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I like her not! was the verdict of Henry VIII on meeting his fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, for the first time, complaining that he had been sent a Flanders mare. Anne, having been promised the most handsome prince in Europe, was also destined to be disappointed in the elderly and corpulent king. Forced to proceed with their wedding for diplomatic reasons, Henry and Anne tried to make the best of the situation, but attempts to consummate the match were farcical. After only seven months of marriage Henry was so desperate to rid himself of Anne that he declared himself impotent in order to secure a divorce. Anne was also eager to end her marriage and, with her clever handling of Henry, obtained one of the biggest divorce settlements in English history. Following her divorce, Anne made good use of her many properties, including Richmond Palace, Hever Castle and the house at Lewes now known as Anne of Cleves House. Anne of Cleves is often portrayed as a stupid and comical figure. The real Anne was both intelligent and practical, ensuring that, whilst she was queen for the shortest period, she was the last of all Henry VIII's wives to survive. Henry's chief minister, Thomas Cromwell, lost his head for his role in the Cleves marriage, but Anne's shrewdness ensured she kept hers. Anne of Cleves led a dramatic and often dangerous life but, for all this, of Henry VIII's six wives, she is truly the wife that survived."

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From Reader Review Anne of Cleves: Henry VIII's Discarded Bride for online ebook

leslie hamod says

Love this book! Anne of cleves, known as the Flanders Mare, was great

Snidget85 says

Rather more opinion than fact to be found which was quite frustrating, and little to be learnt about Anne of Cleves herself except in the final few pages. Quite an engaging, easy to read writing style though.

E L E A N O R (bookishcourtier) says

3.75 stars

I think that Anne of Cleves is often unfairly pushed aside. There are simply more interesting wives of Henry VIII - Anne Boleyn, Katherine of Aragon, Katherine Howard. But I have always had an interest in her, which was why I picked up this book. I wasn't too daunted because it's quite slim, so it didn't take me more than three days to read, which was great, because often the problem I have with biographies is that they drag. This was perfectly easy to get through whilst still being extremely interesting.

Elizabeth Norton, I think, gave a fair and accurate account of Anne's life, and I think that she portrayed Anne as a strong, intelligent woman who was actually pretty sensible. And although Anne of Cleves was the luckiest of the wives, who outlived all of them and never had to marry again, Elizabeth Norton is entirely correct when she says that being the luckiest of an unlucky group of women did not mean she was happy.

Anne of Cleves went through some hardship in her life - she had to leave her homeland forever, to marry a man who discarded her on sight. It must have seemed like such a waste, and she was to live and die in England. She was, as the author puts it, an intelligent woman who enjoyed the role of queen. However, a small fault I have with this book is that Elizabeth Norton often stated how Anne felt, but offered no evidence to support it, which leaves me wondering whether I can actually fully believe it. It feels more like an assumption than reality.

All in all, I think this was a well researched biography and I really liked it. I think it was interesting and not heavy going, it gave Anne a story of her own and I enjoyed it a lot. I think that maybe Elizabeth Norton could have gone into a little more detail, but this was a good overview and gave me a good and detailed idea of her life.

Caidyn (SEMI-HIATUS; BW Reviews; he/him/his) says

I loved Norton's The Temptation of Elizabeth Tudor: Elizabeth I, Thomas Seymour, and the Making of a

Virgin Queen and enjoyed Jane Seymour: Henry VIII's True Love, but this one was just a wash for me.

Norton loves making suppositions. Suppose Anne felt this way, or that way, or this other way. She likes assuming in all of her books. Some claims she makes I can agree with, others I can't. The main claim in this book that bothered me was that Anne of Cleves, after Catherine Howard was executed, wanted Henry back. That doesn't ring true with me. Would you really want a man back that insulted your body and said that you probably weren't a virgin because your breasts weren't to his liking? Or that you smelled bad? Or, even, that your stomach was too loose so you can't be a virgin? (Although, all those statements are probably things that Henry projected onto her. Ah, psychoanalysis and defense mechanisms.) Would you really want that back? No. So, Norton's claim about that just didn't work for me since Anne got waaayyyy more freedom being unmarried than she did while married to Henry. And, a lot less fear.

Besides that, I wanted more on Anne's relationship with Mary I. It sort of just randomly popped up. They were both Catholics, so they likely stayed together during Henry's vacillating religious "reforms". But, why? How did they become friends? Did they write to each other? Why did they have the falling out? Those were brought up, but never explained. I thought that really knocked a lot off this book since I could tell Norton was drawing on the history from *somewhere*, but she never fully explained the situations and such. That disappointed me.

My main problem was that I wanted **more**. I heard a lot about the women Henry was interested in before landing on Anne of Cleves. Then, I heard a lot about Catherine Howard. Anne just lacked from this book about her. While I loved what was about her, hence the three stars, but it was all information I'd heard before. Seriously, the only things I learned about Anne of Cleves was that she actually was a Catholic and did not convert to the religion after going to England, she considered herself the queen even after the divorce (another thing I didn't see a lot of evidence for, so who knows), and that during Mary I's reign she petitioned about being made the Dowager Queen of England. The latter thing actually had historical writing and letters about it, so I would love to know more.

Norton made a very run-of-the-mill biography of a woman who survived all the others Henry married. She learned from Katherine of Aragon's mistakes, she did not tempt Henry like Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard did, she remained rather meek and obedient like Jane Seymour and, the later, Catherine Parr did. And, this was just a biography good for beginners that rehashed information I've read before. Bit of a bummer, and I'll keep a look out for other, more extensive, biographies.

Sarah says

When Anne of Cleves was introduced to King Henry VIII (of England) for the first time it must have been an enormous shock and disappointment. Henry, once regarded as the most "handomest prince in Christendom", was obese, balding and old, and nothing of what Anne, aged 25, would have been expecting. Sent to a strange country where she didn't understand the language or the culture, Anne's marriage to Henry was to create an alliance between England and the German states that at the time was deemed necessary in the event that either France or Spain decided to invade English soil.

As the middle daughter of the Duke of Cleves, Anne's education and upbringing focused on what was considered to be a woman's traditional role and duties. Whilst she was taught to read and write, Anne was not taught music, the arts or politics; however, she was taught to be polite, modest and patient.

This does not mean that Anne was lacking in smarts. In fact, Anne was far more intelligent than what she is often given credit, and in retrospect was probably the most intelligent of all of Henry's wives. When faced with the reality of her failing marriage, Anne was clearly devastated, not because she loved Henry, but instead for the fear and uncertainty that came with it. Anne was faced with two options: To stand firm and refuse to accept that her marriage to Henry was null and void, or to conform to Henry's wishes, whether she agreed with him or not.

It's not surprising that Anne would have been apprehensive about suffering the same fate as Henry's earlier wives Katherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn if she refused to agree to an annulment. She was popular with the English people and enjoyed being their Queen, and was also fully aware that the alliance with the German states was important to Henry, who would be looking for a diplomatic way out of their marriage so as to not damage that alliance. Therefore, Henry went on to promise Anne a substantial divorce settlement, which included being adopted as the "King's beloved sister", and being given numerous palaces and properties where she could reside and derive income. Anne readily agreed: This decision, quite possibly, saved her life. Not only did she remain in Henry's high favour, she also suddenly became very independently wealthy. For many, this would have been seen as a far greater prize than the constant uncertainty of being Henry VIII's wife.

However, after Henry's death Anne's good fortune started to fade: The young King and his advisors did not see Anne in the same light as Henry had. Almost overnight she became an unwanted expense and a major nuisance, and as the new King slowly diminished her holdings, her wealth began to disappear and she struggled to meet her household expenses each year. When the young King died and Mary I took throne, Anne returned to court and favour, for a short time at least. However, Mary I was a paranoid Queen and due to Anne's fondness of her sister and rival, Elizabeth, felt that she could not be trusted and was not invited to court after the coronation, nor was she provided with any additional holdings to replace those she had lost during the reign of the young King.

Anne passed away at Chelsea in July 1557, aged 41, having outlived all of Henry's other wives. Although she lived the remaining few years of her life not having enough money to pay all her expenses and being unable to support the lifestyle she had become accustomed to, she kept a much-loved and trusted household, bequeathing most of her remaining possessions to those who served her since her arrival in England. She received a royal funeral and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Elizabeth Norton's biography [Anne of Cleves: Henry VIII's Discarded Bride](#) is a reminder of all these facts, yet it fails to produce any new information on Anne's life. A lot of what is written about her life before England and after Henry are facts already known, and there appears to be quite a bit of assumption about Anne's response to the events that were taking place around her.

At the same time, however, Norton's biography reiterates the fact that Anne was not the woman she is often portrayed to be in legend: She was a beautiful, dutiful princess, fully aware of what her position and status entitled her to, and if she expected certain treatment to be shown to her she was not afraid to ask for it. However, overall Anne was a down-to-earth woman who possessed a love of food and cooking, even going to far as to have a kitchen installed in her quarters so she could partake in this hobby at any time. Anne was born and lived her life a Catholic (not a Lutheran as has often been suggested), was thought of fondly by the English people, and received the utmost devotion and care from her servants, a fact that on its own exemplifies the amazing type of woman she was.

[Anne of Cleves: Henry VIII's Discarded Bride](#) is short and sharp biography that covers all the major events in Anne's life, but skims over the areas where information may be lacking. Although failing to provide

anything new, this is an easy-to-read historical biography for anyone interested in Tudor England.

Louise says

Norton is writing a series profiling each of Henry VIII's wives. This volume follows Norton's book on Jane Seymour. The Jane book was wanting, perhaps due to her short life and time of fame. This new book is a very good account of Anne and how she came to marry Henry, how he came to divorce her and her life beyond his.

The author is sympathetic to her subject. Anne comes to England speaking German. She has had little formal education and very little worldly experience. She is a bridal candidate somewhat by default. Her marriage deteriorated quickly. She did not understand why and is humiliated by it. Anne tries to be the pleasing model wife, but Henry's lack of attraction to her is deep. As it becomes a legal issue, Norton describes what little room she had to maneuver.

Norton feels Anne is the most fortunate of all Henry's wives. She survives him, and his gratitude for her not contesting his divorce made her very wealthy... at least for a time.

Rebecca says

It's a good overview of the brief reign & life of Henry VIII's fourth and least-known wife, but it's not much more than that.

Meaghan says

A very good, if basic, biography. Although there's some conjecture and Norton doesn't really offer anything new, this bio is highly readable and short enough so that people won't get tired of the book and not finish. I think Norton makes some very good points about how, even though Anne of Cleves was made wealthy and treated relatively well by Henry VIII, she would still have been much better off if she'd never met the man. This book makes me want to read the other biographies in this series on Henry VIII's wives.

Jodi says

Is she plain or attractive? Naïve or worldly? Such questions to have lingering about oneself throughout history! But, linger they will on the reputation of Anne of Cleves, fourth wife of Henry VIII.

Ann was not the wife Henry envisioned (see the blog entry, The Second Step-Mother to Elizabeth I: Anne of Cleves, at <http://elizregina.com/>, for a discussion of the reasons for the ill-fated marriage). Being well-versed in the marriage and divorce of Anne and Henry, there was not much new for me on those topics in this book.

Norton does cover what material there is from Cleves, prior to Anne's marriage and afterwards, thoroughly. This proved helpful as the political pull of Cleves had been lost on me. Having its wealth, strategic position and alliances explained was interesting. Another fresh topic was the incidents of her household.

My biggest concern about the text is the author's way of presenting the thoughts and feelings of the principal parties, without documenting them as factual. As former history teacher, I find it appalling an historian will script such assumptions. Sadly, while taking notes to use for my review, I wrote down 18 occasions (those were not all but the ones most disturbing to me) which alters the factual course of the historical text.

Page 32 we learn of the death of Anne's father whom Norton tells us was a distant figure in her life but it was a personal blow—because it showed the passage of time for her and highlighted that she was unmarried. Those connections were lost on me.

The letter Anne wrote to inform her brother of her divorce, we are told on page 109, "was the most difficult that she ever had to write." Yet on page 110 we must stand corrected as "writing the letter was something of a release...." These statements could possibly be true –we deserve to have documentation to prove it.

Several places in the book, starting on page 112, Norton asserts that Anne believes herself to be the legitimate wife of Henry. There is never any proof offered about this and I wonder how Anne could have publicly declared such a thing and not have it reported back to Henry. She would certainly have felt some ramifications if it was her official stand—just as if Henry caught wind of the fact that she wanted him to remarry her as Norton claims multiple times. Norton tells us that Anne was especially angry when Henry married Katherine Parr. Offering no evidence it is contrary to the rather sympathetic remark that Anne supposedly made and was reported by the Spanish Ambassador Eustace Chapuys: "A fine burden Madam Katherine has taken upon herself."

The next concern of the text was the lack of citation. Quotes were not cited and the sources were jumbled together (at least by chapter) in a paragraph at the back of the book. This made it difficult to attribute the source positively to the material. When Norton included passages from primary sources they were in a form as close to the original as possible, which is always a plus. Photographs were great, in color as much as possible and illustrated the text well.

Overall, this is a readable biography, which, if one can get past the author's conjectures, can satisfy an interest in this more obscure surviving bride of King Henry VIII.

C.S. Burrough says

The style of this follows a pattern across all Elizabeth Norton biographies I've read: skilfully researched, not too drily academic, and effectively enough written that we feel present in certain episodes.

This never-crowned queen consort, whose marriage was famously annulled, was passed down to us in a assortment of unkind and unjust ways, usually as an uneducated frump, the 'Flanders mare' whose looks and personal odours repulsed Henry VIII so much that he felt unable to consummate their marriage, paying her off with a wealth of palaces and income.

While this royal couple's chemistry was, evidently, all wrong, Anne was actually attractive and intelligent.

Attractive enough to have had her admirers' remarks well documented and intelligent enough to negotiate probably the best deal of all Henry's wives, becoming an honorary royal 'sister' who remained in high favour and enjoyed her independence.

Neither formally well educated nor culturally sophisticated, Anne was skilled in needlework, loved card games and considered 'gentle, virtuous, and docile'. Thought solemn by English standards, she perhaps appeared older than her years but her paintings had undergone Holbein's 'treatments' to suit her much older king (these likenesses were famously accused of inaccuracies, blamed for overly flattering her to win Henry's approval).

The French ambassador described her as tall and slim, 'of middling beauty and of very assured and resolute countenance'. She was fair haired and was said by chronicler Edward Hall to have had a lovely face.

A sister of Duke Wilhelm of Cleves, Anne was a Roman Catholic who converted to Anglicanism to suit Henry but later reverted to suit his Catholic daughter Queen Mary I. A popular figure with the public and Tudor royal family alike, Anne had a great life and was universally liked and respected. The last of Henry's wives to die, she is the only one buried in Westminster Abbey.

Following the current trend of biographical amendments to Anne's reputation - from spurned, ugly foreign hausfrau to wily, highly esteemed great dame - Elizabeth Norton's contribution may offer no groundbreaking revelations, but her style is among the most accessible.

Without lowering standards to the emotively driven novel-style of some, Norton strikes a fine balance granting us authentic entry into her subject's personal world without losing that all important scholarly perspective. Here she once more shows herself to be an erudite historian blessed with literary talent and a popular voice.

Margaret says

Not in the mood for a lecture. May try again some other time.

Serra Swift says

Anne of Cleves is my favorite of Henry's brides, and this book did a great job laying out the details of the Cleves-Tudor marriage debacle. I wish there had been more information about certain aspects of the subject, but overall it was well-written and fun to read.

Lauralee says

Anne of Cleves has always been the joke of Henry VIII's wives. She has been known to be Henry VIII's ugliest wife. Her position as Queen of England only lasted for a few months. However, her divorce with Henry VIII landed Anne as one of the wealthiest women in England. She was the second highest lady after

the queen. This biography stresses that even though her marriage to Henry VIII was very unlucky, her fate was the best out of all of his wives. Anne of Cleves was indeed the wife that survived.

Anne of Cleves was not destined to be Queen of England. She was betrothed to Francis of Lorraine. When the betrothal fell through, she eventually became a candidate for a suitable marriage to Henry. At first, Anne was at the bottom of the list as a possible wife for Henry. Henry wanted Marie of Guise and Christina of Denmark. When those fell through, Henry began to take an interest in Anne. The duchy of Cleves was very wealthy and powerful. Anne was descended from the kings of England and France. Henry requested a portrait of Anne and liked it so much he wanted to marry her.

Being courted by Henry VIII was an honor. The family happily accepted and immediately began making preparations for her marriage. When Anne arrived in England, he decided to surprise his future bride. However, the meeting did not go so well. Mrs. Norton suggests that Anne had ignored Henry and did not recognize him as her betrothed until he formally introduced himself. However, Henry held grudges. He never forgave Anne for her mistake and that is why he disliked her intently. The author emphasizes that Anne was not the ugly bride that has been depicted in popular culture. Rather, Anne was very pretty, and she was discarded because she wounded Henry's vanity.

Mrs. Norton also tells us that Anne did not want to submit to divorce easily. She was terrified of the divorce and was afraid to suffer the same fate as Catherine of Aragon. She was so embarrassed about her divorce that she dreaded telling her family of the news. Even after the annulment, she always saw herself as the true wife of Henry VIII and the real queen of England. The author even speculates that Anne was happy about Catherine Howard's beheading because she believed that Henry would take her back. She was very disappointed when Henry chose Katherine Parr to be his next wife. Even after Henry's death, she saw herself as Henry's widow. She wanted to be recognized as the dowager queen of England and wanted the same rights as Katherine Parr.

Overall, Anne fought for the recognition as Queen of England throughout her life. While she had a better fate than Henry's other wives, she was always regarded as the cast aside wife. She always came in second in prestige and rank. Anne went through many obstacles and challenges. It makes us wonder if Anne was ever happy. Still, the biography shows Anne not as a discarded queen, but as a woman of intellect. Even though this was a short read, Anne of Cleves is very detailed and well-researched. There were many times that it became difficult to read because of the numerous primary sources. Still, Anne of Cleves is a must-read for any Tudor fan! It gives us a very different Anne than the silly and stupid Anne of Cleves that is often portrayed in popular media!

Samantha Bee says

3.5 Stars

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It's nice to read something focusing on Anne for once, who generally goes forgotten or is at best quickly glossed over. A very quick and easy read, which I appreciated. My only complaint is the lack of footnotes, considering just how many excerpts there were from various letters. I personally like my history books to be generous with their use of footnotes...

Robert says

The most concise discourse on this 'QUEEN' I have had the pleasure of reading. Never a lagging moment . Excellent lively delivery style as well.

Anne Holmes says

An interesting book.

I enjoyed reading this, but had a problem with some of the illustrations at the end. It seems very unlikely that no. 3 is Anne. It is nothing like other portraits of her and bears a marked similarity to her younger sister, Amalia. And surely no.19 is not Jane Seymour! Rather trust Holbein on her. Also, no.41 is by most authorities thought unlikely to be Catherine Howard, at most she was 21 years old and if this is her, she was not "the prettiest" of Henry's wives! Look up an early portrait of Katharine of Aragon.

Rebecca says

If you walk into any bigger book-store in England, you will find shelf after shelf after shelf with books on Tudor history. There are books on Henry VIII and his court, his wives, his mistresses, and books on a chosen individual from these groups. Several on each. Finding a book on Anne of Cleves should therefore be easy. It isn't. She is the one that obviously hasn't tickled the imagination of neither many writers nor readers. That is quite a pity - admittedly she wasn't queen for long, but she is still a member of the group.

There are a few biographies out there, though, and this one is quite interesting. There are a few instances of 'Anne must have felt this/that', but the guessing is kept to a minimum (and are quite sound and believable) and most is based on contemporary sources with a lot quotations from them (if you need to brush up on your 16th century English, this might be a nice place to start). I am very glad I read it - I just knew her, as I think many others do, as the ugly, discarded one, but there is more to her story than that.

(view spoiler)

Kara says

Norton takes the refreshing step of starting off an Anne of Cleves biography with the history of Anne's family, rather than starting with Henry VIII's marital career. In doing so, we find out Anne did not come from a family of the royal equivalent of backwater hillbillies, as her background is often portrayed, but rather from a fairly distinguished royal house that had connections all over Europe and we learn that members of her family often played fairly high roles in Medieval and Renaissance-era politics.

And THEN we get into Henry's marital career, but with a heavy emphasis on what the political situation was on both sides of the Channel at that moment of the engagement, showing just how this marriage came to be. Norton covers not just how Henry was in need of a wife of certain characteristics, she shows what the Cleves

family was looking for, and also gets into the political background of Anne's prior engagement, and both why it was made and why it was called off.

Norton is a little too heavy handed at pronouncing what people "must" have been feeling at times: "Anne awoke with trepidation," etc., but she also starts digging into the subtext of quotes, questioning the motives behind what people said, and remembering to ask what was happening to Anne after so many centuries of people focusing on Henry.

Norton shows just how fast this quickie divorce was, (fast enough to make my grandmother's 1954 Reno divorce look long and dragged out) and how it left Anne's head spinning and she was probably more confused than complacent regarding how she felt about things ended. And Norton has plenty of snarky quotes from various people around both country and Continent to show how surprised absolutely everyone *except* Henry was that Henry got divorced (again).

And what really made this book stand out was digging into what happened to Anne not just post-married life, but post-Henry's life altogether. We see her pop up in histories at Mary I's coronation. But what happened between Henry's death and Mary's coronation? A lot of financial bickering, apparently.

Edward VI and his officials decided to take the viewpoint that "payment for life" meant *Henry's* life, not Anne's, and it was like pulling teeth to get the money owed her during Edward's reign. Its petty and full of the dull, daily grind of paying bills, but it shows just how *human* these distant historical figures were as we read about them arguing about contracts and invoices, real estate and rent.

Anne of Cleves had a lot of financial difficulties at the end of her life, but always kept her head (literally and figuratively), cared about those around her, and was always aware she was royal acted with royal dignity.

shinycl0uds says

Great biography of Anne of Cleves. It was really interesting to learn what happened to her before and after her marriage to Henry VIII. I think she really lucked it out, of all his wives, and she seemed to be quite a kind person, according to the sources, very lively.

Writing style was very enjoyable too.

Lil's Vintage World says

3.5/5
