

# **BOOK CLUB To Go!**

## **The Other Boleyn Girl**

### **By Philippa Gregory**

#### **Introduction**

The daughters of a ruthlessly ambitious family, Mary and Anne Boleyn, are sent to the court of Henry VIII to attract the attention of King Henry VIII. He first takes Mary as his mistress, in which role she bears him an illegitimate son, and then takes Anne as his wife.

*(novelist.com)*

#### **About the Author**

Born in Kenya in 1954, Philippa Gregory moved to England with her family and was educated in Bristol and took the National Council for the Training of Journalists course in Cardiff.

She worked as a senior reporter on the "*Portsmouth News*", and as a journalist and producer for BBC radio.

Philippa obtained a BA degree in history at the University of Sussex in Brighton and a PhD at Edinburgh University in 18th-century literature. Her first novel, *Wideacre*, was written as she completed her PhD and became an instant world-wide bestseller. On its publication, she became a full-time writer, and now lives with her family on a small farm in the North of England.

*(philippagregory.com)*

## Author Interview

**Q.** What made you pick Mary, the other Boleyn girl, as the character to tell the story of Anne's ascendancy and eventual fall?

**A.** Gregory: I found Mary, rather than "picked" her. I was delighted to come across a character who was in the spotlight, but mostly in the wings of one of the most intriguing periods of British history, and her relationship to Anne was something that I knew would be stimulating and provocative.

**Q.** Why do you think she's the best narrator here?

**A.** Gregory: I think history is always more interesting when told by the "losers" or those on the margins. This is because most conventional history is that of the "winners," so you get a different slant. But because she is badly treated by her family and by the king, it is possible to show her development from naive and trusting and very young girl, to a woman who is ready to turn her back on the court. The way she tells the story is also part of the story itself.

**Q.** Is Mary a real person? If so, what is actually known about her?

**A.** Gregory: We have the barest details about her. We know that she was born at Hever Castle in Kent, that she married William Carey, as in the novel, that she was the queen's lady-in-waiting and the king's mistress. That she was supplanted by her sister Anne, that her husband died of the sweat and she remarried a poor man for love and went to live in Essex, as in the novel. The invention of the novel is her motives and feelings; the broad facts of her life are accurate.

**Q.** How about Mary and Anne's brother, George? Did he really sleep with his sister so that she could give Henry a son?

**A.** Gregory: Nobody can know the answer to this one. Anne was accused of adultery with George at their trials and his wife gave evidence against them both. Most people think the trial was a show trial, but it is an interesting accusation. Anne had three miscarriages by the time of her trial, and she was not a woman to let something like sin or crime stand in her way -- she was clearly guilty of one murder. I think if she had thought that Henry could not bear a son she was quite capable of finding someone to father a child on her. If she thought that, then George would have been the obvious choice.

*(readinggroupguides.com)*

## Reviews

“Sisterly rivalry is the basis of this fresh, wonderfully vivid retelling of the story of Anne Boleyn.” – *publisher's weekly*

“Historically based, page-turning story of Mary Boleyn, sister of the infamous Anne, decapitated by Henry VIII: here, as much a tale of love and lust as it is a saga about an ambitious family who used their kin as negotiable assets.”-*Kirkus Review*

( *ebSCOhost.com*)

## Movie Adaptation

A sumptuous and sensual tale of intrigue, romance and betrayal set against the backdrop of a defining moment in European history: two beautiful sisters, Anne and Mary Boleyn, driven by their family's blind ambition, compete for the love of the handsome and passionate King Henry VIII. Written by *Marisa Gabriella*

(*imdb.com*)

## Movie Reviews

“*The Other Boleyn Girl*, is a classy romantic cocktail distinguished by its tart yet breezy bite.”- Owen Gleiberman (*entertainmentweekly.com*)

“An enjoyable movie with an entertaining angle on a hard-to-resist period of history.” – Mick LaSalle (*San Francisco Chronicle*)

“A richly appointed period piece, it features kingly tantrums, mistresses, bodices, roaring fireplaces, incest, and mutton. It also features sharply enunciated, period-perfect dialogue in which nary a contraction can be heard.”-Peter Rainer (*Christian Science Monitor*)

(*metacritic.com*)

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## **Further Reading**

*The Boleyn Inheritance* by Philippa Gregory

*The King's Pleasure: A Novel of Katharine of Aragon* by Norah Lofts

*The Constant Princess* by Philippa Gregory

*Six Renaissance men and women: innovation, biography, and cultural creativity* by Elisabeth Salter

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#### **Possible Discussion Questions**

1. Why does Philippa Gregory choose Mary to narrate the story? Keeping in mind the relationship between the observer and those observed, is Mary a good, trustworthy, narrator?
2. Look at the exchange between Mary and her mother at the end of the first chapter. How does the author foreshadow what is to come? How do the events of the first chapter frame the story?
3. Discuss the Boleyn family's scheming and jockeying for favor in the court. In light of these politics, discuss the significance of Mary's explanation that she had "a talent for loving [the king]" (page 119)
4. Consider pages 38 and 82. How does the author create sexual tension? How do the narrator's thoughts and feelings communicate the attraction between her and the king? Why is this important to the story of *The Other Boleyn Girl*?
5. On page 85, Anne tells Mary, "I am happy for the family. I hardly ever think about you." Do you think she's telling the truth? Later, Anne says to her sister, "We'll always be nothing to our family" (page 310). Do you think she believes this, especially given her overwhelming desire to advance her own status?
6. In general, what are your impressions of the sisters? Keep in mind Anne's and Mary's discussion on page 104: "So who would come after me?...I could make my own way." Also look at page 123, when Anne says, "Hear this, Mary...I will kill you." Why are these statements significant, particularly given their timing?
7. How do you feel about the idea that a woman had to be married before she could bed the king? What do you think about the king changing the laws to suit his needs?

8. On page 303, George exclaims to Mary, "You cannot really want to be a nobody." Why is this such a revolutionary idea in Henry's court, and for the Boleyns in particular? What should the response have been to Mary's question to Anne (page 330) about the rewards of Anne's impending marriage to the king: "What is there for me?"
9. Why do you think George declares that Anne is "the only Boleyn anyone will ever know or remember" (page 410)? Was that true for you before you read *The Other Boleyn Girl*? What about now?
10. After Anne is arrested, Mary pleads for her by saying, "We did nothing more than that was ordered. We only ever did as we were commanded. Is she to die for being an obedient daughter?" (page 650). What is your reaction to these arguments? Did Henry have no choice but to sentence her to death?

*(readinggroupguides.com)*