



## Anne Boleyn: A King's Obsession

*Alison Weir*

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**Anne Boleyn: A King's Obsession** Alison Weir

**A novel filled with new insights into the story of Henry VIII's second—and most infamous—wife, Anne Boleyn. The second book in the epic Six Tudor Queens series, from the acclaimed historian and bestselling author of Katherine of Aragon.**

It is the spring of 1527. Henry VIII has come to Hever Castle in Kent to pay court to Anne Boleyn. He is desperate to have her. For this mirror of female perfection he will set aside his Queen and all Cardinal Wolsey's plans for a dynastic French marriage.

Anne Boleyn is not so sure. She loathes Wolsey for breaking her betrothal to the Earl of Northumberland's son, Harry Percy, whom she had loved. She does not welcome the King's advances; she knows that she can never give him her heart.

But hers is an opportunist family. And whether Anne is willing or not, they will risk it all to see their daughter on the throne...

## Anne Boleyn: A King's Obsession Details

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# From Reader Review Anne Boleyn: A King's Obsession for online ebook

**Hannah Greendale says**

[Click here](#) to watch a video review of this book on my channel, *From Beginning to Bookend*.

Anne Boleyn is eleven-years-old when she leaves her noble English family's estate to serve at the royal court of the Netherlands. She is shuffled from one estate to another before her ambitious father arranges for Anne to work as a maiden to Queen Katherine, wife of Henry VIII. Before long, Anne inadvertently catches Henry's eye, who begs her to be his mistress. Though she initially spurns his advances, he remains persistent and Anne soon realizes his affections could be worked to improve her status and that of her family. Anne decides to play along, unaware that her machinations will be the cause of her undoing.

*Anne Boleyn: A King's Obsession* is the second book in the Six Tudor Queens series (in which each book is dedicated to recounting the life of one of King Henry VIII's wives). Spanning from 1512 to 1536, Anne's life is examined from the time when she is eleven years of age living in her family's Hever Castle to the moment when the light of life leaves her eyes forever.

Because Henry VIII courts Anne Boleyn while he's still married to Queen Katherine, some of Anne's story overlaps with events from the first book in the series, *Katherine of Aragon: The True Queen*. Having read books one and two back-to-back, the intermittent overlap was evident but caused minimal irritation, due in large part to the intrigue of the events being recounted from Anne's perspective.

Based on decades of extensive research, Weir gives one interpretation of Anne Boleyn's life, charting her transformation from a demure and obedient girl to an empowered, free-thinking adult woman. When Anne sets off for the Netherlands at the age of eleven, she is imbued with the understanding that her life will always be ruled by men.

*Anne and her brothers and sister had been brought up to render unconditional obedience [to their father]. When she and [her sister] married, their husbands would take over this role. It had been drummed into them both that women were weak creatures and should always be subject to the wise dominion of men.*

However, while working in the Netherlands, and later in France, Anne is influenced by her progressive female employers. Encouraged to think for herself, and given access to literature penned by feminist author, Christine de Pizan, Anne adopts unconventional attitudes about the roles of men and women.

*It was wrong, surely, that men had the right to make women take husbands against their will. She would never let anyone force her into marriage!*

*No, she would never let [a man take advantage of her]. No man would have the chance. In fact, she was resolved never to have anything to do with the perfidious, dangerous, bestial creatures.*

In due time, Anne grows to be a sophisticated young woman. She becomes "aware of her budding figure and the admiring glances of the young men" and learns how to "flash her dark eyes, swish her skirt or sway her hips to effect." As her body becomes more womanly, Anne is delighted to realize that she can enjoy "mastery

*over the opposite sex*” by shrewdly employing her own sexual prowess to her advantage. Nonetheless, she carefully guards her virtue, determined to never “*allow a man to make a fool of her.*”

Try as she might to retain a sense of autonomy, Anne falls in love and, in giving her heart to another, inadvertently weakens her resolve. When her affections are twisted by another for the purpose of political gain, Anne’s heart is shattered and she is permanently hardened by the experience.

*She wished, how she wished, that she had given a better account of herself, put (view spoiler) in his place, exposed him for what he was. But her moment would come. She did not know when or how, but she and her family would see him brought down. She had vowed it. He would suffer, as he had made her suffer.*

Anne’s broken heart is not yet mended when Henry VIII begins his advances, which she initially rejects: “*Your wife I cannot be, both in respect of my unworthiness, and also because you have a wife already. Your mistress I will not be!*” However, Henry is relentless and Anne eventually arrives at a shrewd conclusion:

(view spoiler)

Thus, Weir examines one of history’s greatest mysteries: Henry VIII loved Anne Boleyn (as is evident by his letters), but did Anne love Henry?

Though concern has been raised that Weir’s negative opinions of Anne Boleyn will taint the narrative, Anne is given a fair portrayal. In fact, after being accused in *Katherine of Aragon* of committing offensive acts, (view spoiler).

Much like in *Katherine of Aragon: The True Queen*, this book slows at about the two-thirds mark, but it picks up again in Part Four when Anne finds herself accused of (view spoiler).

Anne’s story concludes with a final paragraph that is eloquent yet deeply unsettling – a memorable conclusion if ever there was one.

*Anne Boleyn: A King’s Obsession* is a skillfully crafted coming-of-age story that proves an engaging exploration of an enigmatic historical figure’s life (and death).

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## **Matt says**

I have long been a fan of things Tudor and the work of Alison Weir. That she can create such masterful biographies and historical pieces is one thing, but to transform all that research into a piece deemed fictional (likely because of the dialogue) and allow a larger reader base to enjoy and discuss her work adds to the awe surrounding her. In this, the second book in her newest series, Weir takes the reader into the life of Anne Boleyn, whose short life offered much to Tudor and English history. Anne appears to have lived much of her life in the shadow of others, as Weir exemplifies throughout. In the early chapters, the reader seems Anne casting her gaze towards her older sister, Mary, who held her parents' favour and made a name for herself at court. While following in her sister's footsteps, Anne served in two continental courts before she was called

home to spend time as a lady-in waiting to Queen Katherine. While Weir purports that Anne paled in comparison to her sister's beauty, there were a few men who sought the younger Boleyn sister's affections, including Sir Henry Norris and the King of England, Henry VIII. Dismissing the affectionate advances of both while serving at court, Anne tried to serve her queen as effectively as possible. The latter Henry would not desist in his approaches, as history has helped us see seemed to be his *modus operandi* throughout his reign. While Anne stood firm, she was counselled not to rebuff the king for too long and eventually entered into an agreement with him, serving as his mistress but would not engage carnally until there was a dissolution of his marriage to Katherine. Weir spends much time weaving together the narrative of the multi-year journey, during which time Henry VIII tried to divorce the pious Katherine, finding roadblocks to success within both Canon Law and the Catholic Church. However, Anne never seems to have that passionate magnetism to Henry VIII that history presented (and television purported fuelled her desire to betray Queen Katherine), which might be one of the largest surprises to me in the entire novel. Weir portrays Anne as living in the shadow of Queen Katherine during this time, as Henry VIII could be seen to cower when it came to confronting his first wife. The eventual ruling by the Vatican led Henry VIII to create the Great Schism and birth of the Church of England (known as the Anglican or Episcopal Church). This break offers a natural divide in Anne's life, when she transformed from a simple woman into a dynastic member of history. Some may argue that it was less Anne than Henry's decision to part ways with Rome, but it came about because of her and for this reason, I feel Weir's elongated narrative about the lead-up is indicative to a great importance in the Anne Boleyn story.

With the dust still settling and the ink not yet dry on the new Royal Decrees, Anne agreed to marry Henry VIII with this impediment removed and soon bore him an heir, though it was not the son that had been sought. Still, Princess Elizabeth would be the apple of her father's eye, at least until a son was forthcoming. Like Katherine, Anne's attempts to have a son were troublesome, as each subsequent birth was either a stillborn or miscarriage. Fraught with concern, Anne was forced to battle with the others who held some confusing sway over Henry VIII, including his counsellors and Princess Mary, his daughter from Katherine. Anne was yet again forced to remain in the shadows, with the princess acting as pious as her mother in regards to the 'true' Queen of England. Add to this, the strain of the ongoing attempts to turn away from Rome and Henry VIII's temper was much shorter, which left Anne to face his wrath over minute concerns at court. After numerous failed attempts to bring forth a son, Anne's allure lessened in the eyes of King Henry and he sought pleasure elsewhere. With rumours swirling, Anne was forced to live in the shadow of these others, the new mistresses of Henry VIII. It was only when Anne pushed back and refused to allow other women to share Henry's affections that she found herself on the wrong side of a charge of treason. Weir supports this latter part of the narrative well, as Anne struggles to understand why she has been subjected to this charge and the apparent false accusations of her unions with the likes of the aforementioned Sir Henry Norris and her own brother, George, surface. Anne struggles to pronounce her innocence and lives in the shadow of the Tower of London, her eventual home as she awaits a verdict of beheading. Struggling throughout, Anne was forced to accept her fate, which came about through a set of purported lies and scandalous behaviour. All this because she upset a man that she likely did not love passionately. A powerful second book in the series, Weir does a masterful job at bringing Anne Boleyn to life, as well as adding depth to some of the struggles that are peppered throughout the history books. A must-read for Tudor fans who enjoy the intricacies of that time period, but would also be of interest to those who love history and all things royal.

I will admit that I have been significantly influenced in my views on Anne Boleyn by Natalie Dormer's portrayal of her during the television programme, *THE TUDORS*. Her beauty, her air, and even the general conniving nature of the young lady-in-waiting I left me with a strong sentiment of a less than lovely Anne. Reading this book has given me a new outlook on Anne and has helped me piece together a better understanding of things at court during that time. It is impossible to understand the true story of Anne Boleyn

without an understanding of numerous other actors who played various roles. Weir develops these characters so well and tied them together wonderfully, allowing the reader to bask in a richer and more complete narrative. While there are surely historical inaccuracies (that I know my buddy read companion will be able to recite), the story flows so seamlessly as Anne ages and changes from a naive girl into a woman who seeks to hold her own. Weir offers up a slow, but consistent, transformation of Anne throughout the piece, which is further exemplified by chapters whose focus is a particular period in time. As I mentioned above, I feel that the only thing pushing this novel into the realm of fiction would be its use of dialogue, which could not have been substantiated with complete accuracy. Still, the reader can get the sense that they are right in the middle of these historical events and conversations, which is surely a positive aspect of Weir's writing. The story is so rich and Anne has so much to offer, the reader will surely want to pace themselves, or at least pay special attention to the story, so as not to miss anything. Then, the eager reader (of which, I admit, I will not be one) can cross-reference things from the first novel and even into the third (when it is released) to see how Anne is portrayed as a minor figure there. The only major downside to the novel, in my humble opinion, is that the reader rides such a high when in the middle of it, that the crash thereafter and knowing that there is a waiting period stings even more. And don't get me started on trying to get the two short stories that accompany this series to date. UK fans should rejoice that they can easily be acquired.

Kudos, Madam Weir for bringing a key Tudor character to light in this novel. I am eager to see what else you have in store for us in the coming years.

Like/hate the review? An ever-growing collection of others appears at:  
<http://pecheyponderings.wordpress.com>

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### **Kate says**

Utterly superb - just as I knew it would be.

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### **Dee Arr says**

My thanks to NetGalley for a complimentary copy of this book.

No better source than the author herself can perfectly describe the content of this historical novel and the story of Anne Boleyn: "I have tried to reconcile conflicting views of her, and to portray her as a flawed but very human heroine, a woman of great ambition, idealism and courage who found herself in an increasingly frightening situation." I believe that Alison Weir successfully achieved this goal.

This second book in the Six Tudor Queens series is an insightful study of Anne Boleyn, the young girl who would see the path she could take and eventually become the Queen of England. Ms. Weir's historical depiction of Henry VIII's court provides an educational background, and her depiction of Henry's second wife fits with my previous knowledge of Anne Boleyn. As there is little in Boleyn's own words that has survived, the character traits Ms. Weir has wrapped around Anne seem appropriate.

The "Author's Note" at the end of the book should not be skipped. Ms. Weir describes how the novel came

together, identifying the issues that might arise in this sort of undertaking. Where evidence is lacking and there are scant clues to indicate what happened, the author informs us of the times when she interpreted facts or statements and inserted what she thinks happened in the book. This balance of being both an author and a good historian at the same time is delicate, especially since an author has more leeway to stretch truth into fiction. However, I feel Ms. Weir has performed admirably, adding only items that could be supported by what we do know to be factual.

Those readers who haven't read the first book need not worry. Even though Katherine of Aragon is mentioned in this book, she is treated as a minor character as the focus is on Anne Boleyn. It will not matter if you read about Henry's second wife before returning to the first.

Ms. Weir paints Anne Boleyn with fairness, exposing both her good and bad qualities. Her ruthless ambition and sometimes reckless behavior might be damaging character traits, or may be viewed as merely a reflection of the times she lived in. Highly recommended. Five stars.

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## **Roman Clodia says**

This is a very long and detailed fictional retelling of the life of Anne Boleyn: it's easy reading but at the same time is attentive to the historical sources. The problem is that Weir is not a natural fiction writer: she tends to the pedestrian ('whenever the Regent praised Anne's dancing skills, the songs she composed, or her skill with a lute, her cup ran over'), the simplistic ('she had given every appearance of being smitten with him'), and sometimes the hilariously mundane ('Madame Louise gave him a piece of her mind': that's Louise de Savoy and her son King Francois II!). Alongside that is an obsession with rape (poor Mary Boleyn is raped not once but twice by two separate kings) and murder, both of which would be positively libelous.

The backbone of the story in term of events and the re-use of sources such as Henry VIII's actual letters to Anne Boleyn seem to be somewhat at odds with the fictionalised characters, relationships and dialogue: there's a lot of Mills and Boon-esque descriptions ('pouting lips, and fair skin.. a tendril of flaming red hair') and while bodices are not actually ripped, all those rapes imply something similar. On top of that, we have a fictionalised calf-love between Anne and one of her courtiers where both of them gaze adoringly at each other for years, and we're expected to believe that during Henry's protracted courtship of Anne, not just does he not have sex with her but he doesn't have sex with anyone else either: "'You realise I have not bedded with a woman in years?' He looked at her in anguish, longing in his eyes'. But, then, on the other hand, another famous historical personage is a sex-addict: "It's as if I want to devour women; it's all I think about. day and night. I'm out of control, and powerless to change. I've - I've even forced widows and deflowered maidens".

As Weir says in her afterword, Anne Boleyn remains a historical enigma: we have few direct historical sources and many of those are themselves politically biased e.g. from Imperial ambassadors supporting Katherine of Aragon, the Emperor's aunt. Weir does, at least, know the sources and uses them in full, and also creates a young Anne Boleyn being educated at the courts of Margaret of Austria and the French court.

Ultimately, this fails to convince me that this *is* Anne: she's too petulant with her shrieking and her screaming and crying - from what we know, Anne was far more intelligent than this. Henry, too, is a weakened, emasculated figure, admiring 'her taste in furnishings' and crying when she's mean to him: "Really, you could be a little kinder. Katherine never in her life used such ill words to me." There were tears

in his eyes'.

For all my giggles and misgivings, I romped through this in a couple of days' commuting: it may borrow imaginatively from chick-lit and romance, but the underlying bones of the story are based on the sources. I just wish the characters had had more stature and conviction about them: 3.5 stars.

Review from an ARC from Amazon Vine and NetGalley

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### **Lisa \*OwlBeSatReading\* says**

Bravo!!!! All the stars ?????? Review to come once I can feel my head!

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Historical fiction is quickly becoming my favourite genre, particularly when I find a royal gem like this. I requested this from NetGalley, half expecting to be turned down, as Alison Weir is an established author. But, lo and behold, I got accepted, and I was delighted!

Anne Boleyn was Henry's second wife out of the six. Their relationship was an uphill struggle from the outset as Henry was still married to Katherine of Aragon for the best part of their courting, which caused controversy among the masses. This painted poor Anne as a harlot and whore. She was neither. In fact, she was a sassy, educated, well travelled woman who certainly knew what she wanted out of life. But back in the 1500's, women generally weren't to be seen as having an opinion to voice. They were there to help secure families' futures, the most important thing of course was to have a son, and in royalty, an all important heir.

Alison Weirs historical knowledge shines from page one. She portrays the era with pinpoint perfection, every minute detail brought to living colour with ease. What I found most satisfying was that the basis of the story was factual. The author achieved an in-depth history lesson that was fascinating because the characters actually existed. She gave them their own part to play, and added their personalities, reactions and mannerisms based on her fantastic knowledge as a historian. The vision she had as a fictional author brought together an accurate depiction of events with drama and passion to make for a truly memorable read.

I'll be honest in saying that it wasn't the easiest read for me at times. At around half way through I had to stop for a while, in fact, for well over a week, because it was getting heavy. Not to hold, as it was on my kindle, (the physical book is a satisfying 544 pages) but heavy on the politics and religion. That was by no means a bad thing, because during the Tudor period, England was going through some very tough times, and Henry Tudor was responsible for a huge amount of uproar and change, so it was necessary and relevant to the story. But in order for me to get full enjoyment from it, I really did need that break. I'm not the best at taking in political plots and religious intricacies, and on various occasions I found I wasn't connected to what I was reading. That, however, did not have any adverse effect on the story flow, it didn't make me enjoy it any less, if anything, it made me more determined to finish it.

On finishing, I discovered at the end a 'Timeline' and a 'Dramatis Personae' or character list which really helped fill in a few gaps due to me not quite connecting or understanding certain areas of the book.

All in all, this is a fantastic read which I recommend to any fan of British History, it's not the easiest, but it's well worth persevering with because Alison Weir is an incredible author whom I shall be reading much more



of in the future.

**I'd like to thank the author, Alison Weir, the publisher, Ballantine Books and NetGalley for the opportunity to read this in exchange for an honest review.**

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## **Alienne says**

(This got long; buckle in, folks.)

First off, I have to say that this was the most thorough fictional portrayal of Anne I've yet read - as it should be, clocking in at almost 550 pages. As with most of Alison Weir's novels it was an entertaining read that kept me engaged. And as with most of Alison Weir's novels it also had things that annoyed the hell out of me. Disclaimer: I do have an advanced reader's copy, so there's a chance that some of these things will be fixed in the general publication.

### **The Good:**

1. Weir definitely did her research with this one and it shows. The novel is chock-full of anecdotes, quotes and incidents Anne fans will recognize from her life, which really adds a sense of flavor and realism to the world. (Among my personal favorites: Anne's meeting with Leonardo da Vinci and Henry informing Anne of Purkoy's death.)
2. The Anne portrayal, while I keep going back and forth on it, felt pretty good. It was complex and layered and I do think it was ultimately meant to be sympathetic. Young Anne is surrounded by female role models, and therefore grows up with ambitions to be a respected female ruler herself - a force for religious reform in particular, which I liked. She is hot-tempered and sometimes vindictive but fundamentally kind, becoming increasingly volatile and high-strung as her marriage unravels. I especially liked the scenes of her imprisonment, trial and eventual execution; I thought her vacillating emotional state, as well as her ultimate strength and dignity, came across very well.
3. The beginnings of her relationship with Henry are portrayed as sexual harassment. Anne is horrified at Henry's attention, as she has no feelings for him and is actually rather fond of Catherine. It's an interesting case of 'Anne as uncomfortable victim' that eventually segues into 'Anne as ambitious re: making the best of a bad situation to advance her reformist causes', and I didn't dislike it.
4. Weir does include authorial notes at the end of the book, explaining (some of) what was pulled from history versus made up and naming (some of) her sources. I do still have a few issues with the content - she notes that Chapuys loathed Anne but still considers him "well-informed" because he "cites his sources" - but I respect including these notes on principle.

### **The Groanworthy:**

1. A caveat to the generally fair portrayal of Anne as outlined above: Anne is portrayed as being unable to bond with or love Elizabeth who, as a girl, is an irrevocable disappointment. Incredibly, Weir doesn't ignore the evidence of the real Anne's affection for her daughter; rather she justifies it in the novel as Anne's way of trying to soothe her own conscience. What. Just what.

2. A disappointing number of the old clichés continue to rear their heads, such as: Anne having a sixth fingernail, Anne and Mary being rivals, Anne being an utterly loathed queen, and Jane Parker as an embittered and unpleasant woman trapped in a hated marriage. It's 2017. Come on now.

3. The writing has some issues. The dialogue can feel uneven, sometimes veering into anachronistic territory and then veering the other way whenever historical quotes are used. There are places where repetitive word choice and phrasing become painfully apparent ("Darling" oh my goddd), especially during the long rigmarole of Henry's attempt to get an annulment. By the time he and Anne have about the sixteenth variant of the exact same conversation it feels like the book is just spinning its wheels. Speaking of whom...

4. **Henry.** Holy *shit*, was this characterization annoying. I couldn't stand him, I couldn't stand his dialogue, and not even for the usual reasons. There is nothing to appreciate here; he's not charming or charismatic, he's not proactive, he's not especially intelligent or politically savvy. What he is is obnoxious, whiny, ineffective, dominated first by Catherine and then Anne, easily manipulated by everyone around him, and overall just a pathetic figure. He is pitifully attached to Anne, so terrified of her leaving him that he does whatever she wants. His famous temper doesn't even make an appearance to liven things up; his only redeeming feature is his enduring "fatherly love". /vomit

Aside from the fact that this portrayal ignores nearly everything we know about the real Henry, it also makes his "partnership" with Anne unbearably one-sided and dull. There's no dynamic and very little exchange of ideas - it's just Anne and her family blatantly manipulating the king on one side, and figures like Wolsey and Cromwell doing the same on the other. As a result there's no indication that Henry knows the charges against Anne are false; the whole coup is framed as Cromwell's doing, and given that Henry has been shown to be a malleable idiot up to this point, there's no reason to think he questions any of it. A thought: Stop trying to make women like COA and Anne look "strong" by making the men around them laughably weak. It doesn't help anyone's cause.

### **The Perplexing:**

1. I've praised Weir's research in putting together this book, but it occasionally fell victim to some bizarre Critical Research Failure. Why did Anne have two extra brothers, when a basic Google search could tell you Elizabeth Howard only had three children who lived to adulthood? Why do these characters exist when they add nothing to the story, don't affect events and are killed off fairly quickly? There's no reason for them to be there, and it's distracting when most of the book seems well thought-out.

2. The treatment of Mary and George Boleyn was just...strange. There's nothing really new about Mary's characterization, but Weir puts forth the idea that she was violently raped by both Francis and Henry. *Why is this here?* At best it's meant as an early reason for Anne to distrust men, but there were plenty of other (more tasteful) ways to do that. Anne even lampshades the fact that it "beggared belief" that Mary could be raped by both kings - you don't say!

As for George...I really don't know what Weir's beef with him is, or how it served the story, but George Boleyn here is effectively Satan. He sexually humiliates his wife, sleeps with everyone (and is possibly bi, the shock, the horror!), admits to raping women of all ages, and - most bizarrely - is "revealed" as having poisoned Catherine of Aragon (and implied to be the source of Fisher's assassination attempt as well). Again: why is *any* of this here? All it does is make Anne look terrible by association, as she learns these things about her brother and never changes her opinion of him for more than five minutes.

3. Anne and Henry Norris are in love. That's...interesting, I suppose, though backed up by basically nothing.

Even in the novel it's utterly underdeveloped; Anne falls in love with Norris at first sight - from afar - and for the rest of the book we're meant to accept that they have this great unspoken passion for each other. I don't necessarily object to the idea of Anne having feelings for someone else during her marriage to Henry, as long as the author doesn't toe the line of "she really *was* an adulteress" too closely. But this felt so random and gratuitous that their "emotional" scenes together became unintentionally funny.

4. Speaking of gratuitous! The choice to keep Anne conscious in the moments after her beheading was really weird, and frankly it pissed me off a little. Weir doesn't totally pull this out of nowhere, granted, but once more: *it didn't need to be there*. At this point the reader has spent over 500 pages watching Anne grow up, sympathizing with her and relating to her and liking her. The entire last section of the book is devoted to Anne's mental anguish and terror over her circumstances, which is difficult enough to read. Ending the novel with a gory description of her experience post-decapitation, ending her story with nothing but more fear and physical agony, was unnecessary. It was cruel.

It was also, I might add, a marked contrast to the ending of the previous book in this series, *Katherine of Aragon: The True Queen*. That novel ends with Catherine dying peacefully in her bed and being welcomed into heaven. Compare that to Anne's horrific final moments before "merciful darkness descended" and tell me it doesn't feel like authorial bias. Which is strange because, again, I *think* we're supposed to root for Anne in this novel.

So, yes, this was an interesting and entertaining read. It did shed light on episodes of Anne's life and facets of her personality that don't get much in the way of popular attention. There are frustrating moments and confusing narrative choices, but I'd still recommend giving it a look.

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## Ana says

{arc-provided}

Yo, Katherine, I'm really happy for you, I'ma let you finish, but Anne Boleyn was one of England's best queens.

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## Susan says

This is the second book in Alison Weir's new fiction series, following the stories of the Six Wives of Henry VIII. The first novel looked at Katherine of Aragon, concentrating on her as a young woman and wife. Of course, in this book, Katherine of Aragon appears too, as we are now looking at the story of Anne Boleyn; the woman who replaced Katherine – not as a mistress, but as a wife.

Like the previous novel, this is also very much a straightforward fictional biography. There is a real sense that Alison Weir is a master of her craft, and so knowledgeable of the time period that she easily makes you feel that you there, at Court, with the characters. This could bring new readers to historical fiction, in the way that, "The Other Boleyn Girl," did when I first discovered the Tudors as a, much younger, reader.

Of all Henry's wives, I personally find Anne Boleyn the most interesting. This takes her from a young girl of eleven years old, up to the end of her life. To many, Anne Boleyn is a feminist icon, to others, she is a scheming, ambitious woman, and many concentrate on her learning, intelligence and her religious reforms. I would say that Weir attempts to be fair in her writing – whether she is speaking of Katherine or Anne. She tells each novel from the point of view of the central character she is writing about and so gives us a fairly sympathetic portrayal of both. This is a difficult balance, but Weir is adept at balancing different characters and storylines.

We begin with Anne going to the court in the Netherlands as a young girl, and, later, France, before returning to England. She is always in competition with her sister, Mary, and closest to her youngest brother, George. This book is full of excellent characters – from George's wife, Jane Rochford, to Wolsey, Cromwell and the Boleyn family; adept at advancing their place at King Henry's court. Then, of course, there is Henry; capricious, difficult to read, changeable, emotional and unstable. The spider at the centre of a web that he knows he has ultimate control of.

Of course, you may not agree with all of Weir's takes on events. Whether it is her early love for Henry Percy, her battles with Wolsey, the demands of her father and uncle or her feelings for Henry and Elizabeth. However, this is a fascinating, historical story and Weir tells it with flair. If you have not read the story of Anne Boleyn before, you are sure to learn a lot about a woman who gambled and, ultimately, lost. I look forward to reading the later books in this series and always enjoy Weir's storytelling.

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### **Helen Carolan says**

Enjoyed this one. My only bug bear is that it was a little too similar to her first book about Catherine of Aragon. Excellent none-the-less.

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### **????? 🖱️ The Bookish Blonde says**

#### **I'M A LOVER OF ALL THINGS TUDOR!**

My favorite movie of all-time is "Anne of the Thousand Days" (starring the unbelievably stunning Geneviève Bujold and the commanding Richard Burton) and what I loved about this book is the story played out much how it did in my beloved film adaptation and Anne's character was much as it's portrayed in that film.

I read "The Other Boleyn Girl" (by Philippa Gregory) when I was around 20 and it became one of my top favorite books, still unrivaled. As for this read...it doesn't necessarily surpass my first love and didn't quite live up to how much I devoured "The Other Boleyn Girl" but I still found myself desirous to jump back into the Tudor Court, as it's one of my all-time favorite "worlds" to visit! I even listened to Renaissance music on my Echo Dot while reading and it just offered a deeper layer of absorption into the story—I especially appreciated it when Greensleeves came on (though I'm aware of the myth of that tale).

This book moved at a molasses pace, at times, compared to "The Other Boleyn Girl" but I truly read just to escape into a certain time or place so it didn't deter me from returning to it...the pace almost felt intentional,

at the author's hand, due to the nature that was Henry pursuing Anne over a seven-year period and what all transpired during that time.

I think Anne gets a bad rap in history and so this book paints her in a much different light than even "The Other Boleyn Girl"—those two stories had some glaring differences but I always read anyone's take on a historical figure (especially one so little has been preserved for) with an open mind and appreciate the work that went into spinning a tale with the minimum of facts and the maximum of artistic liberty. I daresay this book made me feel quite sorry for Anne...whereas I vaguely remember thinking more poorly of Anne upon completion of Gregory's work.

I would definitely pick this tome up again in the future just because I love revisiting and being reminded of certain details that escape you over time. I thoroughly enjoyed this read in its own merit and I don't think anyone who enjoys all things Tudor would be wasting their time picking this one up.

I did want to share an interesting tie to my ancestors...

On page 487 the excerpt reads:

"Those who had been chosen to attend her were waiting for her. She was dismayed to see that chief among them were four ladies she disliked. There was her Aunt Boleyn, the wife of her Uncle James, who had recently incurred Anne's enmity by switching his allegiance to the Lady Mary. There too was Lady Shelton, who greeted Anne with undisguised venom.

Lady Kingston came forward and curtsied. She too was a friend of Lady Mary, and had once served the Princess Dowager. Anne did not expect her to be sympathetic. Lastly, there was **Mrs. Coffyn, the wife of her Master of Horse.**"

So upon investigating my Ancestry.com family tree I was able to determine that Mrs. Coffyn is referring to (Lady) Margaret Dymoke who was married to my ancestor's (direct descendent) brother William 'Master of Horse' Coffin (Coffyn). William and Margaret never had any children together. She did however have two children with her first husband, before William, and none with her third husband after William's death. Margaret went on to become the lady-in-waiting of the King's third wife, Jane Seymour. So she's a very distant great-aunt...16th I believe.

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## **Caidyn (SEMI-HIATUS; BW Reviews; he/him/his) says**

*This review and others can be found on BW Book Reviews.*

### **DNF at pg. 155**

I have no idea where I want to start this review. Generally, I love Alison Weir. If people want books, fiction or non-fiction, about Tudor history -- which is the era I'm personally interested in -- I will recommend her to them. I trust her history. Based on other books that I've read about this era, she does a good job and interprets facts generally fairly.

However, let her bias be known. **Alison Weir has a strong dislike for Anne Boleyn.** Which is why I have no clue why she wrote this book. I'm sure it's a part of the book deal she has. She gets six books where she can write about the six wives. One book for each wife, so Anne is one of them. Here is proof of this whole

thing. In her book, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, she calls Anne: "an ambitious adventuress with a penchant for vengeance" (pg.3 in my paperback edition). Alison seems to believe that Anne wanted to kill Katherine of Aragon and Princess Mary. Those are two things that were explored in this book, yet have no historical veracity to them.

I highly suggest you read these reviews as well, of people who read the whole book or most of the book. Charlie's review is detailed and she read the whole book for a book review. She has also written a fiction novel about Anne and cares about history. Adrienne, on the other hand, did not read the whole book and did not leave a review or rating, however, I suggest that you read the comments for it because she does go into depth in some comments. She has also done tons of research into this era because she's written books about Catherine Carey (Mary Boleyn's daughter) and Jane Boleyn (the wife of George Boleyn). These are two people I personally trust a lot and their opinions matter to me. So, when they say a book is bad, I believe it. They know more about these authors and history than me.

Now, onto the review. I read less than 200 pages of this book, but I was horrified. Weir makes so many claims in this book and it's horribly done. First, she alleges that Henry VIII is a rapist. I'm not saying that he's a good man. He wasn't. At all. He was a murderer, megalomaniac, narcissist, and likely had a few other mental disorders in there from whatever cause. For all he was, he was not a rapist. There are no historical allegations of it, so, therefore, there's no point in actually making that theory. Weir posits it her book about Mary Boleyn, then carries it into here.

George Boleyn is also framed as a rapist. (This is something that Charlie and Adrienne go into more detail in for their reviews. I didn't get far enough to read that part, but it was hinted at.) Again, George has no historical claims to being a rapist. The only place he's called that is in a poem by Cavendish. No historical writing. This link can give more information than I can. And it basically tells you why Weir is completely wrong.

Weir also talks about Anne Boleyn and Henry Norris. For those who don't know, Henry Norris is a man who was executed for treason and adultery with Anne. This comes about because Henry Norris was going to try to marry someone in Anne's train as a lady in waiting, but he hadn't proposed yet. Anne told him that he was "looking for dead man's shoes". Aka, when Henry died, Norris would want to marry her instead. Anne also, in her last confession said that "she had never offended with her body" against the King (pg. 536 in this book).

Weir says that this means that she offended him (cheated on him) with her thoughts. Not her body, but in her mind she committed adultery. Apparently, this means that Norris is the one who she put her affections on. There is no veracity for this whatsoever. Again, this is a theory that Weir cooked up and put in here. And it seems as if Weir is basing it off of a retracted confession Norris made after his arrest and the fact that he hung around her rooms a lot to flirt with a woman he was interested in.

Weir falls into the trap of going with the unfavorable opinions of Anne. Not just trying to kill people, but her looks as well. Sallow skin and some tiny hint of a sixth finger, I believe because both Anne's supporters and enemies wrote about that. But, Weir talked about her terrible moles and on and on. Both sides never talked about that. No paintings of her show it. She was a beautiful woman, albeit unconventionally so. Otherwise, she wouldn't have caught Henry's eye.

So, we already have terrible history on the part of a historian. This is also awfully written as if Weir just wanted to get this shit over with. It's so mind-numbingly boring that I couldn't concentrate on the words. And this is one of my favorite historical figures. Hell, I have Anne Boleyn's signature -- or one of her reported

signatures since we don't know for sure -- tattooed on my arm.

I know that people will probably comment on this review if it gets enough attention and shout at me about how this is *fiction*. It's historical *fiction*. Authors are allowed to make their own things. They're allowed to take facts and wiggle them around. Change them. And I agree with you. Yes, authors can take liberties. They should! They should have some pet theory and toy with it.

**However, these pet theories should be based on facts. If there is no historical grounding or evidence for them, the theories are unsupported and should be dropped. Alison Weir has made a living off being called a historian. This is not acceptable, even for fiction.**

Skip this book. Just skip it. Read some actual historical books about Anne instead. And if you do decide to read it, actually keep in mind that Weir is incredibly biased and you shouldn't take her work as fact. Research if you find the topic interesting rather than blindly believe her.

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## Holly B says

Five \*\*\*\*\*Amazing Stars

I must admit that I love reading about historical queens! This one was AMAZING!

This is the second book in the six tudor queens series (of 6) and I intend to read all of them. The queens were all wives of Henry VIII. If you love historical fiction, I would highly recommend this book. I got totally immersed in the story and was taken back in history.

It begins when Anne Boleyn was a young girl and follows her life and how she became the obsession of the king. I was totally absorbed in this book by Alison Weir. Thank you to netgalley for an advanced copy.

Book to be published in May 2017

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## Marialyce says

Anne Boleyn surely is the subject of countless novels and I have read a few. One of my reading pleasures and truth be told watching pleasures is anything to do the the Tudors and especially people who surrounded Henry the Eighth. The times, the people, the intrigue, and oftentimes the wantonness of this age fascinates me.

In this telling Anne's point of view is presented. In the beginning, she is totally caught up in court life from her stay in France to the coming to court in England and the of course to the coming into Henry's sight. Many have tried to paint Anne as the wanton pursuer of Henry but in this telling the tables are turned and it is Henry who pursues her and stays true, well mostly true to her, for seven years. It is not until the middle of this novel that we begin to see Anne as she has been presented before. She is the married queen and will hold nothing back to get what she wants which is ultimately the demise of those she considers her enemies. She succeeds in getting her daughter Elizabeth to be first in the line of succession and eventually her desire for that comes to fruition.

Trough this story, one can feel sorrow for Anne. She gave up a lot to be queen and ultimately she gave up her life thinking that Henry would always protect and love her. Was she guilty? The scant evidence we have seems to say that she was not. However, Anne was no innocent and desired to death of the former queen and perhaps even of her daughter Mary. It is always amazing to read of the intrigues, the manipulations, and the lack of morals practiced in court. Amazing also was that while there was such much pageantry, so many rituals, and so much faith in the church and its tenets, that things went on in the court so much so that it seemed like a brothel. Propriety was often cast to the wind as Henry had a wandering eye and many fathers had the desire that their daughters catch it.

As always reading about this age and what followed it is the stuff of legends and half truths and facts built upon shaky knowledge. Suffice to say, Ann and Henry's story have filled many a book and perhaps at one time in the British Kingdom of old, they really did love one another. It is hard to know when your beloved lobs off your head!

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**Evgnossia O'Hara says**

I cried my eyes out...

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