



# Murder Most Royal

*Jean Plaidy*

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## **Murder Most Royal** Jean Plaidy

At the decadent French court of King François, the young Anne Boleyn grows into an enigmatic and striking woman, a temptation to many courtiers. But whilst Anne's ambitions are high, she has learned from her sister's unfortunate reputation. Unlike Mary, Anne refuses to become even a King's mistress.

So when Anne returns to the English court of Henry VIII, it is the King who is led a dance by this mysterious young beauty. Before long Henry is lured away from his stale marriage to Katharine of Aragon. But the new Queen Anne is not loved by the people, and it is only a matter of time before Henry's patience runs out...

## **Murder Most Royal Details**

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Author : Jean Plaidy

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## From Reader Review Murder Most Royal for online ebook

### Michelle Robinson says

I thoroughly enjoyed this novel.

I felt that it was well researched and seemed more accurate according to what researchers seem to have to say about this particular period in history.

I found that hearing the voice of Anne Boelynne helped me to connect with her, as a person, as I never have before. I felt that I had a much better understanding of who she might have been and of her motivations. I still cannot say that I really liked her but I had to admire her courage and the way she faced her death.

I did not come away feeling that I really knew Cathrine, she just seemed like a victim more so than a person in her own right with a fully formed character and ideas of her own. Ho

Henry comes across as an amoral villain, which really, I suppose by today's standards he is.

This novel made me excited to read more by this author and I am glad that I heard about it from the Tudor History Lovers group here on Goodreads.

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### Elena says

This is the second book by Jean Plaidy I read, and I enjoyed it just as much as I did with the first, *The Lady in the Tower*.

The main characters are Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard, who were possibly the most tragic of Henry VIII's wives. They had very different personalities, but also much in common: they were cousins, both captivating women with a great charm, and of course they were both married to Henry VIII - and were both executed by him. Plaidy interweaves their stories, showing their similar fates and their differences, and also makes them interact in a few scenes - probably not historically accurate, but a lovely idea.

Plaidy's novels may be a little dated, fluffy and not historically irreproachable, but they are definitely entertaining. The story is full of drama and has few boring parts, while some points are really emotional. I liked Anne's parts better, but mostly because I just appreciate her more than Catherine. I also think the focus was more on Anne than on her younger cousin. I would have liked to read more about Catherine as a queen, but after all she was so for a very little time.

While in *The Lady in the Tower* the story was told with Anne as a narrator, and so the other characters were not always well developed, in this case we have multiple point of views, a choice I appreciated greatly. We get to know not only Anne and Catherine, but other interesting figures too, like Wolsey, Cromwell and Henry. I think the switch in the point of views kept the story always alive and engaging.

Now I just need to decide which Plaidy novel to read next!

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## Tania says

Henry VIII managed to behead 2 of his 6 wives – Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard, cousins. We've heard the story of Anne Boleyn in several of Plaidy's novels already, details remain fairly stable and this shows Plaidy's firm grasp on the historical events of that time period.

I was really looking forward to this novel and found myself greatly disappointed. The story lingered in some places and rushed in others, and the change in pace was distracting. I didn't read this cover to cover like other Plaidy works but instead struggled thru. The story never took on a life of its own.

I may be partially at fault – perhaps one can only read the story of Anne Boleyn so many times in a single year. But these characters were never infused with life, never drew me in.

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## Portia Costa says

I read this book years and years ago, probably when I was in my teens, so I'd forgotten almost everything about it... and forgotten how good it is.

The style is a bit oldfashioned, but nevertheless it's a real page turner. Although we can't know for certain how the characters really thought and felt, Jean Plaidy does a fantastic job of making Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard believable. She creates sympathy for the women, without making them saints, and paints a particularly vivid portrait of the monster that was Henry VIII, a basically weak, self serving, self deluding egotist who had virtually no empathy. Okay, so Tudor times were radically different to ours, and the pressures of being a king were very real, but Jean Plaidy perfectly reflects the opinion I've formed of this notorious monarch, based on extensive reading.

She shows us a man who was constantly banging on about his 'conscience' while effectively not possessing one at all. He didn't give a \*\*\*\* about anybody but himself. A psychopath.

Sorry for the rant, but I really do dislike Henry VIII with extreme prejudice!

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## Helene Harrison says

Review - I didn't like this one as much as *The King's Great Matter* because I felt that the story was far too abbreviated and there wasn't enough detail in either story. It would have been better to look at Anne Boleyn's story in one book and Katherine Howard's in another, so that their stories could be fully explored and explained. I felt this was a major flaw, but that what was written was well written and interesting, if abbreviated. I thought that neither character came across as entirely 3D because I think in this novel Plaidy overreached herself in trying to cover so much territory in so little words. Katherine came across as a petulant and selfish child while Anne was an ambitious and power-hungry woman, but I think there was more to them than this.

Genre? - Historical / Romance / Drama

Characters? - Anne Boleyn / Katherine Howard / Henry VIII / Jane Seymour / Anne of Cleves / George Boleyn / Thomas Boleyn / Henry Norris / Mark Smeaton / Thomas Cromwell / Thomas Culpeper / Francis

Dereham / Henry MannoX

Setting? - London (England)

Series? - Tudor #5

Recommend? - Maybe

Rating - 14/20

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### **Hannah Sloane says**

This book not my favorite Tudor book, but still worth reading. I found it interesting that the author chose to tell the stories of Anne Boleyn and Katherine Howard together. I learned a lot about their family connections. Overall, I think it was a good read.

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### **Jinny says**

More books about the Tudors! Although to be fair, this one was written in 1949 so I wouldn't say it's a part of the current Tudor craze. As usual with such historical novels, though it says it is a part of a series, you can most certainly read them in any order you like.

Murder Most Royal takes place during the reign of Henry VIII and it focuses on two of his wives: Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard, who were cousins of one another. As per usual, if you have an understanding of history, than the plot of the story is going to be predictable and familiar for you. The story begins with Henry being dissatisfied with his current wife, Katherine of Aragon (who is, by the way, my favourite of Henry's six queens). Anne Boleyn catches the eye of the king, but Anne is steadfast in her initial decision to not have anything to do with the king. She has seen how her sister, Mary Boleyn, is treated by others after Henry has enjoyed her and then, discarded her. Henry is absolutely smitten though. Eventually, with her own love gone and lost, Anne decides to embrace her ambitious side and be with the king.

As this is happening, we also have young Catherine Howard, beautiful and passionate. She flits from lover to lover, believing herself to be truly in love each time, until someone "better" comes along. She is proud that her cousin Anne is the soon-to-be queen and never would have dreamed that one day, she will be filling in Anne's shoes.

I think this is probably the most historically accurate Tudor novel I've read yet. That's not to say it's 100% historically accurate, just that it's the most accurate I've read so far. I really enjoyed it, especially being exposed to some more historical figures and learning about them. There's a whole slew of minor ones, but also the characters of Catherine Howard and Anne of Cleves. There's so few current novels that feature those two queens. Usually they are kind of glossed over, or just mentioned in passing. Although Anne of Cleves' part in this novel is brief, I finally got to be "acquainted" with her and Catherine Howard. Of course, their characters' are the author, Jean Plaidy's interpretation of them, and it was a very likeable and enjoyable perspective of these two ladies.

As for Anne Boleyn, I was pleasantly surprised that she was portrayed rather positively in this book. It's so easy to portray Anne Boleyn in a negative light and a lot of current Tudor novels do indeed do that. In this

book, Anne is not shown to be ambitious right from the start. Anne is shown to be a clever, witty, and beautiful young lady. She sees the way her sister ruined her reputation, and she has no interest in following in her footsteps. Anne is shown to be passionate and loving when she was with Henry Percy, and devastated when they could not be together. Believing that she will never have the happy love life she wanted, she decides to answer the king's flirtations and begin scheming for power, so she may hurt those who have ruined her chances for happiness.

The funny thing with this novel is that although the book is supposed to be about Anne and Catherine, I feel like it is disproportionately more about Anne Boleyn. Fair enough, she is the more "exciting" queen and all. It just felt a bit unequal while reading. 80% of the book focused on Anne, interspersed with bits and pieces about Catherine's childhood and lovers. Then the last 20%, when Anne dies, focuses on Catherine, but she frequently thinks about her tragic cousin. Henry, too, also continuously thinks about Anne, even as he takes new wives. This book shows how deeply involved Henry was with Anne Boleyn and he could do nothing to remove her from his life, even having her killed.

With all that said, I did not find this book to be a "page turner" as sometimes the passages can feel quite dry. I wouldn't label this book as exciting, but it definitely is emotional and full of drama. Maybe it's just because I am so accustomed to reading about Henry and his wives now ... However, for the most part, it was a pleasant read and I truly enjoyed the different take on Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard. I definitely want to try out more books by Jean Plaidy.

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## Gary says

Nobody writes British historical fiction better than Jean Plaidy and this is one of her classics.

First published in 1949, it is NOT AT ALL dated. The style is engaging, witty, moving, and brings the period and characters to life in such a brilliant way. A page turner which kept me reading late into the night. Plaidy creates much more multifaceted character, much more so than the books about Henry's wives by Phillipa Gregory and Susanna Dunn. This is a far superior work to *The Other Boleyn Girl* in which Gregory demonizes Anne Boleyn and *The Confession of Katherine Howard* in which Dunn does a horrible hatchet job on Katherine Howard.

Plaidy presents Anne Boleyn as an intelligent, passionate woman, capable of great love and loyalty (she is heartbroken when her one true love Henry Percy, 6th Earl of Northumberland

She can be ruthless and acts against Katherine of Aragon, and against Princess Mary but we see Mary has #is so filled with hate to Queen Anne (a particularly gruesome passage where Princess Mary describes how she would like to torture Anne to a slow death—a foretaste of her career as Bloody Mary when she took the throne).

Henry VIII is exposed as the cruel egotistical monster he clearly was, though we begin by observing his passionate ardour for the dark haired beauty whose vivacity and polished manners have been acquired during a spell with the French royal family. When she returns to England she quickly attracts Henry's attention. Of course this love turns to venomous hate when Anne commits the fatal crime of bearing him a daughter!!! The most evil villain of the piece is no doubt Thomas Cromwell who in his malicious and dastardly conspiracy to destroy Queen Anne, has court musician Thomas Smeaton hideously tortured until he is falsely forced to claim he had sex with her, and to name a slew of lovers.

And it is wonderful to read a sympathetic portrayal of Catherine Howard, whose life is traced from her childhood, her mother's death when she is a little girl and her move to stay at the mansion of her step-grandmother, the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk.

Catherine is revealed her as having a forgiving nature and always ready to believe the best of people. I personally believe that Katherine Howard, while indeed was a sexually promiscuous girl and perhaps simple, had a loving heart which was why she loved more than one man

Ultimately her past of having had several lovers before she married Henry was used to depose and murder the unfortunate girl.

When we see the media and courts today in Britain excuse rape and even murder of young girls by Muslim rape gangs, claiming that the girls are not innocent in cases when they were not previously virgins, we wonder how far England has really come since Henry's time, or indeed that it came forward particularly since the 1960s in attitudes to women and their value as humans, but has gone backwards in an effort to appease Islamization.

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### **BAM The Bibliomaniac says**

I realize that Plaidy takes creative license with most of her books, but this one was really not correct historically. I rated it too low because I've read so much about the great Queen Anne that I just shook my head too much.

The other beheaded queen, and Anne's cousin is discussed in this book too, and I'm not sure that age wise that's even possible. I'm questioning the timeline. I don't think the ages are right.

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### **Kelly A. says**

It's hard to believe that this is a piece of history. We get personal, yet fictionalized looks into the lives of two of England's most infamous queens. The first chapter begins around the year 1510, with Anne as a seven-year-old girl, and ends in 1542, after the execution of her younger cousin Katherine (NOT a spoiler, I think the title gives away enough). What follows in between is such an interesting, engaging story, so wild it almost seems made up.

One thing I ask of you, please don't base your facts off of this book. The general facts and events are correct, but many historical discrepancies are taken. These are some that bothered me most as I read:

-Katherine of Aragon (Henry's first wife) is described as never being beautiful, even as a young woman. This is definitely not true; she lost her beauty as she aged, but she was a very beautiful young woman, literally called the most beautiful woman in the world.

-On a related note, Anne Boleyn's beauty is gushed over in this book. According to historical documents, she was rather mousy looking. She attracted men and friends because of her charm and wit, not her beauty.

-It is highly doubtful that Anne Boleyn and Katherine Howard ever met, even though they were cousins. They ran in completely different circles. It does add a good story-telling element, two future doomed Queens innocently meeting when they are very young.

-Even more doubtful is that Katherine Howard and Thomas Culpepper were childhood friends...even though they were cousins (too many family relationships going on here!).

-In the book, Jane Boleyn (Anne's sister-in-law) is arrested and taken to the Tower of London shortly after Anne's marriage to Henry for speaking treason against her. She may have been banished from court, as she was later on for trying to get rid of one of Henry's mistresses, but she was never arrested on that charge.

-This can't really be called an historical error, but Jean Plaidy does take on the rumor that Anne Boleyn had a sixth finger and odd moles on her body. (Not literally an extra finger, just second nail on her left little finger.)

Still weird.) This is still up for debate.

If you think you may be interested in this period of time, I wouldn't recommend starting with this book (start with *The Other Boleyn Girl*, many historical errors, but a nice overview). Since I am familiar with this era, I thought I might be bored. Jean Plaidy is an author you either love or hate, and even though I nitpicked my way through this book, I still loved every minute of it. The writing style is easy to read, I couldn't even tell it'd been written in the 1940s. I am definitely interested in reading more of her books (that may take me awhile, she's written around 100!).  
4 stars.

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### Sarah says

I don't know if it's because I've almost practically exhausted the Tudor historical fiction genre, or if this book just was not written as well as it could have been, but it seemed very bland to me. There was a LOT more intrigue and scandal in that time period, I'm sure, but she tends to skip over a lot. The majority of the book is spent on Anne Boleyn, which I understand since she was around longer. However, it takes a lot away from the character of Catherine Howard, leaving her a little empty. (Also, since Plaidy never goes into detail about what has happened with Catherine during her time in her grandmother's house, those who don't know a lot about her person would be very confused until the very end.)

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### June Louise says

*"His great weakness had its roots in his conscience. He was what men called a religious man, which in his case meant he was a superstitious man. There was never a man less Christian; there was never one who made a greater show of piety. He was cruel; he was brutal; he was pitiless. This was his creed. He was an egoist, a megalomaniac; he saw himself not only as the centre of England but of the world. In his own opinion, everything he did was right; he only needed time to see it in its right perspective, and he would prove it to be right. He took his strength from this belief in himself; and as his belief was strong, so was Henry".*

Oooh what a nasty piece of work that Henry VIII was!! The already unlikable character who we saw emerging in the previous book **The King's Secret Matter** becomes even more detestable in **Murder Most Royal**, as do some of his "henchmen".

Having read about poor Katharine of Aragon's treatment by Henry, and indirectly by Anne Boleyn, I started off reading this book not being a huge "Anne fan". However, on reading a bit more about Anne - I can't help feeling a little sorry for her - especially when it seems that Henry allowed himself little dalliances with the women of the court, but when Anne did the same (not that they were of the same intensity as those of Henry VIII), she is condemned to death. It also seems that failure to produce a boy child was a cardinal sin to Henry, and following her miscarriage, Anne knew her time was up. It's a shame that Henry didn't realise that the sex of a baby is determined by the father - not the mother....it was his fault all along! However, baby Elizabeth (the future "Good Queen Bess") was the legacy of this unfortunate union, and anyone familiar with English history will know how mighty a leader she turned out to be.

*"Look Nan! This figure represents me....and here is the King. And here is Katharine. This must be so, since our initials are on them. Nan, tell me, I do not look like that! Look, Nan, do not turn away. Here I am with my head cut off".*

As well as charting the rise and fall of Anne Boleyn, **Murder Most Royal** follows the risqué life of Henry's fifth wife, Catherine Howard - cousin of Anne Boleyn. Not having been brought up in such privileged circumstances as Anne, Catherine is sent to the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk's house where she "grows up" extremely fast amidst the wild and bawdy company of the other women, and a couple of beaux. The book describes Catherine's rise to Court, as one of Anne of Cleves' maids to being the new bride of the King, and her downfall shortly afterwards, eerily echoing that of her cousin Anne Boleyn.

*"He looked at her with smouldering eyes; there were occasions when he could forget he was a king and put his hands about that little neck, and press and press until there was no breath left in her. But a king does not do murder; others do it for him. It was a quick thought that passed through his mind and was gone before he had time to realise it had been there".*

Jane Seymour (whom Henry married days after Anne Boleyn was beheaded and was the only wife who successfully provided Henry with a son) and Anne of Cleves (Henry's fourth wife) are mentioned fleetingly in this book. I admit to having laughed at the thought of the actual meeting of Henry and Anne of Cleves and the disgust that each felt at the sight of the other! Needless to say, a marriage annulment ensued which was a far from sombre occasion...

*".....this was miraculous! This was happiness! That corpulent, perspiring, sullen, angry, spiteful, wicked monster of a man was no longer her husband! She need not live close to him!.....She was free.....Never had Henry succeeded in making one of his wives so happy."*

There are grim sections in this book, where the different methods of torture are described, and the agonies of Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard's allies are described in detail, as well as those of the monks and other "traitors" - namely those people who disagreed with anything Henry said. On finishing this book I can say that the characters with the "boo factor" were Henry VIII himself, Jane Rochford, Mary Lassels and Wriothesley (the cruellest torturer). Cranmer was a bit too simpering and sly. The Dowager Duchess of Norfolk with her many snoozes and free use of the whip seemed to me a bit of a comic character - although the punishment she wreaked on her victims was far from funny. Some of the historical facts are a little on the inaccurate side (for example Plaidy stated that Anne Boleyn was twenty-nine when she was beheaded, but other historical sources believe she was in her mid-thirties), but these niggles aside, it is a fantastic read - very engaging; in fact, I think this is the most dramatic Plaidy book I have read so far.

Oh those terrible Tudors!

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## **Karla says**

This was the book that got me interested in the Tudors was back in the early 90s. Who knows what Twilight-esque literary phenoms were raging through my high school at the time, but I was gobbling up Plaidy by the armful.

I have no idea if I would like this book now - as I've found Plaidy to be a bit dry in recent years - but this book had me turning the pages frantically to find out what happened to both Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard. So I'll simply keep it on the memory shelf where so many books should remain.

## Cintia says

No me atreví a darle más estrellas simplemente porque este es mi primer libro de Jean Plaidy. En realidad, es el primero de ficción histórica que leo, por lo tanto no tengo ninguna obra con la cual compararla. Sé que no es la mejor opción leer el quinto volumen de una saga sin haber leído ninguno de los anteriores, pero el interés por este episodio de la historia inglesa pudo más. Es increíble que una mujer que fue tan interesante y admirada en su tiempo, lo siga siendo hoy, ¿no es así? ¿No es acaso increíble que Anne Boleyn y Catherine Howard, siendo primas, hayan sido esposas del mismo hombre, y tenido el mismo fin?

Fue muy interesante el hecho de poder conocer a Anne Boleyn a través de su propia voz y ser testigos, paso a paso, de la pérdida de su inocencia, la cual empezó a una edad muy temprana de la vida: a los siete años, enviada a la corte francesa como parte de la comitiva nupcial de Mary Tudor, hermana del hombre a quien ella todavía no hubiera podido considerar como su futuro marido, ni tenía la más leve idea de lo cerca que un día estaría a él. Y ya entonces se vislumbraba un atisbo de la cautivadora mujer en la que Anne se convertiría, porque, a pesar de su edad, despertaba la envidia de otras cortesanas por su porte y elegancia, algo que la acompañó durante toda su vida. A los diecinueve, ella es descrita como una mujer hermosa, sagaz y atrevida, y aunque los datos históricos que se tienen indican que no era de belleza especialmente destacable, era su personalidad la que suplía aquello, constituyendo su mayor encanto, un encanto que la rodeó de admiradores, le ganó la devoción de tres hombres, y el odio de muchos, entre ellos su cuñada, Jane Parker, quien desesperaba por el aprecio de un marido al que amaba y a la vez odiaba, pues Anne ocupaba en su corazón un lugar que debió haber sido suyo.

Henry, lord Percy, y Thomas Wyatt, alimentaron sueños y espejismos de felicidad que no se concretaron, y en la figura del rey Henry surge la posibilidad de aspirar al enlace más importante del mundo. En una corte donde todos bajaban la cabeza y decían "Sí, su Majestad", Anne desafió al rey, tratándolo como al hombre detrás de la corona, y cautivándolo de tal manera que se transformó en una amenaza para Catalina de Aragón, ya que, como favorita y amante del rey, hizo uso de su papel como reina no oficial con aplastante determinación. Miembro de una familia desesperada por poder, procuró no correr la misma suerte que su hermana, y aunque fue tenida por bruja y ramera por el oprimido pueblo inglés, eso no constituyó un obstáculo en su camino al trono. Y resulta una ironía que Elizabeth, la Reina Virgen -la mujer más aclamada de Inglaterra- haya sido la hija de una de las más despreciadas. La corte de los Tudor rebosaba de intrigas y traiciones, el favor del pueblo no bastó a Catalina de Aragón en la lucha por conservar su trono, pero la ambición fue lo que le costó la cabeza a su sucesora, la condenada Reina Anne.

La construcción de Henry como personaje es genial, por más que nada de lo que lea hará que deje de verlo con asco. Con el poder supremo en sus manos llenas de anillos, el rey lideraba las falsedades y perversiones de su corte, escondiendo con él -y con sus ropas resplandecientes de joyas- la magnitud de sus pecados. Elizabeth Blount y Mary Boleyn fueron dos de sus favoritas, entre otras, y resulta repugnante la manera en que, una vez que pierde el interés en ellas, las deja un lado, lidiando solas con las consecuencias que puedan derivarse. Como la mayoría de los hombres, Henry era rápido para ver las faltas ajenas, y, en mi humilde opinión, seis esposas e innumerables amantes hablan de un vacío interior que no pudo ser llenado (más allá del laberinto de maquinaciones políticas).

Por otro lado, está Catherine Howard, y la conocemos en una época en que ella nunca hubiera podido imaginar que algún día todo lo que oía acerca de su prima, Anne Boleyn -por quien ella sentía respeto y admiración- sería su propia realidad. Joven, ingenua y manipulable, parece casi imposible que esta niña, en un futuro, vaya a sentarse en el trono de Inglaterra como la quinta reina de un envejecido Henry Tudor. La historia de Catherine se cuenta a través de sus ojos, y aunque el lente de su inocencia la protege durante un

tiempo, eso no es garantía de seguridad. Thomas Culpepper fue su primer amor, y Jean Plaidy lo retrata como alguien casi tan ingenuo como la propia Catherine. Prometidos en secreto, con apenas conciencia de lo que eso significaba, Tom desaparece de la vida de ella, dejándole a la vez un dolor y una ilusión. Y Catherine, al igual que Anne, comienza a perder su inocencia, a partir de la perversión que presencia cada noche en compañía de las damas de la casa de su abuela, una mujer por otro lado perezosa y sin cariño ni interés por su nieta. Es allí donde Catherine descubre el amor de Henry Manox y comete el error que la perseguiría y sellaría su perdición.

Dos primas. Dos reinas. Dos mujeres víctimas de la ambición, peones en un juego de poder mucho más siniestro, peligroso y grande que ellas mismas, pagando un precio demasiado alto por el crimen de decepcionar a un rey, un precio que manchó de sangre las páginas de la historia. Jean Plaidy escribió una obra muy bien investigada, atrapante, y para cerrar me gustaría dejar un párrafo que, si bien no mencioné anteriormente, me dejó helada:

*"En los días que siguieron al encuentro de los reyes, Anne bebió, comió y flirteó con los demás. Hoy los miembros de la corte francesa eran huéspedes de los ingleses: desfiles, deportes, torneos, un baile de máscaras y un banquete. Mañana la corte francesa agasajaría a la inglesa. Todo debía ser generoso; la corte francesa debía exceder en brillo a la inglesa; y luego los ingleses deberían mostrarse aún más fastuosos. No importaba el costo para las naciones sobrecargadas de impuestos; no importaba que los dos reyes, detrás de sus demostraciones de amistad, fueran enemigos jurados. ¡No importaba! Este es el despliegue más brillante y más rico de la historia, y si es también el más vulgar, el más inconcebiblemente estúpido, ¿qué? Los reyes tienen que divertirse".*

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## Ashley W says

Everyone knows the story of Henry VIII and his six wives whether from USA to Australia. That being said, Murder Most Royal doesn't add any new information, but was pretty entertaining all the same. The novel mostly focused on wives two (Anne Boleyn) and five (Catherine Howard), the two queens with two connections. One being that they are cousins, the other that they are beheaded...murdered, as the title suggests by the man they both called husband.

Anne goes from precocious seven-year-old, leaving England for France in the train of Mary Tudor, Henry VIII's younger sister, to the bitter woman some of know her to be, because of a chance love affair with Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, gone wrong. However, when the King falls for her, she sees her chance to become Queen of England. My feelings for her went up and down throughout her whole story (I hated how she treated Katharine and Princess Mary; I felt sad when she failed Henry in giving him a son; I hated how she seemed to not think of doing something for the poor until she needed to put on a show of humility; I was nearly sobbing when she went to the block). However, I see why she became the way she was and can't help but wonder if she would've found happiness with Percy or even Wyatt, who she also held dear.

Anne's story is intertwined with Catherine Howard's, who we meet as a young girl growing up in poverty. Her mother dies when she is about seven, and she is first given into the care of her mother's brother at Hollingbourne, where she meets and falls into puppy love, with her young cousin, Thomas Culpepper, and then into the hands of the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk, her stepgrandmother, where I believe everything went wrong. The Duchess was definitely not attentive to the young ladies of her household, who she was meant to instruct in everything, but mostly slept or ate. Of course, the girls were going to take that as a sign of "It's time to party!"

It's also easy to see why Catherine became the girl she was. When Catherine threatened to tell what the other girls were up to, the poor girl was bullied to tears, the other girls telling her they would tell what she did with

Thomas Culpepper, even though she knew she did nothing with him. The other girls even vied to find her a lover, so she would participate in their late night parties, but that wasn't needed as Catherine found one for herself: Henry Manox, her music teacher. Towards the time she found Francis Derham, she was portrayed as a senseless, naive, hopeless romantic, who believed everything everyone tells her. Of course, that leads to her downfall.

Now, for the three characters I couldn't stand:

1.) Henry VIII - In Murder Most Royal, he is portrayed as the most cold, arrogant, egotistical, selfish man ever! He always thinks about himself, never his wives, children, courtiers, or subjects. Whatever Henry wants, Henry gets, no matter how many heads have to roll. He divorces Katharine just because she's old and can't bear any children, not to mention screwing up Bible verses in the process, he contemplates murdering Anne herself when he finds out about her "adultery", and threatens "dear" Jane with the same fate when she asks him to rebuild monasteries. And that's only three wives!

2.) Jane Rochford - The catalyst of Anne and her husband and Anne's brother, George's deaths. She is an evil, vindictive, shrewish, b\*\*\*\*! No more needs to be said about her, except that I was nearly cheering in the end when she met the block...

3.) Mary Laselles - The catalyst of Catherine Howard's execution. She's the prudish, stuck-up girl who rats out Catherine and Francis Derham to the Duchess under a show of piety, when she was really angry about Henry Manox choosing Catherine, and not her, and that can't find a man of her own. She also tells her brother, John, of Catherine's PAST, knowing how dangerous that was, who then told Cranmer, who then told Henry, etc.

All in all, I very much liked Murder Most Royal. But I did get somewhat annoyed with it for this reason. Not only was it in the POV of Anne and Catherine, but also of Henry VIII, Katharine of Aragon, Princess Mary, Wolsey, Cranmer, Cromwell, Jane Rochford, Jane Seymour, etc.

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