



In the Lion's Court: Power, Ambition, and Sudden Death in the Reign of Henry VIII

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The story of Henry VIII and his six wives is a well-known example of the caprice and violence that dominated that King's reign. Now renowned historian Derek Wilson examines a set of relationships that more vividly illustrate just how dangerous life was in the court of the Tudor lion. He tells the interlocking stories of six men—all curiously enough named Thomas—whose ambitions and principles brought them face to face with violent death, as recorded in a simple mnemonic: 'Died, beheaded, beheaded, Self-slaughtered, burned, survived.'

In the Lion's Court is an illuminating examination of the careers of the six Thomases---

Thomas Wolsey, Thomas More, Thomas Cromwell, Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury and Thomas Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton---whose lives are described in parallel. Wilson traces their family and social origins, their pathways to the royal Council chamber, their occupancy of the Siege Perilous, and the tragedies that, one by one, overwhelmed them. By showing how events shaped and were shaped by relationships and personal destinies, Derek Wilson offers a fresh approach to the political narrative of a tumultuous reign.

In the Lion's Court: Power, Ambition, and Sudden Death in the Reign of Henry VIII **Details**

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From Reader Review In the Lion's Court: Power, Ambition, and Sudden Death in the Reign of Henry VIII for online ebook

Lauren Albert says

Now, I don't know if Wilson pushed a bit to get his six Thomases (to match Henry's six wives that have been the focus of so much attention), or how central a couple of them were to the story. But he does show well that what happened during the reign encompasses a lot more than six marriages. The six Thomases were: Thomas Howard, Thomas More, Thomas Cromwell, Thomas Cranmer, Thomas Wyatt and Thomas Wriothesley. He also demonstrates how dangerous it could be to be in the lion's court.

Geo Forman says

very tedious and filled with detail. it did provide information and insight into court of Henry VIII, which is what I was after so not a total waste. I'm sure it be more enjoyed by someone already familiar with Henry

Blair says

Brings a depth to the historical account. Excellent.

Julia Hendon says

A dense but well researched study of the dangers of political success in Henry VIII's service.

Sarah - All The Book Blog Names Are Taken says

My book blog:

<http://allthebookblognamesaretaken.bl...>

<https://www.facebook.com/AllTheBookBl...>

www.Twitter.com/SarahsBookNook

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As my daughter would say, "Oh my gracious sakes!"

This one took me For.Ev.Er. Probably because of my preference to place periods in the middle of words, but I digress.

I admit that I have a very love/hate relationship with Wilson when he is being misogynistic but there is no denying that he is a very serious researcher when it comes to texts. I wonder where some of these sources come from though, when the facts are blatantly wrong, but that is another issue I will address later on.

Instead of going the typical route of focusing on the six wives of Henry VIII, Wilson explores the lives, and deaths, of six of the most important men in Henry's Court - all named Thomas. Thomas More, Thomas Wolsey, Thomas Cromwell, Thomas Cranmer, Thomas Howard, and Thomas Wriothesley. Not going to lie, that last Thomas I was the least familiar with and even had to double check the spelling of his last name. Despite the many flaws of these men, it is hard not to feel sorry for them when they meet their ends - though Howard, proving his family always survives, managed to become the only of the six to die at home in his bed of natural causes. Not too shabby for a man who very nearly met his end in the Tower and was saved only by the death of Henry himself.

So, the positives first. As I already stated, it is clear that a lot of research went into the book. That is further evident by the vast numbers of direct quotes drawn from several historical documents. It got to the point where nearly a whole page might be a letter or document having to do with one of the Thomases, and that did get to be a bit much. I skimmed some of them for a while when explanation was discussed in the preceding and following paragraphs. There's only so much old English spelling I can take. I expected the text to be much more disjointed than it actually was, because weaving together not two, but six lives and careers, could not have been easy. The disjointedness came more from the tangents (such as detail on Mary and Suffolk's marriage); even those they were not the worst things that bothered me about this book.

I would have liked to have seen equal attention given to each man in their own introductions before jumping into the chaos that was the later reign of Henry VIII. More, Howard and Wolsey got pages and pages devoted to them, yet Cromwell and Cranmer got a few paragraphs each at what can only be described as the end of Wolsey's chapter - and though it has been a while since I began this book, I do not actually recall how Wriothesley figured into that section at all. But, again, this might be due simply to me forgetting, as it has been three months since I began this journey.

Despite the obvious issue of Wolsey's desire to shine so brightly and outdo everyone, perhaps even Henry, in show, I certainly do not think he was incompetent, as Wilson states. Wolsey played a dangerous game in trying to "work on" the annulment/divorce for Henry and it cost him his life because of his master's impatience, and all of Wolsey's enemies at Court. But his failing in getting the what Henry wanted had nothing to do with incompetence. It has been shown time and again prior to Henry's involvement with Anne that he was a skilled adviser and highly intelligent. For all these flaws of Wolsey's, it is a shame his end came as it did - though dying on his own accord of illness as opposed to the execution awaiting him was surely a better way to go out.

A lot of the issues I have with the book are, incidentally, things that have little to do with any of the Thomases at all. I consider myself to be somewhat knowledgeable about this time period and so when I see facts that are disputed by other historians, it gives me pause. This book was published in 2002, so there are possibly new documents and such that have come to light in the last thirteen years that could have contributed to shifts in opinion. However, that is not true in all cases and when I read things I know to not be accurate about events and people I am familiar with, it makes me wonder what inaccuracies might exist elsewhere in the text when the information is new to me - such as in the case of Wriothesley. First, there is Anne's birth date drama, which will likely never go away because we will never know for sure. Here Wilson seems to accept as fact that Anne was born in 1507, as he states that Henry had fallen in love with Anne when she was still a teenager (page 383). I think at this point we can agree that the date does not entirely make sense and there is a much stronger case for 1501 (and let's not even get started on who was born first,

Anne or Mary!) The earlier birth date makes much more sense considering what we (relatively) know of her travels in Europe before coming home to England.

My next gripe comes about in regards to Jane Seymour, the 'lucky' one, you could say. Without any room for the possibility that it is not true, Wilson states (one page 404) that Jane died after having given birth to Edward via C-Section. WAIT A MINUTE. You're really trying to tell me that in the mid 1500s, this was a thing? I can safely tell you it in fact, was not. Certainly not while the mother still lived, anyway. While Church law (both Catholic and Anglican) did not allow C-Sections, they were performed when the mother had already passed away during the birth. However, seeing as how all records indicate that Jane lived nearly two weeks after Edward's birth, it is nearly impossible that she had a C-Section. She even began her recovery from birth, before weakening and dying - most likely from puerperal (childbed) fever. Then on the same page recounting Jane's death, Wilson states that, "Henry was so distressed at Jane's passing that he was already looking for another bride." That is completely contradictory of itself. Henry would not go on to marry Anne of Cleves for another three years. Whether he started looking for a wife immediately or not, Henry considered Jane to be his true love. I personally believe this is only because she gave him what no other wife did - a son. And I also believe that had she lived, Henry would likely have found some reason to grow tired of her as well. He may have believed she was his true love, but I don't think anyone else does.

This is a very detailed, very heavily researched book. It is also dry and at times incredibly boring. That does not mean it is not good, but it is certainly not for the faint of heart. If you have no knowledge of the Tudors, this is the absolute last book on earth you should pick up to start you education. However, for anyone who has knowledge of the life and times of one of the most turbulent periods in England's history, then by all means have at it.

"The drama of the six Thomases is a tragedy of men who were destroyed not simply by a king who was a capricious monster. They were tossed to and fro by the violent gusts of social, political and religious change" (page 521).

Rachel says

"The Tudors" on Shotime (I think) introduced me to the family, but it was this book, bought on sale at the British Museum, that gave me my obsession with the Tudors and Henry VIII in particular.

Karen Cox says

Many of you are reading or watching "Wolf Hall." I can't prove that Hilary Mantel read this one, but this is the essential history book to understand the characters in Mantel's work. The book is about the six most important courtiers in Henry VIII's court, all of whom were named Thomas. Thomas Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell were commoners who rose far about their origins; Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk was uncle to both of Henry's executed wives, Anne Boleyn and Katherine Howard. (He comes off the worst of the six). Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury after the break with Rome and later burned at the stake by Bloody Mary, is portrayed as a gentle and serious churchman. Wilson shows Thomas More as a harsh religious nut, frustrated because his father made him marry and become a lawyer instead of the monk he wanted to be. Cranmer appears much more appealing. The final Thomas, and the one Wilson likes the least, is also the least well-known, Thomas Wriothesley, nicknamed by Mantel as "Call Me Risley." Wilson posits

that Wriothesley killed himself over being disgraced at court during Edward VI's reign, which, since suicide was a crime and could have resulted in the impoverishment and disgrace of his family is interesting.

Henry is not the focus of this book and doesn't appear all that often. That Wilson can write a book about Henry's court without spending too much time on the monarch himself is actually quite impressive. It's an excellent and easy read, but also informative and scholarly. I highly recommend.

Ryan Groesbeck says

An interesting book that examines the reign of Henry VIII from the perspective of "six Thomases" (Wolsey, More, Cromwell, Cranmer, Wriothesley, and Howard), rather than the more standard "six wives" approach. I was fairly familiar with 5 of the 6 (Wriothesley was the exception) but primarily checked this out of the library for a biography of Thomas Howard, 3rd Duke of Norfolk, who apparently is not awesome enough to merit a standalone bio that I was able to find. Wilson even comes up with a cutesy couplet (to mirror the famous one about Henry's wives) to describe them:

Died, beheaded, beheaded,
Self-slaughtered, burned, survived.

It has a tendency to gloss important things (like the fall of Anne Boleyn, and also that of Cromwell) on the assumption that most people are familiar with those events already, and I can give it a pass on that subject because it's an accurate assumption with regard to me...but I suspect that Cromwell's fall particularly is not as well-known as the author seems to think. The book really hit its stride once it hit into the 1530s discussing the English reformation and the varied reactions of the Thomases to it, which were intriguing in where they had contradictions and similarities.

The character analyses of both Cranmer and Cromwell were first-rate; those for More, and to a lesser extent that of Wolsey, less so. I was impressed with what he managed to do with the other two, particularly Wriothesley, given the paucity of historical information about them.

The major drag down on this was from the extensive quotation of primary source material. While I agree that a certain amount is necessary to understand the personalities, the author had trouble pruning in some cases, giving us many-paragraphs-long quotations in 16th-century English...which while the same language, is in such a different (and highly ornate) style that it's difficult to follow at times.

Juliew. says

I was pretty surprised by this book as I had previously read one other by this author and while I thought that one was okay I wasn't prepared for the amount of detail this one had. It was very easy to read and I loved the organization and flow of the book. I also thought it was a fascinating approach to Henry VIII's court. Instead of a study on the six wives this was a study on the six Thomas's most closely associated with Henry VIII. More, Cromwell, Howard, Wolsey, Cranmer and Wriothesley. This tells each man's rise and sometimes fall while following the time line of Henry's life and reign. It seemed mostly well researched but I very much disliked how some of the wives were portrayed as occasionally there was quite a few inaccuracies. As for the Thomas's they seemed more fairly researched and dealt with. At five hundred twenty one pages perhaps a

little more info than I would I have liked.

Caroline says

The story of Henry VIII's reign is most often told through his wives and that most famous of rhymes - 'Divorced, Beheaded, Died, Divorced, Beheaded, Survived' - but Derek Wilson takes a different approach in this scholarly and enlightening book. He hangs his tale on a different sextet - his Six Thomases: Thomas Wolsey, Thomas Cranmer, Thomas More, Thomas Howard, Thomas Cromwell and Thomas Wriothesley. All of them attained the very heights of power and ambition under Henry VIII; all ran afoul of him in some way; and some, like his wives, ended up on the block.

Looking at Henry VIII through his Thomases rather than his wives gives a far different aspect to his reign - the traditional personality-driven history gives way to a truly fascinating look at the tangle of politics, religious reform, ambition, intrigue, faction and betrayal that so characterised the Tudor period. One could argue after reading this book that many of the Thomases were undone not so much by Henry VIII but by those jostling for the position as his right-hand man and second power in the realm. Whether Henry would have despatched them anyway, without others succinctly reading his mood and manufacturing or uncovering proof of treachery and incompetence, is a question history will never be able to answer.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book - Derek Wilson has a real knack for narrative that manages to clarify and simplify a truly complicated era in English history. He is a little overly fond of colourful metaphors - "as soon as the downpour of cold realism began the colours soon streamed from the sagging bunting of Christian fraternity" was a particular favourite! But that's a small quibble that only occasionally dislodged me from an otherwise firm enjoyment of this book.

Jodi says

Very ambitious undertaking. Included many of the figures of Henry's Court. Thorough coverage and exacting.

Brandi Declue says

This history book engaged me to the very end and read like a novel. Loved it!

Siria says

A compelling book which combines strong academic insights with the best elements of popular historical writing. Rather than using the familiar approach of the six wives, Wilson takes six famous Thomases of the era—Wolsey, the accused traitor; More and Cromwell, at opposite ends of the politico-religious spectrum and both beheaded; Howard, reprieved from execution by the death of Henry VIII; Wriothesley, who perished in the aftermath of a failed coup; Cranmer, burnt at the stake as a heretic—to tease out the power structures which lay tangled at the heart of the Tudor court. He's good at recreating the atmosphere of the

period, though I disagree with both his assessment of More and his characterisation of Catholicism in pre-Reformation England, which surely can't hold up to criticism now that we have works such as Eamonn Duffy's Stripping the Altars. Interesting introduction to the period, but one which must be read critically.

Rose says

Should have been written in bullet points. It was so dry I couldn't finish it. I, who can plod through the ploddiest of all histories, couldn't plod through this. Made it about 1/3rd of the way through and gave up as a birthday present to myself. Probably the 3rd book I've ever left unfinished in my adult life.

Sorry, Mr. Wilson. I'm sure it was well researched, but it was not presented well at all.

Cara says

This is a very, very boring book. That's not to say it isn't good, because it is very good, it's just also boring, so if you don't like boring books, you probably won't like it. I don't always like boring books, but Henry VIII is pretty interesting, so I still enjoyed the book.

It's well known how Henry VIII went through and disposed of six* wives, many of whom were named Catherine, but it's less well known how he went through and disposed of advisers, many of whom were named Thomas. First, there's Thomas Wolsey, Henry's Lord Chancellor, who probably would have been executed had he not died of natural causes first (and they say it doesn't pay to be fat!) Then there's Thomas More, Lord Chancellor after Wolsey, who was executed because he didn't approve of the royal divorce. Then came Thomas Cromwell, who helped Henry get out of two marriages but then hooked him up with an ugly woman, so he had to die. And Thomas Wriothesley, who outlived Henry but then killed himself because his career was finished. And Thomas Cranmer, who outlived Henry and Edward only to be tortured and killed by Mary. And finally, my favorite, Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, who outlived everyone (including the two nieces who became Henry's two executed wives), despite apparently being kind of a loser, who constantly tried and failed to win wars and Henry's affections.

* Ok, so one died of natural causes, and he didn't get rid of the last one, but I bet he would have if he hadn't gone and died.
