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**Anne Boleyn's Performance of Femininity: The Tudors**

Anne Boleyn by an unknown artist, oil on panel, late 16th century. NPG 668. Wikimedia.

A woman with a long neck, delicate mouth and with black and beautiful eyes; a pearl necklace with a golden B adorning her thin neck, a jewel that becomes a signature piece and a proud assertion of identity; sumptuous cloth fabrics, precious gems, gold: all part of a social spectacle, means to captivate the gaze. The details of the portrayed figure become allusive visual traces which evoke a conceptual frame for a reflection on the specific links between real and abstract sites of the performance of power which emphasise female appearance.

This image of a body conceived as a representation of beauty, clearly reveals how the ductile materiality of the female body has been modeled and given the possibility for a social intervention that finds its conceptualization in one of the constituent paradigms of Western society, which combines femininity and appearance, femininity and physical beauty, femininity and sexuality (Nahoum-Grappe 1993). This is a female body which was historically banished from the founding categories of politics for it was the bearer of that instinctual and animal immediacy which civil society absolutely denied and, conversely, admitted at the same time because of its generative power.

The opening image of *The Tudors* introduces a reflection on the ambiguous relationship between the body and political performance, which is further developed by the television series. Although devoted to Henry VIII, the series refers to the whole cultural universe of the Renaissance, an age which heralded symptoms of modernity.

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1 *The Tudors*, historical fiction television series created by Michael Hirst and produced for the American premium cable television channel *Showtime*. I will analyse season one which opens in 1509, the year of Henry VIII’s ascension, and season two (ten hour-long episodes) which concludes in 1536, on the day of the execution of Anne Boleyn.
(Carpi 1990) and was pervaded by deep fissures in society, religion and politics. Therefore, the TV series is like Ariadne's thread in as far as it unravels a narrative artfully and powerfully conceived over the centuries by the patriarchal system, in order to limit and abolish all the "later possibilities" of rebellion against the established order. The discourse on beauty, in fact, closely woven into the reflection on the body, is not only the analysis of a "natural" expression, biological and anatomical, but it is also, and above all, a symbolic construct, a fiction. A "discourse, whether verbal or visual, fictive or historical or speculative, is never unmediated, never free of interpretation, never innocent" (Suleiman 1986, 2).

According to Catherine Mackinnon, a characteristic trait of the cultural construction and the symbolic representation of the female body during the Renaissance is its lack of power and its reification:

> The substantive principle governing the authentic politics of women's personal lives is pervasive powerlessness to men, expressed and reconstituted daily as sexuality. To say that the personal is political means that gender as a division of power is discoverable and verifiable through women’s intimate experience of sexual objectification, which is definitive of and synonymous with women’s lives as gender female. Thus to feminism, the personal is epistemologically the political, and its epistemology is its politics. (Mackinnon 1982, 535)

Female pervasive powerlessness in the male world entailed the programmatic exclusion of women from any exercise of power, due to the intellectual, moral and psychic weakness intrinsic to their nature; men, instead, garbed with the power of the mind, of the logos and of rationality, were citizens entirely legitimized to define, and participate in, the political sphere.

If, in the feudal world, women of different social classes could enjoy a freedom of action that subsequently led to a recognition of legally codified rights, from the 14th century the female world was deprived of any margin of autonomy through specific customs and laws. In this period, a profound change in the way of conceiving politics – in which the notion of res publica gradually replaced the medieval concept of lineage and the king's authority replaced that of the lords – corresponded to a new formulation of the conception of "family" as the foundation of the "Modern State." The stability, balance and solidity of this institution, which substantiated the State, took on a new importance which was essential both to the private and the public sphere. At a legal level, this new awareness led to the introduction of legislative measures that could protect the family institution from the potential threats (irrationality, irresponsibility, inconstancy) arising from feminine nature. These measures imposed a programmatic subjection of women to male authority, confined the exercise of female power within the domestic sphere, and circumscribed the female legal identity to the roles of daughter, wife and widow.

As Daniela Carpi maintains in her analysis on the "woman question" in the Renaissance period, a strong discrepancy emerges between the moral treatises urging women to stick to typically medieval behavioural and ethical canons, with the application of the sexual "double standard," and the theatrical plays, which presented female figures of great expressive power, with articulated psychological nuances and overflowing personalities (Carpi 1990).

The TV series The Tudors graphically illustrates such discrepancy, reflecting and outlining the characteristics of the new woman (embodied by Anne Boleyn) and presenting, at the same time, evidence of the suspicion and horror with which this new
woman is observed. This series, however, is grounded in the awareness, critically enunciated by the historiographic methodology of "Presentism" (Grady and Hawkes 2007; Hawkes 2002; Hedlam Wells 2000; Streete 2008) that our understanding of the past is mediated and determined by the demands of the present and by the conscious needs of the cultural moment in which a specific historical period is "performed." The authors of this conscious attempt to rethink history underline the impossibility of evading the present:

And if it's always and only the present that makes the past speak, it speaks always and only to – and about – ourselves. It follows that the first duty of a creditable presentist criticism must be to acknowledge that the questions we ask of any literary text will inevitably be shaped by our own concerns, even when these include what we call 'the past.' (Grady and Hawkes 2007, 5)

Through his attempt to establish a conscious connection with a past that is necessarily shaped by contemporary concerns, Michael Hirst, the director of *The Tudors*, demands that his audience abandon the preconception that there can only be one account of Renaissance history, since any reading of the past is bound to be biased and filtered by the present.

As regards the creation of the setting, Michael Hirst filters his own and our reading of Renaissance history by re-creating the details of the period so as to propose, instead of the common stereotypes of the "golden age," a more multifaceted and anti-romantic image. Paintings, especially those by Caravaggio, are cited as inspiration, lighting is restricted on both set and location, and film stock is shot without filters (Bishop 2007). For all its splendour and sumptuousness, Hirst's version of the Henrician court becomes a dangerous and essentially unknown place. The director's choice is embraced by the historian Tracy Borman who both acknowledges the pervasive historical inaccuracy of the series, and identifies its defining trait in the capacity of "re-creating the drama and atmosphere of Henry VII's court, with its intrigues, scandals, and betrayals" (Hough 2009). This positive critical review is reinforced by John Guy who, in his role of prominent expert on Tudor England, asserts: "The Tudors conveys brilliantly the claustrophobic atmosphere of Henry's court; it's a place where back-watching is second-nature, plotting endemic [...]" (Fletcher 2008).

These reviews allow us to posit that, by following the critical view of presentism adopted by the director, Renaissance history can be turned into an ideological provocation to the present. By accepting this hypothesis, the historical inaccuracy of the series comes to underline the postmodern idea of history as necessarily unstable. Meanwhile, the insistence on scenes of violence metaphorically stands for the "violence" of the processes of historiography. In addition, as Ramona Wray (Wray 2011) highlights, the dominating physical presence of the Henrician figure – at the centre of *The Tudors* right from the opening credits – allows the viewers to become aware of a special connection between history making and bodily discourse and, thus, to read both – that is, body and history – as texts. In graphically representing the symbiotic relation between the historical process and the physical form, Hirst puts to postmodern use the Tudor concept of the body politic: in the frequent evocations of the breakdowns and collapses of Henry's body, he opens a gap between the king's 'actual' body and his performance of royalty. As viewers, we are led along a path of discovery of two different bodies (a material and a conceptual one) which metaphorically stand for an increasing separation between monarch and nation.
If Henry's body is seen as corrupting itself from within, Anne's body becomes a cipher for the shifting polarities between a conception of female beauty, which allows the construction of an individual destiny, and a definition of femininity imagined as constitutive of reality by social institutions and the policies of male prerogative.

Thanks to her ambition, her intelligence, and ability to exploit her beauty, Anne is able to take advantage of favourable situations and to achieve power; her authority is, however, always provisional and subject to objections. By describing beauty as a feminine mode of trying to impose a new alternative female language, *The Tudors* suggests a connotation of power that evokes Stephen Greenblatt's description of the essential characteristic of power as "the ability to impose one's fiction upon the world: the more outrageous the fiction, the more impressive the manifestation of power" (Greenblatt 2005, 13). In the filmic narration, the play between the deconstruction and re-contextualization of power becomes subtle and ambiguous, as the female protagonist is not able to renounce the paradoxical role assigned by the body politic's relationship to beauty (i.e. beauty as a tactical possibility of social intervention), but she is also aware that such beauty is a profound element of reification. Anne's female identity can, therefore, manifest itself through beauty, which, on the one hand, is a gift that integrates and legitimates other opportunities such as the attainment of patrimony and social rank, but, on the other hand, it specifies what femininity risks, by highlighting the link between physical presence and sexual identity.

Let us consider in this critical light the description of the first encounter between Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, which takes place, in the TV series, during Anne Boleyn's historical and public debut (see Ives 2005) in March 1522 during the court's Shrovetide festivities where she acted in an elaborated pageant known as "The Assault on the Château Vert." These pageants were quite widespread and appreciated in the Henrician court because they imitated the themes of the past chivalric age of King Arthur and the lost world of Camelot when courtly love was still honourable. In this specific case the theme of "The Assault on the Château Vert" was the cruelty of unrequited love.

Historical accounts report that, for the occasion, an elaborate castle had been constructed at York Palace, Wolsey's episcopal palace in Westminster. The castle was a decorative wooden construction with three towers, painted green and with battlements built with hundreds of pieces of green tinfoil. Musicians were hidden inside and, standing on the towers, there were eight damsels waiting to be rescued by the King and his brave knights. Masked and dressed in white and yellow satin with headdresses of gold, the damsels represented the eight chivalric Virtues (Beauty, Honor, Perseverance, Kindness, Constance, Bounty, Mercy, and Pity) and Anne prophetically acted the part of Perseverance. The Virtues were guarded by eight ladies representing vices or undesirable qualities. They were called: Danger, Disdain, Jealousy, Unkindness, Scorn, Malebouche, and Strangeness. The name of the eighth vice has been lost (cf. Wilkinson 2011). The King was dressed as Ardent Desire and led his men in a battle, after which they reached the damsels and carried them off to cheer the audience of diplomats and courtiers and to start dancing. When the dancing was over, the masks were removed and all sat down to a lavish banquet. Historical reports do not specify which lady the king carried off from the Château Vert to be his first partner for that night's dancing, but it is unlikely to have been Anne. If on this occasion Anne did not catch Henry's attention, nevertheless, her participation in the Château Vert pageant did help her being noticed by other gentlemen at court. Eric
Ives reports that shortly after this event, men came into the queen's (Catherine of Aragon's) chambers - but only to speak with Anne, and to flirt with her.

The shooting script of The Tudors, instead, suggests that Henry, in the tower of Château Vert, "comes face to face with his destiny – with a sharp intake of breath, like an arrow through his heart. A very beautiful, 18-year-old young woman with jet-black hair and dark, expressive, exquisite eyes looks back at him" (Hirst 2007, 16). Later, after the dancing begins, "he stares at Anne as if suddenly rendered incapable of speech . . . 'Who are you?' he asks, when the steps of the dance bring them eye to eye. And she whispers back, 'Anne Boleyn' (The Tudors, Episode 3, "Wolsey, Wolsey, Wolsey!", 00:12:47 and 00:12:52). Be it historical or fictional, Anne Boleyn's theatrical performance is dictated by the awareness that the power, the history and the appearance of the Beautiful Woman are heterogeneous social performances that gradually dominate the visual scene with similar tactics of brightness and suspense (see Nahoum-Grappe 1993, 100).

However, the director, in this first scene and later, seems to suggest that history and power remain an official prerogative of the male world and that, in order to fit into this order, women must disguise themselves, sneakily seduce, and use various ploys, trying to turn their inferior status into a winning position. In this sense, the mask physically worn by Anne in her first encounter with Henry becomes the figurative metaphor of a tactical mask that Anne deliberately decides to wear. The aim of this fragile mask, which is always provisional, is not merely sexual seduction: it becomes a precarious, but effective instrument of social action, especially because Anne understands that other types of social action (legal, cultural, economic and political) are limited and not easily accessible to women. The mask physically worn by Anne in the Château Vert performance will turn, in the course of the series, into a "skin mask," a fundamental element of her personality, constantly concealing her real person. Anne is represented as a person who does not seek in Henry the recognition of her identity, but who sees in her own beauty a tactical chance for social intervention. This mask/performance of "femininity" is, however, a balancing act that requires great skill, constant calculation, self-scrutiny and social intelligence because it configures itself within a codified set of patriarchal rules which frame female behaviour in contradictory terms and double binds.

Indeed, The Book of the Courtier by Baldassare Castiglione ([1528] 1903) highlights how this set of requirements of female courtly behaviour aims at designing, in theory, a delightful ideal of femininity, but introduces, in practice, an unstable balance, forcing women to constantly walk a tightrope between "vivacity" and "modesty," "a little free talk" and "unseemly words," "prudishness" and "unbridled familiarity" (Castiglione [1528] 1903, 177). In accordance to Castiglione's codification, a woman should be physically desirable and could engage in flirtatious, even sexually provocative talk, but her social performance should never raise doubts about her virtue. Susan Bordo emphasizes Anne's ambiguous position on this shaky ground:

Ultimately, Anne was to pay a high price for her own vivacity and flirtatiousness, which she could not simply turn off as if it were a faucet once the crown was on her head, and which her enemies used to raise suspicions about her fidelity to Henry. But in the beginning, it was likely her consummate skill in walking the tightrope between desirability and chastity that made her a standout in the English court. Enemies may have described this as manipulative, and, of course, it was; but it was conventionally manipulative—a game all court ladies were expected to play. (2013, 37)
The image of Anne the "woman," as a skilled tightrope walker on the thin thread of the body politic, suggests the need of grounding representations of the body by providing not only an analysis of the subject, but also a codification of the connections between politics and politeness, intended as an education that guarantees submission to an established order. Indeed, the rules of the seduction game codified by Castiglione evoke an idea of the body politic and of the artificial order in which its cohesive power of wholeness does not tolerate any diversity or deviation. Such a social formation of the body, according to Pierre Bourdieu, becomes:

more effective because it extorts the essential while seeming to demand the insignificant: in obtaining the respect for form and forms of respect which constitute the most visible and at the same time the best hidden (because most "natural") manifestation of submission to the established order, the incorporation of the arbitrary abolishes what Raymond Ruyer calls 'later possibilities,' that is, all the eccentricities and deviations which are the small change of madness. (Bourdieu 1977, 95)

The path of Anne, as described in The Tudors, reveals and denounces the powerful fictional construction in which, over the centuries, patriarchal power has circumscribed, proscribed and silenced all those ex-centric "later possibilities" which Raymond Ruyer alludes to.

As it has already been argued, female corporeality has not been recognized as a natural pre-existing fact, but as a culturally imprinted construct: the qualities characterizing feminine beauty, or rather the qualities meeting the definition of femininity, have, therefore, always been merely symbols of a female behaviour considered as desirable in a certain historical moment (cf. Wolf 1990). About the history of women in general and of the female body in particular "what we know [...] has been transmitted mainly through the reflection of men [...] and has been shaped by a system of values defined by men" (Lemer 1977, XXI). The definitions and examinations of the female body, or of the qualities that describe its beauty, refer primarily to male images that are only rarely descriptive and are, rather, often prescriptive, establishing the standards women must match, upon penalty of proscription and dishonour. The symbolic meaning of the male gaze and imaginary for political thought and for the construction of political virtues is evident here. If the canons of female beauty have undergone significant changes throughout history, these transformations in doctrine and in taste reflected something more than simple changes in the conceptualizations of the female body and its appearance: actually, they reflected wider issues in relation to social changes and political and religious conflicts. Moreover, they expressed a persistent desire for order, stability and clearly defined social boundaries. During the Renaissance, the essence of this beauty, as underlined by Castiglione, was an idea of femininity understood and emphasized as difference from the male world. If beauty is the specific and legitimate weapon through which the weaker sex can compensate its intrinsic "weakness" and tame the stronger sex, it becomes crucial to provide a thorough definition of this gender differentiation. Sexual dimorphism imposed itself on the codification of the female image as an obligation, and any resemblance to the masculine becomes a disturbing anomaly:

I hold that a woman should in no way resemble a man as regards her ways, manners, words, gesture and bearing. Thus just as it is very fitting that a man should display a certain robust and sturdy manliness, so it's well for a woman to have a certain soft and delicate tenderness with an air of feminine sweetness in her every movement, which, in
her going and staying and whatsoever she does, always makes her appear a woman without any resemblance to a man. (Castiglione [1528] 1903, 211)

In The Tudors, the description of Mary – Anne Boleyn's sister, significantly known as "the fair Boleyn" to emphasize how her light complexion and golden hair defined her as a conventional beauty in opposition to her sister – and of the ladies of the court with whom Henry VIII flirts responds perfectly to the dogmatic female ideal outlined by Castiglione. In these performances of femininity, the filmic text enhances all the features that convey sensitivity and delicacy: from the transparent and soft skin to the petite body structure that induces a sense of protection, and to the numerous hints at passivity and a typically feminine kindness; from the timid and subdued tones of their voice to Henry's, their families' and the other courtiers' epithets that emphasize women's sweetness and docile stupidity. These figures, in their correspondence to the traditional icons of femininity, are "imaginary" women, loved and disowned, docile to the patriarchal calling and passive in being subject to the king's infatuations in the eternal male game of transgression and security.

The images of beauty and femininity performed by female figures define a bodily presence that takes on, in an almost paradoxical way, aspects related to childhood (roundness, smooth skin, dimples and curls, smiles) and to the idea of death (lack of expression, sweet enigmatic smile, selflessness, pure formal presence), as if women were not living in their bodies, as if the exhibited body annihilated any identity different from the ideal of beauty and femininity.

Since the culturally and socially constructed ideal of beauty, embodied by Mary and the other ladies of the court, does not arouse male fear or suspicion because it supports the ethno- and andro-centric creation of a female specificity which is completely synthesized and defined by the desire to please men, let us consider now a further ex-centric "later possibility" well brought to light by the TV series.

In the second episode of the first season, "Simply Henry," Michael Hirst depicts Anne Boleyn's private arrival at court. She is greeted by her uncle, the Duke of Norfolk, and her father, Thomas Boleyn, who tells her that the King is getting tired of her sister and therefore wants Anne to catch the King's attention. Anne is concerned that even if the King had her, he would not keep her. Her father is certain that she could find a way to keep the King interested, since in France she learned how to play on a man's passions and he adds: "There is something deep and dangerous in you, Anne. Those eyes of yours are like dark hooks for the soul" (The Tudors, Episode 2, "Simply Henry"). First of all, it is interesting to observe the cinematographic location in which the dialogue is set: the tight and concise close-ups of the dialogue between father and daughter alternate, in fact, with long and medium shots in which the director's attention lingers on the courtyard and on a trained hawk as if to emphasize that Anne's father has an ambitious objective and Anne is the hawk that will get it for him. The first issue evoked by the episode is an idea of feminine beauty that is not only the center of the relationship that a woman maintains with a single man – and therefore reducible to a "private" dimension –, but that is also at the centre of social life, as since she acts as an object of exchange, and of communication in the relationship between groups of men. This idea, which highlights the powerful presence of the patriarchal discourse as a structuring apparatus, would seem to go back to that culturally and socially constructed ideal of beauty, described previously and perfectly embodied by Mary. However, the father's allusion to Anne's dark and dangerous eyes and the historical knowledge that Anne Boleyn later adopted as her own badge a
white crowned falcon holding a scepter on a tree stump with red and white sprouting flowers, (Ives 2005, 221) lead us to reflect on the deeper meaning of her unconventional beauty of which her dark eyes become the meaningful image.

Since the heraldic meaning of the falcon/hawk is that it "does not rest until [its] objective [is] achieved" (Neubecker and Brooke-Little 1976, 125) and the falcon/hawk itself "is an active symbol and represents and illustrates status consciousness" (Johns 2003, 130), we can reasonably conceive Anne's unconventional idea of beauty as a powerful tool to exploit male passions, an instrument whose purpose is dominion and power, even if this is not openly declared, but disguised as a union of amorous senses. If the real issue at stake in this performance of appearance is therefore more functional than aesthetic, then the body becomes a means to hide the true inner self of an individual and to outline a personality that is "other," more consistent with the social stage upon which the individual moves. Anne knows the fate of those, such as her sister Mary, who gave in easily, only to be used and discarded by Henry, and she is determined to avoid that fate. Anne's choice to embody an idea of beauty so far from the demands of the times is therefore dictated by an awareness of the limits of the peculiar power of beauty: if the effect of beauty is limited to merely representing the stakes of sexual desire, then the power arising from such beauty is destined to disappear in a short time, as it is rendered deceptive and ephemeral by the fact that the woman who holds this power is an easily replaceable object. As Alison Weir highlights, Anne, in her loving relationship, tries to keep Henry bewitched by carefully and strategically manipulating his emotions: "She handled him with such calculated cleverness that there is no doubt that the crown of England meant more to her than the man through whom she would wear it […] everything she did, or omitted to do, in relation to Henry was calculated to increase his ardour. In this respect she never failed" (Weir 1991, 173-74). Anne's performance of beauty relies on clever manipulation strategies that express the definition of "individual power" as "the ability to mobilize economic, social, or political forces in order to achieve a result, bring about an effect or undergo a modification […] in the face of various kinds of obstacle or opposition" (Blackburn 2016, ad vocem, 373).

The power of beauty is transient and ephemeral because it works in the limited time of aesthetic perception, and therefore the necessary condition for physical beauty to become an effective tactical opportunity is, in fact, that in the fleeting instant in which the woman is captured by the male gaze, she manages, thanks to her uniqueness, to propose her own point of view, her own way of living and perceiving reality. The conscious evaluation of the power and limits of beauty reveals Anne's possession of a skill that, according to Stephen Greenblatt, "is a characteristically (though not exclusively) Western fashion, present to varying degrees in the classical and medieval world and greatly strengthened from the Renaissance onward," which is that of exerting the power "to insert oneself into the consciousness of another" (Greenblatt 2005, 227).

This statement recalls the previously mentioned necessity to analyse the representations of the body as a codification of the connections between politics and politeness, where the etymological meaning of "politeness" leads back to the idea of an education directed to the acceptance of social usage and to the submission to an established order. This is a submissive politeness which Anne, in what Eric Ives defines her "European education" (Ives 2005, 18), has not been educated for. Young Anne, indeed, spent two years in the household of the sophisticated and politically powerful Archduchess Margaret of Austria, regent of the Netherlands, and then seven years in
France, where she came into contact with Marguerite de Navarre, Francis's sister. Marguerite had turned the Valois court into a center of intellectual and artistic brilliance and it cannot "be doubted that Anne Boleyn derived incalculable advantage from her early intercourse with one of the most brilliant women of the age" (Benger 1821, 137). Educated to be a court lady rather than a queen, Anne was far from silent and verbally disputed with the men at court; what is more, in France, she had learned that clever, provocative talk was an art, not a transgression. On the contrary, Catharine of Aragon, the first wife of Henry VIII, educated to be a queen and raised much more strictly in Spain, had learned that such behaviour was a sin and her undeniable intelligence and her potential capacity for rebellion were constrained by obedience to her role and religion. Therefore, Anne's arrival at the English court led to a clash between two different and contrasting performances of femininity. And the quick comment, often reported by many historians, with which Henry VIII explained to Wolsey his infatuation for Anne – "She is not of ordinary clay" (Starkey 2004, 285) – seems to identify precisely in Anne's un-politeness – that is, in her independence and unconventionality – the quality that made her extraordinary to Henry, who was tired of docile mistresses and of an obedient, respectful and silent wife. Their sharing of enjoyments, compatibility of interests, and intellectual stimulation increased this attraction, and favoured a conception of a "couple" as a partnership, which was extraordinary for the time. As David Starkey notes, "in the divorce, Anne and Henry were one. They debated it and discussed it; they exchanged ideas and agents; they devised strategies and stratagems. And they did all this together" (Starkey 2004, 285); this depicts an unusually 'modern' partnership indeed, one that did not fit into any of the available cultural patterns of the period.

This aspect of intellectual sharing and stimulation is emphasized by Hirst's choice of transforming the sensual Anne Boleyn of the first TV season into a still seductive, but politically engaged and sharp intellectual woman and a committed reformist in the second season. In fact, scenes were added, showing Anne talking to Henry about William Tyndale's The Obedience of a Christian Man, and how Christian Kings ought to Govern, instructing her ladies-in-waiting about the English Bible, quarrelling with Cromwell over the misuse of monastery money. In the second series, Anne is no longer a character in the ether but she is presented as a woman "not of ordinary clay" (Weir 1991, 161) who, following Marguerite's path, demonstrates that a woman's place could extend beyond her husband's bed and who has learnt to value her body and her ideas.

In such an interpretive view, it is important to ponder on Henry VIII's dream, which is never mentioned in the historical sources but proposed by Michael Hirst in the third episode of the first season. Henry dreams about a very seductive Anne: he is chasing her in a large hall and she hides behind a pillar and then runs into a room. He wants her, but she shoves him back, "No, not like this." She then appears behind him and she lips a few words to him: "Seduce me […] write letters to me. And poems. Ravish me with your words. Seduce me" (The Tudors, Episode 3, "Wolsey, Wolsey, Wolsey!"). She slams the door on him. He opens the door and she stands there, naked. Henry wakes up. In this episode, the seductive Anne who encodes the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order is a specular and complementary image of an Anne who asks for intellectual exchange as the basis of an egalitarian relationship, aware of the instrumental role of words in creating impressions, armouring her naked self with beauty and protective convention, and forging unshakeable alliances.
This reveals how Anne displays the characteristics of the new woman in her ability to understand the role and the importance of her image as a determining factor in the design and construction of her female identity and in her ability to transform, at least temporarily, a body, a female one, always perceived by the male culture as an insignificant body — politically, culturally, historically — a body to be marginalized, into a body appointed with a great power, due to the clever and disguised use of her beauty. If the new woman performed by Anne is an example of a female figure with an articulated and multifaceted personality and with an intense expressive power, she also testifies to, and denounces, the undeniable patriarchal attempts to elicit a hegemonic transformation of private life into a public domain where female beauty becomes the object of complex strategic games.

These attempts point to a significant relation between representation and power, one preferred and favoured by any monarch eager to extend his power and in which the body is mystified in order to serve the state and in which, therefore, any private sphere is abolished. This relationship involves a dramatization of royalty, but also a strong connection between husband and wife where the latter, clothed with her husband's noble title, shares his glory and is necessarily present at his side in the solemn parades of power. Hence, female beauty is the object of complex strategies in virtue of its appearance, which by occupying the centre of the scene, is at the same level as the other symbols of power.

In the TV series, the long passages dedicated to the description of Anne's coronation (The Tudors, Episode 3, "Checkmate") highlight how, from the Renaissance period onward, a specific link between the places of power and the emphasis on appearance has been established. Court society, and more generally any "bodily" representation of the political, makes use of an imposing and magnificent appearance as a spectacular sign of power. The luxuriously decorated fabrics ("golden gown interwoven with pearls," "golden haze," "cloth of gold fabric"), precious stones, gold and ceremonial gestures in slow motion bind the public's eyes, becoming a visual representation of the king's power.

Female beauty is, in this case, used in a tactical way, to convince, as a particular type of eloquence. The pomp of her apparel, together with the other paraphernalia of power, confers a sacred aura onto the image of the queen; they allow Anne to lose any human connotation and become an iconic image. Anne's coronation symbolizes the culmination of her incessant spectacularization of political power, where even clothing becomes a form of magnificent expression which re-evaluates the reification of the female body, thus allowing her to transcend traditional boundaries and look for a mediation with the cultural environment within which the queen's "sacralised" physicality moves. Her apparel, a privileged space for the representation of the body, a ritual and theatrical space, must conform to the social environment of the woman who wears it, and must be functional in the service of the ceremonial position she occupies, thus becoming a demonstration of belonging and of values. If in Anne Boleyn's coronation her apparel explicates the female decorative function and becomes a communicative performance that consciously strengthens her role and royal identity, in the TV series the choice of a particular dress also seems to express a precise ideological choice resting on well determined codes and conventions.

Let us mention, as an example, the episode in which Anne (The Tudors, Episode 10, "The Death of Wolsey"), by then the official mistress and the proclaimed future wife of the king, wears a purple gown, thus scandalizing the court because purple was the col-
our of royalty. By exploiting the enigmatic language of the vestimentary code, Anne does not only press Henry to resolve the divorce situation, but also to "(dis-)solve" queen Catherine whom she hated. The body, and the dressed body, is not, therefore, powerful in itself, but the meanings that it attracts and which it is able to communicate can be powerful indeed.

The TV series clearly shows how often women's bodies become an emblematic embodiment of the statement that they "may do more than represent power: [they] may actually help to generate the power that they represent" (Montrose 1983, 84). Anne's pregnant body acquires a privileged position for it becomes the display of both female and male power. As the bearer of a future monarch, it represents the woman's power to generate power. This is well described in the TV series in the long sequence devoted to Anne's coronation where the camera lingers on her pregnant belly. In the display of Anne's belly there is a theatricalization of a power that, through the woman, constantly reaffirms the consistency of a socio-cultural structure. Anne is the King's "official" wife because with her pregnancy she not only guarantees the birth of an heir and the continuity of the royal dynasty, but she also ratifies that order which makes control of the female body the epitome of control over the natural world with which women are more closely linked, their bodies being changeable (because of pregnancy, menstruation) and therefore less controllable. Anne's pregnancy confirms to the English subjects the King's ability to bring security to the realm by protecting them from the volatility and instability of the natural world of which women are emblematic manifestations.

In considering beauty as a female tactic to try to impose her own language while at the same time assessing the limits of this power, Anne Boleyn proves to be aware that as soon as female beauty disappears and its powerful effect is forgotten, female beauty itself becomes suspicious: once no longer considered beautiful, as Véronique Nahoum-Grappe asserts, a woman's body "[is] associated with death, whose grimacing, sexless skeleton, staring at her from beyond the mirror, already held her decaying but still bedizened body in its embrace" (Nahoum-Grappe 1993, 98). The power of female beauty always presents ambivalent connotations, but in old age, when the codified ideal of beauty fades, "the woman does not exist or she is a witch" (Bock and Nobili 1988, 30; my translation).

The fear of aging, the fear of not existing, creep into The Tudors, thus identifying one of the constituent paradigms of Renaissance culture that links – too closely – femininity and physical beauty, femininity and sexuality, femininity and reproductive power. Significantly, the beginning of old age – a term which alludes to a physiological, psychological and social whole and which, as such, is extremely fluctuating (see Thane and Minois 2005) – is identified in the TV series with the loss of reproductive power which transforms the "beautiful woman" (Catherine of Aragon) into an asexual skeleton.

Catherine had a fertile body, a desirable body, a body of power; however, since the female body is identified with its biological-reproductive and sexual function, the moment in which she loses her generating function, Catherine becomes an ab-

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2 It is important to mention the belief that linked the dangerousness of elderly women to menstrual blood, not expelled because of menopause. In De secretis mulierum, a treatise attributed to Albert the Great, but which resulted from successive aggregations/collections in the 13th and 14th century and which acquired, thanks to the invention of printing, fame and influence in the second half of the 15th century, the author emphasizes the danger of elderly women's bodies by connecting them to the menstrual blood withheld (see Magno 1992).
sent body, a ghost before which Henry and Anne flirt unscrupulously. When analysing the performance of the female body and of the power generated by the beauty of that body, it is important to remember that the body in question is an object in the "plural" and not in the "singular:" the experience of having a body, of having a value as a beautiful body is not the same for all women and it is not always the same because the body changes in the course of life and changes irreversibly in the aging process.

The emphasis placed by Elizabeth I on her aura as virgin queen was a wise and conscious tactical choice apt to distance her image precisely from this corruptibility of the female body. In the TV series, Elizabeth will in fact embody a masculine power determined by limits and ambiguity, of which she shows herself well aware when she affirms: "I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king and of a king of England too" (Speech to the Troops at Tilbury Elizabeth I, 1588, qtd. in Leah, Mueller, and Rose 2000, 326).

It has previously been observed that, once faded, female beauty becomes suspect, transforming the woman into an absence or a witch. The story of Anne Boleyn adds a piece to the puzzle of witchcraft demonstrating how the power of beauty is not only a transitory, but also an ambiguous and dangerous weapon that on the one hand constitutes a strategic possibility of social intervention, but, on the other, can be susceptible to charges of deadly seduction. The woman’s body, appearance, sexuality make her so attractive as to give her the opportunity to impose her language in an otherwise male universe. However, at the same time and paradoxically, she becomes so dangerous and destabilizing for that universe that she is forced to annihilation. If, in the Renaissance, neo-Platonism had given a new value to beauty, proclaiming it the outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible goodness, the texts, the plays, the pictures and the archives of the period present an image of discord: woman is depicted as mischievous, imperfect, a creature of excesses and evil mysteries, deadly and cunning. "Of course," as Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge observe, "they were also gentle and submissive, but cruelty and sexual excess soon loomed larger than these qualities in most descriptions of the sex" (Zemon Davis and Farge 1993, 3). Nothing is more powerful and dangerous than a female body and its sexuality, which is contained by the social gaze but can still cause scandal and dishonour. In the series, Michael Hirst devotes a dark and ominous sequence to the dialogue between Henry's secretary, Thomas Cromwell, and the imperial ambassador Chapuys in which Cromwell confides in him by disclosing that the King said "that he had made this marriage seduced by her witchcraft, and for that reason he considered it null and void, and that this was evident, because God did not permit them to have male issue, and that he believed he might take another wife" (The Tudors, Episode 8, "Lady in Waiting"). What is more, historical sources confirm that Cromwell turned Anne's famous sex appeal against her, blaming her for adultery, which was considered to be treason.

There is a significant connection between the idea of a sterile sexuality – related to Anne's repeated miscarriages – and that of sensuality. Witchcraft and the figure of the witch (in the Western imagination the practice of evil and demonic sorcery for a long time remained closely linked to feminine nature) offer an effective representational system of the relationship between mankind and supernatural forces and of the respective roles of "man" and "woman:"

In fact, the concept of sorcery is a simplification that conceals the rich anthropological diversity that still existed in late medieval and early modern Europe, a diversity that re-
ligious rivalry only served to underscore. Different European cultures assigned different roles to women, and these differences determined how important a role women were believed to play in sorcery. The underlying causes of the belief in sorcery must be sought in the religious and cultural spheres. (Sallmann 1993, 449-450)

In the historical period in which The Tudors is set, witchcraft charges mainly involved women (85-90% of the accused [cf., e.g. Ehrenreich and English 2010; Murray 1921]): witchcraft was then a crime connected to sex, although not specifically sexual. To some extent, women were suspected of witchcraft because it was believed that they were morally weaker than men and therefore more prone to succumb to the temptations of the devil. The idea, which dates back to the early days of Christianity, recurs frequently in early modern treatises on witchcraft, especially in the Malleus Maleficarum, a text with a strong misogynist trait commissioned by Pope Innocent VIII to two German monks.

In particular, the Malleus connects female moral weakness not only with women's intellectual inferiority and superstitious attitude, but also with their sensuality, concluding that "[sorcery] is governed by carnal lusting which is insatiable in them [women]" (Kramer and Sprenger 2009, 170). The dominant perception of the witch as a woman driven by sexual desire reveals the male deep fear of sexually independent and experienced women. If the moral and physical impurities of women make them easier prey for the devil, the witch, like the devil, who had moved away from heavenly bliss with an act of rebellion against God, embodied the quintessential rebel because she did not fit into the patriarchal norms of behaviour, neither those of her community nor those of her sex. With her behaviour and her language, the witch challenged the common ideal of a submissive woman and upset the Christian one of a good wife and mother. In the course of the TV series, Anne herself becomes physically and verbally elusive for Henry; in this regard, she introduces a symbolic and real protest against the established order, and epitomises the overthrow of all traditional values: the irrational dominates the rational, woman governs man, the body the mind.

Anne's fatal mistake is determined when she shows rebellious behaviour which goes beyond the private sphere, thus directly threatening an entire system of values: Anne's conduct disregards those rules that a good wife should respect. The dual meaning taken by Anne's performance of beauty – in the past a source of power and, subsequently, the paradigm of chaos as total denial of the socially acceptable image of the female body as docile and submissive – sheds light on how the inebriating experience of feeling powerful or in "possession" of control, far from reflecting the consolidation of a safe social position, is always suspect because, as such, it represents the product of power relations that may take very different forms. The fate of the body through which Anne has performed her own power, thanks to a smart and masked use of beauty, demonstrates how women, in Renaissance England, remained "patriarchal territories," trapped and placed in institutions and practices that they, as individuals, could neither create nor control. The plethoric and reiterated discourse on "woman" is therefore characterized by the need to contain her, by the barely concealed desire to make of her presence and of her desires some sort of absence or at least a discreet presence, limited within the boundaries of what seems to be a walled garden, thus transmuting her into an ornamental element in the large territories of power.
In the TV series, Anne, as a witch, represents the quintessence of the "other," of the unruly feminine that society wants to repress because it is perceived as threatening. Anne's trial and subsequent sentence become the privileged spaces for the confirmation of such attitudes and the resulting imposition of moral boundaries in an attempt to support the current ideals of feminine behaviour and thus to render society more harmonious. In fact, during a trial, the dynamics which generally support norms and behaviour deemed "socially acceptable" are those of otherness. The deviant behaviour of the offender, or of the alleged offender, is defined as different from and other than the legally compliant behaviour of the public attending the trial. Alison Weir analyses Anne's performance at the trial which, once again, shows remarkable insight into the gender politics that played an important role in Boleyn's downfall:

Anne recognized that she had overstepped the boundaries of appropriate wifely behavior. At her trial, insisting that she was "clear of all the offences which you have laid to my charge," she went on to acknowledge not only her "jealous fancies" but also her failure to show the king "that humility which his goodness to me, and the honours to which he raised me, merited." (Weir 1991, 230)

Anne reacts to the charges of adultery and treason by admitting to a different "crime," viz. that of not remaining in her proper "place." In juxtaposing these transgressions, Anne seems to suggest that "not only did she recognize that she had overstepped the norms of wifely behaviour, but that this transgression also was somehow related to the grim situation she now found herself in" (Bordo 2013, 60).

The performance of power embodied by Anne Boleyn ends with a head severed from its body. In this last and tragic performative representation of the relationship between body and power, the body is destroyed in its figural uniqueness, but the image of Anne (The Tudors, Episode 8, "Lady in Waiting"), who mounts the scaffold wearing a robe of grey damask (grey in the TV series, black in other reports) trimmed with white fur, remains and becomes the privileged recording surface for denouncing that visible text of the law which society prescribes to its members, and for staging the irrational fear generated by an independent and autonomous woman who is able to skilfully embody and perform her power.

Works Cited


