



The Other Boleyn Girl

Philippa Gregory

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Two sisters competing for the greatest prize: The love of a king

When Mary Boleyn comes to court as an innocent girl of fourteen, she catches the eye of Henry VIII. Dazzled, Mary falls in love with both her golden prince and her growing role as unofficial queen. However, she soon realises just how much she is a pawn in her family's ambitious plots as the king's interest begins to wane and she is forced to step aside for her best friend and rival: her sister, Anne. Then Mary knows that she must defy her family and her king and take fate into her own hands.

A rich and compelling novel of love, sex, ambition, and intrigue, *The Other Boleyn Girl* introduces a woman of extraordinary determination and desire who lived at the heart of the most exciting and glamorous court in Europe and survived by following her heart.

The Other Boleyn Girl Details

Date : Published May 21st 2003 by Touchstone (first published 2001)

ISBN : 9780743227445

Author : Philippa Gregory

Format : Paperback 661 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Romance

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From Reader Review The Other Boleyn Girl for online ebook

Sara W says

I got through 25 pages of this book and had enough! I wrote down (literally - I had a pen and paper with me after the reading the first page or two) so many historical inaccuracies that I thought my head would explode. Then I checked out reviews on Amazon and realized the book would get much, much worse. As strictly a novel, this might be a great book, and I do hope to pick it up again with the mind-set that it is strictly fiction because I might be able to enjoy it then. But as a book dealing with Mary and Anne and George Boleyn, it is awful. Why did Philippa Gregory feel the need to use historical figures if she was just going to make up the story? I might have enjoyed this book if it was two fictional sisters! What's frustrating is that people think this book is historically accurate, and it doesn't come close. I was a history major, and I've read tons of non-fiction books about Anne and Henry and the Tudors, and I hate it when people quote this book as fact (which many, many people do)! By all means, if you want to read this book, do so, because it is wildly popular (a lot of my friends love it and I'm sorry if you hate this review), but PLEASE read a reputable non-fiction book about these people as well or at least a better researched novel about them!

**November 2010 Update - I've gotten through half this book and stand by what I wrote in 2008. I plan on finishing it, but at a later time.

Sally says

I picked this one up at work because I want to see the movie (hello, Scarlett Johansen and Natalie Portman? Yes please), and because I know I'll have thousands of people asking me about it, like with Atonement, which I never read. In short, this book sucks. It's the worst kind of historical fiction - light on the history, and not fun or well written to make up for it. The characters are one dimensional, the writing is trite and full of cliches. Complete trash, but I'm not putting it on my enjoyable trash shelf, because it's not particularly enjoyable.

The worst thing about this book was how blatantly obvious it was that Gregory hates Anne Boleyn. Mary may have been the narrator, but Anne was without doubt the main character, and it is impossible to enjoy a book where the author goes all out to make you hate the main character. Especially a badly written main character. Anyone who has done any literary criticism, or any writing, will know that good characterisation involves showing, not telling. We're told how charming and witty Anne is to the King, but we're shown her being a bitch and arguing with Mary. Anne would have been a much more effective character if she'd been written like her brother George (the only likeable character in the whole book), who IS charming and witty, will stab you in the back if it suits him, but then admit to it with a disarming honesty. If she'd been charming but manipulative to everyone, including Mary, her seduction of the King would have been much more plausible, but as it was I just couldn't see it.

Then there's the way Gregory manipulates historical fact in order to make Anne seem worse. Anne was clever, and well educated, all we got from that was that she spoke French and read a lot, but in reality her education and ability to discuss politics and serious issues with Henry was a significant attraction. And there was the love affair with Henry Percy. Anne admits to her sworn enemy that she has slept with her betrothed, and he says, no you didn't because it isn't politically convenient for you to marry him and later doesn't tell the king even when he's in a precarious political position because of Anne. WTF plothole??

Next we have the incest and the witchcraft, both of which Gregory paints as true. No, seriously. As far as incest goes, well, who the hell would sleep with their own brother? Apart from the fact that it's generally acknowledged that it was just a means of getting rid of them. As for witchcraft, well she was a devout Christian, and again, it's generally thought to be a convenient pretext.

The whole enmity between sisters thing is a creation, which would be fair enough, poetic license, dramatic tension, etc etc. Except Mary hates Anne, and yet she's always doing what she's told, helping Anne out, blah blah. She'll occasionally say that of course she loves her she's her sister, but we're told far more often and with far more vehemence how much she hates her, and all we're shown is the fights and the vindictiveness. Again, this is mostly because Gregory hates Anne. She seems to like Mary, although if the real Mary was anything like the characterisation then I can't see why. Gregory's Mary is insipid, whiny and spineless, and pretty much irritates the hell out of me. And then we get the whole "wanting to marry for love and not power as a feminist statement" thing that Gregory does with Mary, while we are told Anne, who had power and intelligence in her own right, is a spineless pawn in a man's game of politics. She couldn't possibly have been regent of England without her uncle's help, we are told. This of the woman who split the church, dethroned a queen, and was mother to Queen Elizabeth.

In the Author's note Gregory cites Retha Warnicke's *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn* as one of her main sources, which according to Wikipedia (I know, Wikipedia, but still), is generally considered to be unsubstantiated which explains some of this. She also expresses admiration for Queen Elizabeth I, which I found rather ironic considering she is Anne's daughter and Anne and Elizabeth seem to me to have been very similar in character as well as ability.

Jason Koivu says

You've probably never heard of *The Other Boleyn Girl*. It's not very popular. I think a movie got made out of it, but I doubt anyone watched it.

Those are the kind of lies, mistruths and distortions that one person can perpetuate when they don't check their facts or worse, intentionally distort the facts. But more on that later.

The Other Boleyn Girl is the story of Mary Boleyn, the could've-been-queen courtier during King Henry VIII's tumultuous reign.

Little is known about Mary, other than that she was the sister of one of the most well-known women in all of history. This is a historical fiction writer's DREAM! She is a malleable, yet important figure orbiting world-changing events. A crafty author can do a lot with just such a character.

Philippa Gregory decided to turn her into the tool of the Boleyns. Mary is offered up by her parents and pushed ahead like a pawn by her ambitious uncle in the Boleyn/Howard campaign for power. She is assisted by her brother and sister, who later set her aside after the king's done with her, in order to put Anne on the throne. Mary's portrait as painted by Gregory is a sympathetic one indeed.

Did Gregory charge her palette with true colors? It's said that she likes to do historical research. Me, I like historical fiction that's well researched. I don't like it when a writer does a little research, latches on to something like an archaic term or whatever, and then proceeds to use that thing in their novel like it's going out of bloody style! (If I ever hear the word stomacher again, it'll be too damn soon!) Simply adding the occasional period piece decor and nothing more does not make a good read in this genre.

I doubt that much historical accuracy was attended to in the making of this book. There are notable inaccuracies. I'll give you one. Mary was not the baby of the family as Gregory asserts, but rather the eldest of the three siblings.

But we've got to be honest with ourselves as readers. Factual history must sometimes be set aside, because that's not what's important in this genre. *The Other Boleyn Girl* isn't a textbook, it's a novel. It's meant to entice and titillate. Dramatic effect and setting the mood is more important than "getting it right". Taken for what it is, this book excels. At times, it's exciting and tense. At times, it pulls at the heart. There are moments when this is drama at its best.

However, taken as a whole, this is not Gregory's best work. The occasionally amateurish writing made me think it was her first published work, but it's not. I read something by her published ten years after this and her writing showed marked improvement, the nuggets from her historical research were inserted more smoothly and everything felt a good deal tighter. This mammoth book on the other hand feels ponderous. At one point I thought to myself, "I bet she wishes she could have a redo on this one," but that ain't gonna happen since everybody and their grandma has read it.

Meaghan says

The thing you must realize about this book is that it is, first and foremost, a novel. A novel based on actual historical events, yes, but still a work of fiction. So for those that criticize it for its historical inaccuracy, your criticism is misplaced. This is not a biography of Mary Boleyn or Anne Boleyn and it doesn't pretend to be.

I myself am a bit of a Tudor junkie and love reading both fiction and nonfiction about the family and the times, and I found this book a delight. It had all the elements of a good story: sex, love, violence, suspense, complicated characters, and comic relief. My favorite character was George Boleyn, due to his wit, probably the funniest one in the story. Catherine of Aragon I think was the most true-to-life.

My only complaints about the story (historical inaccuracy aside, as I said above that doesn't have to be an issue here) are that sometimes it sounds like a Harlequin romance novel, and also it's very slow-moving. But if you are willing to wait through the long beginning I think you will find yourself well rewarded.

A word of advice, though: skip the movie. It was dreadful.

Elizabeth says

The Other Boleyn Girl was my last read of 2017 and also the biggest surprise. This book has been sitting on my shelf for years; so long that the spine is actually completely faded from sun damage. For whatever reason I just assumed this would be a three star read, which is something I like to avoid at all costs. I watched the movie on a plane ten years ago and even though I liked it I thought, well, there's no way the book is actually any good. Obviously I'm an idiot because it turned out to be one of four (out of fifty - count 'em, *four*) of my 5 star reads this year.

I loved this from beginning to end. This baby is 661 pages, okay, and I actually read the majority of it in one day. My reading progress will tell you differently but that's only because I abandoned it after the first few

chapters to read *A Court of Mist and Fury*. I didn't really return to it until after Christmas, and then I read about 450 pages in one sitting (while ingesting copious amount of alcohol and chocolate). It's so bloody entertaining! There is never a moment of tedium despite its length, and I constantly wanted to know what would happen next.

A lot of people appear to be unhappy with Anne being portrayed as the villain, but I wholeheartedly disagree with that. I saw her as a protagonist of sorts; a feminist gone mad. She wanted so badly to be treated like a man, respected by men, and then eventually served by men. She knew her sister Mary didn't have the guts, and she knew her father and uncle intended to use her for the rest of her life. She nearly killed herself trying to obtain the crown, and within moments it was all ripped away from her, purely because she couldn't produce a male heir for the king and therefore, as a woman, she was useless. I loved her character despite how brutal she could be. She was selfish, certainly, but honestly so was everyone else. I didn't think she was any more ruthless than her uncle, her parents, or the King. She was certainly more clever though, and I found her fascinating. After everything that's happened this year I found her refreshingly relatable; there are a lot of people I'd like to poison right about now.

On the other hand I thought it was brilliant to have the story narrated by Mary. I preferred seeing Anne from Mary's eyes. If anything it made me sympathetic towards Anne, the way Mary was, regardless of all that Anne put her through. If you don't have a sister you'll probably never understand what it's like to love someone unconditionally even while you hate them passionately.

I would recommend this to all historical fiction lovers/people who have had this on their TBR shelf for a long time. It's guuuuud.

I technically finished this on January 1st but I had SO LITTLE LEFT it wouldn't make sense for me to include it in my 2018 reads. Also my original 2017 reading goal was about 20 and I kept bumping it up so I really have completed it at least twice over now.

RTC.

Amy (Foxy) says

Well, this bites! I got a digital copy from my library and after 6 hours of listening to the audio **it just ended.**

◆◆◆◆UPDATE:◆◆◆◆

Well, I guess, I should have paid better attention to what I check out from the library. Apparently, the library **only** has the **abridged** version. SIGH!!!

Even though I didn't get the full version of this book I was not feeling it. I felt like something was missing... what was missing? I'm not sure but I needed more.

I have not seen the movie adaption of this book but I'm interested in watching it. Guess, I'll need to check if

it's on Netflix.

Felicia says

This was the november pick for Vaginal Fantasy Book club and I LOVED it! I have always been fond of the Tudors, as a kid I always fancied myself somewhat of an Anne Boleyn lover, she was my favorite of the poor wives, so this delving into her history, and her sister's especially, was super fascinating. It isn't a standard smutty romance, and you end up sympathizing a lot with how women were treated, how Henry the 8th behaved and WHY he did what he did. I have done some research (ie read Wikipedia haha) since, and of course this isn't TOTALLY accurate, but the drama of it is very entertaining in a sort of soapy-history sort of way.

Mandy says

Disclaimer: Don't confuse this book with a biography of Mary Boleyn. It's fiction all the way. It's a good read when you remember that this is fiction and not a blow-by-blow account of historical events. And because it is fiction, Gregory is able to play a little fast and loose with historical fact. Mary was most likely the oldest Boleyn child, not the youngest as presented here. She had also served the French kings court, just as Anne did, but was sent home in disgrace after tales of her promiscuity got out, including the fact that she was probably also that king's mistress. She was probably not the young, inexperienced girl Gregory chooses to portray her as. Gregory also depends heavily on Retha Warnicke's thesis that a homosexual ring surrounded Anne and included her brother George. This has been widely discredited by historians, since both Anne and George were very religious, and George was also a renowned womanizer.

Otherwise, it was a decent book. There were parts I thought went a little far, especially with Mary and George teaching Anne "whore's tricks" to woo the king without actually having sex with him. Granted, activity like this may have happened, but I don't necessarily want to read about it. I loved the love story between Mary and William Stafford, and would have liked to seen more of the relationship between Anne and Henry, when they were younger, seemingly in love, and she was as much a partner and advisor in his affairs as king (especially in religious thinking and such) as any man at court.

Somehow though, this book has tarnished my romanticized concept of courtly behavior. It's horrifying to consider that some of the political wrangling and the use of women as temptations, mistresses, and pawns to rise in society, titles, and the court probably happened, at least to some extent. If this was the way life was in those days, I would hope that I was a commoner. Because being in the court and used as someone's chattel to get what they wanted with no regard for my desires or who I loved would have been awful.

Kelly (and the Book Boar) says

Find all of my reviews at: <http://52bookminimum.blogspot.com/>

“There is no room for mistakes at court.”

I have owned this book since Jesus was a toddler but never got around to reading it – mainly because every time I even come close to the “puppy squisher” bookshelf, this guy gets a little antsy

I have a vague recollection of being envious of ScarJo’s magnificent boobage in the film version . . . followed immediately by what I do best once I decide to watch a movie: fall asleep. Anyway, I hadn’t really planned on ever reading *The Other Boleyn Girl*, but when I logged on to the library website to cyberbully the porny librarian until she finally puts a copy of Made for Love in my hands, this one popped up on the available now/recommended to you page. I planned on starting it (possibly poolside) once my family went out of town for the weekend since I had a feeling that once I started it would be like book crack and I wouldn’t be able to put it down. But I could not avoid its siren song and

Since there are over 15,000 reviews for this sucker, I’m not going to waste a whole lotta time here. The story goes a little something like this

???? Howards, meet the Howards. They’re the vilest of families. From the land of England. They’re a page right out of history????

WILLLLLMAAAAAAAA!

The Other Boleyn Girl takes place in the olde days of yore when King Henry VIII was married to Catherine of Aragon and a young Mary Boleyn caught his eye. The “Howard family ambition” rules all and Mary is instructed to become the King’s mistress and deliver him a son he might claim since his aging wife is quickly approaching the dreaded *change*. When Mary proves to be foolish with dreams of love rather than power at the forefront of her brain, Anne Boleyn steps in

And the rest is history. Sort of. This isn’t what you’d necessarily call historically accurate, but seriously

If you’re like me and your husband has had to dig an old burp rag out of the cupboard in order for you to wipe your drool after watching seven straight hours of *The Tudors*

Or you have a DVR filled with the househoes of any given city or you've contemplated learning Spanish more than once simply so you can watch Telemundo, this might be the train wreck for you.

Linda says

This book is pure trash. Simple as that. I was kind of embarrassed reading it. It reads something like a Danielle Steel novel wannabe. Not to knock Danielle Steel cause I'm certainly guilty of reading a number of Danielle Steele. (Tho in truth it was when I was much younger so I really didn't know any better.)

So back to "The Other Boleyn Girl" being pure trash. It's crazy for me to make such a harsh claim cause: 1. I love historical fiction-- always have. Even since fifth grade I can remember! and 2. the plot is boiling great. You couldn't make this stuff up it's so rich! and crazy!! and debauched!!! But for all the real life grandness of it, Phillipa Gregory gives the events a small and somehow unrealistic dimension. Her words bely the fact that the fate of nations are at stake, political courses, the role of religion. It's all at play and somehow unreal and soap opera-ish. Mary and Jane are two girls straight out of Sex and City set in 1545 (except without the wit and charm of Carrie and her happy comrades).

I think the truth is that Phillipa Gregory is only able to give readers the surface of an event. I feel like there is no depth of emotion of subtlety or nuance. Hopefully the movie will do better! But with Natalie Portman and Scarlet Johanson as the leads I'm sure we can expect better than the book version.

Phrynne says

An enjoyable read but I am afraid Wolf Hall has ruined me for historical fiction set in this period. I kept waiting for Cromwell to walk in and organise everything! There has been a lot of criticism about this book being light on historical fact but since it is fiction I did not mind that. I wondered if it limited itself by telling it through the character of Mary. She was not a very politically aware or even especially intelligent person and seeing the story unfold through her eyes alone made it a little less gripping than it could have been. Still a good easy read with an interesting take on the relationship between the Boleyn siblings.

Stella says

OK firstly, there's no doubt that Philippa Gregory can write a good story. Her prose is engaging and the content of The Other Boleyn girl was easy to read.

However what put me off was the absolute ignorance of historical fact and total vilification of Anne Boleyn - yes this is a fictional interpretation but now it has made it to the big screen, there are a few who will think this is what really happened.

Ms. Gregory describes Mary Boleyn as her personal heroine and this bias is clear through the book. A very dark picture of a woman without feeling (except fear and arrogance) or conscience is painted of Anne Boleyn. This I do not agree with.

In fact it is widely accepted by historians that Anne was the younger sister not Mary, that in fact, Anne was a very loving Mother to Elizabeth, that she was not universally hated by the British people and even her dignity and composure in death, with her documented last words being a tribute to the King, are denied in this version of events.

Taking the historical inaccuracies aside, as a woman, Anne is painted as the cause of Henry becoming a tyrant, as the reason women had to live in fear that they could be cast aside and so she had her just desserts when Henry cast her aside.

Let us not forget that Henry was actually the one who was married - Anne was just a teenager when she met him and a pawn in a political game. Henry is responsible for his own behaviour, not Anne, his own greed, arrogance and increasing desperation for a son are the reason he became a tyrant, not Anne. For he himself had many other wives after he disposed of her and his pattern of behaviour continued.

To absolve him of this and place the blame at Anne's door is a shocking error in this book.

In addition, yes Anne and Henry paved the way forward for divorce in this country - Anne helped change history and who knows what would've happened otherwise. Yes there may have been wives cast aside as a result but at least they are saved a life with someone who cannot stay faithful or whatever. And look how many wives can walk away from a bad marriage, an abusive one, an unhappy one, as a result of this young woman's bravery in taking on a King and country.

It is widely accepted that Anne also had an impact in the improved relations with France when she accompanied Henry to the Court. The trip is documented in the book however once again Anne's significant role in these relations, her exceptional intelligence and wit, her educational background in the French court and her overall contribution are completely undermined and glossed over in this book.

It is also documented in history that the saintly, oh so pure of heart, so good Mary as portrayed by Ms. Gregory, went nowhere near Anne or her brother when they were sent to the Tower and did not see them for some time before that happening. Her support was as absent as she was - preferring to keep her distance and save her good self perhaps? Who knows.

OK rewrite history in an entertaining fictional read - fine. But to completely and unnecessarily vilify one woman at the expense of another, and more or less absolve the shocking behaviour of a man, a King no less, is really not a great message for women in this day and age in my opinion.

And that is what grates me about the book - what it says about women when a strong and intelligent young woman like Anne Boleyn who certainly did not deserve her unfortunate demise, is portrayed as some Machiavellian villain rather than the brave woman she was and the positive contributions she made to the development of this country for the role of women (I'm a Catholic so I'm not talking religiously, THAT is a completely different matter!).

Shocking. Would not recommend this book as a result.

Markus says

Well, then...

Reviewing this book should be more fun than reading it, but since I'm not in the mood to deal with rabid fangirls (yes, I very consciously use a term describing only one gender), I'm not sure if I want to risk criticising such an amazingly overrated book.

The book does have some redeeming qualities, and luckily I feel that most of my disappointment lies with this book specifically and not with Philippa Gregory as an author, so I'll happily read more by her.

Carol says

Interesting account of the time how people, especially women, were treated....even the Queen's themselves....by their politically ambitious parents and family. No one to be trusted by numerous devious characters.

Excellent book!

James says

This was one of the first books I read by Philippa Gregory -- and out of order. How could I do that to myself... but in the end, you can read them out of order assuming you know the entire list of monarchs in order. :) Informative book. If you're a history buff, it will line up well -- and give you some things to dispute!

Ana says

No.

No.

No.

Heck to the nah.

Heck to the naw naw.

I read The Other Boleyn Girl - and I wish I hadn't. This book makes Reign look like a masterpiece. It might as well have been called 'The Other Kardashian Girl.'

The one thing that is abundantly clear is that this book is very anti-Anne Boleyn. The author is no fan of Anne Boleyn, that much is certain. Now the author ain't sayin' she a gold digger....

Except that's exactly what she's saying.

Smh.

First Nefertiti, now this. I am done with historical fiction. I'm not into villainizing famous historical figures. I'm really not. The poor woman lost her head. Literally. She is so over her haters. She doesn't need this shit.

P.S. Apparently there's a novel about Queen Elizabeth I called *The Virgin's Lover*.

Awesome. Oh my good queen Bess. Once again, your reputation is at stake.

Heads will roll.

Iset says

The book is in outward appearances the same length as "The Constant Princess" and "The Boleyn Inheritance", but is actually a longer work, as is revealed when one realises that the font size is considerably smaller than the two aforementioned novels. The up side of this is that at least "The Other Boleyn Girl" has more of a story than the wafer thin plot of the other two. This is not however enough to make it into a good book. The writing itself is of low quality, many scenes are redundant, drag with little or no purpose, and the descriptions and dialogue are lacking sophistication. The book butchers the historical fact, an issue which I'll examine shortly, but in many areas it also fails logically too, for example the idea that if Anne wanted to risk conceiving from another man then her brother George would be the obvious choice, or that Mary Boleyn would have actually done the work of a peasant farmer's wife. The so called plot revolves around the sensationalist scandals surrounding Mary and Anne Boleyn, in what Philippa Gregory laughably claims is a completely historically accurate portrayal, reducing the international political and ethical complexities of the period to the contents of a modern celebrity gossip magazine. She also inexcusably allows anachronisms to permeate the novel, turning the well-spoken Anne Boleyn into a foul-mouthed harpy. The novel, like her others, unfortunately succumbs to "tell" rather than "show" on far too many occasions.

To be brutally honest, I found it difficult to get through the book because it was so awful, and one of the biggest problems was with the main character, Mary Boleyn. The issues with her character overlap with the problems of historical accuracy in the book, since Gregory ignores certain historical facts and cherry picks from controversial discredited theories to create the Mary Boleyn character. It should thus be noted that the Mary Boleyn I am about to describe from the book bears no resemblance to the real life person. She is completely innocent, in stark contrast to every other character (including Jane Seymour who acts holier-than-thou but since Mary dislikes her, we know she's only putting it on), except perhaps Queen Katherine. She is portrayed as passive, naive, slow-witted, submissive to the authority figures in her life even when they are morally wrong, and all that is pure and virtuous in the world. She is always ethically and morally right, despite having some quite ugly opinions of other people and undertaking questionable actions. She cuckolds her husband and has a sexual affair with the king - but it's alright because Mary is truly in love with him. She betrays her mistress, the queen, by engaging in aforementioned affair and furthermore reporting the queen's secret correspondence to her relatives and betraying her - but it's alright because Mary constantly talks about

how virtuous Katherine is and how she admires her. Mary is never reviled by the other characters, and is only once or twice called offensive insults, but only by stereotypical bad characters. In contrast, when Anne is with the king, she is single and has no husband to betray, and yet she is in the wrong because her love for Henry is not the innocent pure love of Mary. When Mary teaches Anne the techniques to keep Henry happy, Anne is spat at and insulted by everyone despite having learned them from Mary.

In short, this Mary Boleyn is bland, boring and one-dimensional. I hated her because she was a drip and a doormat, and a dictionary definition of a Purity Sue. Worst of all, Mary is held up as something to be admired. It's obvious that since Mary is supposed to be the character the readers identify with (Gregory thinks that making her unfailingly innocent and plopping her down in an unrealistic world of caricature villains will achieve this) and can do no wrong, her fate is supposed to be something to aspire to. We too, the readers are told, should try to be placid and obedient and prefer the life of an impoverished country idyll married to the stereotypical poor but honest man. Gregory hit upon a good idea of writing a book about the forgotten sister of Anne Boleyn, but in throwing all known historical fact out of the window, she might as well have written a novel about a completely fictional king and two sisters competing for his love.

As obvious as it is that Philippa Gregory adores Mary Boleyn, it is equally plain that she loathes Anne Boleyn. Anne, the devout, clever and generous woman of history is nowhere in evidence here. Instead she's been replaced by a character of the same name who is instead petty, vain, cruel, possessive, and whose wit and intelligence is painted as a negative character trait for a woman to possess. Her story in this novel revolves around sensationalist twaddle such as incest with her brother, deformed babies resulting from aforementioned sinful union, attempted poisonings of Princess Mary and Bishop Fisher, and using witchcraft to have an abortion. The other characters are equally implausible and one-dimensional, from the saintly Katherine of Aragon to the irredeemable greed and ambition of Thomas Boleyn, his wife Elizabeth and her brother the Duke of Norfolk, and as for Henry VIII he was simply a mixture of stupid and petulant. None of these characters have any depth or believability.

Finally, a particular word must be made in the historical accuracy stakes about Mary Boleyn's fate. Philippa Gregory has her riding off to find Stafford and marry him, and she lives in a small farmhouse cottage with him with some farmland. When Stafford is at court, we are told, he employs local tenants to keep this house and farm the lands, but when he is present he apparently sends his tenants away and takes up the plough himself. We are even treated to preposterous scenes where Mary describes how, following her marriage to Stafford, she learns how to cook, smoke ham, light a fire, churn butter, make cheese, bake bread and pluck birds. She even declares how much she is looking forwards to being a farmer's wife. This is all patently ridiculous. Either Gregory has a completely erroneous idea of just what class and standard of living gentry had, or she has a completely erroneous idea of farm life, imagining it to be a country idyll like Marie Antoinette's mock shepherdess residence at La Petite Trianon with no conception of the constant hard work involved. The real Mary Boleyn, judging from her stream of letters to her family and the king, was desperate to return to court and escape even the life of the country gentlewoman. She certainly wouldn't have contemplated undertaking manual labour.

These, and many more patently deliberately chosen inaccuracies in the book and about the characters had me shaking my head, and it was a strain not to throw the book down in anger at the disservice done to the historical people here, including Mary Boleyn herself who clearly had a much more interesting personality and life than the simpering drip of this novel. The only reason I curbed that urge was to avoid accusations that this review could not possibly be an accurate reflection of the novel if I had not read it all the way to the end. I appreciate that authors have a right to literary license, to fill in the gaps in history in their historical fiction, and maybe even to alter or reinterpret a few facts here and there, but the polite thing to do when an author does that is to admit to the alterations in the author's note, explaining where and why you did it and

what actually happened. That way it openly acknowledges where the story has diverged from fact and helpfully informs the reader which bits in particular have been changed by the author and are not in fact accurate. The vast majority of people reading it won't be knowledgeable about the period, or historians, and could come away from this novel with a very skewed and in many places wrong idea about who these people were and what really happened. As a result, most people's idea of Anne Boleyn for the next generation or two is now going to be of a cruel, scheming harpy.

In historical fiction, based closely of real life events and people in the past, I believe that authors have a responsibility to be as accurate and as true to life as possible, or else freely admit their alterations, to do justice to the men and women who lived through it, otherwise it is ultimately doing those men and women a grave disservice.

Asghar Abbas says

First time I was introduced to Anne Boleyn and I have been infatuated with her ever since, her cause my own and my own quite forgotten. Happily so. Recklessly so. So, Gregory gets props for that but nought for much else, see not all is forgiven not even close. Because I completely, utterly, vehemently resent Gregory's depiction of Anne in this book.

And

After watching Natalie Dormer perform Anne, yes perform ; no other word for it, oh boy, no one else can ever be Anne Boleyn for me. Dormer animated her character so uncannily she became Anne in flesh and bones, bringing her to life in a way that's a little hard to describe, and all I want to do is describe it, all of it. It's even harder to watch her be that vulnerable, but so so arrogant, she showed us Anne just couldn't help herself. Dormer was straight up necromancer, a clairvoyant, a ventriloquist what the heck for good measure a soothsayer too, all rolled into one. She wasn't playing a role, she was conducting a séance being the perfect conduit herself. So if you haven't seen Natalie Dormer do her thing, watch the Tudors, watch it, watch her bewitch the sun with her pale, pale skin.

But we were talking about this book, sadly. Sigh. I think Philippa Gregory is every historian's, serious or casual, migraine. See, Gregory took an intriguing slice of history, a very exciting time to say the least, and turned that basically into a soap opera, not even a good one. She trivialized important events, she belittled significant players, she over blew people who had no impact on this phase. Every page of this history was fair game to her, subjected to her whims, to turn it around as she willed. She changed things without offering any factual backings or historical evidence. Two prime examples of her misconduct being making Mary Boleyn younger than her sister Anne, and accentuating that her children were sired by Henry VIII. There is nothing there in the annals to suggest that was the case. Henry before getting mixed up with Mary had acknowledged other illegitimate off springs. So, it's not like he was averse to making such things public. Though Henry VIII was bit of a right bastard himself. But that's neither here nor there.

Somewhere along the way, Gregory decided she liked The Other Boleyn Girl better, but it was a conscious decision . A calculated move. She made Mary innocuous of all of this, all the plotting to gain favors that couldn't last, hasty grab for power like she was just a naive pawn in this and did as her family bid her. She was shown as an unwitting, unwillingly player. Not even a slight mention of being the English Mare, was laughable here. When Mary had to go do the King, it was all pure and she was in love of course, and but

when it was Anne's turn, it was all evil. Haha, yeah right. No one was innocent of playing that game, they were all in it, all were equally guilty of trying to advance the Boleyn family, that was how it went then, that was the game they were playing, well aware they'd pay dearly if it didn't pan out and boy did they pay, or did they? Hey like Martin says when you play make sure you win or you know, you are gonna die. But none of them were innocuous in all of that, not even Anne but especially not Mary. And she wasn't even a major player like Gregory made her out to be.

However.

To me Anne Boleyn felt innocuous you know, but like music innocuous of her surroundings and what she did to people, she was like that.

But the more Philippa Gregory tried to beatify Mary into this Saint the more she needed to make Anne a monster she clearly wasn't, a villain she never was. Sometimes unnecessarily so, to the point of senselessness, after a while the whole Anne-shaming just became nonsensical, making a vastly talented writer look stupid. Did she really believe that, that's how everything happened? Gregory blamed Anne for everything, every single solitary thing that she could blame Anne for she did. I mean everything, not a single thing that could be missed was missed. Gregory charged Anne with the charges that were once laid at her feet, charges she has long since been acquitted of..... from people better and far more legitimate than Gregory. Oh man, no one distorts history with such aplomb quite like Philippa Gregory does.

I don't think Mary Boleyn was ever that important, she was just too omnipresent of a witness in this novel , or Anne Boleyn that regular. I think the history doesn't believe the sisters were that particularly close as they were made out to be here.

As far as introductions goes this book was a pretty good one, but the way Anne was portrayed is still so very unforgivable, it still rankles. She wasn't some mean one track high school drama queen. She was a better musician than that. Look, okay yes she wasn't infallible. She wasn't blameless of her downfall, demise, she practically designed her own destruction, but Anne, Anne made a dent on history and for better or worst changed courses of rivers in her country, in the lonely country where she died alone. But who could deny her contributions? Her fiery intelligence still burns to this day, my mind is on fire still. And let's not forget it was her daughter Elizabeth who reigned the longest among all the Tudor children. She made England strong again, rich again bringing about the Age of Her, before Elizabeth England was a relatively poor country, intellectually and financially. It was during these times arts of all kinds and music of every type flourished. Advent of English Renaissance happened in Elizabeth's lifetime, English were late bloomers both to the arts revival and settling in the New World, always late to the party tsk tsk. You know Shakespeare (whoever he really was), right? Of course you do. He was totally there in her era too, sure he was promulgating old Tudor lies about Richard III, but we are not grudging him that, a man gotta eat, make art and all that. Hey, no listen, I am completely against monarchy but that's another topic, my point was Anne's legacy and the impact she was directly responsible for. I really dislike monarchy so very much. Lemme illustrate that with a quote by Denis Diderot, don't go anywhere :

Men will never be free until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest.

OK, back to this book. Let's be fair, I guess one thing that I did agree with was Gregory's exhibition of Henry VIII. I agree with how she presented that animal in her book. Though I'll admit Jonathan Rhys Meyers tried to domesticate him, he did try to make him human, but there's no humanizing something that is not human by definition ; a monarch. Henry throughout his miserable life suffered from severe complexes and delusions of grandeur, probably even masculinity issues. The Other Boleyn Girl showed Henry as a spoiled brat, well

every prince is but I don't think that was it. Henry was a shrewd and sly statesman, who managed to keep the country from being torn apart despite doing everything he could to alienate everyone from common farmers to the Catholic Church with his antics, still he didn't let his country engulf in utter chaos he managed to hold it all together, so there is that. He did manage to keep everything intact, just about. Even in 2008, when I first read this book I thought it was very simplistic to make him a spoiled child who pouts whenever he doesn't get his way. There's more to it than that. It always is. I think our dear boy had been living under the cold shadows of his father for far too long. So he ended up overcompensating everything. I feel Henry VIII was under the illusion that Henry Tudor had performed great feats on the battlefields, haha right.

*coughJasperTudordidallthework*cough So therefore little Henry went looking for glory in all the wrong places and failing miserably in every one of them, well at least warring with France never bore him any real fruits. He wanted more than that chair, in that he was like Robert Baratheon, he got the throne but he didn't know what to do with it. He just wanted to do great things, but the only great thing he truly did was to marry Anne. Say what you will about Richard III but he was a warrior, all his blunders aside, at least Richard didn't have any qualms about what he was, he wasn't confused about himself. Despite all his flaws, all the mistakes he made Richard wasn't delusional. Plus, I believe Henry VIII did go really insane later on, too many bumps on the head, got knocked down too many times jousting. A lot of people remark on Henry's madness as bipolar, at least that's the explanation they offer for all his offing with the people's heads, anyone who displeased him basically. But I wouldn't associate a serious mental affliction with the king or insult people suffering from it, it feels too much like an excuse for his behavior that bore out of his personality and was on him alone. Though a serious head injury is a much more plausible explanation.

Oh, I just remember something! When I was reading this book something occurred to me. I realized with a sinking feeling, what a sunken feeling it was indeed, Anne Boleyn's story was just another retelling of Elizabeth Woodville's story. Think about it, both their rise and fall is parallel. It's tragic and essentially the same, well almost; Woodville didn't lose her head, well at least not that way. And Henry VIII is her grandson and Anne named her Daughter after his mother. Woa. Shouldn't have taken both pills and now they are not mixing well. I shouldn't have followed the White Rabbit down to this warren. Um, how to get out ? Okay got it.

No, don't get me wrong this is a well written book and very entertaining, yes we are still talking about the book, I wasn't digressing, but it's also salacious, malicious propaganda against Anne Boleyn. I am calling it what it is; a smear campaign and I doth protest. But some aspects of it were very vulgar and dreck. During those parts it felt like it was written by Jackie Collins on cocaine. I'll never forgive Philippa Gregory for making utter these two words Jackie Collins, I feel like I already need a shower.

By the end of this novel, even the despicable Gregory had to admit Anne was innocent of all the extramarital affairs she was accused of, they were just trumped up charges and completely baseless. The only thing she insisted, almost pathologically, Anne was guilty of- the one thing that almost all historians have absolved her of- the incestuous angle. While I am at it, I'll blame Gregory for the abysmal Other Boleyn Girl movie too. Arguably, Gregory has popularized the historical fiction genre, but read Sharon Kay Penman's books instead, especially The Sunne in Splendour which while not pitch perfect, I guarantee you is way better, sure I had my own problems with it but they were for personal reasons, nothing to do with excellence that is Penman's work. Quick, someone make a Sunne in Splendour movie. With a moving sound track.

I sure hope the ghost of George Boleyn haunts Philippa Gregory, George who most historian agree was homosexual, but whether or not he consorted with the Queen is unclear and quite frankly irrelevant, why would he do that? You want to discredit someone you don't like? Spread the word they are fucking their sibling; boom! Instantly ostracized they will be. Of course, it's an easy and ugly accusation to sling at them as much as now. Same thing happened with the Borgias, the fact that the Borgias were demented is beside the

point.

So yeah I do hope George Boleyn haunts Gregory. You know what, I am taking back one star from the ratings. I had originally given it four stars, four stars not because of Gregory's sensationalized writing style, but because I get to meet Anne whom irrespective of Gregory I still liked enough to follow and mostly because I am still in love with the year 2008.

Anne

Anne, darling don't let anyone dissuade you from wearing yellow, it's your color, it's your mouth, you can do whatever you want with it. No matter if the shock of your yellow is making the sun shy away from you. It's not your fault the big yoke in the sky can't handle your colors. It's entirely the sun's loss he couldn't love you more openly. Lemons are all there are, you are still a cloth of gold and Sigur Rós are singing for you.

I don't think I am even ashes now, so I'll leave this half finished ode with two of my favorite quotes ; one from Anne and one about Anne.

Seduce me. Write letters to me. And poems, I love poems. Ravish me with your words. Seduce me.

Lady Anne is so beautiful, it is the duty of every man to love her.

-Thomas Wyatt ; The Tudors.

footnote : while I was composing this I was listening to Sláinte Mhath. Whilst editing it, I had to listen to Como poden per sas culpas, Cantiga 166. You should listen to it, it will make you feel....things, it'll make you feel the night. Like my own Anne makes me feel everything and nothing at the same time.

Madeline says

Some people (read: uptight history nerds with nothing better to do) like to get their undies in knots over Philippa Gregory's writing and whine about how she takes too many liberties with history. Well, guess what? She makes it *interesting*, and since her books are classified as fiction, I think she can be allowed that. Also, I consider myself a history nerd, especially when it comes to the Tudors, and I think Gregory's books are great. The stories surrounding Henry VIII are already really good; all Philippa Gregory did was add dialogue and sex scenes that your history teachers pretended never happened.

I was also very grateful that she didn't attempt to garner sympathy for Anne Boleyn. I've read a couple novels about her where the author attempts to portray her as an innocent victim and it's just sad. The woman was a manipulative, conniving, intelligent, confident *bitch*, and **The Other Boleyn Girl** makes this very clear. Other books in Philippa Gregory's Tudor series that I read and enjoyed: The Virgin's Lover, The Queen's Fool, The Constant Princess, and The Boleyn Inheritance.

Cindy says

I love anything that has to do with English History and really am kinda fascinated by Henry VIII. After

reading so many good things on here and elsewhere about this book I was looking forward to it.

At about 100 pages into it I thought I really was enjoying it. Too bad the book didn't end at page 200. Because I hated this book with a passion. I don't even know where to start with it.

First you have the writing style which is written by Mary Boylen's POV. Which is fine. But every character in this book is one sided. Mary hasn't a brain for herself, Henry is a lustfilled king (that may be true), the Queen is soooooo smart but doesn't know what is going on. And Anne Boleyn is this hateful person that makes the reader want to kill her before she even is sent to the axe. There was also the same use of phrases over and over again. "You're just the other Bolyn Girl, we don't like you"...."I am Queen", "You are a whore" it's almost like the author has a limited vocabulary and wanted us to know it.

Second thing I hated was that there wasn't one ounce of family love, or loyalty about anyone. I know there is the family games going on in England, but not one guy thought about his daughter as anything more then a piece of old meat. That really really bothered me.

Third, this book had more details about sex then porn. I really wanted to hope the movie would be good and people have complained the movie is nothing like the book, which is obvious because if it was like the book it would be in the XXX section of the video stores.

Fourth, There were parts that focused on things that didn't matter. 5 pages about a tennis tournament that made you say "Why do I care about this". It's like the author had a goal page amount and she was going to go above and beyond it.

Lastly, the topic of Homosexuality and incest. Yes this is a theory out there about Anne but did the WHOLE book have to focus on it. Anne's brother was this neck kissing, french kissing sister lover the whole entire book. Anne was this girl that was always hot for her brother regardless of anything. Great way to branch out there!

Overall I hated this book.
