

## Book Review of Philippa Gregory's *The Boleyn Inheritance*

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### Abstrak

*The Boleyn Inheritance* adalah salah satu novel bestseller karya Philippa Gregory. Novel ini diadaptasi berdasarkan kisah nyata kerajaan Inggris pada jaman Tudor. *The Boleyn Inheritance* bercerita tentang tiga wanita bangsawan yang hidup pada masa pemerintahan Raja Henry VIII. Seorang raja yang terkenal pada masa dinasti Tudor karena kebijakan politik serta kehidupan pribadinya yang fenomenal. Raja Henry VIII adalah raja Inggris yang pernah memiliki enam ratu, dua diantaranya meninggal karena dihukum mati oleh raja Henry VIII sendiri. Novel ini tidak hanya bercerita tentang kehidupan pribadi raja Henry VIII tetapi juga bercerita tentang kebijakan politik, hukum, kebudayaan serta fenomena-fenomena yang terjadi pada masa pemerintahan raja Henry VIII. *The Boleyn Inheritance* juga banyak menyinggung serta mengangkat isu tentang hak perempuan serta hubungannya dengan dominasi laki-laki. Dalam final project ini penulis berusaha menganalisis novel ini dengan memaparkan kelebihan dan kekurangan yang terdapat dalam buku ini melalui unsur-unsur intrinstik yang ada dalam novel ini seperti tema, alur cerita, setting, karakter serta gaya penulisan sehingga dapat menjadi referensi sebelum membacanya.

### 1. Introduction

Almost every young girl dreams of being a princess or a queen. It is because in their childhood, they always hear about how happy it is to be a princess or a queen through stories and fairy tales. The most popular fairy tale is Cinderella. Cinderella is described as an ordinary girl who has miserable life but gets a miracle to meet and marry a prince. By marrying a prince, her miserable life is taken and replaced with happiness. It becomes a mindset in most young girls that to be happy is to be a princess, marry a prince, a king, or a man who has abundance of money and

power so the happiness will be theirs. Sometimes, they never think about the other sides of being a princess or a queen. They never think of big burdens that must be carried by Queen and Princess.

Unlike fairy tales, Philippa Gregory's *The Boleyn Inheritance* does not only tell about the glamour life of noble woman but also the miserable life that noble women experience. This novel has a concern about the lives of noble women who have burden twice higher and more dangerous than that of common women. It becomes interesting because the basic story of *The Boleyn*

*Inheritance* is about the noble women's life in Tudor era in England.

One of the interesting eras in the English Monarchy is the Tudor era especially in the era of Henry VIII reign. There were so many phenomena that happened in that reign which not only make the change and revolution in that era but also have impacts for the future of the English monarchy. Henry is well known as the King who has six Queens. Ironically, he beheaded the two of them. Based on this history, Gregory tells these phenomena in her fictional history: *The Boleyn Inheritance*. Gregory tries to explore her point of view in three main characters of this story: Anne of Cleves, Jane Boleyn and Katherine Howard who are the Queen and the closest noble women of Henry VIII. *The Boleyn inheritance* is interesting to be reviewed because this novel explores the other side, the dark side of being princess, Queen and noble woman.

## 1.2 The Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to give a review about "*The Boleyn Inheritance*", especially to describe the strengths and weaknesses of this novel through the discussion its intrinsic elements; theme, plot, setting, character and style.

## 1.3 Philippa Gregory and Her Works

This following description is taken from <http://www.philippagregory.com/philippa-gregory-biography/> and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippa\\_Gregory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippa_Gregory).

Philippa Gregory was born on 9 January 1954 in Nairobi Kenya. When she was two years old, her family moved to England. She is a past student of Sussex

university, and a PhD and Alumna of the Year 2009 of Edinburgh University. She worked in BBC radio for two years before attending the University of Edinburgh, where she earned her doctorate in 18th-century literature. Gregory has taught at the University of Durham, University of Teesside and the open university, and was made a Fellow of Kingston University in 1994.

She has written novels set in several different historical periods, though primarily the Tudor period the 16th century. *A Respectable Trade*, a novel of the slave trade in England, set in 18th-century Bristol, was adapted by Gregory for a four-part drama series for BBC television. It was nominated for a BAFTA, won an award from the Committee for Racial Equality, and the film was shown worldwide. Some of her novels also have won awards and have been adapted into television dramas. The most successful of her novels has been *The Other Boleyn Girl* which was published in 2002 and adapted for BBC television in 2003 and then Miramax bought the film right and produced film with the same name "*The Other's Boleyn Girl*". It was filmed in England and generally released in February 2008.

## 2. SUMMARY

After the death of Jane Seymour, the third queen of England, King Henry and his advisor are looking for a noble woman to fill the position of Queen. Their decision goes to Anne of Cleves, a noble woman from Germany. This decision is not about her beauty but a political strategy. If the King Marries a German-noble woman from Cleves, England will have a good alliance against the papist. Anne's brother is a

leader of the Protestant dukes and princes. Anne of Cleves herself has a desire to be the Queen of England to run away from her dominant brother. She wants freedom and uses this as a chance to be the greatest woman in England. Nevertheless, she is not well prepared to be the Queen of England. When she meets King Henry VIII in Rochester, she does something that makes the King feel ashamed and angry. She pushes the King away when he tries to get close and kiss her. She thinks he is just a drunken man who acts impolite. Jane Boleyn as the lady-in-waiting who has served three Queen of England before knows that The King does not like her. She predicts that he will find a way to get out of the marriage.

Months after months the king does not consume his marriage. Jane Boleyn's prediction becomes true. The King dispatches Duke of Norfolk to make an alliance with France so he does not need Queen Anne's brother as his friend anymore. Duke of Norfolk himself is the rival of Thomas Cromwell, the King's greatest friend who arranges this marriage. Duke of Norfolk looks after a reason to make Queen Anne proven guilty of treason then plans to enrage King Henry to divorce her and marry Katherine Howard, his niece.

The King claims that the marriage is not valid because Anne is betrothed to Francis of Lorraine in her youth. The King also suspects that some people do treason over him, join the papist and have a plot to throw the King from the throne. Fortunately, Anne is not proven guilty of the alliance with Cromwell but she has to put her name to the agreement that she is pre-contracted and

not free to marry. Anne does not want to come back to the Cleves, to her abusive brother. She prefers King's offer to live in Richmond. Anne will be appointed as the King's sister after their marriage is annulled.

On 28 July 1540, The King marries Katherine Howard, a girl who is only fourth teen years old. The king is mad about her and gives what she wants. The trouble comes when the wound in the King's leg relapses. His health has declined. Duke Norfolk worries because Katherine has not been pregnant yet. He plans to take a favor to Katherine so she will have a child with a young man. He asks Jane Boleyn to persuade Katherine and Thomas Culpeper to get close to each other. He asks Jane Boleyn to manage it. He worries that there will be no coronation if the Queen can not give a son to the King.

Unfortunately, King sends his archbishop to ask Katherine because he suspects that Katherine has an affair and takes a lover. She is proven guilty of treason that she ever married Francis Darehem when she lived in her grandmother's house. She also takes Thomas Culpepper, King's favorite courtier as her lover. The council sends her and Jane Boleyn to the tower. They sentence them to death. Duke of Norfolk runs away from the responsibility and acts innocent. In the end, Francis Dare ham, Thomas Culpepper, Jane Boleyn, and Katherine Howard who is The Queen at that time are beheaded because the charges of committing adulteries and treason over the King.

### **3. Review of Philippa Gregory's *The Boleyn Inheritance*.**

#### **3.1. The Strengths and Weaknesses of *The Boleyn Inheritance***

The *Boleyn Inheritance* as a New York Times bestseller novel must have something that attracts the reader to make it as bestseller. This review explores the strengths and the weaknesses of Philippa Gregory's *The Boleyn Inheritance* by scrutinizing its elements.

##### **3.1.1. The Strengths of Philippa Gregory's *The Boleyn Inheritance***

###### **3.1.1.1. Theme**

The first strength of *The Boleyn Inheritance* is the themes. The main themes of *The Boleyn Inheritance* may be said as history, love, and the criticism over the reign of Henry VIII and his oppression over noble women. In this book, Gregory tries to tell these phenomena of Tudor era during Henry VIII reign through women characters. *The Boleyn Inheritance* wraps the history into love drama which always becomes mainstream favorite theme. It is good for people who do not like reading history. Reading *The Boleyn Inheritance* is like killing two birds with one stone. The reader can enjoy the plot and also know the history of Tudor era.

Love plays an important role in this novel because *The Boleyn Inheritance* makes love more complex, realistic, and somehow ironic. Gregory explores love through her three main characters. When the reader reads each of their love stories, the reader can feel how love is told as something that is full of intrigues. Love does not only bring joy but also anguish of life because love sometimes brings people to the wrong person and condition. It is represented by three main characters of

this novel: Anne of Cleves, Jane Boleyn and Katherine Howard.

Another theme that can be seen in this novel is oppression towards noble women. *The Boleyn Inheritance* shares a number of stories about King Henry's domination and the excessive power of noble men that causes the oppression towards women in the Tudor Era. The stories will evoke the reader's emotion because the psychological oppression that is experienced by the three main characters is told very well. It is as though that *The Boleyn Inheritance*'s aim is to give an example of how oppression could happens to every girl in the world even when she belongs to high class position. It shows that what happen in this novel really happens in the real world because *The Boleyn Inheritance* based on history of Tudor era. This novel is like trying to tell and underline that there is the oppression that happens to the women in every class.

###### **3.1.1.2. Character and Characterization**

The second strength is the characters and the characterization. Anne of Cleves, Jane Boleyn, and Katherine Howard are chosen as main characters because they represent the inheritance of Anne Boleyn, the second wife of Henry VIII who was beheaded of treason. They share one fate, Anne Boleyn's fate. Anne of Cleves shares the accusations and false witness; Katherine Howard shares the treat of the axe; and Jane Rochford shares a fortune and a title in exchange for her soul. *The Boleyn Inheritance* tries to give opinion and criticism over the reign of Henry VIII through three different characters.

What makes these three characters interesting is not only that the characters are real people from real

life, but also that the characterization serves as the alter ego of the author herself. ("Alter ego is a literary character or narrator who is a thinly disguised representation of the author, poet, or playwright creating a work." [http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit\\_terms\\_A.htm](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_A.htm)) Gregory is well known as a feminist historian. Almost all of her novels are about woman in history. She has a special interest in rescuing women from historical stereotypes. Anne of Cleves of *The Boleyn Inheritance* is Gregory's literary character that represents Gregory herself. Through Anne of Cleves, the reader can see that this character is the alter ego of Gregory who tries to raise the awareness about feminism and patriarchal stereotype.

Anne of Cleves is described as a woman who already has awareness of men's domination and the freedom that a woman should get. She is the character who realizes that. In Tudor era men always are the heir who has opportunity and power and women always destined to be either wives and mothers at very best, or spinster at the worst. She is told as a woman who dare to rebel to his brother or even King Henry VIII. Anne uses her unique stubborn personality as a weapon to rebel and survive. She uses silence rather than crying or begging a mercy when her brother tries to abuse her. She thinks that silence is a sign to show that she is a girl who is not easily subdued in that way like her sisters. Her motivation to become the Queen of England is not about the money and the glamour life, but to make it as a ticket to freedom. Anne also thinks that becoming Queen of England means having the authority and land greater and larger than Cleves so it is a change to prove to her family that she can be the Greatest Queen of

England. Nevertheless, no matter how hard she tries, she will never succeed. Because the more loudly she voices her wish, the more it will send her into the death. That is interesting and ironic because in this time there are so many women who have the ambition to be great, but the men's domination block their step.

Jane Boleyn is a witness of the tragedy that happens to the five Queens of King Henry VIII but even after witnessing for King's domination over his wives, she still wants to become lady-in-waiting. She is described as a good woman, but even a good woman also has a weakness. She is like the common woman who needs a man to give her good prospect because she has a bad trauma of being a poor widow. She accepts Duke of Norfolk's offer to plot Queen's affair in exchange she can get a good man to marry. Unfortunately, she becomes a scapegoat for Duke of Norfolk's guile. Jane Boleyn is beheaded because the charge of treason against the King. She is like a symbol that exists since long time ago that justice is questionable. Money and excessive power can make someone cheat upon the law. It happens to King Henry who takes a role as God. He decides who deserves to live and die without passing through jurisdiction.

Katherine Howard is described as a woman who dreams of glory to be a princess or queen. The type of this girl is told in so many fairy tales. Unfortunately, she does not find a handsome King, but a fat forty seven year old man. She stakes everything for Queen Position. She believes the myth that Queen is the happiest woman in the world. She does not realize that being a Queen is a dangerous position and is not a peaceful life for any woman.

The different characteristics of three main characters make this story more complex and interesting. Especially all of them have the same portion as central character. Gregory shows how the characters are very incisive. Gregory creates the three characters so complex by combining a good and a bad personality with their reaction and motivation.

The three characters represent the character of women in this time. How women are portrayed by various characterization in understanding the meaning of freedom. There are some women that currently get to know about women's right. Nevertheless, most of women still do not realize about the existence of gender equality. This contrast is clearly seen in the novel because Gregory divides her main characters into two opposite characters in relations to the awareness of men's domination. Anne of Cleves is portrayed as a woman who realizes that her brother's domination on her and her sisters is not fair so she tries to prove herself by being the Queen of England. Jane Boleyn and Katherine Howard are like the satire to the real world. Despite the violence that happens in front of their eyes, women still hold the stigma that they should come head over the heel over the men. Most of them believe that it is best to be in the protection of a powerful man who has a lot of money. They do not realize that the oppression come from the domination and excess power. They also believe that woman nature is submissive to men. This misconception is often used to reinforce male domination. *The Boleyn Inheritance* through the opposite main characters tries to give the contribution of raising the awareness of men's domination. It gives the woman

viewpoint that someday when they get the oppression from the man, they will know that it is not proper.

#### **3.1.1.3. Point of View**

The next strength is the point of view. Anne of Cleves, Jane Boleyn, and Katherine Howard as the characters who receive the oppression share their story in the first point of view. Using three main characters as narrators make the benefit to build the different emotion because the readers will know one event through three characters' experience. The readers can move from one to the other characters' thoughts and feelings. Sometimes, when the reader reads the book which has first point of view that focuses on one character there is something crossed in their mind on how the other characters' feelings, thoughts, or even motivation. *The Boleyn Inheritance* which has three main characters as narrators make it more easily for the readers to understand the plot of this story and bring strong emotion over the main characters' miserable life that is caused by King Henry and noble man's domination .

#### **3.1.1.4. Setting**

Setting is the next strength. The setting of this novel is very detailed especially in the setting of time and place. It is interesting because each part of the event is always entitled with month and place. It is like reading the journal of the characters. The reader can read the chronology event to event because Gregory put month and place in each chapter. By reading *The Boleyn Inheritance*, the reader can be familiar with the place and the palace that English Monarchy have. It enriches the reader's knowledge that English have the other courts and palaces besides

Buckingham Palace which popularly known as The Royal residence.

#### **3.1.1.5. Style**

The final strength of *The Boleyn Inheritance* is about the style of this novel that makes the reader easy to read this novel. Although the story occurred in the past, Gregory writes *The Boleyn Inheritance* as a contemporary novel that is easy to read. Reading *The Boleyn Inheritance* is like reading the epistolary novel that takes the form of a letter, or actually consisting of letters written to another person. Even though the form of this novel is not using a letter, when the reader reads this book, the reader will feel like reading journals of three different people alternately. The reader will get the different experience over the same event.

### **3.2 The Weaknesses of Philippa Gregory's *The Boleyn Inheritance***

Apart from those strong points, *The Boleyn Inheritance* also has some weak points. There are some weak points on point of view, plot and the accuracy which are found as the weaknesses of this novel. These weaknesses will be explained on this following discussion.

#### **3.2.1. Point of View**

First, using first point of view of this novel may build good emotion for the reader. However, having three main characters as narrators exploring their feeling about the abuser noble men continuously and excessive can make the reader will feel that these characters are over lamented. This novel through its point of view also leads the reader to one perception and interpretation on the critic of Henry reign as the cruel reign.

#### **3.2.2. Plot**

Besides, there are double or even triple similar events of the plot because each event is experienced by the three characters. For the reader who likes rushing to finish reading or who is obsessed about the ending, *The Boleyn Inheritance* could be a boring one. It has too many repeated conflicts. Even though an important information is added in the later chapters, the reader may become too tired to re-read the same event that is told in the previous part by the other characters.

#### **3.2.3. Accuracy**

Finally, the accuracy of *The Boleyn Inheritance* is questionable. *The Boleyn Inheritance* is a novel that introduces the reader to history of English monarchy especially the reign of Henry VIII but it is not a history book so some data are not precisely accurate. The story and the characters of this novel indeed represent the real story of Tudor era, but there are some events, characters and characterization in this novel that can be doubted. For example, in *The Boleyn Inheritance*, Anne is told as a woman who is obsessed with freedom. She has the fear to become the Queen and remarry Henry VIII. Nevertheless historians assume that Anne has a desire to remarry Henry VIII. After King Henry VIII died, she attempted to have their marriage declared valid so she could enjoy the perks of being the Queen Dowager. *The Boleyn Inheritance* is a fictional history that the accuracy of the history is adopted as a fiction by Gregory as the author. The accuracy of the events, characters and characterizations depend on the author's will.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

*The Boleyn Inheritance* is one of the finest fictional histories written by Gregory. This book consists of tremendous strong points. They are themes, character and characterization, point of view, setting and writing style. Although there are some weak points, such as double events and lack of accuracy, those weaknesses do not lessen the greatness of this book.

*The Boleyn Inheritance* is a novel that tells history of English monarchy especially King Henry VIII reign through love theme. It is good to make the reader knows about history through fictional novel. Even this novel is based on true story that occurred in the past but this book is easily to read. The characterizations of the main characters in this novel are highly correlated with the phenomena about the awareness of men's domination that happen in this time. The three main characters that share the story as narrators also build a good emotion for the reader. The style and setting in this novel are so details. It makes the reader feels like going to the past by reading three main characters journal.

Even there are some weak points such as the three main characters that over exploring their feelings continuously and excessive, the repeated conflicts, and also the inaccuracy. some data is not precisely accurate because it is a fictional history that the accuracy of the history is adopted as a fiction. Nevertheless, those weak points do not diminish this book becomes unattractive.

*The Boleyn Inheritance* is a highly recommended book to be read for all people, especially for people who are interested in history of English monarchy. By reading this novel, the readers will know about the life of noble women and the reign of Henry VIII of Tudor era. This book also enriches the reader's knowledge about English Monarchy including the policy law, culture and phenomena in Tudor Era. It exposes that in the reign of King Henry VIII, King has the absolute right to set the policy and law as his will. It makes some phenomena that are influenced on the present of English Monarchy. *The Boleyn Inheritance* is also good for women to the entire of the world especially for young women. This novel raises the concept of feminism issue that is the awareness of men's domination. This book brings a message for the people to look at history from woman's point of view. The three main characters in this book; Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard and Jane Boleyn are the examples of how terrible women's life because of men's domination. *The Boleyn Inheritance* is not only a best seller book but also a messenger to rescue woman from patriarchal stereotype.



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