

The Other Boleyn Girl

Philippa Gregory

Historical Fiction

Simon & Schuster

661 pages

© 2001

Mary's Dilemma

By Melissa R.

When students look at the novel, *The Other Boleyn Girl* by Philippa Gregory, the first thing they notice is that it is a little over 600 pages. This can be misleading, since it was not a hard, long read as many may suspect such a large book to be, and it is definitely worth reading. The novel contains many accurate facts about royalty from the Tudor period such as King Henry VIII's time as ruler, which students may be familiar with from school. The author also uses such descriptive detail in each event that it grabs the reader's attention from the very start throughout the entire novel.

The Other Boleyn Girl exposes a family, the Howards, who rise up higher in the aristocracy than they already are. They developed plans in a private room as to how they could get the king to favor them over another family called the Seymours. The Howards use their two nieces, Mary and Anne Boleyn, to get closer to the King. Time goes on and the Queen goes through menopause and is unable to bear the King a son to one day be heir to the throne. The King starts to believe that his marriage had been cursed all those years because he married his brother's wife after his brother died. After this turn of events, Mary and Anne's new job is to get the Queen out of power and bear the King a son. This would enable one of the sisters to marry the King and, therefore, become the new Queen of England.

Mary and Anne were the Boleyn girls and they were always competing to be better than each other and more importantly for the King's love. One Boleyn girl would rise up and be favored over the other and then it would switch. The title of the novel is significant because the girl that was not favored by the King at the time would be referred to as the other Boleyn girl, hence the name of the novel.

Gregory's novel is well written with many strengths. One of Gregory's strengths that she has as a writer is the ability to use foreshadowing in the novel. The Howards were at a family meeting and the Uncle said, "Don't forget it. There will be great rewards. But if you fail, there will be nothing for us at all. Remember it." This foreshadows upcoming events because the reader will eventually find out whether or not the Howards succeed or fail and what rewards they can get from their success. Her use of foreshadowing makes the reader want to keep reading to discover the outcome of the event. When one conflict dies down, another problem arises, which keeps the book flowing smoothly and the reader absorbed in the novel.

There are very few slow points in the novel where the reader gets uninterested and discontinues reading. When there are slow points however, within a page or two, the novel will once again become action filled and grab the reader's attention. The second the audience starts reading, the novel instantly engages its readers because it has a well-developed plot. The opening immediately sets the scene by giving out key information on the characters as well as the plot. Mary Boleyn's father told her that he was "going to France tomorrow and I shall bring your sister Anne home with me." This was a pertinent part of the beginning because without Anne, there would be no story.

The author, Philippa Gregory, is an established historian and writer. She has an interest in the Tudor period, which inspired her to write her first novel, *The Other Boleyn Girl*, in 2001.

This novel has been made into a major film and TV drama series; her international success was well deserved. Gregory later released the novel *The Boleyn Inheritance*, in 2006 and *The Red Queen* in 2010. She has many other books as well, about families of complex rivalries, love, and hatred.

Most high school students will want to read *The Other Boleyn Girl* because it is almost another way of teaching them about history, the life that took place as royalty in the 1500s. The difference in life style in the 1500s from the way we live today is rather intriguing and the novel portrays that. It is a fun way of learning rather than listening to a teacher talk in global or taking notes.

The overall concept of the novel relates to people and events that have actually occurred in history, such as the King, Queen, and their court moving from castle to castle on behalf of each season. However, the specific dates of the events and the conversations in the novel did not actually take place, which is the reason the novel is fiction. Even if you do not like learning about history, *The Other Boleyn Girl* is fascinating because there is romance between characters and a lot of plot twists that will cause the reader to be in awe. The problems and situations in the novel will keep the audience wanting to read more.