The Six Wives of Henry VIII Study Guide

The Six Wives of Henry VIII by Alison Weir (historian)

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

This book chronicles the lives and relationships of the six wives of England's King Henry VIII, one of history's most well known monarchs. Rich with well-researched and meticulously documented historical detail, the book navigates the chronology of one of the most spiritually and politically volatile periods in English history while maintaining a clear focus on the personal experiences of the people living through it. Themes relating to the role of women in medieval society and the destructive power of certainty emerge as the author weaves a vivid tapestry of ambition, lust, loneliness, idealism, and the occasional glimpse of grace.

A detailed chronology of the important events in the lives of Henry VIII and his six wives is followed by an introduction by the author, in which she summarizes both the general situation of women during Henry's time and the individual ways in which Henry's six wives lived within the confines of that situation.

Part One, Katherine of Aragon, focuses on the early life of the Spanish princess Katherine, child of two great rulers who was betrothed while still an infant to Arthur, eldest child of the politically insecure king of England, Henry VII. The narrative explores the political maneuvering, typical of the age, that brought the betrothal into being, that brought Katherine to England at a very young age, that brought her to Arthur's bed as his wife, and that eventually brought her to the bed of his brother Henry as his wife after Arthur's sudden death. Part One concludes with narration of the deterioration of Henry and Katherine's marriage following the birth of their only surviving child, Mary, and his falling in love with one of Katherine's ladies-in-waiting, the ambitious Anne Boleyn.

Part Two, The "Great Matter", is titled with the name given to the circumstances that, in many ways, defined Henry's life and reign—his determination to annul his marriage to Katherine so he could marry the increasingly impatient and demanding Anne. The narrative portrays this determination as so intense that when the Roman Catholic Church refused to declare Katherine and Henry's marriage invalid (a declaration Katherine unwaveringly supported until her dying day), Henry created his own church within which he could get the marital result he wanted. The narrative goes on to describe how Anne gave birth to only one living child (the future Elizabeth I), how Henry quickly grew tired of her and found another potential wife in Jane Seymour (one of Anne's ladies-in-waiting), and how his advisors manipulated events to have Anne declared treasonous and therefore expendable. Part Two concludes with a narrative of Anne's execution, Henry's subsequent (and very hasty) marriage to Jane, Jane's almost immediate pregnancy, her giving birth to Henry's long-desired male heir, and her almost immediate death from a common fever.

Part Three, How Many Wives will he Have chronicles Henry's last three marriages—the arranged and politically advantageous union with Anne of Cleves (whose physical appearance repulsed Henry), the lust-driven union with the promiscuous Katherine Howard (whose foolish and very public adultery led her to her execution), and the contented union with the mature but reluctant Katherine Parr. The final section of the

narrative includes descriptions of Henry's death, of Katherine Parr's subsequent ill-fated romance with the fickle Thomas Seymour, and of her subsequent death from the same childbirth-related fever as Jane Seymour. The book closes with a description of the contented life and graceful death of Anne of Cleves, portrayed as perhaps the wisest and certainly the luckiest of all Henry's six wives.

Chronology/Introduction

Chronology/Introduction Summary and Analysis

This book chronicles the lives and relationships of the six wives of England's King Henry VIII, one of history's most well known monarchs. Rich with well-researched and meticulously documented historical detail, the book navigates the chronology of one of the most spiritually and politically volatile periods in English history while maintaining a clear focus on the personal experiences of the people living through it. Themes relating to the role of women in medieval society and the destructive power of certainty emerge as the author weaves a vivid tapestry of ambition, lust, loneliness, idealism, and the occasional glimpse of grace.

The book opens with a chronology of important dates, beginning in 1485 with Henry VII (the father of Henry VIII) usurping the throne of England and ending in 1558 with Henry VIII's daughter, the legendary Elizabeth I, becoming queen. Other dates include the approximate birth dates of Henry VIII's six queens, the dates of their deaths, and important concurrent dates in the history of Europe at the time.

In her introduction, the author begins by commenting on how there is more information available about the court of Henry VIII, and about his wives in particular, than there is for any previous court. Henry's reign, she says, was a period not only of increased learning, it was also a period in which details of the intimate lives of kings and queens "became a matter of public interest, and no snippet of information was thought too insignificant to be recorded and analyzed, a trend that has continued unabated for 450 years, and which has burgeoned in the twentieth century with the expansion of the media". She adds that much of the material available to scholars of the period was either political or religious in nature, and suggests that any commentary on Henry, his life, or his wives was colored by this context. She goes on to say, however, that careful examination of available material can create a broad sense of the kind of people Henry and his six wives were.

The author then discusses, in some detail, the life circumstances of women in general, and of high-born women in particular, during the time of Henry VIII. Women, she suggests, were mostly uneducated—the high born were an exception, but even then, some (such as Henry's third and fifth wives, Jane Seymour and Katherine Howard) were virtually illiterate. Women were also, she points out, treated as possessions by men—whatever property they came into their marriages with became their husband's, they were expected to have no will or desires other than what their husbands wanted, and they were expected to practice utter fidelity (where men could be as sexually free as they wanted). Their primary duty was to produce male heirs in order that the family line continue, but since medical practices and standards of hygiene were of a much lower standard than they are today, pregnancy and childbirth were often dangerous, even fatal. Jane Seymour and Katherine Parr were only two of any number of women who died during, or shortly after, childbirth.

Finally, the author discusses how at the time marriage among the royal and high-born was essentially either a business or a political relationship. It was not uncommon, she says, for princesses to be betrothed in infancy, leave their families before puberty, be married at thirteen or fourteen to a man they met for the first time on their wedding day, be pregnant once a year for the rest of their lives, and die by the time they were thirty. Love, she adds, rarely entered into the relationship—which meant that Henry's determination to marry at least three of his wives (Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Katherine Howard) for love was out of the ordinary, to say the least.

There are two important elements to note about the chronology. The first is the evidence it offers of the relative brevity of lives lived at the time. Henry VIII died at age fifty-six, in contemporary terms a relatively short life but a little above average for the time. The longest lived of his wives, Katherine of Aragon, died at age fifty-one, but she was exceptional—the non-executed wives aside, Jane Seymour perhaps lived the most typical lifespan of women of the time, dying shortly after giving birth around the age of thirty. The second element to note about the chronology is the evidence of the intensity of the lives lived during such a short period. In his fifty-six years, Henry fought wars, remade a church in his own image, married six times, was left a widower three times (albeit twice by his own choice), fathered at least four children who survived childbirth and an untold number of children who didn't, and had innumerable affairs. Katherine Parr, in her thirty-six years of life, was married four times, widowed three, a mother once, a queen once, a warrior queen once, and the survivor of an attempted religious persecution. An interesting question might be to consider which was the cause and which was the effect—the desire to fully live a life that was known to be short, or the life shortened by such an intensely lived life?

The introduction, meanwhile, serves the same essential function as the introductory paragraph of an academic thesis—the theory to be tested is outlined, the sources for both the theory and its proof are presented, and the context within which that proof is to be explored is defined. It's important to note, however, that while The Six Wives is undoubtedly a work of considerable scholarship, as its narrative progresses there is a clear and deliberate attempt to humanize its approach—to create, as the author herself suggests, an understanding of who these women were beneath the labels of "wife" and "queen".

Part 1, Katherine of Aragon: Chapters 1 and 2

Part 1, Katherine of Aragon: Chapters 1 and 2 Summary and Analysis

The first chapter describes the circumstances into which Katherine was born—the wealthy, influential court of Spain. The author describes how her parents, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, were intent upon maintaining and strengthening their country's position as one of the great European powers, and did so by both conquest and by arranging politically advantageous marriages for their four children. Henry VII of England, the author suggests, was determined to have his son and heir, Prince Arthur, married to Ferdinand and Isabella's youngest daughter Katherine, but Ferdinand and Isabella were wary. Henry's position on the throne of England was by no means secure—he had, as he himself admitted, taken the throne by conquest and had no real royal blood in him. To ensure his position, however, and to ensure that Arthur and Katherine would be married, he had at least one of his potential rivals executed. This satisfied Ferdinand and Isabella, who agreed that Arthur and Katherine could be married by proxy—a wedding ceremony was performed in England, with a Spanish diplomat reciting the vows on Katherine's behalf. Shortly afterwards, Katherine, with an extensive dowry and a large retinue of servants, left Spain never to return and set sail for England.

Chapter two narrates the events of Katherine's arrival in England, which was marked by Henry VII's determination to see her before his son. This leads to a more detailed analysis by the author of how unstable Henry's claim to the throne was, and how he constantly worked to shore up that instability by, among other things, frequent exhibitions of great wealth. In this case, such exhibitions included a series of elaborate welcoming ceremonies for Katherine, staged by the side of the various roads she took to London, where Prince Arthur awaited her. There the two young people were married, and after a day of ceremonial and celebration, they were publicly "put to bed" (the very public undressing and putting to bed of royalty was a common and popular part of the marriage ritual undergone by nobility of the time). "Thus began," the author writes, "one of the most controversial wedding nights in history".

The question of what happened on the wedding night of Arthur and Katherine was to become vitally important in the history of Henry VIII's reign. After Arthur's death (a description of which occurs later in the chapter), Katherine was married to Henry, Arthur's younger brother. Years later, when Henry was attempting to annul his marriage so he could marry Anne Boleyn, he insisted that Katherine and Arthur had consummated their marriage (i.e., had sex). This, Henry claimed, made his marriage to Katherine invalid, since according to an obscure but convenient verse in the Bible, a man could not morally have sexual relations with his brother's wife. Until the end of her life, however, Katherine maintained that she and Arthur did not consummate their

relationship, and therefore blocked Henry's determination to end their marriage. The consequences of Katherine's obstinacy on this point are discussed later in the book—here, however, the author points to Katherine's well-documented moral integrity and to Arthur's equally well documented history of illness as proof that Katherine was almost certainly telling the truth.

Whatever happened that night, Arthur died shortly afterwards—never, according to Katherine, having had sex with her. Following his burial, his younger brother Henry was named heir to the throne, and the question of what to do with Katherine became first and foremost in Henry VII's mind.

The most important element of this first section of The Six Wives is the introduction of the author's primary narrative technique, the blending of academic analysis and chatty, almost superficial but undeniably entertaining detail. The specific example here is the way in which the author juxtaposes her research-supported theorizing about what happened on Katherine and Arthur's wedding night with colorful, almost excessively detailed descriptions of, for example, what Katherine wore on the various stages of her journey to meet her future husband. Such analysis and such detailing appear throughout the book, often juxtaposed and often harmonizing to create the sense of a full, multi-faceted life. Occasionally the diversions into details about clothing and jewelry veer dangerously close to being overdone, but it must be remembered that lives lived by royalty during this period of English history were themselves overdone. Their clothing and personal ornamentation were as intensely and carefully chosen as their public words and actions, essentially because they were all about the same thing—the presentation of a public image of affluence and power. As the narrative reveals, however, all this show concealed a significant degree of moral, psychological, and spiritual corruption.

A secondary narrative element presented here for the first time is the way in which the author offers opinions on the psychological condition of the people whose lives she is examining. While she clearly expresses those opinions within the context of undeniably effective research, it must be remembered that she is writing about a time in which people had little psychological insight of their own, into themselves, or into other people. Also, she is also writing about a time in which flattery and manipulation of those in power were both commonplace and expected; in other words, her research material was, for the most part, written by people with some kind of agenda. Overall, there is the sense that the author has worked hard to sift the grains of truth from the chaff of various agendas, but occasionally the reader runs into the nagging question of whether the author has been just a little too easily convinced by the opinions, as opposed to the facts, presented by those whose work she's examined.

Finally, there is the occasional sense that the author is drawing conclusions without a great deal of evidence. The example in this opening section is her analysis of the early devotion and respect the young Prince Henry originally felt for Katherine. Yes, the bibliography cites several sources of information about Henry's youth, but the author doesn't say which source triggered which insight and/or comment. The conclusions seem reasonable, but are they accurate? On the whole, the reader's inclination is to say

yes, they probably are—ultimately, however, the point is probably moot, since they contribute to the book's overall readability.

Part 1, Katherine of Aragon: Chapters 3 and 4

Part 1, Katherine of Aragon: Chapters 3 and 4 Summary and Analysis

In the third chapter, the author recounts the process by which Henry VII convinced Ferdinand and Isabella that Katherine should marry young Henry. At first Ferdinand and Isabella were reluctant, partly because of ongoing political instability in England and partly because they too were aware of the Bible verse prohibiting a man from marrying his brother's widow. They agreed to seek a special dispensation (exception) from the Pope allowing the marriage. Meanwhile, Henry VII's wife Elizabeth died shortly after giving birth to another child, plunging the English court into mourning. The author here suggests that Henry, who was devoted to his mother, never recovered from his grief, was looking for a replacement for her love in his wife, and when he didn't find it in one, sought it in another.

Shortly after Elizabeth's death, it was suggested that Henry VII remarry in order to secure his throne. At first, Henry considered marrying Katherine himself, but Ferdinand and Isabella refused outright. They did agree, however, to the wedding between young Henry and Katherine, who was becoming attracted to her brother-in-law and who was enjoying the freedom that being associated with him, even only by rumor, brought with it. Soon afterwards, however, Isabella died, leaving both Ferdinand and Spain weakened. Henry VII immediately saw that there were fewer advantages to England, and began looking around for a more influential bride for his son and heir even while he was looking for ways to keep his hands on the dowry Katherine had brought to her marriage to Arthur. This attention on scheming led him (Henry), and by extension young Henry, to neglect Katherine, whose sense of security and financial well-being suffered. She also endured extreme grief for her mother, and for some time was a victim of ill health, from which she never fully recovered.

In chapter four, the author describes events and circumstances of the five years between Arthur's death and Katherine's marriage to Henry. They were, for Katherine, years of emotional uncertainty, financial hardship, and deep political vulnerability. Her one consolation was her strong Roman Catholic faith, and in this, she was sustained by Fray Diego, a young (and very attractive) priest assigned by Ferdinand to be her spiritual guide. It wasn't long, the author suggests, before Katherine became completely devoted to Diego, eventually becoming unable to make any kind of decision or take any sort of action without his advice. Diego, however, was secretly a womanizer and political player, using his position within Katherine's household for his own ends. A number of ambassadors from the Spanish court saw both his influence and his duplicity, and urged both Katherine and Ferdinand to get rid of him. Katherine, however, refused—an

indication, the author suggests, of the strength of will that would sustain her throughout her years of battling for her rights as Henry's queen.

Many of Katherine's difficulties during this period, the author writes, were the direct result of Henry VII's struggles to maintain his political status. During this time, he entered into long and complicated negotiations with a number of foreign powers with an eye to arranging marriages for himself and/or for young Henry that would ultimately gain England more influence and/or money and/or power than a Spanish alliance made through marriage to Katherine. At the same time, he was struggling to retain control of Katherine's expansive dowry, to keep young Henry from falling more in love with her, and maintain to his own health, deteriorating as the result of several years living with tuberculosis. Eventually he won the battle for Katherine's dowry but lost the battles for Henry's heart and for health, dying of tuberculosis in 1509.

At the time of Henry VII's death, the author writes, it seemed probable that young Henry, now Henry VIII, would marry Katherine, but he suddenly had doubts. Katherine was four years older than he was, already past her child-bearing prime. He also was unsure whether their marriage would be morally legal, because he suddenly became aware of that troublesome verse in the Bible about a man marrying his brother's wife. Ultimately, the author writes, Henry VIII realized "he needed the alliance with Spain, he wanted Katherine's dowry to add to his already rich inheritance, and above all, he wanted Katherine herself. And what Henry VIII wanted," she concludes, "he usually got".

If it hadn't been clear enough from the book's introduction and its opening chapters, these chapters make very clear the political nature of royal marriage at the time of Henry VIII. The manipulations of Henry VII, and to an extent of Ferdinand and Isabella, may seem disagreeable, even incredible, to contemporary readers. It must be remembered, however, that this was how things were done among the royal families of Europe, and not just during the lifetimes of Henry VII and Henry VIII. For decades after their deaths, into the reigns of Elizabeth I and beyond, marriage was first and foremost a political tool. Love, if it entered into the equation at all, was much lower on the list of priorities—although Henry VIII was to prove an exception to the rule, as the following chapters vividly illustrate.

Also in this section, the author introduces another of her more effective narrative techniques—the use of a few well crafted phrases to vividly define the identities of what in a novel might be called "secondary characters". The example here is Fray Diego, who is portrayed in this section with an economy of specificity that leaves very little doubt in the reader's mind of the kind of human being he was. The Six Wives abounds with such individuals, who move in and out of the lives of the principal players (Henry, his wives, and their chief advisors) with the impact of aggressively, or badly, played pieces on a chessboard. Meanwhile, the description of the intensity with which Katherine defended Diego is, as the author herself suggest, a clear foreshadowing of the similar intensity with which Katherine defended herself against Henry's assaults on her moral character.

Finally, this section is the first in which the author's thematic and academic intent (to fully explore and define the human sides of Henry VIII's six wives) becomes fully

apparent. Examples here are the author's succinct but completely lucid portrayal of Katherine's miseries while she was waiting to learn what was to be done with her, and the equally succinct portrayal of her devotion to Diego. These are key illuminations into the character of a woman who, like the rest of Henry's wives, was much more complicated than Henry, his courtiers, and indeed history, could or would ever comprehend.

Part 1, Katherine of Aragon: Chapter 5

Part 1, Katherine of Aragon: Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

This lengthy chapter describes, in meticulous detail, Henry VIII's royal court, of which Katherine became an indispensable part when she finally married him on June 11, 1509. There were, the author writes, several defining characteristics of the court, the most obvious being its extravagance. Henry and Katherine were, she contends, the most expensively and elaborately dressed of all the European monarchs of the period. Katherine was particularly fond of appearing in public (which she did constantly) wearing rich-looking clothing, an aspect of her personality that came even further to the forefront as she both matured into her role as queen and fulfilled her responsibilities as wife—which means, essentially, being constantly pregnant. Henry was desperate for an heir, and the author makes a point of saying that while there was always doubt about whether there was any sexual activity the night of Katherine's wedding to Arthur, no such doubt ever arose when it came to the night of her wedding to Henry.

Henry, the author writes, was robust, physically and sexually attractive, and far more interested in the pleasures and pastimes that came with his title than with its responsibilities—those he preferred to the "old men" on his council, men like the moral philosopher Sir Thomas More. More, the author writes, was the only advisor in the King's circle to see that he (the King) was a dangerous man, and foresaw Henry's eventual (inevitable?) descent into tyranny. But that, the author indicates, came later—in his youth, she writes, he was among the most popular rulers England had ever had. His queen, she adds, was also extremely popular, and their shared court was full of dancing, music (some of which was composed by Henry himself), and pleasures of all sorts—some of which involved Henry and the "scores" of women who made themselves available to him once he became king. He was, the author writes, always discreet about his encounters with other women, which became more and more frequent as Katherine became less and less attractive to him, probably the result of the strains of being so consistently pregnant.

A key element of the court's emphasis on pleasure rather than on government (the second of its defining characteristics) was Henry's enjoyment of extravagant banquets followed by other activities mounted with equal extravagance. These ranged from jousting tournaments (which Katherine always attended) to elaborate balls to "masques", a masked ball to which an element of story was added. Men and women, including the king (but less often the queen) enacted stories such as Robin Hood and "Sir Loyal Heart", a noble knight who proclaimed his chaste and platonic love for equally noble ladies. On many occasions, the author writes, the king took the leading role. She also, however, takes pains to point out that Henry also had a mind. He was relatively well read and educated, and could argue theology and morality with people like Thomas More (and, to a point, Katherine). His debates were a third characteristic of his court,

albeit a less frequently displayed one—he was, as previously discussed, much more interested in enjoying and displaying himself. Finally, Henry was fully aware of England's historical place in Europe, and was determined to improve that place by whatever means necessary. Implementing his plans, however, was not high on his list of priorities.

This chapter also introduces several important people who later played significant roles in both Henry's rule of England and in his relationship with his wives. Aside from the previously mentioned Sir Thomas More, the author also refers to Cardinal Wolsey, a lower-class merchant's son who had advanced in status until he was the most influential member of the Roman Catholic Church in England. He was an able administrator, and early in Henry's reign managed to bring a more responsible financial sensibility to the court. There were also two women at court who became Katherine's friends and confidantes—Maria de Salinas, a Spanish servant who was devoted to Katherine, and Margaret Countess of Salisbury, a British aristocrat who was one of the last descendants of the ancient Plantagenet ruling family usurped by Henry VII. At various points in this chapter, the author comments that all four of these individuals each played important roles in the later lives of both Katherine and Henry. Finally, she discusses how Fray Diego's presence in Katherine's life diminished rapidly. This happened partly because other politicians around them both could see how dangerous his influence was, and partly because as a loyal woman of the time and an even more loyal queen, "her submission to the King's will was absolute; from henceforth she would suffer no man but her husband to rule her".

This chapter introduces two defining elements that reappear frequently in Henry's life, and therefore throughout this book. The first is his need to appear impressive, powerful and wealthy—all his life, Henry was driven by his apparently insecure need to display himself in the best, most powerful light. Here it's interesting to note the apparent contradiction in Katherine's character—her intense Christian faith, which in no uncertain terms denounces vanity and show, and her love for extravagant dress and showy jewelry which are, after all, the clearest possible manifestations of vanity and pride.

The second defining element appearing here can be found in the reference to Henry's need for a male heir to solidify his family's claim to the English throne. This need was behind every choice Henry made in terms of his marital relations—when to leave one wife for another, whether to divorce the unwanted wife or manipulate circumstances so he could have her executed, whether to look for a new wife in the first place. It would not be going too far to suggest that the issue obsessed him, blinding him to just about every other concern—except, of course, the best way to manifest his glory (which, after all, could be shown in no more telling way than by fathering a healthy son).

Meanwhile, as indicated in the Summary of this section, several secondary "characters", defined with the same vivid shorthand as Fray Diego was, appear for the first time here, with their appearances foreshadowing later appearances in both Henry's life and in this narrative of that life. Of all these individuals (More, Wolsey, de Salinas, the Countess of Salisbury), Wolsey is perhaps the most significant. For many years he was, as portrayed by the author, the king's trusted advisor and loyal friend, as well as being the

recipient of Henry's frequent and extravagant generosity. The story of his rise to power and his ultimate downfall, however, can easily be seen as the story of the King in microcosm. Both were men whose reach exceeded their grasp—in Wolsey's case the reach was for power, while in Henry's case the reach was for power, for love, for respect, for children—for a great many things. Ultimately, however, their parallel stories can be seen as embodiments of one of the book's key themes—the dangers of a human being believing too strongly and too absolutely that he or she is right.

Finally, there is a noteworthy irony in the final lines of this chapter, since at this point Katherine's life was soon to become entirely defined by resistance to Henry's will, specifically in the matter of his intention to have their marriage declared invalid. The initial stages of Henry's acting on that intention are the focus of the following section of the book.

Part 1, Katherine of Aragon: Chapter 6

Part 1, Katherine of Aragon: Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

Chapter six narrates, in considerable detail, the first several years of Henry VIII's reign, and of his marriage to Katherine of Aragon. The author creates a sense of complicated, and simultaneous, political and emotional maneuvering, all grounded in Henry's desire to secure the power and reputation of his kingdom. He acted on this desire, she asserts, in several ways—all of which, she adds, were at times aided, at times initiated, at all times supported by his devious, manipulative chief minister, the low-born but highly ambitious Cardinal Wolsey.

First and foremost, Henry acted on his desire for both the security and longevity of his family's power by keeping Katherine almost constantly pregnant. The author narrates how she had "conceived six, possibly eight, times" and yet had only one living child, the future Queen Mary I. By the time she was in her early thirties, Katherine had already entered menopause, and Henry had long been indulging his habit of flirtation and extramarital activities. At first, the author writes, Katherine was intensely upset by her husband's infidelities, but soon learned that she had no choice but to live with it.

Another way Henry acted on his desire to secure his kingdom and influence was to attempt to arrange advantageous political marriages for Mary. Again, in all of this he was guided and abetted by Wolsey, whose sole interest was to gain economic and political advantage for England which would in turn lead to economic and political power for him. Mary was, at various times, betrothed to princes of France and of Spain, depending on which country Henry (and Wolsey) wanted to form an alliance with. Katherine was, for the most part, left out of any considerations for her daughter's future—she was deeply involved in plans for Mary's education, but when it came to Mary's marital prospects, Katherine was rarely, if ever, consulted. As a result, the author claims, she detested Wolsey, but was helpless to reduce his influence on Henry. Meanwhile, planning Mary's marriage was only one way in which Henry intended to consolidate his political position. Early in his reign, he acted on his determination to lay claim to a disputed French territory, and invaded. Katherine was left behind as ruler in his stead, and while he was gone successfully defended England's northern border against an invasion by the Scots. Henry's attack on France was less successful, but such was his ego that he took Katherine's victory as his own. Katherine, the author writes, accepted this as only just and right.

Yet another way Henry strove to strengthen his authority was to continue taking every possible opportunity to demonstrate the wealth of his court. The author describes how, at one point, he spent thousands of pounds on a ceremonial peace-making meeting with the King of France, a meeting which everyone present knew was a sham since it was evident the two kings hated each other and were in fact allied with other countries. Such excess quickly became a habit—every ambassador that arrived at the English

court, the author suggests, was treated to extravagant banquets and other showy celebrations of Henry's wealth.

The author writes that Henry's determination to become the most powerful and respected monarch in Europe reached a peak of intensity when he began to seriously consider what he was going to do about a legitimate heir. He had lived, the author contends, with Katherine for several years after she became incapable of having children, and while it was possible that Mary could become queen, Henry knew that the government and the people would prefer a male heir to the throne. It would also be more possible for a man to keep, and possibly increase, the respect for England felt across Europe. In other words, a son would be the ultimate manifestation of Henry's determination that England should be the greatest of the European powers, and its monarchs the greatest of the European kings.

As he pondered the problem, the author suggests, Henry became convinced that the real reason he hadn't produced a legitimate male heir was that his marriage to Katherine was itself not legitimate. Not only did he use the old excuse that because she had been married to his brother, their marriage was not valid—he also came to believe that the Pope, at that time the highest possible earthly authority on religious matters, didn't actually have the power to make decrees based on interpretation of the Bible. At this point, Henry began moving towards proclaiming himself head of the Church of England and source of its ultimate authority, but that didn't happen for several years. For a long time, the author suggests, Henry merely contemplated the situation, and began to feel more and more inclined towards taking action—by finding himself another wife who would be more able to bear him a son. He had, in fact, fallen in love with a woman who he believed would do just that—but she, however, had no intention of being merely his mistress. She was keeping herself chaste and Henry at arm's length. In the author's words, "she would have marriage, and the crown of England, or nothing." This woman was Anne Boleyn.

At this point in the book, it becomes clear that the author has begun to shape the chapter-by-chapter narrative around single thematic points of interest. In this chapter, for example, she explores the theme of Henry's obsession with consolidating power—all the events of this period of his reign are discussed from the perspective of that obsession, and how it both pervaded and corrupted Henry's perceptions and actions. This thematic perspective is reinforced by the relative absence of Katherine from the narrative—her thoughts, feelings, reactions, and experiences are secondary, both in terms of the story being told and the thematic point of that story. In other words, at this point in the book she is, narratively and thematically, along for the ride—but soon, as the following chapters will show, she becomes much more present both in her life, and in this book about that life.

At the same time as Katherine is becoming less of a presence, Wolsey is becoming a greater one. Again, this is true of both the life and the book chronicling that life—this is the point of Henry's reign during which Wolsey's presence was most influential, the most pervasive, and the most ultimately futile. Katherine's eventual efforts, described in the following chapters, might be described as futile—she never actually achieved what she

wanted, recognition as Henry's legitimate wife. She died, however, with her integrity and her morality intact. Wolsey, on the other hand, died with nothing—his integrity, as the narrative will show, had been utterly eroded and his morality corrupted by his desire to maintain power. The story of his downfall, simultaneously paralleling and foreshadowing Henry's own moral downfall, begins in the following section—for now, though, Wolsey's influence is on the rise, as is that of Henry's next queen, the much reviled Anne Boleyn.

Meanwhile, a key element of Henry's character is explored in some detail in this section. This is his obsession with fathering a male heir, which the author portrays here as originating beginning with a simple, logical, reasonable desire for security. A contemporary reader might well ask whether it is in fact reasonable for a man to contemplate discarding a wife simply because she hasn't fathered a son. A more cynical commentator might respond to that question by saying stranger things have happened, but a historical commentator (such as the author) would, in turn, respond that for the time and for a man of his position, Henry's concern truly was both logical and reasonable, grounded in practical realities. Ultimately, by defining Henry's position here as "reasonable", the author places Henry at the beginning of a downward spiral into domestic tyranny, with his "realism" mutating into a desperation much more toxic than he, or any of his wives, could possibly realize.

Again, there is a significant irony in the title of this chapter, for as the author clearly portrays, the marriage of Katherine of Aragon and Henry VIII may have become chaste (albeit not by mutual wish), but it was certainly not "concordant".

Part 2, The 'Great Matter': Chapter 7

Part 2, The 'Great Matter': Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

Chapter seven begins with commentary by the author on how Anne Boleyn has been viewed and/or portrayed by biographers and historians. She suggests that whether she's viewed as a heretical, manipulative witch or as an enlightened reformer depends at least in part upon which religious faction a biographer and/or historian belonged to—to Roman Catholics she was an embodiment of evil, but to Protestants she was a wronged near-saint. The author contends that the true Anne was somewhere in between—she had flaws of personality (arrogance, volatility and vindictiveness the most prominent), but she also encouraged religious tolerance and demonstrated considerable courage.

The author then discusses Anne's childhood and youth—born to an ambitious father, sent to attend the French Queen at a young age, schooled early and well in the arts (by tutors) and in sexual manipulation (by the men of the French Court, including King Francis I). In her late teens, she returned to England to serve as a lady in waiting to Katherine of Aragon, where she and her sister Mary (equally well schooled and equally flirtatious) both attracted the attention of Henry VIII. The author describes how Mary was the first of the Boleyn sisters to succumb to Henry's charms, how Henry soon tired of her and became attracted to Anne, how Anne's father encouraged both his daughters to, in turn, encourage the King, and how Anne realized, more than Mary, that with Henry there was an opportunity for greatness. She saw how tired he was of Katherine and how desperate he was for an heir, but she also saw how quickly he discarded his mistresses. So, she decided that the way to gain the power and influence she and her father wanted was to walk the tricky line of enticing the King without giving herself away.

Anne's task, the author writes, was made more difficult by the increasingly influential presence of Cardinal Wolsey. Shortly after Anne returned to England, Wolsey blocked her efforts to marry a young aristocrat. Anne was to remember his actions for the rest of her life, and was determined to destroy him—but, the author suggests, she (Anne) needed Wolsey's help to get rid of Katherine, and so kept her peace. Meanwhile, she was using every means possible to both keep the King interested and keep him at bay, to entice but not deliver until she got the power and security she craved. The author quotes several letters sent by the king (and a few by Anne) that illustrate how completely captivated he was by her, how frustrated he occasionally became, and how his growing love for her prevented him from acting on that frustration and simply leaving her.

For her part, Katherine seemed unaware that Henry's feelings for Anne were anything other than his usual feelings for a mistress. She had no sense that Anne was setting in motion a chain of events, the so-called "Great Matter", that would see Henry struggle for

six years to free himself from Katherine and enable him to marry the woman he so passionately desired.

Anne Boleyn is one of the most notorious women in history. She was, after all, the woman for whom Henry VIII created a new church, whose manipulations and desires started a once noble monarch down the road of moral corruption, and whose apparent physical deformities (a large number moles on her body, an extra nail on one of her little fingers) led many to decry her as a witch. As the author herself points out, however, while Anne was often portrayed in deeply negative lights she was also, at times, viewed in brightly positive ones, particularly during the reign of her daughter, the much-beloved Elizabeth I. In this section of the book (in many ways a prologue to the detailed recounting and analysis of Anne's short life that follows), the author strives to live up to the intention described in her introduction—to portray and define the deeper humanity beneath the traditional, almost archetypal portrayals of Henry's wives of times gone by. In doing so, Anne (like Henry, the rest of his wives, and many of the book's other "secondary characters") comes across as a profoundly, indeed fatally, flawed human being—but a human being nonetheless.

On a technical and/or narrative level, the story of Anne Boleyn is almost entirely foreshadowing—of her eventual marriage to Henry, of her death, of Wolsey's fall from grace and eventual death, and of Henry's moral and spiritual deterioration. This might be seen as a manifestation of the effect Anne apparently had on Henry's life. His reign, his life, the life of his kingdom, and perhaps the life of a large part of the world all changed direction when Anne came into his life, making every incident, every confrontation in which she participated a harbinger of the life, death, and transformation to come.

Part 2, The 'Great Matter': Chapter 8

Part 2, The 'Great Matter': Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

Chapter eight follows the evolution of "The Great Matter" which, the author contends, became for Henry VIII as much about royal power as it was originally about passion. She describes how Henry, initially in full collaboration with Wolsey, pursued every legal means possible in England, and eventually in Rome (center of the Catholic Church's power), to have his marriage to Katherine declared invalid. Henry is portrayed here as becoming more and more obsessed, his deepening determination and frustration being clear consequences of Anne's vindictive determination to get rid of Katherine.

The author suggests that for some time Katherine had no sense of what was going on around her, other than tolerantly believing that Henry was having an affair with Anne. She (the author) adds that many biographers have suggested that this was in fact the case, but offers several forms of evidence to suggest that the sexual relationship between Anne and Henry didn't begin until a number of years after they met. All that said, Katherine eventually did find out what Henry was after—first from her loyal servants, and later from Henry himself, who awkwardly confessed his desire to end their marriage. Katherine immediately protested that her marriage was completely valid, a position she held for the rest of her life even in the face of legal challenges from Henry's sham courts, emotional outbursts from Henry himself, the manipulations of Wolsey, and the arrogance of Anne Boleyn.

Throughout this period, the author writes, Anne behaved more and more like a woman who was determined, and was expected by many, to be queen. Courtiers all knew that Katherine's influence had all but disappeared and that that Anne was closer to the King. Therefore, they paid her much more attention and courted her favors much more extensively than they did Katherine. But for Anne, this time of her life was as much about manipulation of Henry's feelings about Wolsey as it was about her manipulation of his feelings about Katherine. She had never forgotten how he had hurt her before (when he had blocked her earlier marriage), and also believed that no one should have the kind of influence over the king that Wolsey had. So, even while Wolsey was desperately struggling to get the king the annulment he wanted, Anne was undermining both his authority and his close personal relationship with Henry. Meanwhile, she was growing ever closer to the King and, at the same time, challenging him in increasingly bold ways. She was, for example, an interested reader of any religious treatise that supported reform of the Church, and advocated the translation of the Bible into languages that would make it easier for the general public (as opposed to just priests, kings, and monks) to read. This, according to strict Roman Catholic teaching, was heresy—but to Henry, in love with Anne and desperate to maintain her favor, it was one way that he could strengthen his relationship with her. The author contends, in fact, that their

discussions of church reform were a significant factor in his eventual decision to break from the influence of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church.

All three of the book's key themes are developed in this section. In terms of its examination of the role/status of women during this period, the simultaneous portraits of the ambitious Anne Boleyn and the determined Katherine serve to illustrate how women could, if strong minded enough, rebel against convention and stand up for their own sense of self worth. This, in turn, is a manifestation of the book's second key theme, the dangers of absolute certainty. Both Anne and Katherine were completely convinced they were in the right, and so acted in increasingly desperate ways to ensure that what they wanted is what they got. The irony here is that they wanted exactly opposite things and refused to back down, putting Henry (who was also absolutely convinced that he was right) smack in the middle of what less sophisticated commentators might call a royal catfight. The thematic point inherent in this aspect of the royal love triangle is that uncompromisingly sticking to a position of absolute certainty, as Henry, Katherine, and Anne all did, can very well lead to misery, as it did for all three.

The book's third key thematic focus, on religious conflict during Henry's reign, also develops here, with the author's exploration of Anne's reformist leanings. The point must be made that Anne was not a secret Protestant, as Katherine Parr later was. She did, however, have a keen and progressive mind (a characteristic inherited by her daughter, Elizabeth I). She was also strong willed and rebellious—witness her determination to have Henry on her own terms, rather than on those of society. Thus, it makes sense that Anne would at least be curious about new religious ideas, and would enjoy challenging her husband to religious debate. This aspect of their relationship foreshadows a similar aspect of the relationship between Henry and Katherine Parr, who also enjoyed religious debate with her husband, although it could be argued that she did so with less arrogance than Anne Boleyn, not to mention much less of a desire to control.

Again, in this section, the blend of analysis and near-gossip is notable. On the one hand, there is the author's cogent and well-supported thesis on when the sexual relationship between Henry and Anne began, and on the other, the details of how Anne became increasingly well dressed and wore larger and larger jewels the closer she became to Henry.

Part 2, The 'Great Matter': Chapter 8, continued

Part 2, The 'Great Matter': Chapter 8, continued Summary and Analysis

For a long time, the author writes, Henry's efforts to annul his marriage involved a great deal of communication with the Pope in Rome, the sole individual who had the spiritual authority to pronounce on the issue one way or the other. Ambassadors traveled back and forth with messages, requests, and commentary, making Henry's wait for a resolution even more frustrating (messages in that day and age took weeks, sometimes months, to reach their destination). Fueled by Anne's manipulations, Henry's frustration took the form of increasing resentment of Wolsey, whom he blamed for the course of events being so slow. Wolsey, sensing his influence was deteriorating, worked with increasing desperation to move "The Great Matter" along more speedily. Eventually, as the result of Wolsey's efforts, the Pope sent a special emissary to England with the authority to convene a papal court to hear both sides of the case. Katherine refused to acknowledge the court's authority, but continued to fulfill the role of obedient wife (at least to the degree that it suited her) and went along with Henry's plan. Again, she did this only to a point—the author includes an almost word-for-word transcription of her dramatic courtroom plea for justice, for her marriage and the legitimacy of her daughter to be recognized. The court sat for several days, hearing several arguments and testimonies, much of which had to do with the question of whether Katherine and Prince Arthur had, on their long ago wedding night, consummated their relationship. Henry swore that when he came to Katherine's bed, she was no longer a virgin—Katherine, however, continued to maintain that she had been. Eventually, after months of hearings, the Pope's emissary decreed that he had to return to Rome to discuss the matter with the Pope. This meant that there would be no decision for months, maybe years.

Anne, the author writes, was furious, and took her anger out on Wolsey. Under her influence, Henry stripped him of many of his properties and responsibilities. For his part, Wolsey knew he was in trouble, and did his best to renew their once close relationship. For a while, Henry relented, and Anne was forced to wait for her revenge. In the meanwhile, a quiet religious lawyer named Thomas Cranmer came up with a solution to "The Great Matter" that the egoistic Henry, according to the author, realized immediately was perfect. Cranmer suggested that the validity of the King's marriage could be decided by religious academics (such as himself) instead of by Rome. The author writes that "even before the advent of Cranmer, Henry had contemplated severing the Church of England from that of Rome . . .", having come to the belief that the Roman Catholic Church was corrupt and that he would never get any help in "The Great Matter" from the Pope. He became intent upon becoming absolute ruler in his own realm, and began to take steps to do so.

This chapter contains something of a climax, in its narration of Katherine's appearance at the papal court—if a climax is defined as a high point of emotion and/or of dramatic tension, then this scene certainly qualifies. It is, however, only one of a series of such climaxes, as Henry's reign was full of moments of high drama and tension. In that sense, it was, and The Six Wives is something of an emotional roller coaster, which is what has made the story of Henry, his wives, and his reign so appealing to historians and readers alike over the centuries.

That said, the narrative focus of this section of the book is on the relationship between Wolsey, Anne, and the

king—or, to put it in novelistic terms, a key subplot. This means that Katherine's climactic appearance in court might be defined, again in novelistic terms, as a point at which plot (the story of Henry's wives) and sub-plot (the machinations of courtiers in relation to Henry's wives) intersect. But The Six Wives isn't a novel, although there are certainly a number of novelistic aspects to it in addition to the development of sub-plots). These aspects include colorful and engaging characters (including the new and significant "supporting" character of Cranmer, who appears for the first time here), the creation of suspense and of mini-climaxes, and the clear development of intersecting themes among them. In other words, the author has shaped history into a story, not just a progression of facts, and herein lies another reason why its appeal expands beyond the circle of academia and into the general public.

Part 2, The 'Great Matter': Chapter 9

Part 2, The 'Great Matter': Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

Chapter nine begins with a description of how difficult things between Anne and Henry became as the wait for the dispensation from Rome extended from weeks to months to years. The author describes the pattern of their relationship—Anne's frustration would reach a breaking point, she would quarrel viciously with Henry, he would apologize abjectly and send her rich clothes or jewelry or both, and everything would be fine . . . until it happened again. Anne's frustration was fueled by the fact that religious academics (suggested by Cranmer as a source of a solution to "The Great Matter") were not unanimous in their opinion of the situation—several had to be bribed to have the right opinion and many had to be ignored. Meanwhile, Wolsey's health and influence continued to deteriorate, and he became increasingly fearful for his life. His fears reached a high point when a member of Anne's family bribed one of Wolsey's physicians to say that Wolsey had, in fact, been plotting against the King. Henry believed this story, and had Wolsey arrested. The author describes how Wolsey died before he could be brought to trial, how Henry regretted the loss of one of his most trusted advisors, and how Anne celebrated her final revenge on the man who had once hurt her and who, she believed, continued to obstruct her ambition.

Meanwhile, Henry had found a new chief advisor—Thomas Cromwell, an unscrupulous manipulator who convinced Henry to take matters into his own hands and declare himself the head of the Church of England. This Henry did, with the result that many people believed him to have been under the heretical influence of Anne. Their impressions of her were not softened by the rumor that she was involved in the attempted poisoning of a cleric who had vocally opposed Henry's declaration, and her ongoing insistence that too many priests were supporting Katherine.

Katherine, meanwhile, continued to refuse to bend her will to Henry's. The author describes how they maintained the pretense of a happy marriage for a while, but how Henry, again under Anne's influence, became increasingly disenchanted to the point where he prevented her from seeing Mary, moved her into increasingly uncomfortable homes, and eventually refused all contact with her, even her well intentioned and habitual Christmas presents. With the people, Katherine's popularity increased as Anne's proportionally decreased, with her increasingly high-handed and arrogant manner deepening the resentment of more and more of her husband's courtiers and advisors. They, however, remained silent since, as the author points out, Henry was still in love with her and his will was still law.

The author writes that the situation changed dramatically in 1532, when Henry took the unprecedented step of making Anne a peer in her own right, "something that had never before been granted in England to a woman". The most noteworthy element here, the author suggests, is the wording of the official documentation, which clearly suggests

that at this point, Henry and Anne had finally begun their sexual relationship and Henry was determined to have any children that resulted from this relationship made not only legitimate, but royal. The author then briefly explores the nature of the sexual relationship between Henry and Anne, which she suggests was, at first, quite successful—if somewhat disappointing for Henry. The change in relationship, she writes, was obvious to everyone, and made more so when Henry insisted that Anne accompany him, as his official consort, on a state visit to France. His proposal was met with deep resistance by the French, where no woman of legitimate rank could be found to welcome her. The French king's mistress eventually accepted the responsibility, an irony lost on Henry—he insisted that the mistress of a king was not fit to receive his beloved Anne. Eventually a compromise was reached and Anne went with Henry to France, but not before humiliating Katherine by demanding that she (Anne) be given the Crown Jewels, normally to be worn only by a sitting queen.

The author concludes this chapter with references to how the relationship between Henry and Anne quickly evolved even further once it became sexual. Anne realized her position was now "unassailable", and when she quickly became pregnant, she became even more arrogant and confident. Meanwhile, her pregnancy led Henry to arrange for a sudden wedding ceremony. As he believed his first marriage was never valid, to marry Anne was not bigamous. He was determined to make sure any children Anne might bear were indisputably legitimate. The wedding took place in secret, and was pronounced publicly two months later. Katherine is described as receiving the news calmly, but vowing to always call herself Queen. There were rumblings in Europe that war should be declared on England in her behalf, but they came to nothing. The way was at least clear for "The Great Matter" to be fully and finally resolved, and Henry wasted no time in giving Cranmer authority to do so.

The roller coaster of drama that was Henry VIII's life rides up and down again in this chapter, as Henry is at first prevented from achieving his goals but then (with the assistance of the calculating Cranmer and the ruthless Cromwell) finally achieves them. There are several key points to note here, the most significant being that the author seems to avoid in-depth discussion of Anne's reasons for finally agreeing to consummate the sexual relationship with her royal lover. There is a short commentary on how Anne felt free to move forward following the death of an archbishop who had been vehemently opposed to the annulment of the marriage between Henry and Katherine, but that is virtually all that's said. This apparent lack of psychological detail seems somewhat unusual, given the frequency and depth with which the author, on other occasions, looks into the minds and souls of her other "characters".

Another noteworthy point to this section is the way in which the two queens, Katherine and Anne, are simultaneously similar and quite different. Both are self-certain and self-righteous, and both make their beliefs about themselves and their marriage plain. What sets them apart from each other is the way in which the author portrays them as doing it. Katherine is described as simple, straightforward, quietly assertive, and confident. Anne, on the other hand, is portrayed as arrogant, pushy, vindictive, and volatile. The differences described here are essentially foreshadowing of points later in the book

when the author describes Henry as realizing that Katherine was far more suited to fulfill the roles and responsibilities of queen-ship than Anne ever was.

The third noteworthy point about this section is its analysis of sexual relations between Henry and Anne. Anne was the only one of Henry's wives (with the possible exception of Katherine Howard) with whom he had issues relating to sexual practice. It's important to remember that that this particular concern is different from Henry's issues relating to the succession—in that context, sex was solely for purposes of procreation. In Henry's relationship with Anne, sex was also about pleasure, an aspect of sexuality that for Henry before Anne, and often since, was restricted to his experiences with mistresses. In other words, for Henry sex in marriage had a purpose. Sex outside of marriage was for fun. In Anne, the two aspects of sexual expression were united, and there is the sense that Henry was, at least to some degree, uncomfortable with the combination. The author seems to be suggesting that on some level, Henry was uneasy with a queen having the sexual experience and desires of a mistress. It might not be going too far to suggest that on some level, the discovery of Anne's sexual experience was a facet of his growing discomfort with her, a discomfort that, as the following chapters prove, grew rapidly.

Part 2, The 'Great Matter': Chapter 10

Part 2, The 'Great Matter': Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

This section of the book begins with descriptions of the intensely negative response Anne received from both the people and Henry's court when she was crowned queen. "Cranmer performed the ceremony of anointing", the author says, "then he placed the crown of St. Edward upon [Anne's] head, a scepter of gold in her right hand, and a rod of ivory in her left, thus effectively crowning her as queen regnant, as no other queen consort has been before or since". This show of faith and respect from Henry was, it seems, intended as a kind of command for his subjects to respect his new wife. For the most part, however, throughout the first years of their marriage, Anne was repeatedly and consistently disparaged by the public and by the court. Such was Henry's rage, the author writes, that people who spoke out against her and in favor of Katherine were actually executed.

For Katherine's part, the author describes how she remained convinced that she was Henry's true wife and the true queen of England—and that their daughter Mary was Henry's true heir. The positions of Mary and Katherine became even more precarious when Henry, at Anne's insistence, separated them; moved them to long-disused castles where their mutually precarious health was likely to suffer; and cut off their allowances. Their fate seemed sealed when the pregnant Anne, sure that her child was the heir Henry so desperately needed, went into labor. The child, however, was a girl, and was named Elizabeth. Mary's humiliation increased when she was ordered by Henry to become one of Elizabeth's ladies-in-waiting, and treated by both her father and her step-mother (Anne) as little more than a servant.

Meanwhile, in spite of adopting the phrase "Happiest of Women" as her personal motto, Anne herself was in trouble, and she knew it. During her pregnancy, the author writes, Henry had continued his pattern of extramarital affairs in spite of Anne's furious insistence that he stop. He was, in other words, tiring of her as he had tired of Katherine. He was also, unknown to Anne but all too clearly to his advisors, becoming tired of her temper tantrums and her lack of dignity, two important aspects of what he believed a queen should have. The author describes how several of these advisors, believing supporting Anne was still the best way to gain and keep influence with Henry, continued to flatter both Henry and Anne and support his decisions in spite of Anne's behavior. Other courtiers, however, were fully aware of Henry's growing discontent and planning to take advantage of it.

The author comments that through all of this, Henry was still obsessed with the question of who should succeed him on the throne. He still hoped that Anne would bear him a son, but in the meantime forced his parliament to pass the Act of Succession proclaiming Elizabeth as his legal heir and disinheriting Mary. He also created a law that everyone in the kingdom would have to swear to uphold the Act. Several of his advisors,

including the once trusted Sir Thomas More, refused to swear such an oath and were thrown in prison. Katherine and Mary, both still ill, were heavily pressured to sign, but continued to refuse.

Eventually, the author writes, "Henry . . . realized that marrying Anne had been a mistake." Not only was her behavior consistently inappropriate—she had made enemies where she should have made friends, she had apparently lied about her virginity, and she had failed (after at least two other failed pregnancies) to produce a son. He wasn't yet prepared, the author suggests, to cast her aside—that was yet to come.

Here again, a key element to note is the contrast the author draws between the lives and experiences of Henry's first two queens. Katherine was never crowned in the way Anne was, she was never as overtly temperamental as Anne was, and she eventually stopped taking Henry's extra-marital affairs personally, something that Anne was never comfortably able to do. This last aspect of Anne's character is particularly intriguing—the reader might very well wonder if she was all too aware that one of Henry's mistresses could easily supplant her in his affections in the same way as she herself supplanted Katherine. In other words, was Anne's indignation based more in fear than in moral outrage?

Another key element in this section is the emergence of Henry's authoritarian streak, evident in his passing of the law requiring all his subjects to acknowledge his Act of Succession. The reference here to Thomas More's imprisonment foreshadows not only his execution, but also the imprisonment and execution of others (including, eventually, Thomas Cromwell) who fell out of favor with Henry for one reason or another and/or refused to unquestioningly obey his will. A third key element is the emergence of another pattern of behavior in Henry—his capricious treatment of his female children. Both Mary (as indicated here) and Elizabeth (as indicated later) went through intensely troubling periods in which they were out of favor and periods of being in favor that were equally troubling, if only because they never knew when they would again be out of favor. This childhood instability, the author contends here and throughout the rest of the book, contributed significantly to the emotional volatility and insecurity of both Elizabeth and Mary in their adult lives, as women and as queens.

Finally, the author again employs novelistic techniques to turn history into story—in this instance, creating a sense of suspense when describing how Henry simultaneously realized that his marriage to Anne had been a mistake and that he wanted to look for a new wife. This suspense is developed further in the following sections as the author describes his increasing unhappiness and his parallel desperation to find himself a consort more agreeable to him, in terms of skills at queen-ship, ability to produce a son, and even temperament.

Part 2, The 'Great Matter': Chapter 10 continued

Part 2, The 'Great Matter': Chapter 10 continued Summary and Analysis

In 1535, the author writes, several changes took place in the royal court and in England itself. At court, the author writes, Anne took the matter of Henry's infidelity into her own hands and personally decided who his next mistress should be—someone loyal to her. The affair continued for a while, but Henry tired of this mistress as he had all the others and moved on—to the woman who would eventually become his next queen, Jane Seymour. The author describes both Jane's family background and her personal history in some detail, suggesting that she served as a lady in waiting to both Katherine and Anne, but had decided that her true allegiance lay with Katherine and left Anne's service. Jane is described as being just as ambitious as Anne, but much calmer and far more circumspect, both characteristics that appealed to Henry in both a woman and a future queen. She was, however, doing exactly the same thing as Anne had done—assuring him of her interest and commitment, but not succumbing to his sexual desires. Soon her influence at court started to rise.

In the meantime, religious practice in England was evolving, encouraged by Anne who appeared, according to the author, to be taking steps to transform her public image from that of a sexual adventuress to a religious matron, much like Katherine. The author describes how she constantly appeared in public holding prayer books, donated conspicuously to religious charities, and supported the causes of individuals actively promoting church reform. Partly in response to her urgings (nagging?) and partly as the result of his own determination to break free of the Pope's influence, Henry began to persecute, torture, and execute those who did not support reform. The author writes in horrific detail of the deaths suffered by those who committed what Henry saw as heresy—some were hung, cut down moments before death, revived, tortured, disemboweled, and torn to pieces by horses. Other, more noble adherents to the old ways, such as Sir Thomas More, were merely beheaded. More's execution, however, triggered the ire and disappointment of much of Europe—he had been regarded as both a great mind and a great soul, and Henry's decision to execute him was seen as repugnant. Henry, however, as determined as ever not only have his own way but have that way perceived as right, paid no heed.

Late in 1535, Anne was again pregnant, but knew that her very life depended upon this child being a boy and so was anxious and nervous. For her part, Katherine's health was deteriorating rapidly. She was visited by her old and dear friend Maria de Salinas, who was with her in the last moments of her life. Also present was a loyal priest, who knew that "his contemporaries set much store by death-bed confessions", and therefore made Katherine swear as she lay dying that she had never had sexual relations with Arthur.

The author writes that many people suspected that Katherine was being poisoned by Anne, and after Katherine died an autopsy supplied evidence that that those suspicions were justified. A modern interpretation of that evidence, however, suggests that Katherine died of cancer of the heart. Henry was so relieved at her death that he planned and staged an extravagant funeral for her as befitted the woman he called his sister-in-law and "the Dowager Princess". The public, however, saw her as a veritable saint. Mary is described as falling so ill when she heard of her mother's death she almost died, but was nevertheless strong enough to continue to refuse to be a lady-in-waiting to Princess Elizabeth.

Shortly after Katherine's death, the author writes, Henry was thrown from a horse and nearly died, but rallied and resumed both his pleasures and his duties. She adds, however, that his health and spirit never fully recovered—a wound in his leg suffered around this time never healed and he became increasingly inactive. For a once extremely active man, this enforced lack of activity triggered increasing frustration, anger, and bitterness, emotional states of being that were to dominate his life for the rest of his days.

Several narrative and thematic motifs reappear in this chapter. Primary among these is the re-emergence of religious conflict, one of the key contextual elements of Henry's reign and therefore a central thematic focus of The Six Wives. The focus in this section is on the increasing influence and presence of the reform movement. It's interesting to note that while this particular movement was increasing in both scope and influence, Anne's personal influence was beginning to wane. The author herself makes the connection, stating that for Henry's advisors and courtiers, Anne's support of reform was one more reason to get rid of her. Henry, as is revealed in the following chapters, eventually came to see things their way, but didn't do so immediately. This is a personal characteristic that appears again and again throughout the book—he knows what move he wants to make, but doesn't make it until he's fully ready to do so.

Meanwhile, an important narrative motif that reappears here is the author's presentation of carefully analyzed and well-supported theories, manifesting here and in subsequent chapters in her analysis of the character and goals of Jane Seymour. As the author herself points out, very little is actually known of the kind of person Jane was. There is, however, significant documentation still in existence to enable the drawing of certain conclusions, which the author proceeds to do, presenting her interpretation of Jane's feelings about Katherine, her analysis of Jane's own sense of ambition, and her commentary on the discreet (more queenly?) ways in which Jane acted on that ambition are examples of such conclusions. The appearance of another thematic motif is related to the author's analysis of Jane's character—her (the author's) examination of the destructive power of certainty. Henry quickly became so certain that Jane was the right woman to be his next queen that he was soon prepared and able to do whatever it took to be rid of Anne and to have Jane. In this case, the power of such certainty was fatally injurious to other people (i.e., Anne), but the thematic point is still the same—blind and over-confident certainty is clearly destructive.

Meanwhile, the author's skills at analysis also manifest in her commentary on the cause of Katherine's death. She (the author) has evidently consulted contemporary medical resources to a significant degree, enabling her to come to a more reasoned diagnosis of Katherine's medical condition than was possible in the less informed, more suspicious age in which Katherine died.

Finally, this section contains the first appearance of a physical condition that was to define the rest of Henry's life almost to the extent of his psycho-spiritual-emotional condition - the wound in his leg. A novelist might draw symbolic parallels between the fact that the physical wound never heals in the same way that the emotional wounds left by the end of Henry's love for Anne never heal, but this isn't a novel. Any relationship between the two wounds is entirely conjectural, if obvious to contemporary commentators who take into account current awareness of mind/body relationships.

Part 2, The 'Great Matter': Chapter 11

Part 2, The 'Great Matter': Chapter 11 Summary and Analysis

The author begins this chapter with a description of events on the day of Katherine's funeral—Anne discovered Jane Seymour sitting on Henry's knee, flew into a rage, and a few hours later "aborted a fetus of about fifteen weeks' growth that had all the appearances of a male. 'She has miscarried of her savior'", wrote an ambassador of the time. This was, for Henry, the last straw—he was in love with another woman, Anne had again failed to give him a son, and political circumstances in Europe were such that to strengthen his position and consolidate his power, he had to get rid of Anne and marry someone else . . . quickly.

Henry began to dismantle his marriage on several fronts. He ordered Cromwell, now his chief political advisor, to come up with criminal charges that would justify Anne's execution, and to offer evidence for those charges. He also ordered Archbishop Cranmer, his chief religious advisor, to arrange for his marriage to Anne declared null and void—this he needed to do so that any children he might have with Jane be declared his legal heirs. Finally, as he began removing influence from members of Anne's family and passing it to those of Jane's, Anne and Jane both waited for what they came to know was inevitable—Anne with increasingly desperate dread, Jane with an apparent calm but seething inner impatience. The author comments that there's no evidence to suggest that she knew the details of Henry's activities, but asserts firmly that she must have known that something was going on, and offered no word of support to, or for, Anne during the entire procedure.

Cromwell soon accumulated his evidence, and brought charges against Anne and four men, one her brother, two others noblemen, and the last a low born musician. They were all charged not only with adultery, but with plotting the death of the king (treason). All five were arrested and brought to the Tower of London. Anne was housed in lodgings that were relatively luxurious, but was attended by women who were essentially spies put into place by Henry to overhear and report on anything and everything Anne said. The author describes how Anne continually protested her innocence, veering erratically between utter hysteria (at one point wondering whether she was "to die without justice), almost amused resignation (calling herself "Anne Lackhead"), and spiritual calm. Her co-defendants at first protested their innocence, but the musician, apparently under torture, confessed that he had in fact committed the crimes with which he was charged. The other three continued to say they had done nothing, even at their trial which was convened with considerable haste and stacked with courtiers loyal to Henry and their own self interest. As the trial proceeded, Cranmer ruled that Henry's marriage was null and void based on the relationship he (Henry) had had with Anne's sister Mary. This therefore meant that Elizabeth was effectively disinherited.

At the conclusion of the trial, the four men were convicted and sentenced to death. The author describes how Anne, according to documents of the time, spoke well in her defense but was also convicted. The whole time, the author adds, Henry was almost constantly in the company of Jane Seymour, dining and dancing happily with the members of his court as though nothing was wrong. Finally, the time came for the executions. The author writes that Anne was forced to watch from the windows of her lodgings as one by one those accused and convicted with her were beheaded. Her own execution was delayed because the special executioner from France was held up by bad weather, so she had to wait for several days. Eventually, however, the execution took place, and Anne is described as behaving with considerable dignity and restraint.

At the conclusion of this chapter, the author describes how, shortly after Anne's head was severed from her body, artisans and servants set to work removing any trace of her from the royal palaces. "It was as if", the author writes, "she had never existed. And not once, during the years that were left to him, would the King be heard to utter her name again".

History repeats itself in this chapter. While Anne's expulsion from Henry's life was hastier, much more violent and more thoroughly grounded in false legal evidence than Katherine's, the result of the process was the same—both women were discarded in the name of Henry's "reasonable" desire for a male heir. That that desire was entwined with a physical desire for a new wife seems almost secondary, at least to the author. It is, however, an essential component to both stories. History also repeats itself in the way in which Henry's advisors, in this case Cranmer and Cromwell, manipulate circumstances and events so that Henry could get what he wanted. Their actions here not only repeat this motif, but also foreshadow moments later in the book when they again do so—and, in Cromwell's case, fail spectacularly and suffer the consequences.

Narrative history also repeats itself, as the author again draws what appear to be reasonable conclusions about character and psychology from evidence that seems to be actually quite slender. In other words, she's drawing inferences rather than actually stating facts when she discusses Jane Seymour's feelings as she waited for Henry's plans for Anne's death to come to fruition. It's interesting to note that of all the portrayals of Henry's wives contained in this book, Jane Seymour seems to be viewed with the least sympathy/empathy. The foolish Katherine Howard, it seems, is treated with more compassion—she was, after all, only a naïve girl. Even Anne Boleyn, for all her unarguable flaws, seems to be held in high regard by the author for her strength of will. Jane Seymour, on the other hand, is portrayed in a light that, in spite of her apparent goodwill towards Henry's troubled daughters, seems harsh.

Finally, the apparent (if symbolic) parallels between Henry's leg wound and the emotional wound of Anne Boleyn's so-called betrayal appear again in the final lines of this chapter—specifically, in the author's comment that Henry never again spoke Anne's name as long as he lived. It's interesting to note, however, that the author never contemplates Henry's sense of responsibility—she never comments on whether Henry ever felt guilty over how he treated Anne, or any of his other wives for that matter. There is in this an implied comment on one of the book's key themes, the corruptive power of

absolute certainty—since such certainty, after all, never truly questions, doubts, or feels responsibility or guilt.

Part 2, The 'Great Matter': Chapter 12

Part 2, The 'Great Matter': Chapter 12 Summary and Analysis

This chapter begins with a description by the author of Henry and Jane's activities on the day of Anne's execution. Henry went immediately to Jane to seek her hand, while "Jane spent the greater part of the day [of Anne's execution] preparing her wedding clothes, and perhaps reflecting upon the ease with which she had attained her ambition: Anne Boleyn had had to wait seven years for her crown; Jane had waited barely seven months". The author also describes Jane's appearance, saying she was not particularly beautiful but had grace of manner, charm, tact, and dignity—a welcome change, the author suggests, from the frequent hysteria of his previous wife.

As plans for the wedding proceeded, and even after the wedding, Jane worked to arrange reconciliation between Henry and Mary (his daughter by Katherine of Aragon). At first Henry resisted, remembering all too well how stubborn both Mary and Katherine had been. After Mary had been convinced to sign a document acknowledging her mother's marriage as invalid, however, she was speedily welcomed back at court. The author suggests that Mary's decision, which she always perceived as disloyal and which was made under pressure from several sources, haunted and troubled her for the rest of her life. Jane, however, welcomed her gladly, and became both a loving stepmother and good friend. Elizabeth didn't fare quite so well, the author suggests—she quickly realized that her circumstances had changed, and was curious about why. Henry, Jane, and Mary all made occasional visits to Elizabeth's various households (in her early life she didn't make her home at court), but Henry's energy was focused on finally fathering a male heir with Jane. The author suggests that Henry himself was doubtful of his ability to do so, and adds that that his increasing inactivity (caused by his constantly troubling leg) combined with his increasing appetite for food and wine to make it difficult for him to be sexually productive.

Meanwhile, his attention was taken up with a struggle against religious rebellion staged by conservative opponents of church reform. Over the course of several years he had, at Cromwell's urging, disbanded several of the many monasteries and convents in England. On the surface, it was an effort to establish the authority of the Church of England over that of the Roman Catholic Church of Rome, to which the convents and monasteries belonged. The reality was, however, that Cromwell saw the significant wealth accumulated in those monasteries and convents as a convenient source of income for Henry's court, which it became as the dissolution of the monasteries progressed. Public resistance to this action was the emotional and spiritual motivation behind the rebellion, which was, the author suggests, the most aggressive demonstration of the deep differences in religious belief that troubled England for decades as the result of Henry's decision to separate the Church of England from that of Rome. Henry fought the rebellion on two fronts—with physical (and very violent)

resistance, and later with political manipulation. The rebellion was eventually suppressed, with its leaders being subjected to the horrors and humiliations of a traitor's death.

Henry's triumph over the rebels was heightened when Jane finally became pregnant. As her carefully monitored pregnancy proceeded, she and Henry (along with the rest of the court) were convinced the baby would be the long, and desperately, desired son. In spite of killing plagues throughout the country, the pregnancy continued and culminated, after a protracted labor that lasted three days and nights, in the birth of a son—Edward. "Henry", the author writes, "wasted no time in informing the world of the glad tidings. Within minutes . . . his heralds had been dispatched to every part of the country with instructions to spread the news". The public and the court celebrated, Jane seemed to be recovering, Mary and Elizabeth both participated in the immediate and very public celebrations of his birth—and then, the author writes, Jane fell seriously ill with "puerperal fever, a common hazard for women in childbed in those days". The author suggests that wounds caused by Jane's lengthy labor had become infected, and since medical practice at the time was so primitive, there was little that attending physicians could do. Jane, she writes, veered back and forth between seeming to recover and seeming to get worse, but finally she succumbed and died within a week of giving birth.

Jane, the author writes, was mourned and buried with full royal honor and ceremony as Henry met with his councilors and considered whom he should marry next. He saw, the author says, "that a fourth marriage might be wise, in view of the fact that his sole male heir was just an infant who might at any time succumb to a multitude of childhood ailments". This perspective, however, didn't prevent him from mourning Jane deeply, which he continued to do for the rest of his life—the author describes how, in his later years, Henry had a portrait painted in which he appeared with his children and the wife he believed to have been the truest of all his wives—Jane Seymour.

This chapter is filled with undeniably intriguing, sometimes appalling juxtapositions—Jane fussing over wedding clothes while Anne's head is being chopped off, Mary's being welcomed while Elizabeth is being shunned, the life in Jane's womb being celebrated at the same moment, indeed in the same breath, as the horrific deaths of so-called traitors and heretics. Other evocative juxtapositions include Henry's simultaneous joy at the birth of his son, grief at the loss of his wife, and pragmatism in his immediate consideration of who his next wife is going to be. It might not be going too far to suggest that this chapter is a highly concentrated portrayal of life at its most complex, its most challenging, and its most rewarding—life and death, joy and horror, all co-existing within breaths of one another.

In the midst of all these juxtapositions, the major themes of Henry's reign (and therefore the major themes of the book) re-appear, these being his obsession with a male heir (which continues even after the birth of just such an heir) and religious conflict. While the reasons for Henry's desperation for male children have been examined in some detail, it might be useful to consider the reasons why disputes of religion were so pervasive and aroused such passion.

On a superficial level, proponents of the old faith (Roman Catholicism) resented what had been done to the church in the name of Henry's earthly desires—for power and glory (as manifested in a male child to succeed him) and for sexual gratification (as manifested in his relations with a woman not his wife). In other words, in the eyes of traditionalists, the new church was born out of immorality and sin. For reformers, however, the Roman Catholic Church was materialistic, elitist, and corrupt, and therefore utterly bereft of moral and or spiritual authority. Reformers desired integrity in their church leaders, a more democratic relationship with those leaders than Catholics had with the authoritarian Pope, and the opportunity to read and understand the Bible and its teachings for themselves. The angry violence with which each side greeted the views of the other was grounded, ultimately, in fear—ultimately, and on a deeper level, the true source of religious conflict. For the Catholics, it was fear that they would lose earthly power, wealth, and influence, while for Reformers it was fear that what they fervently believed to be the true way would always be suppressed and condemned. In other words, each side believed that it stood to lose a great deal if the other was fully recognized and supported. Thus, as history indicates time and time again, religious fear and a religion-based desire for power, two sides of the same coin, combined to create societal tension that ultimately functioned in opposition to the stated goal of all religions—peace, universal love, and transcendent states of grace.

Part 3, How Many Wives Will He Have?: Chapter 13

Part 3, How Many Wives Will He Have?: Chapter 13 Summary and Analysis

This chapter opens with a description of Henry's eager, unprecedented and unplanned visit to his next wife, Anne of Cleves. The author describes how it had been two and a half years since the death of Jane Seymour, how Henry had fallen in love with Anne's portrait, and how he was so eager to meet his new bride that he impulsively decided to travel to meet her shortly after learning she had arrived in England. The author concludes this brief, introductory section with a description of how Henry was instantly disappointed when he saw Anne's true face.

The author then describes, at some length, the process Henry went through to select Anne as his next bride. Edward, she writes, was healthy, but Henry worried that any sudden disease might kill him (Edward), that he couldn't trust either Mary or Elizabeth (next in line to the throne after Edward) to rule, and that he was getting too old and too fat to father children. He was also worried about possible challenges to his rule, including from the last remnants of the Pole family, of which Margaret Countess of Salisbury (devoted friend to Katherine of Aragon) was the last. He beheaded the male members of the family and imprisoned the Countess, thus (in his mind) solidifying his grip on power.

The author writes that ultimately Henry still needed to find a new wife as soon as possible, and ordered Cromwell to search out prospects. Several were rejected, several (perhaps surprisingly, perhaps not), rejected Henry. Finally Cromwell heard of a pair of German princesses, Anne and Amelia of Cleves, who might be suitable. He and Henry commissioned the Dutch painter Hans Holbein to paint portraits of them both. Holbein did so, and the author discusses whether he painted what he actually saw or what his "artist's eye" saw. Whatever he painted, Henry fell in love with Anne's portrait, and arranged to marry her. The author describes Anne's character as naïve, straightforward, agreeable, and all too eager to escape the restrictions of the court at Cleves for more freedom in the court of England. After a description of Anne's difficult journey from Cleves (in Germany) to England, this section ends where the first section began—with Henry's eager dash to meet his new bride.

The author then describes how Henry went through with the elaborately planned ceremonies designed to welcome the new queen to England, even though he already felt a strong distaste for any kind of physical union with Anne. He ordered Cromwell to use any means possible to keep the marriage from taking place, but Cromwell insisted the political benefits of the marriage were essential to Henry maintaining, and perhaps improving, his position. Henry, privately grumbling ("I like her not!" was his frequent

comment) but publicly happy, went along with the plan and got married—but, according to all accounts (including those of Henry and Anne) never consummated the marriage.

For her part, Anne was completely unaware of her new husband's unhappiness and therefore rejoiced in her new marriage, even when conversation with her curious (and somewhat impertinent) ladies-in-waiting led her to understand that Henry wasn't being as much of a husband as he should have been. Aware of what had happened to Henry's previous wives (particularly Katherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn) she became quite nervous—and with good reason. For, the author suggests, Henry was still looking for ways out of the marriage, and when word came that his marriage was no longer politically advantageous, he immediately took steps to annul it. Anne soon became aware of this, and immediately withdrew to one of her houses in the country in order to keep distant from potential intriguing.

By this time, Henry was also falling in love with the young and vivacious Katherine Howard, who, the author suggests, had been maneuvered into a position as one of Anne's ladies-in-waiting by the powerful Roman Catholic faction at court. The author describes Katherine as being good at flattery and flirting, Henry as being all too susceptible to both, and the Catholic courtiers as being eager to consolidate their power. Meanwhile, Cromwell had been thrown in jail, tried for treason, and convicted; Anne remained in her country home, waiting to see what would happen to her; and evidence for an annulment of the marriage between Henry and Anne was being gathered. Also, a woman from Katherine's past, Joan Bulmer, had heard of Katherine's growing influence at court and was demanding a place in Katherine's service. Katherine, a "soft hearted" girl, was all too willing and welcomed Joan into her retinue. It was, the author writes, a decision she would later regret.

The author then writes of how Henry's marriage with Anne was easily annulled, and how Henry proposed that if Anne didn't dispute the annulment, she would be granted an annual income, the use of three fine houses, and the right to be treated as his sister (with all the benefits of high rank that entailed). Anne readily and happily agreed to all his conditions, asking only that she be allowed to continue the friendship that she had developed with Henry's three children—Mary (who was the same age as Anne), Edward (who longed for a mother figure), and particularly Elizabeth (with whom Anne became good friends). Henry agreed, but because of his previous experiences with stubborn wives (Katherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn), was suspicious of Anne's motives. A search of her personal letters and belongings revealed that she had no plans of any sort to stage any kind of rebellion against him, and the two settled into a relationship of pleasant amiability.

Finally, the author writes that as Henry moved into this new phase of his life, and as it became clearer that Katherine Howard would soon be his next wife, it also became clear that Henry's anger with Cromwell (for arranging the marriage to Anne in the first place) was not going away. Cromwell was executed at the Tower of London, and within days Henry married Katherine Howard.

If other parts of the book are almost novelistic in approach, this chapter is similar in many ways to a self-contained short story, in that the entire narrative of a marriage begins, plays out, and ends in a little more than fifty pages (fifty-four, to be precise). It begins with the employment of a narrative technique unique to the book but not uncommon in short stories. This is a prologue, written with enticing energy and dash, describing Henry's eager race to meet his latest bride, whose face he had hitherto seen only in a portrait, and his crushing disappointment when he sees what she actually looks like. The narrative then returns to the point at which it ended at the conclusion of the previous chapter—with Henry's desire to find a new wife to hopefully provide him with what some historians have described as "a spare heir". Once again the personal (the desire for an heir, a longing for love) blends with the political (the determination to consolidate power and reputation) as Henry searches the continent for a bride either unaware of or unafraid of his marital history.

That said, novelistic elements continue to appear in this chapter—it is, after all, only a thread in a complex and sizable narrative tapestry. Among these is the use of foreshadowing, notable here in the reference to the fatal attention Henry was paying to members of the Pole family. The account here foreshadows the gruesome account in the following chapter of the execution of the last surviving member of that family, Margaret, Countess of Salisbury. Another element of foreshadowing can be found in the reference to Joan Bulmer and the role she plays in the eventual downfall of Katherine Howard.

Meanwhile, another novelistic aspect of the book that manifests in this short-story-like section is the reappearance late in the chapter of the book's thematic and narrative focus on religious conflict, manifested here in the maneuvering to get the pro-Catholic Katherine Howard into Henry's bed and by his side on the throne. A third novelistic aspect of The Six Wives is the motif of the eager-to-please advisor, as Cromwell once again attempts to gain favor with the King by arranging what he (Cromwell) sees as an appropriate marriage. This time, however, his efforts end with disaster, both for him and for Henry—another manifestation of the book's thematic contention that absolute certainty, such as that with which Cromwell urged Henry's marriage to Anne of Cleves, is destructive. And once again, the motif of a woman caught up in circumstances beyond her range of influence appears; however, in this case Anne of Cleves is portrayed by the author as reacting with more sense, more discretion, and more reasonableness than any of the three wives preceding her.

Anne comes across as essentially being realistic about her situation, taking into account the broader picture of what's going on as opposed to being absolutely certain (as Katherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, and several ill-fated advisors all were) that getting what she wanted was the only possible outcome to her situation. The point is not made to suggest that personal conviction is absolutely wrong, but the book does give the strong thematic sense that there is wisdom, and the potential for not only survival but contentment, in being conciliatory and compromising. The story of Anne of Cleves, as brief as it is in this book, seems to be ample proof, contrasting the relative peace of her later life with the torturous lives of Henry and so many of his troubled queens.

Part 3, How Many Wives Will He Have?: Chapter 14

Part 3, How Many Wives Will He Have?: Chapter 14 Summary and Analysis

This chapter begins with a description of the early days of Henry's fifth marriage (to Katherine Howard), of the secrecy of their wedding, of his evident happiness, and of Katherine's cheerful, greedy, self-indulgent, and sometimes compassionate character. There is also a description of the life at that time of Anne of Cleves, who celebrated her freedom with rich food, beautiful clothes, and lavish entertainments at one of her country homes. The author describes a happy visit paid by Henry and Katherine to Anne's home, and also a visit paid by Anne to court in London one Christmas. The pleasure she and Henry took in each other's company led some to imagine that reconciliation was possible, but it was evident that Henry was completely infatuated with Katherine, and the imagined reconciliation never took place.

Also during this period, a sudden rebellion in the north of England, which Henry's armies quickly suppressed, led Henry to again consider the potential threat to his throne presented by the Pole family. He realized that the only way he could be fully free of this threat was to have Margaret, Countess of Salisbury (the last living member of the Pole family) executed. The Countess was therefore awakened one morning, told she was to prepare to die later that day, and then led to the scaffold where "there occurred one of the worst atrocities of Henry's reign . . . the executioner was not the usual one employed on such occasions and was young and inexperienced. Faced with such a prisoner, he panicked, and struck out blindly, hacking at his victim's head, neck and shoulders, until he had finally butchered her to death". This turned many people, courtiers and public alike, against Henry, but he was unrepentant. "The peace of the realm", the author writes, "had been preserved, and the security of the dynasty maintained . . . [but Henry] was now more feared than beloved by many of his subjects".

Soon afterwards, the author writes, Henry and Katherine traveled throughout England, visiting Henry's many properties. On this trip (called a royal "progress"), Katherine encountered a young man whom she knew previously, Francis Dereham, who, like Joan Bulmer before him, reminded Katherine of their past and asked her to bring him to court with her. Katherine agreed, but Dereham soon became very unpopular with the queen's household because of his arrogance and familiarity with the queen. "[Katherine] did not know it", the author writes, "but she was standing on the edge of a precipice". Following his return from the progress, Henry discovered that his sister (the current queen of Scotland) had died, and also that Prince Edward was ill. He immediately became upset, and turned to Katherine for comfort. Prince Edward became well again and for a while Henry was happy, "but his idyll was soon to be abruptly and tragically shattered".

The author describes how Henry's chief advisor, Archbishop Cranmer, had been visited by a Protestant named John Lascelles, who gave him information about Katherine's life before she met Henry—specifically about her sexual and relationship history. This suggested to Cranmer, who was himself a secret Protestant and therefore eager to get the pro-Catholic Katherine away from Henry, that there was a possibility for the marriage to be annulled—if she had not come into her marriage a virgin, she had lied and so could not be Henry's true wife. Cranmer therefore searched for additional evidence of Katherine's sexual activity before her marriage, and found it—stories told by household servants of a relationship Katherine had with Dereham, as well as with other men (including her cousin, Thomas Culpeper). Cranmer, moving carefully, presented what he had discovered to the king, who was upset but ordered that Cranmer do whatever necessary to discover the truth. From that moment on, the author writes, Henry never saw Katherine again.

For his part, Cranmer interviewed Katherine, who (the author suggests) had more than her relationships with Culpeper and Dereham to worry about. She immediately became hysterical, attempted first to deny everything, and then after she had been removed from court and placed under arrest, confessed that she had indeed had previous relationships with Culpeper and Dereham. She then wrote a letter to Henry, pleading for mercy. Henry was inclined to believe that all she'd done was been involved with someone else before their marriage and not, as Cranmer hinted, continued the relationship after the marriage. This would mean, the author writes, that all that would happen was that the marriage would be annulled. Worse, however, was to follow.

If much of the rest of The Six Wives is novelistic, and the chapter on Anne of Cleves has elements of the self-contained short story, this and the following chapter focusing on the life and death of Katherine Howard bear marked similarities to a soap opera. Sexuality, melodramatic emotion, scheming and plotting—all are elements of that particularly titillating form of drama, and all are found in the story of Henry and the flirtatious, simultaneously naïve and worldly girl who became his fifth wife. Again the motif of the devious advisor appears, this time in the form of Cranmer, whose true motivation (secret Protestantism) becomes apparent, in a way similar to that in which deeper motivations are frequently revealed in soap operas. Finally, Cranmer's actions in leaving Henry the letter implicating Katherine in the same kind of treasonous adultery that cost Anne Boleyn her life have a melodramatic, soap opera-ish sensibility about them, as do the tales of Katherine's extreme emotional reactions to the doom-woven net closing around her.

It must be remembered, however, that for all her sexual experience (not uncommon in women of her age) Katherine was still only a girl of fifteen, naïve in the ways of the world in general and of the court in particular. All she knew for certain were the ways of men, and the ways women of the time manipulated and enticed them. The point is not made with any kind of misogynist or sexist intent, but to suggest that women of the period had very few resources available to them, their sexuality being easily their most accessible and their most successful. Anne Boleyn and Jane Seymour both used it to gain influence and power—Katherine Howard was, it could be argued (and is, by the author) only doing what came naturally to women of the time. She suffered and died,

where other women would have merely been disgraced, because she was a queen and because Henry's sense of security was so fragile.

In the middle of all the drama associated with Katherine, a couple of the book's key narrative and thematic motifs reappear. The first is Henry's obsession with the security of his family and his power as manifested in the description of his attitude towards the Pole family, particularly in relation to the graphically described death of the Countess of Salisbury. This is, in essence, another appearance of the book's thematic focus on the corruptive, dangerous power of absolute certainty—in Henry's case, that he, and only he and his descendants, has the continuing right to power, control, and authority. The second motif, both narrative and thematic, manifests in relation to Cranmer. This relates to the book's focus on religious conflict. Once again, a woman (Katherine Howard) is caught in the middle of the struggle between Protestant and Catholic. In this context, it's possible to see here, and in the chapter that follows, that Katherine Howard was the first and only one of Henry's six wives whose exit from his life was deliberately initiated and engineered by others. Yes, Wolsey, Cranmer, and Cromwell each variously assisted in the removal of Katherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, and Anne of Cleves from Henry's life, but they were only acting on his wishes. By contrast, with Katherine Howard, the advisor (Cranmer) was the initiator. This, arguably, makes Katherine Howard the most victimized of Henry's six queens.

Part 3, How Many Wives Will He Have?: Chapter 15

Part 3, How Many Wives Will He Have?: Chapter 15 Summary and Analysis

"Archbishop Cranmer," the author writes, "was not a cruel man, but he was determined that the Queen should be sacrificed in the cause of [religious] reform. If she was allowed to live, there was always the possibility that the King might relent and take her back". So, the author continues, a charge of adultery had to be brought against her and proved, meaning that she would be executed. She was only

sixteen.

The author then describes, in considerable detail, the process by which Cranmer accumulated his evidence—torturing Dereham and Culpeper, questioning Joan Bulmer and other ladies of Katherine's household, and repeatedly interrogating the Duchess of Norfolk (with whom Katherine lived when she was a child) and Lady Rochford (Katherine's chief lady-in-waiting). Soon, the author writes, the evidence was inescapable. Katherine had not only had pre-marital relationships with both Dereham and Culpeper, but had continued those relationships (aided by Lady Rochford) after her marriage to Henry. As the result of that evidence being brought to court, several things happened. First, Henry became depressed, and withdrew from all court activities for several weeks. Second, Henry's council passed an act proclaiming that if any queen, present or future, was found to have had adultery while married to the king, she was guilty of treason and could legally be executed. So could any men found guilty of such adultery, or any person found to have assisted in its commission. This last condition applied to Lady Rochford, who realized that the only way she could hope to escape execution herself was to reveal what she knew about Katherine, and so confessed everything. For her part, Katherine realized that there was no hope for her, and prepared with relative calmness for her inevitable end.

The author writes that Derehem and Culpeper were brought to trial for treasonous adultery with the queen, found guilty, and condemned to death. Lady Rochford was brought to trial for assisting in the commission of adultery, was also found guilty, and also condemned to death. Finally, Katherine herself was tried, found guilty, and condemned to be executed. Meanwhile, Cranmer worked to convince Henry, who was by this point somewhat recovered from his depression, to rid the country of the rest of Katherine's influential Howard family, which he proceeded to do—imprisoning several and executing a few.

Soon after their trials, the author writes, Dereham and Culpeper were both executed. When Katherine received word that she was soon to follow, she requested that the block upon which she was to rest her head be brought to her chambers so she could

practice placing her head upon it, and therefore act with dignity on the day of her execution. Her jailers, despite their surprise, agreed. Katherine, the author writes "spent the night coming to terms with her fate". The following morning she and the block were both taken to the scaffold. Katherine gave a brief speech acknowledging her crimes, placed her head on the block, and was swiftly beheaded—just like her cousin, Anne Boleyn, had been. Lady Rochford, not nearly so calm, soon followed, and was executed just as swiftly.

Once again, the reader can find similarities between the narrative style this chapter and popular narrative styles in contemporary culture. Here the present-day reference is the television crime procedural, any one of the CSI or Law and Order programs—there, as here, the narrative line follows a course of suspicion, gathering of evidence, confrontation of the suspect with that evidence, trial, and execution (in this case literal) of justice. There is one significant difference between the legal proceedings documented here and those documented in such procedural television programs. In the case of the latter, investigations are ultimately motivated by the pursuit of truth and of justice. In the case of the former, Cranmer may be in search of truth, but it's highly questionable whether he's also acting in the interest of justice. As the author states, he was acting primarily to advance his own reform oriented interests—Katherine was, to him, akin to a troublesome fly that needed to be swatted out of the way. As previously suggested, this gives the impression that Katherine, in spite of her own foolishness, was the most victimized of all Henry's wives.

Meanwhile, Katherine Howard's case and condition is the most glaring example of the double standard that was applied, at the time, to sexual activity outside of marriage. Henry, as frequently described by the author, had countless affairs and fathered at least one child, if not more—and yet he went virtually unpunished. His wives were, in fact, expected to turn a blind eye and accept his activities. Women, on the other hand, were treated harshly, unsympathetically, and with complete misogyny. There was the possibility that a child born to a queen as the result of an affair might upset the succession. But as Henry himself attempted to do, the child of a king born in the same circumstance was actually welcomed into the succession. Ultimately, it all boils down to a profound and pervasive sexism, a total disregard for the human value of women at a time when women, in fact, were the only way in which a man could sustain power. The culture of the era seems to have missed the irony that only a healthy, well-treated woman could produce a healthy, well treated son.

Part 3, How Many Wives Will He Have?: Chapter 16

Part 3, How Many Wives Will He Have?: Chapter 16 Summary and Analysis

The author begins this chapter with a discussion of the marriage possibilities facing Henry following the death of Katherine Howard. There were factions in the country that wanted him to remarry Anne of Cleves, but he made it quite clear that that would never happen. There was also the possibility of his finding a new consort at court, but that seemed unlikely. There were very few possibilities in Europe, and for a while, the king seemed content to let the question rest, especially since he was also interested in alliances with either France (possibly through the marriage of Mary to the French heir) or Scotland (through the marriage of Edward to the infant Mary, Queen of Scots). Plans for this latter marriage went as far as being contracted, but were later annulled when Scottish rebels attacked England.

After a time, Henry became aware that a lady of wealth and good reputation whom he had always admired had become a widow (for the second time). This was Katherine Parr, who eventually became Henry's sixth and last wife. The author describes in some detail how Katherine had been broadly educated by a strict mother, been married to two elderly men in succession who each left her with considerable property, and who, at the time the king began courting her, was in love with the roguish Thomas Seymour, the brother of the late Queen Jane. When Henry began to express his interest in her, Katherine was at first dismayed, partly because she knew how Henry had treated his previous wives and partly because she wanted to be with Seymour. Henry, aware of her attraction, sent Seymour on a diplomatic mission. Katherine realized she didn't have much choice, and eventually agreed to marry the king.

The author describes the marriage between Henry and Katherine as essentially good. Katherine endeavored to be a good step-mother to Henry's three lonely children, and they in turn responded with affection. She was also able to ignore, for the most part, Henry's peevish temperament, which was becoming increasingly aggravated as he himself became increasingly overweight and pained by his always troublesome leg. She was his intellectual equal, playfully debating matters of religion with him and even writing and publishing a book of religious contemplations, something almost unheard of for a woman of the time. Finally, she proved herself an able administrator and ruler—when Henry was in France pursuing an attack on the city of Boulougne, Katherine commanded England's armies to a defeat of yet another Scottish rebellion. They were, in many ways, the most functional of Henry's marriages, except for the fact that Katherine never became pregnant—the author suggests that by this time, Henry's weight and general ill health had made him impotent.

Katherine was, however, a secret Protestant—a practitioner of the reformed faith. Two of Henry's key advisors were determined to get her out of the way so the traditional Catholic faith could, and would, predominate. The author writes of how they managed to get Henry halfway convinced of her heresy, but a misplaced letter conveyed to Katherine made apparent that she was in significant danger, and she was able to plead her case with Henry, who sent the two advisors away in disgrace. Shortly afterwards, as Henry's health deteriorated steeply, a plot to replace Katherine with a notably Catholic young woman was foiled, and its nobly born instigators sent to the Tower of London to await punishment. Henry, meanwhile, was fully aware that he had to prepare for his death. He passed a new Act of Succession, naming Edward his heir, expressed his desire to be buried next to Queen Jane, arranged for Thomas Seymour (now returned from his diplomatic mission) to be barred from the council that would advise the future King Edward, and wrote a will providing amply for Katherine after his death.

When Henry died, the author writes, "It was the end of an era. England was now to be ruled by . . . a child of nine . . .", and there was to be a constant struggle over who would control him. The author describes how Edward, and indeed Henry's two other children, received the news of their father's death with great sadness, how the funeral was conducted with immense gravity and pomp, and how Henry was indeed buried next to Jane Seymour. The author then expresses her opinion of Henry, his reign, and his marriages—that he was driven by his desperation for an heir more than by anything else, that he was soured on marriage by Katherine of Aragon's stubbornness and Anne Boleyn's ambition, and that he was fondly remembered by his people for years after his death.

For the last time in the book, its major themes and motifs are enacted. The theme of absolute certainty is once again on display in Henry's determination to marry Katherine Parr, and in his advisors' equally certain determination that she had to be removed from the picture. This, in turn, evokes and dramatizes another of the book's themes, the continued presence of religious conflict and tension. Finally, Katherine's reluctant agreement to marry the king is yet another manifestation of the way women were treated, viewed, and forced to act under the societal strictures of the time. In terms of the book's repeated narrative motifs, there is the presence of manipulative courtiers, the author's careful and well-thought out analysis (in this case, of Katherine's emotional state before and during her marriage), and suspenseful, engaging writing style (applied in this case to the story of the dropped paper).

By far the most important part of this chapter is the way it narrates the end of Henry's life. Almost to his last breath he maintained his dictatorial, absolutely certain response to affairs both public and personal. It might seem a debatable question whether his single-mindedness was the result of his being royal or the result of his being the man he was, but ultimately the question is irrelevant—Henry was who he was because he was royal. If he'd been a commoner, if he'd had a life away from the pomp and manipulations of court life he'd have still been a man—he'd have still, according to the dictates of culture, been able to dominate his wife—but he might have found a way to make even his difficult marriages more sustainable.

Finally, of all Henry's wives, Katherine Parr is portrayed here as being the most fully rounded as a woman, and the most complex as a human being. More intelligent and educated than any of the other wives, more experienced as a wife, woman and courtier, more suited to the roles and duties of queen-ship (except, perhaps, for Katherine of Aragon), she seems to have been in many ways the perfect wife. And then, as the next chapter proves, she was still able to have children, even at the relatively mature age at which she married. The reader might be justified in wondering whether Henry's life and reign, as well as the life of his kingdom, might have been very different if, for example, he had married Katherine Parr, or a woman like her, earlier.

Part 3, How Many Wives Will He Have?: Chapter 17

Part 3, How Many Wives Will He Have?: Chapter 17 Summary and Analysis

This chapter focuses on the lives of Henry's two living queens, Katherine Parr and Anne of Cleves.

Shortly after Henry's death, Thomas Seymour returned to England, intending to advance his financial and political position with the new King Edward, who was after all his nephew. As Seymour attempted to manipulate his way into the king's council, he also attempted to develop a relationship with the king's sister, the Princess Elizabeth. Elizabeth, attracted to Seymour but aware that he was a dangerous man, refused his advances. Seymour then turned his attention back to Katherine Parr, quickly learning that she was still in love with him. At the same time, Seymour's brother, the Duke of Somerset, became the head of King Edward's council, and knowing full well how irresponsible his brother was, refused to give him a place on it. Seymour, seeing that he was about to gain significant influence on the king through Katherine (with whom King Edward was still close), didn't pursue the matter, and he and Katherine were soon married.

Katherine settled into her home in a large castle at Chelsea, and soon invited Elizabeth to live with her and Seymour. For a while they were all happy, and Katherine became pregnant for the first time in her life. Seymour saw the pregnancy as an opportunity to renew his relationship with Elizabeth, which he did with Elizabeth's eventual encouragement and Katherine's initial acceptance. The author writes that after a while, Katherine became aware that the relationship between Seymour and Elizabeth was more than it should have been, and banished Elizabeth from her home. A short while later, Elizabeth wrote to her pleading for forgiveness, and Katherine accepted—Seymour, however, was much in disgrace and didn't have much to do with Katherine until her baby was born. The child, a girl named Mary after Princess Mary (with whom Katherine was also close) was healthy, but Katherine was not—she succumbed quickly to puerperal fever, the same post-childbirth fever that had taken the life of Jane Seymour. When she died, she was buried with full royal honors, although the author describes how her grave, and the monument placed above it, were eventually desecrated. The author also describes what happened to Katherine's daughter—Seymour was executed only a few months after her birth for attempting to gain too much control over King Edward, and the child was left an orphan. The author writes that it's impossible to determine exactly what happened to her, as several records were lost in a fire.

Finally, the author writes of the later life of Anne of Cleves, who embraced the Catholic faith while Henry was still alive, and remained a Catholic (and therefore a staunch friend

of the Princess Mary) until she died. Anne remained popular at court and on her manor farms, keeping herself apart from court politics and proving to be an astute businesswoman. She survived King Edward (who died when he was sixteen), and celebrated with Princess Mary when she (Mary) became queen and took on her life's mission of returning England to the Catholic faith and traditions. When Anne died, she left bequests to several friends and servants, as well as to the then Queen Mary, thus sealing her reputation as a generous, gracious, and noble lady.

This section of the book is in some ways free of many of its previous narrative and thematic considerations. In terms of the former, there is a certain degree of academically grounded analysis involved in the narrative of events surrounding Elizabeth's stay at Katherine's home, but for the most part, there is, in comparison to other chapters, relatively little that needs to be analyzed. It seems that the actions of the individuals whose lives are explored in this section are actually fairly clear and relatively easy to determine.

In terms of the book's main thematic considerations, there is relatively little discussion of the question of religion, and while Thomas Seymour's sense of absolute certainty (that he has a right to power and influence) is as destructive to him as it is to others elsewhere in the narrative, it's far from being this chapter's narrative focus. The most thematically relevant of this chapter's narrative threads is its focus on the lives of the women, Katherine Parr, Anne of Cleves, and to an extent, Elizabeth.

It could easily be argued, in fact, that in this chapter, the book becomes about women, as opposed to queens. Yes, the queens were women, but women whose lives were confined and defined by rigorous, constricting circumstances. The stories here of both Anne of Cleves and Katherine Parr suggest that their emotional, spiritual, and physical lives truly began when released from these circumstances. While Anne's story essentially ends happily and Katherine's tragically, the fact remains that they embraced their freedom to live their lives on their terms, perhaps with greater determination and pleasure than they would have if they hadn't endured such constrictions in the first place. This, then, is the climax of the book's thematic and narrative focus on the lives of the queens, rather than on the life of the king they married. Yes, Henry plays an important role in those lives, but as a catalyst for the challenges, opportunities, rewards, and destructive ends faced by each of these very different, but in many ways very similar, women.

Characters

Henry VIII

Henry VIII is one of the most famous kings of English history. He ruled England from 1509 through 1537, and was responsible for some of the most defining moments of English history. He became heir to the throne at age eleven following the death of his older brother Prince Arthur, and was crowned king when he was only eighteen. He was, according to most historical accounts (including this one) ambitious, duplicitous, intelligent, well-read, and obsessive. His outsized appetites for women, food, pleasure, power, and glory were renowned throughout the known world of the time, as was his equally outsized temper. These larger-than-life aspects of his personality have made Henry a popular subject for biographers, historians, and film-makers for centuries. In this book, however, the author creates a portrait of considerably more depth, depicting Henry as emotionally vulnerable, deeply troubled, and easily obsessed—with religion, with securing his family's shaky claim to the throne by fathering a male heir, and with various attractive women whom he believed could be the mother of that heir. Perhaps incongruously, he was also a capable musician, having composed several pieces of music that are still popular today, the Christmas song known variously as Greensleeves or What Child is This among those credited to him. In his later years, Henry became something of a tyrant, displaying no hesitation about executing those (including two of his wives) whom he believed got in the way of his realizing his goals. Of robust health and athletic build in his youth, a never-healed injury to his leg in mid-life reduced his capacity for physical activity. This contributed to his aging into the grotesquely overweight monster of popular imagination, and to his relatively early death at the age of fifty-six.

Katherine of Aragon

Katherine of Aragon was a princess of Spain, daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Her first marriage was at sixteen to Prince Arthur, the original heir to the English throne. The question of whether their marriage was ever consummated was the defining aspect of her life, becoming as it did the focus of her years-long dispute with Henry over whether she was his legal wife (Katherine having been married to Henry shortly after Arthur's death). Henry wanted to believe, and eventually became convinced, that Katherine and Arthur had consummated their relationship, which meant that her marriage to Henry was invalid and he could be free to marry his beloved Anne Boleyn. Katherine, however, insisted to the moment of her death that the marriage was never consummated, and that she was therefore Henry's true and only wife. She is portrayed as a woman of deep religious faith, traditional and Catholic. She is also portrayed as stubborn, intelligent, and devoted—to the well-being of her single living child after several miscarried pregnancies, to the subjects she ruled, and above all to Henry, her king, her husband, her lord and master.

Anne Boleyn

Anne was an English-born, Paris-bred lady-in-waiting to Katherine of Aragon when she first attracted Henry's roving eye. Ambitious and self-serving, she quickly used Henry's attraction to gain influence for herself and for her family. By withholding her sexual favors, she was able to manipulate and control Henry to the point that he became so desperate to rid himself of Katherine that he created a new church so their marriage could be declared invalid, and the marriage to Anne could finally take place. Anne is portrayed by the author as emotionally volatile, selfish, manipulative, and vengeful—but is also described, via the inclusion of more flattering portrayals written during the rule of Anne's beloved daughter, Queen Elizabeth I, as deeply religious and having been profoundly wronged by both Henry and by historians of Henry's time. Anne, like Katherine, became pregnant several times, but only gave birth to a single healthy child —the aforementioned Elizabeth I. Her failure to produce a male heir, her ultimate unsuitability for the dignified role of queen, and Henry's attraction to Jane Seymour all combined to make Henry as desperate to get rid of her as he had once been to get rid of Katherine. Charges of treasonous adultery against Anne and several alleged "lovers" were fabricated, and all were executed by royal command. The author writes that after her execution, Henry was never again heard to say Anne's name.

Jane Seymour

Like Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour was a lady-in-waiting at court when Henry first became attracted to her. Also like Anne Boleyn, Jane withheld her sexual favors until she could be sure her predecessor was safely out of the way. Shortly after Anne's execution, Henry and Jane were married, shortly after the marriage Jane became pregnant, and shortly after giving birth to Henry's long-desired male heir, she died of a poorly treated infectious fever, a common fate of many women of the time. The author portrays Jane as being just as ambitious as Anne Boleyn, but more discreet, more submissive, and more respectful of both her position and her husband. Because of these aspects of her character, and because she gave birth to his much desired and even more beloved son and heir, Henry viewed her throughout the rest of his life as the best and most loving of his wives. Jane's son Edward became king upon Henry's death, while her brother Thomas became the fourth husband of Henry's sixth wife, Katherine Parr.

Anne of Cleves

Anne of Cleves was Henry VIII's fourth wife. He pursued her out of need for a political/military alliance with her country, fell in love with her portrait, fell out of love the moment he saw her, and married her anyway because he had no political alternative. Anne, naïve and trusting, had no idea that her new royal husband was displeased. But when the political situation changed and Henry realized he no longer needed either Anne or her country, she was wise enough to realize that the only way to avoid the fate of the long-suffering Katherine of Aragon and the beheaded Anne Boleyn was to give

Henry what he wanted—an annulment. As the result of her willing compliance, Henry behaved generously and graciously towards her, bestowing both rank and wealth that she enjoyed for the rest of her happy life.

Katherine Howard

The author portrays Henry's fifth wife as young, pretty, flirtatious, and charming. Her problem, as the author demonstrates, was that she displayed those characteristics not only to the king (who fell passionately in love with her) but to men in general, and from a very young age. This resulted not only in Katherine having a sexual history thought to be inappropriate for a queen—it also resulted in her committing what came to be called treasonous adultery with men of the court. Henry's advisors, desperate to replace Katherine with someone more easily controlled, gathered evidence against her and presented it to Henry, who decreed that she should face the same fate as Anne Boleyn, who had faced similar charges—execution by beheading. Katherine faced her fate bravely, and was the instigator of what many historians see as one of the strangest incidents not only in Henry's reign but in English history. On the night before her execution, Katherine asked that the block upon which she was to rest her head before it was chopped off be brought to her room. She wanted to practice placing her head upon it so the next day she could face her death with dignity and without fear. Apparently, practice does make perfect—Katherine met her end calmly and with grace. She was only sixteen.

Katherine Parr

Henry's sixth wife had been married twice before marrying Henry, both times to men of advanced age and difficult temperament. This meant that she was well-equipped for marriage with Henry. Katherine is portrayed as being exceptionally well educated, generous and loving to Henry's three children, a capable ruler in Henry's absence, and a wise political player—when it came to her attention that plans were afoot to make Henry believe she was a religious heretic, she immediately and effectively convinced Henry that the opposite was true, thereby saving her life. Upon Henry's death, Katherine (who had, after all, been romantically in love with any of her husbands) renewed her intense relationship with Thomas Seymour, a suitor from before her marriage to Henry. They wed and lived happily for a while, but when Katherine discovered Seymour's intention of having an affair with Henry's daughter Elizabeth (who was living with Katherine at the time), the marriage soured. Katherine nevertheless had a child, fathered by Seymour, but died shortly after giving birth.

Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas More

These two individuals were Henry's key advisors early in his reign. Wolsey, a low-born but ambitious highly placed Catholic politician, was Henry's first trusted councilor, a wily politician and manipulator who fell out of favor when he proved unable to effect the

annulment of Henry's marriage to Katherine of Aragon. More was more intellectual and more broadly educated than Wolsey, but less ambitious and less willing to bend his morality to fit what Henry wanted. This led him to refuse to pledge loyalty to Henry's new church and new bride (Anne Boleyn), and he was executed.

Thomas Cranmer and Thomas Cromwell

Cranmer and Cromwell were Henry's advisors late in his reign, and were both instrumental in Henry's creation of the Church of England. Cranmer, an archbishop, was a scholar who found an academic way around the religious dispute that blocked Henry's divorce from Katherine, and in so doing earned Henry's gratitude and favor. His belief in the cause of religious reform led him to become a secret Protestant, and also led him to become the chief instigator of the plot to remove Katherine Howard and her powerful Catholic family from Henry's sphere of influence and replace her with the more reform-minded Katherine Parr. Cranmer was later burned as a heretic when Henry's oldest daughter, the virulently Catholic Mary became queen and strove to purge England of Protestantism.

Thomas Cromwell, on the other hand, was not a religious man but was also not afraid to manipulate religious conflict in order to gain power. He manipulated the politics of religious conflict in order to facilitate both the marriage of Henry to Anne Boleyn and the creation of the Church of England, and was also the prime instigator of the plan to marry Henry to Anne of Cleves, a Protestant who he (Cromwell) believed would become a figurehead for religious reform. Henry's romantic distaste for Anne, however, meant that Cromwell's scheme backfired. He quickly fell out of favor, was imprisoned, then executed for treason.

Henry VII

The father of Henry VIII was, according to the author, responsible but insecure and unloved, someone who claimed the throne by conquest rather than by inheritance, and who strove to make sure that any potential claimants to it were eliminated. Good with money but bad with people, Henry VII made his country wealthy and prosperous but was so unsure of his position, both within England and as part of Europe, that he went to extreme and sometimes obsessive lengths to preserve his position. There is the sense that his son, Henry VIII, inherited that insecurity and was in fact driven by it his entire life.

Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain

The parents of Katherine of Aragon were the same Ferdinand and Isabella who funded the visit of Christopher Columbus to America. They were powerful, wise, wealthy, and walked the shadowy line between personal and political interests with skill, tact, and diplomatic dexterity. They were simultaneously Henry's allies and adversaries, and among the most formidable in either camp.

Henry's Children

Edward was Henry's long awaited and much cherished son and heir, born to Jane Seymour. He was a healthy child, but became sickly as he entered adolescence and died six years after becoming king at the age of ten. The author portrays Edward as being solemn and serious, suggesting that his character was indelibly formed by having the awareness that he was to be king drummed into him from a very early age.

Mary was Henry's daughter by Katherine of Aragon. A staunch Catholic and devoted to the memory of her mother, she is portrayed as being alternately adored and ignored by her father, vilified by one stepmother (Anne Boleyn), ignored by another (Katherine Howard, who was actually several years younger), and cared for by the other three (Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves, and Katherine Parr). As the result of the upheavals of her childhood, youth, and young adulthood, Mary became emotionally and physically unstable. When she became queen following Edward's death, she re-instated the Catholic faith and strove to eradicate Protestantism with such heretic-burning zeal that history has nicknamed her "Bloody Mary".

Elizabeth was Henry's daughter by Anne Boleyn, and is portrayed by the author as being intelligent, precocious, spoiled, and flirtatious. As her half-sister Mary had done, she endured being either ignored or doted on by her father, but unlike Mary, she was accepted and loved by only one stepmother—Katherine Parr, who invited Elizabeth to live with her. This proved to be an unhappy arrangement, however, since Katherine's then-husband Thomas Seymour attempted to have an affair with the young princess. This led Katherine to ask Elizabeth to leave, a circumstance which, combined with the traumatic death of Anne Boleyn, led Elizabeth to a vow of remaining unmarried, a vow she kept until her death. After the death of Queen Mary, Elizabeth took the throne, restored the Protestant faith, and became one of England's most powerful and universally loved, monarchs ever.

Hans Holbein

This famous Dutch artist painted the portrait of Anne of Cleves with which Henry fell in love. The portrait in question still exists, and depicts a graceful, delicately beautiful woman that apparently was nothing like Anne in reality. The author suggests that Holbein painted what his "inner eye" saw of Anne's purity of character, as opposed to the external beauty of her face. He escaped Henry's wrath at being misled by the portrait by painting an equally beautiful portrait of Henry's beloved son and heir, Prince Edward.

Joan Bulmer, Francis Dereham, John Lascelles, Thomas Culpepe

These individuals each played key roles in the downfall of Katherine Howard. Bulmer and Dereham knew Katherine as a girl, and were aware of her active sexual past; Dereham, in fact, was sexually active with her, and continued to be so even while she was married to the King. This act of treasonous adultery got him executed, in the same way that a similar act (sex with Katherine after her marriage to the king) committed by Culpeper got him killed. John Lascelles, meanwhile, triggered the development of the scheme to have Katherine removed when he first brought stories of her precocious sexuality to Henry's advisor, Thomas Cranmer. Finally, Lady Rochford was Katherine's chief lady-in-waiting, enabled her affairs with Dereham and Culpeper, and after confessing her involvement, was executed.

Thomas Seymour

Seymour was the brother of Jane Seymour, and one of the ambitious members of her family encouraging her to encourage the king. At the same time, he was carrying on a flirtatious relationship with Katherine Parr, who was then married to a courtier. After Jane's death, Seymour's influence at court deteriorated, but he was still present as uncle to the heir to the throne (Prince Edward). After the death of both Katherine Howard and Katherine Parr's husband, the always ambitious Seymour attempted to re-establish his relationship with Katherine Parr, but Henry, who was by this time interested in Katherine himself, sent him away on a diplomatic mission. Upon Henry's death, Seymour returned, saw the opportunities for advancement inherent in marriage to the king's widow, and passionately renewed his suit. Katherine fell in love with him, married him, and soon became pregnant with his child. At the same time, Seymour was attempting to have an affair with Henry's daughter Elizabeth, who was living with him and Katherine. Katherine found out and sent Elizabeth away. Seymour continued to strive for advancement, even after the birth of his daughter and the death of his wife. Eventually his activities were found treasonous, and he was executed.

Objects/Places

London

This is the capital city of England, the center of Henry's power, and the site of several of his homes.

The Tower of London

This is an ancient castle in the center of London. At various times throughout history, monarchs have used it as their principal place of residence, a military fortress, and a zoo. In Henry's time, it was primarily used as a prison, with several of its towers housing torture chambers. Countless executions took place here, mostly of nobility. Two of Henry's wives, Anne Boleyn and Katherine Howard, were executed on Tower Green, an expanse of lawn in the heart of the castle complex.

Henry's Court

The term "court" refers less to an actual physical place than to a large gathering of people, servants and advisors and ambassadors, their escorts and servants, all striving to gain influence with the King and doing so through any means possible, including sexual, political, personal, and religious. The court frequently traveled from house to house, from castle to castle. Reasons included plague in the area, the king getting restless or feeling a need to connect with his subjects, or even a castle needing to be cleaned.

France

Throughout history, France has been at different times England's chief political and military rival, and one of its most powerful allies. During Henry's reign, it was both, sometimes simultaneously. One of Henry's most cherished goals as king was to gain control of, if not all of France, at least some of its disputed territories. He actually set out on conquest on a couple of occasions, but never got further than winning a couple of provinces.

Spain

Like France, Spain was one the most important military, political and economic powers in Europe during Henry's reign. Particularly under the rule of Ferdinand and Isabella, Spain's influence was such that Henry VII (Henry VIII's father) was desperate to have his heir (Prince Arthur) marry a Spanish princess, and didn't care which one. Eventually,

the princess selected turned out to be Katherine of Aragon, whose eventual marriage to Henry VIII sealed an alliance between England and Spain, at least for a while.

Henry's Leg Wound

At some point in Henry's young adult life (the specific date is lost to history), an accident while jousting caused an injury to Henry's leg that never healed. It was, as the author describes, a constantly open wound that needed to have its dressing changed every day, and that on good days caused little pain but on bad days caused agony, oozed pus, and stank. The author contends the wound was the principal source of Henry's increasing irritability and eventual tyranny, with the frustrating suffering he experienced as the result of the wound aggravated by his increasing weight and inability to exercise.

The Succession

From the moment it became apparent that he was to become king, Henry VIII followed the example of his father Henry VII and worried constantly over who was to assume the throne after he died. This question of "the succession", or who would succeed the king on the throne, was, the author contends, the primary motivation for Henry's taking six wives. He wanted a male heir at whatever cost, and if one wife couldn't give him one, the next one would. (It must be noted that Henry reigned before it was scientifically understood that male and female genetics played an equal role in determining the gender of children. At the time, and indeed for several hundred years, it was generally believed that gender was determined by the woman, and often more specifically determined by her moral uprightness). Ultimately, Henry's choice of who was to succeed him, and later his son Edward (who took precedence because he was male, but who could not be relied upon to live a long life), depended upon which religious faction (Catholic/Protestant) was in power, and depending on which wife was in favor. Throughout his life, as a result of these two factors, Henry moved his daughters (Mary and Elizabeth) in and out of the line of succession on a whim. He even attempted, at one point, to place his illegitimate son in line for the throne, but his advisors told him that if he did, the people would probably rebel. Henry VIII died having settled on an order in which the throne would be passed on, but unhappy that there weren't more male heirs to potentially carry on the name of Tudor even further.

The Church of England

The Church of England, the forerunner of the Anglican/Episcopalian church, was formed when Henry was advised (by Thomas Cranmer and Thomas Cromwell) that the only way he could marry the woman he loved (Anne Boleyn) was to break away from the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and set himself up as the supreme authority of his own church. This became the Church of England, Roman Catholic in tradition and in faith, English in name only. Eventually, the cause and ways of Protestant reform became absorbed into the new church, and its religious/spiritual teachings and practices

also became separate from those of the Roman Catholic Church. In short, Henry's desperate desire to produce an heir with Anne Boleyn led to the world-changing creation of a new expression of Christianity.

The Portrait of Anne of Cleves

Painted by Hans Holbein, this miniature portrait of a potential queen caused Henry to fall passionately in love with the woman whose face it framed. That face, however, was not (according to the author) the actual face of the woman in question—in other words, the portrait was an interpretive rather than literal presentation of the woman. Henry's rage and disappointment at discovering the discrepancy between portrait and subject led to the execution of the advisor who commissioned the portrait, Thomas Cromwell, and the short-lived disgrace of the artist.

The Dropped Letter

This letter saved Katherine Parr's life. Written by a pro-Catholic courtier eager to replace the pro-Protestant Katherine at Henry's side, it purported to contain details of Katherine's heretical beliefs. It was, however, accidentally dropped, and found by a servant loyal to Katherine, who took it to her. She immediately realized that a net was closing around her and she had to do something to protect herself. She immediately went to the king, showed him the letter, and proclaimed her innocence. Henry believed her, and the marriage remained intact.

Themes

The Role of Medieval Women

At the time of Henry VIII's reign, and for centuries both before and since, there were strict socio-cultural conventions defining the ways in which women, and in particular high born women, were expected to behave. They were more or less property, with their fundamental purpose being to serve men—sexually, politically, financially, and/or emotionally. If their husbands were unfaithful, women had to put up with it, silently and with grace—but if a woman was unfaithful, she could be divorced or even executed. If a man wanted a woman to marry a potential political and/or business ally, she had no choice—she did it, often leaving her home at a very young age never to see it again. If a woman wanted to marry for love, she was often sent to live in a disgraced exile (such was the case with Henry VIII's sister, who married a man of lower birth without first receiving her family's approval). Then, if a man had a vicious temper or was emotionally unstable, the woman's responsibility was to again put up with it. Ultimately, however, these various aspects of women's purpose were, at their core, manifestations of what the culture and society of the time saw as women's only real value—whether they had the ability to produce healthy male children. The Six Wives explores, at considerable length and in great detail, the ways in which each of Henry's wives acted on their tradition-mandated pledges of unquestioning loyalty to their king/husband/master, but at the same time each, in her own way, rebelled.

The Destructiveness of Absolute Certainty

The Six Wives is filled with cautionary tales, some told in passing and others recounted in great detail, of how certainty and self-righteousness destroyed hopes, dreams, and in many cases even lives. Henry and his advisors, his queens and their lovers, countless other courtiers who move in and out of the narrative line of The Six Wives—all, to one degree or another, are portrayed as being motivated and/or defined by the absolute conviction that they, and only they, are right. This certainty, the narrative suggests, led them to strive at whatever cost for power (Henry, Anne Boleyn, Wolsey, Cromwell, dozens of courtiers), for vindication (Katherine of Aragon, Thomas More, Princess Mary), for favor (Thomas Seymour), for sexual liberty (Katherine Howard), or for any other way in which their individual belief systems might be advanced and/or manifested. Almost without exception in The Six Wives, such conviction-driven striving ends destructively, or at the very least unhappily. Henry, Wolsey, and Katherine of Aragon die lonely and embittered . . . Anne, Cromwell, More, Katherine Howard, Seymour and countless others are executed . . . Mary lives on to become one of the most reviled monarchs in English history. Virtually the only individual portrayed in the narrative who appears to have no such sense of absolute certainty is Anne of Cleves, who is portrayed as being content to "go with the flow", as the saying goes, and who (coincidentally?) is also portrayed as living a long, peaceful, happy life. In other words, the relative contentment of her un-ambitious, un-striving live is a vivid, thematically

defining contrast to the obsessive destructiveness, or destructive obsessive-ness, around her.

Religious Conflict

For centuries, tensions in Europe between traditional Roman Catholics and reform-minded Protestants were a particularly destructive arena in which absolutely certain individuals fought devastating moral, political, spiritual and even military conflicts. According to The Six Wives, this Catholic/Protestant warfare played out at Henry's court, across England, and throughout the known world of the time—it was the chessboard across which kings, queens, courtiers, and families all moved and were moved, the battlefield where they all strove for earthly control over what was essentially a spiritual concern. The Six Wives makes the thematic point, however, that the spiritual, political, and personal were all inextricably linked, an aspect of the conflict most evident in its analysis of one of the most historically significant acts of religious war ever—the creation of the Church of England. To make a very long story short, Henry created a new church so that he could marry the woman he loved, a personal desire (combined with the absolute certainty that he was right) triggering enormous cultural change, political chaos, and ultimately spiritual terrorism as one side took whatever chance it could to weaken the influence of the other. These terrorisms, according to The Six Wives, played out on both large (country-to-country, as in England and France/Spain) and small (sister-to-sister, as in Mary and Elizabeth) scales, defining the English and European political scene for years to come.

Style

Perspective

In her introduction, the author suggests that her reason for writing The Six Wives was to bring a realistic, thoroughly researched perspective to bear on a much mythologized part of British royal history. She comments that while there have been several books about Henry's reign and his many marriages, none (in her opinion) have fully and/or thoroughly explored the essential human character of each of Henry's six wives. This would seem to be her core intention—to bring these well known women to fuller life beyond the historical stereotyping that has portrayed, for example, Anne Boleyn as an ambitious bitch and Jane Seymour as a near-saint. Her intention is supported by what is evidently a significant amount of research—her bibliography is over thirty pages long, and lists a large number of actual documents as sources. That said, there is the very clear sense that her intended audience is not confined to academics. While there is undoubtedly careful and reasoned analysis throughout the book, there is also an almost gossipy undertone. This is most evident in the detailed descriptions of what jewels and clothes were worn by Henry and his wives and also in the frequent, equally detailed descriptions of which lady flirted with which gentleman, which gentleman maliciously kept which courtier out of power, and so on. In short, there is the sense that the author also intends her book to be read and enjoyed by the same sort of people that read the magazines in the checkout line at the grocery store. This blend of academic insight and titillation is generally well balanced, and adds a valuable layer of readability to what otherwise might be a dry exercise in history.

Tone

In many works of historical non-fiction, particularly when there's relatively little source material for the author to analyze, there is the sense that while it's generally possible to have a clear understanding of what happened, it's less possible to understand why it happened. This gives most books of the genre an overall tone of combined objectivity and subjectivity—the "what" is objectively presented, the "why" can often be more subjective. There is the sense throughout The Six Wives, however, that the author has gone to considerable lengths to present the "whys" of the book in as objective a way as possible, supporting her contentions and theories with historical documentation and thoroughly reasoned analysis. In other words, she takes matters of record and extrapolates what into why, developing objective presentations of what might normally be subjective interpretations. On an academic level, this gives additional weight to her theories, but on a tonal level, it contributes heavily to the sense that, to put it bluntly, the author knows what she's talking about, or that she has genuine insight. This combines with the occasional detour into near-gossip (see above) to draw the reader into the narrative line of The Six Wives, and bring him/her into a deeper understanding of both the facts of what and the possibilities of why.

Structure

For the most part, The Six Wives is structured chronologically, anchored by its focus on Henry's six wives—the narrative begins with the birth of Henry's first queen (Katherine of Aragon), and ends with the death of his last surviving queen (Anne of Cleves). Parts One and Two, approximately two thirds of the book's narrative pages, focus on Henry's first three wives (Katherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, and Jane Seymour). This seems to be because most of the important activity of Henry's reign (the birth of his children, his divorce, the creation of the Church of England, his military conquests) took place in that phase of his life. Part Three focuses on his last three wives (Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Katherine Parr). While there is the sense that these wives are somewhat narratively short-changed, the fact remains that they passed through Henry's life for much shorter periods of time than his first three wives and, for the most part, had much less personal and/or political impact on that life.

While the narrative is mostly linear, sections are occasionally prefaced with a kind of prologue, an enticing description of action such as is contained in the opening paragraphs of chapter thirteen, where Henry's urgent ride to meet Anne of Cleves is recounted. Following this prologue, the narrative explores events leading up to it, and then narrates what happened afterwards. Application of this technique functions, as do the various tonal and perspective-defined properties listed above, to make what might be a dry and academic exercise in history both accessible and entertaining.

Quotes

"Katherine of Aragon was a staunch but misguided woman of principle; Anne Boleyn an ambitious adventuress with a penchant for vengeance; Jane Seymour a strong-minded matriarch in the making; Anne of Cleves a good-humored woman who jumped at the chance of independence; Katherine Howard an empty-headed wanton; and Katherine Parr a godly matron who was nevertheless all too human when it came to a handsome rogue." Introduction, p. 3

"[m]arriage brought no real security to women; in all too many cases, they died as a result of it." Introduction, p. 11

"Prince [Arthur] declared . . . that he much rejoiced to contract the marriage [to Katherine of Aragon] because of his deep and sincere love for the Princess his wife, whom of course he had never seen. Such courtesies were the order of the day, however superficial." Chap. 1, p. 23

"To the maturing [Katherine], exposure to these unfamiliar freedoms brought with it a desire for some measure of independence and liberation from the restrictions hitherto imposed upon her." Chap. 3, p. 46

"It was . . . a matter of absolute necessity that [Henry VIII] marry and get himself an heir as soon as possible: there were still living some members of the house of York who thought they had a better claim to the throne than he, and the specter of civil war still loomed large." Chap. 4, p. 68

"The English loved Henry [VIII] for his youth, his beauty, his high courage, his accomplishments, and above all for having identified their interests as his own." Chap. 5, p. 80

"Katherine [of Aragon] was always an extremely popular queen . . . the main reason . . . lay in her personal qualities, her unfailing graciousness and dignity, and her kindness . . . the English had taken her to their hearts; they rejoiced on her marriage, grieved with her in her sorrows, and - much later - were ready to champion her cause in the face of the King's displeasure." Chap. 5, p. 87

"Because [Henry] was young and inexperienced, he did not perceive the steel beneath [Katherine's] meek exterior, and he certainly underestimated Katherine's tenacity." Chap. 6, p. 105

"What Henry VIII was really questioning . . . was the power of the Pope . . . this was not immediately apparent as the central issue in the affair, but it would soon become so . . . [and] to question the Pope's authority . . . was tantamount to heresy . . ." Chap. 6, p. 139

"Anne's charm lay not so much in her physical appearance as in her vivacious personality, her gracefulness, her quick wit and other accomplishments . . . she was not pretty, nor did her looks conform to the fashionable ideals of the time . . ." Chap. 7, p. 151

"Had [Katherine] known just what her husband's intentions were towards Anne, she might not have accepted the situation with such equanimity, but as far as she was concerned, Anne was merely the latest in a line of royal mistresses and would be discarded in due course." Chap. 7, p. 167

"Under Anne's influence, [Henry] was beginning to display the character traits that would govern his later behavior, and this period of his life saw the beginning of the transition from knight . . . to tyrant." Chap. 8, p. 171

"[n]ot for nothing [was Katherine] the daughter of Isabella of Castile: her principles were firm, her moral courage undoubted, and she believed her marriage was good and valid. [The Pope] had permitted it, and that was enough for her. She was the King's true wife, and the Princess Mary his legitimate heir, and on those premises she would take her stand." Chap. 8, p. 176

"From the first Anne was openly called a whore and a sorceress . . . Anne might pretend it did not bother her, but her flippancy concealed anger and disappointment." Chap. 8, p. 181

"The discovery that [Anne] had had some sexual experience after all, though it may be that she was still technically a virgin, was doubtless a disconcerting one for Henry, especially after [her] constant protestations that she meant to preserve her virtue until she married." Chap. 9, p. 237

"After six long years, Henry finally had what he wanted: Anne was now legally his, and their child would be indisputably legitimate." Chap. 10, p. 248

"Anne's hostility . . . was based on jealousy of Katherine's breeding and virtues . . . on rage that Katherine had dared defied Henry for so long, and on fear, because Katherine and [Mary] appeared to be doing their best to oust her own daughter [Elizabeth] from the succession and herself from the throne." Chap. 10, p. 268

"So open was the affair [between Henry and Jane Seymour] that courtiers were falling over themselves to win the friendship of the new favorite, leaving the Queen to sit alone in her empty apartments. History was repeating itself." Chap. 10, p. 291

"Henry saw himself as the spiritual father of his people, appointed by God to lead them; and, as time passed, he grew increasingly pedantic and dogmatic, so that few dared argue with him." Chap. 12, p. 346

"[t]he knowledge of what had happened to Anne Boleyn had a traumatic effect on Elizabeth, and may well have crippled her emotionally for life; it is a fact that she made

a point of avoiding marriage and any other serious commitment to a man." Chap. 12, p. 354

"As the King's sister, [Anne of Cleves] would take precedence over most of the ladies of the kingdom, and a place at court would always be reserved for her. There is no doubt that she had grown to appreciate her adopted land, and she was now fortunate enough to own three of the most charming houses it could boast. It was not such a bad bargain when all was said and done." Chap. 13, p. 424

"[Anne's] handling of a difficult and potentially dangerous situation shows that she was, perhaps, the wisest of Henry VIII's wives. She was certainly the luckiest." Chap. 13, p. 429

"[Henry] considered himself blessed indeed. Whether Katherine [Howard] was so elated with her husband is a matter for conjecture, but to all appearances the new Queen suffered her wifely duties with commendable fortitude, displaying at all times a cheerful and loving matter towards her august spouse." Chap. 14, p. 432

"[Henry] had meant to be merciful towards Katherine, but now he found he had no desire to save her from the headsman, and wished her to suffer as he was suffering. The law would take its course and he would not lift a finger to stop it. Then the world would see how he dealt with those who made a fool of him." Chap. 15, p. 475

"[t]he new act [required] 'any lady the King may marry, on pain of death, to declare any charge of misconduct that can be brought against her'. This rather narrowed down the field, since the ladies of Henry's court were not known for their virtue." Chap. 16, p. 483

"Perhaps the most outstanding thing about [Katherine Parr] was her formidable intellect, which had been cultivated to an unusual extent by her mother and by the people with whom she had associated in later life. She was perceptive, articulate, thirsty for knowledge, both general and religious, and industrious. Her virtue, a female quality always suspect in an age that believed that teaching women to write would encourage them to pen love-letters, was beyond question." Chap. 16, p. 495

"[s]ensible, virtuous, but all-too-human Katherine Parr seized what she saw as her last chance of happiness with a man she loved; she was not , after all, so young that she could afford to waste time, and she could battle no longer with the strong emotions that were overwhelming her." Chap. 17, p. 536

"[Katherine Parr's] death would herald the beginning of a great divide between [Mary and Elizabeth], who had once been close but would now gradually grow ever more suspicious of each other and end as formidable rivals in the dangerous arena of politics and religion." Chap. 17, p. 563

Topics for Discussion

Consider the book's thematic examination of the nature of women's roles at the time of Henry VIII's reign. In what ways did each of Henry's wives live up to what was expected of them? In what ways did they rebel? Consider each of the five principal arenas discussed above—sexually, politically, financially, and emotionally.

Compare the situation of women of stature in Henry's time with that of women in similar positions of power and/or celebrity and/or stature today. In what ways are the situations similar? In what ways are they different?

Tensions between spiritual tradition and spiritual reform were a defining force in the time of Henry VIII for the monarch, for government, and for the common people. In what ways do such tensions continue to manifest in contemporary culture?

Consider the book's thematic consideration of absolute certainty. In what ways can the story of Henry VIII and his wives be considered a kind of morality tale, a fable warning of the dangers of a certain kind of behavior? What lessons on this subject can be applied to contemporary social/political/sexual/spiritual concerns?

Discuss the nature of marriage—what is its purpose? What are its moral, spiritual, emotional, sexual, and economic foundations? What are the differences between the ways those foundations functioned in Henry's time and the way they function in contemporary society? What are the similarities? In what ways are reasons for marriage now similar and/or different from reasons for marriage then?

Project what might have happened if the lives of each of the six wives had been different. What might have happened, for example, if Katherine of Aragon or Anne Boleyn had given birth to a son? If Jane Seymour had lived? If Henry had found Anne of Cleves attractive? If Katherine Howard had not committed adultery? If Henry had enjoyed a longer marriage with Katherine Parr, or if he had married her first? Take into account the many thematic and narrative threads that run through the book, including the basic characters of Henry and of his wives. What might have happened, for example, in terms of the ongoing tensions between Protestants and Catholics? What might have happened to Elizabeth and Mary (who might never have taken the throne)? Might Henry, given what is known of his character, have settled into a long relationship of relative domestic harmony, such as that lived by his father and beloved mother?

Henry was what history describes as an "absolute" monarch, one with real power whose will defined the lives of his people. Such monarchs were the rule, rather than the exception, around much of the world for hundreds of years—but now, monarchies function quite differently. Explore ways in which both the concept and the function of monarchy has changed. Consider not only the English monarchy (easily the most well known and documented of the contemporary monarchies), but also other monarchies.

It could be argued that some contemporary governments are democracies in name only, functioning in the same way that absolute monarchies once did. In what ways have the functions and belief systems of an absolute monarch, such as Henry, been absorbed into the functions and belief systems, corruptions, and strengths of other forms of government in the contemporary world?