

The Other Boleyn Girl: A List of Nonfiction Reading Resources

Introduction

One of the greatest movies this year was *The Other Boleyn Girl*, based on Philippa Gregory's novel. The movie details Henry VIII's emotional struggle for a male heir, starring Natalie Portman as Anne Boleyn, Scarlett Johansson as Mary Boleyn, and Eric Bana as Henry Tudor.

The queen, Catherine of Aragon, has yet to produce a male heir following the birth of her daughter, Mary. Noting this failure, the Boleyn family, guided by the Duke of Northumberland, begins an elaborate scheme to elevate one of the daughters to the status of the king's mistress, produce a male child, and thereby guarantee the family's future prosperity. The family's first choice, Anne, fails to captivate the king, and instead it is her sister, Mary, who captures the king's heart. Initially unwilling, in time Mary falls in love with Henry, and is soon pregnant.

Mary finds both pregnancy and recovery difficult, and the Duke brings Anne to court as a diversion for the King, where she begins a seductive game of power to win the king's heart for her own. Despite the birth of her son, Mary is forgotten in Anne's shadow. Unsatisfied as a mistress, Anne instead demands to be his queen, and her persuasion leads Henry to break with the Roman Catholic Church, divorce Catherine, and marry Anne. Despite heartbreak at Anne's hands, Mary remains by her side in continual support throughout this quest.

Anne's first child is a daughter, Elizabeth, failing to calm the king's anxiety. His attentions to Anne wane, and the Boleyn family watches as he looks for another mistress. Anne continues her desperate fight to keep the king, but a miscarriage further isolates her from his affections. Frantic, she is determined to conceive by any means, and her dubious plans are overheard by a jealous lady of the court, and her testimony turns Henry's heart against Anne forever. She is subsequently charged with adultery and condemned to death. Despite Mary's fight, Henry will not relent, and Anne is beheaded, leaving Mary to care for her daughter and carry on the legacy.

This list provides resources about Henry VIII and Tudor England. The English court system is complex, and these resources help provide background. Further exploration provides greater detail on the king. Also discussed are the lives and legacies of each of his queens, as well as those of his children.

Tudor England

Henry VIII's reign occurred during a unique period of English history. Tudor England operated under a complex system of courts and courtiers, with rankings based on class, wealth, and family status. This system spawned continual fights for power within the court. The ladies were not exempt from these struggles; the system of ladies-in-waiting provided some of the most vindictive characters in English history. This framework provides a background for the story of Anne Boleyn and Henry VIII, underscoring the growing need for power and success portrayed in

the movie. The following titles introduce Tudor England, English history, women in England, and the court system.

Brigden, Susan. *New Worlds, Lost Worlds: The Rule of the Tudors, 1485-1603*. New York: Viking, 2000. Brigden's text outlines the rule of the Tudors, spanning Henry VII to Elizabeth. Chapters focus on either specific time periods, such as the Reformation, or on broad historical topics, such as social customs. Brigden takes care to alternate specific history with overarching topics, providing a substantial background for Tudor England. Much of the text reads like a novel, with characterization of major historical figures and the use of quotes throughout to provide greater accuracy. Illustrations are mixed with the chapter, including a genealogical tree for the House of Tudor and five maps relevant to the topics and battles discussed. The bibliographic essay included at the end provides information about source materials in detail.

Elton, G.R. *England under the Tudors*. London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1974. Elton's work is part of the comprehensive series, *A History of England in Eight Volumes*. This text begins with the rule of Henry VII, and continues to the years just after the Renaissance. The text discusses the role of the kings, but also mentions key historical figures, including Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell. The text does well to explore a variety of events throughout the Tudor reign, including issues of the church, the price revolution, and wars. Chapters are broken into subsections, each clearly labeled, which helps readers browse for specific information if desired. Resources include four historical maps, as well as a list of revisions and a genealogical table noting the descendants of Edward III.

Plowden, Alison. *Tudor Women: Queens and Commoners*. New York: Atheneum, 1979. The Tudor women provided the framework for Henry VIII's reign. The text begins with a discussion of the Lady Margaret, mother of the first Henry Tudor. Discussion continues by leading the reader through the habits, accomplishments, and downfalls of each of Henry's queens, while also exploring the female heirs to the throne. Lady Jane Grey, the Princess Mary, and the Princess Elizabeth all receive recognition and analysis, and Plowden makes a point of exploring not only the reign of each, but also the upbringing and environmental factors contributing to the accomplishments and failures of each. Also included are eight pages of portraits, a brief conclusion introducing Elizabethan women, and a family genealogical table.

Somerset, Anne. *Ladies-in-Waiting: From the Tudors to the Present Day*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984. Ladies-in-waiting helped define court life, particularly in the rise and fall of queens and other powerful women. This text explores the ideas of ladies-in-waiting, although only the first chapter, "Continuance in the King's Favour," refers to the reign of Henry VIII. The chapter begins with an exploration of the service duties for most ladies-in-waiting, considered a career for many of the women at court. The rise and fall of Henry's queens defines this chapter, providing the timeline for discussion. The text includes a variety of names of important ladies at court, and paints a vivid picture of the betrayal inherent in this environment.

Henry VIII

During his reign, Henry VIII provided England with a complex history and many changes to English life, perhaps most notably through his tumultuous marriages and his break with the Roman Catholic Church. Many struggle to understand both Henry and his motivations, attempting to explain his actions and insanities within a relevant historical context. The following titles examine Henry's history, from his early years to court life.

Bagley, J.J. *Henry VIII and His Times*. London: Severn House Publishers, 1962. This text attempts to describe and explain the eccentricities of Henry VIII. Beginning with his ascension to the throne at 17, the text continues through to his death, discussing his life in six major sections: his ascension to the throne and early years with Catherine, his relationship with Cardinal Wolsey, the introduction of the Boleyn family, Henry's break with the Catholic church, the tumultuous years surrounding Anne's death and the birth of a male heir, and the ending years of his life and final three wives. Each chapter includes subheadings for sections, clearly outlining the phases of Henry's life and rule. Enhancing the text is a series of twenty-eight illustrations, providing glimpses of Henry, his friends, and his queens.

Bruce, Marie Louise. *The Making of Henry VIII*. New York: Coward, McCann, & Geoghegan, Inc., 1977. This text discusses Henry VIII's early years, including the formative years leading to his ascension to the throne at a young age. Bruce argues that perhaps these years formed the basis for Henry's eccentricities later in life as England's monarch, and this analysis of his childhood provides a unique framework for the ruler. The text discusses the tumultuous events of a royal childhood and his unexpected ascension to the throne in light of his brother's death, including his young marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Particularly intriguing are details of political turmoil during Henry's youth. The text includes an inset of eight illustrations, providing context for much of the information discussed.

Weir, Alison. *Henry VIII: The King and His Court*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2001. This text provides an extensive look at the life of Henry VIII, focusing on the years of his reign as king. Beginning with his young coronation and immediate marriage, the text continues through Henry's rule until his death in 1547. The chapters, while containing much information, are short and easy to read. The text explores Henry's wives, but takes care to mention details about his rule, the social and political problems during his reign, and Henry's descent into old age and illness. Despite the depth of coverage, the text remains engaging and enjoyable. Resources include genealogical charts for the Tudors and their rivals, as well as two inserts providing a total of sixteen pages of color illustrations emphasizing the topics discussed.

Wilson, Derek. *In the Lion's Court: Power, Ambition, and Sudden Death in the Reign of Henry VIII*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001. While most are familiar with Henry VIII's marriages, less well known are the daily perils associated with court life. Wilson's text examines the life and downfall of six men of the court: Thomas Wolsey, Thomas More, Thomas Cromwell, Thomas Howard, Thomas Wriothesley, and Thomas Cranmer, men who experienced

political facts similar to those of Henry's wives. The text covers six sections, divided into years of major events in the king's court. Through a mixture of quote and historical data, the text presents a vivid portrait of court life. Also included are sixteen pages of relevant information.

The Six Wives of Henry VIII

During his reign, Henry VIII had six wives, each an attempt to produce a male heir or find personal happiness. Throughout these tumultuous marriages, his wives found themselves divorced, beheaded, cast aside, and humiliated. In turn, Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Katherine Parr each provided a unique background to Henry's rule, as well as providing heirs to the throne. The following titles explore in greater depth the women who served as queens of England.

Cowan, Maurice. *The Six Wives of Henry VIII: The King Seen Through the Eyes of Each of His Ill-Fated Wives*. London: Leslie Frewin, 1968. Much research has been done on Henry VIII's relationships with his wives, but little explores how the women might have viewed their lord and husband. Through six plays, Cowan examines the attitudes, actions, and opinions of each of the wives. Based on historical research, these plays provide a unique interpretation of these women, offering new insight into their personal reactions to the events of their time. Overall, they provide an easily read and unique understanding of the wives, giving scholars a background for important historical events while considering the emotional realities.

Fraser, Antonia. *The Wives of Henry VIII*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992. This text seeks to define each of the women that Henry VIII loved, defining the rise and fall of each woman within her unique characteristics as queen. Throughout, the discussion outlines the complexity of court life, particularly for women with everything to gain or lose. The text is comprised of five sections, one for each wife except the combined section for Anna of Cleves and Katherine Howard. Each section has chapters separating concepts, and each chapter begins with a relevant quote. Typically, sections outline the rise of each queen, the unique elements she brought to court, and her ultimate downfall. Resources include genealogical charts, as well as an eight-page photo inset for each section including black-and-white and color illustrations.

Lindsey, Karen. *Divorced, Beheaded, Survived: A Feminist Reinterpretation of the Wives of Henry VIII*. New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1995. This text explores the six wives of Henry VIII as independent and intelligent women, in an attempt to provide greater background and characterization of each beyond her position as the king's wife. Each chapter looks in detail at a different wife, with additional chapters exploring the political ramifications of Henry's rule. Each chapter also begins with an illustration of the key person discussed, providing insight into the material discussed. Additional resources include a timeline and a list of prominent historical characters with brief descriptions.

Mattingly, Garrett. *Catherine of Aragon*. New York: Book-of-the-Month Club, 1990. As Henry VIII's first wife, Catherine of Aragon offers unique historical appeal. Serving as queen

for twenty-four years, Catherine proved herself both kind and benevolent, beloved by her husband until the seductive games of Anne Boleyn tore him from her affections. This text outlines Catherine's life, divided into three portions: her life as a Spanish princess, her time as Queen of England, and her tumultuous fight against Henry VIII's divorce decree. Although chapters are not headed with specific titles, each is broken into numbered subsections for easy reading. Overall, the text is engaging and reads much like a novel. Various quotes and excerpts included in the text successfully interweave narrative and historical detail. The text also provides genealogical charts noting heirs and marriage alliances.

Heirs to the English Throne

Because of his various marriage and liaisons, Henry VIII left multiple heirs to the throne, with the line of succession not always clear. Edward, Mary, and Elizabeth all claimed rights as Henry's biological children; Lady Jane Grey also claimed the throne in a complex political scheme. Each ruled England differently, further contributing to the country's history. The following titles focus specifically on each of these heirs to the throne in greater detail.

Jenkins, Elizabeth. *Elizabeth the Great*. Garden City, NY: International Collectors Library, 1958. The Princess Elizabeth ascended the throne following Queen Mary's death. The child of Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth struggled for many years to find her place on the English throne, and of Henry VIII's children, she rule the longest. This text reads much like a novel; there is little indication of the historical information that will be provided. Using a combination of factual data and quotes, Jenkins creates a portrait of the life of Queen Elizabeth, from her tumultuous childhood through her great and lengthy reign. The text covers the various political problems during her reign, as well as touching upon aspects of her personal life. Of all Henry's children, Elizabeth was perhaps the most beloved, and this text presents her striking story.

Luke, Mary. *The Nine Days Queen: A Portrait of Lady Jane Grey*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1986. Lady Jane Grey became queen of England at sixteen. This text details her story and the manipulation that her family used to place a member of the House of Suffolk on the throne over the rightful heir. The text is similar to a novel, with numbered chapters but without the headings and subheadings commonly found. Neatly chronicling the life of Lady Jane, it begins with the marriage of her parents and concludes with her unfortunate execution. The use of quotes and letters throughout provides a historical emphasis for events described. The text concludes with additional notes on the characters, events, and sites described throughout the work.

Plowden, Alison. *Lady Jane Grey and the House of Suffolk*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1986. Lady Jane Grey ascended the throne for nine days following Edward's death. A stubborn protestant, she took the throne to prevent the Catholic heir, Princess Mary, from returning England to its former religion. This text discusses the House of Suffolk and its brief control of the English throne, taking care to provide the historical background leading to Lady Jane's coronation and outlining her specific role within the family. The text explores Lady Jane's

service as a maid at court until, forced into marriage, she became a pawn of her family in their quest for the throne. The text concludes with her brief reign and inevitable downfall, followed by a description of court life following her execution. Resources include genealogical charts and a sixteen-page photo inset.

Ridley, Jasper. *Elizabeth I: The Shrewdness of Virtue*. New York: Viking, 1987. The first child of Anne Boleyn and Henry VIII, Elizabeth's birth was anticipated across the country. She was, however, a disappointment, and it was not until many years later, when she ascended the throne as Henry's final heir, that she truly became an important part of England. The text begins with a background of England in the years preceding Elizabeth's birth, providing the historical framework for the ensuing story. Throughout, the text discusses Elizabeth's political triumphs and conquests, as well as discussing various characteristics that made her reign memorable. Ending only at her death, the text provides a careful record of the more than forty years of Elizabeth's reign, paying particular attention to political allies and enemies and the great strides that she made as queen. Also included are various illustrations, interspersed as appropriate.

Skidmore, Chris. *Edward VI: The Lost King of England*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007. Edward served as the first heir to the throne following the death of Henry VIII. Although just a boy, he strove to reunite England and bring stability to the turbulent country his father left. This text provides a look at the unexplored reign of Edward VI, including the threat of civil war and religious upheaval that continued to separate the country even after his death. Beginning with a brief background of Henry VIII, the text continues with Edward's birth and christening. Subsequent chapters deal with specific political characters and events during his brief reign, and the text concludes with a brief synopsis of events following his death. Resources include brief biographies of key individuals, a summary chronology prefacing the text, numerous genealogical charts, and a sixteen-page photo spread.

Starkey, David. *Elizabeth: The Struggle for the Throne*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001. This text provides a straightforward look into the life of Elizabeth. Beginning with her birth, each chapter in the text provides further detail about the life, struggles, and reign of the Princess Elizabeth. Through short and simple chapters, Starkey provides an understandable yet detailed history of Elizabeth, including emphasis on the key historical players and events that defined her reign. Through a blend of historical background and specific events, the text portrays a glimpse of royal life in the English court. Also included are two inserts, each eight pages in length, of color photographs of relevant individuals.

Waldman, Milton. *The Lady Mary: A Biography of Mary Tudor*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972. Although raised heir-presumptive to the throne, the Princess Mary did not ascend it until after the death of her half-brother, Edward, and the overthrow of Lady Jane Grey. The text begins with Mary's birth, and continues to explore her life through the tumultuous reign of her father, his many wives, and the political upheaval defining her youth. The text further outlines her brief and bitter conflict with Lady Jane Grey before her ascension to the throne, and concludes with her brief and violent reign as queen. The text is simple,

interspersed with quotes to support historical details. An eight-page insert provides relevant photos of key historical players.

Weir, Alison. *The Children of Henry VIII*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1996. At his death, Henry VIII left three biological children and one great-niece as heirs to the throne. This text explores each of the four children that ascended the throne, from Edward to the Lady Jane, from the Lady Jane to the Princess Mary, and from the Princess Mary to the Princess Elizabeth. Each portion of the text is clearly labeled with the names of the children that it discusses, creating an easy read through history. The text discusses each of the children and their respective reigns, including both their potential and their mistakes in ruling. Quotes mixed with the text provide further evidence of historical validity, and a genealogical chart included at the end of the text further outlines the heirs.