

# **The Wives of Henry VIII Study Guide**

**The Wives of Henry VIII by Lady Antonia Fraser**

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# Plot Summary

The Wives of Henry VIII is a study of the six wives of one of the most famous English kings by historical writer Antonia Fraser. In this book, Fraser attempts to separate these six remarkable women from the husband who made them all famous. Fraser looks at the divorce that Catherine of Aragon refused to accept for the remainder of her life, the lack of sons that led to Anne Boleyn's demise, and the celebrated birth of the first surviving son that made Jane Seymour the most beloved of all Henry's six wives. Fraser discusses the failure of Henry's marriage to Anna of Cleves, the betrayal of Katherine Howard, and the final companionship Henry found with widow, Catherine Parr. The Wives of Henry VIII succeeds in destroying some of the misguided beliefs long held against many of these women and setting the record straight. It finally reveals to readers how Henry VIII's deep-seated desire to have a male heir created and destroyed six Queens of England.

Catherine of Aragon was the daughter of Catholic Kings of Spain, Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon. While still a toddler, Catherine was promised to the Prince of Wales, the son of Henry VII. When only fifteen, Catherine traveled to England to meet her promised husband. At fourteen, Arthur was small and frail, smaller than even petite Catherine, due to his premature birth and frail health. The marriage took place as planned although Arthur was too young and immature to consummate the union. Within six months, Arthur would be dead, leaving young Catherine a widow in a foreign country.

Catherine would remain in England at her father's request as plans were being made for Catherine to wed Arthur's younger brother, Henry. However, the failure of Catherine's father to pay the remainder of her dowry caused Henry VII to keep Catherine as a guest in his country even though he decided not to have young Henry marry her. For seven years, Catherine would live at the mercy of Henry VII, often going without enough food to feed herself and her servants for days at a time. Finally discouraged by Henry VII's actions, Catherine began to arrange her return to Spain. A short time later, the old King died.

Catherine and Henry VIII married six weeks after the death of Henry VII. This marriage would appear a happy one to everyone for more than eighteen years. Catherine would become pregnant many times during the course of her marriage. Unfortunately, Catherine's only surviving child was a girl, named Mary.

Henry VIII became infatuated with Anne Boleyn. With the hope of having a male heir with Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII began searching for ways to get out of his long-time marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Henry was pointed to a passage in the Bible that says a man should not marry his brother's wife as such a marriage would curse them with no children. Henry took this as an explanation as to why all of Catherine's male children died. Henry began to fight for a divorce on the grounds that his marriage to Catherine was never legitimate in the first place.



Anne would give birth to a baby girl a few months after her marriage to Henry. Two more pregnancies, a stillbirth and a miscarriage, would cause Henry to begin doubting Anne's ability to ever provide him with a male heir. Shortly after her last pregnancy, Anne was arrested and charged with treason under the accusation that she had committed infidelity. Anne was beheaded.

Henry VIII married Jane Seymour within a week of Anne Boleyn's execution. This third marriage would be a happy one that would end in the birth of a son, Edward. However, shortly after the birth of her son, Jane Seymour died. Single again, Henry's advisors began to urge him to marry again, to have more male children in case the one surviving son would succumb to the high rate of infant mortality common at the time. Henry began looking over candidates. In the end, Henry chose Anna of Cleves.

Henry surprised Anna of Cleves with a visit upon her arrival in England. Unfortunately, Henry VIII found Anna of Cleves unappealing. For unknown reasons, Henry went through with the marriage. However, Henry did not consummate the marriage. Within months, Henry VIII met Katherine Howard and he requested a divorce from Anna of Cleves.

Henry claimed to have found great happiness in his marriage to Katherine Howard despite the fact that the Queen did not become pregnant during their brief marriage. After only a short time together, the King learned that Katherine Howard had had a lover as a teenaged girl and that she was carrying on a flirtation during her marriage with a courtier of the King's court. Katherine was arrested and beheaded for infidelity.

Depressed over the end of his marriage to Katherine Howard, Henry VIII began a friendship with Catherine Parr. Twice widowed, Catherine Parr was more of a companion to Henry VIII after their marriage than lover. Catherine Parr would nurse Henry VIII through his multiple illnesses at the end of his life. After his death, Catherine Parr would marry again quickly and die a short time later from fever during childbirth.



# **Prologue and Part, Catherine of Aragon: Chapter 1, Arthur's Dearest Spouse and Chapter 2, The Princess in his Power**

## **Prologue and Part, Catherine of Aragon: Chapter 1, Arthur's Dearest Spouse and Chapter 2, The Princess in his Power Summary and Analysis**

Antonia Fraser is a writer of historical biographies and fictional detective stories. This book is an ambitious attempt to separate the six wives of Henry VIII from their famous husband and to tell their stories, both good and bad.

In the prologue, the author sets about debunking myths. Many people believe they know the stories of the wives of Henry VIII, but much of what is known is historically wrong. The author explains that she is attempting to right these wrongs and show her readers who these women really were.

In Arthur's Dearest Spouse, Catherine of Aragon was born to Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, the Catholic Kings. Raised by a mother who would often lead her armies into battle while remaining chaste in a marriage rife with infidelity, Catherine was raised to be strong, well educated, and chaste. While still a toddler, Catherine was promised to the Prince of Wales in a desire to create a treaty between Spain and England. At the age of fifteen, Catherine would travel to England to meet her betrothed husband.

In The Princess in his Power, Catherine of Aragon was welcomed in triumph in London. The wedding ceremony took place November 14 at St. Paul's Cathedral. Arthur's young siblings attended the ceremony, including young Henry who was only ten at the time. That night, the young couple was escorted to the bedchamber where they were expected to consummate their vows. Some question remains whether or not this actually took place, but history suggests that Arthur was too small and frail due to his prematurity and history of illness to consummate the marriage. Catherine herself denied the marriage was consummated her until her death. Unfortunately, after six short months of marriage, Arthur died.

It was immediately suggested that Catherine marry Arthur's younger brother, Henry. At first it appeared that both Catherine's parents and Henry VII agreed to this plan. However, the failure of Ferdinand to finish paying off Catherine's dowry and the endless possibilities of other, more advantageous matches, caused Henry VII to back away from this plan. Also influencing this decision was the fact that Henry VII's wife, Elizabeth of York, died. Now Henry VII could remarry himself and make an even better political match for himself and his son. For a time, it was thought that Henry VII might have



intended to marry Catherine of Aragon himself, but this was never formally discussed. Instead, Henry VII seemed to have his eye on a marital triangle that would create a bond between his family and the imperial house of Habsburg.

Over the next seven years, Catherine of Aragon would live as a hostage of Henry VII, unable to return home but exiled from the King's court. Catherine would often find herself short of money, unable to feed herself and her servants. Eventually, Catherine stood up to the King and began to arrange her transportation back home. Before she could leave, however, King Henry died after a short illness.

In these chapters, the author introduces her purpose, discussing with the reader the multiple misinterpretations of history in the time since these women lived and how she plans to remedy that. This sets the reader up to understand that what they are about to read might not compare to what they have always known about the history of these women. The author then begins with Catherine of Aragon. Catherine of Aragon's early life was a life filled with unusual things for a child of her time period. Catherine was educated where many of her contemporaries were not. Catherine was taught to be graceful and to be chaste despite the examples of a mother who would often go into the battlefield like a man. Catherine learned early to be strong but to defer to a man. These were skills that would serve her well as Queen of England.

Catherine went to England and married the young Prince of Wales. However, Arthur was born prematurely and was always sick. Arthur died before their marriage was more than six months old despite the years and years of planning that went into this marriage. The political advantages of the marriage were lost to both sets of parents with Arthur's death, leading to a flurry of discussions about Catherine's future. In the end, Catherine was left to struggle on her own in England, abandoned in part by both her father-in-law and her own biological father for differing political reasons.

The author takes a great deal of time to point out the fact that Catherine's marriage to Arthur was most likely not consummated in these chapters. The modern reader might not understand why the author would go to so much trouble to point this fact. However, it will later prove to be a matter of great importance in the life of Catherine of Aragon when her husband, Henry VIII attempts to get a divorce in the eyes of the Catholic Church.



# **Part 1, Catherine of Aragon: Chapter 3, Golden World, Chapter 4, Example of Wedlock, and Chapter 5, Without an Heir Male**

## **Part 1, Catherine of Aragon: Chapter 3, Golden World, Chapter 4, Example of Wedlock, and Chapter 5, Without an Heir Male Summary and Analysis**

In Golden World, Catherine of Aragon and Henry VIII were married on June 11, 1509. Catherine was then quickly crowned Queen at the Tower of London. Historians often wondered why Henry VIII married Catherine of Aragon even though their marriage contract was never completed. This author speculates that it was because Henry and Catherine had spent some time together as children and he simply married her because he loved her.

By the fall of their first year of marriage, Catherine was pregnant. However, the baby, a girl, was stillborn in January of the following year. Another child would be conceived within a few months. This baby, a boy named Henry, was born January 1, 1511. Unfortunately, baby Henry would die of unknown causes fifty-two days later.

In Example of Wedlock, on February 18, 1516, Queen Catherine gave birth to a daughter named Mary. There was disappointment that the child was not a boy, but King Henry confessed his happiness at having a healthy child at last. Soon after Mary's birth, Queen Catherine's father, Ferdinand of Aragon, died. Catherine's nephew, Charles of Austria, became Emperor of Spain. Henry immediately began to discuss the possibility of a marriage between Charles and Mary despite the more than twenty year difference in their ages. Then, in 1518, the Queen became pregnant again. The pressure for this child to be a boy increased as monarchs in other parts of Europe were welcoming male heirs. However, the child born of this pregnancy was a stillborn baby girl. The following year the King did welcome a child, but it was born to a mistress, Bessie Blount. This child, named Henry Fitzroy, would never be allowed to ascend to the crown.

Emperor Charles came to England in 1520. Catherine was quite pleased to meet her young nephew for the first time and they quickly forged a solid bond. Relations between Henry and Charles also appeared to be positive. About this time there was a meeting between France and England called the Field of Cloth of Gold. This was a huge gathering that took place both in Guines and Ardres, placing both parties on their own land part of the time. It is possible that Anne Boleyn was present at this event do to the fact that she resided in the French Queen's household, but historians are unclear on whether or not she came into contact with King Henry at the time. Afterward, King Henry



and his party met again with Emperor Charles, focusing again on a possible marriage between Charles and Princess Mary.

In *Without an Heir Male*, in the early 1520s, it became apparent that Queen Catherine, who was approaching her fortieth birthday, would never give birth to a male heir. As a result, King Henry turned his focus on finding a suitable husband for his sole heir, Princess Mary. At the time, King Henry appeared satisfied with the idea of Mary becoming his successor as long as she made a good marriage. At this time, it was generally assumed that Charles V would marry Princess Mary and ascend to the throne of England upon the death of Henry VIII. However, King Henry also investigated the possibility of marrying his daughter to other potential allies, such as the King of Scots. Eventually Charles V would enter into a treaty with France and enter into a marriage contract with Isabella of Portugal, a much better and more timely match in his point of view. Queen Catherine and King Henry would feel betrayed by this move on Charles' part and it would inspire Henry to make Henry Fitzroy the Duke of Richmond.

These chapters discuss Catherine of Aragon's marriage to Henry VIII. Catherine and Henry apparently married for love and found great happiness for the first sixteen or seventeen years of their marriage. In fact, Catherine showed herself to be quite a capable Queen, in the same vein as her mother, when she inspired the English army to defeat the Scots. There appeared to be no discord between husband and wife all these years despite two affairs the King indulged in, one of which resulted in the birth of a single illegitimate child.

The need for King Henry and Queen Catherine to have a male child was understood from the moment of their marriage. The way the inheritance laws worked at that time in England was that any child of the King's would ascend to the throne in order of their birth with the male children given preference over the female. If King Henry had a son, his son would become king after Henry no matter where he was born in the birth order. Therefore, the birth of Princess Mary did not concern the King because he believed that he would still have a son one day. Unfortunately, the two boys that Catherine bore during her marriage to King Henry both died, one stillborn and the other died several weeks after his birth. The King remained unconcerned, hoping that one day Mary would wed a man who would be a suitable ruler of England. At this point in the narrative, King Henry appears content in his marriage despite his lack of a male heir. This would change.





# **Part 2, Anne Boleyn: Chapter 6, A Fresh Young Damsel, Chapter 7, The King and His Lady, and Chapter 8, People May Grumble**

## **Part 2, Anne Boleyn: Chapter 6, A Fresh Young Damsel, Chapter 7, The King and His Lady, and Chapter 8, People May Grumble Summary and Analysis**

In A Fresh Young Damsel, Anne Boleyn was born into a family that could trace its ancestry through merchants to a duke and an earl. Anne's father was a military man who made a name for himself through his knowledge of languages. Thomas Boleyn would become an English ambassador to France and was a successful diplomat throughout his adult life. Anne was educated in the court of Archduchess Margaret and would become a member of the household of the King's sister Mary during her marriage to the old King of France. After the King of France's death, Anne remained in the court of the new King's wife, Queen Claude.

Sometime around 1521, Anne Boleyn was brought back to England so that her father could arrange a marriage for her. A marriage to Sir Piers Butler was discussed for Anne, but it failed to prosper. About the same time, Anne Boleyn entered into a romance with Henry Lord Percy. This relationship appeared to have advanced to a promise of marriage between the two young people, but it was stopped by Cardinal Wolsey at the request of the King. Historians have often questioned whether this relationship was consummated, a question that would be an issue at the end of Anne's marriage to King Henry.

In The King and His Lady, in 1527, King Henry sought a divorce from Queen Catherine. King Henry read a passage in the Bible, Leviticus 20:21, that said that if a man should marry his brother's wife, it was an unclean thing and they would be childless. King Henry took this to mean that this illegitimate marriage would result in no sons. Convinced his marriage was illegitimate, King Henry could not be talked out of his desire to end the relationship. King Henry instructed his advisors to begin an investigation that could be presented to the Pope so that the Pope might dissolve the marriage. Cardinal Wolsey's investigation into the marriage resulted in the discovery that Queen Catherine's asked for a disposition from the Pope that stated that her marriage to Arthur might have been consummated. If the marriage had been consummated, it would make King Henry's marriage to Catherine illegitimate by the laws of the Church.



Queen Catherine heard about the investigation into her marriage from an imperial ambassador. Catherine wrote to her nephew and asked for his help, but he refused to become involved. Cardinal Wolsey then approached Catherine and suggested that she might enter into a convent to spare herself and her husband the unpleasantness of a divorce. Catherine refused. In 1528, Anne Boleyn took a more public position in the King's court, though it appears that her relationship with the King remained unconsummated.

During this time, King Henry, Queen Catherine, and Anne Boleyn continued to live in the same household. In fact, Queen Catherine continued to make King Henry's shirts for him despite the fact that Anne felt this was something she should do. There was question as to whether the King and his Queen continued to have intimate relations during this time but the author believes this to be unlikely despite the King's lack of satisfaction from Anne.

In *People May Grumble*, in May of 1529 there was a tribunal to investigate the legitimacy of the marriage between King Henry and Queen Catherine at Blackfriars. The King spoke first, expressing his concern that his marriage to Catherine was not legal because of her marriage to his brother and the passage in Leviticus in the Bible. Catherine then spoke, offering a speech that was later immortalized by Shakespeare, declaring that her marriage to King Henry was ordained by God and that the King himself knew that she was a virgin on their wedding night. In fact, Queen Catherine pointed out that the King bragged about her virginity after that night. The Queen then left the tribunal. Queen Catherine was summoned to return to the tribunal several times after this first appearance but Queen Catherine refused. At the end of the tribunal, however, the Pope put off the decision and rumors abounded that he intended to advocate the case to Rome to avoid making a politically dangerous decision.

During the King's attempts at getting a divorce, Queen Catherine continued to live with him despite the public knowledge of his romance with Anne Boleyn. Queen Catherine would often use their time together to remind the King of his knowledge that she was a virgin on their wedding day. At about the same time, the parliament was convened and would serve for seven years to carry through the religious evolution that began with the appearance of Martin Luther and his radical ideas. As part of this, the parliament suggested that the King of England was the supreme head of the Church and Clergy of England.

In these chapters, the King of England, Henry VIII, fell in love with Anne Boleyn. The reader must recall that Catherine of Aragon, after multiple pregnancies, was unable to give the King a male heir. The King needed a male heir to ensure that his throne would remain in capable hands. Despite the fact that Mary, King Henry's daughter with Catherine of Aragon, could have taken the throne and ruled England with her husband, which she would one day do, King Henry became focused on the idea of having a son. It is unclear why King Henry suddenly moved his focus from Mary to a hypothetical son, but the fact that he fell in love with a young, virile woman might give readers an idea.



The marriage of Catherine of Aragon and King Henry took place seven years after Catherine married Henry's brother, Arthur. At the time of their initial betrothal, King Ferdinand of Aragon petitioned the pope for a disposition allowing Catherine to marry Henry even if her marriage to Arthur had been consummated, a situation that would have required papal approval. However, Ferdinand was assured by his daughter and others that the marriage was never consummated. Ferdinand was simply covering all the basis to smooth the way for a marriage between his daughter and the new heir to the English throne. At the time of King Henry and Catherine of Aragon's wedding, there was no mention of this, a possible consummation of the marriage, or of any possible obstacles to the marriage. However, the moment the King begins to consider a new marriage, this suddenly becomes the only issue.

Henry VIII convinced himself that his marriage to Catherine of Aragon was cursed because he married his brother's bride. No one and nothing could change Henry's mind even when it became clear that the Pope was not going to offer him a divorce. Then, unlike the popular belief, King Henry was named head of the Church of England not by his own demands but by the actions of parliament in their attempts to squash a religious revolution begun by Martin Luther. This move came at a good time for Henry however, because it meant that he could grant his own divorce and marry his lady love as soon as possible. Henry was focused on the idea that Anne would give him a son within months. This however was an idea that would eventually spell disaster for his temptress of a mistress.



## **Part 2, Anne Boleyn: Chapter 9, Hail Anna! and Chapter 10, The Most Happy?**

### **Part 2, Anne Boleyn: Chapter 9, Hail Anna! and Chapter 10, The Most Happy? Summary and Analysis**

In Hail Anna!, in July of 1531, King Henry rode off to Woodstock bidding his wife goodbye. Henry would never see Catherine again. The Queen was taken from the King's court into seclusion in one of his more distant palaces at Hertford Castle and later to Ampthill in Bedfordshire. After Queen Catherine's banishment, King Henry began attempting to get leaders throughout Europe, as well as his own country, to become used to thinking of Anne Boleyn as his consort. King Henry even took Anne Boleyn to a visit with the French king, Francois.

Anne Boleyn became pregnant sometime in the end of 1532, possibly in the early part of December. This added urgency to the King's need to get a divorce. Anne and King Henry were married in secret on January 25, 1533, even though they told everyone they had married the 14th of November, 1532. Beginning in February, Anne began flaunting her pregnancy even though the King was not yet divorced from his first wife. On February 3 of that same year, the Act of Restraint of Appeals was passed to allow the matter to be settled in England. On May 23, Archbishop Cranmer would judge the marriage of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon invalid. Anne Boleyn was crowned a week later. On July 11, 1533 the Pope would declare the divorce invalid and tell Henry that his marriage to Anne Boleyn was illegal and thus their children would be illegitimate. King Henry ignored this declaration. On September 7, 1533 Anne Boleyn gave birth to a healthy baby girl named Elizabeth for Anne's mother.

In The Most Happy?, the birth of a daughter was such a surprise that the birth announcement had to be altered to reflect the child's sex. Like Mary before her, King Henry immediately began to think of the kind of politically advantageous marriages he could make for his infant daughter. In the meantime, Queen Anne conceived again. At the same time, Catherine continued to attempt to fight for her marriage but still failed to find the support she needed to create a serious threat. In fact, the King simply moved her to less desirable lodgings each time she became a nuisance. During this time period, King Henry also refused to allow Catherine to see their daughter, Mary, except on one occasion when Mary was ill.

The King's marriage to Anne Boleyn appeared to be a happy one at first. The King spent a great deal of money redecorating castles for his new bride as well as preparing nurseries for the children they would one day have. However, Anne's frequent temper tantrums that once excited the King quickly grew irritating to him. Not only this, but Anne grew jealous each time the King appeared to take notice of a beautiful woman in her household, even dismissing one girl for flirting with the King. Then, in 1534, Queen Anne delivered a stillborn son. Queen Anne would become pregnant again in 1535



despite her statements that implied the King was impotent. It was during this same time that Catherine, Dowager Princess of Wales, began to suffer health problems and the King met a young woman named Jane Seymour.

In these chapters, the King finally achieved what he had wanted for nearly seven years, a divorce from Catherine of Aragon. The parliament passed an act that allowed the King to settle the matter in his own country. This led to the dissolution of the marriage by Archbishop Cranmer. The King remarried before this took place, however, due to the pregnancy of his mistress, Anne Boleyn. Queen Catherine was not prepared to allow this to happen and saw hope in the Pope's decision to overturn Archbishop Cranmer's decision and excommunicating the King. However, Catherine, despite a large number of supporters, would never find the political ally she would need to help her regain her position as Queen. As a result, Catherine has returned to her previous title, the Dowager Princess of Wales, and been sentenced to live out her life in seclusion. The King clearly wanted out of the marriage and made this clear. In fact, it appears that the King punished Catherine of Aragon for her determination to continue fighting her cause by keeping her from their child. However, the reader must wonder if King Henry did not do this simply because he still loved his wife and did not want to be reminded of the hurt he caused her.

Anne Boleyn failed to give the King a son with her first pregnancy despite the assumption of everyone involved that her first pregnancy would deliver what the King has given up so much to achieve. When Anne Boleyn became pregnant again and failed to deliver a healthy son, the King became frustrated. The King was no longer a young man but a man in his early forties. The chances of the King fathering a male heir before his health began to decline were becoming slimmer and slimmer. The King was desperate. This, coupled with Anne's statements that the King was often impotent, made for a difficult and stressful time for both parties. The reader can quickly realize that with the appearance of Jane Seymour on the scene, Anne's days would be numbered.



# **Part 3, Jane Seymour: Chapter 11, Very Modest Behavior, Chapter 12, The Third Marriage, and Chapter 13, Entirely Beloved**

## **Part 3, Jane Seymour: Chapter 11, Very Modest Behavior, Chapter 12, The Third Marriage, and Chapter 13, Entirely Beloved Summary and Analysis**

In *Very Modest Behavior*, Catherine of Aragon died in early 1536. The King had Catherine's body interred at Peterborough Cathedral. The death of her chief rival should have brought Anne Boleyn relief. Instead, Anne miscarried another male child, opening the door for her rivals. King Henry began an affair with Jane Seymour, an affair that quickly became public knowledge. At the same time, Anne Boleyn was placed under investigation. On May 2, Queen Anne was arrested and placed in the Tower of London.

In *The Third Marriage*, Queen Anne was quickly put on trial and charged with treason, infidelity, and incest. Anne faced her accusers with grace, denying everything they charged her with. However, dozens of Anne's servants, acquaintances, and even a few relatives, testified against her. One of the most damning witnesses against her was Anne's sister-in-law, the wife of Lord Rochford and the brother she was accused of engaging in incest with. On May 17, all of the five men Anne was accused of taking as her lovers were executed. On the same date, the decree of nullity was issued, dissolving the marriage of King Henry to Anne Boleyn. On May 19, Anne Boleyn was executed by a professional swordsman brought in for the occasion from Calias.

King Henry married Jane Seymour on May 30. Jane quickly befriended Princess Mary and might have been instrumental in the King's decision to reinstate his daughter as one of his heirs after he had had her declared illegitimate during his ongoing battle with Catherine of Aragon. Also as part of her marriage to the King, Queen Jane was to be crowned in the summer of her first year of marriage but an outbreak of plague canceled the ceremony.

In *Entirely Beloved*, the King and his new Queen quickly settled into a happy marriage. Jewels were created with their initials intertwined. The left over badges from his previous marriages began to disappear from his various homes. Then Queen Jane became pregnant with what Henry hoped would be the first of many sons. The religious revolution continued, causing unrest in the northern section of the King's empire in reaction to the King's forcible dissolution of monasteries in that area. At the same time, the King again began looking into politically advantageous marriages for his daughter Mary.



In October, Queen Jane went into labor. The labor lasted four days. Finally Queen Jane gave birth to a healthy boy named Edward. Unfortunately, due to the prolonged labor and lack of hygiene, Queen Jane contracted puerperal fever and died nine days after her son's birth. The Queen would be buried in Windsor and the parliament would turn their attention to finding their King another Queen.

In these chapters, Anne Boleyn suffered from her inability to give Henry VIII a son. Anne Boleyn suffered two miscarriages after the birth of her daughter, Elizabeth. Convinced for some reason, that both these pregnancies were sons, King Henry became disillusioned with his temptress wife. King Henry had given up everything for Anne Boleyn including a successful marriage, his reputation, and his position within the Catholic Church. King Henry did this with the belief that Anne would give him a son. As the result of Anne's inability to do this, Henry quickly fell out of love with her and instead fell in love with a young woman who came from a very fertile family. This seemed to underline the idea that King Henry only embarked on his multiple marriages after his marriage to Catherine of Aragon in order to have a son.

Catherine of Aragon died about the time Henry lost interest in Anne Boleyn. Ironically, if Catherine had died sooner she would have saved her husband the pain of his marriage to Anne Boleyn or at least the pain of the divorce they went through. Anne might also have been spared the charges brought against her, which were charges that were thought to be legitimate at the time but have failed to stand up to the test of time. Historians now believe that Anne Boleyn was innocent of the charges brought against her and that her trial and execution were simply Henry's way of getting rid of her quickly and quietly so that he might marry again. This action, however, would come back to haunt the King later in life. In the meantime, however, King Henry found happiness and a male heir in his third wife, Jane Seymour. Unfortunately, in another ironic twist of faith, Jane died after the birth of her son. Perhaps her mother's mortality rather than fertility had skipped a generation.



## **Part 4, Anna of Cleves and Katherine Howard: Chapter 14, An Unendurable Bargain, Chapter 15, That Young Girl Katherine, and Chapter 16, Old Man's Jewel**

### **Part 4, Anna of Cleves and Katherine Howard: Chapter 14, An Unendurable Bargain, Chapter 15, That Young Girl Katherine, and Chapter 16, Old Man's Jewel Summary and Analysis**

In *An Unendurable Bargain*, after the death of Jane Seymour, the King's advisors began searching for a wife for their newly single King. The idea was to make a politically advantageous for the King not unlike the marriages the King had considered for his daughters. During this same period, the French and the Spanish had entered into a treaty that made King Henry nervous. The King's advisors began focusing on a marriage that would keep this treaty from becoming a problem for England. Among the candidate were the cousins of the French King, the sister of Charles V, and the Duchess of Milan. King Henry was concerned with the appearance of his future wife, so he sent his artist to create portraits of potential wives. Among these was a portrait of Anna of Cleves, the sister of the young Duke of Cleves. A bargain was eventually made with the Duke of Cleves and Anna was scheduled to travel to England to become Queen.

On the arrival of Anna of Cleves, King Henry rode in disguise to meet her. Anna of Cleves did not recognize the King and thought he was simply a messenger. Therefore she did not devote the attention to him that she should have. The King returned in his royal garments. Anna of Cleves was more receptive to him once she was aware of his true identity but the meeting continued to be awkward. Afterward, the King announced that he found her unappealing and did not like her. However, the King went forward with the marriage anyway.

In *That Young Girl Katherine*, King Henry and Anna of Cleves were married January 6, 1540. Alone that night, King Henry was unhappy with his new wife's naked body. Later King Henry would claim that Anna's unappealing body was evidence that she was not a virgin upon their wedding night. However, a discussion with other women of the court would suggest that Anna of Cleves was either a good liar or she knew too little about sex to have been anything but a virgin.

Shortly after his marriage to Anna of Cleves, King Henry met Katherine Howard, a young woman who had come to court to serve Queen Anna. Katherine was from a





family similar to that of Anne Boleyn's. In fact, the two women were cousins. Katherine was educated in the home of her grandmother, Agnes Duchess of Norfolk. During her time with Duchess Agnes, Katherine would have a love affair with two different men. The first was Henry Manno, a teacher at the school. This love affair was inappropriate but was never consummated. Two years later however, when Katherine was seventeen, she would have a love affair with Francis Dereham, a fellow student at the Duchess' estate, which was consummated.

With the beginning of the King's affair with Katherine Howard, Henry became aware that he would have to find a way out of his marriage to Anna of Cleves. The King approached his current wife and asked her to agree to a divorce with the understanding that she would receive a generous monthly allowance and would be treated with the same respect given to one of the King's sisters. Anna of Cleves quickly agreed. King Henry and Katherine Howard were then married on July 28, 1540.

In *Old Man's Jewel*, King Henry, now in his late-forties, was besotted by his new and young bride. Katherine was friendly and outgoing, taking into her heart the three children of her new husband, and even accepting the frequent visits of his previous wife, Anna of Cleves. During this time, the King began to suffer frequent fevers from ulcers on his legs and began to gain a great deal of weight due to his frequent bouts of inactivity. Perhaps this caused Katherine some distraction in their marriage. It was about this time that Katherine began a flirtation with Thomas Culpepper, an ambitious courtier in her husband's court. In fact, the only surviving letter in Katherine's handwriting is a love letter to Culpepper.

During a trip to visit his northern territories, King Henry learned of his wife's indiscretions. The Archbishop Cranmer was forced to inform the King that his wife was not a virgin on their wedding night, but had in fact carried on a sexual relationship with Francis Dereham in her youth. This information began an investigation that would eventually reveal the flirtation between Katherine and Thomas Culpepper. Katherine Howard was arrested, along with her two lovers, and various members of her family, including her elderly grandmother, Duchess Agnes. Ironically, Katherine would be beheaded and buried in the same place as Anne Boleyn.

These chapters cover King Henry's fourth and fifth wives. Even though King Henry finally had a male heir, thanks to his marriage to Jane Seymour, it was thought that it would be better if he had another son due to the mortality rate of infants at the time. This, coupled with the sudden ability of the King to make a politically advantageous marriage, spurred a worldwide search for a new queen. The writer pointed out in an earlier chapter that all of King Henry's marriages up to this point had been made with women whom he loved.

However, this time the King had little to do with the decision process. The reader could see from the beginning that this would most likely be a disaster and it did turn out to be one. King Henry refused to consummate the marriage, claiming his new bride was not a virgin. This seems against the whole point of the arranged marriage since the King was hoping to have another son, but it also seems to prove the author's contention that King



Henry truly loved the women he had married previously, including even the one he threw away like so much trash.

King Henry's marriage to Katherine Howard might appear to the modern reader as a bit of karma come back to bite him. As a young man, King Henry thought nothing of throwing away the one woman who had been true and supportive to him for twenty years. Now, as an older man, King Henry knew enough to be grateful for the arrival of his young and happy bride. However, this bride was naive and innocent but not so innocent that she did not indulge in a sexual affair before receiving a promise of marriage. Turning the situation around on the King, Katherine Howard was not a virgin upon their marriage and she indulged in a flirtation that easily could have become an affair during their marriage. This, ironically enough, is exactly what King Henry had done to three of his wives and is what he accused Anne Boleyn of doing. It is almost like cosmic justice that King Henry actually suffered the humiliation of infidelity after so many years of continual betrayal against his wives.



# **Part 5, Catherine Parr: Chapter 17, Necessity and the Widow, Chapter 18, Obedient to Husbands, Chapter 19, Farewell Admirable Queen, and Epilogue, What the King Lusted**

## **Part 5, Catherine Parr: Chapter 17, Necessity and the Widow, Chapter 18, Obedient to Husbands, Chapter 19, Farewell Admirable Queen, and Epilogue, What the King Lusted Summary and Analysis**

IN *Necessity and the Widow*, for a time after the execution of Katherine Howard, it was thought the King would remarry Anna of Cleves. However, this was never even a consideration for the King. Growing older and having more frequent bouts of fever from his ulcerated legs, the King stopped hoping for another male heir. In 1543, King Henry became enamored with Catherine Parr, the widow of Lord Latimer. Latimer was Catherine's second husband. Her first, Edward Borough, was son of Queen Anne Boleyn's chamberlain. Both marriages were childless for Catherine even though she inherited several of Lord Latimer's children.

At the time King Henry became enamored with Catherine Parr, she was involved in a love affair with Thomas Seymour, brother of Jane Seymour. Catherine ended the affair in order to become Queen of England. On July 12, 1543, King Henry and Catherine Parr were married.

In *Obedient to Husbands*, Queen Catherine became a believer of the reformist view of religion. Catherine wrote a book about her beliefs during her marriage to King Henry and would preach to anyone willing to listen to her. Queen Catherine's views were not shared by her husband and her continuous attempts to promote her beliefs would lead to an investigation into her behavior. In fact, Queen Catherine came close to being arrested for her outspoken actions. However, King Henry told Catherine about the impending arrest. Queen Catherine was given the chance to defend herself. To this aim, Queen Catherine told her husband that she preached obedience to husbands. Queen Catherine promised to stop her questionable actions and King Henry agreed to end the investigation.

King Henry outlined the line of succession, returning both his daughters to their rightful places as his heirs while continuing to refuse to reinstate their legitimacy status. On December 10, 1546, King Henry fell ill once again. The illness was long and protracted. In the final days of his life, King Henry did not call for his wife and died without seeing



her again on January 28, 1547. Prince Edward was quickly crowned King Henry VI of England.

In Farewell Admirable Queen, while Edward Seymour, the Duke of Somerset, became the Lord Protector, Thomas Seymour, Lord of Seymour of Sudley rekindled his romance with Catherine Parr. The couple was quickly married with the full support of King Edward. Catherine remained close to her stepchildren, continuing to correspond with King Edward and taking Elizabeth into her own household. However, the flirtatious behavior of her husband, Thomas, caused Catherine to send Elizabeth away shortly after learning of her own pregnancy. Catherine retired to Sudley Castle where she hoped to deliver a healthy son. However, Catherine bore a little girl named Mary. In the days after the child's birth, Catherine would contract puerperal fever and die.

Anna of Cleves would continue to live another ten years after the death of her husband, dying of cancer July 16, 1557. Anna was buried in Westminster Abbey.

In What the King Lusted, the author compares the six women once married to Henry VIII and suggests that the one thing all these women had was their ability or inability to provide a male heir to their husband. The author suggests that history would have been drastically different if Catherine of Aragon's son, Henry, had survived rather than dying after fifty-six days of life. To the author, it appears that the only reason Henry divorced his first wife was a desire to have a male heir. After all, King Henry could have had affairs with all these women he lusted, but his true desire was a male heir.

Each of King Henry's wives are buried in historic locations throughout England. Queen Catherine is buried at Peterborough Cathedral where visitors still bring her flowers on a regular basis. Anne Boleyn and Katherine Howard are both buried in the floor of the Chapel of St. Peter ad Vincula near the Tower of London. Jane Seymour is buried with Henry VIII, King Charles I and the infant child of Queen Anne, a vault that has been disturbed on many occasions, but is currently sealed under a marble slab. Anna of Cleves is buried on the south side of the High Altar in Westminster Abbey, her initials barely visible under a ducal crown. Finally, Catherine Parr was buried at Sutley Castle, but her body was exhumed accidentally after the castle was allowed to fall to ruin. Finally, in the nineteenth century, a new tomb was built for Catherine Parr, offering her the respect she has earned.

In these chapters, King Henry has grown old and unhappy after the betrayal of his fifth wife, Katherine Howard. The King no longer expects to have another child, so he settles for companionship. Catherine Parr was a woman who had been widowed two times before and never had a child, suggesting she was infertile. This seems to prove to the reader that Henry was only looking for companionship, or perhaps to escape the matchmaking attempts of his many advisors. Catherine Parr proved to be a gentle and understanding wife, as well as a supportive and caring stepmother to Henry's three children.

King Henry lived a long life that was filled with drama in the final ten years of his life. King Henry was married to Catherine of Aragon twice as long as his final four wives

together, suggesting that the marriage to Catherine of Aragon was one of love and happiness that would have remained a happy marriage if she had been able to give him a surviving male heir. In fact, the writer suggests this very thing. However, if Catherine's son had survived, the world would not have had Elizabeth I, one of the most important Queens in English history.

In the end, the author suggests all these women had one thing in common, which was their ability or inability to have a male child. The author also suggests that each of these women were strong and passionate women for their time period and they all deserve to be remembered for this reason. In the end, each one suffered for their relationship with Henry VIII and he ended his life a miserable old man despite his many attempts at finding happiness.



# Characters

## Henry VIII

Henry VIII is the second son of Henry VII, King of England of the house of Tudor. Henry VIII, as the second son, was not expected to rule England. However, when Henry's brother, Arthur, died before he could take the crown, his brother Henry was elevated to eldest son and therefore inherited the crown of England upon his father's death.

Henry VIII was an athletic young man who was extremely handsome. At the time Henry took the crown of England, he was the youngest and most handsome monarch alive. Upon his coronation, Henry married Catherine of Aragon, the widow of his elder brother Arthur. Henry was intended to marry Catherine practically from the moment of his brother's death, but Henry's father continuously refused to allow the marriage to take place because of the refusal of Catherine's father, Ferdinand of Aragon, to pay her remaining dowry. In fact, Henry VII made attempts to marry Henry VIII to several other young ladies over the seven years between the death of Arthur and his own death. However, each deal always fell through for one reason or another. As a result, Henry VIII chose to marry the young woman he had fallen in love with throughout his childhood upon his coronation. This marriage would last more than twenty years.

As Henry VIII grew into middle age, he became aware that the inevitability of his death was becoming more and more of an issue with each passing day. The problem was that Henry had no son to take his place on the throne of England. Coupled with the seductive attentions of a young maid in his wife's court, Henry decided to divorce his first wife and marry again. Henry convinced himself that his first marriage was not sanctioned in the eyes of the church because he had married his brother's wife, which was an act that was forbidden in the Bible. However, when his second marriage failed to produce a male heir as well, Henry became convinced that that marriage too was cursed by God because of his immoral actions. Henry had his second wife beheaded for infidelity. Henry would go on to marry a third time, to a young maiden he met at the home of a courtier. This young woman finally gave Henry a surviving son, but died in the process.

Parliament saw Henry's single status as an opportunity to strengthen England's world status. A marriage was arranged between Henry and Anne of Cleves, a small country between the countries of Spain and France that could place England in a strong position should the treaty between these two countries fail. However, Henry was not attracted to his new wife and sought a divorce on the grounds that his bride was not a virgin upon their wedding. Henry would next marry a young, seductive courtier who would bring great happiness to him in their short alliance. However, ironically enough, Henry would learn that this young woman was having an affair in his own household. Henry had this wife and her lovers beheaded. Afterward, Henry married a young widow who would be his nurse and companion until the final moments of his life.



## Catherine of Aragon

Catherine of Aragon, the daughter of Queen Isabella of Castile and King Ferdinand of Aragon, the Catholic Kings, would be given to Prince Arthur, Prince of Wales, as a political move on the part of her parents and the King of England, Henry VII. The marriage would take place before Catherine's arrival in England with a representative of Spain standing in for her. Upon her arrival in England, Henry VII met her party and insisted upon looking at her before allowing the marriage to be made official. This went against Spanish tradition, but Catherine relented. Pleased with Catherine's beauty, the king would consent to the marriage.

Arthur was a sickly child from birth, born prematurely and small for his age. On their wedding night, Catherine claimed that Arthur was too young to consummate their marriage and that they would share a bed on six more occasions, but Arthur's frailty would continue to prevent consummation of the wedding vows. After six months of marriage, Arthur died. Catherine became the Dowager Princess of Wales and remained in England at the mercy of her father-in-law. Henry VII and Ferdinand immediately began to plot a marriage between Catherine and young Prince Henry who was the new Prince of Wales. However, this plan fell through when Ferdinand refused to pay the remaining money due on Catherine's dowry. For seven years, Catherine would live in near poverty at the mercy of King Henry. Finally Catherine had enough and she began to prepare for the journey back to Spain. At this point, Henry VII died and Henry VIII became king. Henry VIII married Catherine almost immediately, possibly based on the fact that he and Catherine spent a great deal of time together as children and he loved her.

For nearly twenty years, Catherine of Aragon would serve as Queen of England, once taking control in a crisis while her husband was out of the country. Catherine would give birth multiple times, twice to sons, but all save one of Catherine's children would die. When Henry VIII informed Catherine that he wanted a divorce, she refused to deny that their marriage was sanctioned by God. Catherine would deny that her marriage to Arthur was ever consummated, instead insisting that Henry VIII knew she was a maiden on their wedding day. In the end, Catherine would live out her life in seclusion, dying of cancer.

## Anne Boleyn

Anne Boleyn was a member of Catherine of Aragon's household during her late teens and early twenties. As a young woman, Anne served the Queen of France, returning to England in her late teens and falling in love with a young man who also served in the King's court. Anne was said to have made a marriage commitment to this young man and possibly having consummated that vow. However, the relationship ended by the order of the king who learned of it from one of his courtiers. Several years later, the king would become aware of Anne Boleyn and fall in love with her as many men before had.



In Anne Boleyn the king would find a potential lover who could fulfill his deepest desire, the opportunity to have a son.

Anne Boleyn would be King Henry's mistress for many years, but the relationship would not be consummated until the year before their wedding would take place in secrecy. In fact, Henry VIII would marry Anne Boleyn several months before he would finally be granted a divorce from Catherine of Aragon through the Catholic Church. Several months after their wedding, Anne Boleyn would be crowned Queen of England. However, Anne's relationship with Henry VIII would grow sour after Anne is unable to provide a male heir in three attempts. Henry VIII's advisors would investigate Anne for infidelity, eventually beheading her, her brother, and several others for treason in connection to Anne's supposed infidelity.

## Jane Seymour

Jane Seymour was the shy daughter of a courtier in King Henry's court. Henry would meet Jane in the home of his trusted courtier and immediately become infatuated with her. Within a week of Anne Boleyn's execution, Jane Seymour and King Henry would marry. Jane became pregnant quickly and plans for her coronation would begin. However, the coronation was put off for several reasons and she would not be crowned before she gave birth to her son, Edward. The birth would be long and difficult, leaving Jane exhausted. Within days, Jane contracted a fever associated with childbirth and died shortly after. Jane was remembered by Henry as his most beloved wife and he was buried with her in St. George's Chapel, Windsor.

## Anna of Cleves

Anna of Cleves was a young girl from the territory of Cleves, a small territory between Spain and France that is now a part of Germany. The people of Cleves spoke Dutch, a language that the English found harsh and annoying. The marriage between Henry VIII and Anna of Cleves was arranged through mediators. King Henry chose to marry Anna based on a portrait that modern historians believes either purposely or inadvertently down plays her rather large nose. Upon meeting Anna of Cleves, King Henry is said to have announced that he was unhappy with her appearance and found her personality unsatisfactory. However, King Henry married Anna of Cleves anyway, making her his fourth wife. This marriage would last less than six months and would never be consummated.

## Katherine Howard

Katherine Howard was a very young woman when King Henry first met her. Again Katherine was employed by the Queen's household from which Henry VIII met several of his wives. King Henry was said to be happier than ever in any of his marriages with his young wife. However, it was soon discovered by those close to King Henry that Katherine was not a virgin upon their marriage, but she had pledged herself to another





young man as a young student and consummated this pledge with him. Then, as wife to the King, Katherine began a love affair with one of Henry VIII's courtiers. Although it is thought that this affair was not consummated, Katherine was beheaded for the crime of treason based on her infidelity. Both of Katherine's lovers and many members of her family, including her grandmother, were also executed.

## Catherine Parr

Catherine Parr was a young woman who had been widowed twice before she began an affair with Thomas Seymour, a young courtier and brother of Queen Jane Seymour. During this affair, King Henry became aware of Catherine and began to court her. In time, Catherine decided against marrying Thomas Seymour and instead elected to become the Queen of England. As King Henry's wife, Catherine was not expected to provide a male heir, but instead became something of a nurse to her ailing husband. Catherine would also befriend each of Henry VIII's three children and become a mother figure to them. During their marriage, Catherine would become an outspoken religious advocate. This caused problems for Henry and Catherine was almost arrested, but she managed to convince her husband that she meant no disrespect with her advocacy. Not long after this episode, Henry VIII would become ill and Catherine would spend a great deal of time nursing him, although she was not present when he died.

## Princess Mary

Princess Mary was the only surviving child of Catherine of Aragon and Henry VIII. Princess Mary, as the first surviving child of Henry VIII, would be the first in line to the throne if a male heir was not born. At first, it appeared Henry VIII was satisfied with this fact as he spent a great deal of time when Mary was a child in attempting to find a good mate for her, a man that King Henry would like to have take over his throne upon his death. However, when Henry VIII fell in love with Anne Boleyn and saw the possibility of a male heir, he was quick to rid himself of his first wife. In the beginning of the divorce process, Henry VIII made no move to change Mary's status in his household or line of succession. However, when Catherine of Aragon continued to fight his efforts to end their marriage, Henry VIII had Mary declared illegitimate, making it impossible for her to ascend the throne. Later in life, Henry would reinstate Mary in the line of succession but would never reverse the declaration that her birth was illegitimate.

## Princess Elizabeth

Princess Elizabeth was the only surviving child of Anne Boleyn's marriage to Henry VIII. Elizabeth would grow up in King Henry's household, first a member of Mary's household and later a member of Edward's household. Due to her mother's fall from grace, Elizabeth too was declared illegitimate and removed from the line of succession. However, later in life Henry VIII would return both his daughters to the line of succession, making Elizabeth the third in line to crown after her brother Edward and her

sister, Mary. Elizabeth would in fact take the crown of England upon the death of Mary and rule for more than sixty years.

## **Prince Edward**

Prince Edward was the only child of Jane Seymour in her marriage to Henry VIII. Edward was Henry VIII only surviving male child and as such he became the first in line for the crown of England upon Henry VIII's death. Edward was very young when Henry VIII married Catherine Parr. As such, Edward and Catherine forged a strong relationship. Edward would refer to Catherine on many occasions as his most beloved mother. When Henry VIII died, Edward became king at the age of nine, with his uncle Edward Seymour as his chief advisor. Edward VI would rule seven years before his death to tuberculosis.



# Objects/Places

## Badges

Each of Henry VIII's wives had a badge that showed their chosen symbol.

## Jewels

Most of Henry VIII's wives had jewelry that showed their initial intertwined with Henry's initials.

## King Henry's Letters to Anne Boleyn

King Henry did not like writing letters. However, there exist letters that were written to Anne Boleyn in Henry's handwriting, suggesting the depth of his devotion to her during their long and secret courtship.

## Katherine Howard's Letter to Thomas Culpepper

The only remaining correspondence credited to Katherine Howard is ironically a letter she wrote to her lover, Thomas Culpepper.

## Spanish Chronicle

Spanish Chronicle was a newspaper written by Antonio de Guaras, a strong supporter of Catherine of Aragon, who reported the events surrounding the coronation of Anne Boleyn as well as other acts committed by King Henry that the Spanish thought were outrageous.

## Announcement of Baby Elizabeth's Birth

The birth of a son was so positively expected at the end of Anne Boleyn's first pregnancy that the announcement written by Anne's assistants had to be altered to change prince to princess in two places. This announcement still exists.

## Portrait of Anna of Cleves

King Henry eventually agreed to marry Anna of Cleves based on a portrait painted by his own artist. However, historians believe that this portrait did not fully reveal Anna's true appearance. In fact, x-rays of another contemporary portrait of Anna of Cleves shows a larger nose under the paint.



## **Parliament Chamber of Blackfriars**

It was in the Parliament Chamber of Blackfriars where Catherine of Aragon made her heart wrenching speech to Henry VIII to ask that he not seek a divorce that was later immortalized by Shakespeare.

## **Sudley Castle**

Catherine Parr died at Sudley Castle after giving birth to her only child. Catherine Parr's body was buried in the Chapel of Sudley Castle and disinterred during a period in which the chapel fell to disarray. Today there is a tomb where Catherine Parr's body rests that was created during a restoration of the chapel in the nineteenth century.

## **St. George's Chapel, Windsor**

Henry VIII is interred with his beloved wife, Jane Seymour, in St. George's Chapel in Windsor.

## **Tower of London**

Anne Boleyn and Katherine Howard were both beheaded at the Tower of London and later buried in the nearby Chapel of St Peter ad Vincula. Today each of these women have their own marker in the floor marking their burial place and restoring the title of Queen.



# Themes

## Need for a Male Heir

In England during the time in which Henry VIII lived, it was customary for a male child to follow his father to the throne. It was very important for a man to have at least one son but it was preferable to have more than one due to the high rate of infant mortality at the time. For this reason, each time Henry VIII's wife, Catherine of Aragon, became pregnant, the whole country prayed for a son. When a son was born, the entire country celebrated, including the king. Unfortunately, neither of the male children Catherine of Aragon bore survived the first few weeks of life. When it became clear that Catherine of Aragon would never have a surviving male child, Henry VIII turned to his one surviving child, Princess Mary. King Henry appeared content to make Mary and whatever man she should marry, his heir. It was not uncommon for a woman to inherit a crown but just not desirable because this would leave the vulnerable to the man whom the woman married or to usurpers intent on stealing the crown.

Henry VIII was married to Catherine of Aragon for more than twenty years. Therefore it is widely believed that he loved her and had no intention of ever ending the marriage. However, when Henry met Anne Boleyn, his feelings changed. Henry was deeply in love with Anne and it is widely believed that she made promises of a male heir to him. Whether it was Anne's promise or the advice of his closest courtiers, Henry clearly grew obsessed with the idea that not only could Anne give him male heirs, but that his marriage to Catherine of Aragon was doomed to not have male heirs because it was an abomination in the eyes of God. Henry read a passage in the Bible that said a man who married his brother's wife was doomed to suffer the inability to have children. Henry took this to mean male children and became so convinced his marriage to Catherine of Aragon was an abomination, he sought a divorce despite her insistence that their marriage was sanctioned by God and she would always be his wife in the eyes of God.

Henry married Anne Boleyn after she became pregnant with their first child. So convinced was he that the child would be a male, Henry made celebrations and announcements ahead of the birth in the expectation of a son. However, Anne Boleyn gave birth to a daughter named Elizabeth. Over the next year, Anne would become pregnant two more times, but both male babies would die. Convinced this was proof of another unsanctioned marriage in the eyes of God, Henry had his wife convicted and executed for treason based on the suggestion that Anne had cheated on him. After Anne's execution, Henry married Jane Seymour, a young woman he had begun to court in the final months of his marriage to Anne. Jane would become pregnant within months of their marriage and deliver a strong, healthy son, but would die a short time later.

Convinced that the king should have a second male heir due to high infant mortality rates, the Parliament began searching for a politically advantageous match for their king. Eventually Henry married Anne of Cleves, but he found her so physically repulsive that he failed to consummate the marriage. After a quick divorce, Henry married



Katherine Howard. This marriage appeared to be a happy one until people close to the king learned that Katherine Howard was once promised in marriage to a young man with whom she had sexual relations. Not only this, but Katherine Howard was carrying on a flirtation with a courtier in Henry's court. Katherine, several of her relatives, and her lovers were all executed. With Katherine's death went Henry's last hope at having another son.

## **Betrayal**

Henry VIII was a strong and virile young man when he married his first wife, Catherine of Aragon. Catherine was older than Henry and multiple pregnancies had taken a toll on her body. By the time the couple had been married for eighteen years, Henry was losing hope of ever having a male heir. Catherine remained Henry's Queen however, as well as his closest confidant. It was not until Anne Boleyn's youth put the idea of hope in Henry's ear that he began to question his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. In the end, Henry chose youth and hope over the woman who had stood beside him for twenty years. Catherine was tossed out of the life she had known for so long, forced to live in seclusion as her husband took a public mistress and tried to convince the world that his marriage to Catherine of Aragon was a sham. For the rest of her life Catherine would continue to insist that she was the only God sanctioned wife of King Henry.

Anne Boleyn failed to produce the son Henry VIII wanted so desperately to have. After three pregnancies, one live birth, a stillbirth, and a miscarriage, Henry felt betrayed by the temptress who promised him a male heir and failed to deliver. Henry VIII had Anne put to death on charges of infidelity that modern historians have begun to question. Ironically, this same issue would come to haunt Henry VIII later in his life. In his late forties and suffering ill health, Henry married a young, beautiful woman he believed was his devoted virgin bride. However, it was later revealed that Katherine Howard had a lover when she was seventeen, a young man who lived at the same estate where Katherine attended classes. This relationship was not an innocent vow of young love as Anne's vow to Henry Lord Percy was later thought to be, but instead an affair that was consummated on many occasions with the full knowledge of many witnesses. Not only this, but it also came to light that Katherine Howard was engaged in a flirtation with one of the King's courtiers during her marriage to Henry VIII. Henry loved Katherine deeply and was badly wounded by this betrayal. Katherine was put to death, along with her lovers and many of her family members, including her elderly grandmother.

## **Marriages of Political Advantage**

During the time in which Henry VIII ruled, it was not uncommon for marriages to be arranged for political reasons rather than for romantic reasons. An example of this was the arranged marriage between Catherine of Aragon and Arthur, Prince of Wales. This marriage was arranged in order to increase the political harmony between Spain and England. However, Catherine of Aragon did not meet her intended husband until their marriage had already been sealed in a ceremony in which a proxy stood in for



Catherine. At the age of fifteen, Catherine of Aragon married a boy she barely knew and spent the night in his bedchamber, raising questions later in her life of whether or not this marriage was ever consummated.

Late in his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII began to come to the realization that his wife would never give him a male heir. Henry began looking into possible marriages for his young daughter, Mary. Henry wanted to wed his daughter to a man who would bring to the crown not only a strong sense of leadership, but a political connection that would only make England stronger. Henry looked to Scotland, France, and Spain for a match for his young daughter. Several contracts were suggested, but in the end none were completed. In the end, Henry left his children unmarried.

Henry VIII himself had experience with arranged marriages. Henry's father arranged several partnerships for his son, one of which included a marriage to Catherine of Aragon. In the end, Henry married Catherine because he knew her from their many childhood days spent together and because he believed that she was his first and true contracted wife. Later, Henry would enter into a contract to marry Anne of Cleves in order to forge a political alliance with her brother's small kingdom in Cleves. However, this marriage was a disaster from the beginning and Henry divorced her within six months.



# Style

## Perspective

The author of this book, Antonia Fraser, is an Englishwoman who has written multiple books about the royal families of Europe, including Mary, Queen of Scots, and King James VI and I. In this book, the author attempts to focus on the women married to the infamous king, Henry VIII. Ms. Fraser has attempted to separate these women from the political and historical time period and tell their stories separate from their famous husband.

Ms. Fraser began her career as an assistant to a publisher. This was the same publisher who would later publish her first book. Ms. Fraser's perspective in this novel is that of an Englishwoman fascinated with the women in her own country's history. Ms. Fraser attempts to tell the story of six remarkable women, some of whom are only remarkable for the man they married and to separate them from their famous husbands. This is a different perspective from many other books written on the subject. However in the end, Ms. Fraser is not able to separate these women completely from their husband since it is Henry VIII who makes them all famous.

## Tone

The book is written with an impersonal tone that is common to this type of biographical book. Ms. Fraser separates herself and her own modern world from the world that these remarkable woman lived in. By doing this, Ms. Fraser creates a tone that is something like that of a history book a student might study in high school. However, this book is filled with history that has become somewhat controversial in modern times and Ms. Fraser remarks on these moments in history, allowing the reader to understand that Ms. Fraser has opinions of her own in regards to the actions of the people on whom she has chosen to write.

The tone of the book is mostly impartial but there are moments in which it becomes subjective. Ms. Fraser writes about women on whom very little tends to be known. Catherine of Aragon was Queen of England for twenty years, therefore there is a great deal known about her. However, other people in this book, such as Anna of Cleves, were not so well known and much of what Ms. Fraser writes is new information that has not been discussed before. There are also cases in which the known history of one of her subjects such as Anne Boleyn was jaded by popular opinion and has begun to shift in a new direction as more historians begin to examine the truth of that history. For this reason, there are sections in this book in which the impartial tone changes to one of mystery or even of disdain for those who would use personal opinion to influence how history will be remembered.





## Structure

The book is divided into five parts and includes both a prologue and an epilogue. Each part of the book deals with a specific time period and wife who appeared in the life of Henry VIII. The first part of the book deals with the life and marriages of Catherine of Aragon. The second covers the downfall of Catherine of Aragon, including her divorce from King Henry, and the life and marriage of Anne Boleyn. Part three covers Jane Seymour, while four touches on the lives and marriages of Anna of Cleves and Katherine Howard. Finally, the last part of the book focuses on Catherine Parr, the only wife to survive marriage to Henry VIII.

The book is structured in such a way that each part of the book begins with the life of the newest wife as well as the downfall of the last. Each chapter includes a title that refers to the theme of that particular time period either in the wife's life or that of Henry VIII's life. The prologue talks about popular opinions of these six women, which the author promises will change after the reader completes the book. The epilogue talks about the deaths of these remarkable women, including a discussion on where each woman is buried. Finally, the book ends with a discussion of the possible reasons Henry VIII chose to marry so frequently. The discussion ends with the conclusion that Henry VIII was propelled to marry frequently in order to provide for himself a multitude of male heirs.



## Quotes

"'Divorced, beheaded, died...divorced, beheaded, survived...' you can hear this rhyme, recalling the order of Henry VIII's wives, like an endless respectful susurraton on the lips of visitors to the historic places associated with them" (Prologue, pg. 1.)

"Even Henry's declared position as the male heir of the house of Lancaster was somewhat dubious on close inspection" (Part 1, Catherine of Aragon: Chapter 1, Arthur's Dearest Spouse, pg. 15.)

"Then there was the question of money, in short supply in Spain so that Ferdinand had never completed the payment of the second half of Catherine's dowry" (Part 1, Catherine of Aragon: Chapter 2, The Princess in his Power, pg. 35.)

"Six weeks after the death of the old King, on 11 June 1509, the new King, Henry VIII, married Catherine of Aragon in the oratory of the friary church just outside the walls of Greenwich Palace" (Part 1, Catherine of Aragon: Chapter 3, Golden World, pg. 49.)

"Clearly in adulthood Anne Boleyn exercised a kind of sexual fascination over most men who met her; whether it aroused desire or hostility, the fascination was there" (Part 2, Anne Boleyn: Chapter 6, A Fresh Young Damsel, pg. 123.)

"The exasperation of King Henry, like the insecurity of Anne Boleyn, was from his own point of view perfectly understandable: why was Catherine so obstinate when submission would bring her, and all around her, so many benefits?" (Part 2: Anne Boleyn: Chapter 9, Hail Anna!, pg. 178.)

"We cannot be sure when the project to substitute Jane Seymour for Anne Boleyn was hatched among Anne's political enemies (and enemies of her family). Obviously nothing could be fully fledged while Queen Anne was pregnant but after her miscarriage events moved extremely fast, suggesting that news of the royal pregnancy had temporarily interrupted plot already laid" (Part 3, Jane Seymour: Chapter 11, Very Modest Behaviour, pg. 236-237.)

"The quest for a new Queen of England began in earnest at the beginning of 1538" (Part 4, Anna of Cleves and Katherine Howard: Chapter 14, An Unendurable Bargain, pg. 287.)

"Maids, waiting-women, gentlemen, and other terrified informers were now pouring out their salacious stories of life after dark during that northern progress, quite apart from stories of Katherine's past" (Part 4, Anna of Cleves and Katherine Howard: Chapter 16, Old Man's Jewel, pg. 348.)

"Chapuy's likened the King's grief after the fall of Katherine Howard to that of a woman



crying more bitterly at the loss of her tenth husband than she had over the deaths of all the other nine put together: 'the reason being that she had never buried one of them without being sure of the next, but that after the tenth husband she had no other in view, hence her sorrow and her lamentations'" (Part 5, Catherine Parr: Chapter 17, Necessity and the Widow, pg. 357.)

"The convention of a royal widow's mourning was one that could have a practical significance: it was possible that the widow of a King might prove to be pregnant by him, and should not therefore marry until the matter had been settled, lest the paternity of the King's posthumous child be called in question" (Part 5, Catherine Parr: Chapter 19, Farewell Admirable Queen, pg. 399.)

"Leaving aside strength, passion, and helplessness, there is another bond that links together every one of the six wives. To a greater or less extent, each Queen was created or destroyed by her biological destiny" (Epilogue, What the King Lusted, pg. 421.)



## Topics for Discussion

Discuss Henry VIII. At what time period did he live? What was the political atmosphere at the time of his reign? Why is Henry VIII so well known? Why did he marry so often? Why was it so important for Henry to have a male heir? What would have happened had Henry been satisfied to make Mary his sole heir? How might history be different if Henry's son with Catherine of Aragon survived to adulthood? How did Henry affect the religious upheaval that took place during this time period? Would this have happened if Henry had not sought a divorce from Catherine of Aragon?

How did Catherine of Aragon come to live in England? Who was her first husband? Why was it so important whether or not she consummated her first marriage? Why did Henry come to use this fact against her in later life? Why did Henry VIII never deny saying that she was a virgin on their wedding night? Why did Catherine of Aragon continue to insist that Henry was her husband in the eyes of God no matter what the court said? Why did people grow tired of hearing Catherine make this argument? Who was the true Queen when Princess Elizabeth was born?

Who is Anne Boleyn? For how long did she and Henry VIII indulge in a courtship before they were wed? What was this relationship like? What about the letters Henry wrote to Anne suggest that they had a relationship that was not consummated? Did Henry know about Anne's relationship with Lord Percy? What problem did this relationship cause later in Anne's life? Why did Henry become so frustrated with Anne's inability to have a son so early in their marriage? What led to Anne's execution? Was Anne guilty of the crimes she was accused of?

Who is Jane Seymour? Why is she remembered as the most beloved wife? What did Jane Seymour do that none of Henry VIII's other wives could do? What did Jane die of? What might modern science say about her death? Was it preventable? Would Jane Seymour have remained the Queen of England had she not died? How is this suggested to the reader?

Who is Anna of Cleves? How did Henry VIII learn about her? Why was she chosen to be Henry's next wife? What was special about her? How did Henry come to choose her as his wife? What was Henry's reaction the first time he met Anna of Cleves? What caused this reaction? Was Anna of Cleves a virgin on her wedding night? Why did the king claim she was not? Why did Anna of Cleves agree so readily to a divorce when Henry asked for one? What might have happened had she not agreed quite so easily?

Who is Katherine Howard? How did Henry come to know Katherine? What did Henry think of Katherine? Was Henry hoping to have children with Katherine? Why or why not? To whom is the only surviving letter written by Katherine addressed? What is ironic about this letter? What does the spelling and wording of the letter suggest about



Katherine herself? Why was a relationship when Katherine was seventeen, long before she met the king, important enough to end her marriage? How did Katherine die?

Who is Catherine Parr? How many times had she been married before her marriage to the king? Why was Catherine nearly arrested during her marriage? Who was Catherine hoping to marry before she was engaged to the king? What happened to this relationship? How long after Henry VIII's death did Catherine wait before remarrying? How did Catherine die? How is this death ironic?