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Bernard, G. W. Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions

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Bernard, G. W.
Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions.
New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010. Pp. x, 237. ISBN 978-0-300-16245-5 (hardcover) $30.

G. W. Bernard's thought-provoking biography of Anne Boleyn invites both the general and the professional reader to enter the intimate family circle of Henry VIII and Anne by focusing narrowly on the queen's personal life. In a series of pointed questions, Bernard judiciously reviews the available records, the often unreliable accounts and gossip in contemporary diplomatic correspondence, and the imperial ambassador Eustace Chapuys's biased despatches. Even if he does not allow evidence that occasionally undermines his argument, he investigates his sources as plausible facts to expand the range of possibilities concerning Anne's relationship and marriage with Henry, her religious beliefs, and the circumstances of her fall. Bernard challenges almost all the contested aspects of Anne's life, shifting the perspective on key issues and overturning commonly held views in influential biographies by Eric Ives, David Starkey, and Retha Warnicke.

Through a careful analysis of Henry VIII's love letters to Anne, Bernard rejects the notion that Anne, aiming at exclusivity first as royal mistress then as wife, seduced Henry and provided him with theological tools, including such key texts as William Tyndale's *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, needed to justify his divorce from Catherine of Aragon. In turn, Bernard maintains that it was Henry "who held back from full sexual relations with Anne" (p. 38) and who masterminded both the political and religious aspects of his own Great Matter. Consequently, Bernard exempts Anne from the accusation that she and her allies at court were instrumental in the fall of the Lord Chancellor and Cardinal Thomas Wolsey. Presuming the sincerity of Anne's letters of thanks to the Cardinal, he discards the possibility of a rivalry between the two, suggested by the main contemporary source, Thomas Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey*, instead placing the blame fully on Henry. Similarly, Bernard refutes the imperial ambassador's assumption that Anne was largely responsible for the humiliations inflicted upon Catherine and Princess Mary after the divorce, again redirecting attention to Henry himself.

Most intriguingly, although at times less persuasively, Bernard argues at length against Anne's supposed role as a promoter of religious reform in

England, the reverently pious position to which she was raised first by her own chaplain, William Latymer, and later by the martyrologist John Foxe during Elizabeth's reign. Reviewing Anne's books, her interest in the Bible, and her patronage of churchmen, Bernard concludes that her religious conviction and practices were rooted in Christian humanism and reveal at best her sympathies to late medieval ascetic Catholicism. As there is no evidence, according to Bernard, that "Anne pursued any active and sustained religious policy" (p. 115), her actions and beliefs cannot be described as "evangelical" or proto-Protestant, and certainly not Lutheran. To support this claim, Bernard examines the fiery sermon preached by John Skip, Anne's almoner, in the royal chapel in the tense atmosphere just over a month before her execution in May, 1536. Equating the homily with Anne's own religious commitment, Bernard interprets Skip's moralizing sermon as highly critical of the king's counsellors and undoubtedly conservative, manifestly defending the traditional ceremonies and images of the church.

Finally, Bernard re-sketches Anne's final year, often relying out of necessity on accounts biased against the queen, to revisit the central question of the book: Was Anne guilty? Bernard counters the factional interpretation of the dramatic events that suggest, in his view unconvincingly, that Anne was a victim of calculated political intrigue spearheaded in unlikely joint action by the conservative faction and Thomas Cromwell. Instead, he turns again to the private lives of Anne's immediate companions at court. Based on the analysis of the Countess of Worcester's unwitting charge against Anne, recorded in the French ambassador Lancelot de Carles's contemporary poem, her gaoler William Kingston's letters, the accounts of the unsympathetic *Spanish Chronicle*, and Chapuys's despatches, Bernard interrogates all parties involved in the trial. He ultimately convicts Anne of adultery with Henry Norris, probably with Mark Smeaton and possibly with Francis Weston, while vindicating her brother George Boleyn and William Brereton. Cautious of the possibility of error and the fragility of his evidence, Bernard tentatively formulates his final verdict that it was Anne's seductive behaviour, "her own actions, or at least justified perceptions of her actions" (p. 194), that led to her downfall.

As in his study of the *King's Reformation*, Bernard restores Henry as the main driving force of events, highlighting his agency not only in the remaking of the English Church but also in his personal life. In the process, however, he excludes to some extent other formidable agents at the Henrician court

and deals only tangentially with their vested interests in promoting their own positions and religious and personal views. We should be encouraged to continue this volume's meticulous query into the private life of the royal couple by scrutinizing the motivations of the other players around Anne and Henry. Examining the differing interpretations of the same events by various personalities at court would modify and enrich the rather singular perspective offered by Bernard's fascinating, though misleadingly intimate, viewpoint from the Privy chamber.

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Borris, Kenneth and George Rousseau (eds.).
The Sciences of Homosexuality in Early Modern Europe.
New York: Routledge, 2007. Pp. xi, 281. ISBN 9780415403214 (hardback) n.p.

The aim of this edited collection is to explore the representations of same-sex desire and behaviours as expressed in a multitude of early modern texts dealing with natural phenomena and the order of nature (p. 1). Evident in Kenneth Borris's cogent introduction and in the individual papers is an attempt to examine different forms of "intellectual disciplines" by expanding the definition of what constituted science in the early modern period. *The Sciences of Homosexuality* is a cohesive collection, beneficial to scholars of both early modern science and early modern homosexuality.

The work is divided into three sections: "Medicine"; "Divinatory, Speculative, and Other Sciences"; and "Science and Sapphisms." Although the first part of the collection approaches early modern science in a relatively conventional way, Kevin Siena's examination of same-sex transmission of the pox is particularly compelling, arguing that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English medical texts did not equate the pox with same-sex sexual acts. Despite condemnations of sodomy and, Siena argues, the likelihood of high infection rates among men engaged in same-sex sexual activity, "sex between men was not policed in this medically discursive way" (p. 115). The second section of the collection presents the most direct challenge to the accepted definition of early modern science and includes two insightful contributions