to oust her from the succession; Mary did not want her at court. Elizabeth was therefore kept in captivity.
in the royal manor of Woodstock. In April, 1555 Mary decided to bring Elizabeth to court. In November, 1558 Mary named Elizabeth as her successor and on the 17th of November, Mary died. Three days later, Elizabeth made Sir William Cecil a member of her council (Neale 34-40, 45, 52, 55). Cecil was the surveyor of Elizabeth’s estates and he “had served as Secretary of State to Edward VI”, Elizabeth’s brother. Cecil was considered very skilled and even his enemies thought he was brilliant and righteous; he was a skilled politician and a behind-the-scenes operator (De Lisle 299).

Elizabeth’s coronation took place on the 15th of January, 1559 in Westminster Abbey. John Knox, among others, did not approve that a female monarch should rule the country (Neale 59, 63). During Elizabeth’s reign there were two things that caused much conflict: the expectations that she should marry and the question of who would succeed her. Elizabeth refused to marry someone she had not seen and she had feelings for Robert Dudley, a courtier. He was made Master of Horse when Elizabeth became queen. Robert was the type of man that Elizabeth would have wanted for a husband. Elizabeth’s feelings for Robert were indiscreet and since Robert Dudley was married, people did gossip. Robert’s love for his wife Amy had faded away and they had no children. As every courtier’s wife, Amy did not live with her husband; Robert was at court and Amy lived in the country (Neale 77-78). In September, 1560, Amy was found dead at the foot of a staircase and the coroner’s verdict was an accidental death. However, a rumour that Amy would be murdered had been going around for a long time before she died which lead people to believe that she had indeed been murdered. After Amy’s death it was obvious that Elizabeth wanted to marry Robert. However, the fact that Elizabeth’s councillors advised her against it and the mystery surrounding Amy’s death made it impossible (Neale 80-82).

According to Henry VIII’s will, Catherine Grey³ should have been next in succession after Elizabeth. When Elizabeth discovered that Catherine had married secretly and was with child she was not pleased. At the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign, Catherine was used by Catholics to try to take the throne from Elizabeth. Since Catherine had made a treasonable marriage and since neither the priest that performed the ceremony nor the witnesses dared come forth, Elizabeth declared the marriage null and void and sent both Catherine and her husband to the Tower (Neale 110). According to Neale, Elizabeth despised Catherine and she had Mary Queen of Scots in mind as a successor. However, in order to be eligible as the successor to the English throne, Mary had to make a marriage that suited England. That was

³ Lady Catherine Grey was the granddaughter of Mary Tudor, King Henry VIII’s sister (De Lisle 237).
when Elizabeth decided to propose a marriage between Mary and Robert Dudley, even though Elizabeth herself was in love with him. However, Mary did not do as Elizabeth wanted and she married Darnley, an English subject. Since Elizabeth had not allowed it, Mary had defied England (Neale 124-125, 134). This complicated the decision Elizabeth had to make about who would be her successor and it was only the beginning of the complicated relationship between the two queens. Elizabeth’s final royal duty was naming James, Mary Queen of Scots’ son, as her successor. On the 24th of March, 1603, Elizabeth died peacefully at the age of 69 (Neale 408).

4.1 The Virgin’s Lover

The novel The Virgin’s Lover by Philippa Gregory, published in 2004, is about Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen. The novel begins when Elizabeth is crowned Queen and ends when Robert Dudley’s wife, Amy, dies. The time frame of the novel is only two years. The novel focuses on Elizabeth’s relationship with Robert Dudley. In the novel they are in love; they begin flirting with each other and then have a relationship. The novel is written from four perspectives: Elizabeth’s, William Cecil’s, Robert Dudley’s and his wife Amy Dudley’s perspective. These perspectives give the reader a deeper understanding of the characters’ feelings and what they are thinking. It is easy to sympathize with Amy because she is very lonely. Her husband Robert seems to have forgotten about her and in the early chapters of the novel she is always waiting for some news of him or for him to come home. Robert Dudley, on the other hand, is very preoccupied with Queen Elizabeth I and he does not think about much else. He has responsibilities at court because he is Elizabeth’s Master of Horse, but he is also very much in love with Elizabeth. Amy is portrayed as the victim in the novel, while Elizabeth is portrayed as hot-tempered and deeply in love with Robert. The novel begins when Elizabeth becomes queen and she has troubles with this new role and the great responsibility it entails. Her sister Mary has governed England as a Catholic country and had many people executed. However, Elizabeth states that she wants the people in England to be able to practice the religion they want to in peace. When discussing religion, she says: “Can’t people just worship in the way that they wish, and leave others to their devotions?” (Gregory 104). Elizabeth is open-minded and she wants peace for her subjects. Elizabeth cares for her mother’s relative Catherine Knollys; when Catherine is coming to court, Elizabeth is really excited and wants everything to be perfect. Elizabeth thinks about her mother and sees her fate as cruel and unjust. When Elizabeth hears that Mary Queen of Scots is about to lose her
mother, she just thinks: “some of us have had to live without a mother for all our lives. Let her know what it is like to be alone” (Gregory 376). Elizabeth is portrayed as lonely and this statement implies that her mother’s execution has left her with the feeling of a great loss.

Elizabeth and Robert are not just in love and flirting with each other, they are secretly having a relationship; they have sex and they use protection because Elizabeth cannot get pregnant. They want very much to be together and get married; however, that is not possible because Robert is married. Soon people all over England are gossiping that Elizabeth and Robert are sleeping together. In the novel, Elizabeth and Robert perform a de futuro betrothal, a pledge to publish their betrothal later, and witnesses are Elizabeth’s cousin Catherine and her husband Sir Francis. However, Amy, Robert’s wife, is still alive when this betrothal takes place (Gregory 374-375). In reality, the rumours about Elizabeth and Robert spread and it was “necessary to make inquiries about Elizabeth’s virtue among those who had brought her up since childhood. They swore by all that was holy that she had most certainly never been forgetful of her honour” (Neale 79). Ultimately, the gossip made people question Elizabeth but she prevailed. By portraying Elizabeth and Robert as lovers without anyone finding out, except Cecil and a few trustworthy people at court, Gregory makes Elizabeth come across as a strong character. She is able to do what she wants and she does not get caught even when she does something that could have disastrous consequences. Again, Gregory uses the myths and gossip about Elizabeth’s reign, because according to Neale there were rumours that Elizabeth and Robert had married in secrecy with the queen’s ladies as witnesses (82).

In her article “Born a Writer: Forged as a Historian”, Gregory mentions her writing process of the novel *The Virgin’s Lover*:

The first part of the task is to ask the questions: where was Robert Dudley on the night of his wife’s murder? How could Elizabeth I have known, before the messenger came to court, that her rival’s neck was broken? The second part of the task is to make a story, to weave these jumble of historical facts into a narrative that makes sense. (242)

That is exactly what Gregory does in her novel. According to Neale, Cecil said that Robert was planning to kill his wife the same day that she died and Elizabeth told a Spanish ambassador that Amy was dead (Neale 80-81). Therefore, history and fiction are cleverly woven together into a plausible storyline where Cecil is the man that ordered Amy’s death. When Elizabeth asks Cecil to help her to break her de futuro betrothal to Robert, he says he knows a way but it will cost one death. Cecil promises her that it is just one life and no one
she loves, so she agrees. Cecil asks Elizabeth to give him something that Robert Dudley owns and she gives Robert’s signet ring that she has on a chain around her neck to Cecil. Later Amy receives a letter supposedly from Robert that states he will be coming home the next day and that he wants her to be alone in the house. The messenger gives Amy Robert’s signet ring as proof the letter is from him. The next day, a man enters Amy’s home and breaks her neck. Cecil had someone kill Amy; he had the power and the motive. Elizabeth wants to break the betrothal between herself and Robert. Cecil is happy to help her because he does not want Elizabeth to marry Robert. If Robert was suspected of having killed his wife, he and Elizabeth would never be able to marry. Again, Gregory walks the fine line between history and fiction, using the gossip around these events and trying to answer unanswered questions with something that sounds possible.

According to De Lisle, Cecil was a zealous Protestant; for him, “any Catholic heir was a particular danger” and in order to rid England of some Catholics, Cecil “manufactured a threat to the queen’s life”. Several Catholic gentlemen were supposed to have plotted “with foreign powers to kill Elizabeth with witchcraft”; these Catholic gentlemen were arrested and convicted. The result was that Elizabeth who was “a firm believer in the occult” became frightened enough to allow Cecil to “launch the active persecution of English Catholics” (De Lisle 317). This persecution demonstrates how much Cecil loathed Catholics and how he could manipulate Elizabeth in order to get the result he wanted; he fabricated plots and then got people convicted for being a part of the plot. In *The Virgin’s Lover*, Amy Dudley is Catholic and therefore, Cecil achieved two goals by having her killed.

Gregory shows how Cecil is in control and how he manipulates Elizabeth, to the extent that he even supposedly controls events that occur 28 years after the novel ends. In 1588, when England was in battle against the Spanish Armada, an army was placed “at Tilbury to resist an advance if the enemy landed” (Neale 308). Elizabeth decided to visit her army and according to Neale “mounted on a stately steed, with a truncheon in her hands, she witnessed a mimic battle and afterwards reviewed the army,” and she made a motivating speech. Elizabeth said: “I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too” (Neale 308). This part of the speech has become iconic and appeared in many novels, movies and TV shows about Elizabeth. However, in *The Virgin's Lover*, Cecil is the one that says to Elizabeth that one day she will need to utter these words. Elizabeth is afraid to go into battle and Cecil tries to persuade her that it is for the best when he says: “One day you will have to say that you are just a weak woman but you have the heart and stomach of a king” (Gregory 303).
portrayal of Elizabeth shows that Cecil controls her and she does what he tells her, so that disappointedly, Elizabeth does not even own the famous words spoken at Tilbury, which undermines the feminist portrayal of Elizabeth. Historically, Elizabeth was aware of other monarchs’ disdain because she was a woman and she also knew of the disrespect of her people. According to Jane Dunn “she was conscious of her own vulnerability, her country’s poverty, and always frightened of war” (377). This is made clear in *The Virgin’s Lover*, as there are many scenes where she is seen as weak and afraid. Being a female monarch in a male dominated world must have been really difficult for Elizabeth and she was aware people were not happy to have a woman as monarch. For this reason, Elizabeth relies on Cecil; he assists her in running the country and while doing so he can do something for his own advancement.

In *The Virgin’s Lover*, Gregory does however portray Elizabeth as a feminist figure because Elizabeth “was always irritable with the smug male style of the Privy Council” (123). According to Jane Dunn, Elizabeth had to confront “the fundamental problem that she was a woman. Even the enlightened thinkers of the Renaissance found it contrary to natural law that a woman alone, without the alliance and natural reinforcement of a husband, a brother, a father or son, could be a leader of men”. Elizabeth’s acceptance of female inferiority was “a clever political ploy to feign incompetence and thereby lull the opposition” (Dunn 106). It is possible that Gregory wants to demonstrate this point of view in her portrayal of Elizabeth in *The Virgin’s Lover* because even though there are scenes where Elizabeth is weak, she manipulates Cecil and Robert when they try to manipulate her. Also, Elizabeth loves Robert and she acts like a fool in love but then she realises that their betrothal is a mistake and that he is trying to control her. She decides she has to get free of Robert and of her de futuro betrothal to him. By murdering Robert’s wife and framing him, Cecil frees Elizabeth of her promise to Robert and that way Cecil shows his loyalty to Elizabeth. Beck states that “Gregory views her strong focus on women as serving not only to make their history visible but also to challenge the masculinist nature of history” (215). This is applicable to how Elizabeth manipulates Cecil and Robert. There is a struggle between Robert and Cecil; they are competing for Elizabeth’s favour. Neither one wants to be the second in line; they both want power and to control Elizabeth. She might be seen as a weak and fragile woman, but Elizabeth’s weakness in *The Virgin’s Lover* is actually a strategy. Elizabeth lets Robert and Cecil think they are controlling her but then she goes and does exactly the opposite to what she has promised to do. One example of how Elizabeth plays Cecil is when he is trying to persuade her to marry an archduke. Elizabeth lets Cecil think
that she is considering the marriage while she is in fact not because she is caught up in a love affair with Robert. Another example is when Cecil leaves court for a while and Robert decides that he can gain some power. He tries to control Elizabeth as he commands her to write a letter to Cecil demanding that the French pay a fine and that they return Calais to Elizabeth. However, Elizabeth does not let Robert control her and she asks the messenger to deliver the letter three days too late. By the time Cecil receives the letter it is too late to meet these requests. According to Neale something took place when Cecil was away. After Cecil returned from Scotland where he was negotiating a treaty, he “had found Dudley in high favour and the Queen difficult” (80). In *The Virgin’s Lover*, Gregory explains how Robert rose in favour in Cecil’s absence and why Elizabeth seemed ‘difficult’ to Cecil. The reason is that Elizabeth does not like to be controlled.

In the article “Love Hurts”, Gregory states that the theme in eighteenth century popular novels was the victimisation of women and that “despite dramatic progress made by women in the changing real world over the last two hundred years, the status and safety of heroines is little improved” (139). In popular novels of the twentieth century, the heroine is “anxious to preserve her virginity which is prerequisite of the only career open to her - marriage”. Meanwhile the male character or the hero can be promiscuous and even rape women without attracting criticism, and after he is married, he can be adulterous and that will not be seen as his problem. It is a problem for the wife to deal with (139-140). Novels that challenge this popular trend can certainly be called feminist works and therefore *The Virgin’s Lover* is a feminist novel. Elizabeth’s love affair with Robert contributes to the novel’s feminist focus because during the 16th century a woman’s virginity was the most sacred possession she had until she got married. Elizabeth is the monarch of England and therefore it is critical that she marries and has a male heir to inherit the throne. A love affair with a man that is of a low status and married like Robert is very dangerous and if she conceived it could be her ruin. Elizabeth has a voice; she is a sexual being and has a relationship with Robert because she loves him. Therefore, Gregory can be seen to be changing this trend with *The Virgin’s Lover* and by portraying Elizabeth as feminist in other ways; the male power of the Privy council annoys her, and she manipulates Cecil and Robert. Gregory states that in novels where women are sexually active and choose the men they sleep with, there is a tendency to portray the heroines “with little else of interest in their lives [making] the love affair their prime concern,” meaning that in novels where a woman chooses the man, this becomes the entire plot of the story and the man is all that she can think about. However, the male characters are struggling with other factors, such as work or danger and for them “the love
affair is a final reward, not the driving desire of their lives” (143). The love affair with Robert is certainly not the only thing on Elizabeth’s mind; she must also rule her country while facing a threat from France and Scotland. Elizabeth becomes victorious when breaking her promise to marry Robert. She decides to end the affair and achieves it with Cecil’s help; Elizabeth is the one in control.

4.2 *Roses Have Thorns*

The novel *Roses Have Thorns* by Sandra Byrd, published in 2013, is also about Elizabeth I. *Roses Have Thorns* begins when Elizabeth has been queen for seven years and ends at her funeral; the time frame of the novel is 38 years. The story is told from Helena, Marchioness of Northampton’s point of view, who was a maid of honour to Elizabeth I. As in *To Die For*, the novel focuses on female friendship. Elizabeth is portrayed as sympathetic, kind and lonely, and described as graceful and powerful; when she smiled “there were tiny wrinkles upon the corners of her black eyes, like splaying of a fine paintbrush. Her skin was poured silver - no, rather moonlight, because it was ethereal. And yet there was no question of the power that rested completely in her hands, sheathed by pretty gloves” (Byrd 17). In *Roses Have Thorns* Elizabeth has the power, she is strong and determined. However, she is lonely and that is her weak point; if someone marries without her approval, she gets angry and jealous. It is easy to sympathise with Elizabeth because she is very lonely. Elizabeth wants her subjects to be able to worship in private in the way they want; even her famous statement appears in the novel: “I have no wish to have windows into men’s souls” (Byrd 93). When discussing *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Crane gives an apt description of how Anne lives through her daughter and how mother and daughter are connected. Anne “has the trump card: her child is Elizabeth. Her fraught maternal tragedy is to end in Elizabeth’s triumphant victory. Overlooked on account of her sex during her mother’s lifetime, Elizabeth will vindicate her mother’s tragedy” (Crane 83). This is certainly applicable to *Roses Have Thorns*. By connecting mother and daughter, Byrd emphasises Anne’s victory through her daughter; Anne achieves something great even though it takes place after her death. What Anne gives England is a powerful monarch, her daughter Elizabeth. In the novel, Elizabeth keeps the memory of her mother alive even though her mother’s reputation was ruined before her death and despite the fact that speaking about her mother is disapproved of.

In Byrd’s novel, Elizabeth’s maids of honour are mostly her relatives on her mother’s side. When Elizabeth’s aunt Lady Knollys dies, Elizabeth is heartbroken: “Her Majesty could
not be consoled for a week or more; her eyes were red-rimmed and every conversation turned to good Lady Knollys” (Byrd 77). Elizabeth loves her mother’s relatives and she is obviously close to Lady Knollys. According to De Lisle, the only way for Elizabeth to honour the memory of her mother was by showing affection to her aunt Mary Boleyn’s children and grandchildren (392). Sandra Byrd demonstrates this affection in the novel. However, in *Roses Have Thorns*, Elizabeth does not talk much about her mother, although she mentions her to Helena a few times. De Lisle states that Elizabeth “defended her mother’s honour by arguing that Anne Boleyn had refused to live with the king unless they were married. She also defended her own, claiming that since her parents had believed themselves to be married when she was born, she was legitimate” (299). Therefore, she cared about Anne, no matter what her fate was. Byrd emphasises the connection between mother and daughter by mentioning a ring that Elizabeth has and, in that ring, there is a picture of Elizabeth and another picture of her mother. This way her mother can always be close to her but still hidden. In *Roses Have Thorns*, Helena is the person that finds a painter to paint the tiny portraits of mother and daughter, has the ring made and gives it to Elizabeth. This ring actually existed and is described by Ives: “The head of the ring is hinged and opens to reveal two enamel portraits, one of Elizabeth circa 1575 and one of a woman in the costume of Henry VIII’s reign, wearing a French hood.” Ives states that the woman in the portrait is certainly Anne Boleyn (42-43). In her article “The Mystery of the Chequers Ring”, Byrd states that Elizabeth wore many crown jewels around her neck or on her head. However, there were only two jewels she never removed: “her coronation ring, which she considered her ‘wedding’ ring, and her ruby and pearl locket ring. This latter ring, shrouded in mystery, tells us as much about the queen’s heart as does the former”. Byrd also states that traditionally lockets are gifts and even though Elizabeth could not have remembered her mother there were people at court who did and could have had hidden portraits of her. This led Byrd to “consider who might have loved and understood Elizabeth enough to risk giving her a ring with a portrait of her beloved, but taboo, mother inside” (Byrd). The outcome is this captivating portrayal of Helena’s close friendship with Elizabeth I.

Elizabeth is very kind to Helena and even though Helena marries without Elizabeth’s permission, Elizabeth forgives her. Elizabeth even confesses to Helena that she has loved Robert since she was a little girl, but she states that she has never known the touch of a man (Byrd 140). Elizabeth cares deeply for Robert but unlike in *The Virgin’s Lover*, she has not crossed the line and slept with him. However, Elizabeth and Helena do have their disagreements and at one point Elizabeth becomes angry at Helena. That is because Helena
tells Elizabeth a story and says that it reminds her of Elizabeth’s relationship with Mary Queen of Scots. The story is about a woman that wants to help a snake and takes it into her arms, the snake bites her and she dies (Byrd 239-240). Helena is advising Elizabeth to be careful about matters concerning Mary because Mary can betray her and have her killed. Here Helena oversteps the mark because giving Elizabeth advice concerning politics and strategy is not something a maid of honour should do. Elizabeth has talked to Helena about her mother, Anne Boleyn, and are indeed close, but apparently this is where she draws the line.

In *Roses Have Thorns*, Mary is not mentioned often but when she is mentioned it is only from Elizabeth’s point of view and that view sees Mary as guilty. Mary writes to her son James, “seeking to quietly ally herself with him against” Queen Elizabeth (Byrd 226) and this demonstrates Mary’s guilt. James informs Elizabeth about his mother’s plan and states that he will not do anything against Elizabeth. Later Elizabeth receives threats from Mary which make her angry; she calls Mary a murderess and says, “Her head should have been separated from her shoulders long ago” (Byrd 227). This is a popular portrayal of Elizabeth because in *The Captive Queen of Scots* by Jean Plaidy (1963), Elizabeth is thinking about Mary and that “She longed to sever that beautiful head from those graceful shoulders” (252-253). This portrayal of their relationship reflects Wallace’s statement that “[B]y the mid-twentieth century, it is Elizabeth who is most often valorised as a model for the female autonomy, whereas Mary is more often seen as a woman who became a victim because of her poor judgement of character, not least in her marriage choices” (19).

In *Roses Have Thorns*, Mary is involved in a conspiracy against Elizabeth; Mary receives letters about the plot to kill Elizabeth and proclaim Mary the Queen of England. Mary writes a letter back and does not disagree with this plan. These letters are intercepted demonstrating that Mary is guilty, and clearly an enemy to Elizabeth. One of the men that capture Mary is Helena’s husband and by doing so he proves his loyalty to Elizabeth. After this plot has been discovered, Elizabeth asks if it is possible “to take Mary’s life in accordance to the terms of the Bond of Association” (Byrd 263). According to De Lisle, Elizabeth was reluctant to sign Mary’s death warrant and in order “To avoid a judicial execution Elizabeth [...] tried to persuade Mary’s jailors to murder their prisoner under the Bond of Association” (370). The Bond of Association was a declaration produced by Cecil in 1584, that “aimed at protecting Elizabeth’s life by removing the reward expected on her death - a Catholic queen on the English throne. The signatories to this document swore to defend the Queen and to pursue to death anyone who attempted any violence against her” (Jane
Dunn 377). Also, a clause in the declaration stated that “if anyone threatened Elizabeth’s life in the interests of the Stuart succession, both Mary and James VI were to be executed, whether privy to the attempt or not” (Guy 475). This declaration “was a license to kill” as Guy states (474). In *Roses Have Thorns*, Elizabeth is reluctant to sign Mary’s death warrant and says: “Do you not see the danger, Sir Francis, in setting a precedent for an anointed queen to be executed by command of another monarch?” (Byrd 264). Elizabeth is afraid that if she orders Mary to be executed, she is making an example she is not sure she wants to make because Elizabeth, like Mary, is a female monarch. Considering Byrd’s portrayal of Elizabeth and her feelings for her mother Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth may also be reluctant to sign Mary’s death warrant because her own mother, an anointed queen, was executed. However, Neale states that it is unlikely that Mary wanted to take Elizabeth’s throne: “That Mary aimed at ousting Elizabeth from her throne, there is no reason to think. Yet her negotiations, coming to Elizabeth’s ears, were certainly open to the sinister interpretation” (127). This demonstrates how the relationship between the queens became complicated. This fact also offers writers of historical novels various possibilities when portraying the relationship between Elizabeth and Mary.

5. Mary, Queen of Scots

Mary Stuart was born on the 8th of December 1542, at Linlithgow Palace and she was the only child and heir of James V of Scotland and Mary of Guise. When Mary was only six days old her father died, and she was only ten months old when she was crowned queen on the 9th of September 1543, at Stirling (Guy 13, 16-17). Henry VIII wanted to rule the whole of the British Isles and when Mary was born and her father dead, Henry VIII quickly became interested in her and wanted her to marry Edward, his son and heir by his marriage to Jane Seymour. Henry began proposing treaties, but Mary of Guise had other plans for Mary; she wanted to strengthen the alliance between Scotland and France (Guy 21-22).

In January 1548, Henry II of France and Arran the governor of Scotland made the deal that Mary and Prince Francis were to be married. On the 29th of July, Mary, only five and a half years old, boarded a ship to France (Guy 40-41). Mary was a great favourite at the French court, and King Henry II often spoke to her alone. When Mary was nine years old, she was used to vast luxuries; she had plenty of pretty clothes and beautiful jewellery and she was always treated like a queen (Guy 55). Henry II died and Francis was proclaimed king, then Mary’s mother died and when Francis and Mary had been king and queen for one and a half
years, Francis died. Before the death of Mary of Guise, the rebel Lords, France and England signed the Treaty of Edinburgh, recognizing Elizabeth as Queen of England. Mary refused to ratify the treaty after the death of her mother and husband, creating a coolness between the cousins which went further when Elizabeth refused to issue a safe passage to Mary when she returned to Scotland. On the 14th of August, Mary boarded her galley and began her journey back to Scotland (Guy 100-133).

Mary and Elizabeth began writing letters to each other and tried to maintain the appearance that they were friends. Elizabeth was still reluctant to name Mary as an heir and Mary wanted to meet Elizabeth in the hope of charming her. Elizabeth let Mary think they were going to meet but they never did. Elizabeth started interfering with whom Mary was supposed to marry and proposed her own favourite and the man she herself loved, Lord Robert Dudley. Mary was not happy about this interference, further cooling their friendship (Guy 157-192). Mary refused to marry Dudley and when Elizabeth ordered that Mary was not to get married until she herself got married, this made Mary very angry (Guy 205-206). Their relationship got even more tense when Mary decided to marry Henry, Lord Darnley. Elizabeth was angry because not only was he an English Catholic, but he also had “the best hereditary right to the English throne after Mary herself” (Guy 194, 215-217).

The marriage to Darnley produced a healthy son and heir, James. When Darnley was assassinated, Mary was suspected of being a part of the plot or at least having some knowledge about it. Elizabeth sent Mary a letter stating this and that she knew Bothwell, Mary’s trusted friend, was suspected of being involved. Generally, Elizabeth told Mary what she should do and Mary found the letter very insulting (Guy 267, 310-313). By then marrying Bothwell, Mary became more implicated in Darnley’s murder and Elizabeth could not ignore it. It also made the Lords in Scotland furious. When the rebel Lords had captured Mary and held her prisoner, Elizabeth was scandalized at hearing the news that a queen was a prisoner in her own country. When Elizabeth heard of Mary’s forced abdication, she had rarely been so angry (Guy 335, 362, 365). Elizabeth cared for her relative and could not stand seeing an anointed queen being treated so badly by her subjects.

Mary fled the rebel Lords and escaped to England, but Cecil got to Mary before Elizabeth and placed her under strict guard (Guy 369). While Mary was held captive in England, Elizabeth avoided meeting her; a good example of this was when Mary was at a spa and Elizabeth quickly changed her plans so that she would not encounter her. According to Guy, Elizabeth did not want to meet Mary because she feared that Mary would “get the better of her in an argument” (Guy 448). Mary tried to persuade Elizabeth to release her by sending
her expensive gifts, but it was all in vain. After Mary had been held a prisoner in England for 16 years, Elizabeth won Prince James over; she kept open the possibility that he would inherit the English throne. James wrote to his mother, Mary, saying that she would never return to Scotland as queen, and this broke Mary’s heart (Guy 453, 476).

A man named Anthony Babington conspired with others to seize Elizabeth and free Mary with foreign aid. This plot was later to be known as the Babington Plot and the goal was to assassinate Elizabeth and bring Mary to the throne. Babington wrote to Mary and asked for her approval. However, Cecil’s spymaster was intercepting all letters to and from Mary. When examining Mary’s letter, Guy states that “Mary’s meaning is perfectly clear. She had consented to Elizabeth’s assassination and a foreign invasion” and “Mary’s complicity in the plot is undeniable” (481, 483). Mary was found guilty of having consented to Elizabeth’s assassination. Cecil wanted a public execution, but Elizabeth wanted Mary “to be quietly smothered by a private citizen” (Guy 493-494). Elizabeth was very reluctant to sign Mary’s death warrant; the fact that Mary was royalty and also her relative were the reasons it was difficult for Elizabeth (Neale 285-287). According to Guy, Elizabeth signed Mary’s death warrant, but she never intended it to be used; she wanted Mary dead, but she did not want to be responsible. After being held captive in England for 19 years, Mary was executed on the 8th of February, 1587 (Guy 517-519).

5.1 The Other Queen

The novel The Other Queen by Philippa Gregory, published in 2008, is about Mary Queen of Scots. The novel focuses on the first four years of her imprisonment in England, with a short final chapter taking place fifteen years later, when Mary is executed. The novel is written from three perspectives: Mary’s and her two guards, Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury, who is referred to as Bess, and Bess’s husband, George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury. Mary is portrayed as strikingly beautiful, she is very religious and she respects royalty, constantly talking about herself as an anointed Queen. This repeated phrase portrays Mary as a rather one-dimensional character. As Ágústsdóttir states, Mary is “not an entirely convincing character. Her recurrent reflections on her sacred status as God’s anointed queen […], her overly capricious nature and her repeated willingness to sanction conspiracies that are obviously likely to fail […] all contribute to Gregory’s failure to portray Mary realistically” (“Feminine and National Icon” 6). Throughout the novel Mary is trying to find a way to escape her imprisonment in England and she is also told a few times that Elizabeth
wants to find a way to send her back home to Scotland. This is a recurring event in the novel; at one point, Mary is negotiating her release and soon after, she is apparently a part of a plot. As Wormald states: “what Gregory brings out well is the often overlooked fact that Elizabeth and her chief minister, William Cecil, contemplated finding a way of getting her back to Scotland as queen. So, the theme of ‘will she, won't she?’ runs through the book” (Wormald). However, in *The Other Queen*, Cecil wants to get rid of Mary. It is easy to sympathise with Mary because she is being held captive and there does not seem to be a very good reason, since there is no evidence of her guilt. As Ágústsdóttir states, *The Other Queen* “emphasises those qualities- or flaws- in Mary that have frequently been used against her. Within this context, Gregory suggests that Mary was indeed justified in acting as she did while under duress in England” (“Feminine and National Icon” 7). The imprisonment is indeed not justified and this helps the reader sympathise with Mary, especially since Mary is portrayed as innocent of being a part of the murder of her husband Lord Darnley and unwillingly married to Bothwell. Mary herself states this in the novel and then later when George and Bess are talking about the murder, George states that “the letters that show her ordering the deed are certainly forgeries” (Gregory 75). Ultimately, there is no question about Mary’s innocence; she is being framed.

Bothwell is portrayed as a brute in Gregory’s novel; however, Mary writes numerous letters to him in prison in Denmark throughout the novel and fantasizes about Bothwell coming to rescue her. Some letters that Mary writes to Bothwell show the Duke of Norfolk proposing marriage to Mary and she accepts. She writes to Bothwell asking him to apply for an annulment of their marriage on the grounds that the marriage was forced on her. She then says that she will free him because they will meet again when Mary is restored to the throne of Scotland. The fact that Mary is thinking about Bothwell indicates that Mary is guilty. However, George states that Bothwell kidnapped Mary: “she was seen to be taken by him without her consent” and he says he thinks that “he raped her and she was with child by him” which forced her to marry Bothwell (Gregory 75). Mary tells the reader that Bothwell told her that he, along with the other rebel Lords, made an alliance and swore to kill Darnley. Bothwell also confesses that he raped her. Mary is therefore represented as innocent and she has clearly been violated by Bothwell. However, Mary states earlier in the novel that she would never admit to having been raped. In reality, Mary might have been afraid about telling the truth. The relationship between Mary and Bothwell is portrayed as complicated; he has obviously violated her and yet she is thinking about them together in Scotland when she is free.
In *The Other Queen*, Bothwell gives Mary the bond that he and the other Lords had signed, which is the proof that Mary’s half-brother James Stuart, the Earl of Moray and Bothwell were guilty of the murder of Darnley. According to Neale, Bothwell was not a good man and he describes Bothwell as “insatiate with women” and “his morals certainly were loose; his tongue also” (159). One time he stated that Mary and “Elizabeth together could not make one honest woman” (Neale 159). One man even said he was the most hated man of the realm. Neale states that Mary had probably been raped by Bothwell before falling in love with him. Neale mentions the Casket Letters in order to support this assertion. In these letters Mary is supposed to have written to Bothwell and declared her love for him through sonnets (Neale 159). This statement by Neale about Mary falling in love with Bothwell after being raped shows Neale’s insensitivity to the issue. Neale is blinded by patriarchal ideas. On the other hand, Guy questions the authenticity of the Casket Letters:

The sonnets were said to be Mary’s own reflections on her adultery. They were intended to prove that her consuming passion for Bothwell gave her a powerful motive for murder. Very few literary experts believe them to be genuine. They are extremely clumsy and would pass only with the greatest difficulty as the work of a native French speaker. As imitations of the genre of courtly love poetry in which Mary had been trained by Rossard, they fail every test. (399)

The bottom line is that the Casket Letters were the only evidence for Mary’s involvement in the murder plot, so that her innocence or guilt depends on these letters (Guy 396). Guy shows that it is extremely unlikely that Mary wrote these love sonnets and therefore it is impossible to prove her guilty of the Darnley murder.

In *The Other Queen*, George Talbot falls in love with Mary and she manages to manipulate him. When Mary persuades George to ask Cecil if he can take care of Mary’s son, she thinks: “He is so in love with me that he does not stop to think that he should ask his wife first, nor that he should beware when an enemy of his country asks for a special favour” (Gregory 302). At the end of the novel it becomes clear that George and Bess have gone separate ways; George’s fascination with Mary ruined their relationship. According to Jane Dunn, Bess, also known as the Countess of Shrewsbury, “had taken damaging allegations to court about the leniency of her husband’s wardship of the Queen of Scots, due to the fact, she claimed, that he was in love with and had enjoyed sexual relations with her”. However, Mary completely denied these allegations (376). As in *The Other Boleyn Girl* and *The Virgin’s Lover*, Philippa Gregory uses hearsay and rumour, which are possible events according to history books, yet entirely unproven to this day.
Mary feels that she is being treated unfairly compared to Elizabeth because people are allowed to gossip that she has planned the murder of Lord Darnley with Bothwell and then married him. She says: “If you dare to say that Elizabeth is unchaste with Robert Dudley or any other of the half-dozen men who have been named with her through her scandalous years [...] then you are dragged before a justice of peace and your tongue is slit by the blacksmith” (Gregory 11). Mary and Elizabeth are obviously rivals and it is here that the reader becomes exposed to Mary’s appalling view of her cousin. When Mary thinks about Elizabeth, she states that: “I don’t drag my feet and puzzle away and put myself to bed, pretending illness as she does whenever she is afraid” (Gregory 37). Mary feels that she should be the Queen of England and that at the very least she should be Elizabeth’s heir to the English throne: “All of Europe and half of England accept that I am the true heir, descended in a straight and legitimate line from King Henry VIII, whereas she is an acknowledged bastard” (Gregory 61). Mary continues throughout the entire novel to call Elizabeth a bastard and a heretic. However, Mary states that since a bishop has crowned Elizabeth, she is sacred and she goes on to say: “I will never, never be a party to overthrow an ordained queen” (Gregory 62). Mary believes that because she is a queen, no one has the right to take away her freedom and therefore she has the right to try and escape this unlawful imprisonment (Ágústsdóttir “Feminine and National Icon” 7). Gregory is stating that Mary’s actions are clearly justifiable; she has the right to get her freedom back.

Throughout the novel Mary and Elizabeth are constantly being compared to each other. George falls in love with Mary and when he compares Mary to Elizabeth, he says: “My own queen is rooted in her power. She is a Tudor with all their mortal appetites and earthly greed. My queen Elizabeth is a most solid being, as earthy as a man. But this is a queen who is all air and angles. She is a queen of fire and smoke” (Gregory 55). Here it is clear that Gregory portrays Mary and Elizabeth as polar opposites, even though according to Ágústsdóttir, Gregory “intends to challenge the idea of Mary and Elizabeth as polar opposites”. If Gregory is trying to challenge the idea of Elizabeth and Mary as polar opposites, she fails. The comparison George makes is a good example. Also, when George Talbot describes the queens, he indicates that “due to her very nature, Mary is simply not up to a job that was generally seen as best executed by men”. The contrast of Mary and Elizabeth as feminine and masculine opposites becomes clear through his comparison (“Feminine and National Icon” 7). The emphasis is on Mary’s feminine side because she is strikingly beautiful and no one thinks otherwise, with even Cecil confessing that she is beautiful. However, that does not change his opinion of Mary, although he says that she is
irresistible and that he can sense her charisma. Cecil states that “[E]ven I, with so many reasons to dislike her, feel her peculiar powerful charm” (Gregory 333), while soon after describing Mary as dangerous: “the men she plots with would see both women dead, to serve their cause. That is why she is so dangerous. She is an active, energetic fool in the hands of wicked men” (Gregory 334). This is certainly the case for Mary; she is desperate to escape; therefore, she joins plots that are doomed to fail, initiated by men that are fooled by her beauty.

Bess’ point of view is interesting because she is Cecil’s spy and she reports to him if Mary receives letters that could contain plots; Bess is very loyal to her Queen and country. However, when Bess thinks about the two rival queens, she says that “There are two queens in England now; the one who holds the throne by our good will, and the other one who probably deserves it” (Gregory 66). Bess is stating that Mary deserves the throne because she has a stronger claim by blood. Bess is captivated by Mary’s beauty like everyone else, stating that “She has a face like a painting, as an artist might draw. She has the face of an angel. She has thick black hair [and] dark arched eyebrows and eyelashes so long they sweep her cheeks”. After a long description of Mary’s beauty, Bess states that “Elizabeth will hate her like poison” (Gregory 67). Bess later states that Elizabeth “is a jealous queen, she never wants anyone else to gain wealth or power. She has to be supreme” (Gregory 125). Even though Bess is devoted to her queen Elizabeth she sees her as vain, mean and unfair. How Bess sees Elizabeth suggests that Elizabeth is the villain. Later when Bess is thinking about her queen she states: “whatever wrong they say Elizabeth has done to England, I can attest that these years of her reign have taken the very heart out of me” (Gregory 257). Serving Elizabeth has taken its toll on Bess and she criticizes her monarch. By portraying Bess as so critical of Elizabeth, Gregory is emphasising Elizabeth’s contrast with Mary. As mentioned earlier, Gregory succumbs to the popular portrayal of Elizabeth and Mary as feminine and masculine opposites. She also capitulates to the portrayal of Elizabeth as the villain.

Gregory emphasises the role of women during the Tudor era by having Mary say: “A man must know best. He is in the very shape of God; he has a superior intelligence. All else aside, he will be better educated, he must be better taught than any woman. His spirits will be more courageous, his determination more constant” (Gregory 87). Mary understands that women are the inferior sex and she cannot see how a woman can be a great monarch. Mary is correct about the difference between the education boys and girls received; however, Elizabeth received a good education. According to Neale, Ascham, Elizabeth’s tutor, praised Elizabeth and said her characteristics were beauty, stature, prudence and industry and that she
showed dignity and gentleness. He went on saying that “Her mind has no womanly weakness, her perseverance is equal to that of a man, and her memory long keeps what it quickly picks up” (14). Therefore, this is where Mary is wrong; Elizabeth was intelligent and as the historical record has demonstrated Elizabeth was a successful sovereign. However, in *The Other Queen*, Mary is the cousin that conquers Elizabeth through becoming a symbol for martyrdom. Like Ágústsdóttir states:

Mary Queen of Scots defeats her cousin through her martyrdom; Elizabeth is left with the shame of having agreed to execute her kinswoman. Gregory’s message here is clear; it is through her tragic death that Mary has stayed so fixed in the national imagination and been accorded her status as a figure of romance and allure, a symbol of Scotland’s victimization by England, and even if many history books do not acknowledge this, Elizabeth was entirely wrong in agreeing to sign Mary’s death warrant. (“Feminine and National Icon” 8)

Therefore, Mary becomes the innocent one while Elizabeth has ordered a monarch to be executed. The contrast of the villain and the hero is evident.

Bess can be interpreted as a feminist heroine in *The Other Queen* because she is very strong-willed and determined in getting what she wants. She was born into a poor family and has been married four times. She inherited all money and estates after her second husband, Cavendish. She knows how to run a manor and take care of the finances of a great estate, and she is even more intelligent than her husband, George Talbot. At the end of the novel, when Mary has been executed, Bess says that she has built a grand country house, “with the greatest windows in the North of England” (Gregory 436). Strong and independent, Bess of Hardwick, is a real historical figure and she was indeed interesting because she had more control over her life and her money than women did at that time. According to Guy, in Bess and George’s marriage “the traditional gender stereotypes were traversed” (441). Guy further states that Bess strongly suspected George of sleeping with Mary, a fact which led to their marriage breaking down (442). This is where Gregory conforms to the historical records because in the novel, Bess and George become estranged because of Mary.

Like in *The Virgin’s Lover*, William Cecil is very powerful and capable of anything in *The Other Queen*. He wants Mary kept under his watchful eye because he does not trust her. Bess says to her husband George: “Never ever work against Cecil. He commands England, he has a spy network that covers every house in the land. He tortures his suspects and he turns them to his service. He knows all the secrets, he sees everything” (Gregory 156). Bess is Cecil’s spy and she has a considerable knowledge about how he works and how powerful he
is. Bess also states that Cecil will do whatever it takes to get what he wants: “Cecil’s enmity against the other queen, against all Papists, has grown so powerful that he is prepared to behead half of England to defeat them” (Gregory 273). According to De Lisle, preventing Mary from coming to the English throne became Cecil’s life’s work and “he was busy considering how best to take advantage of a rebellion that had broken out in Scotland” (311). The central argument of Guy’s book is that Cecil obviously did not like Mary at all and considering how powerful he was, it is possible he had something to do with forging the evidence against Mary. In The Other Queen, a mysterious letter appears, implicating Mary in a plot against Elizabeth. George is surprised because he never intercepted this letter and he believes that this letter is Cecil’s doing. When Cecil’s man, Ralph Sadler, is talking to George, it becomes clear that Cecil will make Mary look guilty, whether she is or not. Ralph says: “We will find evidence against our enemies, and if there is neither law nor evidence then we will make it fresh” (Gregory 409). Gregory’s interpretation is that the evidence against Mary might have been forgery. As stated earlier, according to De Lisle, Cecil saw all Catholic heirs as a threat and he manipulated Elizabeth by manufacturing a threat in order to be able to persecute English Catholics (317). As in The Virgin’s Lover, Cecil is the man behind the plots and he goes to extreme lengths to get what he wants and, in the end, he is successful. 

In the final chapters of the novel, there is a powerful scene where Elizabeth states her feelings for Mary. Elizabeth’s cousin, Norfolk, is about to be executed for his involvement in a plot with Mary when Elizabeth says: “She has forced me to put my own family on the block”. She then goes on to say that she really hopes she will not have to execute Mary (Gregory 430). According to the historical records, the relationship between the queens was very complicated and this is reflected in The Other Queen. Also, at the end of the novel, the reader is left unsure about how far Mary was implicated in the plots against Elizabeth. Mary does indeed want to escape imprisonment but still she states various times throughout the novel that Elizabeth is an anointed sovereign, chosen by God and therefore Mary cannot touch her. The final chapter in the novel is short and told from Bess’ point of view. She says that Mary has been executed and she states that Mary “signed her own name to the plan to murder Queen Elizabeth and that was her death warrant. Or they forged it. Who knows?” (Gregory 435). Not even Bess, the character that does not like Mary and is annoyed at how much trouble Mary causes her, cannot be sure of Mary’s guilt. Unlike in The Other Boleyn Girl, where Anne is clearly guilty, Gregory chooses to portray Mary as possibly guilty and
possibly innocent, giving no clear answer to the question of her involvement in the Babington Plot.

5.2 The Memoirs of Mary Queen of Scots

The novel *The Memoirs of Mary Queen of Scots* by Carolly Erickson, published in 2009, is about Mary Queen of Scots. The novel begins on Mary’s wedding day, the day she marries Francis in France, and ends the day before her execution. Mary is the main character of the novel and the novel is told from her point of view. Mary is portrayed as trusting towards people, impulsive, naïve and gullible. At the end of the novel, Erickson puts in a note to the reader where she explains that the novel is fiction and she mentions things that did not happen according to historical records, but were her invention. She ends by saying that if the reader seeks to know the factual truth of events, the reader should study the life of Mary.

In *The Memoirs of Mary Queen of Scots*, Darnley is portrayed as the villain and Bothwell is the hero. Darnley is portrayed as more of a villain than he actually was; in the novel Darnley rapes Mary while two other men watch. The only person Mary tells about the rape is Bothwell and he becomes extremely angry at hearing what happened. He is very protective of Mary and later in the novel he promises that he will always protect her. As Ágústsdóttir states, “Erickson capitalises on the negative characteristics of Darnley as outlined in historical accounts” (“Nothing Against Her Honour” 46). In fact, the relationship between Mary and Darnley was complicated and Guy describes it as thus: Mary was sexually attracted to Darnley and thought she was in love with him but later she realised that the “marriage was purely one of convenience” (218). Darnley had his eye on the Scottish crown and for him the marriage to Mary was his claim to it. According to Guy, Mary had allowed Darnley “to be styled King to appease his vanity. She was prepared to allow him to take an equal share in governing Scotland, but he expected her to cede all her power as a reigning Queen to him. He really believed that their marriage had made her his subordinate”.

However, Mary deeply wanted a son and heir which led her to being submissive to Darnley (236-237). In the novel, Mary gets pregnant after the rape and names her son James, possibly after Bothwell. Darnley is actually the villain as he is plotting to kill Mary. By portraying Darnley in such a negative way, his murder is made justifiable. The fact that Darnley is plotting to kill Mary makes it necessary to eliminate him.

In Erickson’s novel, Mary and Bothwell are passionately in love, and they even have affectionate nicknames for each other; Mary calls Bothwell Jamie, and Bothwell calls Mary...
“Orange Blossom” (Erickson 55). The fact that Bothwell calls his monarch by a nickname demonstrates that their relationship is not the ordinary relationship between a monarch and her subject. Bothwell and Mary first meet in France when Mary is married to Francis; however, Mary and Bothwell instantly have a connection. This connection between them early in the novel is part of how “Erickson presents their union as that of destiny being fulfilled” (Ágústsdóttir “Nothing Against Her Honour” 46). Bothwell is portrayed as a victim, which in reality he was not. Twice in the novel he is supposed to marry a woman that he does not want to marry, but each woman is thrust upon him nonetheless. According to historical records, Bothwell was a womaniser and therefore this portrayal of him is not historically accurate but Erickson’s creation.

In the novel, Bothwell is involved in Darnley’s murder; however, the murder is not planned and is partly coincidental. Bothwell discovers that Darnley intends to kill Mary when he finds gunpowder that Darnley has planted in Mary’s castle. When Bothwell is removing the gunpowder, he gets the idea to use it to kill Darnley. Mary is not involved in the plot to kill Darnley, although Bothwell confesses his involvement to her. Mary tells Bothwell to go back to bed and pretend to know nothing. Mary does not want Bothwell to face the consequences of having murdered the king. After Darnley’s murder, Mary and Bothwell go on a trip to the Isle of Mull and all they do is sleep and make love; it is during this trip that Mary becomes pregnant. In her book Mary, Queen of Scots and the Murder of Lord Darnley, Weir goes over the events leading to Darnley’s murder and what happened after it, in great detail. She comes to the conclusion that Mary was not involved in the plot to murder her husband. According to Weir, the originators of the plot to get rid of Darnley were Mary’s half-brother, the Lord of Moray and William Maitland, Mary’s advisor. They approached Bothwell and he agreed to their plan. However, Moray and Maitland intended to make Bothwell their scapegoat and get rid of him along with Darnley (172). Mary was hoping Elizabeth would name her as the successor to the English throne and Mary wrote to Elizabeth that she wanted to keep peace and amity with Elizabeth. Mary would never have jeopardized her negotiations with Elizabeth by plotting the murder of Darnley, an English subject and nobility (Weir 194). When Bothwell was planning the murder of Darnley, he needed a key to Mary’s chamber and the fact that he did not ask her for it “strongly suggests that Mary was innocent of what was going on” (Weir 265-266). The murder of Lord Darnley became a major turning point for Mary because as Weir states “it was Mary’s misfortune that she misguidedly placed her trust in a man [Bothwell] who had conspired to kill her husband, for, as suspicion attached to him, many people would come to deem her guilty by association”
Weir states that the incriminating Casket Letters “were genuine letters of Mary’s that were later doctored by her enemies in order to prove her guilty, not only of an adulterous relationship with Bothwell, but also of the murder of Darnley” (196). This is similar to Guy’s conclusion on the authenticity of the Casket Letters. Guy further claims that “not a single piece of uncontaminated evidence has ever been found to show that Mary had foreknowledge of Darnley’s murder” (313). Guy and Weir strongly imply that Mary was not a part of the plan to murder her husband and that she was framed.

After their trip to the Isle of Mull, Mary and Bothwell decide to get married and in order for them to be able to marry, they stage Mary’s kidnapping. However, historians have come to the conclusion that Mary was really abducted by Bothwell. According to Guy, Mary “was most definitely abducted against her will” (329-330) and it is important to remember as Guy states that “[h]istory is written by the winners; and after [Mary’s] incarceration, she was to be a spectacular loser” (353). The question remains whether Bothwell did rape Mary. Jane Dunn states that

the true nature of this extraordinary series of events will probably never be fully known. The only certainty was that they led to the wreck of all Mary’s immediate hopes and the destruction of her reign. Certainly the extent of her culpability and her state of mind were a much more complicated story than any of the simplistic characterisations that have shadowed her from this moment to the present. (301)

According to Dunn, it is unclear what exactly happened. Mary was abducted, but what happened between her and Bothwell is difficult to state. This is the point where everything went downhill for Mary and she became a captive queen, a victim and a “spectacular loser”. Historically, Bothwell had a motive for killing Darnley, since he wanted to marry Mary and rule Scotland with her. The rebel Lords were intoxicated or were bribed by Bothwell to sign a bond where they pledged their support for a marriage between Bothwell and Mary. According to the bond, Bothwell had not yet discussed the matter of marriage with Mary. Bothwell showed Mary the bond and proposed a marriage to her which she rejected (Weir 201, 344-346). When Bothwell had captured Mary and brought her to Dunbar as his prisoner, he said that he would marry her whether she wanted to or not. Weir states that “this was not the sentiment of a man inspired by passion or lust, but that of a man motivated by ambition and the instinct for self-preservation” (Weir 354-355). According to Melville, who was at Dunbar castle, Bothwell raped Mary after she had rejected him again. This account of events states that Mary was abducted and raped by Bothwell.
In *The Memoirs of Mary Queen of Scots*, Mary is pregnant after her trip to the Isle of Mull with Bothwell. She gives birth to a baby girl without anyone knowing while she is held captive by the Scottish rebels. She names the baby Marie-Elizabeth after Elizabeth I. Mary’s grandmother then takes her daughter under her care. Historically, there is no evidence that Mary had a daughter and in fact Mary was pregnant after the events that took place in Dunbar. Later when Mary was held captive at Lochleven she miscarried twins (Guy 348, 362). Another scene in the novel of Erikson’s invention is when Elizabeth plans a trip to a spa where she intends to meet Mary. In fact, Mary dearly wished to meet Elizabeth, speaking fondly of Elizabeth and sending her a ring with a heart shaped diamond. Mary hoped that if they met, she would be able to persuade Elizabeth to name Mary as her successor to the English throne. When a planned meeting did not go through, Mary was devastated and cried (Dunn 194-196). Eventually, the cousins never met and this had an enormous influence on their relationship. As Jane Dunn states: “the fact they were never to meet is the black hole at the heart of their relationship, the dramatic axis of their story” (196) which lead to Mary’s death. “The lack of human connection allowed each to make what she would of the other” (Dunn 196). If the two queens had in fact met it is possible that Mary’s fate had not been so cruel.

When the queens meet in *The Memoirs of Mary Queen of Scots* Mary notices that Elizabeth is very thin and weak: “an aging woman who looked ill, and whose bony arms, wrists and chest revealed a physical vulnerability” (Erickson 207). When Elizabeth starts talking “her voice was low, masculine and commanding” (Erickson 209). Elizabeth’s body is failing her, but she is still powerful and Erickson uses the word masculine to describe her. Therefore, the popular portrayal of the contrast of Mary and Elizabeth as feminine and masculine opposites is evident. Elizabeth tells Mary that Cecil wants Mary to be executed but Elizabeth is not sure that is what should be done. However, she is really perplexed about what to do about Mary. This portrayal of Elizabeth’s dilemma is historically accurate. Guy states that Elizabeth was reluctant to sign Mary’s death warrant and that Cecil and his men were the mastermind behind Mary’s execution.

After Mary’s meeting with Elizabeth at Buxton mineral baths, Bothwell arrives and they go out riding. They ride to a farm where Mary’s grandmother and daughter are. Mary has not met her daughter since she was born and she is now six years old. Later in the novel Mary is saved from her imprisonment in England and she and Bothwell go to meet the Pope in Rome and Mary spends years in Italy. In Italy, Mary meets a man named Don John of Austria, who is the half-brother of King Philip of Spain. The Pope wants Mary to marry Don
John and bring Christendom back as the dominant religion by invading England. According to the website of Encyclopædia Britannica, Don John of Austria did exist and he was a military leader and the half-brother of King Philip II of Spain. In her novel Erickson, is using a person that did exist and, by weaving together history and fiction, she invents a relationship between Don John and Mary. After her stay in Italy, Mary then spends a few years in France with her grandmother and daughter Marie-Elizabeth. Bothwell and Mary intend to find letters that prove that Elizabeth, along with Robert Dudley, planned the murder of his wife Amy Dudley. When Mary is searching for those letters, Elizabeth captures Mary and she is again imprisoned in England.

This part of the novel is obviously complete fiction. According to Guy’s biography on Mary, Elizabeth refused to meet Mary when she fled to England. Also, Mary did not want to discuss the Casket Letters through a negotiator, which lead the negotiations between the queens to a dead end. Mary had neither won nor lost, and for the next eighteen years Mary was under house arrest in England (437). When Mary was held captive in England, Bothwell was in a prison in Denmark. In 1567, the confederate Lords in Scotland outlawed Bothwell as a rebel (Guy 371). Bothwell fled to Norway, where a woman he was supposed to marry recognised him and “sued him for breach of his promise to marry her” (Guy 373). The King of Denmark then ordered Bothwell’s arrest and “he was sent to the castle of Copenhagen, to be held as a state prisoner” (Guy 373-374). Bothwell died in a Danish prison in April 1578 (Guy 384). There is a possibility that Erickson is writing about Mary’s imagination. Mary’s memoirs might just be her way out of the imprisonment and a way into the world where she can have an adventure. However, the prologue in the novel rules out that theory. In the prologue, the narrator is Bothwell and he is witnessing Mary’s execution. Arguably, Erickson simply wanted to give Mary freedom and the opportunity of an adventure. Historically, Mary was held captive in England for 44 years and during that time Mary did not get to enjoy life. In the novel, Mary is innocent of plotting her husband’s death and she becomes unjustly imprisoned. The novel is reflecting the life that Mary did not have, the life that was taken from her. The Memoirs of Mary Queen of Scots is a story where Mary is free when in fact Mary was held captive.
6. Comparing the Queens

The historical novel can vary in historical accuracy, as the author might want to follow, as much as possible, historical facts or change events. Authors can let their imagination answer some unanswered questions or even do what Carolly Erickson does in her novel *The Memoirs of Mary Queen of Scots*. That novel is to a great extent fiction; Erickson invents meetings that never occurred, makes up people that did not exist and makes up an adventure that Mary experiences after escaping imprisonment in England. The fact that writers can fill in the blanks in history with their imagined version of how events came about makes the historical novel a powerful medium. People are eager to know why something occurred and there is not always a clear explanation available. This gap in explanation presents the perfect opportunity to write a novel and explain why and how events took place. What the historical record says about the losers in history is ambiguous because history is written by the winners. This is clear with both Anne Boleyn and Mary Queen of Scots because they became captive queens and were executed. Therefore, they are on the losing side in history, which leads to the fact that their side of history was never written from their perspectives and never will be. Their story is insufficient and therefore it captivates people and makes them want to know more. Since the true nature of some historical events and people’s experiences will never be known, the historical novel becomes the tool through which their side of history can be represented and speculated on. The women’s historical novel can be described as feminist, as De Groot states, since history is dominated by men and rewriting history “is common to revisionist feminist histories of the last three decades, and situates female historical fiction writers as ‘writing back’, bringing their subjects from darkness to light” (“The Historical Novel” 70). There is a lot more known about Elizabeth I than Anne Boleyn and Mary Queen of Scots because Elizabeth became a successful monarch. Elizabeth was a winner in history while Anne and Mary were not. However, when Elizabeth’s father decided to declare her a bastard she was forgotten and when her sister was queen, she kept her a prisoner in the Tower. During that period of her life Elizabeth was the loser, although later in her life she became the winner. In modern historical records, Elizabeth is praised as one of the most successful monarchs in England, which is ironic since she was the daughter of an iconic loser. The novels that are covered in this essay have different portrayals of Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots. In this chapter the focus will be on comparing different portrayals of the queens.
6.1 The Other Boleyn Girl and To Die For Compared

Both The Other Boleyn Girl and To Die For focus on a female relationship; in The Other Boleyn Girl Mary tells the story of her sister Anne and in To Die For Meg Wyatt tells the story of her friend Anne. Both are ladies in waiting to Anne and therefore know the most about her. However, these two portrayals of Anne Boleyn are very different. In The Other Boleyn Girl, Mary and Anne are rivals; Anne treats Mary badly, is mean to her and only wants to have Mary around her when she can help or comfort her. Anne is so mean and inconsiderate that she takes Mary’s son away from her. Nothing can stop Anne when she has gained power. In To Die For, the friendship between Anne and Meg is really strong and they are very close; it is a genuine friendship that goes both ways. They have known each other since they were children and therefore, they are as close as sisters. It is interesting that in The Other Boleyn Girl Anne is not as close to her real sister Mary as Meg is to Anne in To Die For. Therefore, Philippa Gregory and Sandra Byrd want to give completely different portrayals of Anne Boleyn. As stated earlier, the popular portrayal of Anne Boleyn has been that she is either power mad or mean. This is how Anne Boleyn is portrayed in The Other Boleyn Girl while in To Die For, Anne is portrayed as sweet, generous and innocent. The difference between how Anne sees Jane Seymour in The Other Boleyn Girl and To Die For is an example of how these portrayals of Anne differ. In The Other Boleyn Girl, Anne sees Jane as a threat and Anne talks badly about her behind her back. Later in the novel, Anne has one of her tantrums when she sees Jane sitting on Henry’s lap. In To Die For, Anne sees Jane as an innocent girl that is being duped by a mean king. Anne feels sorry for Jane because she is being tricked by Henry, just like Anne was.

Unlike in The Other Boleyn Girl, where Anne is portrayed as cold-hearted towards her daughter, Elizabeth, Anne is affectionate towards her daughter in To Die For. For instance, there is one powerful scene between mother and daughter:

Anne clung to the toddler when she arrived and Elizabeth entwined her little fingers in her mother’s hair. Anne kissed Elizabeth’s pretty pink cheeks a dozen times or more and cooed to her in French, and her daughter responded with inhibited joy and love.

(Byrd 287)

Byrd’s portrayal of Anne as a mother shows that she loves her daughter very much and is very kind to her. This portrayal reflects Ives’ description that Anne showed a maternal side when it came to Elizabeth. However, Gregory’s portrayal is not historically accurate; Anne is shown as someone whose daughter means nothing to her. The reason for portraying Anne as
so cold-hearted towards her daughter might be because the story is told from her sister’s point of view. The sisters do not have a good relationship, and this reflects how Mary’s view of Anne is biased. Bordo states that the portrayal of Anne as disappointed by the birth of a daughter “has been firmly installed - an embellished - in the popular mythology about Elizabeth’s birth, particularly in novels” (75). However, as has been stated earlier, this is incorrect according to historical records. Bordo further states that “[i]n an age when infant mortality was high [...] the mere fact than Anne had given birth to a healthy child was cause for celebration” (75). By considering the infant mortality rate, it is not realistic that Elizabeth’s birth was anything but an event to celebrate.

Another major difference in the portrayals of Anne Boleyn in *The Other Boleyn Girl* and *To Die For* is whether Anne was guilty or not of the adultery accusations that were made against her. In *The Other Boleyn Girl*, there is no doubt that Anne is guilty, she sleeps with her brother and the result is a deformed foetus. Anne is very mean to her siblings and nothing can stop her when she has decided to get on the throne and when she has gained power. She still treats her siblings very badly even though she is queen. In *To Die For*, Anne is completely innocent of the charges laid against her. Meg Wyatt is a reliable source because she is Anne’s lady in waiting and knows everything about her. Meg knows where Anne was when she was supposed to have had the affairs; there is no way Anne could have done the things she was accused of. Byrd sticks to the historical records and uses what Ives asserts about Anne, which is that she was not in the places where these alleged affairs took place (Ives 344). Meg is a very close friend to Anne and is constantly at her side and by using her to demonstrate Anne’s innocence, Byrd makes the story very credible.

### 6.2 Sandra Byrd and Ladies in Waiting

In both *To Die For* and *Roses Have Thorns*, Sandra Byrd emphasises the relationship between the queen and her lady in waiting and their intimate friendships. A lady in waiting knows almost everything there is to know about the queen and therefore she is the person that can tell the queen’s story the best. The relationships depicted in Sandra Byrd’s novels are strong female friendships that stay strong through good and bad times. In both novels, Byrd uses women, Meg Wyatt and Helena, Marchioness of Northampton, both of whom were real historical persons and who attended to Anne and Elizabeth, respectively. However, not much is known about these women, which makes it possible for Byrd to explore and rewrite their stories and relationships. In *Roses Have Thorns*, Elizabeth respects the people that are
devoted to her and the people that are devoted to her are greatly rewarded. Helena stays beside Elizabeth from the moment she arrives in England until Elizabeth dies and during that time period Helena proves her loyalty to Elizabeth countless times. Helena’s husband also proves his loyalty when he captures Mary Queen of Scots. In the final chapters of the novel, a shipwreck is discovered which is loaded with gold and silver and Elizabeth gives everything to Helena and her husband. Therefore, Elizabeth is very generous. In To Die For, Meg is proven loyal to Anne because she stays with her until the very end; she witnesses her execution. Anne whispers in Meg’s ear that she will die a martyr and Meg sees that Anne still has her spark. Having her dear friend with her at the end empowers Anne, and it probably relieved Anne to know that she was not completely alone.

These two novels by Byrd about Anne Boleyn and her daughter Elizabeth I reflect Byrd’s interest in the mother-daughter relationship between Anne and Elizabeth. Byrd represents these two characters as having a connection, even though Elizabeth was very young when her mother died and that therefore it is unlikely that she would remember much about her mother. This portrayal can be demonstrated as a relationship reaching beyond death. According to Crane, the theme that stimulates novelists when writing about Anne Boleyn is “an intense longing for unspecified achievement, an achievement finally realized in her daughter Elizabeth, who is implicated in her mother’s disgrace but is also triumphant in the face of it” (84). This description is applicable to the mother-daughter bond portrayed in Roses Have Thorns because Elizabeth keeps her mother’s memory alive; she wears a ring with her picture in it and keeps her mother’s relatives close. Also, “For Elizabeth, Anne works as an alluring, if tragic, memory” and Elizabeth “re-makes her mother’s qualities into her own shape, becomes, herself, the virgin hind who will never be caught” (Crane 84, 87). In her mother’s tragedy lies Elizabeth’s success. This portrayal of a mother-daughter relationship reaching beyond death, as it appears in Roses Have Thorns, has also been utilised in a previous novel by Robin Maxwell called The Secret Diary of Anne Boleyn (1997). This novel is also about the connection between mother and daughter. In the book, Elizabeth I finds her mother’s secret diary and while reading it Elizabeth comes to know her mother. In Maxwell’s novel the connection between mother and daughter is very strong, especially in the scene where Anne writes a diary entry about her coronation. She is very nervous and afraid that the people of England hate her, but then she feels Elizabeth kick inside her womb and she realises that she is not alone. The connection between mother and daughter is evident. The interpretation of scenes like these is that Anne, even though she is a loser, still has one legacy: her daughter Elizabeth who becomes Anne’s victory.
Another similarity between *Roses Have Thorns* and *To Die For* is that Anne and Elizabeth are both portrayed as beautiful, kind-hearted, generous and sweet. They both treat their lady in waiting with respect and show them affection. To Anne and Elizabeth their ladies in waiting are more than just servants. By portraying mother and daughter in such a similar way, Byrd might be emphasising that they have similar characteristics. Even though they only had a few years together, their personality is similar. By portraying Elizabeth as similar to her mother and not her father Henry VIII, Byrd may be suggesting that Anne could have been more successful as a monarch than Henry VIII; since her daughter Elizabeth certainly was. Again, there is obvious connection between mother and daughter, a connection that cannot be broken.

### 6.3 Elizabeth and Mary

The relationship between Mary Queen of Scots and Elizabeth I was very problematic and the two queens constantly competed when it came to beauty and accomplishments, rousing jealousy between them. Wallace states that “[i]t is Mary Stuart, rather than Elizabeth I, who is central to the early development of the historical novel as a genre” and mentions a novel written in 1678 (19). The most popular portrayal of the queens is that Mary wishes they can become allies while Elizabeth sees Mary as a threat or a problem that needs to be taken care of. Mary Queen of Scots does not appear often in *The Virgin’s Lover* but when she does, Elizabeth’s feelings for her cousin are clear. In novels about Elizabeth there is a tendency to compare her to Mary Queen of Scots and *The Virgin’s Lover* is no exception. When Elizabeth hears Mary mentioned she says: “She lives a life of nothing but pleasure” (Gregory 68). Elizabeth thinks that Mary has not had to fight for anything in her life and that everything has come easily to her. Later when Elizabeth hears that Mary is losing her mother, Elizabeth thinks it is time for Mary to have to fight for something in her life. She thinks “Let her know that she has to fight for her kingdom as I have had to fight for mine. There will be no pity for the Queen of Scots from me” (Gregory 375). There is rivalry between the cousins and Elizabeth does not even feel sorry for her cousin when her mother is dying, which is callous.

As Wallace states, the popular portrayal of Elizabeth and Mary is that of the masculine and feminine opposites. “Mary is the feminine ideal, a woman victimized by her gender, Elizabeth is constructed as [...] as a ‘masculine’ woman because (like a man) she puts the public world of politics above the private world of emotions” (19). In *Roses Have Thorns* Elizabeth is portrayed as beautiful and feminine while in *The Memoirs of Mary Queen of*
Scots, she is portrayed as old and weak, with a masculine and authoritative voice. This is the popular portrayal of Elizabeth when she appears in novels about Mary. As Wallace states: “The villain in the Mary Queen of Scots books is Elizabeth I, who is held responsible for Mary’s death and is presented as coldly unfeeling, an unnatural and unfeminine figure” (139). This is a fitting description of the portrayal of Elizabeth in The Memoirs of Mary Queen of Scots. However, Gregory chooses to portray Cecil as the mastermind behind Mary’s execution in her novel The Other Queen. Here, Elizabeth is described “as earthy as a man” (Gregory 55), which again reflects the masculine/feminine dichotomy applied to Elizabeth and Mary. However, in The Virgin’s Lover, Cecil is the mastermind behind the murder of Amy Dudley, and even though the novel ends before Mary’s execution takes place, the reader can assume Cecil will use his power again. In the novels about Mary, The Other Queen and The Memoirs of Mary Queen of Scots, Mary is portrayed as feminine and beautiful. She is the victim of cruel and unjust fate and her cousin Elizabeth is the masculine Queen that holds all the power. The novels covered in this essay about Mary tend to portray her in the same way.

As stated by Ágústsdóttir, it is interesting that “[l]ittle seems to have changed in popular perceptions of the tragic Queen of Scots as a feminine icon, regardless of important changes to women’s rights and female self-perception brought by second-wave feminism” (“Feminine and National Icon 3).

When discussing fictional portrayals of Mary Queen of Scots, Ágústsdóttir states that “Mary and Bothwell’s relationship is central to plot developments that relate to the Darnley murder” (“Nothing Against Her Honour” 43). This also applies to Erickson’s novel The Memoirs of Mary Queen of Scots because Bothwell becomes the hero that saves Mary’s life when Darnley is trying to kill her. Mary and Bothwell are in love and when Darnley is dead, they go on a romantic trip which makes the portrayal of their relationship highly romanticized. This statement also applies to Gregory’s novel The Other Queen because Mary writes Bothwell many letters and hopes that he will rescue her. Even though Bothwell raped Mary she sees him as her hero and throughout the novel she fantasizes that when she regains her throne in Scotland, Bothwell will be with her. In both these novels, Elizabeth and Mary are compared. However, Erickson’s and Gregory’s portrayals of Elizabeth as the masculine one differs; Erickson’s portrayal is more obvious. One scene in The Memoirs of Mary Queen of Scots clearly demonstrates Elizabeth as masculine. Elizabeth is standing by a fire, burning papers and she is very powerful. She is the central authority in the room and she has Bess bound on a bench and Cecil lurking in the corner. She is portrayed as very thin, old and fragile while Mary is the one using physical force by trying to fight the men holding her back.
In this scene the two queens are complete opposites. In *The Other Queen*, Gregory portrays Mary as a great beauty, and overall places much more emphasis than Erickson on how beautiful Mary is. There is not a person in the novel that is not stunned by Mary’s mesmerizing appearance. On the other hand, Elizabeth is portrayed as mean and bitter, even though she does not want to execute Mary. By comparison, in *The Memoirs of Mary Queen of Scots*, Elizabeth is much more cold-hearted and not as troubled about having Mary executed. The main similarity between Gregory and Erickson’s portrayals of Elizabeth and Mary is the fact that they are represented as complete opposites; in both novels Mary is Elizabeth’s victim and treated unfairly by her cousin, while Elizabeth is lonely and bitter. In both novels, Mary knows that she is beautiful and she intends to use her beauty to control and manipulate people.

According to the historical records, Elizabeth had sympathy for Mary and she struggled with what she should do with her. Also, there was no certainty at the time regarding whether Mary had been kidnapped and raped by Bothwell or if it was all a trick. However, “Elizabeth still maintained a more sympathetic stance towards Mary than most of the other commentators at the time” (Dunn 298). Later, when Elizabeth heard from Melville, who was with Mary when she was abducted and raped, she was scandalised. Elizabeth was “the most charitable in her interpretation of Mary’s behaviour” (Dunn 298-299). This is similar to Guy’s statement, mentioned above, that Elizabeth became very angry when she heard of Mary’s imprisonment in Scotland and her forced abdication (Guy 362, 365). Elizabeth and Mary were always thinking about each other and how they measured up to one and other. This rivalry between them was obvious when Mary sent Sir James Melville to England. Elizabeth started asking him questions about “how the two queens compared in beauty and accomplishments” and when Melville answered that Elizabeth’s skin was whiter, Elizabeth was satisfied (Dunn 224). The rivalry between Mary and Elizabeth has clearly been dramatized in the novels that are discussed in this essay. Evidently, Elizabeth cared about what happened to Mary, but she could never escape the fact that Mary was a threat to her throne.
7. Conclusion

As demonstrated in this essay, the historical novel has become more popular. The women’s historical novel is very well liked and a great number of novels within this genre are being published. Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots lived in the 16th century, also called the Tudor era. During this era women did not have a voice, had no power, and their main role in life was to have children. The pressure on royal women was tremendous because a queen had to give birth to a son in order to keep the king’s bloodline on the throne. However, these women influenced religion and politics but have not always been treated fairly by historians. Anne Boleyn, Queen and wife of Henry VIII, was accused of adultery, leading to her execution. Historians have researched whether she was guilty or not and there is no clear evidence of her guilt. She greatly influenced the Reformation and wanted to be listened to and have a voice. Elizabeth I was Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn’s daughter; she became the monarch of England, reigned for many decades and was a very successful queen. Her reign was significant because she demonstrated that the person that inherits the throne does not necessarily have to be a man. Mary Queen of Scots was born a princess but was eventually forced to abdicate and flee to England where she was executed for her involvement in a plot to kill Elizabeth. The evidence presented in this thesis supports the view that these women are the proto-feminists of the Tudor era. There are gaps in these women’s lives and historians have not always agreed on what transpired or whether the person in question was guilty or not. The historical novel allows the writer to explain events that did occur in history using their imagined versions. The novelist can also write a fictional story around a person that did exist, making the possibilities endless. The woman’s historical novel becomes the tool by which these women’s stories can be told. It also gives women of the past a voice, a voice they did not have during the Tudor era and a voice they do not have in the historical records. This type of fiction is empowering for the modern woman because even though, in recent times, tremendous gains have been made toward equality between the sexes, the modern woman must continue to fight for things that come naturally to men. The novels discussed in this essay, *The Other Boleyn Girl* by Philippa Gregory, *To Die For* by Sandra Byrd, *The Virgin’s Lover* by Philippa Gregory,* Roses Have Thorns* by Sandra Byrd, *The Other Queen* by Philippa Gregory, and *The Memoirs of Mary Queen of Scots* by Carolly Erickson, are all historical novels written by women about women that lived in the Tudor era. The main theme of these novels is how these women have to fight for the things they want. Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots are the iconic queens of the 16th century.
and they were significant to history, they made a distinguishable mark on the politics of their countries and today they have been given a voice through the genre known as the woman’s historical novel.
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