



Rival to the Queen

Carolly Erickson

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From the New York Times bestselling author of The Last Wife of Henry VIII comes a novel about the bitter rivalry between Queen Elizabeth I and her fascinating cousin, Lettice Knollys, for the love of one extraordinary man.

Powerful, dramatic and full of the rich history that has made Carolly Erickson's novels perennial bestsellers, this is the story of the only woman to ever stand up to the Virgin Queen— her own cousin, Lettie Knollys. Far more attractive than the queen, Lettie soon won the attention of the handsome and ambitious Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, a man so enamored of the queen and determined to share her throne that it was rumored he had murdered his own wife in order to become her royal consort. The enigmatic Elizabeth allowed Dudley into her heart, and relied on his devoted service, but shied away from the personal and political risks of marriage.

When Elizabeth discovered that he had married her cousin Lettie in secret, Lettie would pay a terrible price, fighting to keep her husband's love and ultimately losing her beloved son, the Earl of Essex, to the queen's headsman.

This is the unforgettable story of two women related by blood, yet destined to clash over one of Tudor England's most charismatic men.

Rival to the Queen Details

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From Reader Review Rival to the Queen for online ebook

Orsolya says

We all know about the passionate affairs between Elizabeth and Robert Dudley (which honestly, I never understood because I seriously can't stand the entire Dudley family); but we rarely get a glimpse into the effects on Elizabeth due to the marriage between Letticia Knollys and Robert Dudley. I'm much more impressed with Robert's first wife Amy Robsart, but Lettie will do.

Sadly, none of that passion really jumped across in this novel. Our simple minds can already detect that Elizabeth was certainly jealous, angry, and felt betrayed. An author writing a story on the matter should strive to fill in more gaps and present deeper elemental emotions and perhaps even psychological terms. Laymen's terms? This book doesn't give you an insight into anything you couldn't already figure out in two seconds on your own. You don't need an entire novel to basically say that Elizabeth was jealous. Plus, the relationship between Robert and Lettie seems so flat and without any passion or loving terms. Erickson tries to demonstrate these feelings but fails.

Overall, *Rival to the Queen* is a super fast read which reminds me of the life of a high schooler. It makes all the characters in the book seem like they are 16 and haughty but all will be well once they end the day shopping at the mall.

Not much is presented in this book, and not much is learned. However, it passes time and brings up a character whom you may be inclined to research further.

Shiv says

'*Rival To The Queen*' is a historical novel from Carolly Erickson. This novel follows the life of Lettice Knollys, the daughter of Catherine Carey and granddaughter of Mary Boleyn, Anne Boleyn's sister. Lettice is also a cousin of the Queen, Elizabeth I. When first reading the blurb of the book, I got really excited to read a book about Lettice Knollys, as I knew about Elizabeth's hatred of her and her secret marriage to Robert Dudley, and I was interested about their relationship with each other.

I will admit that I did like reading the novel from Lettice's point of view, as she is a usually forgotten Tudor figure, even though her family and her own life is very interesting! I also found it refreshing reading about Lettice (even though it's fiction) and her relationships with her first husband Walter and her relationship with Robert Dudley. Also, rather than just reading about her marriage, I liked the fact that the novel showed her relationship with her children.

The novel starts with Lettice witnessing the torture that Queen Mary I inflicted upon protestants, who she believed were heretics to her beloved Catholic Church, and one of the victims was Lettice's former tutor. This highlighted the fact that most people in England at that time, would have seen someone beheaded; hung, drawn and quartered or burned at a stake especially during the reign of Mary I. Reading the first part of the book, you cannot help but feel sorry for Lettice and all of the Protestants at the time, as they were in fear of being prosecuted, and it is made clear that the Knollys family were extremely worried due to that blood relation with the Princess Elizabeth, who Mary detested. In the next section, (view spoiler)so it would make sense when Elizabeth labels her as the 'She-Wolf' but I got quite annoyed whilst reading that section.

Even though, there are many positives to this book, such as bringing a light on a forgotten Tudor figure of

Lettice Knollys, depicting her marriage to Robert Dudley, which tends to get forgotten and showing her loving relationship with her children but there is one negative, I personally found the sub-plot of her brother's long lost love adorable but irrelevant to the rest of the story. I felt that it had no connection with Lettice's story, but when her brother's long-lost love magically appeared one day, it really confused me and just didn't make any sense to me.

There are some characters within this novel that I just couldn't like, and one in particular was Lettice's sister, Cecelia. She is their father's favourite daughter, as whenever something would happen, he would support Cecelia, but would berate Lettice and call her a sinner. However, when both Knollys sisters start at Elizabeth's court as her maids of honour, Elizabeth takes an instant dislike to Cecelia and says some horrible things to her, which at the time I smirked at as I thought that it would put Cecelia in her place, but sadly the abuse didn't stop there for her, as Elizabeth becomes cruel towards her, (view spoiler) After this, I gave Cecelia a chance, but still failed to soften towards her.

Another character that in reality I adore but in this book cannot like is the Queen herself; Elizabeth. She is depicted as a spiteful, mean and jealous woman, who relies on Robert Dudley and offers him power, but will threaten to take it away if he displeases her in an argument. Also, she is shown as a jealous woman to any woman who becomes interested in Robert, especially where Lettice is concerned as she was noted as being younger and more beautiful than Elizabeth, even though they looked alike.

During her time at court, Lettice encounters the Queen's favourite courtier and closest friend; Robert Dudley. However, as the novel continues, it is clear to see that Lettice is infatuated and in love with Robert, and will remain so throughout her life. However, for Robert, it is not easy being close to the Queen, as their love goes further than being friends, but when his wife suddenly dies, there are rumours that Robert had a hand in his wife's death, and Elizabeth slightly distances herself from him. Although, throughout the book, it is plain to see that Robert wants to grasp any power he can from Elizabeth and would love to become king, but it is Elizabeth that is in control! It was interesting reading the sections between Elizabeth and Robert, where they would have an argument, but Elizabeth would goad him knowing full well that Robert would have to tone down what he would say to her, as she was the monarch and held all the power. However, as the book continues and gets closer to the end, I felt sorry for Robert as he slowly worked out that he was dancing to Elizabeth's tune and she was using him and berating him when it suited her.

Reading about Lettice's marriage to Walter Devereux and her pregnancies was interesting for me, as I did feel sorry for her as many women in those times had to marry for convenience rather than love, and Lettice was no exception. I started to dislike Walter when he blamed Lettice for bearing 'a weak son and daughters' and how he referred to his daughters really made me mad, as even though I am looking at the novel and characters from a 21st century perspective, I felt that he should of been grateful that he had any children at all!

This book is a good book to read if you want to read a bit more about the volatile relationship between Elizabeth and Robert Dudley, and to imagine the relationship and secret marriage between Robert and Lettice. But sadly like Carolly's other book that I have previously reviewed 'The Spanish Queen' I found the events rushed and as previously stated above, some of the plot lines do not tie into the rest of the story. Like her other historical novel, I would have liked with the chapters if it included at the top the year in which the chapter and events were happening.

Mary says

This is how I enjoy my history. Wrapped up in an interesting read.

Angie and the Daily Book Dose says

I made myself finish this one. I found it horribly ridiculous on several levels; which is very sad as I have enjoyed some of the author's older non-fiction books a great deal.

I found the portrayal of Lettice Knollys flat and completely uninteresting. The cast of supporting characters were equally boring, derivative, or downright unappealing. I found that any historical truth was bent out of shape to such a degree that I am loathe to even believe the parts that were more factual.

Perhaps the part that bothered me the most was the scented codpieces ostensibly worn by Robert Dudley. Not once, but twice, was I told about them. I'm not a prude and not squeamish about sex or anatomy in fiction, but this was one of the many proverbial straws that broke the camel's back in this book.

Hopefully the author's other works attempting historical fiction aren't so ridiculous.

It pains me to dislike this book to such a degree as I have enjoyed her non-fiction and maybe one other fiction book of hers in the past. Unfortunately this is the worst book I have read this year.

Pam says

I read her biographies of Anne Boleyn and Queen Elizabeth 20 years ago, still have them on my shelves, in fact. I would not have picked this one up if I hadn't known of the author. This one is a fictionalized history the author refers to as an "entertainment". And at first it was quite entertaining, but halfway through I became more and more annoyed with the first person narration and finished it with a great deal of skimming.

Stephanie Tracy says

This was another great book, starring my favorite Tudor man, Robert Dudley! This book is narrated by Lettice Knollys (who I had a negative impression of before this book) - but I decided she actually seemed like a pretty normal and respectable woman. Although I love the romance between Robert and Queen Elizabeth, I now understand the romance and marriage between Robert and Lettice much better. Robert was just as charming as usual in this story, but the focus on Elizabeth was much more negative than I usually read about - of course that is probably because it was narrated by Lettice, who was hated by Elizabeth. Definitely a great read, although slow at some parts in the middle. I recommend it!

Charlotte G says

I enjoyed this book. I like how it used actual people in history.

Kate S says

This was a different look at Queen Elizabeth I (for me). In this portrayal, there was open animosity between the narrator and the Queen. As they fight for the man they both love best of all, the narrator shares customs and happenings of the times.

Donie Nelson says

Looked forward to learning more about Queen Elizabeth's maternal cousin Lettice Knollys, but this book was a disappointment. This is a hack job, very superficial--however, I do realize that there is very little historical info about the Knollys--yet, I can imagine that in the hands of a more creative writer, she could be more than a one-dimensional cypher.

Colleen Turner says

Much is known and written about Queen Elizabeth I. There is less known about her cousin, a woman who lived and loved alongside Elizabeth and even married Elizabeth's closest ally and alleged lover. Letitia Knollys was the granddaughter of Mary Boleyn, Ann Boleyn's sister. Since Ann Boleyn was Henry VIII's second wife, who he executed for supposed infidelities and other atrocities and who was Elizabeth's mother, this makes them cousins. But, rumor has it that Henry VIII was also the father of Mary Boleyn's children, making them actually half sisters, not cousins (if the rumors are true). Either way, they were related by blood and reportedly both had the Tudor look. While you might think this would make them closer, especially since Elizabeth grew up without close siblings and instead had to fear her older sister's vengeance, it appears they actually had quite a bitter rivalry.

Carolly Erickson does a good job of bringing the Elizabethan court and all its circus appeal to life. She also highlights a unique rivalry between these two strong willed women, neither of which will back down from what they believe to be right and just. One thing I thought was odd with the book is Ms. Erickson's characterization of Elizabeth and a shreaking, manipulative, abusive and bitter woman who cared for nothing more than deceiving those around her. While I have read a lot about Elizabeth that does not paint her in the best of lights (I have seen her described as stubborn, clever, calculating and often indecisive) I have never seen her as simply a shrew with a power trip. This is the impression I got from this book, which made me almost have to side with Letitia as Elizabeth was so unsympathetic. Being that I don't know much about Letitia Knollys I do not know how much about her is correct in this story or not. Ms. Erickson definitely writes the story with the intention of siding with her and her choices. Since the story is told in her voice, I guess that can be expected.

I would have enjoyed the story a little more if the love story aspect of the narrative was a bit stronger as well. We have Letitia married off to a man she doesn't love, one she has to endure for years while he comes to think of her as only a way to get a male heir. She falls in love with Robert Dudley (Elizabeth's closest friend and ally who she reportedly loved for her lifetime as he did her) and begins an affair with him while her husband is away on the queen's bidding. She later marries him after her husband dies, but I couldn't see the relationship as much more than lust. She professes their deep love for each other, but Robert continues to do whatever the Elizabeth asks and, even on his deathbed, is asking not for his wife but for a visit from the Queen! That coupled with the fact that the author has Letitia begin to have feelings for her future husband (who she doesn't seem to really ever love) while her husband is away fighting the Queen's battles and while

he is on his deathbed leaves me without that "true love" sensation. I just think it would have made for a better story, and would have helped justify the actions Letitia continued to do throughout her lifetime, if Robert and Letitia's characters had seemed more connected.

There were a few times in the story that I just cannot believe the author used actual fact (such as when Letitia's brother, Frank, pulls a woman out of the ocean who just happens to be the long lost love he had believed died at sea years before) but, since I do not know the history supporting the facts all that well I am not positive. All in all, it was an entertaining read and one that can be enjoyed by historical fiction fans, especially those that do not require a close adherence to the facts. Fans that expect more rigorous factual information might get sidelined by the fiction portion of the book. I have continued to enjoy Ms. Erickson's novels and will do so in the future as well.

Kate Guinan says

A disappointment. Having read most of Ms. Erickson's non-fiction work, I assumed her historical fiction would be much better. This doesn't begin to touch on the complexity of the relationship of Elizabeth I and Robert Dudley. Robert Dudley was Elizabeth's childhood friend and her favorite through much of her reign. Though she never married, speculation was that if she did it would have been him. After the mysterious death of his first wife and Elizabeth still refused to marry him, Dudley married Elizabeth's cousin, Lettice Knollys. Eventually Lettice's son Robert Devereaux, Earl of Essex became another of Elizabeth's favorites. His ambitions cost him his head. With all this drama, this novel still manages to drag along and offer no insight into all this complex relationships.

Amanda says

I cannot stand historical fiction books that make a mockery of the characters they are portraying. History is full of great stories that do not need to be embellished with events that never happened or people never existed. In the first 10 pages of this book the author introduces Lettice Knollys as the daughter of Catherine Carey. Catherine Carey was the daughter of Mary Boleyn, the sister of Anne Boleyn and mother of Elizabeth I. This would make Lettice and Elizabeth second cousins but the author describes Catherine as Elizabeth's aunt and Lettice as her first cousin. How can someone miss such a glaring error??? It should have been a sign of what was to come. I got about 50 pages in and couldn't go any further. It's just so aggravating for me to invest time in a story of real people that has nothing to do with the real people.

Kera Norris says

Good read for Fiction Lovers

For those of you interested in historical fiction surrounding the Tudor court. This novel follows Lettice Knollys the second wife of Robert Dudley. Although it was a descent book, it was a lot more fictional than most. Picturing Queen Elizabeth in a very different light, basically as an insufferable tyrant.

Susan says

This novel, narrated by Lettice Knollys, who became the wife of Elizabeth I's great favorite Robert Dudley flowed nicely and wasn't as over-the-top as some of her "historical entertainments" are, but it's very much History Lite. There were some scenes (such as Dudley announcing to a room of courtiers in the queen's presence that he had shared Elizabeth's bed, and Elizabeth leaving a diary around where anyone could read it) that struck me as implausible. Some of the plot lines, such as the return of a long-lost love of Lettice's brother, seemed entirely pointless. There were also some loose threads: Lettice's grief over the execution of her son made for poignant reading, but she hardly even mentions the execution during the same period of her second husband, though she was depicted in the novel of being fond of him. The Kindle edition has no author's note; I don't know if it's the same in the printed book. On the plus side, I did like Lettice a lot more here than in the novel about her by Jean Plaidy, though it may be because Erickson glossed over some of Lettice's more offputting character traits. Robert Dudley's death scene was quite moving, and I thought the last chapter was also poignant.

Rio (Lynne) says

I went into this knowing it was light and more entertainment than historically correct, even though the back cover boasts "full of the rich history." After reading Legacy, I wanted to read more about Lettice Knollys. 50 pages in, I knew I couldn't go any farther. It started with an obvious fictitious story about Lettice living in Germany. I'm OK with authors writing what ifs, but it was very far fetched and I just wasn't buying Lettice leaving candles in her window so wild drunken boys could see in. Then Lettice moves back to England when Elizabeth becomes Queen and wants Boleyns in her household. Lettice and her mousy sister join the court. Elizabeth might have been vain, but she wasn't ignorant. The author always had her leaving her diary out, so her ladies in waiting could read it. Lettice read the line about Robert Dudley saying he would free himself of his wife and wondering what that could mean and how until then Elizabeth could never be his wife? Right then, I was finished. Elizabeth was also overly bitchy and even had the mousy sister's head scalped to make a wig. Just ridiculous.

I'm all for entertainment, but to take real people and rewrite their history just annoys me, especially when it's a person as well documented as Elizabeth.
