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This study is a content analysis of ten historical fiction novels set in Tudor England featuring female protagonists. Five of the novels analyzed were published in the 1960s and five were published in the 2000s so that a comparison could be done of whether the characterization of female characters in this genre has changed over time. The books were assessed for the presence of traditional stereotypical female characteristics as well as for the portrayals of romantic relationships, women's sexuality, and women's agency. The results of the analysis show that there has been little change in the portrayal of these female characters over time.

Headings:

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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PORTRAYAL OF FEMALE
PROTAGONISTS IN TUDOR ENGLAND HISTORICAL FICTION NOVELS FROM
THE 1960S AND THE 2000S

by
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Introduction

“Deliberately or not, in fiction as well as in nonfiction, readers are always collecting information about the world and its possibilities, always learning” (Hickman, 2001, p. 92). Popular fiction is composed of many genres, including historical fiction, and is often seen as escapist literature rather than serious and scholarly material (Johnson, 2009, p. 4). However, popular fiction often portrays and discusses important characteristics and issues for the society in which it is written. Although issues such as gender, race, sexual orientation, and other social and cultural issues might not be able to be comfortably discussed by readers in relation to their daily life, fiction is a place where they can explore what they think of themselves and society.

Popular fiction, therefore, acquires a new resonance as it offers both the means of consolidating or reinforcing older, more conservative or traditional norms and identities in the face of these new challenges, *and* the means of negotiating new paradigms and helping us to cope with the particular anxieties – and opportunities – that they might occasion. (Mitchell, 2012, p. 123)

Historical fiction is a very popular genre, as shown by the fact that in the years 2000-2007, about one third of the “Editors’ Choice” adult novels in *Booklist* were historical fiction (Johnson, 2009, p. xv). One current popular trend in this genre is to provide a new perspective on a well-known story or historical event through a real or fictional female character’s point of view. As Goodman states,

...the majority of the readers are women, and they like to read about other women. Much of history is dominated by men, which means you have to look for subjects that include women. The most common device is to take a woman who really lived and to let her tell her own story, free from the alleged ‘misrepresentation’ of history. (Goodman, 2005)

This subgenre of historical fiction has become so popular that it is often possible to identify this type of historical fiction novel simply by looking at the cover, which generally shows an illustration of a woman in period dress (Johnson, 2009, p. 5-6).

This idea of portraying a female point of view of history has its roots in the second wave of feminism that began in the 1960s. Unlike first wave feminism, which focused on societal inequities in regard to education, employment, and the laws dealing with marriage (Gamble, 2000, p. 233), second wave feminism focused more on the rights and freedoms of women in regard to “reproduction, sexuality, and cultural representation” (Gamble, 2000, p. 310). Thus second wave feminism gave birth to the idea that the representation of women in cultural media such as popular fiction is important to the development of female identity. Genres traditionally marketed to female readers are especially important in this regard. In fact, many female writers and critics of the feminist era who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s have credited historical novels with helping them in their identity development as women. For instance, writer and founder of Virago Press, Carmen Callil, claims that Georgette Heyer’s novels inspired some of her feminist thoughts in that, in these novels, even though the ultimate goal was for a woman to marry, it should be her choice. Wallace even goes so far as to state that the beginnings of the second wave of feminism may have originally emerged from the popular historical fiction that these women read (Wallace, 2005, p. 5).

The trend of portraying the stories of female protagonists in historical fiction largely began in the 1960s and continued into the 1970s and beyond when the study of social history became popular in academic circles (Johnson, 2009, p. 5). This focus on previously marginalized populations in the historical record particularly appealed to

historical novelists who were looking for a new story to tell. Women are considered marginalized populations in history because it is difficult to know very much about their daily lives, as they were often not included in the written historical record. This has led many authors to portray women in historical novels as a way to write their history for them (Wallace, 2005, p. 2). Thus, the genre of historical fiction allows female readers to explore their own history. “By placing the female historical figure at the centre of their narratives, and by exploring her sexuality and her agency, novels...re-appraise and reassert the role of the woman in history” (Cooper and Short, 2012, p. 3).

However, historical fiction does not just portray the past, but can also be used to comment on the time of writing. “It is this dual temporal dimension which both lends the women depicted in these novels their own particular characteristics, and which influences the ways in which their stories are re-told, and the unique emphases in each re-telling” (Cooper and Short, 2012, p. 7). This also allows historical novels to explore certain issues of the present time period through these female characters.

Although readers are often attracted to historical novels because they believe they will learn about the past time recreated in the novel, any historical novel has as much, or perhaps more, to say about the time in which it was written. (Wallace, 2005, p. 4)

Since it is set in the past, the historical novel provides a literary space where current topics like women’s sexuality can be discussed in a safe historical space apart from the present day (Wallace, 2005, p. 6).

Thus, because historical novels are also influenced by the time period in which they are written, the portrayal of women in historical fiction has changed over time. This paper will explore how female protagonists in historical fiction novels are portrayed by comparing five novels set in Tudor England written between 1960 and 1970 and five

written between 2000 and 2010 to see if there has been a change in how women are characterized as well as how their romances and sexuality are portrayed and how much agency they have. Although women's portrayal in historical fiction does need to take into account the historical roles of women, the characterization of these protagonists is something that may vary depending upon the time period in which a book is written. Although historical fiction novels with female protagonists are often viewed as a way for women to reclaim their history, if these characters are described using stereotypical female characteristics, these novels may not be so progressive after all. By comparing historical fiction novels from the 1960s, when second wave feminism was just beginning, to books from the present day, this paper will be a study of how women are represented within society, whether traditional feminine stereotypes are still being used in these rewritings of female history, and what messages these novels may be sending to today's female readers about their own place in society.

Literature Review

Definition of the Genre

Historical fiction as a genre is hard to define. Although it seems logical that the genre would include any fiction set in the past, this definition is not as simple as it appears. For instance, what does it mean for the novel to be set in the past? How far in the past does its setting need to be for the novel to be truly historical? Does the past mean the author's past or the reader's past? By considering historical fiction to be any fiction set in the past, classic works by Jane Austen could be considered historical fiction, but this is usually not what readers mean when they think about the genre. Historical fiction is a unique genre because it is clearly fiction, but since it is set in the historical past and often incorporates characters who were real people, both critics and the reading audience can also be concerned with the accuracy of the setting and character portrayals. In addition, relating to the characters requires a different response from readers because these characters live in a setting and time period so different from their own. By allowing readers to see how people were living in one particular historical moment, these books help them to better relate to and understand history as well as gain a sense of their own society within a historical framework (de Groot, 2010, p. 4).

In his study, *The Historical Novel*, Georg Lukacs credits Sir Walter Scott with being the father of the modern historical novel because it is in his works that the "derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age

(Lukacs, 1965, p. 19) first takes place. Rather than just being a background for the plot of the novel, the historical setting becomes essential to the story itself. However, a historical novel is not just the recounting of important events in history. As Lukacs states,

What matters therefore in the historical novel is not the re-telling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality. (Lukacs, 1965, p. 42)

In *Historical Fiction II: A Guide to the Genre*, Johnson defines historical fiction as “fictional works (mainly novels) set before the middle of the last century, ones in which the author is writing from research rather than personal experience” (Johnson, 2009, p. 1). In addition, traditional historical novels portray the setting of a specific historical time period realistically while also including engaging characters. The plots of these novels tend to be straight-forward and move along fairly quickly and main characters are often real historical figures, although that is not a requirement, as many novels include both fictional and real characters. In addition, these books tend to be fairly long and follow one character throughout the book as history affects his or her life in important ways (Johnson, 2009, p. 19). Although there is quite a lot of genre blending in historical fiction, to be historical fiction in the classic sense, the emphasis of the story needs to be on the historical period rather than on a mystery or romance (Saricks, 2009, p. 291).

In *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction*, Saricks lists five characteristics that apply to historical fiction:

- 1) There is a wealth of accurate historical detail relating to setting (geography, customs, beliefs, culture, society, habits) as well as to characters and events.

- 2) The mood of Historical novels runs the gamut from rollicking to somber, and this tone may be a major, if unacknowledged factor in reading choices.
- 3) Story lines may focus on a particular historical event or time period, or they may follow the life of a character (real or fictional). Novels may raise difficult social or moral issues through the plot.
- 4) Characters may be real or fictional, but they are portrayed in such a way that they fit the times. Their lives and actions are shaped by the historical times and details, not vice versa.
- 5) Historical novels are usually big books, with stories that unfold at a leisurely pace. Even shorter Historical novels are usually so densely written that they must be read slowly.
- 6) Language and style may affect a reader's experience. Some readers appreciate an "authentic" style, while others find this distracting. Dialects and formats also affect reader reaction. (Saricks, 2009, p. 292)

As these characteristics show, works of historical fiction can be very different from one another and will not all appeal to every historical fiction reader, but there are characteristics, such as the importance of accurate world-building, that make it possible to identify historical fiction and distinguish it from other genres.

History of the Genre

The historical novel has long enjoyed popularity. Although Sir Walter Scott's *Waverly* is generally considered to be the first true historical fiction novel, the genre became increasingly popular throughout the nineteenth century, as shown by many of the books that we consider to be classics today, such as Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (Johnson, 2009, p. 2). In addition, throughout the nineteenth century, the division between history and historical fiction increased. Historical fiction took on the role of making history a fun and interesting way to explore the past, often through focusing on seemingly minor events in the historical period, whereas the academic field of history focused on the major historical facts (de Groot, 2010, p. 33-38). This trend continued into the twentieth century, as the historical novel began to be seen by some as an

opportunity to provide educational value to people in an interesting way rather than having them read facts out of a history book (de Groot, 2010, p. 47-48). In the 1960s, genre categorization of books became more common and, with the advent of the mass market paperback, a much larger group of readers for genre fiction could be reached. These developments helped to cement the historical novel's place in the realm of popular fiction (Wallace, 2005, p. 126-128). The genre's popularity increased throughout the twentieth century and, starting in the 1990s, works of historical fiction began receiving a large amount of critical acclaim, which led to even greater recognition for the genre by readers. As shown by recent popular movies, TV shows, and novels, the cultural obsession with the past has continued to grow and now *Booklist* even dedicates its April 15 issue every year to historical fiction due to the genre's popularity (Johnson, 2009, p. 3).

Criticisms of Historical Fiction

Although historical fiction clearly has a long tradition of popularity, it has often been criticized as being a lower form of literature. "In both 'history' and 'literature', the historical novel has always been regarded as a hybrid, even a 'bastard' form, as well as being vulgar because it is a 'popular' genre..." (Wallace, 2005, p. 3). Much of the literature on the development of the historical novel names Sir Walter Scott as the father of the genre, but in *The Great Tradition*, F.R. Leavis derides Scott as an author who does not deserve to be included in the ranks of the great English novelists.

Scott was primarily a kind of inspired folk-lorist, qualified to have done in fiction something analogous to the ballad-opera...the heroics of the historical novels can no longer command respect. He was a great and very intelligent man; but, not having the creative writer's interest in literature, he made no serious attempt to

work out his own form and break away from the bad tradition of the eighteenth-century romance...Out of Scott a bad tradition came. (Leavis, 1954, p. 14-15 n. 5)

Contributing to the reputation of the historical novel as being a lower form of literature, throughout the nineteenth century historical fiction was often referred to as historical romance, differentiating it from the high-class realist novel (de Groot, 2010, p. 6). The reputation that historical fiction gained as a romanticized view of history led to it being seen as a genre that was not based on credible historical facts and one of the main criticisms of the genre was that the masses were being fed inaccurate history (de Groot, 2010, p. 5-6). Although the genre's popularity increased throughout the twentieth century, this actually contributed to its reputation for being inferior in quality since the market was so flooded by it. "Either these novels were bad history – costume dramas, in which modern-day characters were dressed up and paraded around in period garb – or bad fiction, in which the author crammed in so much research that it overwhelmed the plot" (Johnson, 2009, p. 2). In fact, in the 1990s, when these books began to be recognized and awarded, many authors maintained that they were literary fiction authors, not historical fiction writers, because they did not want to be associated with an inferior genre (Johnson, 2009, p. 3). Even now with the great popularity of female-centered historical fiction, in comparison to other popular genres that often focus on women, there has been little written about it in professional criticism, showing that historical fiction is a genre whose critical value is continuing to be overlooked (Wallace, 2005, p. 8).

A New View of History

The plots of historical fiction books have traditionally been based around politics and war and include predominantly male characters, which has led to historical fiction portraying a very one-sided view of history (Cooper and Short, 2012, p. 2-3). Since history was mostly written by and about men, it has become clear that recorded history in itself is simply a version of history, not absolute truth. Marginalized groups, such as minorities and women, are often not mentioned at all in the historical record, making it easy to leave them out of history all together.

Gender is only one of the aspects of truth in fictional lives, but it creates more than its share of complexities, beginning with the relative scarcity of specific information about real girls and young women...As subjects of historical research, women are more problematic than men, for in most times prior to our own, they appeared far less frequently than men in reference books and published records. (Hickman, 2001, p. 93)

In order to effectively portray women's histories, historical fiction novelists have had to become much more creative with the sources that they use. "The problem comes not in naming truth as a standard but in attempting to define it in practice, a task that requires the piecing together of many perspectives and a great deal of material from disparate sources" (Hickman, 2001, p. 92). Even if women are mentioned in the historical record, the sources may be biased and should not be taken as absolute truth. As Cooper and Short state, "Any consideration of the 'real' historical female figure must acknowledge the contested nature of narratives surrounding her, as it is she who has been manipulated by male-authored and/or patriarchal accounts of history" (Cooper and Short, 2012, p. 5). Both historians and specifically historical fiction novelists have come to realize that history is not objective and therefore historical accuracy itself is impossible, so they have become freer in using their own subjective understanding of women and women's issues to write this new female-centered historical fiction.

Thus, women writers in particular have risen to the challenge of a changing, postmodern understanding of the nature of history, the historical process and the (in)validity of any individual account's claims to accuracy or, ultimately, objective truth. This has made the possibilities of resurrecting, altering and (re)imagining women's historical lives greater, and has also provided a seemingly more secure future for the genre itself. (Heilmann and Llewellyn, 2007, p. 3)

In addition to the issues inherent in a historical record that is male-centered, another question related to historical fiction is whether the issue of presentism should be considered. Presentism is defined as “a bias towards the present or present-day attitudes, esp. in the interpretation of history” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2007). Although it is clear why this could be considered harmful in strictly historical works, as it could distort the historical facts that are available, works of historical fiction are open to a looser interpretation of history simply because they do not purport to be historical fact. Although historical fiction can be judged on its relation to historical truth, as Hodgkin states, this may be a problematic standard.

What kinds of accuracy or authenticity can the historical novel provide? Should it even try to provide any? If history is itself discursive, textual, fragmentary and uncertain, and, like fiction, driven in unrecognized ways by our own individual and cultural preoccupations and desires...then to set up the debate on the presumption that history is true and fiction must obey its rules would be naïve in relation to both. (Hodgkin, 2007, p. 16).

In addition, this may not be something that readers of these novels are very concerned with in contemporary historical fiction novels. Although accurate world-building is an important aspect of historical fiction, the accurate descriptions of real or fictional characters may no longer be so important to many readers of the genre.

Readers and audiences no longer expect to find a verifiable – or, occasionally, a recognizable – history within these narratives. No longer discouraged by the question of historical accuracy and attention to detail which fascinated more conservative critics and authors, contemporary readers are able to suspend their disbelief, and seem unconcerned as to whether the narratives they consume are factual or fictional. (Cooper and Short, 2012, p. 5).

In fact, specific historical moments are often picked by historical fiction novelists because they provide a societal backdrop that has analogous values or problems to the present day. This allows the novelist to comment on current societal issues from a seemingly distant historical time (Hodgkin, 2007, p. 15). This “dual temporal dimension” (Cooper and Short, 2012, p. 7) is a unique feature of historical fiction that pairs well with the new interest in telling female histories in that it allows historical fiction authors to explore contemporary women’s issues in the safe space of a historical period.

Feminism in Historical Fiction

This popular trend of re-claiming female history has led to a large number of historical fiction novels being written specifically for female audiences by portraying female protagonists. In fact, this trend of portraying female characters in historical fiction has led many publishers to re-issue older titles that were out of print (Johnson, 2009, p. 8). For instance, historical fiction novels written in the 1960s were among the first to begin to portray marginalized feminine histories. These novels portray how these characters’ personal lives were affected by the public events and forces surrounding them, which is also a reflection of the societal changes that began to take place during the 1960s (Wallace, 2005, p. 129-132). Authors of this period, such as the prolific Jean Plaidy, helped to portray contemporary women’s issues in fiction by using historical settings.

Despite their conservatism, Plaidy’s texts offer the historical evidence of women’s oppression across history. They suggest an implicit argument for many of the reforms for which second-wave feminists were to struggle: control of their own bodies, the right to sexual fulfilment, easier divorce and the right to retain their children, access to abortion and so on. (Wallace, 2005, p. 137)

This interest in social history involving women's and minority studies became very popular in both academic circles and literature during the 1970s and has continued into the present, which has led to an explosion of historical novels that provide new points of view from people who may have been marginalized in the written historical record. Not only are women featured in these books, but they are portrayed as strong protagonists who appeal to modern female readers (Johnson, 2009, p. 5-6). Although these novels are often very different from one another in time period and geographical setting, "What links together these often very disparate novels is their use of a historical setting in order to explore issues of gender, and a desire to rewrite history from a point of view that centralises women's concerns" (Wallace, 2005, p. 5).

In addition, to simply portraying female protagonists, however, these historical fiction novels also explore women's issues in society, such as female sexuality. The 1960s were an important era for the portrayal of women's sexuality in historical fiction because of the sexual liberation that occurred during this decade (Wallace, 2005, p. 7). This trend continues into the present as there has been a continued genre blending of romance and historical fiction (Johnson, 2009, p. 7). However, many contemporary historical novels give women much more sexual agency than they would have actually had in a historical period, thus portraying a more empowered female figure and giving history a feminist twist. In addition, not only is sexuality explored in relation to heterosexuality, but homosexuality and lesbianism are also explored in historical fiction novels, such as *Life Mask* by Emma Donoghue. This novel portrays the life of Anne Damer, a relative of Horace Walpole, and how her sexuality affected her relationships with the people around her (Cooper and Short, 2012, p. 134).

In situating their commentaries on contemporary sexual politics within a historical period, writers effectively distance themselves (and their readers) from the types of sexual behaviour or gender politics they wish to explore, allowing them more freedom to depict and to interrogate the socio-sexual norms and practices of the present. (Cooper and Short, 2012, p. 10)

The point of much of the contemporary historical fiction featuring female protagonists is not necessarily to tell accurate history, but to portray a female version of history that includes issues that are inherently feminine. Important current feminist issues such as sexuality and abortion are found in these historical fiction novels as society “projects its own ideas of empowerment and female agency” (Cooper and Short, 2012, p. 10) onto these female protagonists. “In so doing, these narratives effectively manipulate an account of the past in order to interrogate the gender politics of the present in a way which would perhaps not be acceptable in a contemporary setting” (Cooper and Short, 2012, p. 10). It is true that a feminist re-telling of history may not be any more accurate than the traditional male-centered view of history, but, if these novels are successfully using a historical setting to comment on current feminist issues, the accuracy of history is not the aim. The goals of these new contemporary historical fictions are to allow women to relate to their own history and to explore issues that women are currently dealing with today by relegating them to a comfortably distant historical space.

The Appeal of Tudor England

Research suggests that women and men read historical fiction differently and look for different appeal factors. Women often choose to read historical fiction based on the time period or historical characters portrayed in the novels whereas men tend to read books about fictional characters that have a series of adventures (de Groot, 2010, p. 51).

This trend is shown by the great popularity with women audiences of historical fiction novels with female protagonists set in Tudor England. The appeal of the Tudor period in historical fiction for women is likely related to the sheer number of powerful women in it, such as Anne Boleyn, Queen Elizabeth I, and Mary, Queen of Scots just to name a few. “Advancement, achievement, public power, and private satisfaction: these are women who have it all...” (Light, 1989, p. 61). These women and the influence that they had on history send a powerful feminist message to female readers.

Other feminist themes also abound in these novels. For instance, marriage is often characterized as being similar to a prison, while having children and families is shown to be more problematic than positive. Sexual desire in women is often celebrated and the combination of both sexual and public power allows these characters to deal with conflicts that are usually only brought up in novels with male protagonists (Light, 1989, p. 63-66). In addition to simply being fascinating, the lives of royal women and aristocrats, although still under-recorded in comparison with men, are portrayed in the written record in much more depth than the lives of common women of any historical period (Hull, 1996, p. 21). As public figures, the intricacies of these women’s lives are much better known, thus providing useful background material for historical fiction novelists.

One of the most famous and frequently documented characters in historical fiction is Anne Boleyn and she is a perfect example of why the portrayal of these characters is so popular. The enduring appeal of Anne’s story is clear:

Anne’s life was not just an important historical event. It was also the stuff of juicy tabloid stories. While we like to think of ourselves as above all that, the fact is that her story pushes all the right buttons. It has sex, adultery, pregnancy,

scandal, divorce, royalty, glitterati, religious quarrels, and larger-than-life personalities. (Goodman, 2005)

Anne is the perfect subject for the trend of revisionist female histories in that it is easy for authors to explore the various facets of her life and character and to assert her innocence even though she was actually found guilty and beheaded of adultery, incest, and witchcraft (de Groot, 2010, p. 70-71).

Her story is attractive and well known, but it is about dissenting from and challenging the dominant cultural norms; her example is that of the woman who created herself and, for a brief time, through her brilliance and her beauty and her will, maintained herself in a society in which quasi-independent female empowerment and political agency were relatively unknown. (de Groot, 2010, p. 73)

Anne Boleyn and the Tudor women have become even more popular now in the twenty-first century when a strong female protagonist in historical fiction written for female audiences has become such a strong trend.

The Importance of These Historical Fiction Novels

This new focus on female-centered history and historical fiction has created a new space for women in popular fiction. Historical fiction novels have provided an avenue for women to explore their own history and to understand their role in current society.

The focus within them is entirely upon individuals, but especially upon femininities, upon women's lives and loves, their families and their feelings. What the novels manage is to give the concerns of the so-called private sphere the status and interest of history... (Light, 1989, p. 59)

This is why it is important to study the portrayal of these female protagonists in historical fiction and how these portrayals may have changed over time. If these novels serve as a way for women to explore their own roles in current society, then these female

protagonists need to be portrayed in a way that is beneficial and respectful to women, not described in a way that just adheres to traditional female stereotypes.

At best popular historical novels may have helped open up a space within which different groups of women have started to perceive how marginal their needs and concerns have usually been taken to be. They offer a number of new perspectives on the past, which sit less easily alongside text-book history... (Light, 1989, p. 70)

Through comparing historical fiction novels from the 1960s, when second wave feminism was still just beginning, to historical fiction novels written fifty years later, when so much progress is claimed to have been made, this study will explore whether the characterization of female protagonists in these novels continue to reflect traditional stereotypical views of women.

Methodology

To perform this study, I compared five works of historical fiction from the periods 1960-1970 and 2000-2010 respectively. These decades were chosen because they represent both the advent of the second wave of feminism and the present day, fifty years later, when progress in culturally representing women has hopefully been made (Gamble, 2000, p. 310). To make my analysis more focused, I also chose to concentrate on one specific time period setting for my historical fiction novels. Tudor England is a period that included many powerful royal women and, since common women are often left out of the details of history, this is a prime period in which to write historical fiction with female protagonists. As Wallace states,

Given the frequent lack of recorded information about women's lives, it is not surprising that royal women, whose lives are a matter of record (however partial), have been the focus of such interest. This fascination is further based on the confluence of public and private history in their lives, and on the possibility of female power. (Wallace, 2005, p. 18-19)

This fascination has been enduring into the present, with characters such as Anne Boleyn continuing to intrigue readers today (Goodman, 2005).

In order to analyze these novels, I performed latent content analysis. Babbie defines content analysis as “the study of recorded human communications, such as books, websites, paintings, and laws” (Babbie, 2013, p. 550). In addition, latent content analysis differs from manifest content analysis in that it is the process of looking at “the underlying meaning of communication” (Babbie, 2013, p. 554) as opposed to “the concrete terms” (Babbie, 2013, p. 554) used in communications. Thus, rather than

counting specific instances of occurrences, I analyzed the books holistically to assess how the heroines are portrayed.

I chose my books using purposive sampling to find books that met my criteria. I chose books in the genre of historical fiction written for an adult audience that are set in Tudor England, have a main female protagonist, and were written between 1960-1970 and 2000-2010. The main female character could be either real or fictional and any narration style was acceptable. Although I did not specifically limit books to those written about royal women, all of the books selected do portray women in a royal setting. I excluded books that included time travel or that were specifically labeled as historical romance, since female characters are likely to be portrayed differently in a romance than in general historical fiction. In addition, I limited my selection so that I only had one book per author, since authors typically portray their characters in similar manners across books. Although I did not specifically limit my sample to books that were written by female authors, all ten of my selected titles were written by women. Since many of the books portray real historical figures, I also limited my books so that only one book written between 1960 and 1970 and one written between 2000 and 2010 dealt with a specific person since a character might be portrayed very similarly across books. In the case of books that are part of a series, I selected the book that was written first in the series. If the book that was written first did not fit within my time period, I excluded the series. Using all of these criteria, I chose five books from 1960-1970 and five from 2000-2010 to compare with one another.

In order to find my books, I used several sources. To find books that met my criteria that were written in the 1960s, I used *World Historical Fiction: An Annotated*

Guide to Novels for Adults and Young Adults and *World Historical Fiction Guide: An Annotated Chronological, Geographical, and Topical List of Selected Historical Novels*.

Both of these guides to the genre organize books by their setting in geography and time period. I then perused the lists for Tudor England, marking down any books published from 1960-1970. Then, through reading the brief annotation given as well as looking the books up on NoveList and Amazon, I assessed whether the focus of the book is a main female character. I then selected my books from those that met all of these criteria and that are still currently in print. To select my books written from 2000-2010, I relied on *Historical Fiction II: A Guide to the Genre*, which provided me with a list of core authors who have written a significant number of works set in Tudor England and a recommended list of traditional historical novels set in Tudor England. Using the list of authors, I searched NoveList to see if any of these authors had written works that would fit my criteria. I also used the Advanced Search option in NoveList to search for the genre Historical fiction for books written from January 2000 – December 2010 for an adult audience that are set in 16th century Great Britain. By looking at the summaries provided by both NoveList and Amazon, I chose the rest of my books from this generated list. Based on all of these considerations, the ten books that I chose are as follows:

- *All the Queen's Men*, Evelyn Anthony (1960)
- *All the Queen's Players*, Jane Feather (2010)
- *The Concubine*, Norah Lofts (1963)
- *Innocent Traitor*, Alison Weir (2007)
- *Katharine, the Virgin Widow*, Jean Plaidy (1961)
- *Lady Rich: A Novel of Penelope Devereux at the Court of Queen Elizabeth*, Elizabeth Boatwright Coker (1963)
- *The Last Wife of Henry VIII*, Carolly Erickson (2006)
- *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Philippa Gregory (2001)
- *The Queen's Governess*, Karen Harper (2010)
- *The Reluctant Queen*, Molly Costain Haycraft (1962)

In order to analyze the female characters in the historical fiction novels that I chose, I divided what I was looking for in the storyline and characterization of the characters into four categories. First, I analyzed the characterization of the books' main female characters to see if they are portrayed using traditional female stereotypes. In order to look for specific female stereotypical characterization, I used Evans and Davies' modified version of the Bem Sex Role Inventory, a scale used to measure the masculinity or femininity of a person (Bem, 1974). In order to use the traits listed in the Bem Sex Role Inventory for content analysis of children's textbooks, Evans and Davies created a new instrument that provided operational definitions for eight distinctly masculine and feminine traits (Evans and Davies, 2000, p. 260). The feminine traits and their operational definitions that I used to determine if the main female characters in the historical fiction novels are portrayed as stereotypically feminine are as follows:

- **Affectionate:** Openly expressing warm feelings; hugging, touching, holding
- **Emotionally expressive:** Allowing feelings to show, including temper tantrums, crying, or laughing
- **Impetuous:** Quick to act without thinking of the consequences; impulsive
- **Nurturing:** Actively caring and aiding another's development, be it physically or emotionally
- **Panicky:** Reacting to situation with hysteria; crying, shouting, running
- **Passive:** Following another's lead and not being active in a situation
- **Tender:** Handling someone with gentle sensitivity and consideration
- **Understanding:** Being able to see and comprehend a situation from another person's perspective; showing empathy (Evans and Davies, 2000, p. 261)

The other three categories that I assessed are outlined in *The Female Figure in Contemporary Historical Fiction*, which discusses how women's portrayal in historical fiction has changed in recent years, specifically in the context of feminism. The main areas that the introduction to this work discusses are romantic relationships, sexuality, and women's agency (Cooper and Short, 2012, p. 1-18). These three categories guided

the questions I asked as I performed my content analysis of the historical fiction novels I chose.

- Romantic relationships
 - Is there one?
 - Is it a main focus of the novel?
 - Does the female protagonist need a man to be happy?
 - Does the female protagonist's romantic partner behave violently toward her?
- Sexuality
 - Does the novel explore the female view of sexuality and celebrate it?
 - Are there any references to lesbianism in the novels?
 - Is abortion mentioned in the novel and, if so, how is it portrayed?
- Women's agency
 - Do women have the ability to make their own decisions?
 - How dependent is the female protagonist on men in order to function socially, financially, and to keep power?
 - Do the women characters have any type of career? If so, is it fulfilling and does it require special skills?
 - Are women pressured to accept traditional female roles?

Analysis

After reading all ten novels, I analyzed each book for the presence or absence of the characteristics listed above. Although the female protagonists ranged from queens to courtiers to governesses to spies, many of them were remarkably similar in their characterizations to those in the other books of either decade.

Stereotypical Female Characterization

While reading these novels, I analyzed each book holistically to assess whether the characters were being portrayed overall using stereotypical female characteristics. I then made a note of instances in which the main female protagonist portrayed one of the stereotypical female characteristics as defined in Evans and Davies' study. Table 1, presented on the next page, gives the results and divides the ten books by decade. An X indicates that, holistically, the character portrays these traits.

Table 1
Presence of Stereotypical Female Characteristics

	Affectionate	Emotionally expressive	Impetuous	Nurturing	Panicky	Passive	Tender	Understanding
1960s								
All the Queen's Men	X	X						X
Katharine, the Virgin Widow						X	X	X
Lady Rich	X	X	X		X			
The Concubine	X	X	X		X			
The Reluctant Queen	X	X	X		X		X	
2000s								
All the Queen's Players	X	X	X					X
Innocent Traitor		X	X			X		X
The Last Wife of Henry VIII	X	X	X	X			X	X
The Other Boleyn Girl	X	X	X	X		X	X	
The Queen's Governess	X	X	X	X			X	X

As shown by this chart, historical fiction novels from both the 1960s and the 2000s portray women using stereotypical female characteristics. In fact, more stereotypical traits are present in books published in the 2000s, with twenty-six occurrences, than in books published in the 1960s, with only nineteen. This is very interesting because, with the growth of feminism, it would have seemed logical that authors would have been more progressive in their portrayals of women in the later published books.

One of the interesting pieces of information to draw from this chart is that none of the books from the 2000s portray their female protagonists as being panicky. Thus, it seems that the idea of women being overcome by hysteria is now an old-fashioned idea that is not being perpetuated in historical fiction. In addition, the nurturing characteristic was only found in books published in the 2000s and more of these female protagonists

were also characterized as being tender and understanding. In particular, *All the Queen's Players* (2010) makes an effort to show how Rosamund has developed empathy for Mary, Queen of Scots and how she begins to deplore her cousin's spy activities which lead to Mary's death (Feather, 2010, p. 354-355). This trend is interesting because it shows that these more recently published books tend to portray their female protagonists more often as sympathetic figures rather than as grasping courtiers.

However, almost all of the books from both the 1960s and the 2000s portray their female protagonists as being affectionate and emotionally expressive. This is not surprising as almost all of the books involve a romantic relationship. Thus, in these books, being affectionate is not portrayed as a strongly stereotypically feminine trait, but more as a necessity for the plot of the book. Being emotionally expressive is also related to these heroines' impetuous natures. All of the books from the 2000s portray their heroines as impetuous and three out of the five books from the 1960s do so as well. Although this is listed as a stereotypically feminine trait, the impetuous actions of these women are often the only way to assert their agency against the more powerful people in their lives. For instance, in *Innocent Traitor* (2007), Jane Grey's verbal outburst against her parents is the only way she has of attempting to shape her own destiny when her parents inform her that she is to marry Guilford Dudley.

For years I have bent the knee, and often my back, to my parents' will, but this is the proverbial last straw, and all the pent-up anger at years of abuse and humiliation now bubbles to the surface. I will not let them do this thing to me – I will fight them until I have no breath left in my body. 'Good Protestant stock?' I repeat, registering their appalled expressions. 'Traitor's stock, you mean. Northumberland's father was sent to the block by Henry VIII, or have you forgotten that? And I dare say that, if all were known, he himself would deserve the same. Look how he treated the Duke of Somerset! I marvel that you can contemplate giving your daughter to the son of such a self-seeking, opportunistic tyrant!' (Weir, 2007, p. 260)

Although this outburst does not do her any good, Jane does at least get to assert her opinion on the match.

Although all of the female protagonists in these novels are generally subservient to men in some way, only two of the novels analyzed portray these women as truly passive characters. All of the other female protagonists are constantly attempting to assert what control they have over their lives and make the most of their opportunities. While they may bow to the will of the more powerful men around them, it is not because they are passive creatures, but because they have no choice in the matter.

Romantic Relationships

The presence of a romantic relationship in the life of the female protagonist is evident in eight of the ten novels that were analyzed. The only exceptions were *Katherine, the Virgin Widow* (1961) and *Innocent Traitor* (2007). In the case of Katherine of Aragon, she has an arranged marriage to Arthur, the eldest son of King Henry VII, but after he dies she is left alone and ultimately neglected in England while the English and Spanish sovereigns decide what to do with her. Although she and her future husband King Henry VIII are attracted to one another and eventually marry, their romantic relationship is not explicitly portrayed in the novel. In *Innocent Traitor* (2007), Jane Grey has no real desire to marry and the only relationship she has with a man is with her abusive husband.

Despite the fact that most of the novels portray a romantic relationship, only two of the novels analyzed use these romantic relationships as the main focus of the novel.

The Reluctant Queen (1962) follows the development of the romantic relationship

between Henry VIII's sister, Mary Tudor, and Charles Brandon, the Duke of Suffolk. The king forbids their union, as he has grander plans for his sister, and she is sent to France to marry the aging French king, Louis XII. However, once the king dies, Mary takes her life into her own hands and weds Charles Brandon without her brother's permission. The novel ends with the happy union of this couple. In *Lady Rich* (1963), although Penelope Devereux is married to Lord Rich and has a flirtatious romantic relationship with Philip Sidney, it is clear throughout the novel that her true love is Charles Blount, future Baron of Mountjoy. The novel follows these characters as they grow up, are thwarted in love, commence a public affair, and are finally married. The novel ends when Mountjoy dies, signaling the importance of this romantic relationship to the novel itself.

Although these novels all portray strong female protagonists, almost all of the books analyzed show them finding their one true love or being dependent on the attention of men to satisfy and complete them. As Mary states in *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2001):

...I suddenly realized that George was wrong, and my family was wrong, and that I had been wrong – for all my life. I was not a Howard before anything else. Before anything else I was a woman who was capable of passion and who had a great need and a great desire for love. I didn't want the rewards for which Anne had surrendered her youth. I didn't want the arid glamour of George's life. I wanted the heat and the sweat and the passion of a man that I could love and trust. And I wanted to give myself to him: not for advantage, but for desire. (Gregory, 2001, p. 443)

Thus, her independence comes from her need for a man, William Stafford. As stated above, both Mary Tudor in *The Reluctant Queen* (1962) and Penelope Devereux in *Lady Rich* (1963) are not entirely happy until they are finally able to marry their one true love. In *All the Queen's Players* (2010), Rosamund falls deeply in love with Will Creighton and is devastated when he is murdered. Her only source of peace comes from marrying

another man, being taken care of, and having children of her own (Feather, 2010, p. 379). Catherine Parr in *The Last Wife of Henry VIII* (2006) risks public scrutiny for her marriage to the man she loves and Kat in *The Queen's Governess* (2010) is only able to begin to reconcile her harsh feelings toward men when she marries John Ashley. In *All the Queen's Men* (1960), Queen Elizabeth I never marries a man, but she needs the constant attention of men in order to feel that she is a desirable woman, while Anne Boleyn in *The Concubine* (1963) begins her quest for power as revenge for being forbidden to marry Henry Percy (Lofts, 1963, p. 69). Thus, although these romantic relationships may not be the main focus of the novel, men are still central to these women's worlds, and they need them to be truly happy or get what they want out of life.

Explicit violence towards women is portrayed in three of the novels: *The Queen's Governess* (2010), *Innocent Traitor* (2007), and *Lady Rich* (1963). In *The Queen's Governess*, Kat Ashley is raped by Thomas Seymour, a man with whom she had enjoyed some romantic dalliances, at the coronation banquet for Anne Boleyn. For the rest of the book, Kat feels very distrustful of men. "Ruined – my virginity, my hopes of a future with Tom, mayhap for any husband. Ruined. More than ever, my trust of men lay in tatters" (Harper, 2010, p. 92). In *Innocent Traitor* (2007) and *Lady Rich* (1963), both of the female protagonists are physically assaulted by their husbands. In *Innocent Traitor* (2007), Jane is married against her will to Guilford Dudley, who has vicious sexual appetites. Her rape on her wedding night is portrayed in horrifying detail.

Then he mounts me, heaving himself on top of me and violently forcing his penis into me. Deeper and deeper he thrusts, and the pain is terrible, sharp and stabbing. I would be screaming, but he has rammed his lips close on mine, and I can only whimper and squeal, squirming beneath him, almost suffocating, praying for him to stop. But he is jerking against me, slamming into me faster and faster, hurting me savagely, yet intent only on his own pleasure. (Weir, 2007, p. 277)

In the case of Penelope Devereux in *Lady Rich* (1963), she is forced to marry the abusive Lord Rich and both her physical and emotional distress is conveyed in the novel. When her mother comes to visit her after her marriage, she finds Penelope severely depressed, and “Her indignant expression changed when she saw the welts and bruises along my legs and arms, my chest, my throat, my left cheek” (Coker, 1963, p. 126). Although Penelope’s mother Lettice gives her advice on how to deal with her husband’s sexual appetites, Penelope is violently assaulted once again after her husband becomes angry with her for publicly flaunting her affair with Mountjoy. In this instance, Penelope is so injured that her male relatives forbid her husband from ever approaching her sexually again or he will lose their favor at court. However, Penelope’s emotional damage is again extreme, as she is described as “silent and hollow-frozen as a corpse woman...nothing intruded my life to comfort me, not even my own shadow” (Coker, 1963, p. 221).

Sexuality

Although female sexuality and the enjoyment of sex from the female perspective is generally portrayed as being subservient to the role of sex in bearing children, several of the novels do portray female sexuality in a positive light. However, although *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2001) and *All the Queen’s Players* (2010) do make reference to homosexual relations between men, none of the novels analyzed reference lesbianism.

In *The Queen’s Governess* (2010), Kat Ashley has a very positive sexual experience on her wedding night.

That night, for the first time in my life, I surrendered myself to someone else, without worry, without qualms. I had struggled to be strong for so long, but now here was someone to trust and love, someone to tend me as I did him...he knew the ways to pleasure a woman...He evoked a passion in me I had never fathomed and foolishly thought I could control...Everything was hot and wonderful, and I wanted more. (Harper, 2010, p.164-165)

When Penelope Devereux first has sex with her true love, Mountjoy, in *Lady Rich* (1963), it is an escape from the cruel sexual appetites of her husband.

I was young and I had faith in myself and my star...I had a stupendous sense of my life just beginning full and flush and all the doors opening and pure love spreading its wings in me. And we lay the day long in each other's arms, our love complete, again and again possessed of each other. Such was my joy." (Coker, 1963, p. 189)

In *The Last Wife of Henry VIII* (2006), Catherine Parr indulges her sexual urges in an affair with Tom Seymour while she is still married to the elderly Lord Latimer.

And when we lay, flesh to flesh and heart to beating heart, in the soft silken bed I was carried higher, deeper, further into realms of passion I had never before imagined...The merest touch of Tom's hand brought my body alive, the merest word he spoke, softly and lovingly, quickened all my senses and sent shafts of fire along my nerves. (Erickson, 2006, p. 139)

Although the marriage between Mary Boleyn and William Carey in *The Other Boleyn Girl* is interrupted by her affair with King Henry VIII, once the king loses interest in her, William begins to win Mary back through tender and thoughtful sexual liaisons.

Then he would take me in his arms and say delightfully, promisingly: 'We only have a moment, my love, only an hour at the most: so this shall be all for you.' He would lie me on the bed, unlace my tight stomacher, caress my breasts, stroke my belly, and pleasure me in every way he could think of until I cried out in joy..." (Gregory, 2001, p. 292)

Although other books do portray female sexuality in a positive light, this is the only book that specifically states that the woman is in control of the sexual relationship. However, later when she marries her true love, William Stafford, Mary begins to truly enjoy her sexual experiences.

I had never before lain with a man who had loved me completely, for myself, and it was a dizzy experience. I had never lain with a man whose touch I adored without any need to hide my adoration, or exaggerate it, or adjust it at all. I simply loved him as if he were my one and only lover, and he loved me too with the same simplicity of appetite and desire which made me wonder what I thought I had been doing all those years when I had been dealing in the false coin of vanity and lust. (Gregory, 2001, p. 460)

In *All the Queen's Players* (2010), Rosamund shows how sexually liberated she feels after first sleeping with Will Creighton.

She must be wicked and destined for hell, but those dreamlike moments in the straw had brought her nothing but pleasure. How could she regret the feel of his body on hers, *in* hers. The scent of his skin, still in her nostrils, the taste of his tongue, the astounding moment when she felt she had hovered on the brink of some exquisite sensation, and the moment when she had fallen from that brink. Rosamund could think only of how soon she could repeat those moments. (Feather, 2010, p. 201)

In addition, later in the novel, she is the one to create an illicit love nest for them in a cottage on the Scadbury property. Thus Rosamund embraces her sexual inclinations and takes the lead in this love affair.

Abortion is mentioned in two of the novels. In *Lady Rich* (1963), when Penelope finds out that she is pregnant with her husband's child, she openly describes her attempt to abort the pregnancy.

Livia helped me in every way to rid myself of Rich's child. But there was no helping me. Livia says I am too earthy and that nature will always save me from the evils of the herb pots and spells of even the most powerful doctors. (Coker, 1963, p. 147-148)

Thus, in this book, abortion is portrayed as a very normal activity. As Penelope is later portrayed as being very happy to bear her lover's children, it is clear that she is not against having children in general, but that she saw this pregnancy as a further tie binding her to the husband she hated. In *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2001), however, when Anne Boleyn is pregnant and she begins to miscarry, Mary is the character who argues for

saving the baby. Anne and George both want to allow the child to die since, by summoning a midwife, it would confirm Anne's pregnancy and show that she has failed to carry a child to term. Mary makes it very clear that she does not approve of abortion for any reason.

‘This is wrong,’ I said flatly to George. ‘This is a baby we are talking about here. We can’t let a baby die for fear of scandal...For God’s sake, George! This is a baby. This is a soul. This is our kith and kin. Of course we should save her if we can...If this is another Boleyn girl she has a right to live as much as Anne or me.’ (Gregory, 2001, p. 500)

This is interesting because rather than portraying a feminist pro-choice viewpoint, this female protagonist in one of the more recently written novels takes a very modern conservative view towards abortion and the sanctity of life.

Women’s Agency

Although many of the decisions in these female protagonists’ lives are made for them, several of these characters have enough agency to make some of their own decisions about their lives. However, this can often take some prompting, generally from romantic inclination. For instance, in the case of Mary in *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2001), it is her decision to marry William Stafford that propels her into leaving court and making her first independent decision about her life.

I was not nervous. For the first time ever I felt as if I had taken my life into my own hands and I could command my own destiny. For once I was obedient neither to uncle nor father nor king, but following my own desires. (Gregory, 2001, p. 445)

In another case, Mary Tudor in *The Reluctant Queen* (1962) only takes the step of marrying Charles Brandon after it becomes clear that her brother has broken their deal to allow her to marry the man of her choice after the death of the French king (Haycraft,

1962, p. 240). Catherine Parr in *The Last Wife of Henry VIII* (2006) is going to be forced into an undesirable marriage, so she approaches King Henry VIII to intercede for her. After that, she is able to marry the man that she chooses, but she is forever in King Henry VIII's debt (Erickson, 2006, p. 24). In *Lady Rich* (1963), Penelope defies social convention and has an open affair with Mountjoy, but she is still unable to obtain a legal divorce from her abusive husband because, ironically, a woman, Queen Elizabeth I, forbids it (Coker, 1963, p. 194-195).

Some of these protagonists, however, make decisions in their lives that affect more than just which man they will marry. In *Innocent Traitor* (2007), Jane Grey uses the only agency that she has throughout the entire novel to confirm her death sentence by refusing to convert to Catholicism (Weir, 2007, p. 389). In *All the Queen's Men* (1960), Queen Elizabeth I makes all of her own decisions, but this is because she is the queen and no one dares defy her. The throne provides her with unparalleled power in Tudor England. In *The Concubine* (1963), Anne Boleyn is portrayed as making the decision to ensnare King Henry VIII herself, thus promoting herself to great heights of power in the English court (Lofts, 1963, p. 69). She is perhaps the most powerful protagonist portrayed in any of the novels since she obtains her power by her own means, manipulating men rather than being ruled by them.

In nine of the ten novels analyzed, the female protagonists are extremely dependent on men in order to function socially and financially and to keep their power once they obtain it. This is shown most clearly in *Katharine, The Virgin Widow* (1961), as Katharine of Aragon is literally kept waiting throughout the entire novel while the powerful men in her life ponder how she can be most useful to them. In all of the other

novels, women are similarly governed by men. *Innocent Traitor* (2007), *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2001), *Lady Rich* (1963), and *The Reluctant Queen* (1962) all portray women whose actions are governed by their more powerful male relatives. In *The Queen's Governess* (2010) and *All the Queen's Players* (2010), both female protagonists are initially employed by men of the court, Thomas Cromwell and Francis Walsingham respectively, to be spies. Their presence at the court and their station in life is thus completely bound to these two men. In *The Concubine* (1963) and *The Last Wife of Henry VIII* (2006) both protagonists have more power than other women as queens of England, but they are still ultimately dependent on Henry VIII's pleasure to keep their power and even survive. The one truly independent female protagonist is Queen Elizabeth I in *All the Queen's Men* (1960). However, she only has this independence because she is the queen, and she still has to listen to her council of advisors, all of whom are men.

The only female protagonist who can be said to have any kind of career which involves special skills is Rosamund Walsingham in *All the Queen's Players* (2010). Rosamund has a rare gift for drawing and, because of this, is enlisted in the network of spies run by her cousin, Sir Francis Walsingham, Queen Elizabeth I's secretary of state. He sends her to court and asks her to draw any scene that involves the queen and send the drawings to him so that he can keep abreast of what is going on at court (Feather, 2010, p. 107). The other female protagonists are courtiers, queens, or governesses. Since none of these positions are ones that are earned purely based on merit or skill, but generally on birth alone, these do not qualify as careers for the purpose of this study.

Throughout these novels, the female protagonists are portrayed in traditional female roles. Two of the books, however, show the struggle that the female protagonists go through to try to resist this pressure. This is seen particularly clearly in *All the Queen's Men* (1960), which documents the first thirty years of Queen Elizabeth I's reign, as she is constantly under pressure from her ministers to marry and bear children, as it was not acceptable for a woman to rule alone and not provide an heir to the throne. As her chief advisor, William Cecil, states "'...when you *do* choose,' he persisted, 'and you must, madam – for your own safety and the safety of the realm you must have children to succeed you...'" (Anthony, 1960, p. 20), Elizabeth fires back a quick response:

'Content yourself my friend. I have no secrets from you. I have seen no one who moves me toward marriage. I doubt if such a man exists. We have talked about *when* I marry. It would be closer the truth to say *if*.' (Anthony, 1960, p. 21)

In *Innocent Traitor* (2007), Jane is deeply criticized by her mother and those around her for caring more about her studies than about making a desirable marriage and forwarding her family's interests. "...I've been told that...I must marry to bring honour and profit to our House...I'd prefer to be left alone with my books" (Weir, 2007, p. 63). While Queen Elizabeth I is able to defy the pressure of men around her because of her position as queen, Jane is forced to follow the dictates of her parents and the other powerful adults around her.

Conclusion

As shown through the aspects of female characterization that were analyzed, there has been little change in the portrayal of these female protagonists from the 1960s to the 2000s, despite the second wave feminism movement in the 1970s and the call to portray women more positively in literature (Gamble, 2000, p. 310). These books still use the same stereotypical feminine characteristics to describe their heroines as well as using many of the same tropes, such as the importance of a romantic relationship for a female character to be happy. After analyzing these ten historical fiction novels, it is clear that more progress needs to be made in the positive and progressive portrayal of female protagonists in historical fiction.

Although I analyzed five novels from the 1960s and five novels from the 2000s, there was very little difference in how female protagonists were portrayed. In fact, there were more stereotypically feminine characteristics applied to these characters in books published from the 2000s than from the 1960s. The two books with the female protagonists who have the least stereotypical characterizations are both from the 1960s: *All the Queen's Men* (1960) and *Katherine, the Virgin Widow* (1961).

The continued importance of romantic relationships for female protagonists is clear in novels from both the 1960s and the 2000s. Although there is one book from each decade that does not have a clear romantic relationship, *Katherine, the Virgin Widow* (1961) and *Innocent Traitor* (2007), the rest of the books include a romantic relationship, which in two books, *The Reluctant Queen* (1962) and *Lady Rich* (1963) is integral to the

plot. This trend does seem to be diminishing in books that are marketed as historical fiction rather than historical romance, as all of the novels from the 2000s did not include a romantic relationship that was necessary for the plot of the novel. In addition, in novels from both decades, a romantic relationship is necessary in order for the women to be truly happy and fulfilled in their lives. Explicit violence towards women is only portrayed in three of the novels, one from the 1960s and two from the 2000s. *Lady Rich* (1963) actually does the most detailed job of portraying both the physical and emotional trauma inflicted by rape while *Innocent Traitor* (2007) and *The Queen's Governess* (2010) focus more on the physical effects. Jane Grey in *Innocent Traitor* (2007) is the only heroine who stands up for herself in directly refusing to allow her husband into her bed after he rapes her on their wedding night, thus showing her to be a strong positive female role model (Weir, 2007, p. 323). In *The Queen's Governess* (2010), however, the rape helps to form Kat Ashley's opinions that all men are untrustworthy, an attitude that continues throughout the novel (Harper, 2010, p. 92). Although this book was published in the 2000s, this is not a very healthy way to view the world and it may be sending the wrong message about how to deal with rape to female readers.

The majority of the novels from both the 1960s and the 2000s portray the female view of sexuality and enjoyment of sexuality in a very positive light, so this did not change very much between the two decades. However, although homosexuality in men is alluded to in both *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2001) and in *All the Queen's Players* (2010), lesbianism is never mentioned in any of the ten novels. With the increasing societal importance placed on the acceptance of all sexual orientations, it is interesting that the contemporary novels, which are supposedly portraying more feminist revised histories,

do not include it. Abortion is mentioned in *Lady Rich* (1963) and in *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2001), but the more pro-abortion view is actually stated in *Lady Rich* (1963) whereas Mary Boleyn advocates a right to life position. This is another current societal issue that could be further explored in modern historical fiction and both viewpoints on the topic should be expressed if the presence of current societal issues is the new trend in contemporary historical fiction.

All of the women portrayed in these novels are dependent on men in order to function socially, financially, and to keep power. This is not very surprising since, given the fact that these books are portraying a historical time period, men did generally have control of women's lives. The female protagonists in the majority of the novels from both of these decades are able to make some decisions for themselves, but only by being prompted by a threat of some kind. The only female protagonists who can be said to truly make their own decisions are Jane Grey in *Innocent Traitor* (2007), Anne Boleyn in *The Concubine* (1963) and Queen Elizabeth I in *All the Queen's Men* (1960). Thus the number of independent women portrayed in these novels is actually greater in novels published in the 1960s. It would be ideal for future historical fiction novels to portray female protagonists attempting to make their own decisions in their daily lives because they want to control their lives rather than just in response to a threat.

The only woman who has a career and is hired for her skill is Rosamund in *All the Queen's Players* (2010). Although the absence of other characters with a profession like this could be due to the prevalence of historical fiction novels set in Tudor England that are based on the court atmosphere, this is still an area in which more female protagonists in historical fiction are needed. All of the women in these novels are pressured to accept

traditional female roles and it is only in *All the Queen's Men* (1960) that the female protagonist, Queen Elizabeth I, is ultimately able to rise above the wishes of her male advisors and ministers.

The importance of the representation of women in literature and culture was a strong tenet of the second wave feminist movement (Gamble, 2000, p. 310). However, it is clear that, at least in the realm of historical fiction, there are still many changes that need to be made. Although it is admirable that more stories with female protagonists are being told, the characterization of these female characters is equally important. If "...the project of rewriting the historical female figure and her liberation from the patriarchal discourse that has for so long dominated historical and cultural narratives forms part of the ongoing project of feminism" (Cooper and Short, 2012, p. 14), then historical fiction novels featuring female protagonists need to espouse these feminist ideals. These female characters need to be portrayed without the overwhelming use of stereotypical female characteristics, not have the focus of the novel be on a romantic relationship, further explore various kinds of female sexuality, and portray more women who challenge the status quo and use their agency. Although historical accuracy is important in order to make the work believable, historical fiction cannot truly be said to have a "dual temporal dimension" (Cooper and Short, 2012, p. 7) if the authors do not use this medium to address current female issues. Perhaps historical fiction has not become such a revisionist feminist version of history after all.

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