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**Título de la investigación:**

Whispers of Seduction, Alliances, and Guilt in the Shadow of the Throne: A Feminist Approach  
to Women's Roles in *The Boleyn Inheritance* by Philippa Gregory

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## **Dedication**

To my parents, whose unconditional love, support, and belief in me have been the driving force behind my achievements. Thank you for being there every step of the way, celebrating my accomplishments and supporting me during moments of doubt. Without you, this would not have been possible.

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Finally, I dedicate this work to the women whose lives inspired this investigation: Anne of Cleves, Catherine Howard, Jane Boleyn, and many others whose stories were silenced, ignored, or erased from historical narratives. Through this analysis, I have attempted to examine their experiences, understand their suffering, and acknowledge their strength. Their resilience in accepting the destinies imposed upon them, often as instruments of dynastic ambition, reflects an enduring strength in the face of adversity.

This is my small way of honoring them. May their voices not be forgotten.

### Abstract

This study examines Philippa Gregory's novel; *The Boleyn Inheritance* portrays the oppression and submission of women in the Tudor court by rewriting history from a feminist perspective and giving voice to those who have long been silenced. Specifically, the study focuses on Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn. Using a qualitative literary approach, the research explores their experiences with power and highlights the ways in which oppression operates within a patriarchal system. It shows how women's bodies, reputations, and public roles were controlled and often used for political alliances or family strategies.

Furthermore, the novel is narrated in the first person from the perspective of the three protagonists. Each character reflects on her fears, desires, and struggles, thus granting the reader access to their inner lives. Consequently, the story shifts the focus from the monarch's decisions to the experiences of women that official history often overlooks. It also shows that social norms and male authority constrained women's actions not only externally but also internally, through feelings of guilt, shame, and fear. At the same time, the characters demonstrate forms of agency: Anne of Cleves manages her situation through careful submission, Katherine Howard strategically manages her reputation, and Joan Boleyn acts with discretion in court politics.

In short, this study shows that *The Boleyn Inheritance* is more than a simple retelling of Tudor history. By giving voice to these women and presenting them as complex individuals, the novel exposes a consolidated patriarchal system and challenges traditional historical narratives, ultimately offering a more inclusive perspective on the past.

## Resumen

Este estudio examina la novela *The Boleyn Inheritance* de Philippa Gregory, que representa la opresión y la sumisión de las mujeres en la corte Tudor al reescribir la historia desde una perspectiva feminista y dar voz a quienes han permanecido silenciadas. Específicamente, el estudio se centra en Ana de Cleves, Catalina Howard y Jane Boleyn. Las participantes de esta investigación son estas tres protagonistas, cuyas narraciones en primera persona permiten analizar los roles de las mujeres dentro de la estructura patriarcal de la corte Tudor.

Mediante un enfoque literario cualitativo, la investigación explora sus experiencias con el poder y destaca las formas en que la opresión se manifiesta dentro de un sistema patriarcal. En particular, se muestra cómo los cuerpos, la reputación y los roles públicos de las mujeres eran controlados y a menudo utilizados para alianzas políticas o estrategias familiares.

Además, la novela está narrada en primera persona desde la perspectiva de las tres protagonistas. Cada personaje refleja sus miedos, deseos y conflictos, lo que permite al lector acceder a su vida interior. En consecuencia, la historia desplaza el foco de las decisiones del monarca a las experiencias de las mujeres que la historia oficial suele pasar por alto. También demuestra que las normas sociales y la autoridad masculina restringían las acciones de las mujeres no solo de manera externa, sino también interna, a través de sentimientos de culpa, vergüenza y miedo. Al mismo tiempo, los personajes muestran formas de agencia: Ana de Cleves gestiona su situación mediante una sumisión estratégica, Catalina Howard administra su reputación de manera consciente y Jane Boleyn actúa con discreción en la política de la corte.

En resumen, este estudio muestra que *The Boleyn Inheritance* es más que una simple recreación de la historia Tudor. Al dar voz a estas mujeres y presentarlas como individuos complejos, la novela expone un sistema patriarcal consolidado y cuestiona las narrativas históricas tradicionales, ofreciendo finalmente una perspectiva más inclusiva del pasado.

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## Chapter I

### Introductory Framework

Men have controlled how history is narrated for a long time, and this has led to women being left out, misrepresented, or reduced to stereotypes. Rather than portraying women as complete individuals with agency, many historical texts reduce them to secondary figures often defined solely in terms of their relationships to men, such as daughters, wives, or mothers.

The Tudor dynasty (1485-1603) clearly illustrates this situation. During this period, women had few opportunities to express themselves or act independently. Society was structured around a patriarchal system that strictly defined gender roles. Women were considered primarily as wives, mothers, or tools for establishing political alliances, regardless of their social class. Their identity and value were determined by the men around them, whether fathers, husbands, or kings. While men dominated the public sphere, including law, politics, and economics, women were relegated to the home. As Crawford (1993) and Starkey (2004) have pointed out, Tudor women were confined to the domestic sphere and denied access to legal or political power, subjected to rigid patriarchal structures.

However, some women of the Tudor period managed to exert influence and circumvent these limitations. For example, Catherine of Aragon acted as regent in Henry VIII's absence, defended England at the Battle of Flodden, and maintained her position during the annulment proceedings. Similarly, Anne Boleyn played a crucial role in the religious and political changes that led to the English Reformation. Furthermore, Mary I, who became the first woman to rule England in her own right, restored Catholicism and reaffirmed the validity of female rule. In particular, Elizabeth I most clearly defied gender expectations by ruling alone for almost 45 years, refusing to marry, and strengthening England's international power.

These examples illustrate that, even within rigid patriarchal systems, women could exercise forms of power and resistance. However, many other women remained voiceless, their experiences filtered or erased by male-centered historical accounts.

In *The Boleyn Inheritance* (Gregory, 2006), Gregory gives voice to three women from that period: Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn. She lets them tell their own stories using first-person narration, which helps readers see their experiences from the inside. Gregory

does not just tell history differently she uses fiction to challenge the usual story and center the lives of women whom historians mostly ignored before.

This research seeks to analyze how Gregory uses these narrative voices to show the oppression and submission experienced by the protagonists, and how patriarchal rules shaped and limited their identities and decisions. The novel not only presents a historical reflection but also a critique that gives depth and emotional autonomy to characters whose traditional history often portrays as naïve, scandalous, or guilty. These women experience significant challenges as they navigated a system that exploited them politically, socially, and sexually. Through her fiction, Gregory seeks to challenge conventional historical narratives by bringing to light the inner lives of these women and restoring their voices, confronting the dominant accounts that have historically marginalized their experiences.

The overall purpose of this study is to understand how *The Boleyn Inheritance* gives voice to female characters whom official history has silenced. The work focuses on three points: first, to identify how Anne, Katherine, and Jane experienced oppression and submission within the Tudor court; second, to examine how characters use themes such as seduction, alliances, and guilt as symbols of power and control in their relationships with men; and third, to explore how the novel rewrites history from a feminist perspective, recognizing the importance of these women and recovering their voice.

The analysis is framed within feminist theories that question the social construction of gender and the historical invisibility of women, allowing readers to understand how Gregory grants agency and depth to her protagonists, challenging traditional male-centered narratives.

By connecting the way the story is told with feminist theory; the study looks at how Gregory gives space and depth to historical women whom historians have often overlooked. These comparisons will help show how the novel deals with questions of power, voice, and how historians or society remember or forget women in history.

## **1.1 Problem Statement**

During the Tudor period, some women gained a certain level of influence. This was the case for Catherine of Aragon, Mary I, and Elizabeth I. At different points, each of them challenged some of the gender expectations of their time. However, most women did not have

that opportunity. Historians ignored their stories, told them from a male perspective, or reduced them to simple stereotypes.

Therefore, today people continue to see how official history has left out many female voices. This is especially true for those who did not hold positions of power, but who also lived, suffered, and resisted within a patriarchal system. Even when they appear in history books, it is common for their emotions, thoughts, and decisions to be misinterpreted or not taken seriously.

The novel *The Boleyn Inheritance* (Gregory, 2006) attempts to recover some of these forgotten voices. Through fiction, she presents the stories of three women: Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn. All of them were part of Henry VIII's court, but historians or traditional accounts have distorted or minimized their legacy over time. Gregory gives them a first-person voice, allowing readers to see their fears, doubts, and the decisions they made to survive in an oppressive environment.

However, this reinterpretation of history through fiction also raises several questions. Can a novel help readers see the past differently? Can fiction recover what history has forgotten or erased? These are the questions that guide this research.

This study explores how the novel reveals the gender dynamics that shaped these women's lives. It focuses on how their voices, often ignored or distorted by history, are reimagined through fiction.

## **1.2 Objectives**

### ***1.2.1 General Objective***

To analyze how Philippa Gregory's *The Boleyn Inheritance* portrays the oppression and submission of women in the Tudor court from a feminist perspective.

### ***1.2.2 Specific Objectives***

1. To identify the forms of oppression and submission experienced by Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn in *The Boleyn Inheritance*, in relation to the patriarchal structures of the Tudor court that shaped and constrained their lives.

2. To analyze how seduction, political alliances, and guilt operate as symbolic mechanisms of power and control within gendered dynamics in the novel, revealing the complexities of influence and female agency in a rigidly hierarchical society.
3. To evaluate how *The Boleyn Inheritance* reimagines official historical narratives from a feminist perspective by restoring the voices of marginalized women and highlighting the relevance of their stories in reshaping our understanding of the past.

### 1.3 Justification

Historical narratives have long been shaped by patriarchal frameworks that portray women as secondary figures, often defined solely by their relationships with powerful men. This tendency is particularly evident in accounts of the Tudor dynasty, where historians have historically reduced women such as Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn to simplistic stereotypes: the naïve foreigner, the flirtatious consort, and the bitter widow. Their inner lives, perspectives, and agency have been largely omitted from official history.

In this context, Philippa Gregory's *The Boleyn Inheritance* (2006) offers a significant narrative intervention. Using first-person narration and multiple focalizations, Gregory reclaims the voices of these women, allowing them to articulate their experiences, emotions, and resistance. This narrative strategy functions not only as a literary device but also as a political gesture, challenging dominant historical representations and inviting readers to engage empathetically with female subjectivities that patriarchal societies have historically marginalized.

This research looks at the literary strategies Gregory uses to recover female voices. By using first-person narration and emotional depth, she challenges historical silence and gives space to perspectives often left out. While feminist literature has long sought to recover women's voices, *The Boleyn Inheritance* stands out for its emotional depth and narrative complexity. Gregory's decision to let her protagonists speak directly flawed, vulnerable, and real is not merely stylistic; it is a deliberate act of resistance. By centering female perspectives and emotional truths, the novel transforms historical figures into fully realized individuals, challenging readers to reconsider the narratives they have inherited.

This research analyzes the literary techniques Gregory uses to reclaim women's voices. By presenting her protagonists as imperfect, vulnerable, and emotionally complex beings, she

challenges the silence that has prevailed throughout history and transforms these women into fully developed individuals. The novel illustrates how fiction has the capacity to transcend mere entertainment: it can question official narratives and offers a space for stories that have been ignored by historiography.

Ultimately, this research explores how fiction, by centering marginalized female perspectives, shapes our understanding of the past and determines whose voices are heard

## **1.4 Antecedents**

### ***1.4.1 Historical Representation of Women in Literature***

The representation of women in historical literature has been extensively analyzed within literary and gender studies. Traditionally, many historical narratives and literary works were produced from predominantly male perspectives, frequently resulting in women being portrayed in limited or passive roles. In numerous works of historical fiction, female characters are often defined by their social standing, marital status, or relationship to powerful male figures, rather than by their personal autonomy or individual complexity.

Several studies have indicated that these representations reflect broader cultural and social structures that have historically marginalized women's voices and experiences. Consequently, literature has frequently reproduced patriarchal perspectives that present women as secondary actors within historical events.

However, contemporary literary criticism, especially from feminist perspectives, has promoted a reinterpretation of these narratives. From this perspective, literature helps to open a space for reinterpreting historical events and recovering the experiences of women whose voices were frequently minimized or silenced in traditional historical accounts.

This research is particularly relevant when analyzing historical fiction set in the Tudor period, where many female figures were embedded in complex systems of political power and patriarchal control. Works such as Philippa Gregory's "*The Boleyn Inheritance*" revisit the lives of historical figures like Anne of Cleves, Catherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn, offering alternative perspectives on their experiences within the Tudor court during the reign of Henry VIII.

Therefore, this theoretical approach allows readers to analyze how historical fiction can challenge traditional narratives by offering more complex representations of women and by making visible the mechanisms of power, control, and resistance that influenced their lives within societies marked by patriarchal structures.

#### ***1.4.2.1 Representation of Women in Tudor Literary Narratives***

Greg Walker (2013), in his research entitled “*Writing Under Tyranny: English Literature and the Henrician Reformation*”, conducted at Oxford University, explored how English literature has reflected the power dynamics during the reign of Henry VIII. The main goal of this study was to analyze how literary narratives reinterpret the political and social conflicts of the Tudor period, with a particular emphasis on the female figures at court whose fates were significantly influenced by the political interests of the monarchy.

To achieve this purpose, the research employed a qualitative approach grounded in the literary and historical analysis of several works depicting figures associated with the monarch and the sociopolitical context of his time. Walker analyzed a variety of texts, including historical narratives, plays, and later literary reinterpretations that portray figures from the Tudor court. This study sought to understand how authors have reconstructed the experiences of women at court, highlighting the connection between political power, social norms, and literary representations.

Within this analysis, the focus is on historical figures such as Anne of Cleves and Katherine Howard, whose literary representations highlight the tensions and challenges women faced within the political and social system of the Tudor court. These figures, frequently described in various texts, offer insight into how literary narratives have interpreted their lives based on the constraints imposed by the patriarchal structures prevalent in their time.

The study's findings indicate that many of these literary representations place women within power structures that limit their autonomy and determine their value primarily based on their relationship to the monarch. In numerous narratives, the identity of these female figures develops based on their roles as wives, consorts, or members of the court, reflecting the social and political expectations imposed upon them. Thus, literature not only reproduces certain historical events but also helps shape how these women are remembered and interpreted in cultural memory.

Walker also indicates that literature plays a fundamental role in reevaluating the historical past. Using narrative techniques, character development, and theme selection, writers can both reinforce and challenge gender structures that have existed throughout history. In this sense, literary narratives become a space where meanings related to power, female identity, and gender disparities are discussed within specific historical contexts.

Consequently, this study is significant for current research, as it provides an understanding of how literature has helped to re-examine women's experiences within a historical context characterized by marked gender inequalities. Furthermore, it presents an analytical framework that allows for examining how contemporary and later narratives reinterpret historical figures from the Tudor period and reconstruct their stories from diverse literary and cultural perspectives.

#### ***1.4.2.2 Representation of Female Characters in Tudor Historical Fiction***

Similarly, Smith (2018), in her study entitled "*Female Representation in Tudor Historical Fiction*," conducted at the University of London, analyzed the representation of female characters in historical novels set in the Tudor court. The main objective of this research was to examine how contemporary historical fiction reinterprets female figures from the past through narratives that combine historical elements with literary creation processes. In this way, the study seeks to understand how current authors reconstruct and reinterpret the lives of historical women who were part of one of the most complex periods in English history.

To achieve this purpose, the research adopted a qualitative approach based on the literary analysis of several historical novels published in recent decades that focus on the Tudor era. Smith examined various works of fiction depicting life at the court of Henry VIII, with a particular focus on the narrative construction of female characters. Through this study, the author discovered that many of these modern works attempt to challenge or expand conventional historical narratives, providing alternative perspectives on the role of women throughout history.

Furthermore, the study reveals that many of these novels present more complex and multidimensional portrayals of the women who lived during this period. Unlike certain traditional historical accounts, in which female characters tend to appear in a limited or stereotypical way, contemporary historical fiction attempts to give them greater prominence within the narrative. This allows for an exploration not only of their role within the court, but also of their personal

experiences, their internal conflicts, and the tensions arising from the social and political expectations of the time.

Furthermore, the results show that contemporary historical fiction tends to give greater psychological and emotional depth to female characters. While in many traditional historical narratives these women have been represented in a simplified way, current literary narratives seek to explore in greater detail their motivations, their personal decisions, and the social constraints they faced within a deeply hierarchical and patriarchal political system. In this sense, literature becomes a tool that allows us to reconstruct the past from a more human and reflective perspective.

Therefore, Smith (2018) highlights that historical novels can serve as an important space for reconsidering power dynamics between men and women in historical contexts influenced by patriarchal systems. Through literary reinterpretation, contemporary writers can challenge conventional narratives and present new perspectives on the role of women throughout history.

In brief, this analysis is relevant to the current research, as it offers a theoretical framework that facilitates understanding how works of historical fiction, such as Philippa Gregory's *"The Boleyn Inheritance"*, reinterpret the experiences of historical female figures like Anne of Cleves and Katherine Howard during the reign of Henry VIII. These literary reinterpretations enrich our understanding of women's experiences at the Tudor court and allow readers to explore how contemporary literature reimagines the narratives of those women who lived in an environment characterized by marked gender inequalities.

#### ***1.4.2.3 Gender and Power in Contemporary Tudor Narratives***

Johnson (2020), in her research entitled *"Gender and Power in Tudor Narratives"*, conducted at the University of Oxford, examined the representation of power dynamics between men and women in contemporary historical literature during the reign of Henry VIII. The fundamental purpose of this study was to investigate how literary narratives reflect the political and social tensions that impacted the lives of women at the Tudor court, as well as how these tensions influenced their decisions, social status, and fate within a highly hierarchical system.

To achieve this objective, Johnson investigated works of fiction that recreate life at the court of Henry VIII, placing particular emphasis on the narratives of female characters and how

the stories reflect power dynamics within the political context of the monarchy. Through this literary analysis, the author was able to identify recurring patterns in the portrayal of the king's wives and other women connected to his inner circle.

The study's findings indicate that many of these literary works portray the king's wives as characters trapped in intricate political structures dominated by male power. Although these women held prominent and seemingly powerful roles at court, their decisions and actions were deeply influenced by political interests, dynastic tactics, and social pressures that limited their independence. In this context, contemporary narratives tend to emphasize how their lives were defined by a constant negotiation between their personal aspirations and the demands of the patriarchal system.

The study also points out that, despite their proximity to the center of political power, many of these women had limited capacity to make independent decisions. Their marriages, family alliances, and public behavior were deeply intertwined with the kingdom's political strategies. As a result, their personal destinies were closely intertwined with the power dynamics that defined life at the Tudor court.

In this sense, Johnson points out that contemporary historical fiction provides a space to critically analyze power dynamics and reflect on how women attempted to navigate their situation within an unequal system. Through narrative, writers have the opportunity to delve into the internal conflicts, emotional tensions, and survival tactics that these historical figures might have faced in an environment governed by patriarchal structures.

Finally, this precedent is of particular importance, as it provides a theoretical foundation for examining characters such as Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn in Philippa Gregory's novel "*The Boleyn Inheritance*". Through this analytical framework, we can understand how contemporary historical fiction illuminates the diverse ways in which women negotiated their position within markedly unequal power structures, as well as the tactics they employed to survive and exercise agency in the face of the constraints imposed by their historical context.

#### ***1.4.2.4 The Journey as a Metaphor for Identity Transformation***

Sandí Villalobos and Sibaja (2022), in their study on *The Metaphor of the Journey in the Construction of Female Identity* within Latin American literary criticism, analyzed how physical and symbolic displacements in narrative can function as processes of personal transformation in female characters. The main objective of the research was to examine how the journey can be interpreted as a mechanism for identity reconstruction in the face of restrictive social structures, especially in contexts where women must adapt to new cultural, social, or political realities.

The research was conducted using a qualitative approach focused on the literary analysis of several narrative texts where the displacement of female characters is fundamental to the plot's development. Through this study, the authors investigated how the protagonists' movement, whether between different geographical spaces or in new social contexts, transforms into an experience that triggers processes of personal change, adaptation, and a re-examination of established norms.

The findings suggest that travel should not be considered merely as a change in geographical location. Instead, it is presented as a symbolic process that entails transformation, learning, and a renegotiation of identity. In numerous narratives, displacement provides protagonists with the opportunity to confront new realities that challenge previously established social structures. This allows them to re-evaluate their position in relation to social, cultural, or political hierarchies. Thus, travel becomes a narrative tool that illustrates processes of resistance, adaptation, and self-redefinition.

This research is significant for current scholarship, as it allows readers to understand the processes of adaptation and change experienced by characters like Anne of Cleves in Philippa Gregory's novel "*The Boleyn Inheritance*". In particular, this theoretical framework facilitates the study of the experiences of cultural and political displacement that the protagonist faces upon arriving at the court of Henry VIII, where she must adjust to an unfamiliar and complex environment. From this perspective, the journey can be seen not only as a geographical disruption, but also as a profound process of personal and identity transformation within a context characterized by political, cultural, and gender tensions.

#### ***1.4.2.5 Patriarchal Guilt and Female Subjectivity***

The construction of female subjectivity through moral and religious discourse has been studied in contemporary feminist thought as a mechanism of ideological control. Jiménez Argüello (2021), in her study entitled “*Patriarchal Guilt and the Construction of Female Subjectivity in Cultural and Religious Discourses,*” analyzed the construction of female subjectivity based on the concept of guilt within religious and cultural discourses present in patriarchal contexts. The main objective of this study was to examine how guilt functions as a symbolic control mechanism that regulates women's behavior, decisions, and identity within hierarchical social systems in which strict moral norms and clearly defined gender expectations predominate.

The research was conducted from a theoretical and critical perspective within the field of contemporary feminist studies. Through the analysis of a variety of cultural and religious discourses, the author examined how certain moral narratives have played a historical role in constructing a feminine image linked to obedience, purity, and moral responsibility in society. From this perspective, the study suggests that these discourses not only affect the social perception of women but also impact how women themselves understand their behavior and identity.

The study's findings conclude that guilt should not be understood solely as an individual emotion or personal feeling. Rather, it presents itself as an ideological tool that reinforces social norms and limits women's autonomy through the internalization of moral expectations. In this sense, guilt functions as a symbolic control mechanism that allows patriarchal structures to persist, as many women end up regulating their own behavior according to socially imposed values and norms.

Furthermore, the analysis indicates that, by internalizing these moral norms, women tend to self-regulate their actions for fear of moral, religious, or social condemnation. In this way, guilt becomes a form of internal control that reproduces and legitimizes patriarchal power structures, since women themselves end up monitoring and evaluating their behavior according to the parameters established by society.

This research provides a relevant theoretical perspective for the analysis of characters such as Jane Boleyn and Katherine Howard in Philippa Gregory's novel “*The Boleyn*”

*Inheritance*". From this perspective, it is possible to understand how moral and religious discourses influence the construction of these characters' identities, as well as how they experience guilt within a context marked by intense social, political, and cultural pressures during the reign of Henry VIII. Finally, this perspective allows for a deeper analysis of the internal tensions and emotional conflicts these female figures face within a profoundly unequal power structure.

### **1.5 Limitations**

Despite the relevance of this study to understanding the representation of women and power relations in historical fiction set in the Tudor period, it is important to acknowledge some limitations that may influence the scope of the research.

First, this study focuses exclusively on Philippa Gregory's novel, "*The Boleyn Inheritance*". Therefore, the conclusions reached are not applicable to all works of historical fiction set in the Tudor period, nor to all literary representations of women in similar contexts. Thus, the analysis is limited to the interpretation of a particular literary work and how it narratively develops its female characters.

Secondly, the research is conducted using a qualitative approach grounded in literary analysis. This type of methodology involves an interpretive element. While the analysis is based on theoretical frameworks derived from gender studies and literary criticism, interpretations of the characters, their motivations, and the power dynamics present in the work may differ depending on the analytical perspective of the researcher or other readers.

Another limitation relates to the historical perspective of the analysis. Although the research considers the context of Henry VIII's reign and the experiences of figures such as Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn, the study's main focus is on their literary representation in the novel, without undertaking a detailed historical reconstruction of their biographies. Consequently, the study's objective is not to judge the historical accuracy of the events, but rather to examine how these figures are portrayed within the literary narrative.

Finally, the research may be limited by the lack of specific academic sources that focus on the critical analysis of this particular novel. Although there are numerous studies on the representation of women in Tudor literature and historical fiction, considerably fewer works

examine the female characters of *The Boleyn Inheritance* in detail, which may limit the possibilities for making direct comparisons with previous research.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes to broadening the understanding of how contemporary historical fiction represents women's experiences and power dynamics within historical contexts marked by patriarchal structures.

## 1.6 Scope

It is important to mention that this research aims to analyze the feminist representation of women's oppression and submission in Philippa Gregory's *The Boleyn Inheritance*. This study examines how the novel rewrites historical narratives to rescue the voices of women whom patriarchal structures of the English court during the Tudor dynasty have ignored. It also seeks to explore how themes such as seduction, alliances, and guilt function as symbolic mechanisms of power and control that shape the lives of Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn. The novel reveals the complex ways in which these women confront their limited agency within a rigidly hierarchical, male-dominated society.

Furthermore, this research project seeks to examine how the novel challenges traditional historical narratives by centering female perspectives and highlighting the importance of these marginalized voices. The study focuses on the Tudor court between 1539 and 1542 in England and analyzes the social and cultural context in which these women lived. Therefore, this research focuses on the experiences of the three female protagonists and does not address broader political events of the period or other historical figures outside of their personal and gender perspectives.

On the other hand, this research also offers significant benefits for readers, such as the development of critical thinking and analytical skills. Through qualitative literary analysis, the researcher closely examines narrative techniques, themes, and character development. For example, the voices of Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn provide insight into the emotional and psychological impact of their oppression. Another example is the novel's use of interior monologues and multiple perspectives, which invite reconsideration of dominant versions of history.

This research promotes a deeper understanding of feminist theory and gender studies. By analyzing the experiences and perspectives of these historical women, readers gain a clearer

understanding of the effects of patriarchal structures and the importance of recovering silenced female voices. The study incorporates feminist theories from Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Hélène Cixous, and contemporary Latin American feminist scholars to strengthen its analytical framework.

Analyzing *The Boleyn Inheritance* aims to uncover the layers of meaning within the novel's narrative, including how the novel represents themes of power, gender, and resistance through the lives of the three protagonists. This involves exploring how Gregory's historical reimagining reflects feminist concerns and contributes to reframing our understanding of the past. To understand the complexity of the characters' experiences and motivations, such as Anne of Cleves's struggle with identity and displacement, Katherine Howard's role in court politics, and Jane Boleyn's burden of guilt and complicity. By examining their stories, the study offers a deeper understanding of female agency and the constraints imposed by historical and social contexts.

Likewise, readers of work can identify the influence of feminist literary criticism and historical fiction in reconstructing cultural memory and questioning patriarchal historiography. This offers a more nuanced understanding of the novel's place within feminist literature and its relevance in cultural discourse.

Drawing on feminist literary and cultural theories, this study allows students to analyze the novel within the sociopolitical environment of Tudor England. It examines how gender expectations, social hierarchies, and historical silencing are reflected in the characters' interactions, identities, and decisions.

In conclusion, *The Boleyn Inheritance* is examined from a feminist perspective to show how the novel critiques patriarchal power, rescues women marginalized by history, and transforms historical memory. The study investigates the effects of gender oppression, the symbolic roles of seduction and guilt, and the reclamation of female subjectivity. By analyzing characters' motivations, narrative strategies, and thematic elements, this research expands our understanding of genre, history, and the role of literature in challenging dominant discourses.

## Chapter II

### Theoretical Framework

This second chapter outlines the key concepts and theoretical frameworks necessary for a thorough analysis of Philippa Gregory's *Boleyn Inheritance*. Defining these terms is essential for examining how the novel addresses themes such as women's oppression, patriarchal power dynamics, and gender roles within the historical setting of Tudor England. This framework will support a feminist analysis focused on how the novel portrays women's resistance and identity transformation under patriarchal oppression.

#### 2.1 Literature

Throughout history, literature has been a tool for expressing ideas, emotions, experiences, and social realities through creative and artistic language. It includes various genres, such as fiction, poetry, drama, and essays. It can be written in prose or verse. Furthermore, it functions as a reflection of the culture and values of the time in which it was created. On the other hand, literature has fundamental value because it helps preserve cultural identity, fosters critical thinking, and allows researchers to question dominant ideologies. According to the website openDemocracy (2017), it also plays an important role in developing empathy and moral imagination, as it helps readers connect with the emotions and experiences of people with different experiences than their own.

In this sense, literature gives voice to the three protagonists of Philippa Gregory's novel *The Boleyn Inheritance*. Through their thoughts, emotions, and struggles, history is rewritten from their perspective. In this way, literature not only reflects society but also challenges traditional historical discourses. Thus, the narrative opens spaces for marginalized voices, especially those of women, to recover their identity and resist patriarchal erasure.

#### 2.2 Theory

A theory can be understood as an explanation or framework that helps make sense of facts or events. This research primarily draws on feminist theory as a tool to analyze the structures of power and oppression that affect women's lives and identities. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), a theory is "an idea or set of ideas that should explain facts or events." In other

words, a theory goes beyond just an idea. It is an explanation supported by evidence that is tested and examined through research.

## **2.3 Key Feminist Concepts for Analysis**

To analyze the text from a feminist perspective, it is essential to understand certain key concepts. These concepts explain how authors have portrayed women in literature and how these representations relate to power, identity, and resistance. They also show how social structures influence women's experiences and their ways of acting within and outside of the text. Therefore, this section addresses four key ideas: patriarchy, gender norms and performativity, systemic oppression, and female agency.

### ***2.3.1 Patriarchy***

According to Walby (1990), patriarchy is “a social system in which men hold power and dominate in the political, economic, and social spheres” (p. 20). This means that, historically, men have had control over important decisions in society. On the other hand, society has viewed women as subordinates, denying them the same opportunities and rights. This inequality is seen not only in politics or the workplace but also in culture, and especially in literature.

Patriarchy influences not only the content of what is written, but also determines who is allowed to write. For centuries, many women were unable to publish freely. Some women used male pseudonyms, such as George Eliot or Currer Bell (Charlotte Brontë), because society did not take them seriously if it knew they were women. Even today, more men than women publish in certain genres, and the media and literary prizes give women less visibility. Therefore, feminist literary criticism is so important. This way of analyzing texts seeks to show how patriarchy hides in stories. It also attempts to rescue forgotten authors and give them the place they deserve. It also invites people to read with different eyes, questioning stereotypes and giving value to female voices.

Analyzing the work from a feminist perspective is important because it reveals how patriarchy operated in the Tudor court and how that power structure continues to leave its mark on today's society. In the novel, men use women as political tools, force them to obey, and silence them if they dare to think for themselves. The experiences of Anne, Katherine and Jane Boleyn demonstrate how male power governs their bodies, choices, and fates. Studying this work allows

readers not only to understand how these dynamics worked in the past but also to reflect on how many of these forms of control are still present and continue to shape the lives of many women today. Therefore, discussing patriarchy in historical and literary contexts is not just an academic exercise, but also a way to question and highlight the inequalities that still exist.

### ***2.3.2 Gender Norms***

Gender norms are concepts that society perpetuates and teaches over time. According to Butler (1990), gender can be understood as "a series of repeated acts that generate the illusion of a stable identity" (p. 33). This means that people are not born with an innate understanding of how they should behave as men or women; instead, these roles are acquired through socialization and cultural conventions. Consequently, gender roles are presented as if they were part of a theatrical performance. This dynamic is evident in literary texts, where characters imitate, question, or even break these roles. Examining how characters adhere to or challenge these norms allows readers to better understand the workings of gender in everyday life.

### ***2.3.3 Systemic Oppression***

Women's oppression is not a single event, but a series of intersecting systems. These systems control their bodies, their sexuality, and even their rights. Crenshaw (1991) argues that "the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of interrelated patterns of racism and sexism" (pp. 1243–1244). This means that it is not enough to analyze a single form of inequality, since different systems of oppression combine and reinforce one another. This perspective helps readers understand why some women face more barriers than others and how these forms of control continue to be present in different spaces, including literature.

### ***2.3.4 Female Agency***

Although society often subjects women to limits, they can act, resist, and speak out. Hooks (1984) says that female agency is "women's ability to act within social constraints and challenge dominant norms" (p. 21). In literature, this is key because it shows readers that women are not just passive victims. They can also be strong characters who seek their freedom and make choices, even in contexts that try to silence them.

## 2.4 Feminist Literary Theory

Feminist literary theory is a critical approach that analyzes how literature reflects and challenges ideas about gender. It does not consider literature as something neutral, but as a product of society and history. Therefore, it studies how authors represent women and construct power relations between men and women in texts. One of the main goals of literary feminism is to discover how patriarchal ideas are present in stories. It also seeks to show how literary traditions have silenced or made women invisible. Furthermore, this theory helps recover female voices and propose new ways of reading and writing that center women's experiences. Tyson (2014) points out that literature is a cultural and political tool that not only reflects reality but also contributes to shaping social ideas and values, thus being able to maintain or challenge patriarchal power structures.

This investigation uses a cultural-historical feminist approach. This means analyzing how historical and social contexts shape women and their identities. In the case of *The Boleyn Inheritance*, understanding the Tudor era is essential to grasp women's lack of autonomy and their struggles to find voice and power. Furthermore, the study incorporates the perspective of intersectional feminism, which recognizes that gender intersects with other factors such as social class and power. By applying these feminist perspectives to the analysis of Philippa Gregory's novel, this study analyzes how she gives voice to women whom history has silenced. It also seeks to reveal how patriarchy controlled and limited their lives. The goal is to understand not only how gender functions in this historical work but also what it tells readers about literature, culture, and feminist thought today.

### 2.4.1 Simone de Beauvoir: Woman as "the Other" and the Social Construction of Gender

In many cultures, women have not been seen as complete people, but as a kind of reflection of men. Their relationships with others, especially men, and not by who they are in themselves, often define their identity. This way of thinking also appears frequently in literature, where female characters often revolve around male interests, desires, or goals. They often lack a voice of their own and the space to act independently.

This relates to what De Beauvoir (1949) proposes in *The Second Sex*. She explains that women have been constructed as "the Other"; that is, as someone who does not represent the

norm, but something different and incomplete. This idea helps people understand why so many female characters, especially in historical texts, seem to be in the shadow of men.

In *The Boleyn Inheritance*, this is evident. Women like Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn are consistently defined by their relationships with men in power: husbands, kings, or political figures. They have no control over their destiny; their value depends on how useful or obedient they are. The novel can be interpreted as offering narrative space. It gives them voice, space, and humanity. They are no longer just figureheads; they now feel, think, and tell their story.

Using De Beauvoir's approach allows researchers to see how gender is a social construct reinforced through cultural discourses. It also shows how literature can be a tool to break down these structures. When authors give women the place of protagonists, not only within the story but also in the way the story is told, they break with the idea that women are "the Other." Thus, they become subjects of their own experience. And that is precisely where feminist analysis becomes so valuable.

#### **2.4.2 Hélène Cixous: *The Need to Write from the Female Body* (“écriture féminine”)**

For a long time, a male voice has dominated writing. Styles, themes, narrative structures, everything has responded to a way of thinking that excludes, or at least limits, the female experience. In response to this, French theorist Cixous (1975) proposes something different. She says that women should write from their bodies, from their desires, and from their personal experience. She calls this “écriture féminine”, or in English, “feminine writing”.

This concept does not refer to women writing only about “women's” things, but to their ability to break the rules of traditional language imposed by patriarchy. For Cixous, the female body is a source of knowledge, creativity, and resistance. Therefore, when a woman writes from her body, from her sensitivity, she is challenging the system that has silenced her. She is speaking on her own terms, not those imposed by society. Cixous' approach was highly influential, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, within French feminist circles. Her most famous essay, *The Laughter of the Medusa*, became a key text in feminist thought. In it, she invites women to write freely, without fear, without asking permission. To write, to find themselves. To write free themselves.

This idea connects very well with what Philippa Gregory does in *The Boleyn Inheritance*. Throughout the novel, people read the inner voices of three women whom history has ignored or judged: Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn. Each narrates from her innermost depths, from her fears, her pain, and her desire to survive. They do not follow a traditional style or a distant perspective. The text exhibits a very intimate, emotional, and personal style of writing, exactly as Cixous proposes.

The novel may be examined through the lens of *écriture féminine*, even if it is not a theoretical text. Through fiction, Gregory gives voice back to silence women. And in doing so, she not only reconstructs history but also questions the very language that has been used to oppress them.

#### **2.4.3 Judith Butler: Gender as Performative Act**

Gender is often perceived as an inherent and permanent characteristic. However, Judith Butler (1990), in her work *\*Gender Trouble\**, argues that gender is not a natural property, but a social construct generated through repeated actions. She presents the idea of gender performativity, which indicates that gender is not defined by what one is, but by what one does. It is formed from the repetition of behaviors, gestures, and norms that society classifies as masculine or feminine.

According to Butler, these repeated acts create the illusion of a stable identity. Social expectations regulate how individuals dress, speak, behave, and interact. Over time, these patterns become naturalized, even though they are culturally produced. Therefore, gender should be understood as a dynamic process rather than a fixed biological essence.

This theoretical perspective provides an important analytical tool for examining female characters in historical fiction. In *The Boleyn Inheritance*, the women of Henry VIII's court are required to conform to specific expectations of femininity in order to survive within a patriarchal system. They are expected to embody obedience, purity, modesty, and loyalty. Their social value depends on how successfully they perform these roles.

From Butler's perspective, such behaviors can be seen as actions influenced by social pressure, rather than as manifestations of a fundamental identity. When these actions fail to meet established expectations or deviate from them, the repercussions are significant. Thus, Butler's

theory allows this study to explore how gender acts as a regulatory mechanism in the novel and how identity is formed through processes of repetition, discipline, and social control.

## **2.5 Recent Developments in Feminist Literary Theory**

### ***2.5.1 Female Journey as Identity Transformation: The Theory of Displacement by Sandí Villalobos and Sibaja (2022)***

From a Latin American feminist perspective, the work of Villalobos and Sibaja (2022) provides an innovative interpretation of women's experiences in literature. They propose that travel, whether physical, emotional, or symbolically, acts as a metaphor for transformation. For female protagonists, moving is not only about changing location but also about questioning the social rules that oppress them and rebuilding their identity.

In contexts where the patriarchal system imposes silence, control, and strict norms, movement represents a form of resistance. Thus, the female body becomes a territory of struggle, and movement becomes a strategy for breaking away from imposed limits. This perspective reveals that even small actions, such as changing space or making a personal decision, can have a profound impact on women's lives.

This approach is very useful for analyzing historical novels such as *The Boleyn Inheritance*, where female characters do not always physically travel, but experience internal processes of transformation. Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn face emotional and symbolic shifts that force them to rethink, resist, and sometimes break free from imposed roles. Therefore, individuals can also read their stories as personal journeys toward autonomy and self-awareness.

### ***2.5.2 Guilt as Patriarchal Control: Insights from Jiménez Argüello's Thesis (2021) and Its Relevance to Feminist Struggles***

Jiménez's (2021) thesis offers a profound perspective on how the feeling of guilt has been used as a symbolic tool to control women, especially through patriarchal religious discourses. According to the author, this feeling is not natural, but a social construct that seeks to limit female freedom. Through guilt, women learn to police themselves, repress their desires, and obey norms imposed by a morality that does not pertain to them.

This approach is key to understanding the development of characters like Jane Boleyn in the novel. Throughout the novel, Jane carries a guilt that is not always her own. Society singles her out for her past, judges her for the mistakes of others, and torments her, expecting she must punish herself. Her guilt becomes self-surveillance, which keeps her silent and disconnects her from her own identity.

Furthermore, Jane's guilt not only acts as a personal emotion, but as a tool of the system that reinforces her submission. As Jiménez's (2021) explains, the internalization of religious guilt turns women into their own jailers. This is exactly what readers perceive in Jane: although she is close to power, she can never use it to her advantage because fear and shame have already shaped her mind. In that sense, her story reflects how guilt can be as effective as any physical punishment in maintaining patriarchal order.

These recent studies are very important for current feminist struggles because they show how control over women is exercised not only through visible or direct means but also through internal mechanisms such as guilt. Understanding this helps make visible more subtle forms of oppression that are still present today. Thus, this research offers tools for women to recognize these limitations and work toward their true liberation, not only physically but also emotionally and symbolically.

In general terms, these theories offer the necessary conceptual tools to investigate the formation of female identity, power dynamics, and mechanisms of control present in *The Boleyn Inheritance*. Each theoretical framework provides a particular analytical perspective, whether focusing on gender construction, performativity, writing as a form of resistance, displacement, or patriarchal guilt. This allows the present study to analyze how female subjectivity is configured and negotiated in the work. Together, these approaches establish a methodological basis that guides the interpretation undertaken in this research.

## **2.6 Approach**

An approach is how one explores a problem or investigates a question. This refers to the plan or perspective that guides data collection, interpretation, and the development of conclusions. The approach chosen shapes the study and influences the methods used to answer research questions or test ideas. According to the Open University (2023), a research approach is the method chosen to guide the conduct of the study and explain the reasons behind it. The

researcher defines it based on what they intend to investigate, their point of view, and the theoretical or philosophical ideas they believe in.

This research adopts a qualitative feminist literary approach, combining tools of literary analysis with feminist theory to explore how women's voices are represented, silenced, or reimagined in historical fiction. By examining *The Boleyn Inheritance*, this study investigates how narrative techniques such as first-person voice, interior monologue, and polyphony reveal the emotional depth, vulnerability, and resistance of female characters who have been historically marginalized. This feminist literary approach enables an exploration of identity transformation not only as a personal journey but as a political act of resistance against patriarchal structures. Also, the novel invites us to listen to Anne of Cleves, Catherine Howard, and Joan Boleyn not only as historical figures, but as women with fears, desires, and complex inner lives.

This approach is not merely academic; it is also personal and reflective. It recognizes that literature has the power to challenge official versions of history and invites readers to see the past through different eyes.

### ***2.6.1 Social Approach***

The sociological approach to literature sees literary works not as isolated pieces of art, but as products shaped by the societies in which they were created. This perspective considers the cultural, political, economic, and historical conditions surrounding both the writer and the reader. Rather than focusing solely on style or content, it looks at how broader social forces like class structures, gender expectations, political ideologies, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions shape literary production and interpretation.

By using this approach, readers can explore how literature mirrors the social realities of its time. It draws attention to power imbalances, dominant values, and the voices that are amplified or silenced within a text. In this research, the sociological lens is helpful for applying a feminist reading to *The Boleyn Inheritance*, set in a period when women had very little control over their own lives. During the Tudor period, gender roles were rigidly enforced, and the novel captures this by portraying Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn as women whose worth is judged by their looks, their compliance, and how well they serve the interests of the crown.

According to Sapiro (2023), in her work *The Sociology of Literature* (Stanford University Press), the sociological approach treats literature as “a social fact.” In other words, it is not enough to analyze a text on its own; one must also consider the social institutions, practices, and power relations involved in its production, circulation, and reception. Sapiro argues that literary meaning is not fixed or universal, but that social structures shape it through their interaction with the text. Therefore, literature is both influenced by and capable of influencing the society from which it arises. The protagonists’ inner lives and actions, as depicted in the novel, can be seen as symbolic forms of resistance against these oppressive social structures.

Building on the sociological approach, which emphasizes how literature reflects and critiques social structures, this section explores how alienation functions as a tool of patriarchal control in Tudor England. Gregory uses the lived experiences of her female characters to highlight how power structures isolate women emotionally, socially, and politically.

#### ***2.6.1.1 Alienation and Social Marginalization***

In the work, Philippa Gregory shows how Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn slowly grow more isolated within the strict, male-dominated world of the Tudor court. Each woman finds herself trapped physically, socially, and emotionally within a rigid system that sees her worth only in terms of appearance, submission, and political convenience. The longer they remain in the Tudor court, the more isolated they become, and any hope for personal freedom or genuine connection slips further out of reach.

Anne of Cleves is isolated from the moment she arrives in England. Her marriage to Henry VIII is arranged without her input, and she is expected to fulfill her role as queen with no regard for her personal desires. When Henry finds her appearance displeasing, she is immediately rejected in a humiliating and public manner. Despite her attempts to adjust, Anne is treated as a stranger within the court and struggles with both language and cultural differences. She reflects on her outsider status with the words, “I am a foreigner, an unwelcome one” (Gregory, 2006, p. 95). Her alienation is both immediate and ongoing, shaped by forces she cannot control.

Anne's isolation continues even after her marriage is annulled. Though she remains physically close to the royal court, they socially removed her from its inner workings. She receives a pension and the title “the King’s Sister,” but this role holds little real power. Her influence fades, and she’s left to watch the court from the sidelines. Anne captures this feeling of

being caught between worlds when she says, “I am neither wife nor queen, but a shadow lurking in the halls” (Gregory, 2006, p. 123). However, despite her erasure, Anne’s survival outside of traditional queenly roles can be read as a subtle form of resistance. Stripped of power, she reconstructs a selfhood that is no longer defined by royal expectations or male desire. Her position becomes one of quiet invisibility noticed, but powerless, showing how the court strips women of their identity once they fall out of favor.

Anne’s growing invisibility shows just how deeply rooted the Tudor court’s sexism and fear of outsiders really were. Even though she avoids the deadly fate that some other women face, she’s still pushed aside, living a quiet life on the margins. Her title might keep her safe, but it does not give her any real happiness. They left her without love, power, or a clear place in the world. Through Anne’s story, Gregory shines a light on how the court treats women like objects useful for politics or appearances and then tosses them aside when they no longer serve the men in charge.

Secondly, Katherine Howard’s alienation is primarily emotional and reputational. The court initially presents Katherine as a vibrant and spirited young woman but later weaponized her earlier romantic experiences against her when she becomes queen. Her innocence is questioned, and her reputation is relentlessly policed. For example, her previous flirtations with her music teacher and others are used to brand her as immoral, leading to her social isolation and ultimate downfall (Gregory, 2006, p. 139). She becomes cut off from potential allies and friendship, trapped in a web of suspicion and betrayal.

Furthermore, Katherine’s alienation deepens as she confronts the brutal consequences of court politics. Despite her youth and vulnerability, she faces the harsh judgment of the patriarchal justice system that denies her the chance to defend herself adequately. Her isolation culminates in her final imprisonment and execution, which Gregory portrays as the tragic end of a woman condemned by forces beyond her control: “No one heard the real Katherine, only the accusations” (Gregory, 2006, p. 159). Gregory’s portrayal gives Katherine back the voice that history denied her, allowing readers to witness the emotional toll of a justice system designed to punish female autonomy.

Thirdly, Jane Boleyn, known historically as Lady Rochford, embodies alienation through guilt and social exclusion. After the execution of her husband George Boleyn, Jane becomes a

pariah in the court. Society ostracizes her and burdens her with the stigma of betrayal and scandal. Gregory gives Jane a voice to reveal the internalized alienation she feels, haunted by accusations and her own remorse: “I live in the shadow of my husband’s death, branded a traitor” (Gregory, 2006, p. 202). Jane’s narrative shows how alienation can be both external, through societal rejection, and internal, as self-imposed punishment. Jane’s inner confusion reflects not only personal guilt but also the broader patriarchal expectation that women internalize blame for their circumstances, even when they are powerless within the system that judges them.

Additionally, Jane’s position in the court forces her into dangerous political games, where her alliances shift as she tries to survive. Her eventual participation in accusations against Queen Katherine Howard further isolates her morally and socially, as she is seen as complicit in the downfall of another woman. This complicated web of power, guilt, and survival highlights the precarious existence of Tudor women led, caught between victimization and agency (Gregory, 2006, p. 214).

This alienation is not merely personal; it represents a broader critique of how patriarchal societies systematically isolate and silence women. Gregory’s feminist lens allows these characters to become voices of historical resistance. Together, these examples from the novel show how Tudor women were alienated and marginalized, physically separated, emotionally isolated, and politically powerless. Gregory’s feminist retelling challenges the official histories by giving these silenced women a voice, showing how their constrained lives reflected broader patriarchal control.

Ultimately, the isolation and alienation experienced by Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn reveal the effects of the rigid patriarchal and hierarchical systems of the Tudor court. These systems actively suppressed women’s identities and agencies, leaving them powerless and marginalized. In this society, obedience, appearance, and political usefulness defined solely their worth. By portraying these struggles, *The Boleyn Inheritance* not only revisits the oppression of Tudor women but also reflects gendered power dynamics that continue to resonate in modern society, making the novel’s feminist message both historical and contemporary.

### ***2.6.1.2 Gender, Power, and Silence in Tudor England***

During the Tudor period, strict rules, religious control, and the constant need to protect royal bloodlines shaped society. In the royal court, they expected women to be quiet, pure, and obedient. They often linked their worth to their ability to serve the crown, not their personal decisions or voices. Queens like Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn, lived under these pressures. People treated them more as instruments of political gain than as real people. The powerful men around them controlled their bodies and lives. Gregory's feminist retelling brings to light how these women's silencing was not accidental, but part of a broader patriarchal system designed to maintain male dominance. By giving voice to women historically marginalized, the novel invites readers to reflect on how similar mechanisms of control persist in contemporary gender dynamics (Gregory, 2006). Therefore, it is important to analyze the history and beliefs of that time. This helps people see how *The Boleyn Inheritance* tells their stories in a new way. The novel gives these women a voice to narrate and highlights their struggles from a feminist perspective (Gregory, 2006).

### ***2.6.1.3 Historical Context: Power Structures, Religion, and Marriages as Politics***

Society at the court of King Henry VIII was strictly organized, with clear divisions between social classes and firm expectations for men and women. Both enforced gender roles the government and the Church. In this context, the monarchy was absolute; the king and queen wielded absolute power, supported by a royal court that helped maintain the ruler's power and protect the royal lineage.

Women had very few legal rights. They often viewed them as property of their fathers or husbands, with little control over their own lives. Religion played a major role in keeping this structure in place. After Henry VIII broke away from the Roman Catholic Church and created the Church of England, religious teachings became deeply tied to politics and authority. These teachings reminded women of their duty to be pure, obedient, and morally upright. If a woman deviated from these expectations, she could face harsh consequences, including public shaming or even execution.

Marriages, especially those involving royalty, were seldom based on personal choice or affection. Instead, they served as strategic alliances meant to secure power, wealth, or peace between nations. Anne of Cleves' marriage to Henry VIII is a clear example. Brought to England

to solidify an alliance with a Protestant German duchy. However, Anne's position as a foreigner made her stand out. This difference, both in appearance and behavior, created tension. Eventually, it led to the annulment of her marriage. Like many royal women, society treated Anne's body as a tool for diplomacy, and the political climate shifted her value. The crown accepted, rejected, and redefined her based on what suited its interests. This commodification of Anne's body highlights a key feminist concern: how women's identities and autonomy are often erased in favor of political or economic agendas both in the past and, arguably, in modern forms of institutional sexism.

#### ***2.6.1.4 The Queen as a Political Figure: Power Without Agency***

The role of queen consort carried great symbolic importance but offered very little real power. Queens were expected to support the king, give birth to male heirs, and present the perfect image of womanhood. However, behind this appearance of influence, most queens had almost no control over their own lives. Society often limited their roles to ceremony and sometimes, those roles became deadly. *The Boleyn Inheritance* explores this painful contradiction through the lives of Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn. A court that values appearance over freedom or truth traps each woman.

Katherine Howard, Henry VIII's fifth wife, is shown as a pawn in her family's plan to gain power. Her youth and beauty are used to please the king, but once she becomes queen, her lack of experience and her past relationships are turned against her. Her tragic fall shows how easily a queen could be lifted, only to be cast aside when she failed to meet the crown's impossible demands. Gregory's portrayal underscores the paradox of royal femininity: the queen holds symbolic power yet remains vulnerable to the same systemic oppression that governs all women under patriarchy.

In other hand, Jane Boleyn, the widow of George Boleyn, stays close to the center of power but remains unprotected by it. Her reputation, shaped by rumors and past scandals, makes her an easy target. In the end, the court uses, blames, and destroys her just like so many other women. Jane's trajectory illustrates how women could be both victims and instruments of patriarchal power, forced to navigate impossible choices that ultimately serve male authority.

### ***2.6.1.5 The Ideal Woman: Obedience, Silence, and decorative.***

In Tudor England, they held women to a strict and limiting idea of what they should be. The ideal woman was quiet, obedient, attractive, and completely devoted to the surrounding men. Her value came from her looks, her sexual purity, and her ability to serve. These expectations were not just forced on women from the outside. Women often accepted and acted out these roles to stay safe. Stepping out of line could mean losing everything, including your life. In *The Boleyn Inheritance*, Philippa Gregory shows how damaging these expectations could be. By letting Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn tell their own stories, she reveals what it felt like to live under constant pressure to be the "perfect" woman.

They laughed at Anne for not being pretty or charming enough, but this rejection ends up freeing her. Because she does not meet the court's standards, she is able to step away from it. Katherine is the opposite, young, beautiful, and eager to be loved. She takes on the role expected of her, but it ends up destroying her. Jane Boleyn has been in the court for years. She's learned how to survive by staying quiet and loyal, but in the end, that does not protect her either.

Each of these women shows how the Tudor court used women to serve its own goals. Powerful men expected them to play a part that suited their interests, and when these women stopped being useful, men pushed them aside, or worse. By telling their stories from the inside, Gregory does not just humanize them. She also raises questions about the systems that reward women for staying silent and punish them when they speak or act for themselves. In doing so, the novel not only critiques the gender norms of Tudor society but also invites readers to question how modern standards of femininity continue to reflect these historical expectations, making the narrative strikingly relevant today.

### ***2.6.1.6 Sexual Politics, Power, and Reputation***

In Tudor England, strict social and political norms marked women's lives. Society already imposed quite strict norms, but it judged women's sexuality and reputation even more severely. In *The Boleyn Inheritance*, Philippa Gregory shows how a woman's body was not her own; it belonged to her fathers, husbands who decided about them to create political alliances. People constantly observed and judged women based on their behavior, their appearance, and whether they followed the "correct" behavior. If they did not, they were often punished. These punishments were not isolated events. On the contrary, they were part of a broader patriarchal

system. This system aimed to control female behavior, reinforce gender hierarchies, and preserve male dominance. Although the context has changed, similar patterns persist today.

Gregory creates a world where society controls a woman's body and decisions. By the surrounding men. Her worth depends on remaining pure and obedient. And if they stepped out of line, the consequences were severe. All of this shows how the court used shame and control to keep women in their place. Through this portrayal, Gregory reconstructs a historically accurate reality. At the same time, she critiques how society has long politicized female sexuality from a feminist perspective. The novel also reflects current debates about bodily autonomy and sexual double standards. As a result, its message feels especially relevant to modern readers.

### **2.6.2 Cultural Approach**

The cultural approach looks at literature not just as a piece of art, but as something that comes from a specific culture. It focuses on how books and stories reflect the values, beliefs, and traditions of the society that produced them. At the same time, literature can also influence that culture. Thus, when reading a novel or a poem, readers can also learn about the time, place, and people behind it, as Hall (1997) points out. This perspective is particularly relevant for feminist literary analysis, as it allows readers to examine how historical narratives encode gender roles and reinforce or question patriarchal values.

Instead of only paying attention to characters, plot, or writing style, the cultural approach asks deeper questions. For example, how does the story show ideas about gender, class, race, or religion? Who has power in the story and who does not? What beliefs are being supported or challenged? Barker (2004) highlights that these questions help to understand how literature connects to real-life issues. In *The Boleyn Inheritance*, these questions expose how Tudor society used cultural norms to justify the subordination of women. The novel critiques these norms. It does so by showing how female characters either resist or submit to them.

As Tyson (2006) explains in *Critical Theory Today*, literature is one of the many ways cultures teach people how to understand themselves and the world. In other words, stories are not neutral. They can shape how individuals think and act. This concept is key to understanding historical fiction like Gregory's. It not only reconstructs the past but also comments on present-day cultural and gender dynamics. In doing so, it shows that female oppression is not just outdated.

Now that the cultural approach has been established, its application can be examined in the novel. Through the analysis of Tudor England's beliefs, values, and gender power structures, it is possible to observe how the novel embodies its historical context. It critiques cultural norms that still influence gender dynamics today.

### ***2.6.2.1 The Female Body as a Site of Political Control and Negotiation***

During the reign of Henry VIII, a woman's body was used as a political tool to forge political alliances. The monarchy, the church, and society constantly monitored, judged, and controlled the physicality of queens and noblewomen. In the novel *The Boleyn Inheritance*, Philippa Gregory shows how Anne of Cleves, Catherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn suffered the consequences of being reduced to their bodies: their appearance, their behavior, and what they could gain from it.

As Bordo (1993) argues in *Unbearable Weight*, the female body is often the "text upon which culture writes its rules and taboos" (p. 165). This idea plays out clearly in Anne of Cleves' story. She's sent to England to marry Henry VIII for political reasons, but once she arrives, her appearance does not meet his expectations. What should have been a strength her modesty and foreign diplomacy get twisted into a problem. Because she does not act or look like the seductive, submissive queen Henry wants, he annuls the marriage. Strangely enough, this rejection becomes her escape. As historian Weir (1991). notes, Anne's lack of sexual involvement with the king likely saved her life, making her "the luckiest of his wives".

On the other hand, from the moment Katherine Howard enters court, people treat her like an object. She's young, attractive, and presented as innocent, the perfect match for an aging king. But when rumors of her past sexual experiences come out, everything changes. Those qualities that made her attractive now make her dangerous. Her body goes from being desired to being condemned. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity helps explain why Katherine fails to "perform" the role of the virginal queen consistently, and that failure strips her of power and legitimacy. Tragically, it also costs her life.

Jane Boleyn's experience is different, but just as revealing. She is no longer young or desirable, and she has already been through the trauma of losing her husband and sister-in-law to execution. But even as a widow, her body carries meaning. She is tied to past betrayals and political scandals, and those associations stick. Simone de Beauvoir's idea that one is not born,

but becomes a woman fits here, since Jane does not get to define herself. The surrounding men constantly defined her and what happened to them. Even when she is no longer in the spotlight, the court still controls her.

Together, these three women show the many ways Tudor society tried to control women's bodies through beauty standards, sexual expectations, and political alliances. In Gregory's novel, a woman's physical presence is never just a personal matter. It is always something more like a symbol, a risk, a weapon, or a threat.

Although the female body was a central tool of patriarchal power, they did not limit control to the physical or symbolic. There were deeper and more violent forms of punishment. It triggered these when a woman failed to live up to expectations. Beauty, virginity, and obedience were not just desirable virtues. They were social demands. If they were not met, the consequences were real. In this context, scandal and dishonor became punishments. Some were public, others more intimate, but all equally harsh. The following section analyzes how the work represents this dynamic. It explores the punishment symbolic and literal—that fell upon women who dared, or simply could not, conform to the imposed norms.

#### ***2.6.2.2 Honor, Virginity, and Scandal: Symbolic and Literal Punishment of Women Who Disobey***

In Tudor England, a woman's body was not her own. Her value depended on her purity, her appearance, and her ability to fulfill a feminine ideal imposed by men. Any deviation from that ideal could bring severe consequences. Philippa Gregory shows in *The Boleyn Inheritance* how women who did not fit these molds were punished, whether through humiliation, isolation, or even death.

Katherine Howard clearly represents this pattern. From the moment she arrived at court, people treated her as an object. Her youth and beauty made her an ideal trophy for the aging king. However, when rumors about her sexual past surfaced, everything changed. What was once desirable became dangerous. Her body went from being admired to condemned. Butler (1990) proposes that gender is a constant performance. Katherine failed to sustain the role of a virginal and submissive queen. As a result, she lost power, respect, and her life. Her case shows how patriarchal control brutally monitored and punished female sexuality when it escaped their bounds.

The story of Jane Boleyn reveals a different punishment. She was no longer young or attractive. She had survived the execution of her husband and sister-in-law. Yet her body remained charged with meaning. It was associated with scandal, betrayal, and failure. De Beauvoir (1949) asserts that “one is not born a woman, one becomes one.” Jane could never define herself. The power of men and the events that surrounded her shaped her. Even away from the center of power, her life continued to be controlled. Her identity was marked by a guilt that was not entirely her own.

On the other hand, Anne of Cleves was neither executed nor publicly condemned. Yet they also punished her. Because she failed to meet the king's physical expectations, she was rejected and ostracized. Her body, insufficiently attractive, was considered useless. Although that rejection ultimately saved her, it also silenced her. They excluded her from public life and turned into a figurehead. Her story shows that sometimes the punishment is not death, but invisibility.

All these women shared the same fate: they were punished for not conforming to expected roles. Their bodies and reputations became political instruments, evaluated according to criteria imposed by power. Once they ceased to be useful, those in power discarded them. As Cixous (1976) points out, “patriarchy not only punishes women; it also erases their voices” (p. 880). Faced with this silence, Gregory proposes resistance. Through first-person narration, she allows Anne, Katherine, and Jane to express their emotions, fears, and thoughts. In this way, she restores to them the agency that official history denied them.

Thus, *The Boleyn Inheritance* does not limit itself to reconstructing events from the past. It goes further. It questions the way history has been told and who has been left out of it. Rewriting their lives from a feminist perspective thus becomes a political act. A gesture that not only reclaims their voices but also demands that they be remembered.

These two dimensions of bodily control and punishment for deviating show how patriarchal power permeated every aspect of women's lives. It was not isolated. It permeated their bodies, shaped their choices, and influenced how others remembered them. Gregory, through fiction, not only portrays this oppression. She also gives them back their voice. She allows them to speak. That makes her novel more than a story: it's a form of resistance. It rewrites the past from a different perspective. One that puts women at the center, not as silent victims, but as protagonists.

## 2.7 Literary Analysis

Literary analysis is basically about looking closely at a book (or any piece of literature) to figure out what it really means and how it was put together. Instead of just retelling the story or saying whether you liked it or not, you dig into things like the characters, the plot, the themes, and the author's language. It is about asking questions like: Why did the author make this choice? What's the deeper message? What historical, cultural, or ideological contexts were influencing the time in which the book was written?

Abrams and Harpham (2012) describe it as inspecting the text and talking about how the form, content, and context all work together (p. 177) and literary analysis is not just one way of reading it depends on the approach you take. Some people use feminism to focus on gender roles, others might use Marxism to talk about class, or psychoanalysis to look at characters' minds and emotions. Tyson (2006) explains this well when she states that critical theory provides readers with different "lenses" to interpret the story, each revealing a unique perspective.

In brief, literary analysis is both thoughtful and creative. It's a way of reading that helps people go beyond the surface and understand how literature connects to real life, big ideas, and human experience. In *The Boleyn Inheritance*, a feminist literary analysis reveals how the novel critiques Tudor patriarchy. It gives voice to women who were oppressed and highlights gender dynamics that still affect society today.

## 2.8 Plot

The story begins with Anne of Cleves, a German princess whom England selects to become King Henry VIII's fourth wife as part of a political alliance with the German states. Although Anne is hopeful about her new life and marriage, things go wrong as soon as she meets the king. Henry finds her unattractive and cold, and their marriage quickly becomes a disaster. Humiliated and rejected, Anne tries to survive by being obedient and strategic. Eventually, Henry seeks an annulment, and Anne accepts it peacefully, gaining financial security and the rare opportunity to live independently.

At the same time, young and beautiful Katherine Howard enters the court. She is ambitious but naïve, used by her powerful Howard family to catch the king's attention. Katherine soon becomes Henry's fifth wife. At first, people admire and adore her, but when her past

romantic relationships come to light, rumors of infidelity circulate. Despite her efforts to play the role of a perfect queen. Authorities arrest, interrogate, and later execute Katherine, making her pay with her life for mistakes made in a world that expected perfection from women.

Alongside these two women is Jane Boleyn, the widow of George Boleyn and sister-in-law of the executed Queen Anne Boleyn. Haunted by guilt and desperation, Jane wants to return to favor at court. She becomes a lady-in-waiting for both Anne and Katherine, and once again becomes involved in dangerous political intrigues. Jane, who once gave testimony against her own husband, now finds herself repeating the same mistakes, blindly following the ambitions of others. In the end, authorities accuse her of helping Katherine in her alleged affair and sentence her to death.

As the lives of these three women unfold, each faces betrayal, manipulation, and the crushing weight of royal expectations. Their stories are told in their own voices, revealing their hopes, fears, and struggles to survive in a court where women are used as political pawns. The novel is a powerful reflection on how history has often silenced women and how, through fiction, they can finally reclaim their voices.

### ***2.8.1 Background***

*The Boleyn Inheritance* takes place during one of the most unstable times in English history during the last years of Henry VIII's reign, from 1539 to 1542. This was a period when England was going through huge political changes, with the king trying to control the church and secure his family line. Society itself was shifting, especially for religion and the roles of men and women. The Tudor court was a dangerous and complicated place. Men ruled it, filled it with power struggles, and often treated women, even noble ones, like pawns, or blamed them when things went wrong.

Henry VIII was obsessed with having a male heir, and this led him to marry several times for political reasons. The novel covers his fourth marriage to Anne of Cleves, which built an alliance with German Protestant states, and his fifth marriage to Katherine Howard, driven more by personal attraction and politics within the powerful Howard family. Both marriages failed badly, and the women involved paid with their freedom or their lives. This shows how closely linked power, gender, and politics were in the Tudor court.

Socially, Tudor England was very strict. The upper class had all the privileges but also lived in constant danger. Women, no matter how high-born, were under men's control, both by law and custom. Queens had to be perfect. They needed to be pure, obedient, able to have children, and stay quiet politically. If they fail in any of these ways, they risk losing their position, their reputation, or even their lives. The court was a place where appearances mattered more than anything and stepping out of line could be deadly.

Henry's break from the Catholic Church and the creation of the Church of England caused a lot of religious and social upheaval. Old moral rules were breaking down, but the new system still tightly controlled women's behavior and sexuality. Even though things were changing, women remained trapped by patriarchy. Queens and noblewomen were in the spotlight but had little real power over their lives.

Philippa Gregory's book puts Anne, Katherine, and Jane right in the middle of this tough world. She shows how their roles as women limited what they could do and constantly put them at risk. By telling their stories from their own points of view, Gregory reveals the huge personal price these women paid for politics and how history often silences women like them. The court in *The Boleyn Inheritance* isn't just a backdrop; it's a harsh system that controls and eventually destroys the women caught up in it.

### **2.8.2 Setting**

In The novel, places like the royal court, castles, and convents are not just backdrops they show how men in power-controlled women and kept them powerless. These physical spaces are more than just historical settings. They represent the patriarchal system that controls and confines women. This shows how men exercise power through control of space.

The Tudor court, with its complicated rules and constant political games, is like a stage where women's bodies and identities become political tools. Women like Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn must live in this tight space where everyone watches their every move. This constant surveillance not only restricts their physical freedom but also imposes emotional and psychological confinement, reinforcing their feelings of powerlessness and isolation. Their worth depends on how well they play the role of a perfect woman.

Castles and royal homes might seem like places of power, but for noblewomen, they were often more like fancy prisons. These places kept them isolated from the outside world and made them rely even more on men. The castles became places where patriarchal authorities closely watched and strictly controlled women, giving them little freedom to move or make their own choices. Thus, these imposing structures symbolize the broader patriarchal control over women, turning even spaces of supposed power into cages.

On the other hand, convents were different but still limiting. They could be a safe place and offer some freedom for women who were not part of court life. But they also showed how society tried to keep women out of politics by locking them away in religious and domestic roles. Moreover, convents represent the social exclusion of women from public and political spheres, reinforcing the idea that their rightful place was within private, religious, or domestic confines.

By showing how these different places worked, Gregory helps to understand how women's power was limited not just by laws or ideas, but by the very spaces they lived in. The novel clarifies patriarchal forces confined women's bodies and silenced their voices. This control occurred behind both physical walls, like castle towers and convents, and invisible barriers such as social expectations and norms. Through this portrayal, Gregory invites readers to reflect on how spatial and social constraints continue to shape and limit women's experiences and voices in modern society.

### **2.8.3 Characters**

- 1) **Anne of Cleves:** Anne is Henry VIII's fourth wife, brought to England as part of a political deal with the German Protestant states. She is calm, diplomatic, and smart, but at first naive about dangerous court politics. Even as a queen, Anne feels lonely and out of place in a foreign country, yet she quietly demonstrates strength and practical sense while learning to navigate her limited role.
- 2) **Katherine Howard:** Katherine is Henry's fifth wife, much younger and more impulsive than Anne. She's lively, charming, and vulnerable, longing for love and approval. Her innocence clashes with the harsh reality of the court. Her feelings oscillate between hope and fear, and her lack of understanding of the danger around her contributes to her tragic end.

- 3) **Jane Boleyn, Lady Rochford:** Jane is the widow of George Boleyn and Anne Boleyn's sister-in-law. She carries a lot of guilt and regret, especially for her role in her family's downfall. Jane's voice is full of bitterness and sadness, showing how painful it was to live with betrayal and public shame. Her character reveals the mental toll of silence and being forced to fit into a system that punishes women for breaking the rules.
- 4) **Henry VIII:** Henry is powerful but unpredictable, obsessed with having a male heir and keeping control. He can be charming one moment and cruel the next. His mood swings create fear at court, especially for the queens whose fate depends on his favor. His marriages show how personal desire and politics mix with deadly consequences for the women involved.
- 5) **Francis Dereham:** Francis was Katherine Howard's lover before she became queen. He is passionate but reckless, and their past relationship becomes a serious problem in court. Dereham's feelings for Katherine are a mix of real love and possessiveness. His personality shows both vulnerability and desperation as he gets caught up in politics he cannot control, eventually paying a heavy price for his connection to the queen. They sentenced Francis Dereham to a brutal execution. He was hanged, drawn, and quartered in 1541, a punishment reserved for those guilty of high treason.
- 6) **Thomas Culpepper:** Culpepper is a courtier close to King Henry VIII. He has an affair with Katherine Howard, which ruins them both. He's charming and ambitious, but also careless and naïve. His wish for power makes him take risky moves, showing how personal ambition can lead to political disaster. Emotionally, Culpepper swings between confidence in his relationship with Katherine and fear of getting caught. His tragic fate shows how ruthless the Tudor court really was.
- 7) **Thomas Cromwell:** Cromwell is Henry's chief minister and the cold, calculating force behind the Tudor court's politics. He controls things behind the scenes with ruthless efficiency. Although his emotions are seldom shown, he exemplifies how political power can dominate individuals' lives.

#### **2.8.4 Moral**

The morale of *The Boleyn Inheritance* is about how dangerous power can be. This is especially true in a world where women have no control over their own lives. The novel shows how the court treats women like objects. They are picked, judged, and then thrown away based

on what others want. Even queens are not safe. They must act perfectly, stay quiet, and follow the rules. If they do not, they lose everything or even their lives.

Another lesson in the book is that surviving in such a world takes patience and intelligence. Women like Anne of Cleves learn to protect themselves by making smart choices. The novel also warns readers about blind ambition. This is shown through the tragic stories of Katherine Howard and Jane Boleyn. They get caught in dangerous situations because of love, pressure, or trying to win power.

In the end, the book teaches that in a world ruled by men, women have to find their own strength. Sometimes that means losing the crown. But it can also mean keeping your freedom and your voice. The novel also gives a strong message about freedom. Individuals should be free to make their own choices, without fear or control. As Anne of Cleves says, “A tyrant is still a tyrant, even if he has a handsome face under a crown” (Gregory, 2006, p. 557). This quote serves as a reminder that true power should not be based on fear or appearance, but on fairness and respect.

## **2.9 Philippa Gregory Biography**

Philippa Gregory is a famous British author known for her historical fiction. She was born in Kenya in 1954. Later, her family moved to England when she was still a child. At first, she studied journalism, but later she became more interested in literature and history. She earned a PhD (doctoral-level academic degree) in 18th-century literature at the University of Edinburgh.

Gregory did not begin as a novelist. She first worked in radio journalism. However, she soon focused on writing books. She became well known for writing about historical women. Her big success came with *The Other Boleyn Girl*. That novel was later turned into a popular movie. Since then, she has published many bestsellers. Most of them are about the Tudor period and the lives of royal women. Today, she is one of the most successful authors in her genre. People read her books all over the world.

In the world of historical fiction, Philippa Gregory has earned a strong and unique place. She combines real historical facts with imaginary details, which makes her stories more emotional and interesting. Some historians criticize her for altering facts or adding things that didn't really happen. However, many readers enjoy the way she brings history to life. Gregory

doesn't just write about kings, battles, or politics. Instead, she focuses on personal stories, family struggles, and, above all, the lives of women. Her characters feel realistic and complex, which helps readers connect with them in a deeper and more personal way. Thus, although she is not a historian, Gregory has helped change the way people read historical fiction. She has focused more on women's voices and less on politics or war.

Also, Gregory writes with a clear feminist purpose. She wants to give a voice to women that history often ignored. In many of her books, she tells the stories of queens, wives, or noblewomen who had very little control over their lives. Through her novels, these women finally get to speak. They share their thoughts, feelings, and fears. Gregory shows how the rules of their time oppressed them. Still, they found ways to survive by being clever, quiet, or strong.

A good example is *The Boleyn Inheritance*. In this book, three women, Anne of Cleves, Jane Boleyn, and Katherine Howard, tell their stories in their own words. In real history, no one really listened to them. But in Gregory's version, they get the chance to be heard. This helps readers understand what life was like for women in the past. Gregory's work shows that women also shaped history, even if they were not always in power. She reminds us that their lives mattered, even when they ended in tragedy.

In conclusion, this study uses different ideas and methods to understand *The Boleyn Inheritance*. The novel highlights feminist ideas, emphasizing how history has often silenced or ignored women's voices. The analysis also looks at historical fiction techniques, which combine real facts with storytelling to make the past feel alive. The study analyzes Gregory's work through character perspectives, symbolism, and thematic elements. It shows how Philippa Gregory empowers female figures who were traditionally reduced to mere political instruments. Overall, these approaches help us see the novel not only as a historical story but also as a way to rethink the place of women in both history and literature.

## Chapter III

### Methodological Framework

This chapter describes the methodological approach used to analyze Philippa Gregory's *The Boleyn Inheritance*. The study is based on a feminist approach, to examine how the novel represents female voices, their experiences, and their forms of resistance in a patriarchal society. Through literary analysis, along with contributions from feminist and historical theory, the paper seeks to demonstrate how fiction can recover voices that have traditionally been silenced.

This approach allows for a close reading of the female characters and their ways of confronting male power and social norms. The central themes are voice, identity, power, and resistance. Based on these themes, questions such as Who can speak? Who is forced to remain silent? How do women resist? These questions help reveal the emotional and social dimension that permeate the characters. The novel is the primary source, although the analysis also draws on texts from feminist theory and the historical context of the Tudor period. This paper examines the influence of gender on the characters' decisions. It also explores how the story constructs power relations throughout the narrative.

#### 3.1 Research Approach

This paper uses a qualitative approach, which is more appropriate for interpreting meanings than for measuring data. It focuses on understanding how people experience, feel, and understand certain situations, which fits well with the analysis of literary texts. Unlike quantitative methods, which rely on numbers and statistics, qualitative research is more reflexive. It enables readers to analyze the context, emotions, and deeper meanings behind what is said or represented. As Taherdoost (2022) explains, it is key to choose a method that suits the research objectives.

Creswell (2013) states that this type of approach helps explore the meaning people give to their experiences. This is especially useful for analyzing how the novel represents women's voices and how it raises issues of gender and power within a historical context. Given the nature of the text, a feminist perspective adds a necessary layer. It focuses on emotional, personal, and silence. It also offers tools for considering how Philippa Gregory rewrites history through women who, in her time, were almost unheard.

## 3.2 Research for this Investigation

A feminist qualitative approach was chosen for this work because it fits with the themes present in *The Boleyn Inheritance*, such as power, gender, and historical silence. This method facilitates the analysis of the characters' experiences and analyze how Gregory reconstructs the lives of women that official narratives have ignored. Thus, the approach not only strengthens the literary analysis but also connects it to current debates about inequality and representation.

## 3.3 Methods of Analysis

### 3.3.1 Historical-Critical Method

The historical-critical method helps readers understand the text by situating it within its original historical context. It not only analyzes what happens in the story but also the historical and social moment surrounding it. This is important because the meaning of a text changes depending on the time and circumstances in which it was created. According to George (2009), this method interprets a text by considering the social, political, and cultural events of the time in which it was written. Therefore, the story being told cannot be separated from the real history of the time.

This approach is useful for analyzing *The Boleyn Inheritance*, as the novel is set in 16th-century England. At that time, women had little power and were under the control of men, especially at court. Therefore, it is important to understand these conditions to better understand the decisions and conflicts of characters such as Anne of Cleves, Catherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn.

Furthermore, this method also facilitates an understanding of the modern perspective from which Philippa Gregory wrote the novel. Although she recounts ancient events, current feminist ideas influenced her perspective. Therefore, combining this method with a feminist approach helps people understand both the historical reality and the message the author wishes to convey about power and gender today.

In brief, the historical-critical method helps readers connect history with literature. This approach encourages a deeper examination of how women were portrayed in their historical context and how these representations are questioned in contemporary discourse.

### ***3.3.2 Feminist Method***

The feminist method focuses on analyzing how authors portray women in texts. It not only seeks to identify whether there are female characters, but also to understand how they live, what they feel, and what their place is in the society depicted. This approach questions who has power, who is silent, and how women confront or resist established norms. It also focuses on emotions, personal experiences, and the social rules that affect women.

As Carter and Little (2007) explain, it is important that researchers align the chosen method with the research objectives. Here, the purpose is to understand how the women in the novel live under a patriarchal system. Therefore, the feminist method is the most appropriate.

Feminist analysis not only points out oppression but also seeks to recognize how women demonstrate autonomy and resilience, even in difficult situations. Hooks (2000) states that feminism is a movement to end sexism and oppression. This is clearly seen in the novel. The protagonists, Anne, Katherine, and Jane, live in a male-dominated world. However, each of them finds ways to act, influence, or survive. Feminist analysis enables the exploration of how they negotiate their place in a society that requires them to remain silent.

Furthermore, this approach helps challenge gender stereotypes. It allows readers to see whether they portrayed women as passive and submissive, or as complex and strong characters. It also shows how they can have power, even when the rules are against them. The feminist method recognizes that there is no one way to be a woman or to resist. Therefore, it is useful for analyzing how the author gives voice to historically silenced women. Finally, this method allows readers to read the novel from another perspective. Not only as a story of the past but also as a way of discussing current issues, such as inequality, power, and identity. Thus, literature becomes a tool for understanding and questioning reality.

### **3.4 Research Design**

The research design forms the foundation that organizes the entire study, defines the approach to be followed, and determines how the researcher will interpret the data. Here, the researcher used a qualitative design with a feminist focus, concentrating on literary analysis. This type of design is not based on numbers, but on meanings, emotions, and power relations. This approach is especially useful for analyzing a novel because it enables the exploration of how

women's experiences and voices represent themselves within a context of limited power. Unlike other, more structured types of studies, literary analysis requires a flexible design. There is no exact formula here. The process is built on a close reading of the text, constant reflection, and the connection between the work's content, feminist thought, and the historical context.

As Creswell (2013) points out, qualitative designs allow for the exploration of complex and profound themes, especially when they relate to human and social. Therefore, this design effectively supports the analysis of *The Boleyn Inheritance*. To organize the analysis, the researcher used key categories, such as identity, silence, resistance, and control. These are not chosen at random. They emerge from the text and the theoretical framework guiding the study. They allow for a more focused interpretation of the characters and their stories.

This design also allows for answering the main question of the paper: how Philippa Gregory gives voice to women oppressed in her time. By combining the interpretation of the text with the historical context and feminist theory, the researcher gets a more complete picture.

### ***3.4.1 Descriptive***

Researchers use descriptive design when they want to observe and explain a phenomenon without modifying it. In this case, it allows for a detailed description of the situation's women experience in *The Boleyn Inheritance* and how they confront the social norms imposed in the Tudor court. This type of design is useful for literary analysis because it helps identify and explain specific elements within the text. That is why we can observe how female characters express their voices, respond to male control, and construct their identities throughout the story.

As Sampieri et al. (2014) mention, descriptive design seeks to highlight the characteristics and properties of a phenomenon as it is presented. In this study, that phenomenon is the representation of female oppression and resistance in a patriarchal context.

The objective is not only to describe what happens but also to analyze how the novel presents that reality. Through this approach, we can highlight phrases, actions, and silences that reveal power and gender dynamics.

Below are three brief examples that illustrate how the feminist approach and descriptive design will apply to the analysis of the novel. These examples are illustrative only and will be developed in greater depth in the analysis chapter.

### 3.5 Categories of Analysis

These categories guide the interpretation of the work from a feminist and historical perspective. Each one allows readers to observe how Philippa Gregory portrays the lives of women at the Tudor court, the forms of power that surround them, and the mechanisms of resistance they manage to construct.

#### 3.5.1 *Oppression and submission*

This category examines how patriarchal structures in the 16th century limited women's freedom. In the novel, Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn face various forms of subordination: arranged marriages, moral control, and constant surveillance. De Beauvoir (1949) argues that society has historically defined women as "the Other," that is, as beings subordinate to men. *The Boleyn Inheritance* reflects this idea by showing how the protagonists live within a system that makes decisions for them.

The analysis of oppression and submission allows people to understand how social norms determined female existence in the Tudor court, while also highlighting how Gregory transforms that historical reality into a reflection on the persistence of inequality. Thus, analyzing oppression not only highlights women's loss of power but also demonstrates their capacity to adapt and survive within an unjust order.

#### 3.5.2 *Power and control*

Power and control are mechanisms that structure the relationships between the characters. In the court of Henry VIII, marriage, beauty, and obedience function as forms of domination. Foucault (1978) explains that power not only represses but also produces behaviors and discourses that maintain social order.

In novel, male power dominates women's bodies and wills, though it also opens spaces where women manage to exert some influence. Anne of Cleves negotiates her place, Katherine Howard uses her charm, and Jane Boleyn uses information to her advantage. Studying power facilitates an analysis of how the novel represents a political and sexual system that uses seduction and guilt as tools of control. Gregory shows that even in oppression, there are small fissures where power can be reversed. This category is essential because it reveals how the author transforms strategies of domination into opportunities to discuss autonomy, desire, and survival.

### ***3.5.3 Female voice and silence***

This category studies the ways in which women express, repress, or are forced to silence their voices. Traditional historiography, mediated by male narrators, has often erased female voices. According to Showalter (1985), recovering these voices in literature constitutes a political act and an act of resistance. Similarly, in the novel Gregory restores the voices of three women relegated by history. Through first-person narration, each offers a particular perspective on power, guilt, and loyalty. Silence, far from being mere absence, can function as a defense or as an alternative language. Analyzing voice and silence allows people to understand how the author reconfigures the historical narrative to give women the opportunity to speak for themselves. In this way, the female voice, even within its limitations, is reaffirmed as a form of resistance.

### ***3.5.4 Historical Revision and Female Agency***

This category explores how Philippa Gregory rewrites history from a feminist perspective. The author brings to life characters that chroniclers of power had ignored or unfairly judged. Butler (1990) points out that identity and agency are constructed within the limits of the system, but also through challenging it. In the novel, the protagonists do not change the rules of the world they inhabit, but they discover ways to assert themselves within them. Their agency is revealed in the gestures, decisions, and stories they tell about themselves.

Examining historical revision and female agency allows readers to see how literature can challenge the official narrative. Gregory not only revives past events but also offers a contemporary reading of women's voices and dignity. This category connects directly with the overall objective of the study: to show how the literature of the past invite's reflection on contemporary inequalities.

## **3.6 Sources of Information**

To develop a solid and meaningful analysis, this essay draws on different types of sources. Each plays a specific role in understanding Philippa Gregory's novel. These sources help analyze not only the plot and characters but also the historical, feminist, and patriarchal elements present in the novel.

### **3.6.1 Primary Source**

The primary source for this research is Philippa Gregory's novel *The Boleyn Inheritance* (2006). This historical work forms the basis of the analysis. Through the voices of Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn, the story reveals how women confronted power and gender roles in Tudor England.

The researcher examines the novel as something more than fiction. It is analyzed as a representation of historical realities, reinterpreted from a feminist perspective. According to the University of Minnesota Crookston (n.d.), primary sources are original materials created at the time of the events. They include novels, diaries, letters, and scholarly works. Gregory's work fits into this category, as it offers a straightforward account based on historical facts, presented through literature.

### **3.6.2 Secondary Sources**

Secondary sources support and expand the reading of the novel. They offer context, theoretical tools, and different interpretations. As the University of Minnesota Crookston (n.d.) points out, secondary sources "summarize, interpret, or critique primary sources." These include scholarly books, articles, and reviews.

Feminist theory plays a central role in this analysis. For example, De Beauvoir (1949) argues that the patriarchal system has historically defined women as the "Other". This idea helps people understand how society judges and perceives female characters. Butler (1990), with her theory of gender performativity, posits that gender is not fixed but performed. This helps readers understand the roles women must play in court. Meanwhile, Hooks (2000), meanwhile, offers her perspective on the relationship between gender, power, and resistance. These authors provide the theoretical framework necessary to analyze how Gregory's characters challenge traditional expectations.

Weir (1991) and Starkey (2004) examine the lives of Henry VIII's wives based on documented facts and historical studies. Their books offer a useful look at the political and social dynamics of the Tudor court. Read alongside Gregory's novel, they reveal where the author takes creative liberties. This enables an understanding of how she combines fiction with history to give visibility to the women's experiences.

### 3.6.3 Tertiary Sources

Tertiary sources were used to clarify general concepts relevant to the analysis. These include dictionaries, encyclopedias, and handbooks. According to the University of Minnesota Crookston (n.d.), tertiary sources compile information from primary and secondary sources. For example, the definition of "theory" from the Cambridge Dictionary (2025) helps explain the use of feminist and literary theories in this work. Although not essential to the analysis, these sources reinforce academic rigor and aid in understanding complex ideas.

Using different types of sources provides a fuller picture when analyzing *The Boleyn Inheritance*. Primary sources offer the essential material for conducting research and analysis. Secondary sources add background, explanations, and ideas that deepen our understanding. Tertiary sources are useful for clarifying terms and supporting the main points. When combined, these sources let us look at the novel not just as a story, but to think about history, gender, and power from different angles.

### 3.7 Data Collection Instruments

In this research, the data collection instrument adopts a qualitative approach. This is based on the textual and critical analysis of Philippa Gregory's novel, *The Boleyn Inheritance*. This methodological choice is pertinent, as the study focuses on the representation of women's experiences, power relations, and the rewriting of history from a feminist perspective. Therefore, a deep interpretation of the meanings, narrative strategies, and symbolic elements present in the literary text is required.

This design aims to analyze how the novel presents the lives of Anne of Cleves, Catherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn within the patriarchal structures of the Tudor court. To this end, careful and systematic reading of the text is carried out. From this reading, significant fragments are selected that reveal different forms of oppression, submission, and control, as well as manifestations of female agency.

To address the specific research objectives, three analysis tables are used, each corresponding to one of these objectives. These tables organize the information obtained from the novel and facilitate a clear and structured analysis from a gender perspective. They also allow for comparisons of characters and situations, enriching the interpretation of the literary text.

Each table has three columns with complementary functions. The first identifies the relevant fragment or situation, along with the character involved. The second classifies the type of oppression, symbolic mechanism, or historical narrative present in that fragment. The third offers a critical interpretation, analyzing power relations, patriarchal structures, and showing how the author reinterprets history.

In short, this method provides a reflective and systematic framework for studying the novel. It allows people to observe how the work challenges traditional historical narratives and recovers the voices of historically marginalized women.

### ***3.7.1 Table 1: Forms of Oppression and Submission within the Tudor Patriarchal Context***

The organization of this table allows readers to identify fragments and situations in the novel where various forms of oppression and submission affecting Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn are manifested. Based on these scenes, the different types of oppression present are classified, whether marital, political, social, psychological, or symbolic. In this way, readers analyze how the patriarchal structures of the Tudor court influence their decisions, limit their autonomy, and shape their life experiences.

This approach is key to understanding how the patriarchal system functions as a structuring force. In addition, it facilitates analysis of how it constructs and constrains the role of women in the historical and narrative context of the work. Thus, the first specific objective of the research is fulfilled.

Quote and character	Type of oppression or submission	Researcher's analysis

### ***3.7.2 Table 2: Symbolic Mechanisms of Power and Control***

Continuing the analysis of forms of oppression and submission, the following table focuses on the symbolic mechanisms of power and control in the novel. Its structure allows for the examination of fragments and situations in which seduction, political alliances, and guilt function as control strategies, always associated with a specific character. From these scenes, the various symbolic mechanisms present in gender relations are identified and classified. In this

way, it is possible to analyze how power is exercised indirectly within the rigid hierarchy of the Tudor court.

Finally, this analysis allows for an evaluation of how they reinforce, or in some cases challenge, the dynamics of patriarchal control and the limits of female agency. Thus, it contributes to the development of the second specific objective of the research.

Quote and character	Type of symbolic mechanism	Critical interpretation / Analysis

### 3.7.3 Table 3: *Historical Rewriting from a Feminist Perspective*

After analyzing the forms of oppression and the symbolic mechanisms of power that structure the protagonists' experiences, the third table expands the study to the historical dimension of the narrative discourse. Its organization allows for the identification of fragments and situations in which the female voice takes center stage. This facilitates a comparison of traditional historical narratives about Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn with their reinterpretation in *The Boleyn Inheritance*.

Based on this comparison, a feminist interpretation is developed that shows how the novel resignifies these narratives, questions dominant historical judgments, and recovers the subjectivity and agency of historically marginalized women. In this way, the third specific objective of the research is fulfilled.

Quote and character	Traditional historical narrative	Feminist interpretation / Analysis

## Chapter IV

### Data Analysis

This chapter evaluates an analysis of Philippa Gregory's *The Boleyn Inheritance*. The study is organized around the categories established in Chapter III: oppression, power, female voice, and historical revision. These categories allow us to examine how the novel represents the experience of women in Tudor England and how they confront a deeply patriarchal system that conditions their decisions, limits their autonomy, and defines their place within the social and political structure of the time.

The analysis is developed from a qualitative approach and is based on careful reading of the novel. According to Duke University Libraries Kunshan (2023), qualitative data analysis is a systematic process. Researchers analyze non-numerical data, such as texts and narratives. They look for patterns, themes, and meanings. This analysis allows them to interpret and better understand the phenomena under study. From this reading, fragments are selected that allow for the observation of forms of agency, resistance, and silence. On the other hand, the relationships between the female and male characters are analyzed to understand how power dynamics are constructed in the narrative. In this way, the analysis is enriched with theoretical contributions and places the novel in debates about gender and power.

This chapter does not simply describe the events of the story. On the contrary, it interprets its meaning from a historical and feminist perspective. Each category functions as an analytical tool that allows enable the exploration of the limitations, strategies, and forms of expression of the female characters. In this way, it is shown how literature can recover silenced voices and, at the same time, open spaces for reflection on gender, power, and social hierarchy.

#### 4.1 Approaches to the Investigation

The analysis adopts a qualitative, feminist approach. According to Musayeva (2023), feminist literary criticism is a methodological lens grounded in feminist principles that examines how literature reflects, reinforces, or challenges the oppression of women by analyzing gender roles, power structures, and patriarchal norms embedded within the text. This approach recognizes that literary works reflect the social and cultural conditions of their time, as well as the perspectives of their authors. For this reason, understanding social norms, gender hierarchies, and

the workings of the Tudor court is fundamental to interpreting the portrayals of Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn.

At the same time, it is acknowledged that Philippa Gregory's contemporary perspective influences the reconstruction of historical events. The author revisits the past and reimagines the experiences of women who were marginalized or judged by traditional historiography. By analyzing the novel alongside historical sources and feminist texts, it is possible to identify power relations, forms of female agency, and the significance of silence in the characters' lives.

Furthermore, this approach allows for the examination of themes such as oppression, resistance, and autonomy. Throughout the analysis, people observe how the protagonists confront the restrictions imposed by the patriarchal order and how, even within those limitations, they find ways to act and survive. Thus, literary representation is understood as a form of questioning and symbolic resistance.

#### **4.2 Theory and Literary Analysis**

The analysis is presented through comparative tables that articulate theory, excerpts from the novel, and critical interpretation. These tables facilitate the relationship between theoretical concepts and narrative events, and allow for a clear observation of how oppression, power, and the female voice operate in *The Boleyn Inheritance*.

Each table focuses on a specific category and links it to relevant passages from the text. In this way, a direct dialogue is established between feminist theory, the historical context, and literary representation. The selected excerpts are analyzed considering the social conditions of Tudor England and the power hierarchies that influence the characters' decisions. Based on this structure, the analysis aligns with the specific objectives of the study, focusing on oppression, power dynamics, and the recovery of marginalized female voices.

The analysis goes beyond the narration of events. It examines patterns of domination, moments of autonomy, and acts of resistance. It also observes the interactions between male and female characters to demonstrate how power is exercised and negotiated within the story. Taken together, this approach allows for a clear connection between the theoretical framework and the novel, sustaining a rigorous and coherent analysis.

**4.2.1 Table 1: Forms of Oppression and Submission within the Tudor Patriarchal Context**

Quote and character	Type of oppression or submission	Researcher's analysis
<p>Katherine, Norfolk House, Lambeth. December 1539.</p> <p>“My reputation is my dowry, my grandmother would point out that I have no other, sour old cat and no one will ever say that Katherine Howard does not know what is due to her and her family” (Gregory, 2006, p. 13).</p>	<p>Oppression / Social expectation</p>	<p>Through Katherine's voice, the author frames the statement around family honor rather than personal desire. A feminist reading shows that the Tudor patriarchal system measures a woman's worth through reputation, not individuality. As Beauvoir (2011). explains, society positions women as subordinate subjects whose value depends on masculine power structures Katherine lacks wealth and political authority. As a result, she understands honor as her only form of value. That honor functions as a mechanism of social control.</p>
<p>Katherine, Norfolk House, Lambeth. December 1539.</p> <p>“She is a Howard girl through and through, says my grandmother, who has no great opinion of Howard</p>	<p>Oppression / Cultural expectation</p>	<p>This quote reinforces how Katherine's identity is defined almost entirely by her family name and reputation. Even though the comment comes from her grandmother, it still reflects internalized</p>

<p>girls... she will do very nicely..." (Gregory, 2006, p. 57).</p>		<p>patriarchal values, as Katherine is judged according to what a "Howard girl" represents rather than who she is as an individual. The phrase "she will do very nicely" once again reduces Katherine to her usefulness, suggesting she is valued for how well she can fulfill a role assigned by others. As a result, Katherine's personal agency is erased, and her fate is shaped by family ambition and social structures rather than personal choice.</p>
<p>Katherine, Dartford, January 2, 1540</p> <p>"Lord uncle, I beg you not to send me to Horsham... I shall be a good girl... I shall make you proud... I shall try to be perfect...." (Gregory, 2006, p. 99).</p>	<p>Submission / Cultural expectation</p>	<p>This quote shows how Katherine begs her uncle and promises obedience to avoid being sent away. This highlights the power imbalance between them. In this context, the quote reflects the cultural expectations placed on women. They are expected to be submissive and to adapt to male authority. Their fear and vulnerability highlight the power imbalance between them.</p>

<p>Katherine Syon Abbey, February 1542</p> <p>“I should like to have the block,” I say. “The block, my lady?” “Yes. The executioner’s block. Can I have it here in my room?” “If you wish, but...” “What do you want it for?” “To practice” (Gregory, 2006, p. 549).</p>	<p>Submission / Internalized</p>	<p>This quote demonstrates how Katherine's attitude changes; it is no longer one of supplication but of acceptance and submission to the fate imposed by those who govern her life. That apparent calm is merely resignation to her destiny and her inevitable end. Accepting it is not a choice, but the extreme result of a system with no way out.</p>
<p>Anne Duchess of Cleves, Duren Cleves, July 1539</p> <p>“I hardly dare to breathe. I am as still as a block; a smile stuck on my face... my borrowed jewels are the best that my mother could lay her hands on” (Gregory, 2006, p. 9).</p>	<p>Oppression / Social context</p>	<p>This quote shows Anne controlling her body and emotions to fit the court’s expectations. Her forced smile and borrowed jewelry reveal that women’s worth is measured by appearance and social status, not by personal character. In this way, Anne performs the gender role demanded of her, shaping her behavior to meet the strict norms of a patriarchal society.</p>
<p>Anne Duchess of Cleves, Duren Cleves, July 1539</p> <p>“I don’t speak their language; I don’t follow their ways. I’m</p>	<p>Oppression / Social context</p>	<p>Here, Anne feels marginalized as a foreigner at the Tudor court, exposing the cultural and social pressures she faces. Being an outsider</p>

<p>always outsider, I'm always a foreigner" (Gregory, 2006, p. 92).</p>		<p>limits her opportunities and makes her vulnerable.</p>
<p>Anne Duchess of Cleves, Duren Cleves, July 1539</p> <p>"He says I disgust him. That I am not a virgin. That I disgust him" (Gregory, 2006, p. 123).</p>	<p>Oppression / Cultural expectation</p>	<p>This fragment reveals the sexual humiliation and control exerted over Anne's body. The repetition of words underscores the symbolic violence she suffers. According to Cixous (1975), the repression of female sexuality functions to silence women's subjectivity, showing how patriarchal structures restrict female agency.</p>
<p>Anne, Westminster Palace, June 10, 1540</p> <p>"Dear God, save me save me, every of my friends or allies is in the Tower, and I do not doubt but they will soon come for me. Thomas Cromwell, the man given the credit for bringing me to England is arrested charge with treason" (Gregory, 2006, p. 282).</p>	<p>Oppression / Political context</p>	<p>In this passage, Anne feels fear and vulnerability as political threats surround her. The arrest of allies like Thomas Cromwell shows how fragile her position is and how little control she has over her safety. At court, she is always watched, and the male-dominated hierarchy limits her freedom and choices. Her fear is not only personal; it is a consequence of the system itself.</p>

<p>Anne, Richmond Palace, July 8, 1540</p> <p>“They will obligate their master and deliver a verdict that I was precontracted, that I was never free to marry, that our marriage is therefore annulled. I have to remember that this is an escape for me, it could have been so much worse” (Gregory, 2006, p.302).</p>	<p>Oppression / Political context</p>	<p>In this passage, Anne convinces herself that annulment is an escape and a "favorable" way out for her, and it is because she knows the history of Henry's previous wives and how he seeks any accusation to rid himself of them. Although the annulment is presented as a "benevolent" solution, Anne knows that the verdict has already been decided and that it has nothing to do with justice but rather with the king's convenience.</p>
<p>Anne, Richmond Palace, July 8, 1540</p> <p>“Silently, I hold out my hand for the letter he carries for me.... This is the end of my girlhood. This is the end of my ambitions. This is the end of my dream. This is the end of my reign. Perhaps it is the end of my life” (Gregory, 2006, p. 303).</p>	<p>Submission / Female voice / Oppression</p>	<p>Here, although Anne reflects, allowing readers to glimpse her feelings, she remains silent and understands that her life has changed. Receiving the letter without saying a word symbolizes her complete powerlessness: she no longer speaks, asks questions, or defends herself; she simply accepts a decision made by others, reflecting the oppression these women lived under. The repetition of "This is the end" signifies the loss</p>

		of her position as queen, her youth, her aspirations, and her personal identity.
<p>Jane Boleyn, Greenwich Palace, January 3, 1540</p> <p>“I am haunted by what I did to George... I cannot undo it, and they all know it” (Gregory, 2006, p. 129).</p>	Oppression / Social context	<p>This passage illustrates how social judgment and patriarchal surveillance limit Jane's agency. From a theoretical perspective, Jiménez Argüello (2021) interprets guilt as a mechanism of control over women. In this sense, Jane internalizes this guilt, demonstrating how moral and social norms influence her behavior. Her personal suffering reflects the constant tension between her conscience and public exposure within a system that monitors and punishes women.</p>
<p>Jane Boleyn, The Tower of London, January 1542</p> <p>“I was wrong to put my faith in the Duke of Norfolk. I thought that we were working together, I thought that he would find me a husband and I that I would have a great</p>	Oppression / Betrayal	<p>In this passage, Jane realizes that she has trusted people who were not acting in her best interest. She understands that the power dynamics at court were not as stable as they seemed and her dependence on others left her vulnerable.</p>

<p>match. I know now that he is not to be trusted... He used me to keep Katherine in check, and then he used me again to put her in the way of Culpepper (Gregory, 2006, p. 529).</p>		
<p>Jane Boleyn, The Tower of London, February 1542</p> <p>“I laugh. There is to be no trial, no questioning, no chance to clear my name... They say that parliament has passed an act of attainder against Katherine and me for treason and conspiracy. We have been judged and found guilty without trial... This is Henry’s justice... (Gregory, 2006, p. 536).</p>	<p>Oppression / Legal injustice</p>	<p>Here, the author, through Jane's words in this passage, highlights her vulnerability in the face of male authority and the legal system. According to Beauvoir (1949), women are often treated as "the other," excluded from positions of power and justice. In this context, Jane's lack of voice and defense reflects how these structures limit the possibility of true justice for women.</p>

*Table 1. Shows the Forms of Oppression and Submission within the Tudor Patriarchal Context. Source: Researcher’s creation.*

#### **4.2.2 Table 2: Symbolic Mechanisms of Power and Control**

<b>Quote and character</b>	<b>Type of symbolic mechanism</b>	<b>Critical interpretation / Analysis</b>
<p>Katherine, Norfolk House, Lambeth. December 1539.</p> <p>“What is the point of being</p>	<p>Seduction - Power / Cultural expectation</p>	<p>This quote shows how Katherine measures her own worth based on male approval. For her, beauty is</p>

<p>pretty if no nobleman is ever going to know me? How will anyone ever see how charming I can be if nobody ever sees me at all?" (Gregory, 2006, p. 14).</p>		<p>the perfect quality for being valued and recognized. From a feminist perspective, de Beauvoir (2011) argues that women have historically been defined as the Other, whose existence is justified in relation to men. Essentially, Katherine believes her beauty depends on being desired and chosen.</p>
<p>Katherine, Hampton Court, November 1541</p> <p>“Now, let me see, what do I have? Surprise, surprise! I have no friends and I thought I had dozens. I have no lovers, and I thought I was pestered by them. I don’t even have a family, as it turns out, they are all gone. I have no husband, for he won’t see me; and I don’t even have a confessor, for the archbishop himself has become my inquisitor...” (Gregory, 2006, p. 481).</p>	<p>Vulnerability / Cultural expectation</p>	<p>In this passage, we see how Katherine is isolated and abandoned by everyone who surrounded her when she enjoyed the king's favor. Now that the king has turned his back on her due to the accusations against her, everyone has left her alone, even her own family. Reflecting the fragility of a woman's position in the Tudor court and her lack of control over her own destiny. The quote emphasizes the consequences that patriarchal power exerts on women.</p>
<p>Katherine, Syon abbey, February 1542</p>	<p>Guilt - Internalized cultural expectation / Control</p>	<p>Throughout the novel, Katherine Howard shows</p>

<p>“I had the Boleyn inheritance of grace and beauty and charm, and it turns out that all I have inherited is this: her block. This is the Boleyn inheritance for me...” (Gregory, 2006, p. 550).</p>		<p>how women at the Tudor court were defined by their beauty, obedience, and reputation. These cultural expectations limit their autonomy and control over their lives. The request for the execution block and her final reflection on the “Boleyn inheritance” demonstrate the internalization of these norms and the dehumanization she suffered: ironically, she inherited a legacy of death, just as her cousin, Queen Anne Boleyn was executed in the same place.</p>
<p>Katherine Hampton Court, March 1540</p> <p>“Katherine, you have taken the king’s eyes,” my uncle says. I swear! I am innocent. You have taken his fancy; now you have to take his heart... But he is married to the queen. I mutter. He can still fall in love with you, my uncle says” (Gregory, 2006, p. 233-234).</p>	<p>Seduction / Patriarchal control</p>	<p>This passage reflects the way families operated in the courts. Katherine has now become an object of desire and political interest in the pursuit of power. Although she claims her innocence, her words are dismissed, and she is immediately instructed on how to seduce the king. On the other hand, readers see the moral stance when Katherine says, "But he is married," and</p>

		<p>her discomfort. However, the uncle's response, "He can still fall in love with you," demonstrates that Katherine had no intention of seducing the king; she was pressured and practically forced into it.</p>
<p>Anne Duchess of Cleves, Duren Cleves, July 1539</p> <p>"The king will have to choose me for my pleasant appearance and political connections. I have nothing else to offer...But he must choose me. I am absolutely determined that he will choose me. It is everything to me to get away from here..." (Gregory, 2006, p. 4).</p>	<p>Political Alliance / Power</p>	<p>This quote shows how Anne measured her worth, her opportunities, and the political advantages she could bring. Her determination to be chosen by the king reveals the pressure women faced in society to secure their well-being through marriage to a powerful man.</p>
<p>Anne Duchess of Cleves, Duren Cleves, July 1539</p> <p>"God forgive me, but I pray that the king does not choose her. She is eager as me for the chance to leave Cleves, and to leap to such greatness as the throne of England; but she does not need it as I do. No girl in the world can need it</p>	<p>Power / Cultural expectation</p>	<p>This passage reflects how Anne views marriage as a means of survival, not a personal choice. Her fear that the king will choose her sister highlights the competition imposed on women within a patriarchal structure. The quote underscores how cultural expectations limit women's opportunities,</p>

<p>as I do.” (Gregory, 2006, p. 4).</p>		<p>forcing them to see political marriage as the only path to salvation and social mobility. Furthermore, from a Latin American perspective, Sandí Villalobos and Sibaja (2022) propose an approach that analyzes the journey as a metaphor for transformation. According to the authors, physical and symbolic displacement represents a process of identity reconstruction in the face of limiting social structures. In <i>The Boleyn Inheritance</i>, Anne of Cleves's move from her homeland to the English court implies not only a geographical change but also a process of forced adaptation within a hostile patriarchal system to which she will be exposed in this new court.</p>
<p>Jane Boleyn, The Tower of London, February 13, 1542</p> <p>“I am innocent of everything. The only thing I ever did, the only sin ever, was against George, for love of George</p>	<p>Guilt / Control</p>	<p>In this passage, Jane asserts her innocence while simultaneously feeling compelled to confess, revealing an internalized guilt. This reflects how patriarchal systems exert</p>

<p>my husband, God forgive me for that, I want to confess...” (Gregory, 2006, p. 556)</p>		<p>control not only externally but also psychologically, shaping women's consciousness and self-image. As Jiménez (2021) explains, guilt functions as a socially constructed form of patriarchal control, leading women to internalize oppression and become agents of their own regulation.</p>
<p>Jane Boleyn, Rochester, New Years’s Eve 1539</p> <p>“We are all actors here, but the king will not play the part of eager bridegroom... He does not like her, he says. He cannot like her. And he is blaming the man who made this marriage for him. (Gregory, 2006, p. 91).</p>	<p>Social Critique / Control</p>	<p>Here, the author, through Jane's thoughts, reveals how everyone must act according to roles defined by the court. Her commentary highlights how women must adapt to expectations that limit their freedom and agency, demonstrating the rigid hierarchy of the Tudor court.</p>
<p>Jane Boleyn, Greenwich Palace, January 7, 1540</p> <p>“I can whisper to the right ears... small influence is still influence.” (Gregory, 2006, p. 144).</p>	<p>Political Alliance / Power</p>	<p>Jane Boleyn's statement illustrates how women could subtly wield power in the Tudor court. Although their authority was limited, indirect influence allowed them to participate in political</p>

		alliances and control strategies. According to Kelley (2018), this type of indirect influence demonstrates that, even within a patriarchal hierarchy, women could negotiate and affect decisions through persuasion and communication, showcasing subtle forms of agency within rigid power structures.
Jane Boleyn, Greenwich Palace, January 7, 1540  “I use my words and my knowledge to navigate the court; it may be little, but it is mine.” (Gregory, 2006, p. 131).	Political Alliance / Power	In this passage, Jane Boleyn demonstrates how women could exert influence at the Tudor court. Her formal power was limited, but she used her knowledge and communication skills to negotiate and protect her position. In this way, she found small ways to exercise agency within a male-dominated system.

*Table 2. Shows the Symbolic Mechanisms of Power and Control. Source: Researcher's creation*

4.2.3 Table 3: *Historical Rewriting from a Feminist Perspective*

Quote and character	Traditional historical narrative	Feminist interpretation / Analysis
<p>Katherine, Norfolk House, Lambeth. July 1539</p> <p>“Now let me see, what do I have... I have me, glorious me! I am fourteen today... wonderfully in love.”</p> <p>(Gregory, 2006, p. 11).</p>	<p>Female voice / Cultural resistance / Historical reflection</p>	<p>Through first-person narration, the author shows how Katherine affirms her identity, displaying enthusiasm and self-affirmation that challenge patriarchal expectations of female submission.</p> <p>According to Butler (1990), gender identity is a performative act that can subvert roles imposed by society.</p>
<p>Katherine, Hampton Court, November 1541</p> <p>“Now, let me see, what do I have? Surprise, surprise! I have no friends and I thought I had dozens... I don’t even have a confessor, for the archbishop himself has become my inquisitor.”</p> <p>(Gregory, 2006, p. 481).</p>	<p>Female voice / Vulnerability / Historical reflection</p>	<p>On the other hand, this quote reflects Katherine's vulnerability, but also her ability to observe and narrate her situation. By giving voice to her isolation and how everyone turns their back on her when she no longer enjoys the king's favor.</p>
<p>Katherine, Syon Abbey, February 1542</p>	<p>Female voice / Acceptance / Historical reflection</p>	<p>Katherine faces her fate with a blend of dark humor and</p>

<p>“I should like to have the block,” I say. “The block, my lady?” “Yes. The executioner’s block. Can I have it here in my room?” “If you wish, but...” “What do you want it for?” “To practice.” (Gregory, 2006, p. 549).</p>		<p>solemn defiance. By requesting to practice with the block, she transforms the proximity of death into an act of control and courage, appropriating an instrument that has historically symbolized her end. Her request redefines the passive acceptance that history assigns her: instead of being a silent victim, Katherine confronts her end with audacity, reaffirming her agency in her final moments.</p>
<p>Katherine, Syon Abbey, February 1542</p> <p>“I had the Boleyn inheritance of grace and beauty and charm, and it turns out that all I have inherited is this: her block. This is the Boleyn inheritance for me...” (Gregory, 2006, p. 550).</p>	<p>Female voice / Cultural expectation / Historical reflection</p>	<p>In this passage, Katherine reflects ironically on the Boleyn legacy, expecting grace and charm but finding only the “block” of execution, inheriting the tragic fate of her cousin Anne Boleyn. This moment highlights how patriarchal violence shapes her family history and exposes the vulnerability of women. Through humor, Katherine maintains her own voice in the face of a history that portrays her as a victim.</p>

<p>Anne Duchess of Cleves, Duren Cleves, July 1539</p> <p>“I know I can do this, I know I can be Queen of England, and a good queen as well.” (Gregory, 2006, p. 88).</p>	<p>Female voice / Cultural resistance</p>	<p>In this passage, Anne demonstrates her skill and determination despite the court's doubts. She tells herself she can do it, a display of resilience that, even in small moments, allows her to have her own autonomy. According to Butler (1990), this can be seen as an assertion of identity: she begins to forge herself as queen through her words and confidence, refusing to accept the passive role expected of her.</p>
<p>Anne, Richmond Palace, July 13, 1540</p> <p>“I will endure, but I will endure with my head held high.” (Gregory, 2006, p. 291).</p>	<p>Female voice / Cultural resistance</p>	<p>In this passage, Anne acknowledges the limitations on her freedom imposed by the patriarchal system, but her acceptance becomes a form of strategic resistance. Her determination to preserve her dignity acts as resistance to patriarchal control.</p>
<p>Anne, Herver Castle, January 1547</p> <p>“I am a free woman now, free from him and finally free from fear... I will own a cat</p>	<p>Female voice / Cultural resistance</p>	<p>At the end of the story, Anne reflects on the king's death and her liberation from years of suffering, finally taking control of her life and exercising full freedom. The</p>

<p>and not fear being called a witch... I shall live my own life and please myself. I shall be a free woman. It is no small thing, this, for a woman; freedom” (Gregory, 2006, p. 558).</p>		<p>poetic pause on the word "freedom" emphasizes that female emancipation is not simply the absence of oppression but rather involves the ability to define oneself and achieve personal fulfillment. According to hooks (2000), women's liberation involves reclaiming their voice and asserting their power in everyday life, even in the most private spaces. In this sense, Anne not only frees herself from male authority, but also celebrates her autonomy as an act of active resistance against a patriarchal system that had confined her for years.</p>
<p>Jane Boleyn, The Tower of London, February 13, 1542</p> <p>“I am innocent of everything. I have always been innocent of everything. The only thing I ever did, the only sin ever, was against George, for love of George my husband, God forgive me for that, I want to confess... In the count of</p>	<p>Historical Revision / Female voice</p>	<p>In this passage, Jane attempts to reclaim her own narrative in the face of a history that has unfairly judged her, thereby rejecting the identity imposed by male authority. By asserting her version of events, she challenges the official narrative and claims the right to be understood from her personal experience,</p>

three, the guard says.” (Gregory, 2006, p. 556).		preserving both her dignity and autonomy.
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*Table 3. Shows the Historical Rewriting from a Feminist Perspective. Source: Researcher’s creation*

### 4.3 Definition of Themes

Before exploring the main themes in *The Boleyn Inheritance*, it is important to clarify what is meant by a theme. According to Oregon State University (2021), a theme is the central idea that runs through a literary work and reflects deeper questions that go beyond the plot. Themes help readers understand the overall meaning of the story. Therefore, identifying them allows people to connect the characters' actions and events to universal ideas.

#### 4.3.1 Table 4 : Selected quotes from the novel illustrating the identified themes

Quotes	Themes	Researcher’s analysis
Jane Boleyn, Greenwich Palace, December 1539 “The king will decide what is faith and what is heresy; it is not for people to say... it is not even for the church to say... he has the power of God now” (Gregory, 2006, p. 33).	Power	This quote demonstrates how the king's absolute power dominated all aspects of life at the Tudor court, including religion, morality, and people's destinies. Following Foucault (1980), power is exercised not only through force but also through the control of discourse and the institutions that determine what is considered true. The king, possessing absolute power, eliminates any possibility of opposition or autonomy, and everyone at court is aware of this.

<p>Anne of Cleves, Duren Cleves, July 1539</p> <p>“The king will have to choose me for my pleasant appearance and political connections. I have nothing else to offer” (Gregory, 2006, p. 4).</p>	<p>Marriage as a Political Strategy</p>	<p>This quote reflects how Anne is treated as a bargaining chip, valued for her appearance and political connections. It highlights the lack of female agency and how marriage decisions were instruments of political power. The quote shows how marriage functions as a political strategy and not as a union based on personal choice. Anne is aware that her value lies in her appearance and her diplomatic utility. As Rubin (1975) points out, marriage has historically operated as a system of exchange in which women are used to consolidate alliances and power. This underscores the lack of female agency and the use of women's bodies as political instruments.</p>
<p>Katherine Howard, Hampton Court, March 1541</p> <p>“Let me warm your hand, he says... Is that better? He asks, pressing my hand to his</p>	<p>Female Sexuality and Power</p>	<p>The quote illustrates how desire and intimacy ultimately define Katherine's life. When Thomas invades her space, he isn't just seeking pleasure. He also wants</p>

<p>jacket. Much better, I say... I wish we were just a boy and a girl walking out together... I would court you, he says... I will not stop till I had a kiss... Perhaps I will kiss you back, I whisper. I am quite sure you would, he says..." (Gregory, 2006, p. 404-405).</p>		<p>power and control over her through sexuality. This power isn't absolute. It depends on societal expectations and his authority as a man. Being close to someone, both emotionally and physically, becomes simultaneously liberating and dangerous. It leaves Katherine vulnerable and exposes her to the dangers that lead to her decapitation.</p>
<p>Anne of Cleves, Westminster Palace, June 10, 1540</p> <p>"Dear God, save me, dear God, save me, every one of my friends or allies are in the Tower... Thomas Cromwell, the man given the credit for bringing me to England, is arrested" (Gregory, 2006, p. 282).</p>	<p>Survival in the Tudor Court</p>	<p>The passage shows that Anne's safety depends on her allies. Tudor court politics can change at any moment. Therefore, she must adapt to survive. It also reveals how vulnerable women are to male power and political intrigue. Anne knows that her protection is never guaranteed. Any safeguard can vanish in an instant.</p>
<p>Jane Boleyn Whitehall Palace, January 1540</p> <p>"For a moment I want to warn her. She is not the only</p>	<p>Female Voice and Silence</p>	<p>In this passage, Jane Boleyn feels for a moment that she should warn Anne. She knows she is in danger, but she also knows she cannot say anything. Her silence</p>

<p>one brave girl to six in this box to be honored as queen and then end her life stripped of her title, facing the death alone” (Gregory, 2006, p. 127)</p>		<p>stems not from indifference, but from fear and the need to survive in the Tudor court. Jane understands that speaking out could cost her her life. At the same time, she recognizes that history repeats itself: Anne is not the first young woman raised to the throne only to be stripped of everything and left to face death alone. The passage illustrates how women are trapped in a cycle of power that uses them and then discards them.</p>
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*Table 4. Shows selected quotes from the novel illustrating the identified themes. Source: Researcher’s creation.*

#### 4.4 Definition of Symbols

Symbols are fundamental to giving meaning to literary texts. According to Oregon State University (2020), symbolism uses objects, actions, or images to represent ideas beyond the literal. Furthermore, these symbols help readers discover hidden meanings. They also connect the details of the story to its main messages. This is why analyzing symbols helps to better understand the characters and the themes the author wants to convey.

##### 4.4.1 Table 5: Selected quotes from the novel illustrating the identified Symbols

Quotes	Symbols	Researcher’s analysis
<p>Katherine Norfolk House, Lambeth 1539</p> <p>“My reputation is my dowry; my grandmother would point</p>	<p>Reputation / Virginit</p>	<p>Katherine’s reputation symbolizes her only form of value in a male-dominated society. As she lacks wealth, land, or political power, her</p>

<p>out that I have no other.” (Gregory, 2006, p. 13).</p>		<p>sexual purity becomes her “dowry.” This symbol reveals how women are reduced to moral currency and foreshadows Katherine’s vulnerability to manipulation and downfall.</p>
<p>Jane Boleyn, Rochester, December 1539</p> <p>“Advise her about her dress! Lady Browne hisses at me, as if it is my fault that the new queen of England looks so outlandish” (Gregory, 2006, p. 73).</p>	<p>Clothing and Appearance</p>	<p>In this excerpt, Jane Boleyn recounts how Lady Browne pressures her to advise Anne on her dress. Anne is judged by how she presents herself to others, highlighting the superficiality and cruelty of the courtly environment. The commentary also reveals how the blame for the failure falls unfairly on the women surrounding the queen, as if Anne's behavior and image were the fault of other women rather than a system that does not tolerate difference. Furthermore, the word "outlandish" underscores Anne's status as a foreigner. On the other hand, the novel reveals how the court uses appearance as a form of control and humiliation, and how Anne is silenced and</p>

		discredited even before she can assert her identity as queen.
<p>Jane Boleyn, Greenwich Palace, December 1539</p> <p>“She will not tell them that we all let Anne go to the block, her saintly mother as guilty as any other. She has been raised as a Carey, but she is a Boleyn, a king’s bastard and a Howard through and through, she will know to keep her mouth shut....” (Gregory, 2066 p. 35).</p>	Silence	<p>In this passage, silence functions as a symbol of guilt and survival. It is not empty. It is laden with memory. Jane Boleyn lives with the burden of having testified against Anne Boleyn and against her own husband, George. Her words influenced their downfall and execution. At the same time, the context explains everything. In the Tudor court, a poorly chosen phrase could become treason. A wrong word could mean death. Therefore, silence is not merely a lack of voice. It is calculation. It is caution. It is a way of staying alive when speaking out could destroy everything.</p>
<p>Katherine Howard, Norfolk House, Lambeth, November 1539</p> <p>“I know you are young, Katherine, but you must understand this. We are</p>	Marriage	<p>In this passage, the novel addresses marriage not only from an emotional perspective but also as a legal matter with consequences. Although Francis acknowledges Katherine's</p>

<p>married now. It is legal and binding. We cannot marry again” (Gregory, 2006, p. 30).</p>		<p>youth, he doesn't protect her; on the contrary, he reminds her that she is already committed to something she barely understands. Marriage here is not presented as love, but as an obligation that binds her and limits her freedom. This pact is what they will later use against Katherine to conspire against her.</p>
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*Table 5. Shows selected quotes from the novel illustrating the identified Symbols. Source: Researcher's creation*

#### 4.5 Definition of Motifs

In literature, motifs help to identify patterns in a story and connect details to larger ideas. According to Oregon State University (2021), a motif is something that is repeated, such as an image, sound, word, or symbol. It reappears multiple times and draws attention because of its significance. These recurring elements reveal character traits, reinforce tone, or highlight themes, as certain ideas reappear throughout the story.

##### 4.5.1 Table 6: Selected quotes from the novel illustrating the identified Motifs

Quotes	Mofits	Researcher's analysis
<p>Katherine Howard, Syon Abbey, November 1541            “Now, let me see, what do I have? I have to say. I’m not doing very well at all... I have no jewels; I have not toys... Everything that the king gave me have been taken from my rooms.... (Gregory, 2006, p. 504).</p>	<p>Jewelry and Appearance</p>	<p>This quote reflects how the lack of these objects, or in this case, that they were taken from Katherine's possession, symbolizes the fall and the beginning of her end.</p>

<p>Jane Boleyn, The Tower of London, November 1541</p> <p>“But when that great wooden gate banged shut behind, and the shadow of the Tower fell cold on me, I felt a terror that I had never known before...” (Gregory, 2006 p. 512).</p>	<p>Cages and Confinement</p>	<p>Based on this quote, the closing of the Tower gate represents the final loss of freedom, symbolizing Jane’s complete physical and spiritual confinement. This marks a point of no return. It reflects how the court controls and traps individuals.</p>
<p>Katherine Howard, Syon Abbey, February 1542</p> <p>“You will be taken to the Tower, and you will be executed in private on Tower Green as soon as may be. Your lands and goods are forfeit the crown” (Gregory, 2006, p. 540).</p>	<p>Tower Green</p>	<p>Tower Green symbolizes the mortality of nobility. It is a constant threat to anyone who falls out of favor with the king.</p>
<p>Anne, Cleves Town, November 1539</p> <p>“I have it! I am to be it! I shall be Queen of England...”</p> <p>“She has only to have a child with him. There is no great skill in that. Her health is</p>	<p>Bloodlines and Heirs</p>	<p>This motif shows how becoming queen is tied to producing an heir, not only to personal ambition. For Anne of Cleves, marriage is directly connected to succession and political stability. The focus on having a child reflects the</p>

<p>good and her courses regular... (Gregory, 2006, p. 20-21).</p>		<p>court's pressure to secure the royal bloodline. It also shows the king's personal obsession with ensuring the succession through a male heir, which makes women's value depend mainly on their ability to give birth to a son.</p>
<p>Anne of Cleves, Durren Cleves, 1539</p> <p>Do you not like being painted? Are you shy?" he asked me gruffly as my smile faded when he looked at me like a piece of meat on the cook's draining slab."</p> <p>...I sit in the window seat, hot in my best clothes... and I will have to be cut free when the picture is finished..."</p> <p>(Gregory, 2006, p. 8).</p>	<p>Portraits and False Images</p>	<p>This passage shows how Holbein's portrait becomes an image that distorts expectations and how the protagonist reflects on what it means to see herself represented in contrast to who she truly is. Holbein's portrait becomes a symbol of how appearances can deceive and how human judgment can depend on an idealized image.</p>

*Table 6. Shows selected quotes from the novel illustrating the identified Motifs. Source: Researcher's creation.*

## Chapter V

### Conclusions and Recommendations

#### 5.1 Purpose of the Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to render the conclusions of the analysis of Philippa Gregory's *The Boleyn Inheritance* and to evaluate the fulfillment of the objectives set forth in this research. Building upon the findings presented in Chapter IV, this section synthesizes the main discoveries regarding the representation of women's roles, the various forms of oppression they experienced at the Tudor court, and the ways in which the novel offers a historical reinterpretation from a feminist perspective.

Furthermore, this chapter re-examines the research question, reflects on the findings, and proposes recommendations for future research in the fields of feminist literary criticism and historical fiction. This analysis is significant because it allows readers to delve into the subtle mechanisms of power and agency that women have wielded in historical contexts, challenging conventional narratives that have often silenced or distorted them. By showing how literature can recover marginalized voices and offer a more complex perspective on the female experience, this research provides readers with a critical tool for reevaluating historical and literary interpretations related to the role of women. Finally, this conclusion underscores the importance of the study and shows how Gregory's work enriches our understanding of women's agency, oppression, and resistance within patriarchal systems.

#### 5.2 Conclusions

The analysis shows how Philippa Gregory rewrites Tudor history from a more intimate side, focusing the narrative on the experiences of Anne, Katherine, and Jane, whom official history has relegated to secondary or scandalous figures. Through first-person narration, the author gives voice to these women, allowing the reader to understand the mechanisms of oppression, submission, and control that operated in the court of Henry VIII.

The novel does not simply recount historical events; rather, it reconstructs the past from within the consciousness of its protagonists. Consequently, the reader gains access to their thoughts, fears, desires, and contradictions. This narrative device reveals that oppression

manifests itself not only in political or legal decisions but also in the control of the body, sexuality, reputation, and female identity.

Based on the analysis, it can be stated that the novel exposes a rigid patriarchal system that limits women's autonomy and turns them into instruments of political alliances, family strategies, and male ambitions. However, it also shows that, even within this system, there are limited spaces for agency and resistance.

***5.2.1 To identify the forms of oppression and submission experienced by Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Jane Boleyn in *The Boleyn Inheritance*, in relation to the patriarchal structures of the Tudor court that shaped and constrained their lives***

The analysis presented in Table one reveals different manifestations of oppression across various social, cultural, political, and legal categories. This categorization of the fragments allowed for the identification of recurring patterns in the portrayal of the protagonists, such as control of the female body, regulation of reputation, and symbolic and material dependence on male figures. As a result, they were subjected to constant moral surveillance and exclusion from spaces of power and decision-making. These findings show that female subordination does not appear as an isolated event, but rather as part of a consolidated patriarchal structure.

In Katherine Howard's case, the analysis demonstrates that her oppression is constructed from a young age through the internalization of family and social expectations. The examined quotes reveal that her value is determined by her reputation and her ability to benefit her family. In this sense, it confirms Beauvoir's (1949/2011) argument that women are constructed as "the Other," that is, as subjects whose identity depends on dominant masculine structures. Katherine lacks economic autonomy and political power; therefore, her "honor" becomes symbolic capital within the patriarchal system. Thus, her evolution from naive obedience to resignation in the face of execution reveals that submission is not always a free choice, but rather the extreme result of a system that offers no real alternatives for agency.

Anne of Cleves, for her part, experiences oppression linked to her body, her status as a foreigner, and her sexuality. These selected quotes show how her identity is reduced to her physical appearance, her virginity, and her conformity to the king's desires. This dynamic can be interpreted considering Cixous's (1975) argument that the repression of female subjectivity operates through control of the body and the limitation of one's own discourse. Anne is constantly

observed and evaluated according to masculine parameters that determine her social and political value. However, unlike Katherine, she develops a survival strategy by accepting the annulment of her marriage as a form of self-preservation. In this case, submission acquires a strategic character, demonstrating that female agency can manifest itself even within restrictive structures.

On the other hand, the analysis of Jane Boleyn shows a psychological and moral oppression, marked by guilt and social surveillance. The novel's narrative demonstrates how internalized guilt functions as a control mechanism, shaping her behavior and limiting her autonomy. This dynamic is linked to the idea that power is not only exercised externally but also internalized, configuring the subject's self-perception. Jane depends on male figures to maintain her position at court, and when she is accused, she is denied a fair trial. The absence of due process confirms that the legal system responds to patriarchal interests rather than principles of impartial justice.

Finally, the analysis of the three protagonists leads to the conclusion that the Tudor court functioned as a hierarchical structure. In this sense, women occupied a subordinate position, defined by their political utility, symbolic value, and relationship to male power. The recurring patterns such as control of the body, manipulation of reputation, exclusion from political power, and legal vulnerability demonstrate that the identified oppression is structural, not circumstantial. Therefore, the findings confirm that the novel represents a system in which female identity is constantly negotiated, monitored, and restricted. Regarding the achievement of the specific objective, it can be stated that it was successfully achieved. The categorized analysis of the fragments clearly identified the forms of oppression and submission present in each character's experience, as well as their direct connection to the patriarchal structures of the Tudor court. The coherence between the textual findings and the adopted feminist theoretical framework validates the methodological relevance of the applied approach.

***5.2.2 To analyze how seduction, political alliances, and guilt operate as symbolic mechanisms of power and control within gendered dynamics in the novel, revealing the complexities of influence and female agency in a rigidly hierarchical society.***

The analysis presented in Table two shows that seduction, political alliances, and guilt are not isolated elements in the novel. They appear as symbolic mechanisms of power and control that uphold the patriarchal order. Using the first-person narrative through Katherine Howard,

Anne of Cleves, and Jane Boleyn, the author reconfigures the traditional historical narrative centered on male power and shifts the focus to the subjective female experience.

First, seduction is presented as an imposed tool, not as a manifestation of female freedom. In Katherine Howard's case, the analysis reveals that her supposed ability to seduce stems from family instructions and political strategies devised by male figures. Her body becomes an instrument for the advancement and consolidation of family power. From Beauvoir's perspective (1949/2011), women have historically been defined in terms of their relationship to male desire; in this sense, Katherine internalizes the idea that her beauty only acquires value if it is recognized and validated by the king. By revealing her inner thoughts and vulnerability, the novel dismantles the historical image of the "ambitious young seductress" and exposes the process of instrumentalization to which she was subjected.

In the case of Anne of Cleves, seduction is presented from a diplomatic and strategic perspective. Her marriage to Henry VIII is a territorial alliance, not her own decision. From the outset, Anne understands that she must be "chosen" for her appearance and the political advantages she represents. This way of thinking confirms that her value lies in her usefulness within political negotiation. When the king rejects her and annuls the marriage, it demonstrates that political stability depends exclusively on the monarch's will. However, the novel reinterprets this episode by giving her a voice and critical awareness. This leads Anne to move from being a passive figure to a subject who reflects on her own condition. Thus, the feminist rewriting does not alter the central historical facts, but it does reframe her experience from a female subjectivity.

Secondly, political alliances function as symbolic mechanisms that delimit female agency. Jane Boleyn is the clearest example of this dynamic. Her reflections show that women could have indirect influence through words, advice, and persuasion. According to Butler (1990), argues that identity is performatively constructed within pre-existing normative frameworks. Therefore, Jane acts within the limits of the system, negotiating small amounts of influence. However, this influence always depends on male favor; when this disappears, so does her protection. By emphasizing this precariousness, the novel challenges the idea that proximity to power equates to real autonomy.

Thirdly, guilt emerges as an internalized control mechanism. In Jane's specific case, self-blame precedes even the official condemnation. This process demonstrates that patriarchal power

operates through visible punishments and the internalization of social norms and expectations. Female consciousness is shaped by constant surveillance, confirming that symbolic control can be as effective as legal or political control. In this way, the novel makes visible emotional and psychological dimensions that traditional historical narratives often omit.

Based on these findings, it can be argued that the novel reimagines history by shifting the focus from the monarch's decisions to the consequences of those decisions on women's lives. In particular, the restoration of the female narrative voice allows for a questioning of official versions that reduce these figures to stereotypes the failed foreign queen, the frivolous young woman, the scheming courtesan and proposes a more complex and humanized reading. Therefore, the work does not necessarily contradict the historical record but rather complements and problematizes it through a perspective centered on the female experience.

In conclusion, the specific objective was successfully achieved. The analysis of symbolic mechanisms shows how seduction, political alliances, and guilt function as tools of power and control within the Tudor court. At the same time, the novel reinterprets these mechanisms by granting discursive agency to the protagonists. The novel illustrates a complex interplay between oppression and female agency through systematic pattern identification, body use, political dependence, and internalization of guilt. These findings confirm that *The Boleyn Inheritance* constructs a feminist reinterpretation of the Tudor past, highlighting the subtle ways women negotiate power within restrictive social structures.

***5.2.3 To evaluate how *The Boleyn Inheritance* reimagines official historical narratives from a feminist perspective by restoring the voices of marginalized women and highlighting the relevance of their stories in reshaping our understanding of the past.***

Based on this objective, it can be stated that the novel does not alter fundamental historical events but rather reconfigures their meaning through the incorporation of the female voice in the first person. This narrative strategy shifts the focus from traditional history, centered on the monarch's decisions and actions, to the subjective experience of the women who lived under that system.

Katherine Howard has often been portrayed as a frivolous and reckless young woman, whose behavior supposedly explains her tragic end. However, the analyzed quotations from the novel allow readers to nuance this image. Instead of a superficial figure, people see a woman who

understands the context surrounding her and can recognize the danger she faces. Her fear is also perceptible, as is her awareness that her options are limited. When she requests to rehearse with the execution block, the gesture is not simply a preparation for death; rather, it can be interpreted as a way of assuming, as far as possible, control over the final moment of her life. From Butler's perspective (Butler, 1990), this act can be interpreted as performative, since it challenges the passive role historically assigned to condemned women. Therefore, the work does not deny her execution, but it does challenge the simplistic interpretation of her as a mere victim or irresponsible seductress.

In the case of Anne of Cleves, she is usually portrayed as the wife rejected by Henry VIII, reducing her identity to marital failure. However, an analysis of the quotations demonstrates that the novel grants her a strategic awareness and resilience that transform her apparent humiliation into a process of personal redefinition. Her declaration that she will endure with dignity reflects a form of cultural resistance absent from official accounts. Moreover, her final affirmation of freedom after the king's death redefines her story: she is no longer the discarded queen, but a woman who survives and reconstructs her identity. According to Hooks (2000), "female liberation implies the recovery of one's own voice and the capacity to redefine oneself beyond oppressive structures." Therefore, the novel transforms an episode of political rejection into a narrative of progressive emancipation.

Jane Boleyn, for her part, has been remembered by traditional historiography as a traitor because of her testimony against her husband and sister-in-law. However, an analysis of the novel allows us to nuance this image. The work grants her a space for introspection that adds greater complexity to her character. In particular, in her final words, Jane attempts to reaffirm her innocence and explain her actions from her own emotional perspective.

Therefore, the recovery of her voice in the moments before her death can be interpreted as a gesture of historical revision, acknowledging her humanity without attempting to absolve her. Consequently, the novel challenges official narratives that reduce women to rigid moral categories, without considering the structural pressures that influenced their decisions.

In summary, the specific objective has been successfully achieved. The analysis of the selected fragments demonstrates how the novel reconfigures historical narratives by giving prominence to the voices of marginalized women. The use of first-person narration allows readers

to access the experiences of Katherine Howard, Anne of Cleves, and Jane Boleyn from a subjective perspective, without altering historical facts. By granting narrative authority to these female characters, the work describes and evaluates how the work challenges official versions and demonstrates that history can be interpreted from angles that highlight those who have traditionally remained silent.

### **5.3 Restatement of the Research Question**

This study sought to answer the following question: How does Philippa Gregory portray the oppression and submission of women in the Tudor court by rewriting history from a feminist perspective and giving voice to those who have long been silenced?

Based on the analysis conducted, it can be stated that Gregory achieves her objective through three fundamental strategies. First, she reveals the patriarchal structures that govern women's lives. Second, she illustrates the symbolic mechanisms of control, such as seduction, guilt, and political alliances. Finally, she gives narrative voice to women who have historically been judged or silenced, such as Anne of Cleves, Jane Boleyn, and Catherine Howard, demonstrating how each of them negotiates, resists, or adapts to the restrictions imposed by the system.

By reconstructing the past from the perspective of its protagonists, Gregory offers an understanding that oppression was not an isolated event, but a deeply entrenched structural system. The first-person narration expresses emotions, insecurities, and survival tactics, humanizing the women and challenging simplistic historical representations. In this way, the novel not only recounts Tudor history but also reinterprets it, providing a critical perspective that highlights female agency even in situations of restricted power. This perspective also invites a reevaluation of other silenced women's histories, opening new possibilities for future research on historical memory from a feminist perspective.

### **5.4 Unexpected Results**

There were unexpected results during research progression. These results did not change the aims significantly; however, they provided wider context and revised some early ideas. First, it was observed that female submission does not always equate to passivity or weakness. Anne of Cleves agrees with the annulment of her marriage to Henry VIII, a decision that can be

interpreted as strategic decision that allows her to preserve her life, economic stability, and security within a hostile political environment. She herself acknowledges that the verdict has already been decided when she states: “They will obligate their master and deliver a verdict that I was precontracted... I have to remember that this is an escape for me; it could have been so much worse” (Gregory, 2006, p. 302). The annulment can be reinterpreted as a means of survival. Likewise, her declaration, “I will endure, but I will endure with my head held high” (Gregory, 2006, p. 291), shows a form of dignified resistance within the limits of the patriarchal system.

In this respect, Anne not only avoided a tragic fate unlike other wives of the king but also managed to maintain a privileged position within the court hierarchy. After the annulment, she was officially recognized, held a status superior to that of all the ladies of the court except the queen and the king's daughters, received a substantial pension, and obtained her own residences and properties. This outcome cannot be understood solely as royal benevolence, but rather as the result of a strategic adaptation to the Tudor patriarchal system. More than simple resignation, her decision granted her access to something exceptional for a woman of the period: relative economic independence and personal autonomy. Thus, apparent submission became a form of negotiation that guaranteed her stability and a degree of self-determination within a structurally restrictive context. This finding demonstrates that female agency at the Tudor court could manifest itself in subtle and calculated ways, even within rigidly patriarchal structures.

Secondly, it was found that interaction with male figures did not always involve direct oppression, but also spaces of symbolic negotiation. Jane Boleyn embodies this dynamic when she states: “I can whisper to the right ears... small influence is still influence” (Gregory, 2006, p. 144). She also acknowledges: “I use my words and my knowledge to navigate the court; it may be little, but it is mine” (Gregory, 2006, p. 131). These quotations demonstrate that Jane wields a certain indirect influence through persuasion and strategic knowledge of the court. Her closeness to Katherine Howard shows that women could influence politics even from seemingly secondary roles. In this sense, the novel reveals forms of indirect power where female agency evolves on the margins of the system.

A third unexpected result was the relevance of first-person narration as a mechanism for historical reinterpretation. By giving alternating voices to Anne, Jane, and Katherine, Gregory allows access to their subjectivity, emotions, and contradictions. For example, Katherine at the

beginning of her story exclaims with youthful enthusiasm: “Now let me see, what do I have... I have me, glorious me! “I am fourteen today...” (Gregory, 2006, p. 11), constructing a confident and self-affirming identity. However, throughout the events, she is confronted with the stark reality of her situation: “I have no friends... I have no husband... I don’t even have a confessor” (Gregory, 2006, p. 481). This change highlights the vulnerability of her situation and adds a significant emotional dimension to her character. By alternating between moments of self-affirmation and vulnerability, the first-person narrative lends Katherine a more human dimension. This demonstrates that her story cannot be reduced to mere scandals or moral failings. Thus, Gregory's choice of this perspective alters our perception of historical events, underscoring how literature can serve as a means of critique and the reclamation of historically marginalized female voices.

Finally, it was observed that patriarchal control mechanisms operated not only through external oppression but also through the internalization of social and moral norms. Katherine expresses early on that “My reputation is my dowry... I have no other” (Gregory, 2006, p. 13), demonstrating how honor functions as symbolic capital and a disciplinary mechanism. This internalization reaches its most extreme point when, faced with its execution, she declares: “I should like to have the block... To practice” (Gregory, 2006, p. 549). More than simple resignation, this gesture reveals the extent to which the system has shaped her subjectivity. Similarly, Jane Boleyn acknowledges: “I am haunted by what I did to George... I cannot undo it” (Gregory, 2006, p. 129), showing how guilt and social surveillance act as forms of internalized control.

These examples collectively illustrate that, in the Tudor court, patriarchal authority was enforced not only through explicit sentences or sanctions, but also through social norms, symbolic influence, and the internalization of moral values. The narrative highlights not only those subjected to a repressive regime, but also the women who navigated, resisted, endured, and reinterpreted their histories from positions outside formal power.

## **5.5 Recommendations**

Based on the results obtained, several recommendations can be made for future research on *The Boleyn Inheritance* and similar works of historical fiction. First, it is recommended that researchers compare this novel with other works by Philippa Gregory to observe how the

representation of women evolves throughout the Tudor saga. A comparative analysis would allow for the identification of continuities and differences in the way female characters construct their identity and exercise their agency in different narratives.

Additionally, a more thorough analysis of the male characters is recommended to gain a deeper understanding of how patriarchal power is structured and exercised in the narrative. Analyzing the decisions and influence of men on female characters would allow for a clearer understanding of the dynamics of control, subordination, and negotiation present in the Tudor court. Similarly, a methodical comparison between the novel and original historical documents could enrich the debate on the connection between literature and historiography. This would clarify which aspects of history are preserved and which are reinterpreted within the framework of the fictional narrative, thus offering a more complete understanding of how history is reconstructed in literature.

On the other hand, it is recommended that feminist literary criticism be applied to other works of historical fiction, which would allow for the continued recovery of silenced voices and a questioning of how traditional narratives have portrayed women and marginalized groups. Additionally, future studies could analyze the work from a historical-cultural perspective. This method would allow researchers to examine how the social, political, and cultural contexts of the Tudor era influence the narrative and behavior of the characters, which in turn would enrich the understanding of the interrelationships between gender, power, and social norms, transcending the feminist approach.

In conclusion, *The Boleyn Inheritance* shows how literature can help readers better understand the past. The novel tells the story through women's experiences and presents historical events from a more inclusive point of view, showing the challenges women faced within a patriarchal society.

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